



Restaurant

Lo-Lo's family
offshoot goes
fine-dining; **6**



CHANDLER
INDEPENDENT



Education

Celebrating new
semiconductor
program; **14**

February 2026 Volume 4 Issue 7 Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

**Chandler board
narrowly OKs
staffing
reduction plan**

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After Chandler Unified's Governing Board took in a thorough presentation Jan. 14 on a detailed staff reduction plan to cut about \$12 million from next year's budget, it seemed the board had a path, albeit a hotly contested one, to get to its goal.

But even after that seven-hour meeting, plus two more lengthy special meetings devoted solely to potential staffing cuts, the board was still sharply divided on the best approach.

The CUSD board voted, 3-2, at a special Jan. 29 meeting to approve a much-debated complex list of staff cuts for the 2026-27 school year. Board Vice President Barb Mozdzen proposed the final package and voted in favor of it, as did board members Kurt Rohrs and Ryan Heap. Board President Patti Serano and board member Claudia Mendoza voted against it.

Administration laid out Options A, B and C for the final vote, though Mozdzen listed a series of cuts that she called "customized."

"I believe our enrollment could drop

• See **CUSD** on page 9

BLACK EXCELLENCE

Chandler entrepreneur
earned Black History
Month Business Series
speaking engagements

By Jason W.. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When Jacary Hawkins took home a \$10,000 symbolic giant check from a competitive incubator entrepreneurship program Dec. 18 of last year, cheers abounded around the Arizona State University Innovation Center.

Hawkins hopes to keep momentum going in 2026 from that Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute Chandler Endeavor program victory, where he bested 62 competing entrepreneurs in the GoDaddy-sponsored

• See **Entrepreneur** on page 12

Jacary Hawkins holds containers of his sea moss nutritional supplements that helped him win a major prize in an Arizona State University incubator competition late last year in Chandler. The Chandler resident was set to speak at some Black History Month Business Series events this month. (Courtesy of Jacary Hawkins)



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PAGE 7

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ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Chamber scholarships apps available online

The Chandler Chamber of Commerce's 39th annual Community Awards is a May 28 banquet will honor award winners, along with the recipients of \$2,500 tuition-and-fees Chandler Chamber Community Foundation scholarships. Completed scholarship forms should be emailed to info@chandlerchamber.com by Thursday, May 1. Email all completed award nomination forms to info@chandlerchamber.com by Friday, March 6. Read more at tinyurl.com/rzhc7ud2

Apply for a free pool fence from nonprofit by April 5

Child Crisis Arizona and the Salt River Project have opened applications for a Pool Fence Safety Program, which provides free pool fences to eligible families in Maricopa County, following a record number of drowning deaths — 75 — in the county in 2024. The program, now in its fifth year, will be accepting applications through Sunday, April 5. Read more at tinyurl.com/yyxb9ruk

Military performers at Center for Arts free show

The Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus are U.S. Army Field Band components set to perform a free show at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, March 7, at the Chandler Center for the Arts. Required tickets are required for the free performance were made available Jan. 30 with a maximum of 4 tickets per person. There are a limited number of tickets available to reserve online; click on a link in the story below to see if any are still available or call 480-782-2680. Read more at tinyurl.com/yckb8cte

City of Chandler's Proposed Utility Rate Changes (Effective 3/2/26)

Water (100% COS)	Mar-26
Residential % (i.e. single family homes)	15.00%
Multifamily % (i.e. duplex, triplex, condos, apartment complex)	15.00%
Non-Residential % (i.e. business, school, hospital, church)	15.00%
Landscape % (i.e. parks, golf courses, HOAs)	15.00%
Industrial % (i.e. manufacturing, dist. centers, lg warehouse)	15.00%
Overall Water Revenue Increase Needed	15.00%

Reclaimed Water (Across the Board Increase)	Mar-26
Reclaimed Water %	18.00%

Water- Avg. Bill Examples	Prior Rate	As of Mar. 2 2026
Residential Avg. Bill (10,000 gal. 5/8" meter)	\$26.32	\$30.27
Multifamily Avg. Bill (500k gal. 6" meter)	\$1,291.32	\$1,485.02
Non-Residential Avg. Bill (200k gal. 2" meter)	\$505.40	\$581.21
Landscape Avg. Bill (200k gal. 1" meter)	\$630.17	\$724.70

Reclaimed- Avg. Bill Example	Prior Rate	As of Mar. 2 2026
Monthly Average (850k gal)	\$ 680.00	\$802.40

Combined Average Bill Examples	Prior Rate	As of Mar. 2 2026
Residential Combined Avg. Bill	\$73.83	\$83.12
Multifamily Combined Avg. Bill	\$3,229.32	\$3,713.72
Non-Residential Combined Avg. Bill	\$1,388.98	\$1,597.33

Wastewater (100% COS)	Mar-26
Residential %	15.00%
Multifamily %	15.00%
Non-Residential % Volumetric	15.00%
Industrial % Volumetric	15.00%
Overall Wastewater Revenue Increase Needed	15.00%

Solid Waste	Mar-26
Residential %	6.00%

Wastewater- Avg. Bill Example	Prior Rate	As of Mar. 2 2026
Residential Base Avg. Bill (Flat Fee)	\$27.65	\$31.80
Multifamily Avg. Bill (150 units)	\$1,938.00	\$2,228.70
Non-Residential Avg. Bill (200k gal. 2" meter)	\$883.58	\$1,016.12

Solid Waste- Avg. Bill Example	Prior Rate	As of Mar. 2 2026
Monthly Fee (Flat Fee)	\$19.86	\$21.05

This chart shows how much more Chandler property owners will be paying for some utilities starting March 2. Council gave final approval to the new rates by a 5-2 vote at its Jan. 9 meeting. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)

City's 15%, other utility hikes into effect March 2

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A 5-2 vote was the final step in one of the larger all-at-once utility rate hikes for Chandler residents in recent memory.

Council members Jane Poston and Matt Orlando voted against the hike at the regular Jan. 9 meeting. The vote comes more than six months after the city's budget team first

brought potential increase choices to council in a work session.

The increases that will go into effect March 2 are 15% for water and wastewater customers, 18% for reclaimed water and 6% for all residential solid waste.

The vote also comes at the end of a process that involved a cost-of-service assessment, three council work sessions and public input gathered

using several methods.

By and large, the negative feedback on the increases was minimal.

Mayor Kevin Hartke said he wants staff and council to be even more forward-thinking about the need for annual reviews of rates. Council and staff have been reviewing utility rates every two years.

• See **Utilities** on page 33

ACQUITTAL

Council member acquitted of stealing signs

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

O.D. Harris has been found not guilty.

The Chandler City Council member celebrated with his wife and attorney Jan. 20 after having charges filed against him multiple times in connection to an alleged political sign-stealing incident just before the July 2024 election.

The Jan. 20 criminal trial should

bring some resolution to a saga that started with complaints to the Chandler Police Department.

Judge Leonore Driggs of the Arcadia Biltmore Justice Court ruled that the prosecutor, who is from Scottsdale, didn't prove that the types of signs damaged were political in nature.

Harris, who was charged with one count each of altering or destroy political sign and criminal damage-de-

facing, was overjoyed to share the news publicly on his social media.

"To the community I love so much, following my Rule 20 acquittal, I want to clearly and responsibly address an issue that continues to be mischaracterized," Harris wrote. "The sign at the center of this case was not a 'campaign sign.' That fact was established in court. It did not meet the legal definition of a campaign sign under

• See **Harris** on page 33



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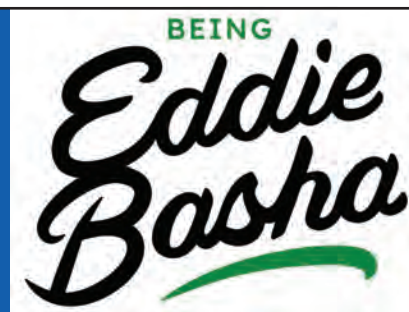


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Naked Fig Soap founder Madeline Harn poses with a sample. The Phoenix handmade skincare brand took home the only \$10,000 among eight awards announced as part of the \$50,000 doled out this year as part of the Chandler-based State Forty Eight Foundation's 2025 Entrepreneur Grant Program. Courtesy of State Forty Eight Foundation)

Chandler foundation announces \$50K in grants

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Chandler-based State Forty Eight Foundation recently awarded \$50,000 in grants to eight Arizona small businesses as part of its 2025 Entrepreneur Grant Program.

The money is headed to founders across industries including wellness, food and beverage, youth development, creative services, and fitness, according to a news release.

The program is designed to help founders move from early traction to sustainable growth.

The eight awardees were honored during the Foundation's annual Winners' Circle Celebration.

