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250th; 14



QUEEN CREEK

INDEPENDENT

Housing
Market hanging
tough; 8



July 2026

Volume 23 Issue 6

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Valley police, county authorities working to stem teen violence over summer

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Maricopa County authorities and police departments across the Valley are addressing the expected rise in teen violence over the summer break.

Queen Creek Police Chief Randy Brice has joined forces with Maricopa County Attorney Rachel Mitchell and Surprise Police Chief Evan Becher to discuss efforts to mitigate teen crime — particularly gun violence.

“Across this country and state, and certainly in Maricopa County, young people are getting a hold of guns and using them at an alarming rate. From armed robberies to drive-by shootings and even murder they’re making decisions that not only carry serious consequences but will follow them,” Mitchell said at a recent press conference. “We

• See **Violence** on page 22

Queen Creek girl among winners of ‘America’s Field Trip’ contest

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kitelynn Nickerson is about to embark on the summer vacation of a lifetime.

The 9-year-old girl from Queen Creek is one of 125 national winners — and one of only three from Arizona — of the America’s Field Trip celebrating the nation’s 250 birthday.

For her big field trip, Nickerson has chosen to go to the Dakotas.

“I chose it just because I could go see Mount Rushmore and that would be really cool,” she said. “And then, also, I would get to see the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library.”

Nickerson will be among the first to visit the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, which opens to the public on July 4.

The homeschooled student won for her drawing for the contest’s theme of “What does America mean to you.” She was chosen from a group of more than 1,000 semifinalists.

She drew a tree symbolizing that nation’s past, present and future, with the roots stemming from key events in America’s founding, such as the Boston Tea Party, the American Revo-

• See **Nickerson** on page 12



Kitelynn Nickerson, 9, holding her winning artwork for the nationwide America's Field Trip contest. (Photo courtesy of Kylee Nickerson)



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COMMUNITY

Council strikes 489 acres from town planning area

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

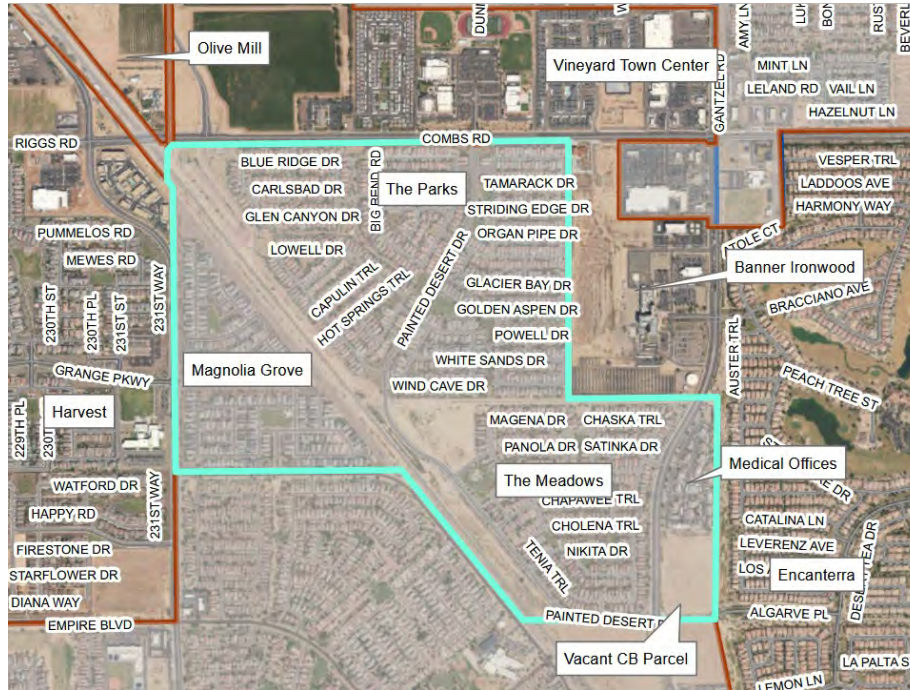
Despite impassioned pleas from almost two-dozen residents and a packed council chamber, the Queen Creek Town Council recently voted to remove almost 500 acres of Pinal County land from the town's general planning area.

