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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR

INDEPENDENT

Business

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June 2026 Volume 7 Issue 6

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper - YourValley.net

Remembering a Friend



Dylan Buensuceso is honored at the Estrella Foothills High School Class of 2026. (Submitted photo/Sumi Mathews)

A Goodyear high school carried Dylan Buensuceso's memory across the graduation stage

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

On a spring afternoon, the Estrella Foothills High School Class of 2026 walked across the stage to receive their diplomas, stepping forward into adulthood, but one chair remained empty.

Dylan Buensuceso, who would have celebrated his 18th birthday on June 5, was not there to wear his cap and gown. The 13-year-old, described as bright, sarcastic with dreams of becoming a surgeon, was

• See **Dylan** on page **21**

Ribbons Tea House closes its storefront after 11 years in Litchfield Park

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Ribbons Tea House, a Litchfield Park staple known for its scratch-made boba, custom coffee recipes and deep community roots, officially closed its storefront on Saturday, May 30.

The closure marks the end of an 11-year run for the family-owned business, which has served as a second home for local youth and stands as the second-oldest establishment on the block.

The decision to close follows a two-year lease dispute with the property's landlord said co-owner Joel Mounce. Rather than exercising a final five-year lease option to stay, Mounce and his family said they decided to exit the brick-and-mortar space to protect their well-being and look forward to retirement, while passing the brand's mobile future to their daughters.

• See **Closes** on page **24**



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MORE INFO

Compass International Holdings Names Greg Hague Director of Home Sale Strategy

Founder of 72SOLD will provide voluntary, no-cost strategy training to more than 300,000 agents across the company's portfolio of brands

New York, NY – April 23, 2026 – Compass International Holdings, a global real estate services company, announced that Greg Hague, founder of 72SOLD and one of the most credentialed and experienced home sale strategists, has been appointed Director of Home Sale Strategy. Hague brings more than 50 years of experience to the role, with a career spanning brokerage, law, and real estate innovation. His work is grounded in the idea that the market is not a fixed constraint but a dynamic environment in which skilled real estate professionals can influence outcomes through strategy, positioning, and execution.

“My passion has always been helping real estate professionals unlock what’s possible for the clients they serve,” said Hague. “It’s about mastering how to position, market, show, and negotiate homes in ways that drive better results. When agents have access to the right strategies and the freedom to use them, the impact for sellers can be significant. I’m excited to share that with agents across this incredible network.”

Hague’s approach is designed to complement the company’s listing marketing strategies, giving agents additional tools around home positioning, buyer demand creation, showing strategy, and negotiation. Agents can adopt and adapt these strategies as they see fit, with the goal of delivering stronger outcomes for sellers.

“Greg and I share a belief that the

future of this industry is one where agents are empowered to lead, and sellers have more choice in how their homes are marketed and sold,” said Robert Reffkin, Chairman and CEO of Compass International Holdings. “The best outcomes happen when the professional closest to the client has the flexibility and tools to act in their client’s best interest. Greg has spent his career building strategies that do exactly that, and we’re excited to make that expertise available to every agent across our network.”

Hague’s training will be available to all agents across Compass International Holdings’ brands at no cost, with participation entirely optional. Agents maintain full discretion over how and whether to incorporate these strategies into their business.

About 72SOLD

Founded in Scottsdale, Arizona, 72SOLD is a home-selling strategy consulting and training company operating across major U.S. markets. Inc. 5000 ranked it #211 among America’s top 250 fastest-growing private companies and the number one fastest-growing real estate company in the Southwest. The company has been recognized as one of the Most Admired Companies in Arizona. Seven independent studies over five years have documented higher seller net proceeds from agents trained on 72SOLD’s methods. Learn more at 72SOLD.com.

About Greg Hague

Greg Hague is one of the most credentialed and experienced home sale strategists in the country. A licensed real estate attorney who earned the top score on the Arizona bar exam, he is a 50-year real estate professional



Greg Hague

who made a deliberate choice early in his career: that the real estate business needed better thinking more than it needed another lawyer.

He began selling homes in the 1970s at his father’s Cincinnati real estate firm and never looked back. Over the decades that followed, he has personally listed and sold thousands of homes, and has trained agents across the country who have collectively effected the sale of tens of thousands more. Realtor Magazine ranked him among the Top 20 home-selling agents in the United States.

Hague founded 72SOLD, a home sale strategy consulting and training company that Inc. 5000 ranked #211 among America’s top 250 fastest-growing privately held firms and the number one fastest-growing real estate company in the Southwest. 72SOLD has been recognized as one of the Most Admired Companies in Arizona.

Seven independent studies over five years have documented higher net proceeds for sellers represented by agents trained on Hague’s methods. The most recent, a 2025 study of 11,618 Phoenix Metro MLS transac-

tions, showed a 5.8% higher median sale price compared to other homes sold in the same market.

Hague has built a fully integrated infrastructure supporting agent training and seller results, including a proprietary CRM, an in-house advertising agency, a buyer lead generation platform, an appointment-setting center, and an AI partnership with PolyAI.

About Compass International Holdings

Compass, Inc. (“Compass International Holdings”, “CIH” or the “Company”) (NYSE: COMP) is a global real estate services company with a presence in every major U.S. city and approximately 120 countries and territories. Compass International Holdings serves millions of buyers and sellers through a portfolio of some of the most recognized and iconic brands: @properties, Better Homes and Gardens® Real Estate, CENTURY 21®, Christie’s International Real Estate, Coldwell Banker®, Compass, Corcoran®, ERA®, and Sotheby’s International Realty®. Every day, we empower a global network of 300,000 real estate professionals and affiliate broker-owners to grow their businesses and deliver exceptional service to consumers.

