

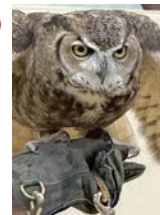
Carefree Town Council approves 10-year contract with Rural Metro Fire; 4



CAVE CREEK/CAREFREE INDEPENDENT

Formerly the Sonoran News, serving the area since 1995

Kiwanis Family Fun Days presents 'Wild at Heart'; 14



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Cave Creek initiates purchase of 4,005 acres of open space

By Jeff Wendt
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Town Council voted unanimously March 31 in a special meeting to initiate the purchase of 4,005 acres of open space land within the town's boundaries.

The town also approved a financing mechanism in which Cave Creek would secure \$10.42 million in revenue bonds with a 25-year amortization.

"This has been a long time coming as (Development Services Director) Luke (Kautzman) said, 20 years or more," said Council Member Joe Freedman in making the motion to initiate the purchase. "It was thought about even probably way before then. There's been a lot of hard work, a lot of folks in the audience have done, a lot of folks preceding them before.

"It's been going on for a long time," Freedman added. "We finally got it up to the plate. This council right here has performed incredibly, our staff, everybody. I mean, this is a win-win for the entire community, period. End of story."

"It's an incredible privilege to be



Ruben Ojeda, left, and Karen Dada of the Arizona State Land Department make a presentation on the 4,005 acres of open space available to the Town of Cave Creek during a special meeting March 31, 2026. (Courtesy of Bo Larsen/Town of Cave Creek)

on a council and have a staff that has been able to put this together," Mayor Robert Morris said. "It died for years, decades almost, at least one decade. And it really is a privilege to be on a council and be able to vote for this, something as significant as our signature piece, which is Spur Cross.

"Now we'll have another one, and I'm just glad I was around to be able to participate in this one," Morris added.

The Arizona State Land Department currently owns the land Cave Creek will aim to purchase. The town

• See **Land** on page 6

Cave Creek Unified terminates 14 teaching positions

Due to district's reduction in force efforts

By Maya McFall
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Unified school board approved the termination of 14 teacher contracts and a principal resignation at the April 7 board meeting due to reduction in force efforts.

The approved RIF terminations will go into effect May 22.

According to assistant superintendent of fiscal and business operations Dr. Ryan Pletnick, the district will save about \$2.7 million with the RIFs and resignations.

"Nobody is happy about this," said board member Jeff Fortney, who works as a special education

• See **CCUSD** on page 6

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TECH

Cave Creek Council gives direction to create policy on license plate-reading cameras

By Jeff Wendt

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Town Council unanimously approved authorizing the town attorney to create a policy on license plate-reading camera technology Tuesday night.

The council received a presentation in February from Town Sheriff Adam Stein on the use of Flock Camera technology in Cave Creek, causing some council members to be surprised they were in use and that there was a line item in the budget for the technology.

At the retreat, it was suggested the town should have a policy in place as to how long the town holds on to the information, how the information is used and obtained, and who has access to the data.

"I asked Teresa (Town Clerk Teresa Riza) to send me pages from Facebook to describe what your constituents have said about license plate readers," Town Attorney Bill Sims said. "They see it as Epstein-class authoritarianism. Neighbors spying on neighbors. Creating a portfolio on everyone. Selling the information nationwide. Those were the concerns."

Sims found a policy in Safford he hopes he can model a policy after.

"Safford has a policy that we're going to go through that I think you could direct me to come back to you and it would address some of your constituents concerns, while preserving the efficacy of license plate reading," Sims said.

Stein took to the podium to address one of the times the cameras aided his department in making an arrest.

"We just had an accident on Sunday. We had a hit-and-run at Jack Cartright Pass and Cave Creek Road," Stein said. "Individual struck a bunch of gabions, a



Town of Cave Creek Attorney Bill Sims, left, and Town Manager Grady Miller, give a presentation on creating a policy surrounding Flock Cameras being used in the Town of Cave Creek at the town council meeting April 22, 2026. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

fence and a sign, literally took the sign right off at the base and just kept going.

"We were able to use the Flock camera to figure out time-wise, color of the vehicle and that type of thing," Stein added. "So that helped. That subject was arrested, and oddly enough he will be paying restitution to the town if convicted for all the damage he did."

Stein also talked about how the camera system aided in finding missing people via Silver Alerts, stolen vehicles and other types of crime.

Stein was asked how many people have access to the information from the cameras.

"There's only one employee in town that has that has access to Flock. I want to be clear about that," Stein said. "There's one sworn police officer employed by the town of Cave Creek. That's me. I've been your marshal for 24 years."

"I am regulated by the state of Arizona. I'm certified by the state of Arizona," Stein added. "The state of Arizona uses the Arizona Criminal Justice Information System in order to access classified data, law enforcement sensitive data. It's a very well-regulated safety net to make sure that the system isn't violated."

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COMMUNITY

Carefree Town Council approves 10-year contract with Rural Metro Fire

By Maya McFall
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Town of Carefree approved a 10-year contract with the Rural Metro Fire Department during the April 7 council meeting at 33 Easy Street. The contract will take effect July 1, 2027.

This comes after the 2024 change in ownership of Rural Metro Fire from Global Medical Response to Brindlee Fire Services.

Based in Alabama, Brindlee specializes in community-based fire protection, emergency medical services, fire protection consulting, wildland fires and more.

Brindlee is also the parent company for California-based Capstone Fire & Safety Management and Brindlee Mountain Fire Apparatus, a fire department in Marshall County, Alabama.

Beginning July 1, 2027, the town will begin paying Rural Metro Fire



Town Council Chambers at 33 Easy Street. (Independent Newsmedia/Maya McFall)

\$2.5 million, which is about a 27% increase from the current rate of \$2.1 million. For the first five years, the annual increase can be no more than 3%; the following years, it can be no more than 4.5%, according to Carefree mayor John Crane.

If the town had waited until 2027 to negotiate terms, there would have been around \$143,000 added to the contract for the first year, said Crane.

Crane praised the department's new leadership.

