



Election

Q&A
with LD 4
candidates; 4



TOWN OF PARADISE VALLEY

INDEPENDENT



Neighbors

Arizona's
balladeer
shares tale; 6

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COMMUNITY NEWS

A growing racket over pickleball

Resident asks council to pause court permits and increase public input as noise complaints persist

By Allison Kotzbauer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A longtime Paradise Valley resident called for greater transparency when new pickleball courts are being approved in town.

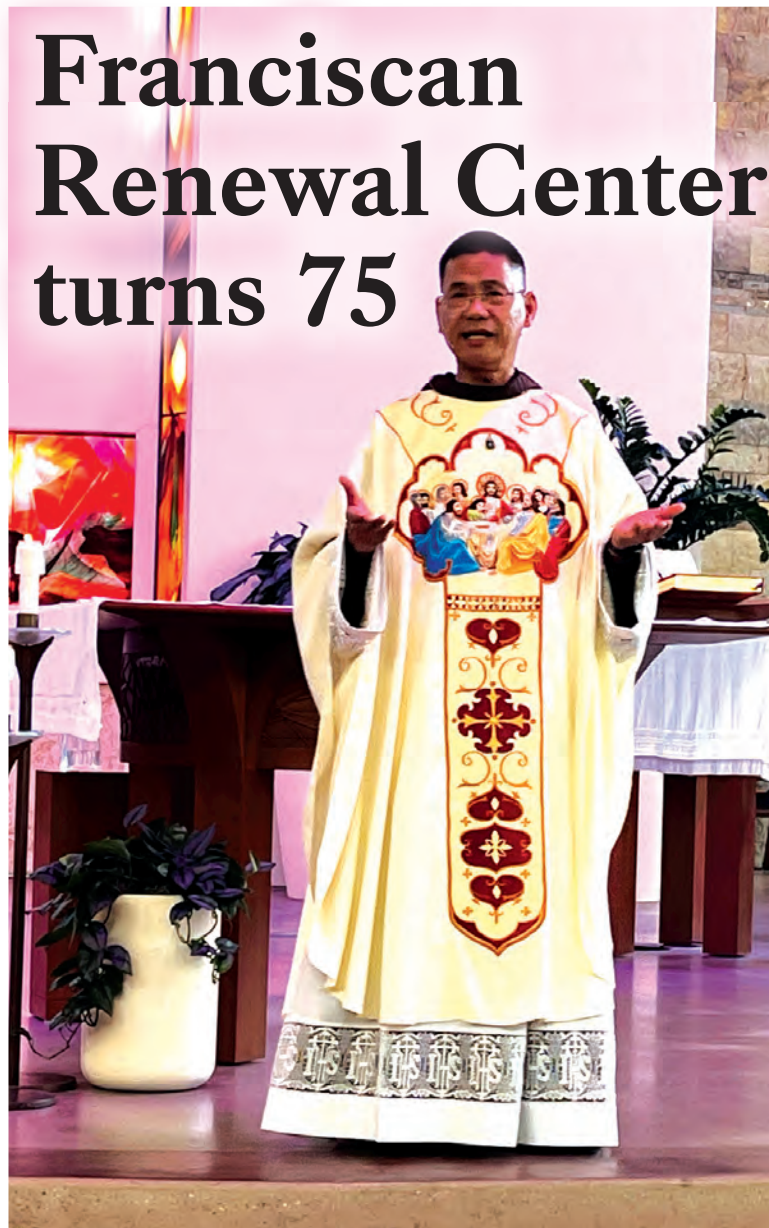
Terry Greene Sterling, a journalist who has lived in Paradise Valley since 1972, raised the issue during the town council's June 11 meeting, arguing that residents deserve more opportunities to learn about and comment on proposed courts before permits are issued.

Homeowners often receive little notice or say before projects are approved despite longstanding community concerns about noise, she said.

"We all know that pickleball nui-

• See **Pickleball** on page 26

Franciscan Renewal Center turns 75



Humble beginnings lay roots for what has become a spiritual destination

By Philip Haldiman
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When the Franciscans came to Arizona in the 1950s, the area that would soon become known as Paradise Valley was sparse, littered with dirt roads, horse trails, stables, and scattered with lodges.

At the time, a Franciscan settlement in the still somewhat wild West where there were more Protestants than Catholics and more lizards than humans may have been a far-out idea.

But the Franciscans, who were dedicated to preaching, working hard and serving the poor, saw the natural beauty of the Sonoran Desert as a place of spiritual retreat, perfect for prayer, reflection and renewal.

The newcomers envisioned the area flanked by Camelback and Mummy mountains as a place where people could follow in the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, have a relationship with God and better themselves.

And so the Franciscan Renewal Center was founded as a Catholic retreat on 20 acres by the Order of Friars Minor on Nov. 1, 1951. It was named Casa de Paz y Bien, or the House of Peace and Good, and it predated the incorporation of Paradise Valley by 10 years. The order had recently purchased the former Kachina

• See **Franciscan** on page 12

Fr. Vincent Nguyen, OFM, addresses the congregation at a Franciscan Renewal Center Saturday service June 6. (Independent Newsmedia/Philip Haldiman)

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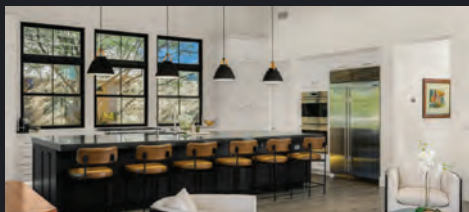
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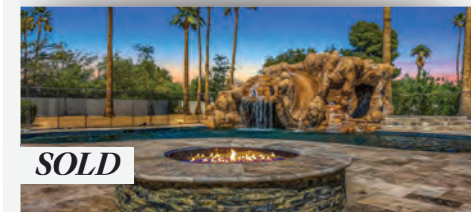
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WHAT'S YOUR BEST ZINGER?

