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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR

INDEPENDENT

Battery storage facility aims to boost grid reliability in Goodyear; 10



LITCHFIELD CITY HALL 204

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Volunteers bring spring training to life



By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Long before the first pitch is thrown or the gates swing open, volunteers are already in place at spring training ballparks across the West Valley, greeting fans, answering questions and setting the tone for the day.

At Goodyear Ballpark, Surprise Stadium and the Peoria Sports Complex, volunteers form the backbone of game-day operations during Cactus League season. Many commit long days on their feet, navigating stairways and sun exposure while working as greeters, ushers and guest services ambassadors.

For many, the work is demanding, but deeply rewarding.

At Goodyear Ballpark, longtime volunteers Judy Tarkowski and JoAnn Terry are instantly recognizable to fans who return year after year. Known affectionately as the “Minnesota

• See **Volunteers** on page 8

Judy Tarkowski and JoAnn Terry welcome baseball fans back to Goodyear Ballpark. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

From wartime arsenal to modern hub: Inside Goodyear’s historic Flite building

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

During World War II, workers at a sprawling desert hangar in Goodyear took Army bombers flown in from across the country and fundamentally reshaped them for naval warfare, slicing off twin tails and rebuilding the aircraft into long-range patrol planes bound for the Pacific.

“People don’t always realize how dramatic that change was,” said Darryl Burton, development manager for the property now known as the Goodyear Flite Building. “They were taking a plane designed for one mission and turning it into a completely differ-

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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Goodyear police receive \$84,000 in highway safety grants. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

Goodyear receives \$84,000 in highway safety grants

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Goodyear Police Department has received more than \$84,000 in grant funding from the Arizona Governor's Office of Highway Safety to support traffic enforcement, impaired driving enforcement and serious crash investigations, officials said.

The funding includes a \$30,000 Selective Traffic Enforcement Program grant to target speeding, aggressive driving, street racing, school zone violations and high-collision areas. The grant will fund overtime and related expenses for officers assigned to traffic enforcement and education efforts.

The department also received a \$50,000 impaired driving enforcement grant funded through federal impaired driving funds. The grant will support DUI enforcement during holidays and special events when impaired driving incidents typically increase, officials said.

An additional \$4,300 grant will support investigations of fatal and serious injury traffic crashes, including overtime costs and inter-agency assistance. Police officials said traffic collisions have increased as Goodyear's population has grown.

All three grants are funded by the Arizona Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

Residents favor community, arts uses for historic Litchfield Park buildings

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Residents who attended a city-hosted public meeting overwhelmingly favored turning several historic La Loma Hilltop buildings into community-focused and arts-oriented spaces, signaling strong support for a community center, gallery and small-scale gathering uses as the city moves into the next phase of its long-term revitalization effort.

City officials gathered feedback on the future use of multiple facilities tied to the La Loma Hilltop project, including the current library building, Mission Church, the recreation center, and several historic cottages adjacent to the



Litchfield Park residents share opinions on city-wide revitalization. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center.

Among the most frequently voiced ideas was repurposing the existing library into a community center offering classes, meetings and flexible gathering space once a new county library opens nearby. Residents also expressed interest in transforming the former Mission

Church into an art gallery, cultural venue or event and wedding space, while envisioning the hilltop cottages as potential coffee shops, galleries, nonprofit space or community gardens.

"We're never going to have this chance again," Planning Director Randy Proch said. Because multiple public buildings are becoming available at the same time, a rare opportunity to reimagine how they serve the community is being shared with the residents.

A vision decades in the making

The meeting was part of the city's broader effort to revitalize the 20-acre Rancho La Loma

• See **Historic** on page 6

Abrazo Health opens inpatient rehabilitation hospital in southwest Valley

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Abrazo Health has expanded its West Valley footprint with the addition of a new inpatient rehabilitation hospital at the Abrazo West Campus, increasing access to post-acute care and strengthening continuity of care for patients across the region.

The 24-bed inpatient rehabilitation hospital is in the two-story Abrazo Litchfield Medical Building at 1375 N. Litchfield Road. The facility will provide recovery services for patients following traumatic injuries, cardiovascular surgery, stroke and advanced spine care.

It is connected to the Abrazo

West Campus by an existing pedestrian footpath, allowing patients to transition between acute hospital treatment and rehabilitation services.

Rehabilitation offerings include physical and occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, psychiatry, internal medicine, and access to surgical and medical subspecialty consultation services.

"This is more than just a medical office building," said Brian Elisco, Arizona Group CEO for Abrazo Health. "People's lives will be impacted here every single day. Inpatient rehabilitation is about helping people reclaim their lives."

Health system leaders said the on-campus model is designed to

improve continuity of care by allowing patients to remain under the same medical team throughout their recovery.

"By having inpatient rehabilitation services on our campus that are supported by physicians on the same medical team, we are able to follow our patients' care from acute to rehabilitation and their transition back into the community," said Hans Driessnack, CEO of Abrazo West.

Dr. Sushant Kale, interventional neurologist and director of Stroke and Interventional Neurology for Abrazo West Campus, said the proximity of the rehabilitation hospital improves outcomes for

• See **Abrazo** on page 5

Abrazo

• From page 4

high-acuity patients.

“This model ensures our high-acuity patients receive the full complement of coordinated care as they move into the post-acute stage of their recovery,” Kale said.

“We are excited to be able to follow our patients’ rehabilitation progress in a facility that is close to the hospital and in the community where they live.”

Elisco said inpatient rehabilitation plays a critical role in helping patients regain independence following life-altering medical events.

“When a person suffers a stroke or traumatic injury, their entire world can change in an instant,” he said.

“Our goal is not just survival, but helping patients return to liv-

ing their lives.”

Goodyear Vice Mayor Brandon Hampton said the project adds capacity to the city’s growing health care ecosystem and expands access to services for local residents.

“Our residents need more healthcare options, and this brings care closer to where they live,” Hampton said.

“This facility strengthens healthcare access not just for Goodyear, but for the entire West Valley.”

Abrazo Health officials said the project reflects a broader commitment to investing in community-based healthcare designed around patient needs.

“The real work begins after the ribbon cutting,” Driessnack said. “That’s when patient care starts, and that’s what matters most.”

For more information, visit AbrazoHealth.com.



New inpatient rehab facility expands post-acute care in West Valley. (James Goldmeer/Independent News-media)



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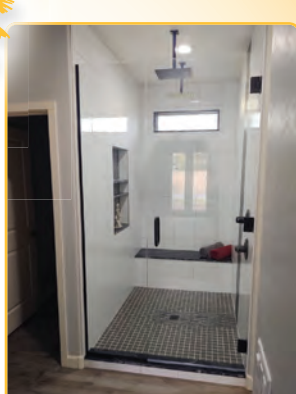


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Historic

- From page 4

Homestead, once the winter retreat of city founder Paul W. Litchfield. The property was gifted to the city in 2008 by Edith and Wally Denny with the expectation that it be used in a manner consistent with Litchfield's original 1920s vision of a place dedicated to culture, education and the arts.

"This property was meant to serve the community in a meaningful and lasting way," Mayor Thomas Schoaf has said previously. "The goal has always been to create something that honors our history while ensuring the city remains sustainable for generations to come."

City leaders say that vision, after years of planning, is now beginning to take tangible shape.

Major projects underway

Several cornerstone projects at La Loma Hilltop are already approved or under construction and are expected to act as catalysts for broader redevelopment.

The Hilltop School for the Arts, developed in partnership with the Agua Fria Union High School District, is scheduled to open in August. The performing arts high school will serve up to 450 students and include a 700-seat theater designed for both student productions and professional performances.