This year, the Foundation awarded a total of \$50,000 to eight Arizona-based small businesses spanning wellness, food and beverage, retail, events, youth development, fitness and creative services.

Selected from among 75 applications, the entrepreneurs were recognized for their commitment

• See **Grants** on page 32

Lo-Lo's family offshoot goes fine-dining

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When Larry Warren White Jr. was born, he was already in the restaurant business.

White grew up in the family that started Lo-Lo's Chicken and Waffles, with his grandmother, Elizabeth, opening Golden Rule Cafe in downtown Phoenix in 1964, helped spawn a restaurant business that has grown beyond Arizona.

One of the latest restaurant endeavors by any member of the family is Warren's Supper Club in west Chandler, run by Larry White, which opened in June 2025.

Larry and his wife, Rasheeda, who were looking to expand again within the Valley, finally saw the opportunity to take Chandler City Councilmember O.D. Harris's decade-old request for the family to expand into the city.

"We actually took over the (former Charleston's Restaurant building) thinking of it as a second Brunch & Sip location," White said. "But as we got into remodeling, looking



Larry White poses with a filet mignon dish and sides at his Warren's Supper Club restaurant in west Chandler. The restaurant opened in June of last year. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

at the building — which has 'good bones' — and the location, and the need, we decided on fine dining."

White said Warren's has a great location and plenty of parking. The site, off 54th Street and Ray Road near Interstate 10 and a luxury car dealership, is versatile as well, with steakhouse vibe but with a bar, patio, deejay and jazz-club room.

"We don't have any residential nearby, so we can make all the noise we want," he said.

In addition to an upscale environment — gangster rap is among the music genres the deejay and live entertainment won't be playing, White says — high-quality food is important.

• See **Warren's** on page 32

BUSINESS

Chandler aerospace firm promotes new COO

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA



Tyler Botthof

AvAir, a Chandler-based aviation inventory solutions and aftermarket service firm, announced the promotion of Tyler Botthof to chief operating officer, effective Jan. 1.

In this role, Botthof will oversee AvAir's global operations, driving operational excellence, scalability and strategic execution as the company continues to expand its footprint in the aviation aftermarket.

Botthof brings more than 24 years of service to AvAir. He began his career with the company in the warehouse, steadily working his way through a variety of sales

and operational roles before most recently serving as vice president of operations.

Throughout his tenure, he has played a key role in strengthening operational performance, optimizing supply-chain execution, and reinforcing AvAir's reputation for reliability, speed, and customer service.

AvAir, which celebrated its 25th year in 2025, offers customized solutions for customers and suppliers to buy, sell, exchange, loan, lease, or consign inventories with more than 26 million in-stock components.

For more information about AvAir, visit AvAir.aero.

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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by Jason Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

NOW OPEN

1 Best Life Chiropractic & Wellness held a grand opening and open house at its location at 980 E. Pecos Rd, Suite 3 in Chandler on Jan. 8. The location offers chiropractic treatments, integrative medical, regenerative solutions, weight loss and body sculpting, hormone replacement therapy, hair restoration, alternative and holistic therapies and comprehensive blood panels as part of its services. Reach the staff at 480-963-8800 or through bestlifechiropractic.com.

2 Claim Assist Solutions has opened its first Arizona office in west Chandler. The new 58,000 square-foot facility is operational and serves as a hub for the company's growing presence in the Phoenix metro area.. With operations underway, the firm is actively hiring and onboarding employees at its Chandler office, with plans to steadily expand its local workforce over the next several years. The firm specializes in insurance

claim support services, helping carriers, adjusters, and policyholders navigate the claims process more efficiently. Proprietary technology helps enhance visibility, accuracy, and communication, allowing claims to be processed quickly while maintaining a high standard of service. Claim Assist Solutions plans to actively engage with Chandler's business community and local workforce resources as operations continue to expand. Learn more about the firm at claimassistsolutions.com.

3 Si Señor re-opened Feb. 11 after about a six-month closure due to an electrical fire. The 25-year-old, family-run New Mexico cuisine restaurant, which closed after the Aug. 2 fire, is in a lot located on the northwest corner of Alma School Road and Galveston Streets. It specializes in warm, fresh sopapillas, baskets of freshly made chips with four separate dipping sauces and large portions of entrees that use Hatch chile liberally. There are also many types of margaritas available. Learn more about

the restaurant at SiSenorARizona.com or by calling 480-857-1217.

COMING SOON

4 C.E. Precision Assemblies, or CEPA, a Chandler-based manufacturer of cable assemblies and wire harnesses for the aerospace and defense industries, is significantly expanding its operations. The company recently signed a 39,757-square-foot lease at 7155 W. Detroit Street in West Chandler for a facility nearly four times the size of its current digs on Frye Road near 56th Street. CEPA is currently submitting tenant improvement plans for the new facility and expects to occupy the space by May 2026, the city states. The company is also recruiting for new positions and anticipates adding up to 20-30 employees over the next two years. For more information on hiring opportunities, visit trexon.com/careers

CLOSED

5 A&W Restaurants, known for root beer and comfort fast food, has closed its only Valley location. It was located inside the Walmart near the northwest corner of Gilbert and Germann in south Chandler. No explanation was announced by the Kentucky-based corporation. It wasn't immediately clear what will happen with Walmart's 50-seat space where A&W had opened in the summer of 2024 to serve its signature root beer and root beer floats. The longstanding chain, which still has two truck-stop-type locations and one each in Seligman and Prescott Valley, also serves hot dogs, burgers and chicken tenders.



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A&W

FROM THE COVER

CUSD

• From page 1

even more severely than we've predicted, and this option protects against overstaffing," Mozdzen said.

The vote came at the end of a two-hour special weekday morning meeting intended to come up with the final \$2 million in staff cuts as part of the overall \$12 million in order to balance the CUSD 2026-27 budget. The meeting was held two weeks after the board voted Jan. 14 to approve about \$10 million in changes or eliminations to many positions around the district.

After dozens of educators and others spoke during public input Jan. 14, mainly in opposition to proposed changes to elementary and junior high school library-related positions, along with school deans, the board told staff to put together alternatives in advance of a three-hour special Jan. 21 morning meeting.

That three-hour meeting, which included administration proposing nine alternative ways to cut the final \$2 million needed. But the board voted, 3-2, to direct administration to complete a more specific list of calculations and to assemble data in advance of a special meeting to be held Feb. 4 or earlier.

Serrano, Mendoza and Mozdzen voted in favor of that informational request motion Jan. 21, with Heap and Rohrs voting against it.



Chandler Unified Governing Board Vice President Barb Mozdzen speaks during a 2025 meeting. The board narrowly voted, 3-2, at the end of the nearly two-hour special meeting Jan. 29 on a plan that covers \$2 million in staff cuts as part of a planned \$12 million cut needed for next year's staffing budget (Independent Newsmedia file-Jason W. Brooks)

Contracts for the 2026-27 school year must be issued by March 15, so the Jan. 29 special meeting was the final time to make some tough staffing decisions.

Early in the Jan. 29 meeting, Heap moved to approve the "Option 1" package of cuts administrators proposed as part of the 10 options laid out Jan. 21, with Rohrs seconding the motion. But Serrano, Mendoza and Mozdzen voted against it.

The final list of positions reduced or cut — especially regarding K-8 media centers and deans — looks much different than what administration teams put on the Jan. 14 agenda.

The summary of some of the changes approved Jan. 29 includes:

- \$388,000 in eliminations of five full-time teachers;

- \$300,000 in reductions to district-level administration staffing;

- \$500,000 in eliminations of six full-time certified non-classroom junior high media specialist positions;

- \$127,000 in new spending on three classified junior high media assistant positions;

- \$1.185 million in elimination of 15 full-time media/tech positions;

- \$155,000 in additional spending by increasing 15 library media assistant positions from 0.25 FTE to 0.5 FTE.

The list of positions reduced or eliminated through \$10 million in cuts approved Jan. 14 is even more vast. That affects many types of positions, such as eliminating director of safety and assistant directors of special education and student services, along with reducing total FTE numbers among other non-classroom support and reducing stipend amounts.

Earlier in the meeting, Serrano said she wasn't necessarily opposed to the new "career literacy teacher" position, though she said there should be "a lot of lessons learned" from a pilot program and newly proposed permanent K-8 staffing model being put together, all before bringing anything to the board Jan. 14.

"The way we got to bringing the position up (at a public meeting) was not best practices," Serrano said. "Along with the way we communicated it. And I want to give credit for the

remarkable work being done by the Instructional Resource center folks and site staff around the district."

The district's main labor union, the Chandler Education Association, issued a statement Jan. 30 about the decision.

"We extend our sincere gratitude to board members Patti Serrano and Claudia Mendoza for their courage and foresight," the union stated. "Their votes to preserve student-facing positions demonstrated an understanding that the heart of our district is the direct interaction between educators and students."