BY GREG HAGUE

Let me take you back more than two thousand years, to the Greek city of Corinth.

Alexander the Great, the most powerful man alive, the conqueror of the known world, went looking for a famous philosopher named Diogenes. He found him lying in the sun, doing absolutely nothing, owning almost nothing. And Alexander, a man who could have handed him a palace, a fortune, an army, looked down at him and said, "Ask me for anything you want."

Now picture that. Anything. From the most powerful man on earth.

Diogenes squinted up at him and said, "Stand a little out of my sun."

That was it. One sentence. He didn't want gold. He didn't want power. He wanted the one thing Alexander was actually taking from him, his sunlight. And the story goes that Alexander walked away shaking his head, and told his men, "If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes."

One line. And the most powerful man in the world suddenly saw wealth, and power, and contentment in a way he never had the moment before.

That, my friends, is a zinger.

A zinger is a sentence, maybe two, that makes a person see things differently than they did the breath before you said it. They work in business



and in life, at the negotiating table and at the kitchen table. And the funny thing is, the best ones are rarely planned. They leap right out of us, and sometimes we're as surprised as anyone that we said them.

My wife Teresa, who many of you know is a luxury real estate agent, has one of my favorite zingers of all time.

She was on a listing appointment with a seller who was, let's say, difficult from the very beginning. He bashed real estate agents. He bashed every agent who had ever represented him. He bashed the market. He talked right over Teresa and would barely let her finish a sentence.

So Teresa stopped him. "That's enough," she said. "Your time is up. I wasn't here to sell you. I was here to save you. But you're not interested, and I have others who need me."

Then she gathered her things and walked for the door.

That man came chasing after her. Apologizing. Please come back. Please tell me about your program. He signed that very day, and everything went beautifully from there.

It all turned on two sentences Teresa never saw coming.

"I wasn't here to sell you. I was here to save you."

She didn't plan it. The best ones never are. They simply arrive. And history is full of them.

When Franklin Roosevelt told a frightened nation, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," he changed how millions saw the hard road ahead. When Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty, or give me death," he turned hesitation into resolve. And when John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," he gave a nation a sentence it would never forget.

That is the power of a zinger. One line, at the right moment, can change how someone sees everything.

So here's an invitation. If a memorable line has ever leaped out of you, or out of someone you know, send it my way. If enough of you do, I'll give your zingers an article all their own, with full credit to the folks who sent them.

What's your best zinger?

ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Arizona elections remain secure, Fontes says ahead of 2026 cycle

As Arizona prepares for another closely watched election cycle, Secretary of State Adrian Fontes says the state's biggest election challenges are not technological weaknesses but public misunderstanding of how elections are administered.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/2we53795>

From fastballs to fine art, former major leaguer finds a new canvas

Long after the crowds stopped cheering and the radar guns stopped flashing, John D'Acquisto found himself staring at a blank canvas.

In the 1970s, D'Acquisto was one of baseball's hardest throwers, a right-hander whose fastball could reach 100 mph at a time when triple-digit velocity was virtually unheard of.

However, it's art that has most occupied his attention in recent years.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/mzxnj8vb>

School voucher fight ramps up over ballot measures to alter Arizona's \$1B ESA program

Supporters of dueling ballot measures to either drastically scale back Arizona's ballooning school voucher program or tweak it are intensifying efforts ahead of a July 3 petition deadline.

So are the defenders of Empowerment Scholarship Accounts, which cost state taxpayers more than \$1 billion this year.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/3fpxakne>

Affordability, school funding top issues for LD 4 House race candidates

By J. Graber
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Democrats Tammy Caputi and Karen Gresham, who are running for the two seats open in Legislative District 4 House race will not have to worry about the July 21 primary race — they're already in for their party.

Republicans Pamela Carter, Sandra Christensen and Matt Gress, on the other hand, will face off to seek their party's nomination.

Carter and Gress are the incumbents.

Legislative District 4 covers parts of Paradise Valley, Scottsdale and Phoenix.

Independent Newsmedia sent out a questionnaire to learn about the candidates' thoughts on the challenges facing Legislative District 15 now and into the future. Carter, Christensen and Gress did not respond.

• See **Election 2026** on page 8

ELECTION 2026

Affordability top issue for LD 4 candidate Carine Werner

By J. Graber
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The candidates running for the Legislative District 4 Senate seat are running unopposed in the July 21 primary race. Incumbent Carine Werner, of Scottsdale, will be on the Republican ticket while Phoenix native Aaron Lieberman will represent the Democrats.

Legislative District 4 covers parts of Paradise Valley, Scottsdale and Phoenix.

Independent Newsmedia sent a questionnaire to learn about the candidates' thoughts on the challenges facing Legislative District 4 now and into the future. Lieberman did not respond.

Carine Werner

Name: Carine Werner.

District: Legislative District 4.

Employment: Small business owner.

Community involvement: Scottsdale Unified School District school board member

Why did you choose to run? As an immigrant, mom of three, small business owner, school board mem-



Carine Werner. (Courtesy Carine Werner)

ber and community leader, I have seen how decisions made at the capitol affect families, classrooms and local businesses. People in our district deserve a strong voice from someone who understands their concerns and shares their priorities. We have made real progress and I am running for reelection to build on that work for future generations.