The Company empowers real estate professionals to streamline operations and seamlessly guide clients through every phase of residential and commercial transactions, leveraging powerful tools, including its modern technology platform. Compass International Holdings brings together integrated services, including brokerage, franchise, mortgage, title, insurance, escrow, and relocation.

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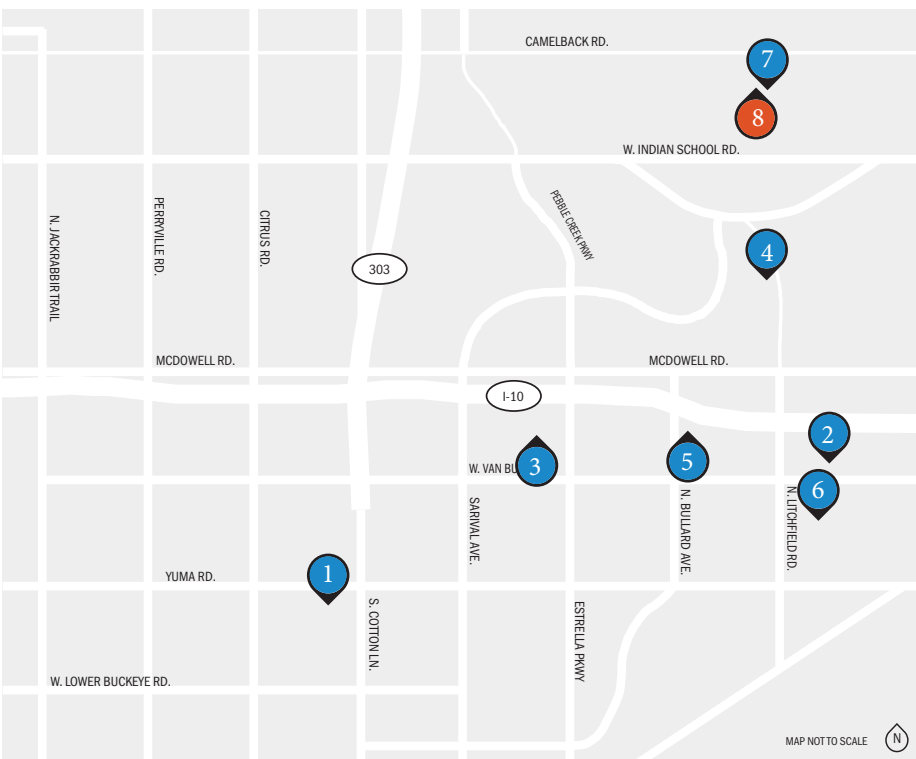
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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

OPENINGS

1 Panda Express opened its third local restaurant at 17211 W. Yuma Road in Goodyear. The global chain specializes in American Chinese cuisine and distributed promotional branded merchandise to its first 88 guests.

2 Tractor Supply Co. #3160, 13540 W. Van Buren Street, Goodyear, is hosting a grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 18th. The rural lifestyle retail chain offers goods for farmers, livestock wellness, pet care, and DIY home projects.

3 Ageless Women's Health, 15655 W. Roosevelt St. Suite 243, Goodyear, is now open. The medical facility specializes in hormone optimization and metabolic care tailored specifically for women.

4 Movement Mortgage, 2950 N. Litchfield Rd, Goodyear, is currently open and operating. The office serves

the local area by providing direct financial services including home loans, refinancing options and mortgage servicing.

5 Buc-ee's, at 1001 N. Bullard Ave, Goodyear, is hosting a grand opening ceremony on June 22 at 10:00 a.m. This event marks the official opening of the massive travel center's first location in the state of Arizona.

6 G&G Cake Decorating Supplies, 245 N. Litchfield Road, Goodyear, is now officially open for business. This family-owned retail shop specializes in selling premade cakes, specialty baking tools, and professional decorating ingredients.

7 Radiant Financial Group, 104 W. Wigwam Blvd, Litchfield Park, is now open in old downtown Litchfield Park. The new business operates as a full-service mortgage brokerage providing direct lending services and



Panda Express opens a third location in Goodyear. (Submitted photo/Panda Express)



Buc-ee's plans an opening ceremony for its debut Arizona location. (Submitted photo/Buc-ee's)

personalized home financing guidance.

CLOSINGS

8 Ribbons Tea House, 111 W. Honeysuckle St., Litchfield Park, closed

permanently on Saturday, May 30, concluding its 11 years of business in the community with a final celebration.

ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Goodyear relocates its Juneteenth celebration. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

Goodyear celebrates Juneteenth

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The City of Goodyear will host its annual Juneteenth Family Day celebration at a new, expanded venue this year, moving the festivities to the Goodyear High School campus to accommodate growing attendance.

The free public event will take place on Friday, June 19, from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the school complex located at 7300 W. Van Buren St. The celebration will feature a mix of indoor and outdoor programming designed to honor freedom, culture and community.

This year's schedule highlights historical education and local heritage. Attendees can participate in workshops, listen to educational speeches and experience live musical and dance performances.

City organizers say that the Juneteenth celebration is free and open to all members of the public, offering both family-focused crafts and recreational activities throughout the evening.

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Litchfield Park breaks ground on Plaza Del Parque

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The transformation of Litchfield Park's raw desert into a walkable downtown corridor took a step forward as local officials and a long-standing resident family broke ground on Plaza del Parque.