"We are elected to represent the best interests of the current 92,000 residents who are very intentionally within the town's municipally incorporated boundaries." Council Member Jeff Brown said.

In February, the Queen Creek Town Council directed staff to begin evaluating the land "to determine whether these areas remain suitable for possible future annexation," according to a staff report.

According to a town analysis, annexing the land and its estimated 5,000 residents would bring \$3 million in tax revenue but also require the town to undertake complicated and expensive projects in just water and sewer services alone.

"(The revenue) mentioned in the staff report of around \$3 million simply doesn't come close to offsetting the costs of a future annexation, and that a future annexation would literally



The Queen Creek Town Council removed 489 acres of Pinal County land from the town's planning area. (Town of Queen Creek)

be to ask the current town residents to shoulder a burden they didn't ask for or commit to," Brown said.

The area includes the residential communities of The Parks, The Meadows and Magnolia Grove, existing medical offices and a 12.5-acre vacant commercial parcel.

The Parks, The Meadows, the med-

ical offices and the vacant parcel are within the town's water service area and receive sewer service from EPCOR. Magnolia Grove's water and sewer are served by EPCOR.

Before the vote, residents expressed feelings of betrayal and frustration.

"When this discussion began, we were told to get involved, and so we

did," said Ashley Loring, a resident of The Parks. "But standing here tonight, many of us feel like this decision may have already been made long before we were ever invited into the conversation."

Others accused the town of "cherry-picking" businesses to annex over residential areas, but as Vice Mayor Bryan McClure pointed out "annexation isn't initiated by the town,"

"Over the years no immediate action was taken prior to build-out to pursue this," McClure said. "Growth should pay for growth and no impact fees or construction sales tax were paid to fund public safety and other infrastructure like roads, utilities and parks (in the area) that Queen Creek would be liable for moving forward."

The planning area identifies land outside town limits where Queen Creek could potentially grow in the future. Being in the planning area does not mean that land will automatically be annexed.

The town is also in the process of deciding whether to remove an additional 878 acres at the southwest corner of Ocotillo and Ironwood roads from the planning area.

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

YOURVALLEY.NET

PUBLIC SAFETY

Work on police HQ begins

The town has broken ground on the new Queen Creek Police Department headquarters, which will be off Ellsworth Road, north of Crewse Lane.

Crewse Lane from Summers Place to Ellsworth Road is closed until construction of the facility is completed

in 2028.

With a total cost of \$96 million, the new headquarters will be paid through bond proceeds, the town's pay-as-you-go reserve, police impact fees and the dedicated construction sales tax.

The new headquarters will replace the growing department's current operations at the Law Enforcement and

• See **Community** on page 16



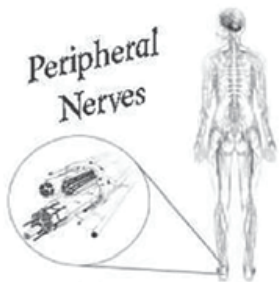
The town broke ground on the new QCPD headquarters on Monday. The building is expected to be completed in 2028. (Town of Queen Creek)

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

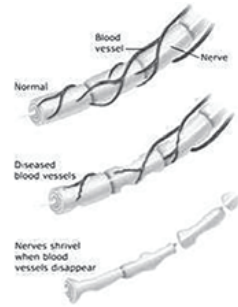
PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY AND CHRONIC PAIN WARNING!

Mesa, AZ — The most common method your doctor will recommend to treat your chronic pain and/or neuropathy is with prescription drugs that may temporarily reduce your symptoms. These drugs have names such as Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, and Neurontin, and are primarily antidepressant or anti-seizure drugs. These drugs may cause you to feel uncomfortable and have a variety of harmful side effects.