"Our relationship with Rural Metro has literally never been better. And that just goes from top to bottom," Crane said. "The firemen in our town have never been engaged as much as they are today in our community."

Rural Metro Fire has already stepped into their role and engaged with the community. In December 2025, at Sky Ranch Airport, the team went over crash response training and plans to do it again next year. They have also begun working with Foothills

Caring Corp to develop evacuation plans for those who cannot leave their homes.

"They've just been great neighbors, and the visibility has never been more than it is today," Crane said. "That's how it should work in a small town and that's how it works here. These guys are great partners for us."

Luke Dorion, Brindlee's chief commercial officer, flew from his home state of Alabama and attended the meeting with several firemen. He thanked the council for their warm welcome.

"We want this to be a permanent relationship; we want to have this as long as you guys will have us," Dorion said. "On behalf of the firemen here and the teams, we're just, we're grateful for this opportunity to be part of this with you... We're hopeful this continues for a long, long time."

To watch the entire council meeting, visit carefree.org/page/council.

Carefree Memorial Day tribute is May 25 at Cave Creek Memorial Cemetery

By Maya McFall
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Town of Carefree will host a community Memorial Day tribute 8-9 a.m. Monday, May 25, at the Cave Creek Memorial Cemetery, 36400 N. Pima Road.

The program will feature several speakers, including Capt. Eric Spencer, who served in the Army over a 12-month deployment during Operation Iraqi Freedom as an infantry officer.

Spencer led nearly 250 combat missions and patrols in southeast Baghdad in 2006 and earned the Bronze Star Medal.

Molly Zehnder, Arizona state corresponding secretary of the Daughters



The Town of Carefree will host a community Memorial Day tribute 8-9 a.m. Monday, May 25, at the Cave Creek Memorial Cemetery, 36400 N. Pima Road (Submitted/Town of Carefree)

of the American Revolution, will speak about a recent Honor Flight sponsored by the Ariona State Society Daughters of the American Revolution, which

traveled to Washington, D.C. to honor 32 female Vietnam War era veterans from Arizona.

A local high school student will per-

form a rendition of the "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America."

Pastor Jim Noble, of Desert Hills Presbyterian Church, will deliver the invocation.

"The Town of Carefree has a proud history of honoring and expressing our immense gratitude to our veterans," said Carefree mayor John Crane. "At the Carefree Memorial Day, the honor and gratitude for those who have given their lives in the line of duty is especially evident. Memorial Day reminds us of the high price of freedom. It is a time to reflect on their courage and honor their memory with heartfelt appreciation."

For more information, visit visitcarefree.com/events.



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FROM THE COVER

Land

• From page 1

will have to go through an auction to purchase the land.

The process, which could take between 12 and 18 months, will include a land appraisal, environmental and cultural studies, and approval of the appraisal. A public notice of auction posted in a newspaper for 10 straight weeks will then be done by the ASLD.

Cave Creek also has the opportunity to receive grants to pay for some costs for the land. Kautzman and former Maricopa County Parks director R.J. Cardin discussed the options available to Cave Creek for grants. Cardin was hired on as a consultant for the open space purchase.

One of the grants that could be available to Cave Creek is the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which Cardin helped to create.

“I was doing planning for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Heritage Fund,” Cardin said. “At that time, the heritage fund was a new program. So, I helped start up the heritage fund



Town of Cave Creek Development Services Director Luke Kautzman talks to council about purchasing 4,005 acres of open space available to the town at a special meeting March 31, 2026. (Courtesy of Bo Larsen/Town of Cave Creek)

grant program. As a planner for the Land and Water Conservation Fund with state parks, I designed the grant priorities and the scoring system for that grant program and consulted with local governments

on developing grant applications for that.

“I also reviewed and scored grant applications over a period of about seven years with Arizona State Parks and also developed the state-

wide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, which is a requirement of the federal government who provides the funds for the Land and Water Conservation Fund,” Cardin added.

Approximately \$9 million in grants are available, and Cave Creek could get a dollar-for-dollar match between \$1.5 million and \$2 million to help with the purchase.

Town Finance Director Cherie White worked with Stifel Managing Director Mark Reader and Director Jack Leeper in developing options for the project’s financing. Two options looked at revenue bonds, which don’t need voter approval, and two options looked at general obligation bonds, which would have needed voter approval.

Most of the town’s residents in attendance were happy to see the council make the decision to purchase the land.

“I love the all-in on the 4,005,” Cave Creek resident David Ackerman said. “I’m not just saying this because I was on the ad hoc open space committee. I hope that you submit the application and we do it expeditiously and we don’t mess around given time. So, thank you.”

CCUSD

• From page 1

teacher at Tolleson Elementary School District. “My heart goes out to the folks that are dealing with this, and that’s everybody—that’s the principals, that’s the people that have to make these decisions.”

Echoing the sentiment, assistant superintendent of human resources Dr. Frank Hendricsen said “this is never fun. It’s never fun to have to communicate to an employee that they’re going to be losing their position.”

Hendricsen will hold meetings with affected employees to help them understand the RIF process.

Multiple employees have also submitted resignations.

The list of affected employees include:

- Stephen Courtney, a Sonoran Trails Middle School social studies teacher
- Christiana Izumi, a Sonoran Trails Middle School art teacher
- Tina Hirsch, a Black Mountain Elementary School first-grade teacher
- Caraline Saigh, a Desert Willow Elementary School third-grade

teacher

- Blake Leaverton, a Sonoran Trails Middle School science teacher
- Jonathon Naylor, a Sonoran Trails Middle School social studies teacher
- Kathleen Newsome, a Sonoran Trails Middle School teacher
- David Alvarado, a Sonoran Trails Middle School Spanish teacher
- Jacob Wampfler, a Cactus Shadows High School English teacher
- Sydney Petro, a Cactus Shadows High School teacher
- Robin Whittemore, a Cactus Shadows High School social studies teacher

• Cynthia Sandi Marchena, a Cactus Shadows High School teacher

• Declan Hellerman, a Cactus Shadows High School world language teacher

• Stacey Kairis, a Cactus Shadows High School physical education and wellness teacher

Included in the list of resignations are assistant principal of CSHS Jason Schnee and principal of the Academy of Excellence Heidi Hopman. Their resignations will go into effect June 30.

