



Water safety
Aquatics center
bash welcomes back
family swim; **14**



INDEPENDENT

Neighbors
Musician turns to
writing children's
books; **16**



May 2026 Volume 23 Issue 4 Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Town removes limit on farm animals allowed on 1-acre lots

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In keeping with its farming roots, Queen Creek has lifted the limit on the number of agricultural animals that can be kept on a 1 acre or larger property.

The Queen Creek Town Council recently amended an ordinance to remove the limit on the number of farm animals allowed on larger properties and to focus instead on how the animals are cared for and managed.

Not only has the limit been removed, but swine can now be kept as well.

The ordinance that was approved was the result of a motion made by Vice Mayor Bryan McClure.

Under the ordinance revisions first proposed by town staff, residents could only add an additional animal, or unit, for every 3,000 square feet over 1 acre. That would mean a 50,000-square-foot lot would see the number of permitted farm animals increase from four to six. For a 2-acre lot, the number of animals

• See **Animals** on page 23



Queen Creek debuts portable drone to help firefighters

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Using drones for public safety isn't new, but the Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department's innovative take on the technology could provide help for its firefighters during various incidents.

• See **Drone** on page 10

Queen Creek Firefighter Sigifredo Castro demonstrates how the department's remote piloted unmanned aircraft system operates. Castro spearheaded the development of the new drone system. (Town of Queen Creek)



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on Yourvalley.net

Measles exposure found in three locations

Queen Creek residents and visitors are being cautioned that they may have been exposed to measles at three locations over Easter weekend.

The department is not releasing any details regarding the measles patient. It has conducted contact-tracing and notified exposed individuals. Read at: tinyurl.com/bdz35zs2s

QCFMD getting new fire truck

The Queen Creek Fire and Medical Department has received approval to purchase a new \$2.4 million ladder truck to avoid costly repairs on an older unit.

The Queen Creek Fire and Medical Department has received approval to purchase a new \$2.4 million ladder truck to avoid costly repairs on an older unit. Read at: tinyurl.com/53tavz3e8

Recycling efforts growing

Queen Creek is seeing more people recycling and more waste being diverted from landfills.

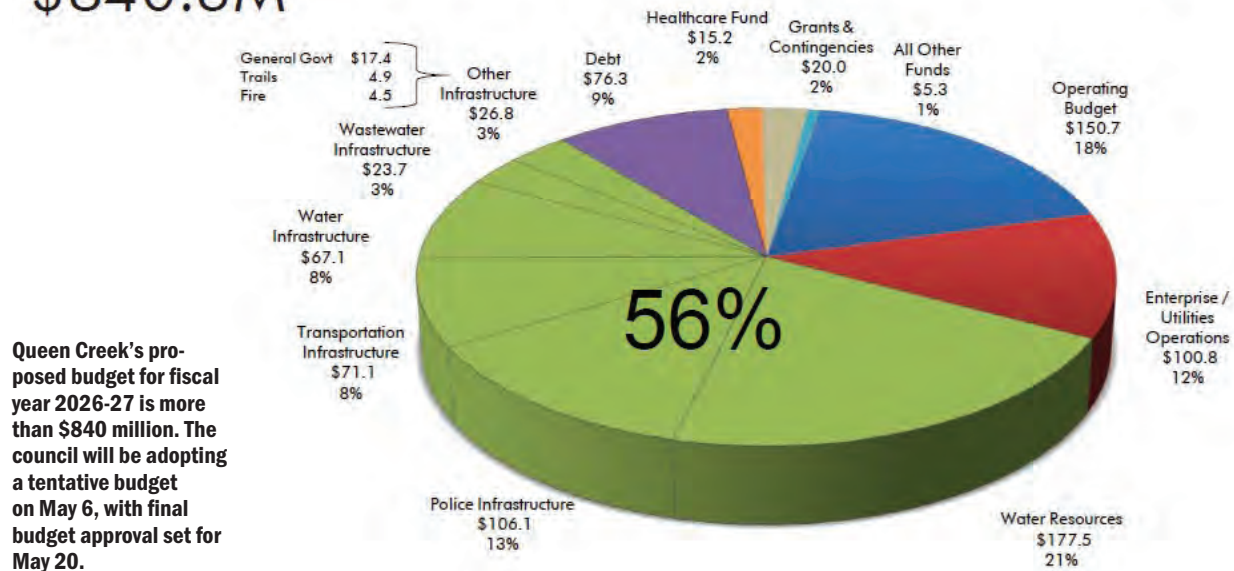
"Our recycling drop-off events ... for 2025, we had over 1,000 participants and we diverted almost 70 tons of material from the landfill to have a second life repurposed or recycled," Ramona Simpson, the town's environmental and fleet operations manager, told the council recently.

Another recycling success story for the town has been the results of its glass recycling pilot program. Read at: tinyurl.com/nhpmf9zs

COMMUNITY

\$840M proposed budget reflects key infrastructure projects

FY 26-27 Recommended Budget
\$840.6M



By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The construction of the new police headquarters and infrastructure for delivering Harquahala water has triggered a 34% increase in Queen Creek's proposed fiscal year 2026-27 budget.

The council will vote on a tentative budget on May 6, with a final vote set for May 20.

Next year's proposed budget is set at \$840.6 million, a \$212.9 million increase from the current adopted budget of \$627.7 million. The increase is being driven primarily by the purchase of Harquahala water and associated infrastructure costs, as well as the new Queen Creek Police Department headquarters.

Overall, 56% of the total proposed

budget, or \$472.3 million, is dedicated to infrastructure projects, including roadwork, that are needed as the town continues to grow, albeit at a slower projected pace than in previous years.

Under the proposed budget, \$177.5 million of the infrastructure budget will go toward water resources, including the final payment for the 1.2 million acre-feet of Harquahala basin water the town agreed to purchase last fall for \$244.4 million.