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



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



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

(See the special neuropathy severity examination at the end of this article) In order to effectively treat your neuropathy three factors must be determined.

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



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BUSINESS

Council approves Taco Bell off Ellsworth Road in Queen Creek

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

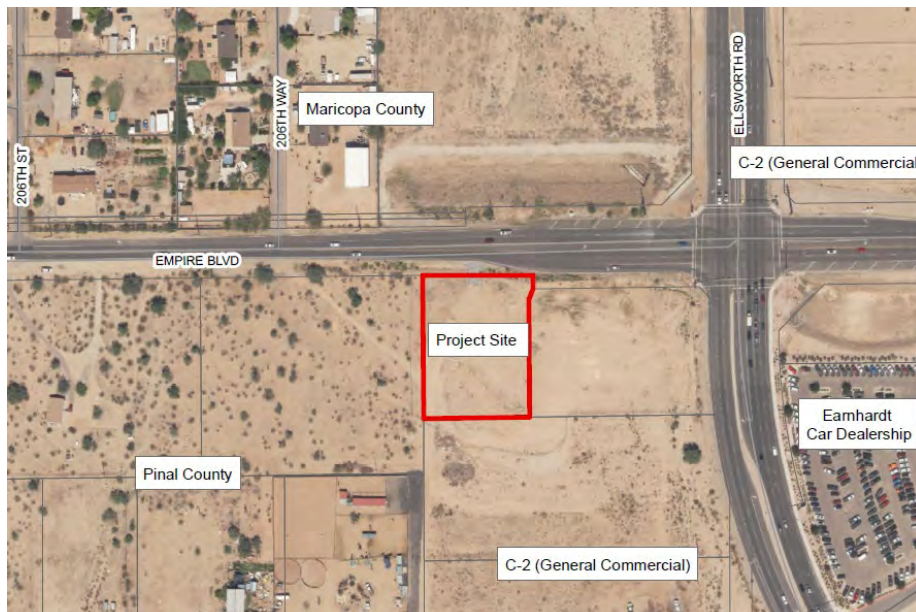
The Queen Creek Town Council has approved plans for a Taco Bell on a more than 1-acre site west of the southwest corner of Ellsworth Road and Empire Boulevard.

At its Wednesday meeting, the council voted 6-0 to approve requests for a conditional-use permit and site plan for the fast-food restaurant. Council Member Jeff Brown was absent from the meeting.

The requests were on the council's public consent agenda in which all items are approved through one motion and vote following a public hearing. No members of the public spoke during the hearing.

The conditional-use permit is needed because of the Taco Bell's proposed hours of operation and the drive-thru's proximity to homes.

The 2,216-square-foot Taco Bell will be adjacent to a 7-Eleven convenience store and fuel canopy.



The proposed Taco Bell will be located west of the southwest corner of Ellsworth Road and Empire Boulevard. (Town of Queen Creek)

nience store and fuel canopy.

The site is surrounded on the east and south by commercial proper-

ty and rural residential lots in Pinal County to the west, according to a staff report.

The property was annexed from Pinal County in 2018 and there are plans for a Cobblestone Carwash, Black Rock Coffee and a public storage facility on the west side of Ellsworth Road, south of the Taco Bell.

The proposed restaurant will be a single-story structure with a building height that does not exceed those of nearby commercial properties.

The applicant for Taco Bell held a neighborhood meeting on April 22. No members of the public attended. In addition, town staff have not received any inquiries or comments from the public.

At its May 13 meeting, the Queen Creek Planning & Zoning Commission unanimously approved recommending the requests for the site plan and conditional use permit to the council.

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

BUSINESS



Burros & Fries co-hosted the grand opening of its first Queen Creek eatery with the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce. (Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce)

RESTAURANT

Burros & Fries opens

Burros & Fries has opened its first location in Queen Creek.