To view the entire board meeting, visit ccusd93.community.highbond.com.

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Seven candidates vying for six seats on Cave Creek Town Council

By Jeff Wendt

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Seven candidates, four incumbents and three newcomers, are vying for the six seats up for grabs on the Cave Creek Town Council.

Current council members Tom Augherton, Cynthia Driskell, Joe Freedman and Tom McGuire are joined by Kathleen Abaie, David Ackerman and Patricia Murphy for the upcoming primary election.

Here's a look at the seven candidates running for Town Council:

Kathleen Abaie

Kathleen Abaie moved with her family to Arizona in 2007 and fell in love with Cave Creek and the surrounding area. When moving here,



Kathleen Abaie

Abaie said her family looked elsewhere in the Valley but gravitated back to the Cave Creek/Desert Hills area. They have lived in both areas; Cave Creek roughly 12-13 years ago, Desert Hills for a number of years and moved back to Cave Creek a few years ago.

Abaie has been married for 44 years and has adult children and grandchildren. She assisted her husband with his business for 28 years until he retired.

She has a small business as a bookkeeper with multiple clients in various markets.

She said Cave Creek has plenty of challenges ahead, and her goal is to keep unity in Cave Creek, to secure open space lands, to protect the town as the impending growth moves closer, to keep Cave Creek viable as a town; safe, protected, aid in finding water solutions, be fiscally responsible and find solutions to our challenges.

David Ackerman

Ackerman moved to Cave Creek in 2023. Ackerman was born in Van Nuys, California. He earned



David Ackerman

a bachelor's degree in managerial economics at the University of California at Davis in 1997. Ackerman is married to his wife Christina and have two daughters.

Ackerman, the CEO & Founder of CalNutri Inc., is currently on the Ad Hoc Open Space Committee, Cave Creek Museum Board, Cave Creek Museum Finance Committee Chair, and the Kiwanis Chamber of Commerce.

He believes given his professional and personal experience, he would bring a fresh perspective to the Town Council.

Tom Augherton

In Cave Creek, Augherton served previously on the Town Council, Planning & Zoning Commission and the Board of Adjustment between 1991 and 1999 and was the first voter-elected town mayor in 1996. He was the town's



Tom Augherton

Regional Council member at the Maricopa County Association of Governments. He returned to serve as a member of the council in December 2022.

Augherton is a career government affairs and legislative advocacy liaison with the Federal and Arizona state governments, in the public and private sectors. Originally a native of Washington, D.C., he worked on Capitol Hill, at the White House Office of Management & Budget, and in the Leg-

islative Affairs office of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, where he produced a daily radio program called "Washington Dial." in the 1970s.

Augherton earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from George Washington University, a master's in journalism from the University of Arizona, and a Ph.D. and DPA in public administration from Arizona State University. He has two certificates in public management from ASU and UofA. Augherton was a 1998 National Toll Fellow for the Council of State Governments representing Arizona, and completed the Executive Leadership Training Program at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

A Cave Creek resident for 43 years, Augherton is a former Arizona Town Hall delegate, Valley Leadership Class X graduate, a Superior Court appointee to the Maricopa County Judiciary Advisory Council, and graduate of the Strategic Leadership for State Executives program, at Duke University's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. In 2021-23, Augherton served on the CSG National Center for Interstate Compacts Technical Assistance panel funded by the DOD.

Cynthia Driskell

Driskell moved to Cave Creek in 1985 to enjoy the rural lifestyle, desert vistas and opportunity to raise a family and build a business. She supported and contributed to the incorporation of Cave Creek and served on a Citizen's Advisory Committee developing the initial ordinances and footprint for a general plan.

Growing up in rural Missouri,

Driskell graduated with degrees in biology from Drury University and health science-physical therapy from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Driskell is the founder and owner of Carefree Physical Therapy, serving the Desert Foothills area since 1987. She is a founding member and principal of Physical Therapy Preferred Providers of Arizona, a statewide network of private physical therapy offices with local, county, state and national contracts.

Active in the physical therapy profession, Driskell has held numerous appointed and elected positions of leadership at the state and national level. She gained regulatory experience as an appointee to the Arizona State Board of Physical Therapy and as State Legislative Chair for the Arizona Physical Therapy Association.

Driskell has been a youth coach and referee with Desert Foothills Athletic Club, and active supporter of Cave Creek Unified School District PTOs, Soroptimist International, Desert Foothills Land Trust, and Foothills Caring Corps.

Driskell served on the Cave Creek Planning Commission from 2021 to 2024 prior to being appointed to fill a vacancy on council on Sept. 9, 2024 and being elected to the council for the term starting December 2024.

Driskell and Walt Murphy have a blended family of five children, all CCUSD and Arizona university graduates, enjoying time with them and our five grandchildren.



Cynthia Driskell

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OP-EDS

Water Conservation is the new normal for living in the West

By Robert Morris
CAVE CREEK MAYOR

It's not just Cave Creek that will feel the effects of the proposed cut-back of Colorado River water in 2027. Communities across the West, and Arizona, are already taking proactive measures to help ensure they have a sustainable water supply for the future.

Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Tucson are investing in large reuse projects. Queen Creek and Buckeye are spending millions on West Valley ground-water projects. The mining town of Kearny, Arizona, may run out of water by July!

Fortunately for Cave Creek, even though we are more than 90 percent dependent on Colorado River water via the Central Arizona Project, we have been preparing for the "what if?"

proposed water cutbacks.

For more than seven years, the Town has continually evaluated and acted on opportunities to improve our water supply to meet customer water needs. Some of the projects the Town is working on include restarting existing Cave Creek wells, water banking using the Town's unused CAP water, and working with other communities to save this water underground for future use or trade.