The first payment of \$140 million was paid in February, with the final \$104.4 million due on July 15. Earlier in 2025, the town closed on the purchase of 500,000 acre-feet of Harquahala water for \$40 million. In total, the town is paying about \$285 million for the basin water.

The proposed infrastructure budget also includes \$67.1 million in water Infrastructure needed to get the water into the town. In this current fiscal year, the town shifted \$19.3 million from other infrastructure projects to begin work on the delivery system.

Another big project for the town is the construction of a new headquarters building for the Queen Creek Police Department. The proposed budget includes \$106.1 million for public safety infrastructure, with \$78.9 million going to the new headquarters. Another \$4.5 million is proposed for fire and medical facilities and equipment, including the design of a new fire station for the southern part of Queen Creek.

• See **Budget** on page 9

COMMUNITY

Queen Creek officials prepare for slower population growth

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The era of population hyper growth in Queen Creek is over, at least for the near future, and it is one reason town officials are tempering revenue projections for the next five years.

“We think the hyper growth is believed to be over at least for the foreseeable future,” Deputy Town Manager and CFO Scott McCarty told the town council at a recent meeting. “We’re going to see a lower rate of population increases. That means we’re not growing at 10%, we might be growing at 6%. I want to emphasize the fact that we are growing, but the rate at which we’re growing is not what we’ve seen in the last three to five years.”

The slowdown is being felt in this year’s operating budget, which has seen the projection of sales tax revenue revised downward by \$5.1 million from \$69.3 million to \$64.2 million.

“The adopted (fiscal year) ’25-26 budget included an aggressive (sales tax) estimate of revenue



The town’s first Costco drew hundreds of residents on its opening day in 2023. With the town’s population expected to grow at a slower rate, Queen Creek is curbing its sales tax revenue estimates. (Special to Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)

growth based on prior years’ double-digit growth trends; however, actual results to date reflect a more modest growth rate compared to prior years,” according to a staff report.

Sales tax revenue, not including construction sales, makes up the largest piece of the operating

budget at 39%. The town is projecting sales tax revenue of \$68.5 million for fiscal year 2026-27.

Despite the downward revision, year-over-year sales tax revenue growth is estimated to be 9% this fiscal year.

Pointing toward continued — if somewhat slower — population growth is the town issuance of 633 single-family permits from July 2025 through December 2025, with the original fiscal year forecast set at 815 permits for single-family homes. The forecast has been increased to 890 permits. The original budget for multifamily permits was 535 and has been adjusted up to 716, according to the report.

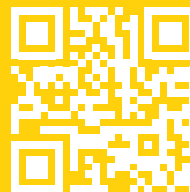
Even with slowing growth, McCarty emphasized the town has had a history of performing better economically than Arizona and the nation.

“We’re still on a trajectory for a fantastic build-out and growth. It’s just a little slower and a little a longer time period at a lower rate than we think,” he said.

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BUSINESS

Horseshoe Park in Queen Creek looks to bring in more events

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre aims to host more events in the upcoming fiscal year.

The proposed fiscal year 2026-27 budget for the event space is \$3.1 million, down 19% from the current fiscal year. The park is under the town's economic development department.

Planned improvements under the proposed budget include a drainage study to analyze needs for potential capital improvement projects.

According to budget documents, the town aims to host 195 equestrian-driven event days and 35 non-equestrian event days.

The 38-acre Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre was founded in 2009, and the town has invested resources and capital improvements as part of an effort to attract, retain and grow events.

Currently, Queen Creek is inviting interested development teams, restaurant operators and commercial partners to vie for a potential ground lease and development opportunity for a full-service restaurant or



Mayor Julia Wheatley and Queen Creek Town Council members were on hand for the official unveiling of the new monument sign at the Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre on March 12. (Town of Queen Creek)

complementary commercial use at Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre.

The request "is intended to gauge market interest and qualifications and will be used to inform potential next steps, which may include a future request for proposals," according to the town's Economic Development Department.

The intention of a restaurant or commercial use is to "enhance the experience at Horseshoe Park while maintaining the park's tradition of providing the full equestrian experience," the town stated.

Various town businesses sponsor sites at the park.

Last year, the Chapman Automotive Group retained the naming

rights for Arena 1. Under the five-year contract, Chapman Automotive Group agreed to pay \$135,000 annually, payable in advance each year for a total of \$675,000. Arena 1 is 150 feet by 300 feet and is the site of many of the park's largest events.

In December, a new 40-foot LED sign for the Horseshoe Park & Recreation Centre was erected. The new sign replaces a 30-foot one adjacent to Riggs Road. It also replaces the old sign as the tallest in Queen Creek. The sign includes a double-sided, 128-square-foot LED animated sign.

The town raised \$267,500 of the sign's estimated cost by February 2025, with Earnhardt Auto Centers kicking in \$124,000 as a platinum sponsor. According to the town, the cost of the new sign was \$433,866 with the total cost of the project set at \$535,000. The town was expected to pay the balance of the cost.

Janet Perez can be reached at jperrez@iniusa.org. Please send your comments about this article to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

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Whether your children are in grade school or high school, they'll be leaving for college or trade school before you know it. With the cost of education rising, now is the time to prepare for that day.

Starting to invest when your child is born is often a great way to build a strong financial future. Even if your children are older, you can still make progress and potentially reap tax benefits by contributing to a 529 education savings plan. Contributions are made with after-tax dollars, accumulate with no federal income tax and can be withdrawn for qualified education expenses federally tax free.

Unfortunately, half of Americans don't know what a 529 plan is, and fewer than a quarter have one, according to 2024 research from Edward Jones and Morning Consult. One way to keep a 529 plan top of mind is to recognize May 29 (5/29) as Save for Education Day.