Located at 22355 E. Queen Creek Road, Burros & Fries offers stacked burros, loaded fries, tacos, bowls and tortas.

It also has a variety of menu items including the California Burro featuring steak or grilled chicken with fries, sour cream, cheese and salsa fresca, as well as the Surf & Turf Fries topped with carne asada, shrimp, cheese, guacamole and pico de gallo.

Burros & Fries continues to expand across Arizona and California. The Queen Creek location adds to

that growing footprint and reflects the brand's ongoing investment in serving local neighborhoods. Read more: tinyurl.com/33mde8nr

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Medical aesthetics practice now open

Modern Grace Laser and Aesthetics is now open to serve the Queen Creek and San Tan Valley area.

The medical aesthetics practice recently held its grand opening celebration, hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce, in the Artistic Umbrella Studio Suites at 40975 N. Ironwood Drive, Suite 5.

• See **Business** on page 17

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Should you Trust a “Finfluencer?”

In the age of social media, it's easy to find advice on just about everything — including how to manage your money.

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When you hear financial advice on social media, here are some warning signs:

- **Unrealistic “get-rich” promises:** Claims like, “Turn \$500 into \$50,000 in a year,” are unrealistic and may indicate a scam.
- **Pressure to act fast:** Important financial decisions shouldn't be rushed.
- **Flashy displays of wealth:** Images of luxury cars, watches or cash can be more about generating views, or making a profit, than offering sound advice.

Fin-fluencers can make financial topics more engaging. Younger investors or older investors with substantial savings sometimes like these platforms because they're easily accessible. But all investors should do their homework. Take the time to verify, research and, when in doubt, seek advice from a professional.



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BUSINESS MOVES



NOW OPEN

1 Burros & Fries 22355 E. Queen Creek Road

Burros & Fries is set to open on June 4. Since 2009, Burros & Fries has been serving Mexican food inspired by the owner's roots in San Diego and Tijuana. The eatery's offerings range from burros and fries to house-made sauces and bowls. The restaurant also serves street tacos. Beef, chicken, and seafood options are available. Based in California, Burros & Fries also has locations in Gilbert, Glendale and Surprise.

2 Livewell Animal Hospital 23021 E. Riggs Road, Suite 100

Livewell Animal Hospital on Queen Creek opened in mid-June and held a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce on June 30. The full-service Livewell Animal Hospital offers a variety of veterinary medical services and urgent care such as wellness and prevention, pain management, vacci-

nations, X-rays, ultrasounds, surgical procedures and an on-site pharmacy and laboratory.

3 Gateway Barbershop 18914 E. San Tan Blvd., Suite 124

For men looking for a shave, a haircut and more, Gateway Barbershop has opened a new location in Queen Creek. Owner Gerardo Bernal opened his first shop in 2015 near Power and Williams Field in Gilbert when he was 22. Since then, he has opened two additional shops in Gilbert. Bernal "believed there was room for a barbershop built around family, respect and genuine relationships," according to the Gateway Barber Shop's website.

LIQUOR LICENSE

4 Sushi Neko 23670 S. Power Road, Suite 102

The Queen Creek Town Council has voted to forward a liquor license recommendation to the Arizona De-

partment of Liquor Licenses and Control for Sushi Neko. The eatery is requesting new Series 12 Restaurant Liquor License. The Series 12 is a non-transferable, on-sale retail privileges liquor license that allows a restaurant to serve all types liquor solely for consumption on the premises. Under the license, the restaurants must derive at least 40% of their gross revenue from the sale of food.

5 Queen Creek Olive Mill 24980 S. Meridian Road

The Queen Creek Town Council has voted to forward a liquor license recommendation to the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control for the Queen Creek Olive Mill. It is requesting a Series 018 Craft Distiller liquor license, a specialized license designed for Arizona distilleries that produce certain volumes of distilled spirits. If approved, the Queen Creek Olive Mill will be allowed to produce distilled spirits, sell to wholesalers, make direct sales to retailers and have on-site sales.