The ceremony marked the official start of construction on the project, formerly known during the planning phases as the Rudolfo Parcel.

Located at the corner of North Litchfield Road and West Village Parkway, the new three-story development represents the second major project to rise within Litchfield Square, the city's ambitious 26-acre urban hub.

Owned and developed by Litchfield Park residents Frank and Nelly Rudolfo, the project is a personal milestone for the family.

"This is a big accomplishment for the generation before us and the generation



Litchfield Park residents team up with city officials to launch the second major mixed-use project in Litchfield Square. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

after, and I hope to inspire the generations to come," said Mark Rudolfo, who delivered remarks on behalf of his father, Frank, before several generations of the family took up shovels. "I hope they continue the legacy."

When completed, Plaza del Parque will feature two levels of mixed-use retail and office spaces, capped by a third-level restaurant and an expansive 6,000-square-foot outdoor dining patio. The architectural design uses a zero-lot-

line approach to place the building close to the street for an integrated, urban feel, balanced by a stepped-back third floor to reduce visual mass.

Mayor Thomas Schoaf celebrated the Rudolfos' dedication to a project that he said had been in development for more than three years.

"It speaks volumes... to have members of your community be so supportive of the lifestyle and unique nature that they will invest their money and

legacy here."

The project's architect and designer, Timothy Wood, said the building was engineered for the ages, aiming to blend shops, offices and community spaces in the classic Santa Monica architectural style surrounding Litchfield Park.

"This building won't just serve us today," Wood said. "It will be standing 300 years from now."

For city leadership, the concrete pouring will be a welcome sight. City Manager Matthew Williams said that just five years ago, the site was an overgrown desert lot used primarily as a hideout for police radar.

"This development realizes the city's long-term vision of mixed-use spaces," Williams said, "This development is a strategic investment in Litchfield Park's future representing economic vitality, enhancing our lifestyle with long term sustainability.

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West Valley food bank launches school supply drive

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Agua Fria Food & Clothing Bank has opened registrations for its annual Back to School Assistance Program to support local families.

The program provides registered preschool through eighth-grade students with a backpack, school supplies, a pair of shoes and two school uniforms at no cost. Families residing in Avondale, Buckeye, Cashion, Goodyear, Litchfield Park and Tolleson are eligible to apply.

The drive comes at a critical time for the nonprofit, which has been stretched thin by a nearly 15% increase in families seeking emergency food assistance over the past year.

"People are working and doing everything they can, and it's still not enough," said Leanne Leonard, execu-



Agua Fria Food & Clothing Bank opens registration for student assistance programs amid a 15% spike in community demand and staffing shortages. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

tive director of the Agua Fria Food & Clothing Bank. "We're seeing neighbors who have never needed assistance before walking through our doors."

Last year, the program served a record 868 students. With demand climbing due to rising living costs, the organization is seeking donations and

sponsorships to help meet this year's need.

The cost to provide supplies for a single student is \$50.

In addition to financial contributions, the food bank is facing a shortage of personnel. Operating with just two paid staff members, the nonprofit relies

almost entirely on volunteer labor to sustain its daily operations.

Due to a lack of volunteers, the organization's clothing bank front desk and clothing warehouse are currently forced to operate only on Mondays and Thursdays.

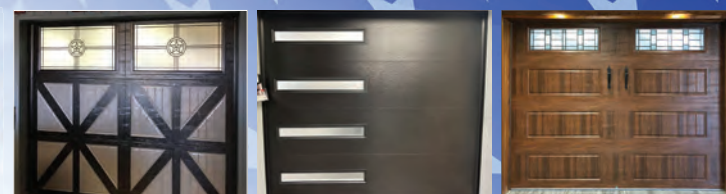
Volunteers are needed 8 a.m.-noon Monday through Friday for a variety of roles, including front desk reception, food and clothing warehouse sorting and delivery drivers.

Founded nearly 30 years ago, the faith-based nonprofit serves about 50,000 people annually through emergency food boxes, a baby care program, mobile food pantries and a daily lunch sack program for unsheltered residents.

Those interested in registering, donating or volunteering can find more information at affcb.org.

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SCHOOLS

Liberty Elementary board calls November override election

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Seeking to avert a looming \$3 million budget deficit, the Liberty Elementary School District governing board has called a special election for Tuesday, Nov. 3, asking voters to continue a 10% maintenance and operations budget override.

If approved, the override is estimated to generate about \$3.5 million in its first year. District officials said the measure is a continuation of an existing property tax, meaning it will maintain the current secondary tax rate of roughly 63 cents per \$100 of net assessed property valuation rather than introducing a new tax.

In contrast, mail-in ballots during off-year elections often attract lower turnout dominated by older voters who traditionally oppose school tax mea-



Board votes to put \$3.5M budget continuation on the ballot despite fallout over recent superintendent payouts. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

sures.

Board President Sarah Schmidt said asking voters for money would be an uphill battle given the district's recent financial controversies.

"There has been so much turmoil that our view from the public right now... is not great," Schmidt said during the meeting. "Asking them to give us more

money when they can turn around and say, 'Well, you spent \$325,000 paying out superintendents you decided to fire. Why should we give you more money?' And they're not wrong, and that's what makes this really hard."

Schmidt also warned that failing to pass the override would directly harm students. While core subjects like math

and science would remain, arts, music, physical education, and teaching staff would face immediate pressure under a \$1 million annual phased reduction.

"Those are the things that are going to be first impacted," Schmidt said.

Board member Bryan Cirrincione was in the voting minority and said the board should wait another year.