Benefits of a 529 plan:

Tax Advantages – Your withdrawals are free from federal income tax when you use them for elementary or secondary school tuition – including vocational schools and some online courses and degree programs – registered apprenticeships, and qualified higher-education expenses such as housing, books and more.

Flexibility – The variety of qualifying expenses may surprise you. For example, you can pay for off-campus housing (up to the cost of on-campus room and board), student loan repayments (up to a \$10,000 lifetime limit), and computers and computer-related accessories, including printers, internet access and educational software used primarily by the plan beneficiary. You may even be able to roll over unused funds to a Roth IRA for your beneficiary, switch beneficiaries or roll it over to another 529 plan.

Control – As the account owner, you – not the beneficiary – control how the funds are used, as you planned and intended.

Strategies for building 529 savings:

If you set aside money every month, it can make a big difference toward funding your child's best educational path forward. So, how can you budget for a 529 for your child, when you have competing financial priorities?

Save early and regularly – Consider setting up automatic transfers into a 529 account, even if it feels like a small amount. Taking a few minutes to set it up now can help pay for four years of your child's education in the future.

Increase over time – You could reallocate your day care expenses once your child enters school, which could be a substantial amount each month.

Review your savings over time – Many things can change over time – your available dollars, education costs, investment performance, choice of college, financial aid options and the number of children you're providing for. You have the flexibility to change your contributions.

Your financial advisor can help you determine how a 529 plan can fit into your overall financial strategy and navigate the various guidelines and limits – such as defining a qualified expense, changing beneficiaries and rolling unused dollars elsewhere.

A 529 plan can be a valuable tool for helping your family members afford the educational opportunities that can lead to a promising future. Whether you're exploring this opportunity for the first time or reviewing your current plan, Save for Education Day on 5/29 is good time to do it.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC.

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BUSINESS MOVES



INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

NOW OPEN

1 First Credit Union

22461 E. Queen Creek Road

First Credit Union in Queen Creek held its grand opening on April 24 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce. The 3,541-square-foot First Credit Union has three drive-thru teller lanes and a walk-up ATM. It offers members products and services, free financial education and free money management tools. First Credit Union has been serving Arizona since 1929.

2 Presidential Pools & Spas

37360 N. Gary Road, Suite 108

Presidential Pools & Spas held a grand opening for its showroom in Queen Creek on April 25. Its consultants work with customers to design and build pools and backyards to fit indi-

viduals' homes and lifestyles. Operating for more than 35 years, Presidential Pools & Spas has a team with 100 years of combined experience that has transformed more than 35,000 backyards. The company handles all required permits, design and construction.

COMING SOON

3 Brain Balance

21820 S. Ellsworth Road, Suite 102

The Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce will host a grand-opening celebration for Brain Balance starting at 11 a.m., Tuesday, May 5. Brain Balance is a drug-free program designed to help kids improve focus, behavior, social skills, anxiety and academic performance. Its approach combines cognitive, behavioral and nutritional strategies.

4 NEWS Point Academy

6321 S. Ellsworth Road, Mesa

NEWS Point Academy is a tuition-free public charter high school located at the Arizona Athletic Grounds. It will hold a grand opening, co-hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce, starting at 9 a.m., Thursday, May 7. The school will open in fall 2026 and serve students in grades ninth and tenth. There are plans to grow the campus into a full four-year high school. The school stated in a press release that it was established to provide a college-preparatory experience while integrating leadership development and access to athletic environments.

5 ROAR Aesthetics and Wellness

22485 E. Queen Creek Road, Suite 103

ROAR Aesthetics and Wellness will hold a grand opening ceremony hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce starting at 11 a.m., Friday, May 8. The public can come see ROAR's new space and meet its team. The spa provides Botox, dermal fillers, laser treatments, IV hydration, skin rejuvenation, weight support, hormone therapy and hair restoration.

6 7 Brew

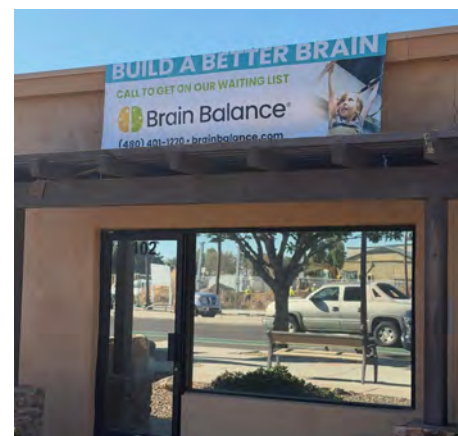
Ocotillo and Ironwood

Founded in 2017, 7 Brew is one of the fastest-growing drive-thru beverage businesses in the country with locations in 38 states. It offers coffee, energy drinks, tea, chai, matcha, smoothies, shakes and more. It also offers original drinks such as the Cinnamon Roll made with brown sugar, cinnamon and white chocolate breve, and Cookie Butter with toasted marshmallow, hazelnut and white chocolate breve.

If you have a new business that has just opened, is under construction or is celebrating an anniversary, please contact iberez@iniva.org.



FIRST CREDIT UNION



BRAIN BALANCE



ROAR AESTHETICS & WELLNESS



7 BREW

Now Open:

FIRST CREDIT UNION

BRINGS COMMUNITY-FOCUSED BANKING TO QUEEN CREEK

First Credit Union has officially opened its newest branch in Queen Creek at 22461 E Queen Creek Rd, offering residents a more personal, education-focused approach to banking.

A Different Approach to Banking

At First Credit Union, banking is about more than transactions—it's about trusted guidance and long-term relationships. The Arizona-based credit union, founded in 1929, aims to help members feel more confident about their financial future through real conversations and practical support.

"Smarter banking" means combining digital tools with in-person expertise—giving members both convenience and clarity when managing their money. That philosophy shows up in everyday interactions, from personalized account recommendations to financial checkups.