What do you see as the biggest issue facing the state heading into

the next legislative session? Rising costs remain one of the biggest challenges facing Arizona. Housing is harder to afford, grocery bills take up more of a family's budget and childcare costs place real pressure on parents. As a small business owner, I also understand how rising expenses affect local employers trying to keep their doors open and support their employees. Arizona needs leadership focused on lowering costs, supporting economic growth and creating stability for families trying to build a better future.

What bills do you plan to introduce to deal with this issue? I support bills that lower taxes so families can keep more of what they earn. I also back policies that create jobs, grow small businesses and strengthen Arizona's economy. Small businesses are the backbone of our community, and the government should make it easier for them to succeed, not harder. My priorities include responsible spending, stronger oversight of taxpayer dollars and stopping fraud in public programs.

• See **Werner** on page 22

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Arizona's balladeer looks back on a 60-year musical journey

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Dolan Ellis stood before a room of admirers, guitar in hand and a lifetime of Arizona dust on his boots. At 91 years old, he remains the state's official balladeer, a title he has held through the administrations of 14 governors.

He began his performance with a song: "I was born about 10,000 years ago," a tall tale claiming he taught the Grand Canyon how to be deep and the desert how to be dry.

Ellis said he views his age as a collection of chapters, describing each one as a wonderful addition to a story that began on a farm in eastern Kansas. He described his young self as a misplaced soul who knew even as a child that he belonged in the desert.

He moved to Arizona in 1959, working briefly in television before his musical career blossomed with the Grammy-winning folk group The New Christy Minstrels. They won a Grammy Award for the top singing group in the nation in 1962, performed twice at Carnegie Hall, and were regulars on "The Andy Williams Show," reaching 30 million viewers weekly.

Yet, at the height of his fame, Ellis said he felt a pull toward home.

"Something was missing," he said. "And what was missing was Arizona."

He returned home, singing at small night clubs and venues before starting his own business. In a smaller market like Arizona in the 1960s, he said that if he did not present his work in a special way, nobody would. He opened his own nightclubs to ensure his music was heard in an environment that commanded respect.

The title of official state balladeer was first bestowed upon Ellis in 1966 by Gov. Sam Goddard. It was a new position and an unsolicited appointment that recognized the value Ellis had already created through his music.



At 91, Dolan Ellis reflects on a million miles of wilderness travels, a new memoir and keeping the state's history alive. (Independent Newsmedia/James Goldmeier)

Since his designation, Ellis has written over 300 songs to further document Arizona's history, culture and its people. He also founded the Arizona Folklore Preserve, a performance space and museum dedicated to uphold the traditions of story-telling music.

Ellis spent the following decades singing closer to home and exploring the state's wilderness, logging more than 1 million miles in Jeeps, on foot and on horseback. He said these travels were the source material for more than 300 songs documenting the legends, landmarks and "desert rats" of the 48th state.

In his new memoir, "Adventures of a Balladeer," Ellis shares 40 stories of show business glitz and wilderness survival. He said a central theme of the book, and his life, is the Navajo concept of Hozho, which he defines as being in rhythm with

the universe.

During a recent Heritage Lecture Series presentation at Goodyear City Hall, Ellis told the audience that the secret to a fulfilling life is learning to listen to one's "inner voice," rather than succumbing to societal pressures.

"Put yourself into a position where you can have a little bit of a breath ... but you have to shut up and listen," Ellis said. "You've got to be in quiet places where those kinds of things will present themselves."

Those quiet places often led to songs immortalizing the people he met, such as George Cline, a world-champion cowboy from the Tonto Basin whom Ellis described as a symbol of strength. When Cline died, Ellis sang a tribute at his memorial, an experience he said brought tears to the eyes of hardened ranchers.

"How can we say he died when the memory of a man is so much alive?" Ellis sang.

Despite the challenges that come with aging, Ellis continues to create. Now living in the historic village of Tubac, he writes songs about the Spanish history of the Santa Cruz River Valley.

"I couldn't retire from songwriting, even if I wanted to. It just comes out," he said.

Ellis has spent 60 years singing the story of Arizona, and he indicated the music will only stop when his inner voice falls silent.

"The door never closes at being a balladeer," Ellis said. "It goes 24/7 all the time. It's something that I love to do."

Visit dolanellis.com for more information.

Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them 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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Election 2026

• From page 4

Tammy Caputi

Name: Tammy Caputi

Age: 57

District: LD4

Hometown: Scottsdale

Employment: Business owner, Yale Electric West, Inc.

Community involvement: Former Scottsdale Development Review Board Member, former Scottsdale City Councilwoman; chairwoman of Scottsdale Coalition of Today and Tomorrow; 20-plus year member of Temple Chai; executive mentor-ASU W.P. Carey School of Business- MBA program, Fellow- Flinn Brown Center for Civic Leadership.

Why did you choose to run? I'm running for the House of Representatives in LD4, after serving 4 years on Scottsdale City Council, to be a moderate, forward-thinking voice for our state. This is a defining moment. We can allow dysfunction and division to shape Arizona's future, or we can choose leaders who are willing to do what's right. Leaders who have the necessary experience and qualifications to do the job. I will run as hard as I can to keep Arizona moving forward: create opportunity, strengthen our communities and leave Arizona better than we found it for the next generation.