The Town has been a non-voting member of the group of cities, towns, and Tribal nations examining the expansion of Bartlett Dam storage capacity. This past year, the Town considered purchasing groundwater from Harquahala Valley, LLC; however, after doing our due diligence, it was determined that this project had

too many cost unknowns to consider at this time.

There is something that we can all do as water customers to help our water supply: conserve. Did you know that we use the most water during summer, when the fewest people are in town? The reason for this is that we are over-irrigating our



Robert Morris

landscaping. Check to make sure your irrigation system is optimized, and your plants are getting the proper amount of water. You can find what the best plants to have in the Sonoran Desert are and the proper amount of water you should use for irrigation for each season on the Town's website. The Town's website offers many use-

ful resources and tips to help you use less water without feeling like you are sacrificing. Go to <https://cavecreekaz.gov/Conservation-Resources> to find a variety of helpful guides for desert landscaping and water conservation tips.

Another way to make sure you are not wasting water is to monitor your water usage. The Town has an online water monitoring program, My360, for water customers that lets you track your daily water usage. If you have an unknown leak, you will know and can get it fixed before it becomes costly and wastes water. Another best practice is to conserve water by using less of it.

Water was key to the town's founding. Today, it's a vital resource we need for our town's future.

Carefree and Rural Metro : A commitment to public safety

By John Crane
CAREFREE MAYOR

The commitment to public safety between the Town of Carefree and Rural Metro has never been stronger.

The Town of Carefree and Rural Metro have partnered in fire protection and emergency services for decades, since the founding of Carefree. Rural Metro has always been our first line of defense against fires, medical incidents, auto accidents, and severe weather. That partnership was first based upon subscription service. Then in 2007 the Town and Rural Metro entered in a master contract where the Town assumed financial responsibility and began paying Rural Metro directly for fire protection and emergency services for our residents, businesses, and property owners.

In recent years, because of Carefree and Rural Metro working harder than ever to bind our community and

their service together, that relationship has blossomed and has never been as powerful. That bond, which spans



John Crane

firefighters, captains, fire and battalion chiefs, and company ownership, has strengthened and maintained public trust, fostered strong our firefighters, and even encouraged a keen sense of shared responsibility.

Carefree firefighters do more than respond to 911 calls. They establish safety awareness programs such as Firewise to improve home safety during wildfires. They provide educational lifesaving sessions such as CPR. They team with the Carefree Water Company to make sure our fire hydrants work. They work with the Foothills Caring Corp to develop evacuation plans for those who age in place. They conduct crash response

training at the SkyRanch Airport. They install Lock Boxes, inspect sprinkler systems, install and inspect car seats, remove rattlesnakes, conduct home safety inspections / smoke alarm checks, and serve as the Town Fire Marshal.

By organizing public events, such as Caffeine with a Firefighter or a recent firehouse pancake breakfast, attending HOA meetings or civic events and the farmers market, they have fostered a sense of community. Neighbors mingle at open-house gatherings and tours of the fire station. Kids pick up fire hats and explore fire trucks.

In Carefree, fire management requires a partnership between the Town, our residents, and Rural Metro. Two years ago, Carefree took delivery of a new fire

truck, replacing our worn-out, obsolete, 18-year-old truck. Needed equipment and radios were replaced.

To better position ourselves in the advent of desert wildfires, the Town purchased a brush truck.

In March, Carefree and Rural Metro entered a ten-year master contract assuring the continuation of this outstanding relationship. Going forward, Rural Metro and their firefighters know that the Town will be there for them, and our residents know that our Rural Metro firefighters will be there for us. Rural Metro can plan their business and count on the support of Carefree well into the next decade. In turn, Carefree can plan the costs associated with fire and emergency services and know that we have a first-rate partner in our Rural Metro firefighters.

This is how it should work in a small town where neighbors are like family.

The shared commitment to public safety will serve Carefree and Rural Metro well long into our future.

Sponsored Content

Let the celebration begin! It's my 31st anniversary of my graduation, and I have a gift for you!

Prioritizing your health: Is it really worth compromising? You've spent years building a lifestyle defined by comfort, success, and rewarding experiences. Now, as you embrace your later years, it's becoming clear that your greatest treasure isn't your wealth, it's your health. My next article will be, "Short term relief, causes long term problems". Be sure and read that one.

Celebrating my 31st year as a physician, I've observed why some patients recover faster and maintain better overall wellness. Their key to success? They never compromise their health, and they will do what it takes to maintain or improve it. My commitment and purpose, widely recognized through my work online, television, radio, and newspaper, is straightforward: empowering people to enjoy long, vibrant, pain-free lives, without drugs or surgery. My anniversary promotion last year was so successful and helped so many people, that I wanted to do it again this year for my 31st anniversary. **I am offering 31% off regenerative treatments, including stem cells, until June 30, 2026!**

At first glance, premium natural healthcare may seem more costly. But ask yourself honestly: what would it really cost you, in lost time, comfort,

and overall life quality, to settle for something less?

Take knee replacement surgery, for instance. Often overlooked are the hidden costs, lengthy downtime, painful recovery periods, dependency on caregivers, ongoing appointments, and medications. There are also the inherent risks and stress associated with surgical procedures and prolonged rehabilitation. The number one cause of mortality in the US is heart disease. The use of NSAIDS, especially ibuprofen, when used for chronic conditions like joint pain, increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. By getting regenerative therapies to assist the body to regrow tissue rather than hiding the pain, patients can reduce their risk of heart disease greatly.

Natural and regenerative treatments, including stem cells, present a clear alternative. Patients who choose these methods spend significantly less time in medical offices and pharmacies, thereby reducing disruptions to their everyday lives and reducing their risk of heart disease. They are able to drive to the office for their treatment, receive no general anesthesia, maintain their independence, mobility, and precious time with family and friends. They also spend more pain free time on the golf course, tennis court, and pickleball court.



The long-term results reinforce this approach. Those investing in proactive health care typically face fewer chronic issues, experience fewer flare-ups, and enjoy a noticeably better quality of life.