"With the way the economy is right now, it hits everybody hard," Cirrincione said. "I also want to show that we're good stewards of money before we go [asking for] extra."

With the election officially called, the political battleground now shifts to voter outreach. Maricopa County School Superintendent's office will compile an informational pamphlet to be mailed to local households.

Visit liberty25.org for more information.



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Litchfield Park cafe launches homeschool meet ups

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Local education organizers have initiated a seasonal series of informal meet-and-greets aimed at connecting homeschooling families and assisting parents considering alternative education models in the West Valley.

The recurring two-hour events are organized by Sara Shields and the Homeschool Collective.

The gatherings begin at 10 a.m. at Milk & Honey Coffee, located at 107 W. Honeysuckle St., for coffee and group introductions. At 11 a.m., the meetings transition to outdoor recreation or group learning.

Organizers said that the series is designed as a low-pressure environment to exchange regional edu-



Biweekly morning gatherings offer peer support for parents and activities for all age groups. (Submitted photo/ Metro Creative Connection)

cational resources, ask curriculum questions, and build localized peer communities.

Visit homeschoolcollective.co for more information.



Governing Board approves Deputy Superintendent for 2026-2027 school year. (Submitted photo/Yardley Zamorano)

Litchfield Elementary district announces new leadership

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Litchfield Elementary School District Governing Board has named a new Deputy Superintendent ahead of the 2026-2027 school year.

Dr. Jennifer Benjamin has been appointed as the Deputy Superintendent of Academic Success. A veteran member of the LESD79 leadership team, Benjamin previously served as the Assistant Superintendent of

Programs and Instruction and as the Principal of Palm Valley Elementary School.

"These leaders bring a strong combination of experience, dedication, and commitment to our Litchfield Learners, staff, and community," said Superintendent Dr. Carter Davidson. "We are proud of our internal candidates while also welcoming new and top talent as we continue preparing our students for success."

More information can be found at www.lesd79.org.



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FAITH

Goodyear church reflects on tech and progress on 70th anniversary

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As St. John Vianney Catholic Church prepares for its 70th anniversary, the parish is turning its attention toward a modern challenge: the rise of artificial intelligence.

The congregation, located at 539 E. La Pasada Blvd., is integrating teachings from Magnifica Humanitas, the newly released first encyclical by Pope Leo XIV. The papal letter addresses safeguarding human identity and conscience in an era of rapid technological advancement.

In a message to the community, the Rev. David Halm, C.S.C., pastor of St. John Vianney, emphasized that the church does not automatically reject progress, but must guard against using technology to replace genuine human connection. Halm highlighted papal warnings regarding the rise of AI "chatbots" used to simulate friendships amid growing trends of isolation.

"No computational system, however sophisticated, can create a heart that gives itself," Halm said, quoting the encyclical. "Machines and technology cannot love, even if they are able to mimic aspects of human relationship."

The parish has witnessed the rapid growth firsthand, expanding from



Pastor urges congregation to study Vatican guidance on preserving human connection in the age of AI. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

6,500 members at its foundation in 1956 to an estimated 225,000 residents in the Goodyear-Avondale area today. With that experience, Halm stated that AI was something that he and the community had encountered and would likely continue to see.

Halm asked the community to consider how to use AI well, and if the community were to use it, he encouraged use for advancements in science and medicine and to push for addressing poverty and unequal access to resources.

Parish leadership noted that navigating the ethical boundaries of modern technology remains vital to their contemporary mission of human service.



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The West Valley celebrates 'America 250' with a developing arts event and gala

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The West Valley Arts Council and the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center have partnered to host "A Night to Remember" on Nov. 14. The immersive, 1940s-style gala is officially recognized as an America 250 event, celebrating the anniversary of the United States by spotlighting the West Valley's critical contributions to the nation's wartime "arsenal of democracy."

The venue for the event, now an adaptive-reuse business hub known as Flite Goodyear, holds a lineage in American industrial history. Built shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the desert hangar was operated by the Goodyear Aircraft Company. There, workers executed massive structural overhauls on Liberator bombers, transforming them into Privateer patrol planes destined for reconnaissance missions in the Pacific.

Organizers are designing the evening as a cocktail-style immersive experience, blending regional history with a glamorous 1940s night club and USO-era swing hall atmosphere.

The hangar will feature 1940s classic and military vehicles, live art creation by local artists and historical displays. Food stations will serve thematic cuisines from Allied nations, including American, British, French and Polynesian dishes.

Beyond celebrating national and local history, the event serves as a joint fundraiser to boost the cultural infrastructure of the rapidly growing West Valley. Proceeds will be split



West Valley Arts Council and P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center partner for "A Night to Remember" fundraiser at former Goodyear Aircraft factory. (Submitted photo/PW Litchfield Heritage Center)



Flite Goodyear hosts "A Night to Remember." (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

equally between the two organizing non-profits. For the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center, the funds will support operations, oral history collections, and family programming as the museum prepares to relocate to a larger facility.

The West Valley Arts Council, which was originally founded in 1969 in Litchfield Park, views the high-profile collaboration as a way to redefine the region's cultural footprint.

"We want to make the West Valley a place where people think of

art and culture, and not automatically assume that you have to drive east to get high-quality entertainment and experiences," said Kathy Knecht, executive director of the West Valley Arts Council. "Arts and culture bring people together, attract a workforce, and create an economic vibe that people want to be in."

Organizers are seeking sponsorships and volunteers in the months leading up to the event.

Visit nighttoremember.org for more information.