Construction is also underway on a new 10,000-square-foot Maricopa County library near the hilltop, funded through a \$5 million county allocation.

Expected to open this fall, the facility will replace the existing Wigwam Boulevard library and offer expanded programming space, updated technology and flexible study areas.

Plans are also moving forward for

the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center Museum, which will include a permanent museum, research library and public programming space focused on Litchfield's legacy and regional history. City officials say fundraising for the project is nearing completion.

"These uses help move the entire vision forward simultaneously," Proch said. "But they represent less than half of what's possible for the site."

Historic preservation and next steps

As redevelopment progresses, Rancho La Loma Homestead is also being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If approved, it would be among the first nationally recognized historic sites in the southwest Valley, opening the door to preservation grants, tax incentives and increased heritage tourism.

The cottages adjacent to the Homestead and the mission church are all historic buildings that city officials say will be respected as they become spaces that residents can actually use.

City officials stressed during the meeting that no final decisions have been made regarding the reuse of the buildings discussed and that community input will continue to shape priorities. The planning process is expected to take up to a year, with additional public engagement opportunities planned.

"This is more than a construction project," City Manager Matthew Williams has said. "It's about creating a place where history, learning and community come together."

Phase one of the broader hilltop beautification effort, coordinated with the school and library projects, is expected to be completed by this fall.

Further community input is being received at litchfieldpark.gov.

Buc-ee's development adds to Goodyear's road work

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A series of road improvement projects across Goodyear are moving forward as the city prepares for continued growth, including increased traffic expected from the opening of Arizona's first Buc-ee's travel center next summer.

Design work is nearing completion on improvements to southbound Bullard Avenue between Celebrate Life Way and Roosevelt Street, just south of Interstate 10. The project is intended to improve traffic flow ahead of Buc-ee's anticipated summer 2026 opening nearby.

The Bullard Avenue project, with a total budget of about \$6.6 million, will ultimately widen the roadway from two to three southbound lanes. The additional lane will eliminate the existing scalloped street configuration and help



Road work expands as Goodyear prepares for Buc-ee's tourists. (Submitted photo/Metro Creatvie Connection)

accommodate higher traffic volumes in the area. The project is currently in the design phase, with construction timing still to be determined.

"Buc-ee's will add to the city's revenue that helps pay for police, fire and streets," said Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo. "Buc-ee's is a destination and 80% of its business comes from outside the city, which means it won't take away from our existing businesses."

Buc-ee's recently broke ground on

its 74,000-square-foot Goodyear location, its first in the Western United States. City officials have said the travel center is expected to draw visitors from across the region and create about 200 full-time jobs.

Beyond Bullard Avenue, several major roadway and traffic signal projects are either under construction or planned throughout the city.

Construction is currently underway on Yuma Road between Canyon Trails

and Sarival Avenue. That \$10.7 million project, which began in fall 2024, will complete the south half of a major arterial roadway and add lanes, medians, sidewalks, landscaping and drainage improvements. Work is expected to continue through spring 2026, with paving, traffic signals and signage scheduled in the coming months.

A major reconstruction of Sarival Avenue between Yuma Road and Elwood Street is in the design phase and is expected to begin construction in spring 2026.

The \$24.7 million project will widen the west half of the roadway, add a landscaped median, improve pedestrian infrastructure and install a new traffic signal at Lower Buckeye Road.

Work is also underway for a future traffic signal at Lower Buckeye Road and Wood Boulevard.

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FROM THE COVER

Volunteers

• From page 1

Twins” around the ballpark, the sisters have volunteered in nearly every role imaginable, but their favorite position is greeting fans at the gates.

“You stand there, welcome people in, answer questions and keep them entertained if there’s a line,” Tarkowski said. “By the time they walk through, they’re already having a good day.”

As the game settles in, their role shifts from logistics to connection.

“After the second or third inning, when most of the crowd is in, we get to relieve the ushers and really talk to people and learn where they’re from or who they’re rooting for,” Terry said.

“By the end of nine innings, you’re not just volunteers and fans anymore, you feel like family.”

That sense of familiarity is one of the hallmarks of Goodyear Ballpark, where season ticket holders often sit in the same seats each spring and greet volunteers by name.

“When someone runs up and hugs you and says, ‘You’re back,’ and you remember them too. That’s when you know you’re part of something special,” Tarkowski said.

Baseball has been part of Tarkowski and Terry’s lives since childhood, growing up in a household where Twins games played constantly and the sport shaped family memories. The sisters say volunteering has become a continuation of a lifelong connection to the game, and to each other. It has also allowed them to witness the transformation of Goodyear itself.

“When we first started, people would ask where to eat, and there wasn’t much to tell them,” Terry said. “Now look around, there are restaurants, new marketplaces, a rec



Rusty Eccleston looks forward to a new season of Mariners baseball. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

center all built around this place, and our love for baseball and the community. You can feel the pride.”

That pride, volunteers say, is shared across spring training sites.

In Surprise, Sundancers volunteer Virginia Swisher has spent more than a decade helping ensure fans begin their visit on the right note.

A retired newcomer to Arizona in 2008, Swisher took the first opportunity she had to attend a spring training game, drawn by the chance to experience baseball in its most relaxed and fan-friendly form.

She joined the organization after striking up a conversation with volunteers in yellow shirts during her first spring training game.

“The passion they had for what they did was compelling,” Swisher said.

“They enjoyed interacting with guests, had fun doing it, and got to watch America’s pastime the way it was meant to be, fun and family friendly.”

Now the co-captain of the Will Call team at Surprise Stadium, Swisher helps coordinate schedules, train new volunteers and adapt to

changes in ticketing and technology. Her goal, she said, is simple: no guest leaves without their issue resolved.

“We get to set the tone for each guest’s visit,” she said. “So we try to make that first contact as positive as possible.”

In Peoria, red-shirt volunteers like Rusty Eccleston play a similar role, acting as guides and problem-solvers throughout the complex.

Eccleston grew up playing baseball and has followed the game for most of his life, developing a lasting appreciation for its rhythms and traditions. He said spring training represents the purest version of baseball, a fresh start each year, marked by optimism, community and a close connection between fans and the game.

Eccleston is a Mariners fan who first stumbled upon the Peoria Sports Complex in 2000, Eccleston now spends his mornings working the practice fields, answering questions and helping direct fans.

“We’re extra eyes and extra help,” Eccleston said. “It’s really about keeping things running smoothly.”

With roughly 400 volunteers supporting operations in Peoria each sea-

son, Eccleston describes spring training as an annual reunion, one built around service as much as sport.

“People show up because they want to be here,” he said. “That’s what makes it feel like a family.”

Volunteer leaders say the value of spring training volunteers extends far beyond staffing needs. At the Peoria Sports Complex, Executive Director Rebecca Wright said volunteers form the connective tissue that turns a ballpark into a community gathering place.

“Volunteers are special because they love what they do,” Wright said. “They want to be part of their community, give back, create community, foster community and support their neighbors. It’s all about connection.”

That same sense of connection is evident at Surprise Stadium, where Stadium & Event Operations Coordinator Marcus Wojtkowicz said the Surprise Sundancers are essential to the success of spring training operations.

“Simply put, spring training wouldn’t be the same without the heart, energy and dedication of our Surprise Sundancers,” Wojtkowicz said.

Whether welcoming first-time visitors, reconnecting with longtime fans or mentoring new recruits, volunteers at every ballpark say their presence adds a human connection that defines the spring training experience.

“Volunteering makes you feel needed, wanted and appreciated,” Tarkowski said. “Every spring feels like coming home.”

As fans file through the gates this season, many may not notice the hours of preparation behind the scenes. But for the volunteers that work, their love of the game and the relationships those things create are the reasons to return each year.