What Residents Can Expect

The Queen Creek branch offers a full range of financial services, including:

- Everyday checking and savings accounts
- Auto, home, and personal loans
- Credit-building tools and financial guidance
- Business banking support for local entrepreneurs

But the focus goes beyond that. It's a personalized experience—staff work one-on-one with members to shape financial plans that reflect their real-life goals and challenges.

Practical Support for Everyday Life

As part of its commitment to free financial education, First Credit Union encourages simple habits that can make a long-term impact:

- Start a small emergency fund
- Understand and monitor your credit score
- Automate savings when possible
- Review recurring expenses annually
- Talk openly about money as a family

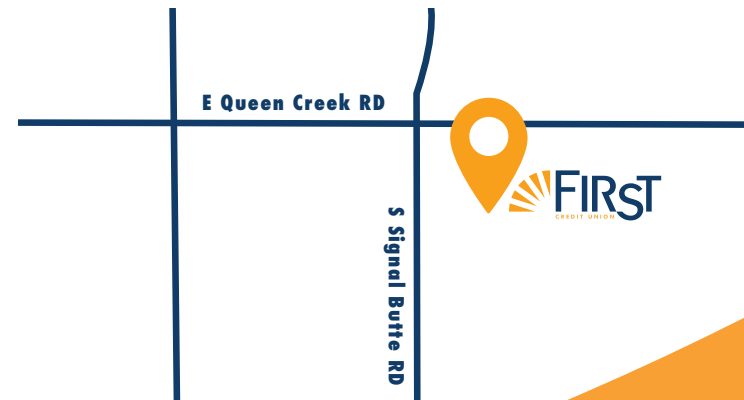
These conversations are a regular part of the member experience, helping turn financial goals into achievable steps.

Why a Local Branch Still Matters

Even in a digital-first world, First Credit Union believes local branches play an important role—especially when it comes to trust and financial confidence. The Queen Creek location is designed as a welcoming space where residents can ask questions, meet with financial specialists, and get personalized support.

Part of the Community

As Queen Creek continues to expand, First Credit Union is positioning itself as a long-term partner for local families and businesses—supporting everything from first paychecks to first homes and beyond.



Residents are invited to stop by, explore the new branch, and experience a more personal approach to banking.

For more information, visit firstcu.net

Budget

- From page 2

Construction on the new QCPD headquarters is scheduled to begin in June 2026, with completion set for the summer of 2028. The building will be located near Summers Place and Ellsworth Road between Fire Station No. 1 and the Community Chambers.

The proposed budget also includes

\$71.1 million for transportation infrastructure such as widening key roads, building a bridge over the Sonoqui Wash, intersection improvements, traffic signals and drainage.

Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org. Please send your comments about this article to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



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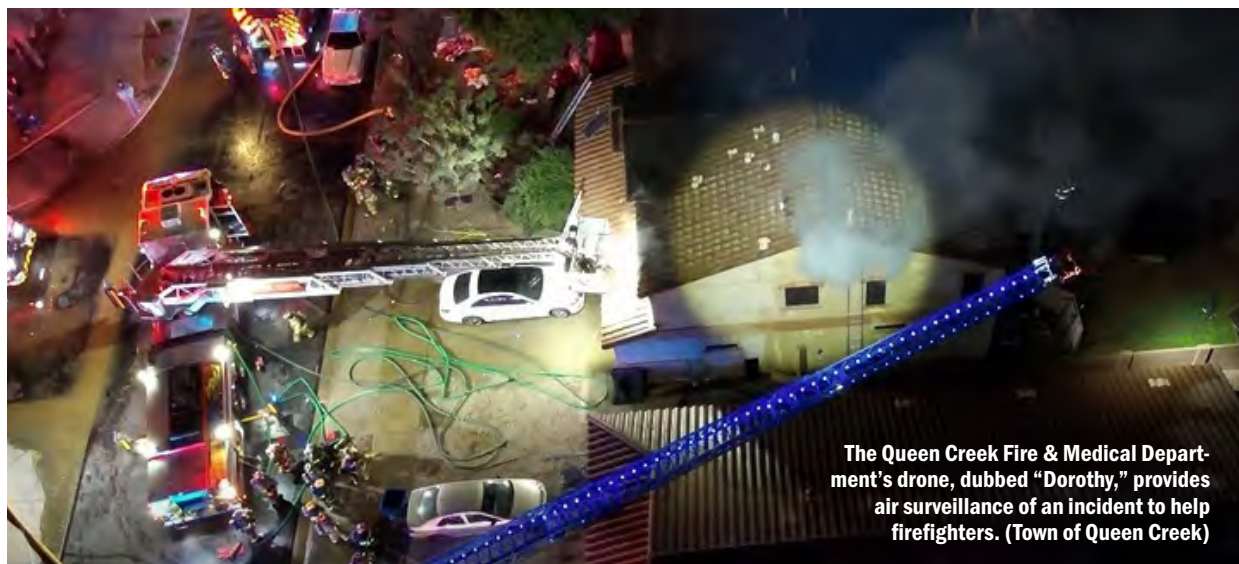
Drone

• From page 1

Drone by first responder programs generally travel from a stationary base to an incident that could be miles away. Queen Creek revamped the traditional deployment system and implemented a mobile base that allows for more efficient use of drones.

This mobility is achieved by mounting a remote piloted unmanned aircraft system, dubbed “Dorothy,” on a sliding tray in the battalion chief’s vehicle, which is then deployed when the unit arrives at major calls. The drones sent out through Dorothy provide real-time aerial footage to incident commanders before crews even arrive on the scene.