THINGS TO DO

Maricopa County Library's Summer Reading Program

Ongoing through Monday, July 20
Online and In-person

This annual reading incentive program is open to children, teens, and adults. Participants track their reading habits, attend library events, and complete challenges to reach a 1,000-point goal. Prizes are distributed at participating libraries while supplies last.

Litchfield Park: Spread Joy

6-7:30 p.m. on Monday, June 22
Thomas Road & Dysart Road, Avondale

Organized by the LGBTQ+ youth non-profit one • n • ten, this Pride Month service activity focuses on crafting motivational gifts and messages for local youth. The event is open to individuals aged 11 to 24. Participants can text @lponenten to 81010 for the exact location details.

Free West Valley Community Essentials Day

9 a.m. – 1 p.m. on Saturday, June 27
13210 W Van Buren St. Ste. 112, Goodyear

Hosted by Gervonni Cares, Inc., this community outreach event provides household items to residents of Goodyear, Tolleson, Avondale, and Litchfield. Available resources include clothing, hygiene products, baby supplies, and mattresses. Assistance is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Red, White & Boom!

5:30-9 p.m. on Saturday, June 27
Estrella Lakeside Amphitheater, 10300 S. Estrella Parkway, Goodyear

The City of Goodyear's early Independence Day and America's 250th birthday celebration includes lawn games, crafts, balloon twisting, and a live DJ. The event concludes with an evening fireworks display. Admission is free, and attendees may bring their own food and seating; however, pets are prohibited.

4th of July Splash Bash

10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday, July 4
Litchfield Park Recreation Center, 100 S. Old Litchfield Road, Litchfield Park

Litchfield Park's annual Independence Day pool event features swimming, music, and poolside games, alongside appearances by costumed historical figures. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. Entry is \$6 for standard admission, \$2 for children under three, and free for pool pass holders.

West Valley communities prepare for historic 4th of July celebrations

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

West Valley communities are gearing up for a historic Independence Day weekend, pulling out all the stops with pool parties, drone displays, and massive fireworks shows that pull double duty to honor America's 250th anniversary.

For those looking to map out their holiday plans, here is a roundup of how the West Valley is celebrating:

Early Celebrations at Estrella

The festivities kick off a week early in the master-planned community of Estrella with its "Red, White & Boom!" celebration on Saturday, June 27. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the public can tour four newly unveiled model home neighborhoods near the Presidio Residents' Club. The community day doubles as a neighborhood showcase and an early patriotic celebration complete with a fireworks display.

Daytime Water Fun in Litchfield Park

On the Fourth of July, residents can beat the desert heat at Litchfield Park's annual "4th of July Splash Bash." Held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Litchfield Park Recreation Center, 100 S. Old Litchfield Rd., the family-friendly event features a pool



From high-tech drone shows to high-speed raceway fireworks, West Valley cities plan a packed week-end of events honoring the nation's semiquincentennial. (Submitted photo/Peter Madrid)

deck lineup of patriotic games, food trucks, and music.

Organizers say special appearances are expected from Uncle Sam and

Lady Liberty.

Entry is \$6 per person, \$2 for children under 3, and free for valid pool pass holders.

Nighttime Spectacles: Fireworks and Drones

As the sun goes down on Saturday, July 4, three major night events will light up the West Valley skies simultaneously starting at 6 p.m.:

- **Buckeye:** The Buckeye Municipal Airport will host a relaxed community evening from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. to honor the nation's 250th birthday. The event features live entertainment, family activities, food trucks, and a traditional fireworks finale set to launch at approximately 8:30 p.m.

- **Avondale:** Billed as the West Valley's largest spectacular fireworks display, the free "Light Up the Sky Celebration" will take over the Phoenix Raceway, 7602 Jimmie Johnson Dr. Gates open at 6 p.m., featuring live music, food trucks, and a Kid Zone, before the fireworks show begins at 8:25 p.m.

- **Goodyear:** For those looking for a modern twist on the holiday, Goodyear Ballpark is skipping traditional pyrotechnics for a massive patriotic drone show. Running from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., the event offers free admission, free activities, and free parking alongside a lineup of live music and food trucks.

Visit city sites for more information.

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SPORTS

Arizona Track and Field: Jaguar girls 2nd at state

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

MESA — While the Canyon View girls track and field team didn't have a large representation at the Arizona Open Track and Field Championships on May 15 and 16, the Jaguars still made their presence felt.

In fact, the Jags were one of the more impressive non-Division I teams on the Mesa Community College track.

Led by middle-distance runners and a few field-event invitees, the Jaguars placed second among 53 scoring teams with 52 points. North Canyon's 56 points was tops, while Queen Creek was third at 46.

The quartet of Taelyn Janssen, Peyton-Rae Isaac, Ramos and Ryane Ast logged a strong performance in perhaps the team's strongest relay this

year, the 4-by-800 meters.

That Jaguar relay placed second with a time of 9 minutes, 14.64 seconds. That was about seven seconds behind race winner Highland and more than 11 seconds ahead of third-place ALA-Queen Creek.

Canyon View's 4-by-400 relay team of Ramos, Aaliyah Rogers, Isaac and Aubrey Baker was fourth in prelims to make the finals. The team then won the finals, running seven seconds faster the second day to outpace North Canyon by about 2 seconds.

Ast, a senior, placed third in the 400 meters, with a time of 54.67 seconds that was a little more than one second behind the winner and runner-up.

Isaac, a sophomore, also ran in the 400, placing sixth at 55.29. Both Ast's and Isaac's times were personal bests.