Savvy patients recognize that true value lies not in minimal upfront expenses but in sustained health, happiness, and independence. Prioritizing your health now ensures you won't face greater costs, financially, physically, and emotionally in the future.

Ultimately, the essential question isn't whether premium healthcare costs more upfront; it's whether you're willing to risk your long-term wellbeing by choosing anything less.

If you're committed to naturally maintaining optimum health, vitality, and well-being, and you appreciate the real value of investing in yourself,

then we invite you to experience exceptional care tailored specifically for you.

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What's The Difference?

There are four differences between
Picture A and Picture B.

Answers in Services under
Miscellaneous in Classifieds



Council races

• From page 8

Joe Freedman

Freedman moved to Arizona in 1981 from Detroit after being laid off from Pontiac Motors where Freedman worked on the assembly line pulling pistons through motors for a few years.

This job plus where Freedman grew up laid the foundation of who Freedman is today. A graduate of Arizona State University, Freedman and spent most of his career in sports marketing.

Freedman has lived in Cave Creek since 2001 with his wife, Linda, and three dogs. Freedman's son, Jacob, who recently turned 22, has lived in Cave Creek his entire life and attended Black Moun-

tain Elementary, Sonoran Trails and graduated from Cactus Shadows High School. He is attending Arizona State University and graduates in May with a degree in business.

The top of Freedman's platform: The water situation and finding alternative potential sources in addition to our Central Arizona Project allotment, creating potential partnerships with Phoenix and/or other partners). Acquisition of 4005 acres of open space for preservation.

This was at the top of Freedman's list when he ran in 2024. Now it's time to finish the job. This was dormant for 15 years and Freedman promised he would jump start the efforts and did). Parking solutions in the town core, which must be resolved. Potential land for town core parking will be gone soon unless we act now. Keeping Cave Creek financially secure. Fire

safety. Road improvements.

Tom McGuire

McGuire has volunteered in Cave Creek for many years at the museum, the library, the Land Trust and on the council. He received a 2026 award for his service at the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area.



Tom McGuire

McGuire believes the most pressing issue for Cave Creek is municipal water. Cave Creek is almost totally dependent on the Colorado River. The town is now using about 90% of our allotment, with two housing developments, both of which have guaranteed water, still to be built. The federal government will soon set water reductions due to reduced flow in the Colorado River. Cutbacks could range from 20% to 50%. This will

limit growth.

Cave Creek will not run out of water. Although the local aquifer is limited, the town is activating wells used before the town received Colorado River water. The town does have groundwater banked, but it needs to rethink how it uses water.

McGuire supports the acquisition of 4,005 acres of open space. With his support, joining the Valley-wide fire protection system was a major safety advancement, as is the town's Phoenix water interconnect.

Strong sales tax from local businesses support essential services. Even with no town property tax, the town's economic viability is strong.

Patricia Murphy

Attempts were made by Independent Newsmedia to reach out to Murphy, but the Independent was unable to get her bio for the story.

Water Conservation Tips with Cactus Charlie



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ELECTION

Race for mayor in Cave Creek between vice mayor, newcomer

By Jeff Wendt
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

With Cave Creek Mayor Robert Morris announcing in January he would not run for another term, Cave Creek will be looking for a new leader in 2027.

Two candidates have announced their intention to replace the outgoing Morris: Vice Mayor Kathryn Royer and Cave Creek resident Brian Hardy.

Here is a look at the two candidates running for mayor:

Kathryn Royer

Royer was elected as a member of the Cave Creek Town Council in August 2018. Royer began serving her first two-year term in December 2018.

Royer has been a resident of Cave Creek since 1996, after accepting a leadership position with Central Arizona Project in Phoenix. CAP manages and delivers Arizona's share of Colorado River water to 5 million people in Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties. In her capacity as associate general manager of communications and public affairs, Royer became fluent in the business of water management, delivery and sustainability.

Since retiring from CAP in 2016, Royer gives back to her community through public service. Royer has served as vice mayor since 2022.

Royer is a graduate of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, earning a bachelor's degree in telecommunications. Royer has two adult children who graduated with Honors from Cave Creek public schools, Ar-

izona State University and the University of Arizona. She is married to Gabe Royer and enjoys spending as much time as possible with her 4-year-old granddaughter, Olive.

Brian Hardy

Hardy has three children and two grandchildren. Hardy has been with his wife Annie since high school and has been married for 30 years. Hardy moved to Cave Creek five years ago and his youngest son graduated from Cactus Shadows.

Hardy has been involved in local causes such as sponsoring the Turquoise Rodeo and the American Legion. Hardy has also donated to local charities and engaged locally whenever he can.

Hardy has been in leadership roles since his first general manager position at 28 years old, managing over 300 employees. Hardy became vice president managing an auto group with over 1,200 employees.

Cave Creek has a water problem that has gone on too long. Indecision and bad decisions have consequences. Hardy believes Cave Creek voters have been kept in the dark on many issues through executive meetings and managed agendas.

Hardy is committed to communicate challenges openly. Hardy promises to bring people together to find solutions for the future of Cave Creek.

Hardy strongly supports the 4,005 acre-conservation land purchase. Cave Creek has already committed the funds for this purchase, but Hardy will explore other funds to save Cave Creek money.



Brian Hardy



Kathryn Royer

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THINGS TO DO



An owl is one of the animals that will be seen at the upcoming Kiwanis Family Fun Days' "Wild at Heart" event on May 2. (Courtesy of Fran Booth)

Kiwanis Family Fun Days presents 'Wild at Heart'

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kiwanis Family Fun Days returns to the Cave Creek Museum to present "Wild at Heart."

The event will take place from 10 a.m.-noon May 2.

Wild At Heart is a program that encourages understanding, respect and compassion for wildlife and the environment. Adults learn to better understand the role of urban wildlife in our environment and children learn to engage with the natural world without fear.

This event is free thanks to generous funding from the Kiwanis Club

of Carefree. Registration is limited and required. Visit the museum website at cavecreekmuseum.org to register.

The 55-year-old museum's mission is to preserve the artifacts of the prehistory, history, culture and legacy of the Cave Creek Mining District and the Cave Creek/Carefree foothills area through education, research, and interpretive exhibits.