The union stated that reducing student-facing positions results in fewer program offerings and uneven experiences, which undermines district efforts to maintain or grow enrollment.

"Chandler educators are deeply frustrated by the last-minute nature of all these cuts," the union stated. "The lack of transparency and the failure to include meaningful input from educators or the broader community has resulted in a decision-making process that feels rushed and disconnected from the reality of our schools."

The union calls some of the positions eliminated "mission-critical."

"As educators, we are gravely concerned about the long-term impact these staffing cuts will have on student achievement — particularly student literacy rates," the union stated.



Leigh Carmichael
2 reviews ★★★★★ 1 week ago

I was looking for a better price to get some wear and tear repair done on my 2017 Honda Civic Coupe. Highline came highly recommended and for good reason! Not only did they find some issues Honda had missed, the price was considerably less than even the repairs for the issues Honda did find PLUS the issues Highline discovered. When I picked up my car, they let me know of some work I will need in the future but did not pressure me to do it right now and were extremely kind when letting me know it "wasn't a cost I needed to worry about right now" (their words). I almost cried as it's so rare to get such honesty and consideration from a business these days. I will only take my Honda to Highline from now on!

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Corrections

We will promptly correct all factual errors. We offer a "right of reply" to the people about whom we write. Readers who disagree with a news story are welcome to respond with a letter.

Why I'm voting for Matt Orlando for mayor

I am a resident of Chandler, moving to a senior living complex, with my wife of 62 years.

We moved to be closer to family. I am very familiar with the outstanding City of Chandler, having spent almost fifty years in city government.

As the city elections near, I have studied the candidates for mayor and City Council.

I know how important local elected officials are to the citizens.

After watching the data center discussion (in December), I have decided to endorse Matt Orlando.

He stands out for his unbelievable dedication to the community as well as his country.

Having worked closely with mayors and City Council members, Orlando checks all the boxes for his dedication to this community.

He has served many terms — not as a stepping stone to higher office.

Because he cares about the citizens and following up on projects, he knows those are important to them.

His passion for serving shows in his many years in the Air National Guard including four years on active duty.

Chandler citizens are fortunate to have had such stable and caring city government for many years. Outstanding citizens have served.

Without any reservations or hesitation, I am endorsing Matt Orlando for mayor of Chandler.

I have not been asked for this endorsement. It comes after extensive research and discussions with citizens and former employee.

Ron Pies
CHANDLER

Black History Month, Jesus, the faith that sustained a people

When I was growing up, I rarely

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We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

learned about the history of Black Americans. What I did learn often came in fragments, limited to a few familiar names or moments, separated from the deeper story of struggle, faith, and survival that shaped generations.

Black History Month gives us space to listen more carefully to that full story. When we take time to learn about one another, fear often loses its grip.

Understanding invites empathy. Ignorance, on the other hand, leaves room for stereotypes and suspicion to grow. Learning the history of others helps us see people not as threats, but as neighbors whose stories matter.

At the heart of Black history is resilience. Despite centuries of enslavement, segregation, and discrimination, Black communities continued to shape culture, challenge injustice, and imagine a future rooted in dignity.

For many African Americans, faith in Jesus played a central role in that endurance. From the era of slavery through segregation and into the present, faith was not abstract.

It lived under pressure. Enslaved Africans were stripped of homeland, language, and legal protection, yet many held onto beliefs with determination.

Often denied education and the freedom to gather openly, they carried Scripture through memory, song, and prayer. Faith became something portable, shared quietly, and sustained together.

Jesus mattered in this context because his story resonated with lived experience. He was born into poverty,

SPEAK UP

Here are some recent online comments about Chandler Independent items:

"ARIZONA LEGISLATOR SEEKS TO NAME LOOP 202 AFTER CHARLIE KIRK":

"How about a road named after every child that has died of a school shooting? They are more important."

— Michael Robinson via story comment

"KYRENE DISCUSSES BUDGET, BOARD MEMBERS CALL ON LEGISLATURE FOR MORE FUNDING":

"How about less board members?"

— William Brinkman via story comment

"CHANDLER POLICE SHOOT, WOUND ARMED SUSPECT FLEEING FROM TRAFFIC STOP":

"Sounds like Chandler PD needs more time at the gun range. Several officers fired and he was hit once."

— Dan M. via story comment

Got a comment on a story you've recently seen? Email us at azopinions@iniusa.org with the name of the story and a one- or two-line comment.

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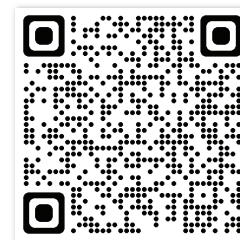
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FROM THE COVER

Entrepreneur

• From page 1

competition.

His company, The Sea Moss Bosses, makes and sells a line of nutritional supplements it says help boost immunities with vitamins and other nutrients.

That success is part of why he's included in events like the Black History Month Business Series, an in-person speaker Black Chamber of Arizona series happening in February.

Hawkins' 2025 success is also why he thinks 2026 will be an even bigger breakout year for him as an entrepreneur.

"These last six months have been very critical for me," Hawkins said. "And there are more opportunities open now — opportunities to use that \$10,000 prize wisely."

Hawkins, 29, said he turned down a \$1 million deal that he felt would have not only forced rapid ramp-up of production, but also might have led to him not being able to keep working preservative-free.

"Someone could probably sell \$1 million of a garbage product," Hawkins said. "It might be a longer route. But I choose to make the product the way I make it — no preservatives."

Hawkins said products from The Sea Moss Bosses not only are only



Jacary Hawkins, left, is handed a \$10,000 check by an organizer of an incubator competition in December of last year at the ASU Chandler Innovation Center. The Chandler resident was set to speak at some Black History Month Business Series events this month. (Courtesy of Jacary Hawkins)

currently sourced only from Honduras and St. Lucia, but The Sea Moss Bosses' handmade method requires refrigeration or freezing — products are never at room temperature.

"Those two parts of the Caribbean are very mineral-dense," he said.

Hawkins said recent changes in U.S. policy involving Central American countries have created some instability in trades and exports. That has sped up long-term thinking and discussion about sea moss and other products sourced in that part of the world.

Hawkins said he's "cottage food" certified. So while he wants to even-



Jacary Hawkins, left, poses with Chandler City Council member Christine Ellis at an incubator competition last year at Arizona State University's Chandler Innovation Center. The Chandler entrepreneur, who won a \$10,000 prize at the competition, was set to speak at some Black History Month Business Series events this month. (Courtesy of Jacary Hawkins)

tually scale up, for now, making supplements at home and studying both the sourcing environments and price points are key.

Networking through a Norwegian organization led Hawkins to a distribution company called Zinzino, which promotes Omega-3 products right on its homepage.

"Omega 3s create the health effects we're looking for," Hawkins said.

Those health effects include cellular health, he said. Hawkins said

The Sea Moss Bosses products drew praise from a leader in the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America after a product was helpful to his son.

"It cleans the blood and aids the start of soft-tissue regeneration," Hawkins said of sea moss products, which he says have an anti-inflammatory effect. "So products have both a niche market and widespread appeal."

Born in Chicago, Hawkins spent much of his life in the Minneapolis area, finding some success in sales with companies like Best Buy and Ashley Furniture. When COVID-19 led to many people thinking more about and researching homemade and over-the-counter supplements and remedies, that's about when Hawkins started learning about sea moss.

He then moved to Arizona — specifically Chandler — where he and his wife, Paris, now reside.

Hawkins said he hopes to learn more about the science side of how sea moss and minerals work through travel to source locations and by working with experts.

There also could be more testing of his products in the near future to further prove their effectiveness, he said.

"I've got so much left to learn," Hawkins said. "But we've come so far and already have so many testimonials."



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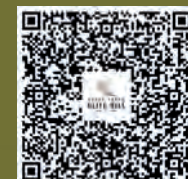
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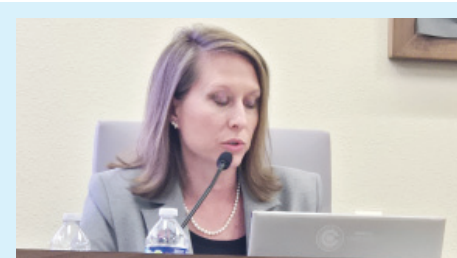
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Chandler Unified Assistant Superintendent Jessica Edgar presented a grant-funded pilot high school math course Jan. 14 called “integrated statistics and quantitative reasoning” that will make its CUSD debut at two sites in the 2026-27 school year. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

School board OKs ‘quantitative reasoning’ pilot math course

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After the Chandler Unified Governing Board spent hours sorting out potential layoffs during its long Jan. 14 meeting, there were still a few action items on the agenda that were resolved afterward.