REBRAND

6 The Shooting Range 18618 S. 186th Way

Ted's Shooting Range has rebranded as The Shooting Range. The business is a family-friendly, women-owned, indoor firearm range in Queen Creek that offers lane rentals, firearm instruction, and retail sales. The Shooting Range recently joined the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce.

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



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REAL ESTATE

Queen Creek's housing market remained attractive to buyers in May

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Queen Creek's housing market in May continued to show signs of strength despite economic headwinds.

"Queen Creek's appeal remains strong because it offers what many families are seeking: newer housing, larger home sites, excellent schools, master-planned communities and a lifestyle that provides more space than many other parts of the Valley," said Sammy Glassman, board president of Phoenix Realtors, a local association for Valley Realtors.

Closed sales increased 2.4% year-over-year, indicating people are still buying homes even if they are taking more time to weigh their options, Glassman said.

That careful consideration is reflected by the increasing number of days a home is on the market. In May, days on market rose nearly 15% to 78 days, giving buyers "greater leverage to negotiate terms, conduct due diligence and compare homes before making an offer," Glassman said.

Another positive for homebuyers is a slight decline in median and aver-



In May, the number of days a home remained on the market rose by nearly 15%. (Special to Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)

age sales prices. The prices declined about 4%, giving buyers an opportunity to break into a market they may have been priced out of in the past.

"While prices have moderated, sellers are still receiving an impressive 98.8% of their asking price on average, indicating that well-priced homes continue to attract strong interest," Glassman said.

Meanwhile, a whopping 24% drop in new listings "suggests that some

homeowners are choosing to stay put rather than enter the market. This reduction in new supply is helping support home values despite softer buyer demand," Glassman said.

"As affordability challenges continue across the region, Queen Creek remains an attractive option for buyers looking to maximize value while maintaining access to employment centers throughout the Greater Phoenix area," Glassman said.

QUEEN CREEK HOUSING MARKET IN MAY

New listings: 167 (-24.1)

Pending sales: 96 (-38.9%)

Closed sales: 171 (+2.4%)

Days on market until sale: 78 (+14.7%)

Median sales price: \$625,000 (-4.4%)

Average sales price: \$703,173 (-4.1%)

Percent of list price received: 98.8% (+0.1%)

Inventory of homes for sale: 619 (-8.4%)

Months supply of inventory: 4.6 (-8.0%)

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



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EDUCATION

Queen Creek teen committee unveils plans for \$5K donation

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Mayor's Teen Advisory Committee is making the most of a \$5,000 donation.

Members of the Mayor's Teen Advisory Committee, made up of resident students in grades 9-12, has revealed its plans for the donation from communications infrastructure company Crown Castle.

"In receiving the \$5,000 Crown Castle donation, we plan to separate the fund amongst four projects," Christabel Emenim, vice chair of the committee, told members of the Queen Creek Town Council.

A downtown art mural project focusing on teen mental health will receive \$1,500. The money will cover art-related expenses and an unveiling ceremony.



The Mayor's Teen Advisory Committee plans to use part of a \$5,000 donation to hold another teen drive-in movie. The first was held in December at Frontier Family Park. (Town of Queen Creek)

The committee plans to use \$2,000 for a new teen event in the fall. The funds will cover startup costs for the event, such as new equipment.

The committee will spend \$1,000 to hold another drive-in movie as it works to establish it as a signature event for the group. In December, the committee hosted a showing of "Elf" for teens at Frontier Family Park. The donation will cover licensing, supplies and out-

reach.

"The drive-in movie in December was a huge success, so we are planning to renew it annually," Emenim said.

The remainder of the donation, \$500, will go toward community outreach and volunteer projects.