The museum is located at 6140 East Skyline Drive. For more information call 480-488-2764. The museum is open from October through May.

Sponsored Content

From Weak in the Knees to Reclaiming His Stride: How John Found Lasting Knee Pain Relief Without Surgery

By Knee Pain Expert, Dr. Matthew Hernandez
Ethos Integrative Medicine

Does This Sound Like You?

You've seen everyone for knee pain and are still left without solutions. You've tried therapeutic massages but it came back (or worse, aggravated it), chiropractic care only offered temporary relief, your physical therapist put you on the same exercises as everyone, the pain management doctor did a nerve ablation and told you to stop being active, and the orthopedic surgeon told you that you weren't a surgical candidate...

You're too young to be losing your mobility – and, worse, your independence. Yet, for many on the quest to conquer discomfort, the only option offered by most healthcare providers is to 'wait until it gets worse.' But here's what they don't want you to

know: You can experience lasting relief now.

Pain is Not Something You 'Just Have to Live With'

John, 42, came to us after exhausting every option outside of surgery: "The worst part is feeling constantly drained. The pain takes so much out of me mentally." Despite months of physical therapy, cortisone injections, and doctor's appointments, his improvement was minimal. An orthopedic surgeon also diagnosed him with a meniscus tear, but told him he needed to wait for it to get worse to consider surgery. But John was determined to find a long-term solution that was NOT surgery.

What the Other Doctors Missed...

John had fallen into what we call "The Gap" — where insurance-based care only offers temporary relief, surgery

isn't an option, and waiting for the pain to get worse seems like the only choice. Additionally, most providers only look for what they know how to treat. [If physical therapy and cortisone doesn't work, and you're not a surgical candidate, they have officially run out of options for you...]

Luckily, our meticulous 'Deep Dive' approach and expertise allowed our team to bridge that gap for John. Recognizing his frustration, we swiftly took action, confirming the meniscus tear and developing a targeted treatment plan to heal the damaged tissue. In just four weeks, the pain improved significantly, allowing John to regain his range of motion, confidently reclaim his stride, and return to the life he loves.

A Comprehensive Solution, NO Surgery or Pills

You don't have to play the waiting

game either; In fact, you're one step away from a pain-free knee, too! With our comprehensive Deep Dive to Avoid Surgery (which was also used to confirm John's pain and guide his treatment strategy), we'll not only get YOU an accurate diagnosis (and explain it to you), but will also provide you with a personalized treatment plan to effectively treat your pain and prevent it from coming back.

If you've been wondering, 'can I avoid knee surgery?' and are eager for answers, call 480-573-6171 to schedule your Deep Dive with our specialists at Ethos Integrative Medicine, and scan the QR code below to access our FREE report, "Knee SOS: The Expert Guide to Decoding Your Pain."



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Allyson, 16



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INDEPENDENT
NEWS MEDIA

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- 3. Precision Knee Scan:** Our advanced musculoskeletal ultrasound exam gives a detailed, real-time view of your knee's structures, providing more accuracy than a regular MRI.
- 4. Ethos Pain Map:** This is a specialized method to confirm the exact source of pain in your body. This detailed approach helps us create a personalized strategy, increasing your likelihood of long-term success.
- 5. Easy-To-Understand Explanation:** We skip the complex terms and offer you a direct, honest breakdown of your diagnosis.
- 6. Leave You Better Promise:** If by the end of the visit you do not have a better understanding of your pain or what your options are moving forward we will give you a full refund on your visit.

Get Out Of Pain TODAY: Call 480-573-6171 to Get Started with your Deep Dive at Ethos Integrative Medicine!

HAPPENINGS

Kiwanis' Preschool Pioneers: Rosie and the Rustlers

When: 10 a.m.-11:00 a.m., May 7

Where: Cave Creek Museum, 6140 E Skyline Drive

What: The program is aimed for children ages 3-5, but all ages are welcome. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Western-themed activities will be available.

Info: cavecreekmuseum.org/events

Carefree Conversations

When: 9-11 a.m. May 8

Where: 101 Easy Street

What: Join this monthly series designed to bring residents and leadership together to engage directly with the mayor and councilmembers. These gatherings are an opportunity for open dialogue and to learn about town initiatives.

Info: carefree.org/events

Carefree Farmers Market

When: 9 a.m.-1 p.m., May 8, 15, 22

Where: 101 Easy Street

What: Find fresh, seasonal produce, herbs, flowers, fresh baked goods, natural meats, and local art at this weekly farmers market.

Info: carefreecavecreek.org

Sanderson Lincoln Saturdays

When: 1-3 p.m., May 9 and May 16

Where: Sanderson Lincoln Pavilion, 101 Easy Street

What: Join for an afternoon of live music. Meet local talent and connect with your community.

Info: visitcarefree.com/events

Carefree Restaurant Week

When: May 11-17

Where: At participating locations

What: This is an opportunity for all participating



restaurants to showcase their menu with discounted prices. Customers have an opportunity to sample new culinary offerings and support their local restaurants.

Info: carefreerestaurants.com

Cave Creek Regular Council Meeting

When: 5 p.m., May 19

Where: 37622 N Cave Creek Road

What: Stay informed on your town's happenings at town council meetings, which is open to the public.

Info: cavecreekaz.gov

Foothills Food Bank Farmers Market

When: 10 a.m.-1 p.m., May 23

Where: Foothills Food Bank, 4250 E Carefree Highway

What: Meet the community at the farmer's market, and shop fresh local produce, breads, sweets, and more.

Info: foothillsfoodbank.com

Cave Creek Farmers Market

When: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. May 23

Where: Foothills Foodbank, 4250 E Carefree Highway

What: Find local, fresh produce, crafts, and much more. A portion of the proceeds will go to the food bank.

Info: cavecreekaz.org/Calendar.

Jubilate Sundial Community Drum Circle

When: 2:30-3:30 p.m. May 24

Where: 101 Easy Street

What: Join for an afternoon of music, rhythm, and community connection for all ages and skill levels.