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BUSINESS

Battery storage facility aims to boost grid reliability in Goodyear

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Pluto Energy Storage Center is now operating in Goodyear, adding a major piece of energy infrastructure designed to strengthen grid reliability and support the city's rapid growth.

Developed by NextEra Energy Resources in collaboration with Arizona Public Service, the 75-megawatt battery storage facility stores electricity during periods of low demand and discharges it during peak usage, particularly during Arizona's extreme summer heat. Company officials said the project reflects long-term planning to meet rising energy needs across the region.

NextEra Energy Resources Vice President Jim Shandelov said the facility plays a critical role in managing energy demand as the city and state continue to grow.



Goodyear celebrates opening of 75-megawatt Pluto Energy Storage Center. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

"It's kind of like your iPhone," Shandelov said. "You charge it when demand is low, and you use it when demand is high. That helps keep businesses running and homes cool

during those hot summer days."

APS Vice President of Resource Management Brian Cole said energy storage projects like Pluto are essential to maintaining reliability as Ari-

zona experiences continued population and economic growth.

"Reliable power isn't optional, it's essential," Cole said. "Long-term planning and thoughtful investments like this help keep our energy grid resilient and running strong."

The facility represents an investment of roughly \$100 million in Maricopa County and created about 100 construction jobs. Over its lifetime, the project is expected to generate more than \$4 million in property tax revenue, supporting schools, roads and public services.

Together, officials said the Pluto Energy Storage Center represents a long-term investment in infrastructure that supports economic development, grid resilience and sustainable growth in Goodyear and the greater Southwest Valley.

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ON YOUR VALLEY.NET

First Watch opens new restaurant in GSQ

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

First Watch, a Florida-based breakfast and lunch restaurant chain, opened a new location Jan. 24 in downtown Goodyear near Bullard Avenue and McDowell Road.

The restaurant offers indoor and patio seating and serves breakfast, brunch and lunch items such as avocado toast, lemon ricotta pancakes and freshly brewed coffee.

First Watch joins several businesses that have recently opened or announced locations in the downtown area, including Trad-

er Joe's, Dave's Hot Chicken, Over Easy and Banner Health. Additional restaurants and retailers are expected to open through 2027.

The restaurant operates under a daytime-only model, serving customers during morning and early afternoon hours. The company currently operates more than 600 locations across 32 states.

First Watch focuses on made-to-order meals and operates kitchens without deep fryers, microwaves or heat lamps, according to the company.

Visit the restaurant at 1670 N Bullard Ave, or firstwatch.com for more information.

HOUSING

Goodyear council approves plan change for master-planned community

By James Goldmeer

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Goodyear City Council unanimously approved a minor amendment to the city's general plan, advancing plans for Rio 1900, a large master-planned community proposed along the Gila River in south Goodyear.

The council adopted a resolution changing the land-use designation of about 31 acres south of the Gila River and west of Cotton Lane from open space to neighborhoods. The amendment is tied to the broader rezoning of roughly 1,940 acres from the long-approved King Ranch planned-area development to a new development known as Rio 1900.

City officials and the developer said the change updates a plan first approved about two decades ago and reflects current housing needs, infra-

structure and development patterns.

"The city's different now. Housing needs are different now," said Brian Greathouse, an attorney representing developer Harvard Investments. "We wanted to relaunch this project in a way that makes sense for today."

Rio 1900 would extend from Estrella Parkway to roughly 187th Avenue and from the Gila River north to the Estrella community. The plan allows for a mix of housing types, including estate homes, single-family residences, townhomes and multifamily housing, with a cap of 1,970 multifamily units.

Principal Planner Ann Dolmage said the new planned-area development replaces outdated zoning standards with a layered land-use approach designed to provide flexibility while maintaining development lim-

• See **Change** on page 35

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BUSINESS MOVES



1 Family Care Center

Family Care Center opened its fifth Arizona location, providing accessible and compassionate behavioral health care for individuals and families in the West Valley.

1616 N. Litchfield Road, Suite 270, Goodyear

2 House of Honey Coffee

House of Honey Coffee opened its second West Valley location, offering pastries, beverages and locally farmed honey to customers.

13778 W. McDowell Road, Goodyear

3 First Watch

First Watch is now open in GSQ, featuring made-to-order meals prepared without deep fryers, microwaves or heat lamps, according to the company.

1670 N. Bullard Ave., Goodyear

4 Pluto Energy Storage Center

Developed by NextEra Energy Resources in collaboration with Arizona Public Service, the 75-megawatt battery storage facility stores electricity during low-demand periods and discharges it during peak use, helping meet energy needs during extreme summer heat.

16345 W. Commerce Drive, Goodyear

5 Abrazo Litchfield Medical Building

The 24-bed inpatient rehabilitation hospital provides recovery services for patients following traumatic injuries, cardiovascular surgery, stroke and advanced spine care.

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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR

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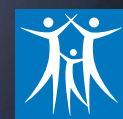
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Litchfield Elementary School District earns district wide A rating. (Submitted photo/Sam Nuanez)

Appeal over testing lifts Litchfield district to A rating

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Litchfield Elementary School District has been designated an “A”-rated district after state education officials approved an appeal related to one of its schools.

The Arizona State Board of Education voted to approve a letter grade appeal for Rancho Santa Fe Elementary School, which resulted in the district’s overall rating being raised to an A. The appeal cited adverse testing conditions during third-grade math assessments caused by a technology error.

School and district letter grades were released by the Arizona Department of Education in late October. Rancho Santa Fe Elementary initially fell short of an A rating by 0.01 points.

Following a review, the state’s Appeals Committee granted the appeal and adjusted the school’s grade to an A.

With the change, Litchfield Elementary School District’s overall grade improved to an A, with a district grade point average of 3.53.

Students across Agua Fria District walk out in protest

By James Goldmeer
and Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Students at every high school in the Agua Fria Union High School District walked out of class as part of a larger, student-led protest opposing federal immigration enforcement, joining dozens of campuses across the Phoenix area in a coordinated day of action.

The walkout was tied to a national campaign known as “ICE Out of Everywhere,” which calls people to protest Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations and broader federal immigration policies.

The campaign originated with Minnesota-based Black and Somali student organizations in response to fatal encounters between Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and civilians and has since spread to schools nationwide.

At several Agua Fria campuses, students gathered on sidewalks and school grounds, holding signs and chanting before dispersing later in the day. Some students said the walkout was intended to draw attention to immigration enforcement practices and their impact on families and communities.

At Goodyear High School, Jocelyn Coronel said she was unsure how the walkout would unfold.

“I was a little bit nervous because I actually thought the school staff were gonna stop us because they were all lined up,” Coronel said. “But eventually, when people started showing up, I felt excited, because I knew it was going to be successful.”

For some students, the walkout marked their first time participating in a protest.

“As soon as I heard about this walk-



Millenium High School students protest federal immigration policies. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

out, I talked to my parents about it and they told me as long as I’m doing it for the right reasons, I’d be OK,” Nevaeh Avalos said. “To me I’m doing what’s right. I know that everybody’s equal, no matter what their immigration status is.”

Students from other schools echoed similar concerns.

At Millennium High School, Enrique Hernandez said he hoped the walkout would draw attention from elected leaders.

“It’s a country made of immigrants. We are Americans, we’re all immigrants” Hernandez said. “After today, I hope the leaders in our state, and in our country, open their eyes and see what’s going on is really affecting every citizen, even if they’re too young to vote.”

Parents and community members observed the demonstrations. Judith Coronel, a parent of a Goodyear High student, said she believed the walkouts challenged assumptions about youth engagement.