One of those items was an agreement with a nonprofit organization for a new type of math course at two high schools.

The board unanimously approved an agreement with WestEd for a pilot 2026-27 math course called “integrated statistics and quantitative reasoning.”

A staff report states the course, known in the 2026-27 high school course catalog as MAT410, was approved by the board when it OK’d new grades 7-12 classes in November.

It’s billed as a “hands-on, integrative curriculum that weaves together quantitative, statistical, and data literacy concepts to solve complex, real-world problems.”

The staff report states ISQR was developed as a fourth-year math course

• See **Math** on page 37

District celebrates new semiconductor program

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chandler Unified’s first semiconductor career pathway program started when students returned in July for the start of the 2025-26 school year.

Students, industry partners, district staff and local officials gathered at Hamilton High School on Jan. 15 to celebrate the start of the program with a ribbon-cutting.

Chandler Unified’s semiconductor program is based at Hamilton this year as part of the district’s career and technical education curriculum.

“This new program is a result of the direct investment in the future workforce, aiming to equip high school students with the specialized skills needed for careers in the rapidly growing semiconductor industry,” the district stated in a news release.

Hamilton Principal Dominic Romero spoke at the event.

“What makes this program special is that it sits at the intersection of education, industry and community,” Romero said. “We’re not just



Hamilton High School students cut a ribbon as Chandler Unified board members, staff, industry professionals and others look on. The Jan. 15 ribbon-cutting was to celebrate the first year of the district’s first semiconductor program, located at Hamilton. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

preparing students for jobs — we’re preparing them for purpose. We’re providing access to the very fields that shape our global community and national security — and we’re doing that right here, at a public high school.”

Superintendent Frank Narducci said the program was built with years of careful staff planning, along with major contributions from “generous partners.”

Several students also spoke, one praising the “high level of expectations” instructors have of students and the amount of hands-on learning that’s built into the curriculum.

Janet Hartkopf, the district’s coordinator of emerging technologies, also spoke, as did Intel public affairs coordinator Angela Creedon, Gene Fallico of NXP Semiconductor and Biren Minhas of Cirrus Logic.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Chandler school board picks new superintendent

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Chandler Unified School District will have a new superintendent July 1.

The CUSD Governing Board announced Jan. 29 that Anna Battle will be its next superintendent. She’ll take over after current Superintendent Frank Narducci retires in June.

Contract terms are still being worked out. But Board President Patti Serrano was quoted in what the board appreciates about Battle.

“Dr. Battle’s passion for public education, combined with her experience leading school systems, reflects the priorities our community identified throughout

this process and positions our district well for the future,” Serrano stated. “Over the past several months, the CUSD Governing Board heard from students, staff, families and community members. That input was invaluable in shaping our leadership profile and guiding both the search process and the final selection. We are deeply grateful for the engagement, thoughtfulness and care our community demonstrated every step of the way.”

Battle, currently a Roosevelt School District deputy superintendent, was chosen over fellow finalists Lana Berry, the current CUSD chief financial officer.

• See **Superintendent** on page 38



Anna Battle speaks at a Jan. 28 Chandler Unified superintendent finalist forum. The longtime educator was chosen over fellow finalists Lana Berry and Ibi Haghighat by the Governing Board and will start as CUSD’s next superintendent July 1. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

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Chandler gymnastic coach with ALS dies

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

This week, Scott Barclay sent out the news release he probably knew he'd have to make — albeit probably sooner than he anticipated.

Barclay, owner of Aspire, a gymnastics gym in west Chandler, announced coach Rob Survick died on Jan. 21. He was 48.

Survick had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, for the past nine years, Barclay said in the news release, though the coach and former Arizona State University gymnast wasn't officially diagnosed until 2020.

"Rob was a coach, father, husband, mentor and a friend," Barclay wrote. "Since (the 2020 diagnosis), he committed to coming into the gym every day he could to do what he felt would keep him going — and that he did right up until 4 weeks ago."

After the loss of the use of his arms and legs within the past few years, Survick relied on staff capable of picking him up, and various chairs to position him in the gym, would use a mic placed on his head to coach the team.

Gymnasts who train at Aspire range from those barely old enough to tumble to college-age young adults. Barclay said Survick was a "vital member" of both the Arizona State University and Aspire families.

"His impact on our athletes, families, and staff is immeasurable," Barclay wrote. "He brought passion, love, and a vibrant spirit to our gym every day. His influence on both the junior and senior levels will be felt for a long time to come."

An Arizona State graduate, Survick competed on the ASU Club team from 1998 to 2002. During his time as a student-athlete, the team



Rob Survick, a former Arizona State University gymnast and longtime coach at the Aspire gymnastics facility in west Chandler, died Jan. 21 from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. (Courtesy of Scott Barclay)

faced significant challenges, Barclay wrote, including a complete end of university gymnastics funding and the loss of its ASU training facility.

"Rob was at the center of the effort to preserve the program, striving passionately to build this team from the ground up," Barclay wrote.

Following graduation from ASU, Survick coached the Sunrays and Desert Devils before partnering with Dan Hayden in 2005 to coach the Junior Sun Devils at the newly opened Aspire Kids Sports Center, located near the Chandler Fashion Center.

For the next 20 years, Survick served as the ASU club's assistant coach.

"Beyond his titles, Rob's heart was dedicated to developing young men," Barclay said. "He used gymnastics as



Coach and former Aspire student Brian Kern helps coach Rob Survick get his chair across the gym during Aspire's 30th birthday celebration Sept. 13, 2025 at the gymnastics facility in west Chandler. Survick died Jan. 21 from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. (Independent Newsmedia file/Jason W. Brooks)

a tool to help them grow into strong, responsible, and caring individuals."

Barclay wrote that Survick was a devoted father to Charlie, age 14 and Gracie, who's 11, and was "deeply in love" with his wife of 16 years, Missy.

Per Survick's wishes, Barclay wrote, Aspire will wait until after the season to gather and celebrate the coach's life with all those he loved and influenced.

Barclay wrote that many people have asked how they you can help or what they can send. The best way to help at this time is to send the Survicks a food gift card; email Barclay at scott@aspirekidsports.com or call

Aspire at 480-820-3774 for more information about donating.

"Thank you for keeping Rob and his family in your thoughts during this difficult time," Barclay wrote.

Survick, in September, spoke at length as Aspire held a 30th anniversary celebration, where Survick spoke to the hundreds in attendance at length. He was also the was the subject of a profile in the Chandler Independent leading up to that event.

"My wife and my kids are the most important people in my life," Survick told the Independent. "But this sure is important, too."

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Travel tips for the over-50 crowd

Travel has long been viewed as a positive hobby that can pay short- and long-term dividends. Some of those benefits may surprise even the most devoted jet-setters. For example, a joint study from the Global Commission on Aging and the Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies found that women who vacationed twice a year had a considerably lower risk of heart attack than women who vacationed once every six years. The same study noted men who did not take an annual vacation had a 30 percent greater risk of heart disease than men who did vacation each year.

Traveling after 50 may necessitate a slightly different approach than it did when individuals were younger. Though adults over 50 can reap the same travel-related rewards they did when they were younger, some additional safety measures may be neces-

sary at this point in travelers' lives.

- Determine vaccination requirements if you plan to travel overseas. The Health In Aging Foundation urges older travelers hoping to go overseas to identify vaccination requirements in countries they plan to visit. Make this part of your early planning, as the HIAF notes some countries require vaccinations be administered at least six weeks prior to entry. Information regarding travel-related vaccinations can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/travel-vaccines>.

- Get a pre-trip medical checkup. A pre-trip medical checkup can ensure adults over 50 are healthy enough to travel. A doctor visit also can be a great opportunity to update vacci-

- See **Travel** on page 23





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Hobbies to get seniors out and about

The threat posed by social isolation has been known to medical researchers and health care professionals for years, but the issue gained wider attention during the pandemic. Restrictions on social gatherings during the pandemic opened millions of people's eyes to the ill effects of social isolation, and while that threat proved temporary for the majority of people across the globe, many seniors continue to live largely isolated lives.