What do you see as the biggest issue facing the state heading into the next legislative session? The biggest issue facing Arizona heading into the next legislative session is our broken and outdated education funding system. We're operating under an archaic formula that was built decades ago, before we had the diverse range of educational options families rely on today. Over the years, we've layered new policies on top of old ones. The result is a patchwork system that's difficult to understand, hard to manage, and doesn't direct funding



Tammy Caputi. (Courtesy Tammy Caputi)

where it's needed. Schools are left navigating a maze of funding streams, families don't have clarity, and policymakers can't guarantee that dollars are being used in the way they were intended. We should be focused on improving outcomes for students and supporting teachers, not dealing with inefficiencies baked into the system. We need a serious overhaul of Arizona's education funding formula that reflects the realities of today's education landscape, is transparent, and ensures accountability. Funding should follow students clearly and intentionally, and should prioritize classrooms, educators, and student success. If we don't fix the foundation, we'll keep running into the same problems.

What bills do you plan to introduce to deal with this issue? If elected, I would bring stakeholders, legislative leaders, and education experts together to build a modern funding formula that reflects how education works in Arizona today. We've layered policy on top of policy for years. We need to fix it deliberately and correctly, not rush another patch into a broken system. While that work is happening, I would move to refer a measure to the ballot to renew Prop-

osition 123. Letting it expire in 2025 was a failure of leadership. Hundreds of millions of dollars that were supporting our classrooms are now in limbo and negotiations have stalled. We can stabilize funding in the short term while rebuilding the system for the long term. Our schools, teachers and students shouldn't have to pay the price while the state figures itself out.

Why do you think you are the best candidate for the position?

As a business owner, I've signed the front of paychecks, navigated recessions, dealt with rising costs and supply chain challenges, and made tough decisions to keep people employed. I've been involved in infrastructure projects state-wide. I have first hand experience in the issues we deal with at the Legislature every day. As a former Councilwoman, I have a track record of making bipartisan, fact-based decisions that move our community forward.

What are issues do you believe could be common ground between the political parties during the next session? Issues that should be common ground are: supporting a strong, growing economy, quality early childhood and K-12 education, lowering the cost of living and supporting our first responders.

Karen Gresham

Name: Karen Gresham

Age: 48

District: LD4

Hometown: Phoenix

Employment: Former CPA, second-term board member of Madison Elementary School District.

Community involvement: Service has always been a way of life for me. I have volunteered in classrooms, supported local schools, worked on campaigns and served charitable organizations. After losing my mother to leukemia at a young age, I became a long-time supporter of the former Leukemia and Lymphoma Society,



Karen Gresham. (Courtesy Karen Gresham)

now Blood Cancer United. I'm also a board member and past-president of the Arizona Trail Association and volunteer hike patrol for the City of Phoenix, giving back to the state I love as an experienced hiker and ultra runner.

Why did you choose to run? I chose to run because as a third-generation Arizona native, I cannot sit idly by while the Legislature passes reckless bills and budgets. My family has called Phoenix home for more than 100 years and I want that to continue. The current Legislature is not thinking about the future. The people of Arizona need someone who is no stranger to tough challenges and willing to fight for them. I'm ready to take that fight to the capitol and I will ensure that every future Arizonan is not left paying the price for today's decisions.

What do you see as the biggest issue facing the state heading into the next legislative session? Affordability is at the top of my list. Arizona is getting too expensive and families across the state are feeling the financial burden. Costs of housing, health-

• See **Election 2026** on page 28

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FROM THE COVER

Franciscan

• From page 1

Lodge property on Lincoln Drive and converted it.

The new home certainly was not the lap of luxury that Paradise Valley has come to be known for. But now, 75 years later, the humble beginnings have retained its religious underpinnings and become a spiritual oasis for Franciscan renewal, healing and education that attracts people from around the globe — last fiscal year, 23,360 people attended retreats at the Casa, as it has come to be known.

The Franciscan Renewal Center will have a formal 75th anniversary celebration in March 2027.

The Franciscan religion began in the 13th century by Saint Francis of Assisi, and Fr. Page Polk, OFM, Rector at the Casa, said Assisi's traditions continue in Paradise Valley today.

As the Casa celebrates its milestone birthday, it also continues an 800-year tradition of gratitude, hospitality and the courage and humility to begin again, Polk said.

"The Franciscan way is rooted in



Benediction of the Guadalupe Shrine, Fr. Victor Bucher. (Courtesy Franciscan Renewal)

recognizing the dignity of every person and creating spaces where people feel welcomed and accepted just as they are," he said. "For generations, community members, friars, and staff have worked together to embody that spirit and create a true place of belonging. And while the world around us has changed, our commitment to accompaniment and renewal remains at the heart of who we are."



An aerial view of the Franciscan Renewal Center site. (Courtesy Franciscan Renewal)

56 first communions and 55 confirmations. The ministry donated 3.3 tons of food for St. Vincent de Paul and Vista del Camino food banks, and completed two Habitat for Humanity homes for local families.

Many say the theme of beginning again has been foundational to the draw at the Franciscan Renewal Center.

Paradise Valley Councilmember Anna Thomasson says she is a die-hard Catholic who found the Casa 35 years ago when she was going through a divorce. She said at the time she was feeling rejected and abandoned, but the Casa became a refuge to her, a place where she could go and feel welcomed and accepted. She said the spiritual gift of Franciscan charism, or radical Gospel living, won her over.