“I think a lot of people have the mis-

conception that the youth doesn’t care about what’s going on. So when they do things like this, it really does send a message,” said Coronel. “(Our kids) have something important to say, and they can make an impact starting now.”

The Agua Fria Union High School District said it was aware of the walkouts and coordinated with local law enforcement agencies to prioritize student safety. District officials emphasized that the demonstrations were not school-sponsored events.

Students who left class were marked absent under standard attendance policies, and those who left campus received unexcused absences.

More than 30 high schools across the Valley participated, including all Agua Fria district campuses: Canyon View, Desert Edge, Goodyear, Millennium and Verrado high schools.

As demonstrations connected to the national campaign unfold across Arizona, school officials and law enforcement

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EDUCATION

Liberty district reports cost savings, heat-related challenges from electric buses

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Liberty Elementary School District officials presented operational data showing fuel and maintenance savings from the district's electric school bus fleet, while also outlining challenges tied to charging infrastructure in extreme heat.

The district received 13 electric buses through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean School Bus Awards, part of roughly \$40 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law being invested in clean school buses across Arizona.

According to data presented, Liberty's fuel costs dropped sharply after transitioning part of its fleet to electric buses. From July 1 to Dec. 31, 2024, the district spent \$60,283.76 on fuel. During the same period in 2025, fuel spending fell to \$20,038.72, a reduction of \$40,245.04.

Electricity costs for charging the buses totaled \$27,285.46 over the same timeframe, resulting in a net savings of \$12,959.58. The presentation noted that electricity costs could potentially be reduced by an additional 10% to



Liberty district reports cost savings from electric buses. (Submitted photo/ Metro Creative Connection)

20% through optimized charging strategies, including demand limiting and scheduled charging.

Spending on bus parts also declined. The district reported \$16,293.60 in parts costs from July through December 2024, compared with \$11,424.87 during the same months in 2025, a savings of \$4,868.73.

Maintenance and service costs remained relatively flat. Service expenses increased slightly from \$2,239.36 in late 2024 to \$2,314.80 in late 2025. The district reported no in-house main-

tenance costs for electric buses at this time because all vehicles remain under warranty. After warranty coverage expires, maintenance will need to be performed by the bus vendor unless district mechanics obtain high-voltage certification.

The presentation also identified charging infrastructure as the district's primary operational challenge. Charging stations installed without overhead cover experienced overheating during periods of extreme heat, preventing buses from charging properly

and generating fault codes that required service intervention. Three chargers have already been replaced under warranty, and one additional replacement is pending. District officials reported no new charging issues since temperatures have cooled.

Liberty is among several West Valley districts that received electric buses through the federal program. Tolleson Union Elementary School District in Tolleson received two buses. Tolleson Union High School District received 15 buses. Agua Fria High School District, which serves Goodyear, Buckeye and Avondale, received six buses.

The EPA's Clean School Bus Program is funded at \$5 billion nationwide over five years, from fiscal 2022 through 2026, to help replace older diesel buses with zero-emission and low-emission vehicles. The agency stated the program is intended to reduce diesel exhaust exposure, lower greenhouse gas emissions and provide long-term cost savings for school districts.

The EPA also announced it is reviewing and revamping the program under President Donald Trump's administrative direction.

Protest

• From page 14

agencies said their focus remained on safety, peaceful assembly and communication with families and communities.

Nearly 300 Canyon View High School students took part in the protest Friday, walking more than two miles from the Waddell High School south along Perryville Road, then west along Camelback Road until the pavement ended.

Two groups that left the campus around 10:15 a.m. joined up at about 193rd Avenue and Camelback to chant

slogans anti-ICE and pro-unity slogans. Cards passing by honked horns and yelled in support, or disapproval, to the students.

The morning remained peaceful. Four or five local parents supported the students, passing out water and snacks.

"It definitely raises our spirits when cars honk," sophomore Olivia Popejoy said. "When I see people with signs I think, 'these people are family. They believe the same things we do.'"

Popejoy, one of the student organizers said the group was heading south toward Indian School road, where it would meet up with student

protesters from nearby Verrado High.

ICE is not an abstract concept to the kids, even at the far end of the West Valley. Students said the ICE agents have been in Waddell neighborhoods.

Canyon View is a diverse campus, with 45% of the student population being Hispanic, 37% White and 10% African-American, according to a 2025 U.S. News and World Report study.

"ICE has been coming up around some of these guys' neighborhoods," said a freshman boy who asked not to be named. "ICE has been disrespectful and not honest. They need to get

the hell away from people like us."

Students around the district found kindred spirits. As Popejoy said, Verrado is one of Canyon View's biggest rivals on the athletic fields, but the Agua Fria students feel more like a family, fighting for their friends.

She said at the start of the week, Canyon View students saw that Millennium was planning a protest and a group chat evolved that included kids from all six Agua Fria schools.

"Our campus is a family. There's not a lot of bullying," Popejoy said. "We're very diverse and we care about others. We're willing to show up and fight for what's right."

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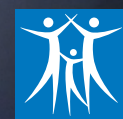
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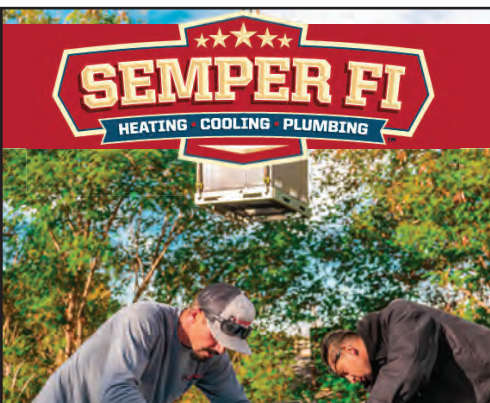
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DHHS recommendations indicate active men between the ages of 61 and 75 should consume 2,600 calories per day, while those 76 and up should reduce that consumption to

2,400 calories per day. Women's recommended calorie intake is significantly lower, as DHHS guidelines advise sedentary women age 61 and older to consume 1,600 calories per day.

Women 61 and older who engage in moderate physical activity each day are urged to consume 1,800 calories per day, a recommendation that increases to 2,000 calories per day for those in the same age group who live a physically active lifestyle.

It's important to note that these recommendations are just guidelines, and seniors should consult a physician familiar with their medical history for more personal recommendations regarding calorie consumption.

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100 years ago this month: historical events from February 1926



The month of February has been home to many historical events over the years. Here's a look at some that helped to shape the world in February 1926:

- The first theater production of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* premieres at the Ambassador Theater on Broadway on Feb. 2. Veteran stage actor James Rennie stars as the titular character.

- The National League holds a banquet at the Hotel Astor in New York City on Feb. 2 to celebrate the baseball league's fiftieth anniversary.

- An explosion at a mine operated by the Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Company kills 20 miners in Horning, Pennsylvania, on Feb. 3.

- Colonel Francisco Franco is promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in the Spanish Army on Feb. 3. Just 33 years old, General Franco, the future dictator of Spain, becomes the youngest general in Europe upon being promoted.

- Terrorists attack a train traveling from Moscow to Riga, Latvia, on Feb. 5. The attackers were attempting to steal a diplomatic pouch, and courier Theodor Nette loses his life after being shot in the head.

- The grave of Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa is raided on Feb. 6. Villa's skull is stolen during the raid and its present location remains a mystery.

- Historian Carter G. Woodson initiates 'Negro History Week' on Feb. 7. The event serves as a precursor to Black History Month.

- The Plough and the Stars, Irish writer Sean O'Casey's four-act play about the 1916 Easter Rising, opens at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on Feb. 8. The play upsets some audience members and ultimately leads to angry protests in the theatre and riots outside of it.

- A filing with the League of Nations officially recognizes the border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on Feb. 8.