Under the direction of Mayor Julia Wheatley, the Mayor's Teen Advisory Committee was created by the council in 2024.

The committee focuses on:

- Addressing concerns and challenges affecting teens in the community.

- Organizing and participating in volunteer projects and initiatives.

- Providing input on policies and programs that impact teens.

- Planning teen-oriented events, workshops and forums.

- Advocating for the needs and interests of teens to local government and community stakeholders.

- Promoting civic engagement and educating.

"You guys know what you need and what other teens need, and you guys are rocking it," Council Member Leah Martineau said. "I'm really excited to see what you guys have coming up in the future, and I know they're going to be successful."



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EDUCATION



Gideon Joffe won third place at the state round of the National Civics Bee. (Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry)

CIVICS BEE

Queen Creek students wins third in state civics bee

A student from Queen Creek placed third in the state round of the National Civics Bee.

Gideon Joffe, who attends Payne Junior High School in the Chandler Unified School District, qualified for the state competition after placing first place in the regional round hosted by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce. The state round was hosted by the Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Joffe wone \$250 for placing third.

The National Civics Bee begins with a written essay and culminates in live events at the regional, state and national levels. A total of 16 students earned a spot in the chamber's regional live competition.

The competition — expanded to all 50 states in celebration of America's 250th anniversary — invites middle school students to showcase their civ-

ics knowledge, engage in their communities and build trust in others and institutions through a nonpartisan, multi-round competition, according to a chamber press release.

HEALTH CARE

Teens learn hospital workings

For the fifth straight year, Banner Health introduced health professions to middle school students in the Queen Creek community through Camp Scrubs, a week-long program held at Banner Ironwood Medical Center.

"The importance of providing these types of opportunities to students in our community can't be overstated," said Michelle Green, co-director of the program. "When we open our doors to young minds, we're not just teaching them about health care — we're investing in the future of the profession, and ultimately, the future of our patients and communities."

Students from the Queen Creek and J.O. Combs unified school districts, American Leadership Academy-Ironwood, Legacy Traditional School-San Tan and Gilbert Christian High School participated.

Throughout the camp, they learned about wound care, orthopedics, medical imaging, surgery, intensive care, laboratory, pharmacy and security, and met with the BannerAir team. They also earned certifications in chest-compression only CPR and first aid.



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Nickerson

• From page 1

lution and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Above the roots is a little girl watering the tree and flowers. The branches of the tree represent Nickerson's hopes for the future, including attending law school.

"The roots I was able to represent the past; the flowers, the present; then the branches of the tree are the future," Nickerson said. "The little girl is me and all the other children in the U.S.A., and we're watering our hopes and dreams for the future."

Nickerson said she was inspired by a phrase in the preamble of the U.S. Constitution — "secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

"It made me reflect about how the people who came before us sacrificed everything so we could have the freedoms we enjoy today," she said. "My art shows that those gifts, those freedoms, are like gifts getting passed from one generation to the next."

Nickerson heard about the America's Field Trip contest from her grandmother. This is not the first time the contest has been held, but in honor of the nation's 250th birthday, the combined first- and second-place winners from third to 12th grade were expanded to 250.

First-place winners could choose from trips all over the country, including Boston, New York City, Atlanta, Dallas, New Orleans and San Francisco. One trip to Washington, D.C., came with an overnight lock-in at the Smithsonian. Second-place winners each scored \$500.

Taking the contest seriously, Nickerson spent three months creating her piece of art.