According to the Mayo Clinic, depression, anxiety, increased risk of suicide, and various chronic health problems are some of the outcomes associated with loneliness. That's a troubling assessment that becomes even more dis-

concerting when considering a general decline in socialization as evidenced by the 2021 American Perspectives Survey. Survey participants indicated they have fewer close friendships than they once did, speak with their friends less often and rely less on friends for personal support. That's challenging for adults of all ages, but it can be especially difficult for aging adults, who may be dealing with the loss of a spouse or other close confidantes they would otherwise rely on when confronting personal problems. Hobbies that promote socialization can help aging adults reestablish friendships and build new ones, pay-

• See **Hobbies** on page 23



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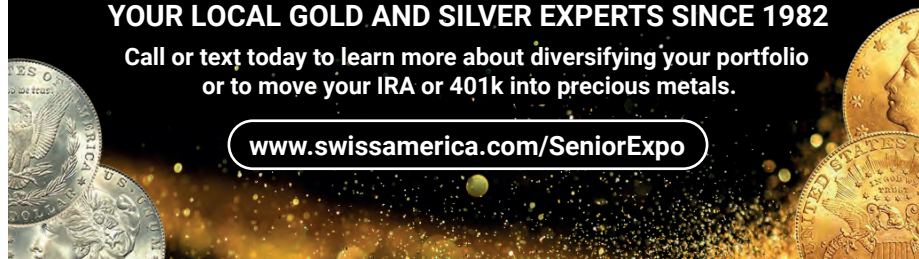
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Travel

• From page 19

nations and discuss medications. It can be tricky to manage medications when crossing time zones, and travelers can work out a schedule with their physicians to ensure they don't miss any doses. This also can be a good time to renew prescriptions to ensure you don't run out while away from home. Work with your physician and pharmacist to create a list of prescription and over-the-counter medications you take, which the HIAF notes will make it easier to get through customs and get replacement medicines should you need them while traveling.

♦ **Beware of deep-vein thrombosis (DVT)** and how to avoid it. The Mayo Clinic notes DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in one or more of the deep veins in the body, typically in the legs. Lack of movement is a risk

factor for DVT, which can affect immobile travelers during long flights, train rides or road trips. DVT risk can be reduced by getting up and walking around when allowed to do so on long flights or train rides. If you'll be driving long distances, make frequent pit-stops to get out of the car and stretch your legs.

♦ **Stay hydrated.** The Cleveland Clinic notes that dehydration can cause dizziness, elevate a person's heart rate, contribute to swollen feet and muscle cramps, and result in fatigue, among other side effects. Travel is exciting, and it can be easy to forget to hydrate during engaging trips. But the HIAF recommends individuals bring a large bottle of water with them and drink even if they do not feel thirsty.

These simple safety precautions can protect travelers 50 and over from health issues that might not have posed as significant a threat when they traveled in years past.

Hobbies

• From page 20

ing dividends that can have a profound impact on their overall health. With that in mind, adults who feel as though their social circles are shrinking in mid-life or in retirement can look to these activities as means to rebuilding their social lives.

♦ **Book club:** A book club offers multiple benefits to adults. Book clubs are inherently social and tend to bring like-minded individuals together, which can help build new and lasting friendships that extend beyond weekly discussions. A 2021 study published in the journal *Neurology* also linked regular reading to a lower risk of developing dementia.

♦ **Sports:** Sports provide another avenue to socialize with like-minded individuals. Golf is not a team sport, but it is typically played in groups of two or four, making it an ide-

al activity for adults with free time on their hands to get out and about and meet other people. Leagues for softball, bowling and pickleball also provide opportunities to socialize, and many adults are participating in such leagues for that very reason. A CivicScience study released in 2023 found that 49 percent of adults who planned to participate in adult recreational sports leagues were doing so for social interaction and the chance to make friends.

♦ **Travel:** Travel can provide another means for aging adults to make friends. Group tours to foreign countries, day trips to local attractions arranged by township recreational offices or even overseas trips with friends you've fallen out of touch with can be a great means to build new friendships and reinvigorate old ones, all the while getting you out of the house.

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How nutritional needs change with age

The human body undergoes an assortment of changes over the course of a lifetime. Some of those changes are visible to the naked eye, but many more are not. The body's changing needs in regard to nutrition is one alteration that people cannot see.

A nutritious diet can be a building block of a long and healthy life. Nutritional needs change as the body ages, and recognition of those changes can help people rest easy that their diets are working in their favor and not to their detriment.

Calorie needs

The body requires fewer calories as individuals reach adulthood. That's because muscle mass begins to decrease in adulthood while fat increases. The National Institutes of Health notes that muscles use more calories than fat throughout

the day, so it makes sense that a body experiencing a decline in muscle mass will require less calories than one in which muscle mass is on the rise. No two individuals are the same, and some adults exercise more than others. So it's best for adults to consult their physician to discuss their own calorie needs and then adjust their diets based on such discussions.

What to eat

The American Heart Association notes aging adults' calories should come from nutrient-dense foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean meat, and low-fat dairy. This recommendation aligns with adults' declining calorie needs, as nutrient-dense foods contain ample amounts of protein, vitamins and/or minerals but do not contain a lot of calories.

Water needs

It's vital for aging adults to make a concerted effort to drink water each day. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion notes that the sensation of thirst declines with age. Aging adults who are unaware of that unique biological reality may be risking dehydration because they are not compelled to drink water throughout the day. The Cleveland Clinic notes that dehydration can contribute to dizziness, weakness and lightheadedness, among other symptoms. Those symptoms can be particularly menacing for older adults, who are at increased risk for potentially harmful falls even if they are not dehydrated. The body



still needs water as it ages, and seniors taking certain medications may need more than usual due to medication-related fluid loss.

These are just some of the ways nutritional needs change with age. Adults are urged to pay greater attention to diet as they age and make choices that can counter age-related changes in their bodies.



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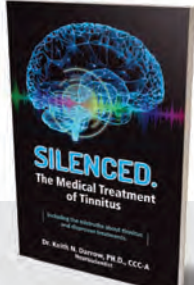


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A home-buying guide for empty nesters

The day a child leaves home can be bittersweet for parents. Although a son or daughter being successful and mature enough to move on to new opportunities can be a source of pride, parents typically lament the quiet that comes from empty rooms and a change to the daily routine they'd grown accustomed to when the kids were around. After some time, some couples decide to downsize to a home more befitting the empty nester lifestyle.

Downsizing presents an option for homeowners whose kids have left the nest. New analysis from a survey of 2,500 empty nesters commissioned by Regency Living found that 30 percent of empty nesters choose to downsize and move from their original family homes. When retirement is just around the corner, many professionals shift focus to how they want to live and where. Moving to a new home presents plenty of opportunities for older adults, including a chance to choose a home based on what's right for them in this stage of life. There are questions homeowners can ask themselves as they ponder if downsizing is right for them.

1. How much upkeep can I handle? A lifelong family home may be well-loved, but chances are it requires significant upkeep and repairs. Empty nesters may choose to move on to



a home that offers lifestyle benefits like less maintenance. Homes in lifestyle communities or those overseen by a homeowners' association tend to have certain maintenance built into a monthly fee.

2. Is this layout still a fit? Many empty nesters may not immediately feel the effects of aging, but before selecting a next home, individuals should think about aging in place

and any unique needs they may have. Opting for a single-level home, or at least one with the owner's suite on the main level, can be advantageous.

3. Can I make due with less square footage? A cavernous home with many rooms often isn't desirable for empty nesters. All of that square footage requires heating, cooling and maintenance. Rattling around inside a big, empty house may precipitate

the decision to downsize. Downsizing also can free up home equity, which can be used to fund retirement needs.

4. Which features do you desire? Many empty nesters want the next home to focus on some luxury items they may have bypassed in the first home when priorities lay elsewhere. Upscale environments like gourmet kitchens, spa-like bathrooms and outdoor living spaces may be in the budget when moving into a home with a smaller footprint.

5. Will my home be secure while I travel? Empty nesters might want to choose homes in gated communities or condominium complexes for safety reasons. Should they opt to spend a portion of time at a vacation rental or second home as snowbirds, secure communities enable residents to leave their primary residence with the peace of mind that those homes will be less vulnerable to thieves.

6. Does this home have enough light? The American Optometric Association says many adults start to have problems seeing clearly beginning at age 40. Homes with more light from large windows and artificial lighting can reduce accident risk.

Moving to a smaller home is a consideration for many empty nesters. Various features offer benefits to adults who want to age in place.

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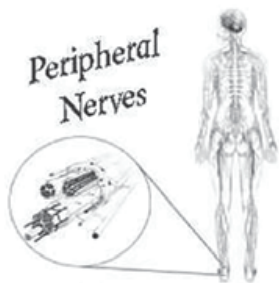
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Chronic pain and/or peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by a hands and feet which causes the nerves to begin to degenerate due to lack of nutrient flow.



As you can see in Figure 2, as the blood vessels that surround the nerves become diseased they shrivel up which causes the nerves to not get the nutrients to continue to survive. When these nerves begin to "die" they cause you to have balance problems, pain, numbness, tingling, burning, and many additional symptoms. The main problem is that your doctor has told you

to just live with the problem or try the drugs which you don't like taking because they make you feel uncomfortable. There is now a facility right here in Mesa that offers you hope without taking those endless drugs with serious side effects.