• See **Jaguars** on page 17



Canyon View senior Rylee Fields competes May 16 in the discus during the Open Arizona Track and Field Championships at Mesa Community College. Fields' third-place effort in the discus and fifth-place best throw in the shotput helped the Jaguar girls place second as a team at the invitational meet. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)





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Senior Ryane Ast, foreground, and sophomore Peyton-Rae Isaac finish the 400 meters during the Open Arizona Track and Field Championships at Mesa Community College. Ast's third-place finish here, along with Isaac's sixth-place effort, along with strong relay running, helped the Canyon View girls place second as a team at the invitational meet. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

Jaguars

• From page 16

The 4-by-100 relay team of Isaac, Rogers, Ashanti Slocum and Ast made the finals, where the Jags placed fifth, being barely beaten by fourth-place Hamilton by less than .01 seconds.

In the 800 meters, Canyon View freshman Camila Ramos placed ninth with a time of 2 minutes, 17.15 seconds, just ahead of the next two finishers.

In the throwing events, senior

Rylee Fields placed third in the discus and was fifth in the shotput. Sophomore Allison Whipple competed in the javelin.

Senior Harmony Stewart finished her career strong with a third-place best mark of 37 feet, 7.75 inches in the triple jump.

Another CVHS senior, Syah Cuff, was sixth in the long jump.

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Track and field: Sophomore's title highlights state performances

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

MESA — When Ava Davis turns gets to the last one-fourth of her sprints, she seems to find another gear.

That's how the Millennium sophomore managed to beat more experienced sprinters May 15 and 16 at the Open Arizona Track and Field Championships at Mesa Community College.

Davis won the 200-meter final May 16, beating Aulani Gleason of Mesquite by only 0.01 seconds. She also placed second in the 100-meter final at the invitational all-classes meet, with her time of 11.90 only 0.07 behind champion and senior Addysan Prassas of North Canyon.

"I felt better in my finals today than yesterday (in the prelims)," Davis said May 16 after climbing

• See **Davis** on page 19



Ava Davis competes in the Open Arizona Track and Field Championships on May 16 at Mesa Community College. The Millennium sophomore won the 200 meters state title and was a close runner-up in the 100 meters. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

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Davis

• From page 18

down from the awards podium. “I think I definitely had been fighting myself a lot.”

Davis said getting past self-doubt is big part of her sprinting success.

“I was less sure of what I can do,” Davis said of the prelims. “But I was able to run more relaxed today and could trust my training.”

Davis said she’s learned to not panic whenever she doesn’t get out of the blocks perfectly or otherwise doesn’t have a great start to a race.

“I feel like my turnover speed definitely helps carry me,” Davis said. “If I did have some fault early on, I try to make it up in my turnover.”

She helped Millennium tie for 10th place among the 53 schools with at least one girls athlete at the

event, with 18 points.

Davis said she’ll probably do some type of training related to sprints this summer, but isn’t sure yet what that will look like.

Unlike some other recent seasons, Millennium and Desert Edge didn’t have quite as many athletes invited this year to the Open meet. Millennium sophomore Rowland Greer made the finals of the boys 100 meters.

The Tiger boys’ 4-by-400 meter relay team of Josiah Davis, Jonas Diedrich, Endy Dixon and Alijah Whiten placed 12th.

Desert Edge senior Asad Ali placed third in the 110 hurdles and was sixth in the 300 hurdles at the meet. He was getting medical treatment for an apparent quad injury after the 300 hurdles final, run later in the evening.

The Scorpions had nine boys team points.

Desert Edge’s Dayvon Standard



Asad Ali competes in a hurdles final during the Open Arizona Track and Field Championships on May 16 at Mesa Community College. The Desert Edge senior placed third in the 110 hurdles and was sixth in the 300 hurdles at the invitational meet. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

was invited to the meet in the long jump, but didn’t compete.

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Goodyear population and resident satisfaction climb

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Rapid population growth in Goodyear has been accompanied by high levels of resident satisfaction, even as newly released data highlights emerging strains on local infrastructure, housing, and education.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Goodyear's population reached 125,359 in 2025, a 6.5 percent annual increase and a 30.4 percent spike since the 2020 census.

"Goodyear's rapid growth is driven by excellent neighborhoods, top-rated school districts, strong economic growth, and an overall great quality of life," Mayor Joe Pizzillo said. "We continue to invest in public safety, water infrastructure, and transportation to ensure our city remains safe, strong, and ready for the future."

Public sentiment data backs up



Census numbers show rapid Goodyear growth as local satisfaction faces infrastructure pressures. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

the growth trends. The 2025 National Community Survey, which measures municipal livability, showed that 9 out of 10 respondents rated the overall quality of life in Goodyear as excellent or good.

The survey also registered an increase in local government approval. Confidence in city governance rose to 70 percent, up from 60 percent

in 2023. Additionally, 71 percent of surveyed residents said the city acts in the community's best interest, both outperforming national averages.

Economic indicators show a median household income of \$103,319 and a poverty rate of 5.2 percent. Separate figures from the 2022 economic census show local retail sales

totaled \$4.14 billion, while health-care and social assistance revenue brought in \$801 million.

That economic activity is reflected in public perception, with favorable ratings for the vibrancy of downtown and commercial areas rising from 40 percent in 2023 to 58 percent in 2025.

However, the pace of growth coincides with a decline in resident satisfaction regarding city planning and housing diversity.

Favorable ratings for "well-planned residential growth" dropped to 48 percent, down from 56 percent. Satisfaction with the variety of housing options also decreased by 10 percentage points.

Federal data places the median value of an owner-occupied housing unit in Goodyear at \$471,300, with a median gross monthly rent of \$1,956.