"The Franciscan Renewal Center offers such a strong sense of social justice and welcomes all people, including those who may feel marginalized," she said. "It's a place of joyful worship and also a sense of humor that puts me in a calm and grounded place."

Senior News Editor Philip Haldiman can be reached at phaldiman@inusa.org, or on X @philiphaldiman. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AzOpinions@inusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



Groundbreaking for the 1954 church, including Mike the dog. (Courtesy Franciscan Renewal)

Over the years, the Franciscan Renewal Center has hosted thousands of retreats, focusing on a variety of subjects ranging from grief and loss to mental health.

Experience Scottsdale President and CEO Rachel Sacco said the tradition of hospitality remains a staple at the Casa.

The Franciscan Renewal Center has long welcomed visitors to Paradise Valley and Scottsdale, offering them a place of worship during their stays, as well as longer spiritual retreats, she said.

"On a more personal note, I have been a parishioner of the Franciscan Renewal Center ever since I was a student at Arizona State University. Over the years, my family has celebrated many milestones there, from weddings to baptisms," Sacco said. "The Casa is a place of peace, tranquility and learning for residents and visitors alike, and I am grateful that it has been part of this community and a destination for 75 years."

Last fiscal year, the Casa experienced a variety of church and ministry highlights.

The church had 48 infant baptisms,



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OPINION

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Yes, I will do my part to help my community become a safe place for people to engage in civil discourse about public issues. Visit iniusa.org/civility-pledge/ to take the pledge.

Your Opinion

Our opinions page is to provide an open forum for our readers. We hope to stimulate debate, not to dominate or control it. We reserve the right to edit our opinions, and we insist on civility. Please include your name and phone number, so we can contact you for clarification or confirmation. We welcome your photo. All opinions must be no more than 300 words.

Those that are judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month. Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. The content of a submission is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

Speak Up

We support the use of pen names. Too many people don't speak up because they fear intimidation or even danger to their families and/or careers. Pen names are an important part of our nation's history.

Corrections

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

A personal commitment to Paradise Valley

Paradise Valley is more than just a beautiful place to live — it's a community people care deeply about. For more than 20 years, my family and



Daran Wastchak

I have proudly called Paradise Valley home because of its quiet neighborhoods, stunning mountain views, open space and unmatched quality of life.

It remains one of the best places in Arizona to raise a family, and I'm running for Town Council to help preserve and strengthen everything that makes our town so special.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of serving our community in many ways, including six years on the Paradise Valley Planning Commission, two as chairman. I also lead the monthly Paradise Valley Men's Breakfast meetings and serve as chairman of the Arizona Town Hall Board of Directors. These experiences have reinforced my belief that the best communities are built when people work together respectfully, thoughtfully and with a shared sense of purpose.

Paradise Valley faces important challenges, including protecting local control from increasing state interference. Decisions about our neighborhoods, public safety and quality of life should be made by residents and leaders who know this community best — not by state lawmakers or the governor. I will continue standing up for Paradise Valley's voice and protect the character of our town.

We must continue investing in critical infrastructure, particularly stormwater improvements that protect homes and neighborhoods during heavy rain. Honoring our limited government approach, we must sup-

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port thriving resorts, maintain beautiful streets and public spaces, and ensure Paradise Valley remains one of Arizona's safest communities.

I believe Paradise Valley's best days are ahead. With thoughtful leadership, collaboration, and a commitment to residents first, we can preserve our unique character while building a strong future for generations to come. It would be an honor to receive your vote. Learn more at Wastchak.com.

Daran Wastchak

PARADISE VALLEY COUNCIL CANDIDATE

Bob Brown and Anna Thomasson have what Paradise Valley needs

When voting in the upcoming elections for members of the town council, it is important to choose people with track records of success that show leadership. Straight shooters with strong character who deliver results, not just attend meetings.

That is why my wife, Carol, and I are voting for Bob Brown and Anna Thomasson. We don't just guess at their character; we have known them for years and we know it.

As a police volunteer for 18 years, I worked with Bob for nearly a decade. He was, and is, highly respected throughout the department. He is in his third year of service on the Planning Commission. And his success in the private sector is well known, building and running his community management company for many years. I was one of his customers.

Anna also had a very successful career in business as a management consultant, working with Fortune 500 companies; a tough job requiring long, long hours and enormous energy. During her eight years on the town council, she has proven herself, time and again, to have studied the issues and acted with knowledge, integrity and tact.

Both are sharp business professionals, now retired, who have a deep love for this town. Most importantly, they know how to work with people, tone down the useless rhetoric and get things done.

Neither candidate has an outside agenda or other political aspirations. Their only focus is on the residents of Paradise Valley. We need leaders with the backbone to protect our public safety, fiscal discipline, low-density zoning and unique way of life. Bob Brown and Anna Thomasson meet that need.

They have earned our vote, and they deserve yours.

Rick Adams

PARADISE VALLEY

Don't trade liberty for the illusion of keeping kids safe online

In the final days of the state legislative session, Arizonans should be watching House Bill 2991, an age-verification mandate that would require residents to prove who they are before they can speak, read or browse online.

Parents are rightly worried about what children encounter online. The last thing government should do is make it harder for parents to protect their kids. Good intentions have never been a sufficient substitute for thoughtful, common-sense public policy.

♦ See **Opinion** on page 18

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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.



Scottsdale-based restaurant group EDGI, plans to franchise Kasai Japanese Steakhouse. (Courtesy Kasai Japanese Steakhouse)

Kasai Japanese Steakhouse sold to Scottsdale business

Kasai Japanese Steakhouse, the experiential teppanyaki and sushi destination that's been locally owned and operated by the Russello family in Scottsdale for 25 years, has been sold by the Russellos to Scottsdale-based restaurant group EDGI, led by entrepreneur Robert Stidham.