Info: carefree.org/events

Carefree Memorial Day Tribute

When: 8-9 a.m., May 25

Where: Cave Creek Memorial Cemetary, 36400 N. Pima Road

What: Honor those who have fallen in battle this Memorial Day. Several key speakers will be presenting, as well as performances of national songs by local high school students.

Info: carefreecavecreek.org/event

COUNCIL

Cave Creek presents \$80.6M budget during work session

By Jeff Wendt
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Cave Creek residents were presented with an \$80.6 million budget during a two-day work session this week in the Cave Creek Council Chambers.

The budget reflects a 6% increase from 2026, which was at \$75.6 million.

According to a presentation by Town Finance Director Cherie White, the budget will be divided up as:

- \$44.3 million is slated for capital improvement projects
- \$8.3 million is for personnel
- \$17.4 million for ongoing non-personnel services
- \$5.2 million in debt services
- \$1.2 million in one-time non-personnel services
- \$4.2 million in contingencies

Included in the budget are placeholders of \$6.2 million for the upcoming remodel and expansion of town hall, and \$16 million for the acquisition of 4,005 acres of state-owned land.

Town Manager Grady Miller said during the work session they will budget funds for the town hall expansion, but that work may be put off until fiscal year 2028 because there may be a need for water acquisition with the town's anticipated cut in resources.

"We're going to postpone doing anything," Miller said. "We're going to suspend that project for next fiscal year in light of the possibility that we may have to do water acquisition, that might be more than what we're budgeting for water acquisition."

"So, in other words, the money's



The Cave Creek Town Council meets at a recent meeting. The town council is looking at approving an \$80.6 million budget for fiscal year 2027. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

there. It's budgeted, but until we get a clearer picture what's going on with water and the possibility of having to buy additional water resources, I think it's just best just to leave it as is," Miller added.

Added to the budget was a parking

arrangement with Stagecoach Village at Desert Awareness Park. The thought was that the parking concept was off the budget plans, but Mayor Robert Morris said Stagecoach Village still would like to work something out with the town, while Development Services Director Luke Kautzman thought Stagecoach Village stopped talking with him and the town.

"They talked to me the other day and they thought you (Kautzman and Planning and Zoning) were not proceeding," Morris said.

"Interesting," Kautzman replied.

"So we have a communications issue here," Morris said. "They told me it's still on their radar."

The budget will go through a tentative adoption on May 19, and the final adoption of the budget will come June 16.

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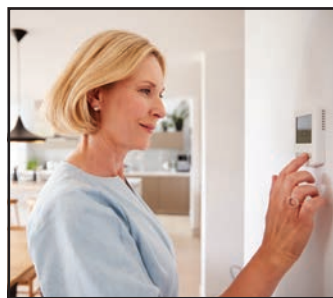
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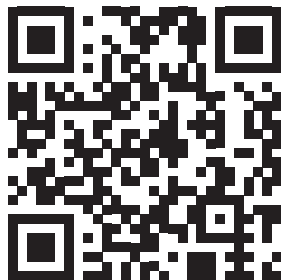
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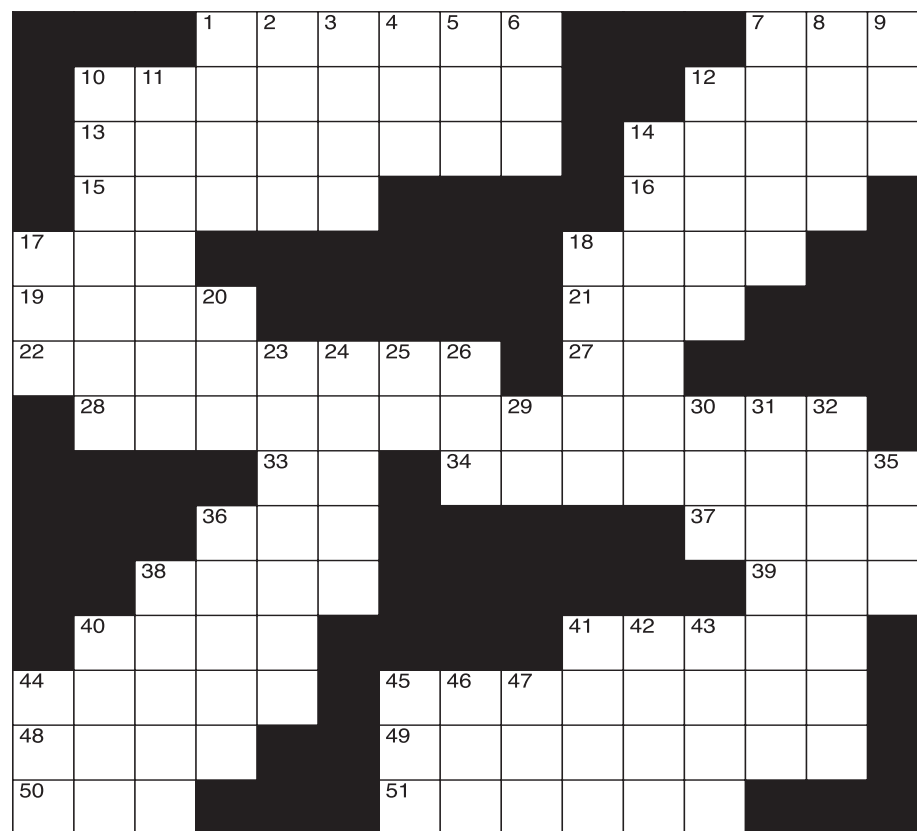
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Large dung beetle
7. Gambling game ___-lo
10. Further along
12. Type of tobacco
13. Looked for
14. Silk fabric
15. Computer method to solve equations
16. As fast as can be done (abbr.)
17. Tear
18. Brews
19. "Famous" cookie baker
21. Women's Army Corps
22. Front parts of an animal
27. It's causing quite a stir
28. Beloved March holiday
33. 12th letter of the Greek alphabet
34. More impudent
36. Indicates center
37. Young woman (French)
38. A cause of distress
39. Santa's helper
40. Hillside
41. Many wombs
44. Is afraid of
45. Popular baked goods ingredient
48. Popular computers
49. Conceiving of
50. Google certification (abbr.)
51. Sturdy