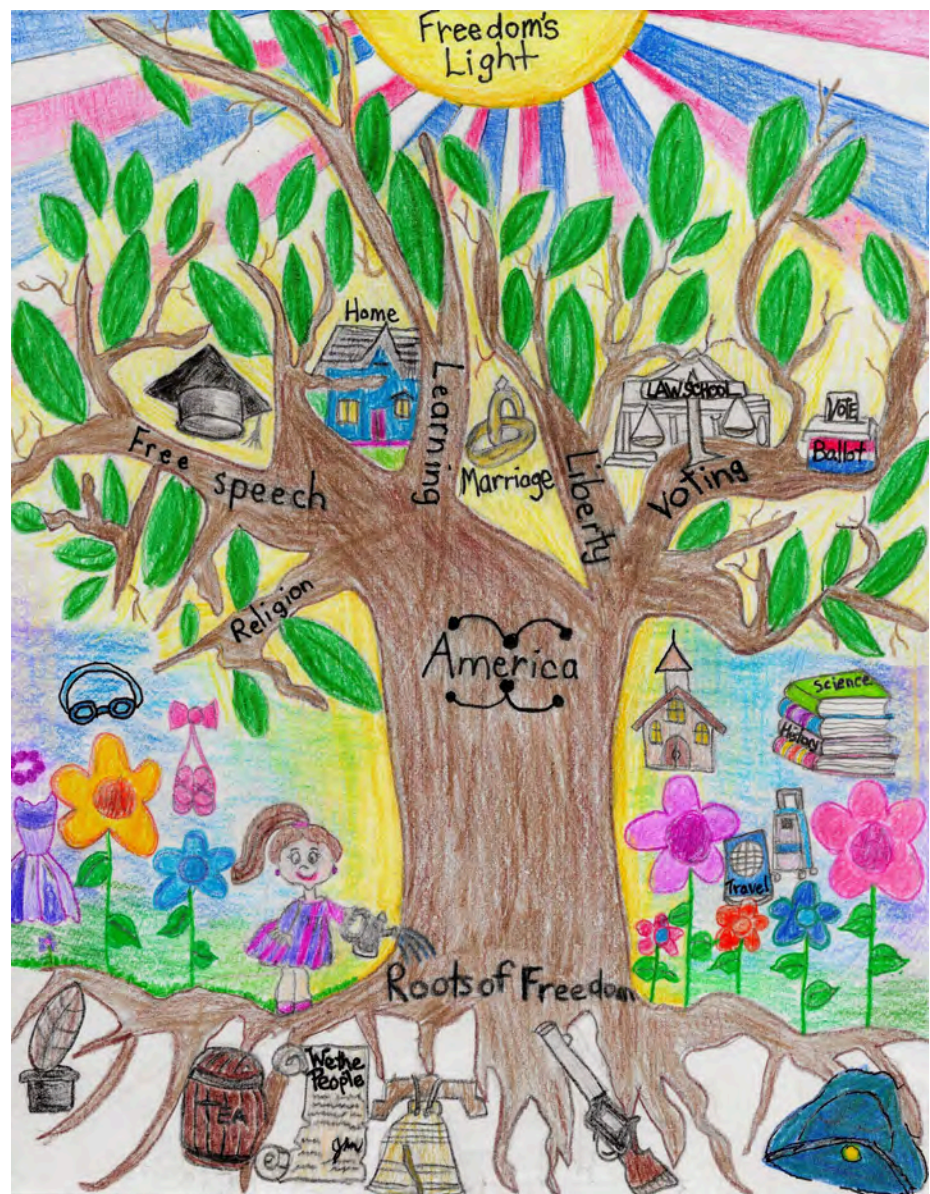
"We never thought in a million years that she would win something like this. In fact, in order to enter, you had to do a writing portion, or you had to do an art piece, and Kitelynn says, 'Mom, I'm going to do an art piece,'" said Nickerson's mother, Kylee Nickerson.

Kylee Nickerson cautioned the girl that she had never taken art classes, and she would be competing against kids who had. But her daughter held firm.

"She's like, 'No, Mom. I'm going to do art,'" Kylee Nickerson said. "Well, now I'm having to eat my words just a little bit here."

Nickerson's mother will accompany her daughter on the trip to North and South Dakota from July 11 to July 14.