“By us being able to drive the drone to the scene gives us a lot of different capabilities. One, we’re not transversing over homes or parks or things like that,” said QCFMD Firefighter Sigifredo Castro, who took the lead in developing the mobile system. “When you’re going from point A to point B, you have to take the weather into account, and you have to take the battery life into account. We removed all those aspects of it, so we’re able to stay



The Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department's drone, dubbed “Dorothy,” provides air surveillance of an incident to help firefighters. (Town of Queen Creek)

on station longer (and) provide the incident commander with a whole new set of eyes.”

The drone is equipped with thermal-imaging capabilities and can assist with a range of incidents including structure fires, brush fires, major crashes, search-and-rescue operations and hazardous material situations.

Live video feeds are transmitted directly to

command staff and responding units to help guide decisions in real time.

When a battalion chief arrives at the incident scene, he slides the tray where Dorothy is mounted in the truck and from there trained firefighters such as Castro pilot the drones remotely. Meanwhile, the battalion chief and battalion safety officer are

• See **Firefighters** on page 20



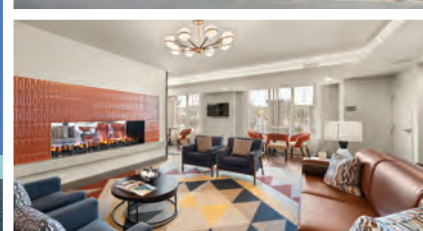
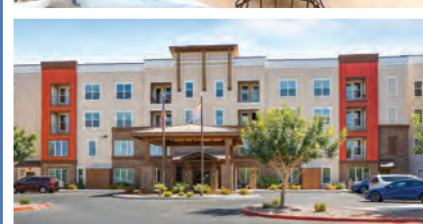
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Jon Wootten

Jon Wootten may have grown up in Tempe, but Queen Creek has been his home since 1998.

He takes the words “be part of the solution” to heart by being heavily involved with a little rodeo that has blossomed into a Queen Creek institution.

Wootten is a founding member of the Friends of Horseshoe Park board of directors, where he is still president. Friends of Horseshoe Park began and still organizes the Roots N’ Boots Queen Creek rodeo, which just celebrated its 15th anniversary.

In addition, he served on the Queen Creek Town Council from 2002 to 2010. Wootten also serves as the East Valley representative to the Maricopa County Extension Office advisory board, which is responsible for the 4H program in the county, since 2020.

Not surprisingly, he is a major advocate for preserving the rural and small-town feel of Queen Creek. He works with residents, town staff and elected leaders to “move our town forward in areas that touch on youth and maintain our rural atmosphere, including Horseshoe Park.”

Name: Jon Wootten

Age: 65

Business Name/Organization: Friends of Horseshoe Park, Roots N’ Boots Queen Creek

Town/neighborhood: Rancho Jardines

When and why I moved here: My wife, two daughters and I moved here from Chandler in 1998 specifically to get out of the city and provide our daughters with a more rural, small-town upbringing.

What I like most about living here: No. 1, Rancho Jardines, our neighbors and our common agricultural lifestyle. We still wave, help each other out and share common outlooks regarding what neighborly means and what living in an agriculturally focused neighborhood means.

No. 2, Queen Creek’s parks and trails and the continual efforts to make those trails and crossings safe for travelers, including horses, and to expand the trail system throughout the town.

What I do: My day job is as a senior system engineer for General Dynamics Missions Systems in Scottsdale. Within Queen Creek I am president of the Friends of Horseshoe Park,

which is chartered to support Queen Creek’s Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre and foster the town’s rural heritage. Our primary fundraiser is putting on Roots N’ Boots Queen Creek, the town’s annual community event at Horseshoe Park.

Personal background highlights: Three kids and two grandkids all in the Valley and we see them often. My wife and I celebrated our 40th anniversary April 5 of this year. We are both Valley natives. Vickey grew up in Lehi (now North Mesa) and attended Westwood High School, and I grew up in Tempe and attended McClintock High School.

Professional background highlights: Various parks and rec committees, planning & zoning commissioner, council member 2002-2010. Together with Mayor Wendy Feldman-Kerr and other council members, we planned the Ellsworth Underpass, Ellsworth Loop, Vesta center and Horseshoe Park. These key improvements helped set the stage for the kind of town we have today, as well as beginning the culture of looking for inventive ways to make our town better.

Founding member and only president of Friends of Horseshoe Park. This year was the 15th anniversary of Roots N’ Boots Queen Creek, and in January Friends of Horseshoe Park crossed the \$500,000 mark in total donations to Horseshoe Park.

The East Valley representative to the Maricopa County Extension Office Advisory Board since 2020.

What I like most about what I do: Working with residents, town staff and elected leaders to move our town forward in areas that touch on youth and maintain our rural atmosphere, including Horseshoe Park.

What does being nominated for this category mean to you? This honor is surprising and very much appreciated, but being included with such people as Mark Schnepf, Steve Sossaman and Paul Gardner really says something. I have worked alongside all three and have seen their vision and accomplishments, so to be included in such company is hard for me to believe.

What does it mean to be a Queen Creek resident? I travel a good deal in my day job, and in the past my wife and I have considered moving, but we have always come back to Queen Creek with its small-town feel (still), its

focus on community and maintaining what is left of our rural heritage.

What do you think you bring to the local community that makes it better? Through Friends of Horseshoe Park, I help bring opportunities to our community that would not otherwise be available. Regular events that allow all members of our community to become better acquainted with the agricultural animals that are still resident in our town, including the horses and mules seen on our trails. We also provide volunteer and leadership opportunities for our youth through our youth rodeo committee.

What would you tell people about why it’s important to make a difference in Queen Creek? Everyone has a complaint or area they would like to change. Just complaining does not help anyone, but getting involved can. Even if the specific item of complaint is not remedied, getting a better understanding of the complex trade-offs involved in running our town helps as well. Our leaders need to hear from town residents on topics they are concerned about, and getting involved is how we make our form of government work.