CLUES DOWN

1. Peruse quickly
2. Automobiles
3. Razorbill genus
4. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!
5. Consumed
6. A place to sleep
7. Small seeds
8. Legendary law man Wyatt
9. Female sheep
10. Indigenous peoples of eastern Siberia
11. A place ships dock
12. Reciprocal of sine
14. Discomfort
17. British Air Aces
18. Exit sleep
20. Solar energetic particle
23. Plagues characterized by starvation
24. Short musical composition
25. Trauma center
26. Habitual twitching
29. A place where checks are exchanged (abbr.)
30. Decameter
31. Hinged surface in a wing
32. Shouting
35. Sports official
36. Volcanic craters
38. Supportive device
40. It's part of a rosary
41. Two-toed sloth
42. Body art
43. Let out
44. Foreign medical graduate
45. Nonprofit journalism organization (abbr.)
46. Couples say it
47. Bird's beak

SOLUTION ON PAGE 23

SUDOKU BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

	7	3	5			1		
					6			
	5						9	4
	4					7		8
		9			3		6	
5					7			
				9				
		1		6		8	4	
				4			2	5

Level: Advanced

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SOLUTION ON PAGE 23

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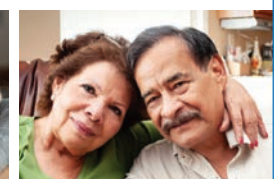
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Sun City West • October 28, 2026 • SCW Foundation Center

Mesa • November 13, 2026 • Mesa Marketplace Swap Meet

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What's The Difference Answers:

1. Man is wearing hat
2. Bird in sky
3. Missing person in raft
4. Power line tower in background

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TOWN OF CAVE CREEK NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING PLANNING COMMISSION – MAY 21ST, 2026

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held by the Town of Cave Creek Planning Commission beginning on May 21st, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Cave Creek Town Council Chambers, 37622 N. Cave Creek Road, Cave Creek, Arizona and via a video conferencing platform to consider the following cases:

- Case A-26-01 Amend the Zoning Ordinance - Chapter 2 Residential Zones, Sec 2.2 Single Residence (R) Zones, related to adding Accessory Living Quarters as an allowable use in R-18 and R-35 zones.

Applicant: Town of Cave Creek

- Case A-26-02 Amend the Zoning Ordinance - Chapter 3 Commercial Zones, Section 3.1 Commercial Buffer Zone, Subsection D, Bulk Regulations; Section 3.2 Town Core Commercial Zones, Subsection D Bulk Regulations; Section 3.3 General Commercial Zones, Subsection D - Bulk Regulations; Section 3.4.E Landscape Requirements in Commercial Zones

Applicant: Town of Cave Creek

- Case A-26-03 Amend the Zoning Ordinance - Chapter 7 Section 7.1 Hillside Provisions Items A, B, and C, 7.4 Driveway Requirements, 7.6 Hillside Lot Disturbances Item A and Table 7.1, Section 7.8 Special Procedures Items A and B.

Applicant: Town of Cave Creek

Copies of the project case summaries will be available on the Town's website at <https://www.cavecreekaz.gov/748/Agendas> and at the reception area at Cave Creek Town Hall one week prior to the Town of Cave Creek Planning Commission public hearing. Interested persons may file written comments concerning the proposed ordinance amendment and/or appear and be heard at the public hearing.

Questions about cases A-26-01 and A-26-02 can be directed to Eric Baker, Planner, at 480-488-6610 or ebaker@cavecreekaz.gov

Questions about cases A-26-03 can be directed to Steven Perales, Senior Planner, at 480-488-6614 or sperales@cavecreekaz.gov

Publish: Phoenix Independent, May 1, Cave Creek/Carefree Independent, May 6, 2026/41185

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Civility Checklist

How to engage in respectful, honest & civil dialogue about public issues

- ☐ **Take the high road.** Respond to the topic — not the person. Refrain from demonizing others for their opinions. Assume those you disagree with are, like you, genuinely interested in improving the community.
- ☐ **Be respectful.** Bullying, public humiliation, insults, name-calling, harassment, and threats directed at another person — or that person's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. — have no place in civil discussions. Find ways to respectfully disagree without questioning someone's character or motives.
- ☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes. When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.
- ☐ **Don't misrepresent.** Always identify your opinions as opinions (not stating opinions as facts). Never misrepresent the views of others or falsely claim your opinions represent someone else. If quoting the words of others, identify and credit the source.
- ☐ **Listen & learn.** It's both polite and respectful to listen to those we disagree with (as well as those we support) and be genuine in our attempts to understand their point of view. Expand your mind by thoughtfully seeking out views that don't agree with your own.
- ☐ **Look for common ground.** When disagreeing with others, look for even small areas of agreement — which can be the gateway to working together for the greater good.
- ☐ **Respect privacy.** Keep private things private — whether it involves your own information or those with whom you disagree. Revealing private information about someone else is rude, unethical, potentially harmful and, in many cases, illegal.
- ☐ **Set a good example.** Practice civil behavior online as well as in public and in your interaction with others. Encourage others to practice these civil behaviors. And it's OK to challenge disrespectful behavior — but be courteous, respectful and helpful in your approach.



Now that you've read the checklist, take the Civility Pledge at yourvalley.net/civility-pledge.



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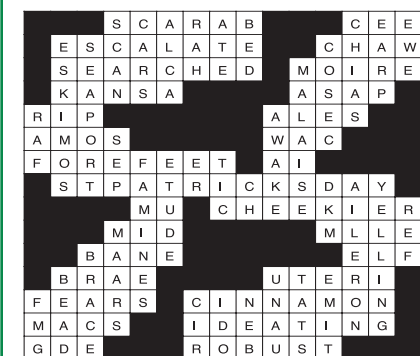
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