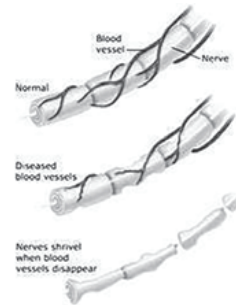
(See the special neuropathy severity examination at the end of this article) neuropathy three factors must be determined.

- 1) What is the underlying cause?
- 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained.
- 3) How much treatment will your condition require?

NOTE: Once you have sustained 95% nerve loss, there is likely nothing that we can do for you.

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The amount of treatment needed to allow the nerves to fully recover varies from person to person and can only be determined after a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation. As long as you have not sustained at least 95% nerve damage there is hope!

Aspen Medical will do a chronic pain and neuropathy severity examination to determine the extent of the nerve damage as a public service to you and/or your family and friends. This neuropathy/pain severity examination will consist of a detailed sensory evaluation, extensive peripheral vascular testing, and a detailed analysis of the findings of your neuropathy.



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Ostrich Fest stays in East Valley, but not in Chandler

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Chandler Chamber of Commerce, Gila River Indian Community, and the city of Chandler have announced that a signature East Valley event is moving.

A news release from LeVine Entertainment states that for several reasons, the Chandler Chamber Ostrich Festival will move to Rawhide Western Town and Event Center “for the 2026 festival and beyond” to support the event’s continued growth.

Rawhide is located off of I-10 and Wild Horse Pass Boulevard, just southwest of the Chandler city limits.

The big change comes after more than 20 years of the event being held at Tumbleweed Park, one of Chandler’s largest municipal parks.

“The Ostrich Festival has become such a beloved and expansive event that it’s ready for a new home,” Terri Kimble, president of the Chandler Chamber of Commerce, said in the news release. “Rawhide provides the space and infrastructure to take the festival experience to the next level for our community.”

The year’s festival will once again take place over two weekends. This year, its March 13-15 and March 20-22. The headline entertainment will be announced in the weeks ahead.

The release states that with new amenities in place at Tumbleweed Park, including an 18-court pickleball facility, a four-field diamond sports complex, and multiple multi-purpose athletic fields, the festival will move to Rawhide to accommodate future growth.

Last year, the parking crunch was apparent even while the pickleball facility was under construction.

The move to Rawhide and beyond supports the continued expansion of the Ostrich Festival at a venue equipped to accommodate increased attendance rates, additional parking,



Carnival rides are one of the many elements of all-ages fun the Chandler Chamber of Commerce's Ostrich Festival promises each year. Starting with this year's 36th annual event, the festival will be held at the Rawhide Western Town & Event Center off of Wild Horse Pass Boulevard and I-10, southwest of Chandler. (Courtesy of Chandler Chamber of Commerce)

and infrastructure, the release states.

The festival will also feature a refreshed layout and updated Rawhide amenities, including indoor vendor space, permanent restrooms and running water throughout the grounds.

There will be more room for attractions, carnival rides and activities, as well as opportunities to learn more about the rich history of the festival, it states.

Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke, who has embraced the festival to the level of making ostriches a theme of fictional themed promotional videos

for other city events, praised festival organizers for pivoting and keeping the festival going.

“The Ostrich Festival has long been one of Chandler’s most cherished traditions, celebrating our unique history with ostriches,” Hartke said. “We’re grateful to the chamber and its partners for their commitment to build on the festival’s success while honoring the heritage and family-friendly attractions that make this a truly special event.”

Founded in 1989 to celebrate Chandler’s early ostrich ranching

heritage, the festival has grown from a downtown event into a regional celebration and the city’s largest event.

After relocating to Tumbleweed Park in 2003, the event built enough momentum to offer two weekends of all-ages entertainment featuring known headliners including The Beach Boys, Shaggy, Walker Hayes, Nelly, Train, Sublime With Rome, Andy Grammer, Flo Rida and The Commodores.

Last year’s entertainers included The Fray, MaryJo, Natasha Bedingfield and Tyler Hubbard.

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Samara Joy | 4/9



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Festival Orchestra Week | 2/22-3/1



The Hot Sardines | 3/23



Charlie Chaplin's SMILE
with Philippe Quint | 3/15



Three American Troubadours | 3/21

Warren's

• From page 6

Fillet mignon, 40-ounce tomahawks and other steaks are featured, as are plenty of seafood, caviar, pastas and salads. A separate Sunday brunch menu offers a whole list of treats.

The full bar, seen when guests first walk in, is stocked to make virtually any cocktail combination. Outdoor seating on the patio, especially in winter months, is where guests can dine, though there's plenty of indoor seating in the main dining room.

White said there's a "smart business casual" dress code for the main dining room, with exceptions made for football jerseys during Sunday brunch.

He said live entertainment has included international jazz singers, while guests have included movie stars and pro athletes; the Arizona Cardinals' practice facility is nearby.

White's grandmother's Golden Rule Cafe helped pave the way for Lo-Lo's, which is now in south Phoenix, as well as Las Vegas and



Fillet mignon and sides are among the many upscale items on the menu at Larry White's Warren's Supper Club restaurant in west Chandler. The restaurant opened in June of last year. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

near Dallas / Fort Worth's largest airport.

Monroe's Hot Chicken is in downtown Phoenix, and Brunch & Sip recently found a new home in the Arcadia area.

A Lo-Lo's location in Old Town Gilbert closed in late 2024 after almost 10 years there.

White believes his grandmother

was one of, if not the only, Black American businesswoman in Arizona at the time.

"One thing she instilled in me is that you'll probably only succeed if your heart is into something," White said. "So when it comes to big decisions, I have to feel it in my heart."

White praised his wife, Rasheeda, for being proficient at bookkeeping and



Larry White opened Warren's Supper Club restaurant in west Chandler in June of last year. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

other business-side aspects of restaurants. He said he's mentored a few people; Rasheeda mentored a woman who was helping Sugar Jam Southern Kitchen prosper in north Scottsdale.

White said there are plans to open a Brunch & Sip in the greater Los Angeles area soon. He said even though the menu has some expensive items, he can see Warren's expanding to Las Vegas or Texas as well.

"All of our restaurants are able to be duplicated," he said.

Learn more about the restaurant at warrenssupperclub.com.

Grants

• From page 6

to their ventures, their communities, and their clear vision for sustainable growth, the release states.

Here are the 2025 State Forty Eight Foundation Entrepreneur Grant recipients:

Naked Fig Soap

Founder: Madeline Harn
Grant awarded: \$10,000
A handmade skincare brand producing plant-based soaps and body care products with a focus on sustainability and small-batch craftsmanship. Learn more at nakedfig-soap.com.

Cruizin For A Brewzin

Founder: Diamond Quinones
Grant awarded: \$7,500
A mobile beverage business offering elevated coffee and cocktail service while giving back to the community by supporting foster children throughout Arizona. Learn more at cruizinforabrewzin.com.

Everything Etched

Founders: Liz Ann Hewett and Tyler Cadwell
Grant awarded: \$7,500
A custom engraving and design studio specializing in personalized products and live, on-site engraving experiences. Learn more at everythingetched.com.

Exceptional Vibe

Founder: Johann Warnholtz
Grant awarded: \$5,000
An event production and experi-

ence company creating high-energy community gatherings, brand activations, and live events across Arizona. Learn more at exceptionalvibe.com.

KOA Pediatric Therapy

Founder: Lindsey Sandys
Grant awarded: \$5,000
A pediatric therapy practice offering occupational therapy and developmental support to children and families across Arizona. Learn more at koapediatrictherapy.com.

The Spaghetti Shack

Founder: Joey Perez
Grant awarded: \$5,000
A locally owned restaurant serving handcrafted Italian comfort food with a community-first approach. Learn more at thespaghettishack.com.

Produce Your Life

Founder: Daaron Battle
Grant awarded: \$5,000
A youth-centered organization empowering the next generation through creative and entrepreneurial education in digital media, music, and storytelling. Learn more at proyourlife.com.

Barbell Effect

Founder: Jose Perez
Grant awarded: \$5,000
A community-focused fitness studio providing strength training, athletic development, and youth programming in Laveen. Learn more at barbelleffect.com.
Since its inception in 2020, the State Forty Eight Foundation states, it has awarded more than \$187,000 to 52 Arizona small businesses.

Utilities

• From page 4

"I think there's a tale of cities," Hartke said, referring to other Valley municipalities drawing complaints from huge catch-up increases. "We don't want to get ourselves into a situation where we have such a huge hole to dig out that we will be having 100% or large increases, rather than this."

Staff has said, in several work sessions, that rate increases are needed to fund debt service costs related to new and expanded water and wastewater capital projects. One example is the Price Road sewer relining and rehab project, which costs \$43.6 million.