EDGI will continue operating

Kasai, 14344 N Scottsdale Road, as guests know while preparing to franchise the concept nationally, according to a press release.

Kasai first opened in Scottsdale in 2001 and has built a reputation for teppanyaki dining, sushi and dinner-tainment.

OPINION

Opinion

• From page 14

Start with the bill's requirements: every adult in Arizona would hand over a government ID or other sensitive personal information just to access lawful content. The Republican Liberty Caucus opposes any government pre-authorization before citizens can exercise constitutionally protected freedoms. Mandating a digital ID checkpoint at the entrance to the internet is permission to speak, granted by the state.

It also wouldn't work. The bill stops at the app store, but children don't. They roam the open web, gaming consoles, and school laptops — none of which the mandate touches.

The bill creates a First Amendment problem. Courts have repeatedly struck down age-verification

schemes because they burden adult speech to regulate minors. Arizona taxpayers would foot a bill litigating a predicable loss.

Ask who benefits. The largest platforms can absorb compliance costs; the Arizona startup cannot. That is not protecting families — it is a protection racket or a liability shield wearing the costume of protecting kids.

The right answer is to strengthen parental authority — device controls, filters, account settings — not deputize government as gatekeepers of every Arizonan's online life.

So, call your legislators. Tell them to slow down. Read the bill. Ask who holds the data, who pays, and who benefits. Then amend it or defeat it. Liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic vote but is lost in the rush, when no one is looking.

Suzanne Klapp
SCOTTSDALE

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EDUCATION

Teacher shortage persists as burnout and turnover strain schools

By Matt Loeschman

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona schools are still struggling with a major teacher shortage as thousands of educators leave the profession each year and districts work to keep classrooms staffed.

According to data from the Arizona Department of Education and the Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association, more than 8,600 teachers — about 14% of the state's teaching workforce — leave the profession annually. The ongoing turnover has left many schools scrambling to fill positions and relying on temporary staffing solutions.

Across Arizona, more than 4,200 teaching jobs are currently being filled by long-term substitutes or educators who do not hold standard teaching certification. Another 1,400 positions remain vacant, and schools face more than 1,000 unexpected teacher departures during the school year.

In some years, the shortage has become so severe that more than half of all filled teaching vacancies have been staffed by individuals who do not meet traditional certification requirements.

Burnout and low pay remain key challenges

For many educators, burnout is the biggest reason for leaving the classroom.

Nearly one in four departing teachers cite overwhelming workloads, classroom challenges, and limited administrative support as factors in their decision to leave. Many also point to difficulties managing student behavior



Filling teaching positions in Arizona schools remains a growing problem. (Metro Creative Connection)

and a lack of resources to address discipline concerns.

Pay remains another major issue. While teacher salaries in Arizona have risen in recent years, many educators say compensation still does not reflect the demands of the job. Dissatisfaction with pay consistently ranks among the top reasons teachers choose to leave the profession.

The shortage is also putting additional pressure on teachers who remain. To cover staffing gaps, about 24% of Arizona educators work under "sixth-fifth contracts," which require them to teach an extra class during periods that would normally be used for lesson planning and preparation.

Education experts warn that losing planning time can increase stress, contribute to burnout, and make it even harder for schools to retain experienced teachers.

Some districts are feeling the impact more than others

Although teacher shortages are affecting schools statewide, some districts are experiencing especially high turnover rates.

The Phoenix Elementary School District and the Isaac Elementary School District both reported attrition rates of around 20%, meaning roughly one in five teachers left the profession.

Several charter school organizations reported even higher turnover. Edkey Inc., Vista College Prep, Arizona Autism Charter Schools, and Archway Classical Academy all recorded attrition rates exceeding 25%.

High turnover can create instability in schools, disrupt student learning, increase hiring costs, and place added strain on remaining staff.

Schools are looking for solutions

State education leaders and local

districts have launched several initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining more teachers.

The Arizona Department of Education has expanded support programs for new educators, recognizing that teachers are often most likely to leave during their first few years in the classroom.

Many districts have also invested in "grow-your-own" teacher programs, which help community members transition into teaching careers. These programs typically recruit individuals who already hold bachelor's degrees, provide mentorship and classroom experience, and support participants as they earn their teaching certification while working in schools.

In return, participants usually agree to teach in the district for a set number of years. Supporters say these programs help build a stronger local pipeline of educators and increase the likelihood that teachers will stay in the communities where they work.

Despite these efforts, education leaders acknowledge that Arizona's teacher shortage will not be solved overnight. Many educators argue that improving working conditions, protecting planning time, and offering more competitive salaries will be critical if schools hope to keep qualified teachers in Arizona classrooms for the long term.

Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them 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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Joybird is opening its first showroom in Arizona in Scottsdale. (Joybird)

Furniture retailer opens new showroom

Furniture retailer Joybird is expanding to Arizona with its new Scottsdale location.

The new showroom is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and is located at 15836 N. Scottsdale Road, according to a press release.

The showroom offers a product assortment of both local and national top sellers for home design enthusiasts and interior designers. Also offered is

free design services such as a Modular Sofa Builder, 3D Room Scanner, 3D space planner and more.

The design services are meant to help customers accurately and quickly measure their room and visualize the finished product at home before making a purchase.