- President Plutarco Elías Calles nationalizes all property of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico on Feb. 11. Just two days later, President Calles's administration orders all Catholic schools in Mexico to close.

- On Feb. 12, Irish Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins appoints members to the Committee on Evil Literature. The committee is tasked with looking into censorship of printed matter in response to growing public pressure insisting that materials considered

• See 1926 on page 23

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Moderate-intensity activities that can improve overall health

Moderate-intensity physical activity gets the heart pumping, but only around one in five adults and teens get enough exercise to maintain good health, says the American Heart Association.

It may be because people are having difficulty figuring out what constitutes moderate-intensity activity. Here are some types of activities considered moderate-intensity.

- Walking very briskly (roughly four miles per hour).
- Heavy cleaning, like washing win-

dows, vacuuming and mopping.

- Mowing the lawn with a power mower.
- Bicycling with light effort (10 to 12 miles per hour).
- Playing recreational badminton.
- Playing doubles tennis.
- Slow dancing.
- Shooting a basketball.
- Water aerobics.
- Playing volleyball.
- Heavy gardening.
- Painting and decorating.

1926

- From page 22

obscene are corrupting public morals or liable to do so.

• The National Socialist German Workers' Party approves a motion to recognize Adolf Hitler as the sole and absolute authority within the party on Feb. 14.

• The Grand National Assembly of Turkey approves the Turkish Civil Code on Feb. 17. The code acknowledges women are entitled to the same rights as men, though it would be another eight years before Turkish women are granted the right to vote.

• On Feb. 18, the French auto manufacturer Citroën opens a factory in Britain that would eventually prove capable of manufacturing 200 cars per day.

• A pastoral letter read in all Catholic churches in Austria on Feb. 21 denounces mixed bathing, rhythmic dancing and immodest sports attire as "un-Christian."

• On Feb. 23, United States President Calvin Coolidge expresses his opposition to former general Billy Mitchell's assertion that the country needs a large air force. President Coolidge disagrees with the suggestion on the grounds it would make the country militaristic and contribute to an arms race.

• Leon Collet is killed when the French pilot attempts to fly under the arch of the Eiffel Tower on Feb. 24.

• Black boxer Tiger Flowers defeats his white opponent, Harry Greb, to win the World Middleweight Title at Madison Square Garden in New York City on Feb. 26.

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SPORTS

BOYS BASKETBALL



Millennium basketball senior and University of Arizona commit Cameron Holmes hugs and high fives fifth-grade students at Mabel Padgett Elementary School in Goodyear Jan. 20. He talked to the students about the importance of academics and balancing multiple things as a student-athlete. (Millennium Basketball on Instagram)

Cam Holmes stays home for Tigers' title drive

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Change is the only constant in high level basketball.

Millennium senior Cameron Holmes watched older brother DaRon Holmes struggle for half his senior year at Montverde Academy in Florida after leaving the Tigers. Cameron filed it away and decided to stay with the Tigers as a senior despite being a national top 40 player.

Then the coach he grew up with since third grade, Ty Amundsen, decided to leave for an assistant coaching job at Arizona State one week before school started. Holmes stayed home and is the leader of the No. 8 ranked high school team in the coun-

try.

"It was definitely difficult losing my coach. He's been my coach since third grade. I was a little down but I couldn't dwell on it too much. He found his new home. I stayed at home," Holmes said. "When Coach Rich came down and I decided I was going to stay. Coach Rich wants the absolute best for me. He's pushed the crap out of me this season and pushed me to my full potential."

Coach Rich is Richard Thornton, a former assistant coach at Bishop Gorman High School and the head of the Vegas Elite Nike EYBL program in the summer.

Millennium hired Thornton in ear-

• See **Holmes** on page 27

SPORTS

Holmes

• From page 26

ly August and improbably, he finally had a chance to coach a Holmes brother — after years of courting DaRon, then Cameron, for Vegas Elite.

“I had to move here to finally get to coach him,” Thornton said with a smile.

Holmes’ ties to Millennium run deep.

He grew up on the court with the Tigers’ class of 2025, playing with most of them since third or fourth grade.

For his first three years of high school, Holmes traveled across the country with them and battled for the big trophy at home.

“That was amazing. Those are my best friends. We traveled. We went to the City of Palms and went to

Bass Pro — all those tournaments,” Holmes said. Playing with them like that was amazing. My boys Quincy, Kingston and JT all went on to bigger things at the college level. I miss Darius. I miss my guys. It was amazing playing with them.”

DaRon’s senior year informed Cameron when he started looking at what to do his senior season. DaRon had a fun last month or two of his senior season after transferring to Compass Prep in Chandler, but was stuck to the bench at Montverde behind Jalen Duren, who was just named to his first NBA All-Star Team.

“The first thing he told me is that not everything is going to work out. He stayed here at Tiger Nation for three years and didn’t get the state championship. But he tried to reach for a bigger level,” Holmes said. “When he was going through all that as a senior, I was in seventh grade. I was still a kid. He told me to take my

time through the whole process and don’t overthink the decision.”

The Holmes made the decision as a family. Daron recommended that Cameron stay at Millennium and battle through the hard times.

Adan Diggs, a 6-4 sophomore guard ranked in the top 10 nationally for the 2028 class, decided to transfer in from Gilbert Williams Field in June.

“I knew I could find a home somewhere else. That’s life, sometimes. But my mom working here and my grandma working here, I kind of wanted to stay for them and make them proud. Adan came over and helped me out, being a duo. He’s such a great guy. He came in and got right to work,” Holmes said.

School already in session when Thornton was hired. He could not move to the Valley until two weeks later.

Millennium’s players all decided

to stay and he got straight to work. Sophomore forward Trey McKinney, a top 75 player in his class, joined Thornton in moving in from Bishop Gorman.

Thornton said Holmes is the focal point, with his energy, work ethic and leadership.

“He’s really easy to work with and a great teammate. He embraced all of the incoming guys and me as a coach,” Thornton said. “He’s still the leader of this team.”

Phoenix Desert Vista transfer forward D.J. Spencer sat out the first half of his junior season and is now eligible.

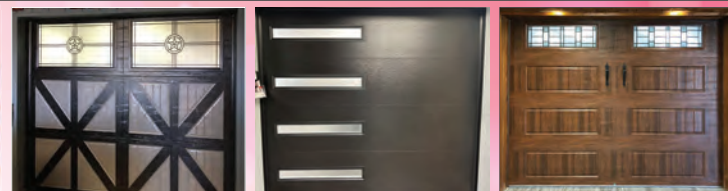
Thornton has done a great job implementing sets and setting up ways for all five starters to get an opportunity, Holmes said.

“We all want to see each other win. We’re all trying to reach the same

• See **Tigers** on page 28

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SPORTS

Tigers

• From page 27

level — that's the NBA of course. All of us can go get a bucket when we want. Now it's about how we get those bucket, how we are making plays and passing," Holmes said.

Holmes committed to Arizona in November, choosing the Wildcats over Dayton — DaRon's school — and North Carolina.

He said coach Tommy Lloyd controls practice and the assistants are locked in.

"It really just came down to my skill set. I can fit in with the team and coaching staff. I felt like Arizona gave me the best option to fit with the team," Holmes said. "I went down for the visit and watched one of the practices. One of the things that stuck with me is that they don't condition. They don't run so the way they condition is to play five-on-five. They simulate game conditions."

Arizona freshmen Koa Peat and Brayden Burries have played major roles in the Wildcats undefeated season.

But there are talented players throughout the program. Holmes said he wants to work to earn playing time.