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FROM THE COVER

Dylan

• From page 1

killed on April 26, 2022, by a hit-and-run driver while riding his bicycle home from school near 182nd and San Gabriel drives in Estrella Mountain Ranch.

To ensure his presence was felt, school administration honored Buensuceso with a posthumous, honorary diploma.

“High school graduation is a milestone celebrating a class’s journey into adulthood, and Dylan remains a cherished part of the EFHS Class of 2026,” Principal Kimberly Heinz said. “Honoring him ensures his presence, memory, and impact on the community are never forgotten.”

Buensuceso’s mother, Mary



• See **Graduation** on page 22 As the Estrella Foothills Class of 2026 graduates, Sumi Mathews keeps her late son’s memory alive. (Submitted photo/Sumi Mathews)



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Graduation

• From page 21

“Sumi” Mathews said the gesture provided a bittersweet comfort that contrasted with the man who killed her son, Richard Carlos Romo Jr.

Romo is currently incarcerated but actively earning professional credentials including completing a basic automotive technician program and working in the federal Bureau of Land Management Wild Horse program.

“My son was robbed of getting a high school diploma,” Mathews said. “Mr. Romo is earning a diploma on the taxpayer’s dime. It still hurts to see all his peers graduating while he was robbed of all of that. When Dylan left us, the color drained from our lives.”

Mathews, a licensed social worker with extensive professional experience in crisis management and the correctional system, argues that Arizona’s legal framework inadvertently creates an incentive for impaired drivers to flee the scene of fatal collisions.

Public records state that Romo had a history of driving under the influence of methamphetamine, a probation violation, and six prior arrests.



• See **Remembering** on page 23 Sumi Mathews pushes to honor her son Dylan Buensuceso through legislative advocacy. (Submitted photo/Sumi Mathews)



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Remembering

• From page 22

Less than two years before killing Dylan, Romo was arrested by Tucson Police for fleeing the scene of a September 2020 crash involving the exact same make and model white Ford pickup truck. In that case, charges were dismissed except for reckless driving, which resulted in 12 months of unsupervised probation.

Mathews said that by exploiting this familiar pattern and fleeing into the neighborhood after striking her son, Romo successfully evaded immediate toxicology testing, shielding himself from much harsher charges like vehicular homicide or manslaughter.

It took Goodyear Police two days to track down and arrest Romo at his local home.

Instead of homicide charges, Romo pled to leaving the scene of a fatal accident. Court records show he was sentenced on May 15, 2023, to the maximum statutory punishment of 8.75 years.

However, with time-served credits and automated institutional systems for good behavior in overcrowded facilities, his projected prison release date is August 13, 2029, meaning he will serve roughly six years for the death of Buensuceso.

"If you leave the scene, after 24 hours you can't prove that person was high," Mathews said. "If he had stayed, because my son's heart stopped, even basic chest compressions might have kept him alive. But he chose himself. Witnesses saw him look at my son bleeding out, say a curse word, and drive away. The law incentivized him to leave."

Now, Mathews is seeking to channel her grief into legislative advocacy, aiming to reform hit-

and-run policies so that fleeing a fatal scene removes any perceived legal advantage to running away.

The loss of Buensuceso was the second catastrophic blow to hit Mathews' family in less than a year. Just eight months prior, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mathews lost her oldest son to fentanyl poisoning. No criminal charges were ever filed in that case.

"I (nearly) lost my identity as a mom," Mathews said. "I literally felt like I was somewhere between the living and the dead. But I had one child left, and she was looking to me to see if we lay down and die, or if we keep going."

Mathews said she chose to live, using her professional training to separate her personal trauma from her daily work as a therapist at a crisis stabilization center. To escape the constant physical reminders of the tragedy, she and her daughter relocated to Colorado to immerse themselves in nature and hiking as a form of meditation and healing.

Her surviving daughter, now 20, completed high school at Estrella Foothills despite the overwhelming grief and is currently studying to become a CPA, with long-term plans to attend law school.

"She wants to fight for justice," Mathews said. "She wants to be an attorney to help families who end up in our situation."

Though the pain of what should have been remains, Mathews said she hopes sharing Buensuceso's story will inspire real legal change and offer hope to other grieving parents.

"Life might not look the way you ever imagined, but you can still create a life after tragedy," Mathews said. "We work each day to remember him and live our lives in a way that would make him proud. You just have to find meaning in it again."

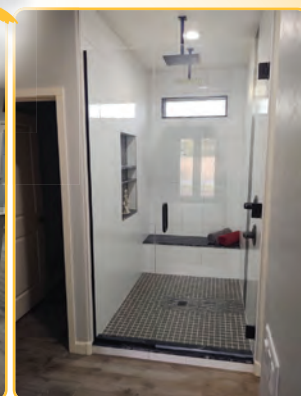
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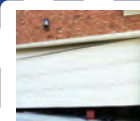
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FROM THE COVER

Closes

• From page 1

Originally founded in 2015 as a safety net against potential corporate relocation, the tea house evolved from a part-time venture into a full-time family passion. Joel Mounce maintained his position in the automotive industry while his wife, Arlene Mounce, baked the shop's signature pastries.

In recent years, operational leadership shifted to the couple's daughters: Sereena Mounce, who manages business operations, and Sabrina Mounce, who acts as the primary barista and recipe developer. Together the team rejected pre-made powder mixes in favor of authentic, whole-leaf brewing and house-made ingredients.

Sabrina Mounce has dedicated her role to elevating the shop's beverage program through natural, small-batch components, such as scratch-made va-



Ribbons closes its' brick-and-mortar, pivoting to a mobile future run by the founders' daughters. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

nilla and blueberry syrups.