Changes I’d like to see in this area: More trail connectivity. Many more residents taking part in the town’s Citizen Leadership Institute.

Favorite community cause & why: Friends of Horseshoe Park, of course. But there are so many outstanding organizations in our town, again, because caring residents take the time and energy to further causes they see as worthwhile. If I had to choose, I would say the American Legion and the Mary Gloria Foundation are my two more favorites of all my favorites.

My family: Wife Vickey, son, Jason, his wife, Kristi, and grandson, Tristan, who plays football, wrestles and I haven’t beaten in chess for years. Daughters, Jessi and Jamie. Jamie is married to Tyler and together have granddaughter, Blake. My mother, Ruth, turned 97 this year and still lives in Tempe near my sister, Beth.

My interests and hobbies: Engineering and delivering cutting-edge communication solutions for our military. Riding our mules on the QC trails, all over Arizona and various parts of the Western U.S.



The trait(s) I admire in others: Listening. The ability to engage in constructive conversation, without animosity or personal attacks. Long-term volunteering to a cause or causes that benefits others.

People who inspired me (and how): My parents, who provided a loving and supportive home, and the desire to learn and travel. John Peterson, youth pastor, who taught me to speak quietly and act on your convictions. Bob Johannsen, who taught me to look at things from multiple perspectives and consider the basis for my own perspective on topics.

My guiding philosophy: Laugh at yourself and help others see the humor around them. Humor is a great tool to lessen stress and keep tasks fun. Treat others as you would like to be treated.

My advice to today’s youth: Get involved with your peers and adults. Take on leadership roles or roles of greater responsibility. Be part of the solution, regardless of the size of the topic or task. As I noted above, even if your proposed solution isn’t implemented or chosen, just being involved will help you learn to better communicate your views, in preparation for future interactions with decision makers.



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Trailblazer: Karen McLendon, Founder, A Caring Manor Assisted Living

Educator: Jarrod Posner, Teacher and Coach, Benjamin Franklin Charter School - Crismon Campus

Volunteer: Julie Hartman, Volunteer, Town of Queen Creek, Queen Creek Chamber, Central Christian Church

Healthcare: Amy Webster, Founder, Hope Heart Heal Medical Nonprofit

Spiritual Leader: Curt McReynolds, Campus Pastor, CCV Queen Creek

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MAY 16 & 17

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MAY 23

Snow White

The Arizona Youth Ballet performs a classical dance adaptation of the tale of Snow White.

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RECREATION & AQUATIC CENTER

Queen Creek hosting aquatics center bash to welcome back family swim

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The start of the summer season is traditionally ushered in on Memorial Day. This year, Queen Creek plans to start the fun a few days earlier with its Pool-a-Palooza.

Pool-a-Palooza will run from noon to 3 p.m., Saturday, May 23, at the Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center.

The event marks the start of family-swim time as the summer break takes hold.

"It's a great opportunity to bring the community together to celebrate the aquatic center reopening for family swim for the summer," said Joey LaNeve, the

• See **Bash** on page 15



The town will be hosting Pool-a-Palooza on May 23 to mark the return of family swim. (Town of Queen Creek)



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Bash

• From page 14

town's aquatic supervisor. "We also want to make sure that we provide an opportunity to educate our patrons, our community on water safety and the importance of drowning prevention."

The Queen Creek Fire Department will be on hand to provide life-saving information, as will the center's lifeguards.

"We'll have a booth set up with our lifeguards to help educate patrons about life jacket use and making sure that life jackets are fitted properly, what it means to wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket, as opposed to a normal personal flotation device," LaNeve said. "We're going to have some water safety coloring book pages for any swimmers who don't want to be in the pool."

There will also be music and games along with competitions to see who can get the fastest times going down the center's water slides.

The event is free to center members, and town residents can buy day passes running from \$5 to \$7 per adult. Discounted day passes are available for kids aged 18 months to 17 years, military active and veteran ser-



Pool-a-Palooza will hold timed competitions on its water slides. (Town of Queen Creek)

vice members, and senior adults aged 55 years and older. Children 17 months and younger get free admission with a guardian who purchases a day pass.

Information on memberships and fees can be found at tinyurl.com/54a69ark.

The Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center has been open for just more than a year and is sifting through feedback from residents. But staff is already

heading two issues.

There were complaints of kids ages 9-12 wandering around the center. Too old for childcare but too young for teens activities, the tweens were left rudderless. As a result, the town has opened Hangout Headquarters — a separate space for the youngsters that offers programs and activities, according to Erica Perez, deputy director for parks and recreation.

Residents also asked for more family swim time hours and the town answered. From May 23 to July 19, family swim will be available from noon to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday; noon to 6 p.m., Saturday; and noon to 4 p.m. on Sundays.

During Family Swim hours all pool amenities are open including the lazy river, water slides and diving boards.

Twice a month starting on May 23 through Aug. 26, the aquatic center will also have sunset swim hours from 6 to 8 p.m.

Pool-a-Palooza is the first event of the summer for the center, but not the last. Residents can also look forward to the July 4th Splash Bash where families can celebrate America's 250th birthday with games and activities, including tie-dyeing, water balloons, lazy river bingo and water volleyball. July 4th Splash Bash runs from noon to 4 p.m., Saturday, July 4.

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NEIGHBORS

Queen Creek musician turns talents to writing children's books

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA



Franklin Smith is a country music artist based in Queen Creek. He released a children's book and a second was set to come out April 25. (Courtesy Evolve Public Relations & Marketing)

A simple misunderstanding opened a whole new world for Queen Creek country music artist, and now children's book author, Franklin Smith.

Around the time of the COVID pandemic, Smith took his grown children's advice and started writing a kids' book. It was initially a story about the adventures of two young sasquatches on Mount St. Helens — an obvious setting for the Washington state native.