Utility rate increases are being implemented "across the board," as chosen by council, so the rate increase will be the same for large industrial users as it will be for single-family homeowners or multifamily housing.

Orlando said he's looking forward to getting more ongoing capital cost information as part of each year's capital improvement discussions. He also said he agrees with Hartke and others who pointed out a cost-of-service study must be done more often than the five-year intervals staff has been using, per its policy.

"There's nothing stating it can't be more often," Budget Director Matt Dunbar told council, pointing out a cost-of-service is set to begin in early July of this year.

Council member Jane Poston said her position hasn't changed from her opposition to the new rate plan she voiced during a late-autumn work session.

"The increases should all be no more than cost-of-service," Poston told Independent Newsmedia. "This is going to impact businesses and residents. We have to help them out, where we can."



Chandler City Council member O.D. Harris, shown here being sworn in for his second term in January 2025, was found not guilty of sign-stealing-related crimes in a trial held Jan. 20 in Phoenix. (Independent Newsmedia file/Jason W. Brooks)

Harris

• From page 4

Arizona law. Instead, it was an illegal and defamatory sign that falsely targeted me and had no legal protection to be posted in the first place by an unregistered political activist group. I will take appropriate steps to address continued misstatements that repeat this false narrative. I also ask that my wife not be referenced or associated with this matter, as no such claims were proven or supported in court."

Harris' wife, Elizabeth Ward, was

not charged in the incident, which was reported to have occurred July 28, 2024 — two days before Chandler voters elected Harris to a second term on Council.

That led to a 2024 Chandler Police investigation. In October of that year, a Maricopa County Justice Court dismissed a case, without prejudice, submitted by prosecutors with the city of Scottsdale, but charges were later refiled.

The incident, covered in detail in a Chandler Police report that includes

• See **Harris** on page 34

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(Register before March 1st)

SECURE YOUR SPOT TODAY!

Harris

• From page 33

interviews with Harris and at least one witness, stems from a Sunday, July 28, allegation of sign tampering.

Judge Driggs said the combination of the type of signs, which encouraged voters simply to not vote for Harris for reelection, and witnesses not being able to positively identify Harris as driving a vehicle near where signs were removed, created enough doubt to acquit him.

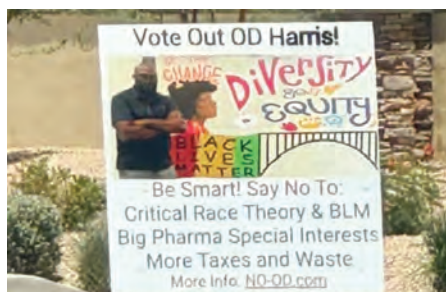
"Based on the state's case in chief, I find the state did not present substantial evidence that the sign involved here meets the statutory description as charged," Driggs said in court. "As for count two, here, the state's evidence shows two females physically tore the sign, and the state's theory places the defendant as the driver. Even viewing the evidence in light most favorable to the state, I find the state did not present substantial evidence that this defendant committed the charged acts or is otherwise criminally responsible for them, or that the required mental state was proved."

The judge then urged everyone involved to take a different approach, going forward.

"I know that politics can get heated and I understand the fears, the pressure," Driggs said. "I would just hope that people could run peacefully, have their free speech, but be kind to everyone out there. Politics needs to be a little bit more friendly. Refrain from any bullying tactics, I ask."

Chandler Police Detective Ryan Kotsur took at least one of the police reports in the incident and was in court in Phoenix on Jan. 20. He wrote, in a report, about video taken by witnesses that shows two women or girls carrying unknown objects.

Video later obtained from a nearby Dutch Brothers Coffee shows the women described by the video-taking eyewitness getting in and out of a silver Lexus detectives believe Harris



Chandler City Council member O.D. Harris was accused of being involved with stealing and/or destroying signs like this one during the 2024 election cycle. Harris was found not guilty of sign-stealing-related crimes in a Jan. 20 trial in Phoenix. (Courtesy of O.D. Harris)

was driving at the time, then returning to the vehicle, which then leaves the area at a much faster speed than nearby vehicles.

The signs in question say "No O.D.," though Harris, who is Black, and his attorney both mentioned that defacing of his personal campaign signs was done using racial epithets.

In both their 2024 statements to the media and again this week on Harris' social media, neither Harris nor Ward flatly denied they weren't involved with sign-tampering, though witness' inability to positively identify him on-scene was mentioned.

"The only alleged evidence was a claim that two women removed a sign and that someone who looked like me, a Black man, was seen driving away from the general area," Harris wrote. "That was enough for the legal system to be weaponized against me and my family."

Harris remained focused on whether the "No O.D." signs were legal and whether those were from a political group.

"I willingly spoke with police and explained that although I was in the general area, neither I nor anyone associated with me has ever removed a political sign," Harris wrote. "I also informed police and city staff that the signs were illegal and part of an unregistered political campaign using racist and hateful propaganda to influence local elections."

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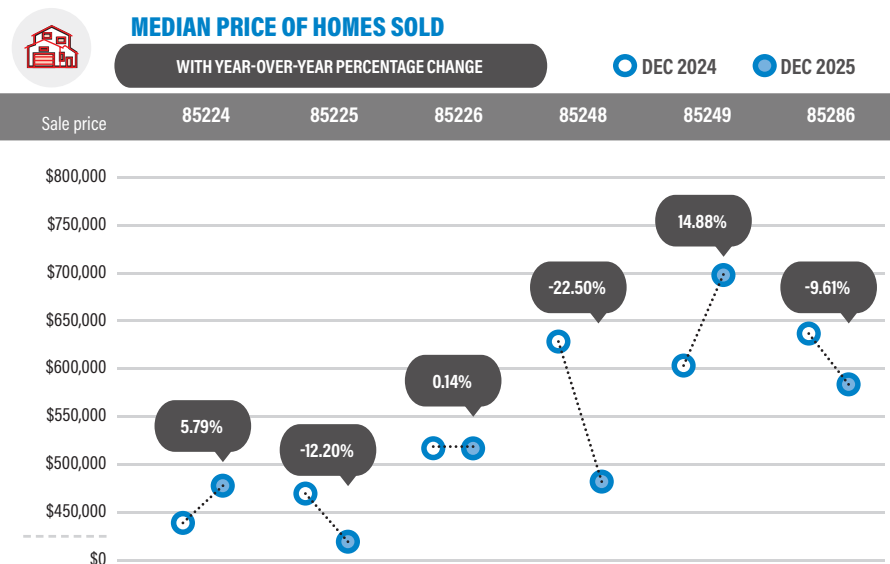
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NUMBER OF HOMES ON THE MARKET

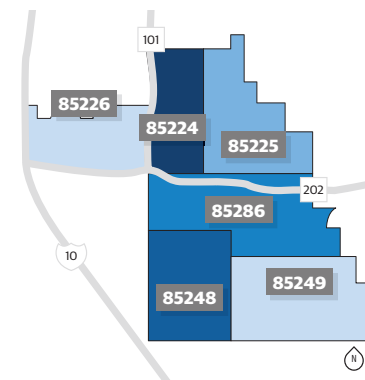
	DEC 2024	DEC 2025
85224	46	64
85225	105	117
85226	51	57
85248	57	71
85249	134	162
85286	53	78

AVERAGE DAYS ON THE MARKET

	DEC 2024	DEC 2025
85224	51	58
85225	51	80
85226	74	73
85248	80	63
85249	63	71
85286	76	81

NUMBER OF HOMES UNDER CONTRACT

	DEC 2024	DEC 2025
85224	30	24
85225	49	43
85226	30	22
85248	17	20
85249	45	48
85286	33	30



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Math

• From page 14

option that offers a project-based learning math instructional model integrating statistics and data analysis.

The pilot program will feature WestEd bringing the course only to Hamilton Casteel high school students. The development of the curriculum and the pilot are funded through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

WestEd is a nonpartisan, non-profit research and service agency with a significant presence and impact in Arizona, its website states. Its programs in the state include school improvement, STEM initiatives and addressing dropout rates.

No dollar amounts are mentioned in the agreement. Assistant Superintendent Jessica Edgar said CUSD staff will attend virtual training on this course. The agreement states

teachers participating in the pilot will attend four to seven hours on-line training this school year and should plan to attend the ISQR Summer Convening, which is three of four days in summer 2026, to prepare. Travel costs will be paid by WestEd.

"They went to this conference previously," Edgar said of CUSD teachers' general familiarity with WestEd training.

Edgar explained the course helps move toward what many administrators around the state believe will be a new set of Arizona Department of Education math standards.

"We believe those changes are coming in the following year (2027-28)," Edgar said. "Knowing that, we're looking at course options that have the statistical or quantitative piece and data literacy concepts. As you'll see, it's part of the movement toward engagement and project-based learning."