For more information, visit <https://joybird.com/showrooms/scottsdale/>.

Werner

• From page 4

Why do you think you are the best candidate for the position?

I bring local experience, state-level leadership and a record of taking on difficult issues. On the Scottsdale school board, I worked directly on issues affecting parents, students and teachers. In the Senate, I have focused on education, public safety, healthcare and government oversight. I listen to families, educators, law enforcement, healthcare professionals and community leaders. Then I turn

their concerns into action. I ask hard questions and stand up for taxpayers when the government fails. My goal is to deliver results people can see and trust.

What are the issues you believe could be common ground between the political parties during the next session? Protecting children, improving schools and creating safer neighborhoods should bring people together. In the Senate, I have learned how important it is to work with both sides to pass bills and deliver results. Families want leaders who stay focused on solutions that make everyday life better in Arizona.

Primary Election Day:
JULY 21

Daran Wastchak

for PV Town Council



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Super Star Car Wash is hosting a three-day campaign to raise money for Feed the Children from June 26-28. (Super Star Car Wash)

Super Star Car Wash raising funds for Feed the Children

Super Star Car Wash, a car wash chain with multiple locations in Arizona including Scottsdale, is holding a fundraising campaign to benefit Feed the Children at the end of the month of June.

The campaign will take place from June 26 to June 28 at participating locations. Every purchase of a retail car wash will result in a \$1 donation from Super Star to Feed the Children, as

part of its effort to address summer hunger among children and families, according to a press release.

Funds raised will help support Feed the Children's efforts to provide food and essential items to children and families experiencing hardship and hunger during the summer.

For more information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/47r4b5t8>.



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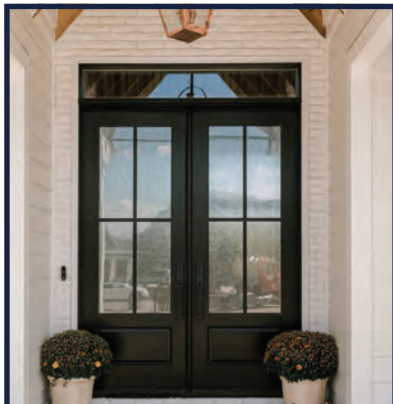
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FROM THE COVER

Pickleball

• From page 1

sance noise is a national problem,” she said, noting some wealthy municipalities have banned pickleball courts altogether while others have changed zoning setbacks and still others have revamped noise ordinances to comport with 21st century technology.

“Rising noise levels from pickleball in Paradise Valley neighborhoods are undermining the qualities that attracted residents to the community,” Greene Sterling continued. “The future of Paradise Valley as a peaceful desert refuge is at stake. Our neighborhood knows that firsthand.”

She said four years ago the town permitted pickleball courts to be built on the property next to hers and, since then, the noise hasn’t stopped.

“The noise is nerveshattering. It feels like an ongoing assault,” she said. “Those of us living close to the courts can’t be outside when pickleball is played for hours on end. We have lost the right to the peaceful enjoyment of our property.”

The residents near the court not only lost their peaceful property but possibly money, Greene Sterling claimed.

“One real estate expert suggests property resale values may decline 10 to 20% if pickleball courts are constructed close to the property for sale,” she added.



A pickleball court at G.R. Herberger Park sits empty on June 16, thanks to the 111-degree summer heat. (Independent Newsmedia/Allison Kotzbauer)

According to Councilmember Karen Liepmann, pickleball is a health concern that can cause real stress.

“Studies have shown that exposure to pickleball noise negatively affects nearby neighbors,” she said in an email statement. “The intermittent, high-pitched sound of hard plastic balls striking hard pickleball paddles can trigger a stress response, increase heart rates and trigger acute anxiety.”

None of the problems her neighborhood faces are of their own making and she does not wish for other Paradise Valley residents to have the same issues arise, Greene Sterling said.

“We neighbors have a long and well documented history of varying concerns about pickleball to the town,” she said. “I don’t want future Paradise Valley residents to endure what we endured and are still enduring in our neighborhood.”

The comments come from zoning discussions at the May 14 council meeting where the council directed staff to come back with updates to city codes regarding pickleball courts, Councilmember Ellen Andeen-Keller stated in an email.

“This has been an ongoing issue that we are addressing,” she stated.

Mayor Mark Stanton said the

council plans to address the issues at a future meeting some time in the fall, although an official date has not been set.

“I am so very, very grateful to you all for considering regulating pickleball via the town zoning and sound ordinances,” Greene Sterling said.

Greene Sterling closed her public comment asking the council to address two things in the future.

“Please pause pickleball permits until you have decided how to move forward and how to regulate pickleball,” she said. “Please notify and seek the input of residents living near proposed pickle ball courts before permits are issued.”

Councilmember Liepmann said she welcomes the council’s comprehensive discussion of pickleball-related issues in Paradise Valley.

“This would include educating residents about using quieter equipment, limiting the hours when pickleball may be played on outside courts, and encouraging the installation of acoustic barriers,” she said. “I would also encourage the town to be more diligent in enforcing existing permitting requirements and nuisance regulations.”

Allison Kotzbauer can be reached at akotzbauer@iniusa.org. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them 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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Delta Dental of Arizona leads several long-term initiatives aimed at education and access to health and wellness across Arizona, both through an annual grant program and key partnerships statewide, according to a press release.

This includes a partnership with Arizona PBS to educate children on good oral health, the Delta Dental of Arizona Oral Health Clinic at St. Vincent de Paul, work with Phoenix Children's Hospital and the Banner Health Foundation Hospital Oral Care and Periodontal Disease Education program.