Peat graduated from Gilbert Perry after winning the last four big division state titles. Now Arizona has two national MaxPreps teams in the top 10, and they're Peat's top two challengers, Phoenix Sunnyslope and Millennium.

Sunnyslope is ranked No. 3 nationally and is lead by junior center Darius Wabington, senior guard Rider Portela and junior guard Delton Prescott. The Vikings held off the Tigers 61-57 on Jan. 21 and they play again Feb. 10 at Millennium.

"Sunnyslope has a great program and a great coach. That's a tough environment to play in," Holmes said. "I feel like we did really well. We were



Millennium senior wing Cameron Holmes winds up for a dunk during a season-opening win over Tempe Corona del Sol on Nov. 20. (For Independent Newsmedia/Courtesy Mason Norris)

fouling a lot and had some costly of turnovers. We looked at the film and saw so much we could get better at."

The competition has never been tougher but Cameron Holmes wants to bring a title back home after near misses by DaRon in 2019 (Gilbert) and 2020 (Ironwood) and his own 5A title game loss in 2023 (to Campo Verde) and a 71-67 loss in a classic Open Division final with Perry in 2025.

"That would mean the world to me. I feel like I've been through a lot," Holmes said. "Me and (fellow senior) Dylan (Coday) have been through a lot. It makes me want to push for it more. I want to be the one holding up that trophy at the end of the year."



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ENTERTAINMENT

Route 66 history comes alive at Goodyear arts talk ahead of centennial

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As Route 66 approaches its 100th anniversary in 2026, Arizona author and travel writer Roger Naylor took a packed audience on a journey through the history, culture and enduring appeal of the iconic highway during a recent Goodyear Arts & Culture Commission event.

Naylor headlined the relaunch of the city's rebranded After Hours Art Talk series, drawing a larger-than-usual crowd to a 90-minute presentation that blended history, humor and personal storytelling. The event marked Naylor's return to the series after a previous well-attended appearance two years ago.

Route 66, often called the "Moth-



Lightning lights up clouds above The Wigwam motel in Holbrook. (Steve Cherek/Independent Newsmedia)

• See **Talk** on page 30



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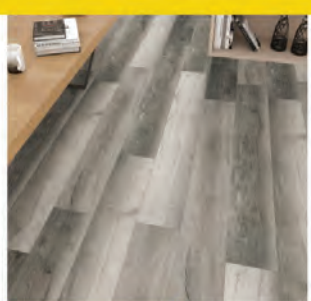
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Talk

• From page 29

er Road,” was officially established on Nov. 11, 1926, stretching roughly 2,400 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Naylor traced its evolution from a vital commercial route and economic engine for small towns to a powerful symbol of hope during the Great Depression, when families fleeing the Dust Bowl traveled west in search of opportunity.

“Route 66 was designed to connect communities,” Naylor said.

He detailed how its winding path intentionally passed through small towns, earning it the nickname “the Main Street of America.”

Arizona, he said, plays a central role in the highway’s story. The state is home to the longest remaining drivable stretch of Route 66, the highest elevation along the route, the steepest grade, and the only national park the road ever passed through, Petrified Forest National Park.

Naylor explained how the highway became fully paved by 1938, thanks in part to New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. During World War II, Route 66 again proved essential, serving as a major artery for troop movements, equipment and access to military installations across the Southwest. The postwar years marked Route 66’s golden era. From the mid-1940s through the early 1970s, the road defined the American road trip, giving rise to motels, diners, neon signs and roadside attractions designed to lure travelers off the pavement.

“That’s where everything we know about road trips comes from,” Naylor said, pointing to Arizona landmarks such as the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, the Jack Rabbit Trading Post near Joseph City, and the “Standin’ on the Corner” site in Winslow, in-

spired by the Eagles’ hit song “Take It Easy.”

But the highway’s fortunes changed with the rise of the interstate system.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 led to the construction of faster, limited-access highways that bypassed many Route 66 towns. Williams became the last Arizona community bypassed in 1984, and by 1985, Route 66 was officially decommissioned.

Naylor credited the road’s revival to grassroots preservation efforts, particularly those led by Angel Delgadillo of Seligman, often called the



Roger Naylor

“Father of Route 66.”

In 1987, Delgadillo helped form the Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona, the first organization of its kind, which successfully lobbied to have portions of

the old highway designated as Historic Route 66.

“That movement started here,” Naylor said. “Arizona provided the blueprint that every other state followed.”

Today, Route 66 attracts visitors from around the world, with international travelers accounting for a majority of tourism along the road. Naylor emphasized the importance of supporting locally owned businesses that continue to keep the highway’s spirit alive.

Throughout the talk, Naylor also highlighted stories featured in his book, “Route 66 Road Trip,” which serves as both a cultural history and travel guide, spotlighting restaurants, motels and attractions along the Arizona stretch.

“Road trips reconnect us to place,” he said. “They remind us that the journey itself still matters.”

The After Hours Art Talk series continues as part of Goodyear’s ongoing arts and culture programming.

Vision & Sound brings art, music and community to Goodyear

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

“Vision & Sound: An African American Experience” returned to Goodyear, bringing months of free art exhibitions, live music and hands-on creative experiences to the heart of the city as part of a statewide initiative celebrating Black artists across Arizona.

Hosted at the Georgia T. Lord Library through March 31, the Goodyear exhibition features the work of 10 Black artists from across the state: Antoinette Cauley, Jacqueline Chanda, Randiesia Fletcher, Chas Frisco, Khandra Howard, Jenita Landrum, Isse Maloi, Philip Gabriel Steverson, Maxx Valentine and George Welch.

The exhibition explores themes of identity, resilience and cultural legacy through painting, mixed media and contemporary visual practices.

“‘Vision & Sound’ is about creating access and visibility while celebrating



Lisa Hightower and her band perform at the Goodyear Jazz in the Park event. (James Goldmeer/ Independent Newsmedia)

Black creativity in spaces where the community already gathers,” said Julie Richard, CEO of Sedona Arts Center, which now leads the program statewide. “Libraries like Goodyear’s are powerful places for shared learning, dialogue and connection.”

Partnering with “Vision & Sound,” Goodyear’s “Jazz in the Park” transformed the lawn in front of city hall into a outdoor arts venue, blending live jazz performances by Black musicians with food trucks, artisan vendors and a beer and wine garden.

“We’re here for the music, the artists. We’re celebrating Black history as it’s being made,” said Dalton Attig, Goodyear recreation programmer at last year’s event.

In previous years, Jazz in the Park has drawn crowds that filled the green space with picnic blankets, strollers and neighbors gathering together. “The event definitely feels bigger each year. When more people come out, there’s something exciting in the air.”

Beyond the music, Jazz in the Park offered interactive art activations where attendees can create alongside professional artists featured in the Goodyear Library Fine Art Show.

Families took home collaborative artworks, contribute to a large community portrait and experience the creative process firsthand. The “Vision & Sound” Fine Art Show remains on display inside the Georgia T. Lord Library through March 31.



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Spring training upgrades boost Goodyear's tourism push

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Goodyear officials unveiled an expanded slate of events, renovations and promotions at Goodyear Ballpark as the city enters the 2026 spring training season, which will feature new college baseball games, facility upgrades and an ambitious game schedule.

John Brown, assistant general manager of Goodyear Ballpark and business development, gave the City Council a preview of the upcoming season, highlighting what he described as one of the most robust spring training schedules the venue has hosted.

The season will begin even before Major League Baseball teams take the field, with the ballpark hosting the Desert Invitational on Feb. 13 in partnership with Major League Baseball. The collegiate doubleheader will feature Kansas State against the University of



Goodyear Ballpark unveils expanded events and upgrades ahead of spring training season. (James Goldmeier/ Independent Newsmedia)

Iowa at 1 p.m., followed by Penn State facing the Air Force Academy at 6 p.m.