"I recruited a group of teachers and therapists to kind of be a focus group on this manuscript, which was not illustrated," Smith said. They all loved it. And so, I was getting ready to illustrate it, but something was just missing from it. I don't know what it was, just an instinct that it was missing that magical component."

As the pandemic eased, Smith started to help a friend who was building a house. The friend told him he planned to see Smith perform that evening and asked him if he planned on playing any Shania Twain.

Standing at the top of a ladder, Smith's response was, "I hope I don't."

"He goes, 'What's a hope I don't?'"

Smith had his "magical component."

Taking a break from helping his friend, Smith immediately began writing about the creatures that would become the HOPEiDONTs.

The HOPEiDONTs are small bean-shaped creatures that take part in the adventures of the young sasquatches Buz and Budger and all their friends. The HOPEiDONTs are used to illustrate various emotions kids are trying to understand.

Suddenly, Smith's initial book had been transformed and started creating a buzz.

He began receiving phone calls from companies interested in the book, as well as from Mark Marder- osian, a long-time illustrator who has worked for Disney.

Franklin soon found himself in meetings with educators, therapists and other experts getting a crash

• See **Smith** on page 17



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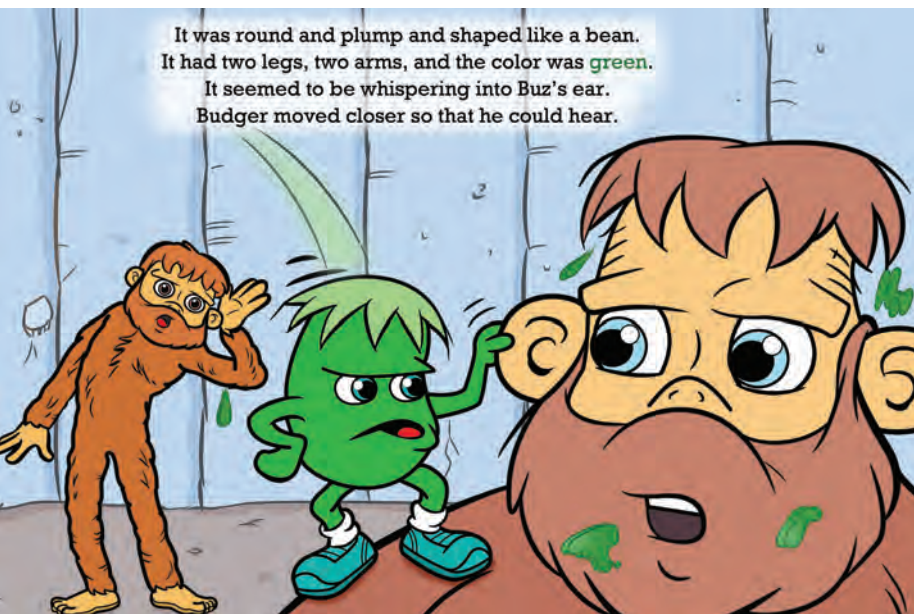
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The young sasquatches Buz and Budger learn to identify and process emotions through Franklin's magical HOPEiDONT. (HOPEiDONT Books)

Smith

• From page 16

course on social-emotional learning.

He then took to the road and began visiting children's hospitals, meeting with kids and the folks in charge as he tried to get a handle on just what he had created.

"I'm the least equipped person to write a children's book on social-emotional learning. So, as I traveled around, I was just interviewing and understanding."

Talking to kids was an eye-opener for Smith. One of his HOPEiDONTs is meant to illustrate anger. Smith

thought the appropriate color would be red. To his surprise, the kids said green because of The Incredible Hulk.

Despite the expense, Smith next hired Marderosian to illustrate his first HOPEiDONT book.

With Marderosian and Ali Crocker co-writing, Smith's simple tale has grown into a business, HOPEiDONT Books, a "character-based social-emotional learning company dedicated to supporting children's emotional development," according to its website.

Smith's first book is called "Slime Time Fun," and his second, "Balbina the Bear Learns to Swim," was released on April 25.

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COUNTY/STATE

Buffalo Soldiers proposed monument at Arizona Capitol inching closer to reality

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

There's one more step left for the proposed Buffalo Soldiers Arizona Territory Monument at Wesley Bolin Plaza to become a reality.

Gov. Katie Hobbs signed a bill April 13 to install the monument on the Capitol grounds. But the leaders of the Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory out of Mesa, which proposed the monument, have been down this road before and aren't willing to celebrate yet.

A contract approving the monument's construction must still be approved by the executive director of the Arizona Legislative Council. Once the signature is obtained, the organization can move forward with hiring a general contractor to conduct the work needed to install the monument.

Deputy Cmdr. Michelle London-Marable of the Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory said in 2024, after the governor signed a similar bill, the installation was stymied because of a move to try to include the names

of other Buffalo Soldiers organizations from around the state that had not been involved with memorial's designing or raising funding for its placement.

But she's hopeful this will be the year thanks to the support the bill has received from Rep. Walter Blackman, R-Apache Junction.

The Senate passed House Bill 2062, the Buffalo Soldiers Arizona Territory Monument, in an April 6 vote of 29-0-1. It was passed by the house on Feb. 17 on a vote of 57-0-3.

Efforts to install the monument at the state Capitol have been ongoing since 2017, when it was proposed by the Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory out of Mesa. The group raised funds needed for the monument, which has been ready for installation since 2022.

The monument stands 8 feet tall and spans 11 feet in width. It is made of granite and is double-sided. It will showcase six Buffalo Soldiers with their pictures and stories on the front. On the back, it will honor Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory Cmdr. Fred Marable and London-Marable, who

worked on the bill and raised funds for its design, creation and installation.

The Buffalo Soldiers were formed in 1866 as the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions, mostly protecting the Arizona Territory. At one time, all Buffalo Soldier regiments were headquartered in Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista. The 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions, the only Black divisions in World War II, were also stationed in Fort Huachuca.