By the numbers:

- \$2,005,743 was donated to improve health and wellness in Arizona.
- 122 Arizona nonprofits were



The Delta Dental of Arizona team volunteering. (Courtesy of Delta Dental of Arizona)

touched by Delta Dental of Arizona.

• 155,862 toothbrushes, 149,064 tubes of toothpaste, and 127,872 dental floss pods were donated in Arizona.

• 907 hours of volunteer service were completed by Delta Dental of Arizona employees.

• 55,239 children received free dental screenings through Delta Dental of Arizona.

• 2.8 million meals were provided for Arizona families through Delta Dental of Arizona.

Election 2026

• From page 8

care, utilities, groceries, gas — all of it has gotten out of hand.

What bills do you plan to introduce to deal with this issue? I plan to introduce bills that demand responsible, transparent state budgeting while protecting funding for public education, infrastructure, and public safety, lowering housing costs, and growing the economy through education and workforce development.

Why do you think you are the best candidate for the position? I have years of accounting and governing experience that make me the ideal candidate to cut wasteful spending and make sure our tax dollars are spent wisely and transparently on is-

suces that affect us all.

What are issues you believe could be common ground between the political parties during the next session? Long-term solutions to our water and energy needs are surely common ground as both are crucial to Arizona's future. There is a role for the state government in ensuring reliable, affordable power and water. Corporations, not rate payers, should pay for their own infrastructure and transmission improvements. Long term, there needs to be coordination between all stakeholders to address the loss of Colorado River water and to manage Arizona's ground water.

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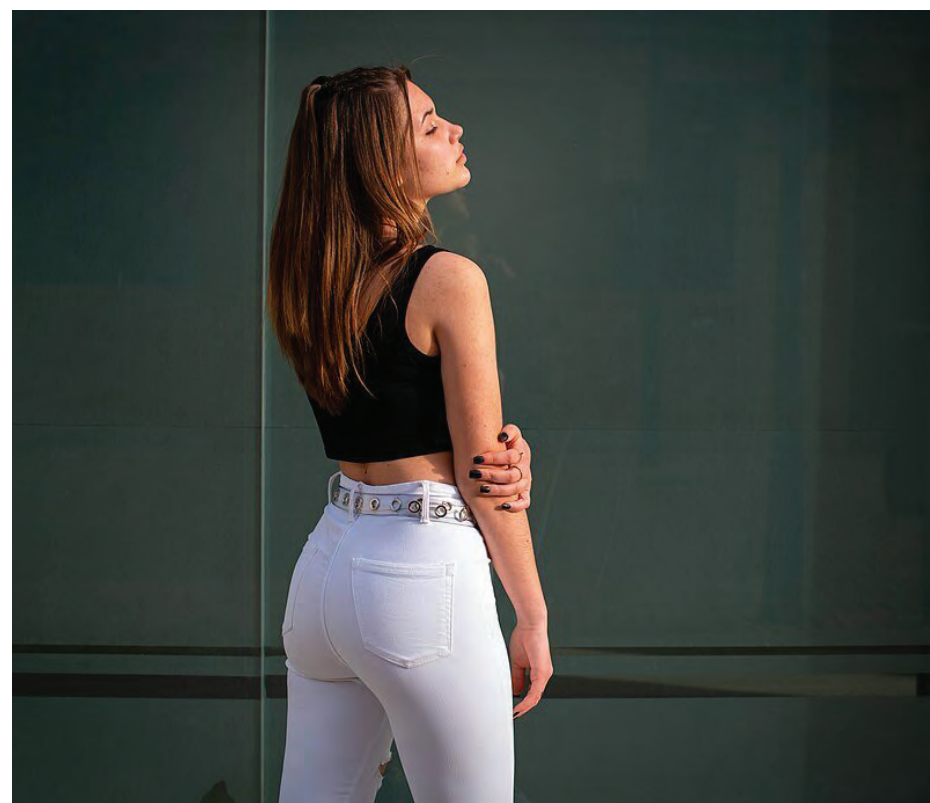
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NEIGHBORS



Aspiring models ages 16 and up are invited to participate in Scottsdale Fashion Week model casting call. (Courtesy Skaja Lee/Wikimedia Commons)

Scottsdale Fashion Week conducting model casting calls

Scottsdale Fashion Week has announced its model casting calls for the 2026 event, providing emerging models the chance to showcase their talent on the runway.

Following strong turnout and demand from last year's casting calls, Scottsdale Fashion Week has expanded to three casting dates for 2026, according to a press release.

Models selected through the casting process will have the opportunity to walk in this year's Scottsdale Fashion Week runway presentations and meet with agents from the FORD/Robert Black Agency.

Casting calls will take place at the following locations:

- Aug. 15, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Empire Scottsdale, 3625 N. Bishop Lane.

- Aug. 22, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Senna House Hotel Scottsdale, Curio Collection by Hilton, and CALA, 7501 E. Camelback Road.

- Sept. 12, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Corella & Co, 4235 N. Marshall Way.

Model casting calls are open to individuals ages 16 and older of all genders.

There is a \$35 audition fee for all participants.

Participants can preregister for the casting calls at ScottsdaleFashionWeek.com/casting-calls.

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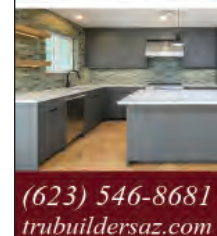
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