"I want to explore different flavors, and I love what I do," Sabrina Mounce said. "A lot of people tell me that they can feel the love that we put into our drinks and the recipes that we make.

That makes me really happy."

When Ribbons Tea House first opened its doors, a Filipino-owned business centering on authentic tea culture was an anomaly in the Litchfield Park commercial landscape. For Sere-

ena Mounce, establishing the storefront was a formative exercise in cultural representation.

"Talking to people in the area, and other Asians, they were so confused," Sereena Mounce recalled. "An Asian-owned business opening up in Litchfield Park selling boba was initially such a shock for a lot of people. Seeing our representation and putting ourselves out there was sort of a jump when it comes to trying to reach people with products they had never really seen before."

Over the decade, the family used their Asian American background to shape the local community's palate, bridging the gap with high-quality loose-leaf teas. The menu also expanded into a broader celebration of multicultural heritage, shaping the menu around their regulars and the community.

As the West Valley has grown, Ser-

• See **Tea** on page 25



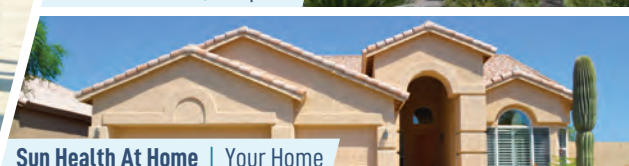
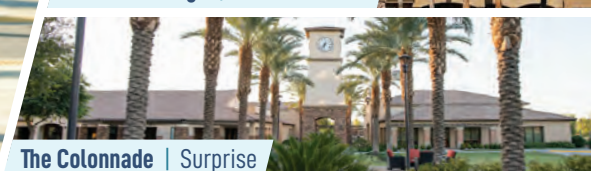
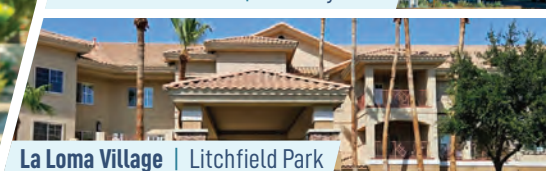
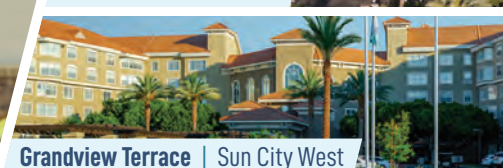
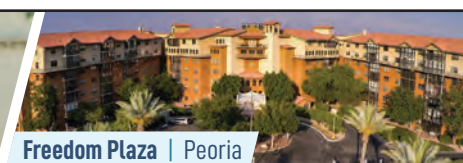
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Tea

• From page 24

Sereena Mounce said, customers have become increasingly receptive to diverse, traditional profiles, which will dictate the flavor directory of their upcoming mobile ventures.

"In the future, we do want to explore more specialty drinks when it comes to Filipino flavors, which have recently been on the rise," Sereena Mounce said.

Situated within walking distance of Litchfield Elementary School, Western Sky Middle School and Millennium High School, Ribbons Tea House deliberately cultivated an environment prioritizing student safety and welcoming kids who needed a place to stay until parents returned from work.

The emotional weight of the closure is felt deeply by the owners, particularly Sabrina Mounce, who literally grew up within the walls of the shop since its opening when she was nine years old.

"I would walk here after elementary school and then after middle school," Sabrina Mounce said. "I have spent over half of my life here, maybe more hours than I have spent at home. I put the stickers up in the bathroom. I painted these walls. I did so much here."

That sentiment is mirrored by generations of locals who have frequented the shop. Sereena Mounce said some regulars have grown into adults, started families of their own and have brought their own kids back to Ribbons. She said that their community is sad to see them go.

"I haven't really seen grief like that," she said. "Seeing them process it has been strange. I want to reassure them by saying this is just a business, but at the same time it's not."

The road to closure was accelerated by a protracted, costly dispute with the firm that owns the commercial block. Despite a robust customer base and a clear lease agreement and offers to buy the property, the family said they faced

relentless pressure.

"Each time they've sent us a notice, say to evict us or raise the rent, we just give them a copy of the lease and they turn around and they can't," Joel Mounce said.

Though confident they could legally sustain a fight to remain for another five years, Joel Mounce said he chose to prioritize his family's peace of mind over an expensive legal battle.

"We were the little guys, and I didn't want to put (my wife) through this for another five years," he said. "That's why we didn't decide to keep fighting. We bowed out gracefully."

While the physical building, which opened on the day of the Litchfield Park Winter Festival in December 2015, will be vacated, the Mounce family emphasizes that the brand is transitioning rather than ending. As Joel and Arlene Mounce prepare to transition into retirement, Sereena and Sabrina Mounce are pivoting the business into a mobile food truck and catering model.

"I'm definitely proud of my daughters. The people that have come, everything on the menu, it's because of them," Joel Mounce said. "We wouldn't be where we're at right now without them."

A primary goal for the sisters is keeping the mobile operation localized within Litchfield Park so they do not lose touch with the neighborhood youth who depend on them.

"I know the community will always be with us," Sabrina Mounce said. "And I know we're going to evolve and have a better building, have a better menu, where we will develop more. But I am going to miss this building that I grew up in."

Long-term, the sisters intend to return to a brick-and-mortar format, ideally in Litchfield Square Park, envisioning a full-service outdoor cafe concept that expands on the scratch-made syrups and Asian-inspired flavor profiles they honed on the patio.

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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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