The Buffalo Soldiers served until 1951, when the 24th Infantry, last serving in the Korean War, was disbanded after the U.S. military was desegregated.

Monuments to the Buffalo Soldiers exist in Tucson and Sierra Vista, and there is an exhibit about them inside the state Capitol.

Once the contract is signed, London-Marable said she hopes to schedule the unveiling of the monument no later than November.

Janet Perez can be reached at jperrez@iniusa.org.



A young reenactor with the Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory is shown above. The group is hoping to unveil its monument to soldiers who kept the Arizona Territory safe for settlers at Wesley Bolin Plaza by November. (Courtesy Arizona Centennial Legacy Buffalo Soldiers of the Arizona Territory)



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Firefighters

• From page 10

the on-the-ground eyes as the drones are being flown remotely.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Dorothy is it adds another layer of protection for QCFMD personnel battling a blaze.

In one incident a few months ago, Dorothy guided firefighters to safety as they took on a fire in a large home.

"We were able to see the instability of that structure with that drone, and that allowed us to talk with the incident commander to let them know that 'Hey, we need to get crews to exit out of the structure,' which they did," Castro said. "Then 60 seconds after they exited the structure, that structure did collapse."

The drones' infrared systems provide night-vision capacity, which comes in handy as an estimated 75% of calls take place in the evening

hours, Castro said.

Dorothy also helps QCFMD to strengthen its good-neighbor policy by assisting fire departments in nearby towns such as Mesa, Gilbert and Phoenix.

Castro began working on the project that would become Dorothy in 2025 and ran it through a variety of trial flights. He was a natural for spearheading the new program as he spent 13 years in the U.S. Army as an aviation operations specialist.

"It was a really easy transition for me to kind of take on this program," Castro said. "Our (drone) program has actually been around since 2018. I just happened to revamp it in 2025, and I just took some of that past knowledge and experience that I have and then absorbed what the current fire service is doing."

Currently, there are seven pilots on QCFMD's drone team who are constantly training. But not every drone operator gets to use Dorothy.



A drone takes off from "Dorothy." (Town of Queen Creek)

"Dorothy is a whole different level of skill and training that we make mandatory for our pilots to learn and have X amount of hours," Castro said. "To just even be able to be part of the drone team, you have to have a Part 107 license that allows you to be a commercial drone pilot and then we have other in-house trainings."

"I would say the training is pretty rigorous on our end, but that's what we want from our pilots."

All drone operations are conducted in accordance with federal aviation regulations and are limited to emergency response and approved public safety training.

Dorothy's docking platform and eight drones cost the town about \$103,000. That's money well spent to ensure the safety of the community and especially that of firefighters.

"Dorothy has proven to protect the lives of our firefighters and optimize how we respond to emergencies," Vice Mayor Bryan McClure said. "This advancement in technology is helping make our community even safer for both our residents and first responders."

Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org. Please send your comments about this article to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

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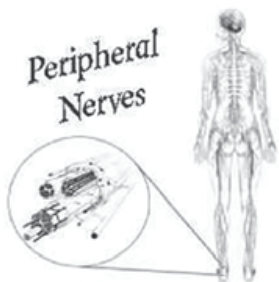
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Chronic pain and/or peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by a hands and feet which causes the nerves to 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) In order to effectively treat your neuropathy three factors must be determined.

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Animals

• From page 1

allowed would go from five to 18.

Staff also recommended that swine would only be permitted for educational purposes, such as part of a school or agricultural club project. An educational exemption also could be granted for those who exceeded the number of animals allowed.

Staff was seeking to bring the ordinance back to pre-2019 language that allowed an additional animal for every 3,000 square feet over 1 acre. In 2019, the amount of extra square footage needed for more animals was changed to 30,000, making it the most restrictive in the neighboring southeast Valley.

In the end, McClure's version of the ordinance entirely removes the limit on animals on 1-acre properties, allows for keeping swine without the education component and nullifies the need for any educational exemptions at all.

McClure's motion did retain the updated animal welfare and management standards proposed by the staff. They include:

- Requiring shade for animals at all times either provided by a structure or natural shade such as trees.
 - Focusing on full containment and management of waste to prevent runoff and nuisances, rather than a fixed 50-foot setback from property lines.
 - Permitting grazing in front yards with permanent stables remaining in side or rear yards.
 - Establishing a 25-foot setback for swine enclosures to mitigate potential odor and noise.
- Enforcement of the code will be triggered by

nuisance complaints or concerns about animal welfare.

"Our code team, by-and-large, is reactive and so they do not necessarily drive around neighborhoods counting animals, looking for swine or anything like that as it relates to this (ordinance)," said Erik Swanson, the town's planning administrator.

Council Member Dawn Oliphant pointed out the number of properties this revised amendment would apply to is just 1,200 out of approximately 28,000 in the entire town.

"It applies to a small percentage of our community, which is what makes our community unique and amazing," Oliphant said.

McClure's motion was unanimously approved by the council.

The vote came after a number of residents — and even some considering becoming residents — spoke out about the need to remove the animal limit, allow swine and no longer require educational exemptions.

"I have previously owned four pigs, four calves and four horses on ... just over an acre, and they've all thrived," said resident Tiffany Baden. "It's not about how many animals you have, but how you keep them. I never had a single complaint when I had all those animals. I encourage you to listen to your residents as this is our way of life, and to remember the history of this town, its agricultural heritage and why it was established."

Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org. Please send your comments about this article to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



D&D Mini-Ranch Trial & Livestock trains herding dogs by using cows, sheep and fowl. New revisions to a town ordinance have removed the limit on how many agricultural animals can be kept on property 1 acre or larger. (Courtesy town of Queen Creek)



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