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Superintendent

• From page 14

cer, and former Phoenix Elementary School District Superintendent Ibi Haghighat.

The release states the selection is contingent upon successful contract negotiations and the board's acceptance of an independent background check.

Battle might have won over board members in another way by addressing what she called "the elephant in the room" — her short tenure as Casa Grande Union High School District superintendent — during a Jan. 28 finalists community forum just before the board deliberated and chose her. She described her 19 months on the job there as relative smooth, with November 2022 board elections leading to a 3-2 vote in January 2023 to remove her.

"I never even got to know some of those board members," she said.

The board might have been swayed by Battle's experience managing multiple facets of various-size districts. The release states that in Battle's current role with the pre-K-8 Roosevelt district, she oversees academics and operations, including human resources, finance, teaching and learning, special education, data and research, technology, student services, transportation, student-wellness and athletics.

"Dr. Battle effectively managed multi-million-dollar budgets, complex operational systems and diverse educational programs," the release states.

The community forum capped a long Jan. 28 tour for the three finalists that included hearing an annual report, interacting at schools with students and hearing about their accomplishments, and meeting with faculty, students in forums.

The three finalists answered the same eight questions at the community forum in front of a packed boardroom. One question was about bul-

lying prevention and students feeling safe on campus, with Battle responding that getting parents and staff on the same page of bullying definitions and appropriate interventions is important, but preventive and positive modeling is a main component, too.

"We have to change and transform the thinking, so that 'hurt people' don't hurt people," Battle said in her response to the question. "We need to share with students the consequences of 'If you do this, or if you continue to do this, this will happen.' Then, we must be consistent on outcomes. We might have less of this if we educate first."

The Governing Board interviewed the three finalists and two other semifinalists via videoconferencing on Jan. 24, followed by an executive-session deliberation and announcement of the finalists.

The five semifinalists were chosen by the board from a list of candidates vetted and screened by search firm Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates.

The board met in executive session Jan. 13 to go over screened recommended candidates from its advertised opening, which closed Jan. 2.

Before she was hired in Casa Grande, Battle was the K-12 managing director/head of schools for ASU Prep and assistant superintendent of operations for the Tempe Union High School District. She's been a principal in both Phoenix and Tempe.

Haghighat took over as the new head of the Phoenix Elementary School District, Arizona's oldest district, in July 2022, after having worked as Scottsdale Unified's assistant superintendent for elementary education.

Haghighat has been in education for about 30 years as a teacher, principal and administrator. She's been in Arizona for more than 20 years.

Media reports show both Battle's and Haghighat's most recent superintendencies ended with a sudden parting of ways with their districts, in terms of close, contentious board votes surrounding their dismissals.



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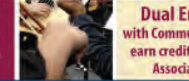
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OPINION

Opinions

• From page 10

lived under an occupying empire, and suffered injustice and violence.

For people shaped by hardship not of their own choosing, Jesus was not distant or idealized. He was someone who understood suffering from the inside.

This understanding shaped the spirituals that emerged from enslaved communities. Songs about crossing rivers, walking through valleys, and longing for rest held grief and hope together.

They named pain honestly while trusting that suffering would not have the final word. Faith did not erase hardship. It helped people endure it.

The Black church carried this faith forward. Churches became spaces where dignity was affirmed in a society that denied it.

Worship offered comfort and truth-telling. The story of Jesus, especially the resurrection, shaped hope grounded in reality. Death and injustice were real, but they were not ultimate.

Today, this tradition continues. Black faith communities still wrestle openly with grief and injustice while nurturing resilience and hope.

Black History Month invites us to learn these stories more fully. When we do, fear gives way to understanding, and understanding opens the door to a more just and shared future.

Derrick Elliott

PASTOR, SUN LAKES UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

What do we tell our children after Minneapolis protester's fatal shooting?

Alex Pretti was someone's son.

We teach our children to look out

for others. To be kind. To help when they can. To speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves. To use their privilege for good.

Alex did exactly what we ask of our children ... what we hope they will do. He looked out for others. He showed up when it was hard. And when he didn't know what to say, he bore witness.

As parents, we ask our children to do brave things. We send them out into a big, complicated world and ask them to make it better. Alex tried and paid the ultimate price. He did it during a frightening and unjust time, when doing the right thing can feel dangerous.

What do we tell our children now, when the world feels so broken? Do we tell them to protect themselves at all costs? To carry weapons? To stay silent?

The Second Amendment — the right of the people to keep and bear arms — can be debated endlessly by people far smarter than me.

I can only speak from my heart. I am scared for the children we raised.

We told them to change the world. To speak up. To make a difference.

Alex chose a life of service. He went into health care to help others. He served veterans as an ICU nurse at the Minneapolis VA hospital. He tried to shine a light on injustice — and paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I want his parents to know this: I am so sorry. And I am grateful for your son. He represents everything my husband and I tried to teach our children — everything we hoped they would become — without fully understanding the risks or the consequences.

We will remember his sacrifice. And we honor yours.

Jennifer Schwegman
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Compiled by
Jason W. Brooks

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

1 Price Road, southbound from the Loop 101 off-ramp to Queen Creek Road, will be the site of major restrictions through Wednesday, Feb. 25. The estimated 96-day project is to remove the sewer bypass chute from a prior sewer re-lining operation and for repaving. Also, Price Road northbound, from Queen Creek Road to West Continuum Drive, will be the site of major restrictions through Sunday, March 8. The estimated 28-day project is for boring, pothole filling and pavement restoration.

2 Germann Road, eastbound from 1,000 feet west of Hamilton Street to Arizona Avenue, will be the site of weekend and night restrictions through Monday, Feb.

16 as part of an estimated 81-day project. Also, Germann Road will be the site of major weekday restrictions through Thursday, Feb. 19. The estimated 31-day project is for boring of a lightpath.

3 Arizona Avenue, southbound from Germann to Queen Creek roads, will be the site of minor restrictions through Friday, Feb. 20. The estimated 12-day project is for boring, pothole filling and pavement restoration.

4 Frye Road, from Nebraska to Washington streets, will be the site of minor restrictions through Friday, Feb. 27. The estimated 31-day project involves an open trench.

5 Chandler Boulevard, from at and near Arizona Avenue and at various locations as far east as Cooper Road, will be the site of both



eastbound and westbound nighttime restrictions through Thursday, Feb. 19. The estimated 11-day project is for shadow trucks to do proofing conduit in manholes.

6 Elliott Road, westbound between Ocean Dr and Salida Del Sol, will be the site of major restrictions through Thursday, Feb. 26. The estimated 32-day project is for boring for telecom equipment.

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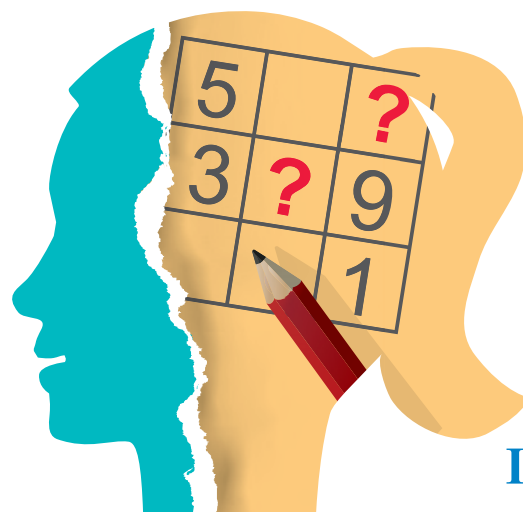
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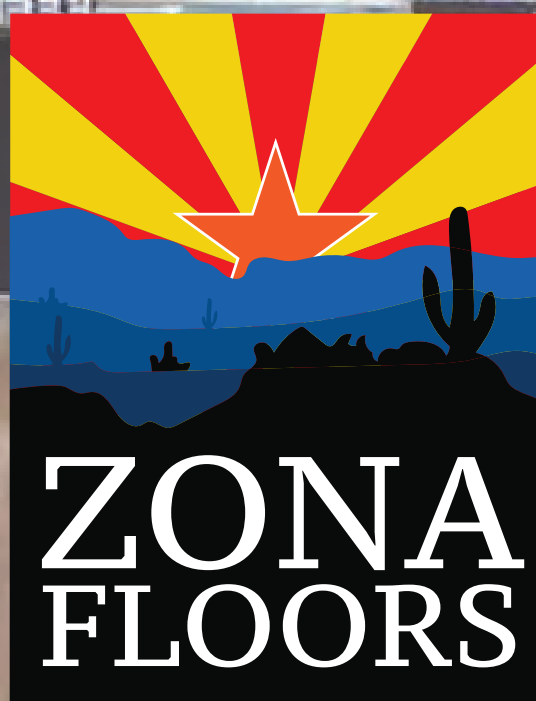
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