Brown said the event will serve as

a kickoff to spring training, which will include 30 games in 30 days, five night games and a World Baseball Classic

matchup featuring Cuba.

"We're very excited about our schedule," Brown told council members.

Fans attending games in 2026 will also see several upgrades throughout the ballpark. Brown said a new left-field landing area will be one of the first features visitors notice upon entering the gates. The space is designed as a group seating area accommodating between 40 and 120 people and will also be available for individual ticket sales when not reserved by groups.

Suites at the ballpark have been renovated with upgraded leather seating, expanded countertop space, additional storage and larger televisions. Brown said the updates are intended to improve comfort and enhance the overall fan experience.

Food and beverage offerings will also

• See **Baseball** on page 33

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John Prothro, CEO of Foot Solutions.

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The impact goes far beyond comfort. Proper alignment can improve how you move, reduce fatigue, and help prevent future injuries. More importantly, it can help you get back to doing what you love—whether

that's walking the neighborhood, standing comfortably at work, traveling, exercising, or simply keeping up with family and friends.

What you wear on and under your feet truly matters. It can mean the difference between sitting on the sidelines wishing you felt better—or confidently stepping forward, pain-free and energized. With the right expertise and the right technology, healthy, comfortable movement isn't just possible—it's achievable.

-John Prothro is the CEO of Foot Solutions, a global foot health retailer with locally owned stores in Peoria, Goodyear, Surprise, Mesa, Scottsdale, Tucson, and North Phoenix.

Baseball

• From page 32

expand this season, including the introduction of a “Desert Heat Burger” at the Burgertopia concession stand and additional healthier menu options alongside traditional ballpark fare.

Several popular promotions will return, including an opening day schedule magnet that doubles as a picture frame, a St. Patrick’s Day pint glass featuring both the Cleveland Guardians and Cincinnati Reds, and an Ace mascot-themed stress ball. Kids Run the Bases events will begin Feb. 28, and Senior Stroll days are scheduled for Feb. 25 and March 4.

Brown said information on tickets, group sales and the full spring training schedule will be available at GoodyearBP.com. City officials said the expanded spring training season supports broader tourism goals as Goodyear looks to capitalize on sports-related travel.

Wendy Bridges, Goodyear’s eco-

economic development director, told the council that the city’s Office of Tourism, launched in July 2025, has completed its first-year objectives months ahead of schedule by focusing on foundational work, industry coordination and targeted promotion.

“This first year was really about laying the foundation,” Bridges said. “And we’ve accomplished everything we set out to do, and even a little bit more, in about half the time.”

The Office of Tourism operates within the city’s economic development department and serves as Goodyear’s official destination marketing organization. Much of its funding comes from Proposition 302, a state tourism program supported by hotel taxes and rental car surcharges. Because the program is designed to drive overnight visitation, most of Goodyear’s allocation is used to promote spring training at Goodyear Ballpark.

“Spring training is the big draw,” Bridges said. “But sports tourism and tournament tourism are absolutely

something we can grow.”

In addition to sports-related travel, the city is targeting small-group meetings and business travel to support year-round hotel occupancy. The tourism office has launched a quarterly tourism roundtable with hotels and hospitality partners and developed an expanded dining guide for visitors.

The city has also received approval to become an official Arizona Visitor Information Center and is evaluating potential locations near high-traffic freeway corridors. Council members discussed preparing for increased visitation tied to the planned opening of a Buc-ee’s travel center in Goodyear, which officials described as a potential tourism catalyst.

Looking ahead, Bridges said the city plans to expand consumer-focused marketing efforts promoting spring training, sports tourism, outdoor recreation and weekend travel.

“This allows Goodyear to be intentional and responsible in how we grow tourism,” she said.

THINGS TO DO

Movies in the Park, ‘The BFG’

Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026, 6:30–9:30 p.m.

The City of Litchfield Park hosts an outdoor movie night featuring *The BFG*, with popcorn and shave ice available for purchase.

Jackie Robinson Field, 14451 W. Camelback Road, Litchfield Park, AZ 85340

Litchfield Park 10K, 5K, 1 Mile Run/Walk

Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026, 7:30–11 a.m.

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Come Back Buddy to headline February Arts in the Park concert in Litchfield Park. (Submitted photo/City of Litchfield Park)

Come Back Buddy to headline free concert in Litchfield Park

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The City of Litchfield Park will host a free public concert featuring the rock-and-roll band Come Back Buddy as part of its February Arts in the Park concert series.

The performance will take place from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 22 on the front lawn of The Wigwam, where attendees are encouraged to bring blankets or lawn chairs. Beverages will be available for purchase, but outside alcohol will not be permitted.

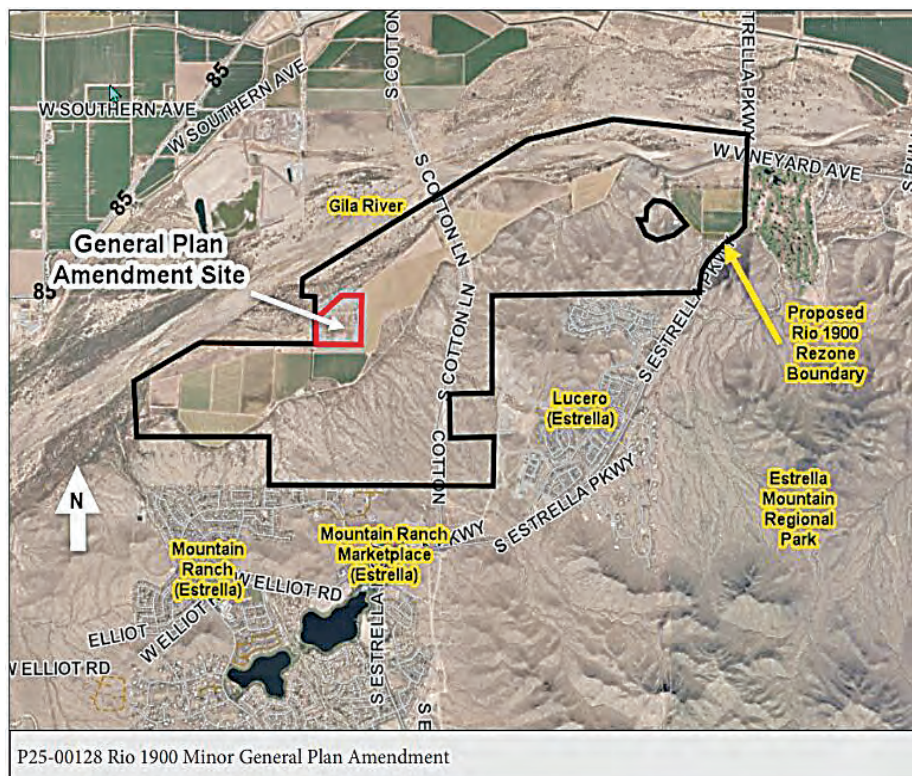
Come Back Buddy performs 1950s rock-and-roll hits, featuring music made famous by artists such as Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison. The band is led by Mike Randall on

vocals and guitar, with Janine Randall on bass. Drumming duties rotate among Scott Rice, Tim Kimbro, Austin Case, Don Rinehart or Carlos Almeida.

City officials said they are excited to welcome the band back for this year's concert series. Additional information about the group is available at comebackbuddy.com.

The Arts in the Park Concert Series will continue with upcoming performances, including the Thaddeus Rose Band from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, March 15, and the City Nights Band for the season finale from 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday, April 10.

More information about the concert series is available at litchfield-park.gov.



P25-00128 Rio 1900 Minor General Plan Amendment

Goodyear council approves general plan change for Rio 1900 development. (Submitted photo/Rio 1900 Project Team, City of Goodyear)

Change

- From page 11

its and environmental protections.

At least 30% of the site would remain open space, including a 30-acre public community park, neighborhood and local parks, trailheads and a linear park and trail system along the Gila River. Hillside areas with slopes of 20% or greater would be partially preserved, with at least half required to remain as open space.

Commercial development would be concentrated near Cotton Lane and Estrella Parkway, with a minimum of 25 acres required. The plan includes sites for two elementary schools, a potential fire station and a resort hotel, though the resort would depend on market demand.

City staff said the developer will be responsible for building all infrastructure needed to serve the site and will generate one-time revenue through permits, construction sales tax and

development impact fees. Long-term fiscal impacts will depend on the pace and scale of development.

Residents raised concerns during public hearings about housing density, traffic, water supply, flood control, hillside protection and compatibility with nearby Estrella neighborhoods. City engineers said construction on Cotton Lane and a bridge connection to Estrella is expected to begin this year, with coordination planned to maintain access during construction.

Several council members voiced support, citing the project's mix of housing, amenities and open space.

"I think this project is a good opportunity for Goodyear," said Councilmember Laura Kaino. "It brings a balance of housing, commercial space, parks and open space that strengthens the community long term."

Harvard Investments anticipates beginning site construction in 2027, with the first homes expected around 2029, Greathouse said.

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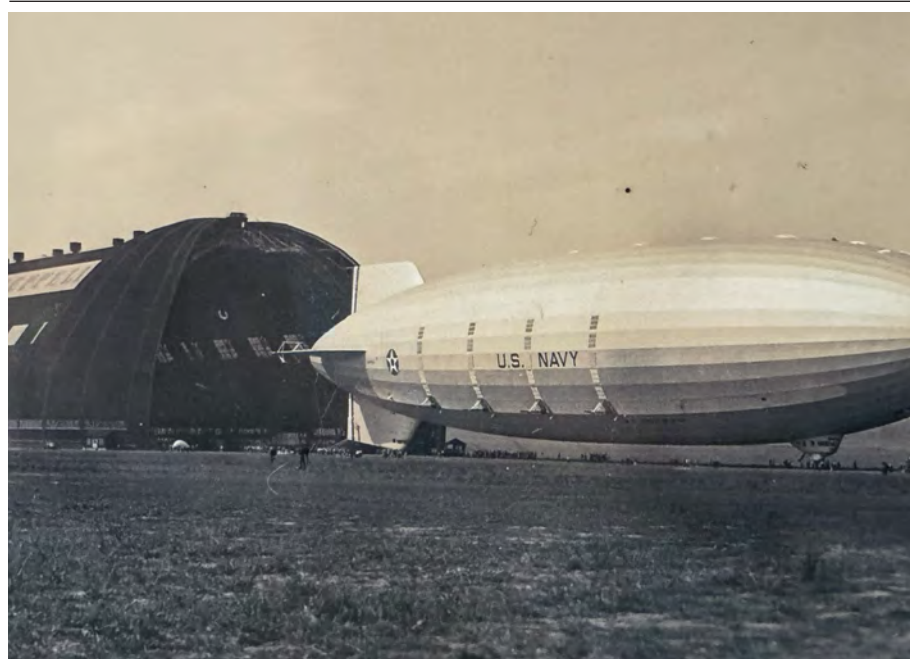
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FROM THE COVER



Goodyear's WWII aircraft factory is reborn as a center for small business. (Submitted photo/PW Litchfield Heritage Center)

Flite

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ent aircraft with a single large tail. That's a major structural change."

The hangar, now a mixed-use commercial and warehouse complex home to about 140 small businesses, began life in the early 1940s as a Goodyear Aircraft Company facility. Built after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it became part of what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called the nation's "arsenal of democracy," modifying B-24 Liberator bombers into PB4Y-2 Privateer reconnaissance aircraft for the U.S. Navy.

Planes were ferried in from manufacturing plants around the country, rebuilt inside massive hangars and flown out again, often within days.

"They flew them right through the hangars," Burton said. "Parts were made on one end, modifications were done on another, and they were back in the air headed to the fleet. It was an incredibly efficient operation."

The site's history stretches back well before World War II.

Goodyear first came to Arizona in 1916, seeking a reliable domestic source of long-staple cotton, a critical material used to reinforce rubber products. Global supply disruptions caused by boll weevil infestations in the American South and shipping challenges during World War I pushed the company west, helping establish large-scale cotton farming in what was then sparsely populated desert.

That agricultural venture laid the groundwork for industrial development in the Southwest Valley, drawing thousands of workers and transforming the region's economy decades before the war.

Goodyear entered aeronautics as early as 1910, developing rubberized fabrics for balloons and early aircraft. During World War II, that expertise translated into blimp production for the U.S. Navy. Donahue said more than 150 blimps were produced

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Historic

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during the war, many assembled by women who supported troops serving overseas.

“It was very hard work,” Donahue said. “They were on concrete floors, using caustic glue and heavy sewing equipment. Those women were incredibly proud of the blimps they made.”

The blimps played a crucial role in coastal defense, patrolling U.S. shorelines and escorting thousands of cargo ships carrying troops and ammunition. “We never lost a single ship that was guarded by a blimp,” Donahue said.

After the war, the Goodyear Aircraft Corporation purchased the property and expanded its mission.

As the Cold War intensified, the site evolved into a major center for radar research, electronics and materials science. Engineers there helped

develop advanced airborne mapping and navigation radar systems capable of seeing through clouds and darkness, technology that would later influence both military operations and civilian mapping.

The facility also became known for innovations in radar-transparent plastics, aircraft canopies and reinforced windows. One unusual but effective testing method involved a “chicken gun,” used to fire birds at aircraft windshields at high speeds to ensure they could withstand in-flight impacts without shattering.

Over the decades, the property passed through multiple corporate identities, eventually becoming a highly secured defense installation where it was largely hidden from view.

“For most of its existence, it was closed off from the outside world,” Burton said. “You needed security clearance just to get inside. Even as owners, we didn’t fully understand what was there until much later.”

That changed after defense operations wound down in the 2010s. Faced with the choice of demolishing the aging complex or preserving it, the owners opted for adaptive reuse.

“It had such a strong physical character and such a rich history,” Burton said.

“Every time we opened up a wall or ceiling, we discovered something: original trusses, old tooling, wartime construction details. It became clear this place deserved another life.”

Renovations required extensive environmental cleanup, including the removal of asbestos and contaminated soil, as well as upgrades to decades-old infrastructure.

Later alterations were stripped away, hangar spaces reopened and 1940s-era architectural features preserved.

One hangar, once filled with classified laboratories, is now open to vehicle traffic and public tours.

Today, the Goodyear Flite Build-

ing houses a mix of light industrial tenants, creative firms, gyms and service businesses. Community spaces and aviation-themed artwork reference the site’s past, including murals depicting aircraft once built or modified there.

Developers say future plans include additional warehouse and industrial buildings on nearby land, designed to echo the scale and character of the original wartime structures.

“We’re trying to be mindful,” Burton said. “This is still an industrial site, but it’s also part of Arizona history. The goal is to let people see what happened here, while making it useful for the next generation.”

Once a guarded hub of wartime production and Cold War innovation, the former Goodyear Aircraft hangar now stands as an example of adaptive reuse, linking today’s small businesses to the workers, aircraft and airships that helped shape American aviation and the Southwest Valley itself.

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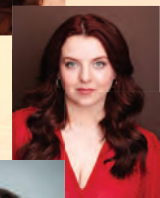
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