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



Kitelynn Nickerson drew a tree representing the nation's past, present and hopes for the future. (Photo courtesy of Kylee Nickerson)



Menu



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- Handcrafted Pasta
- Savory Entrees
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THINGS TO DO

Celebrate America's 250th anniversary across the southeast Valley

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

This is a special Fourth of July as the nation hits its 250th anniversary, and residents can enjoy music, food and fireworks at events all across the region.

In Queen Creek, residents can enjoy a cool holiday at the Fourth of July Splash Bash at the Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center, 22343 E. Ryan Road. There will be games and crafts or folks can just lounge in the Lazy River, splash in the pool and zip down the water slides.

Florence is going big this Fourth of July with Freedom Fest 2026. This year's event will be headlined by internationally acclaimed musician and performer, Sheila E.

The five-time Grammy nominee and recent Grammy Award winner's performance will cap off the evening

before the big fireworks show.

Also set to perform is Honeygirl, a Queen Creek-based country act fronted by singer-songwriter Kira Brown. Honeygirl includes seasoned musicians such as Scotty Johnson of the Grammy-nominated Arizona band Gin Blossoms.

July 4 events are also taking place in Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa and Apache Junction.

4th of July Splash Bash

Noon-4 p.m.

July 4

Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center

22343 E. Ryan Road

Celebrate Independence Day and America's 250th birthday with Queen Creek Parks & Recreation. Enjoy a variety of games and activities, including tie-dye-

ing, water balloons, Lazy River Bingo and water volleyball. Friendly competitions and activities will be available for all ages, whether relaxing in the water or joining in the fun. Participants must bring their own item to tie-dye (limit one per participant). Center members get free admission, and residents and their guests can purchase a day pass.

Arizona Celebration of Freedom

6-10 p.m.

July 4

Downtown Mesa

There will be food, fun, patriotic displays/activities and a fireworks display that starts at 9:15 p.m. Various events such as flag displays, a stunt show, wrestling matches and laser light show will be held throughout Stage America, Independence Hall and between the

• See 250th on page 15



Sheila E. will be headlining Florence's Freedom Fest 2026 on July 4. Bands from Queen Creek will also be performing. (Courtesy town of Florence)

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ALL SUMMER

Free Event

250th

• From page 14

food court and amphitheater. Entry to the events and activities is free.

Chandler's All-American Bash

7-9:30 p.m.

July 4

Dr. A.J. Chandler Park: Stage Plaza
178 E. Commonwealth Ave., Chandler

Celebrate the Fourth of July in Downtown Chandler and enjoy live music, yard games, food vendors and more. There will be a 15-minute pyrotechnic show as part of the concert. Food, family activities and raffle baskets will be available. The show will begin at 8:15 p.m. Admission is free.

Gilbert 4th of July Celebration

5-9:30 p.m.

July 4

Gilbert Regional Park

3005 E. Queen Creek Road, Gilbert

The entire park will be closed starting at 10 p.m. July 3, reopening at 5 p.m. July 4. This free, family friendly event will have live performances, aerial entertainment, a drone show, plus a fireworks show. General admission is free and on-site parking is \$15 per car payable by credit card only. The celebration offers a VIP Experience that includes premier lawn seating for live performances, fireworks and drone show, complimentary food from Big Nate's Family BBQ, drinks, alcohol

for purchase, backyard games, family fun and more. Guests will need to bring their own chairs. Pre-sale tickets cost \$40 per person, and day-of is \$55 per person. Children under 2 get in free.

4th of July Event

All day

July 4

Superstition Shadows Park

1091 W. Southern Ave., Apache Junction

Celebrate Independence Day with Apache Junction at its annual Fourth of July celebration. This family-friendly event will feature live entertainment, food vendors, activities, games and patriotic fun for all ages. This year's celebration will include more than 250 added event elements and enhancements to create an even more exciting and festive atmosphere for the community.

Freedom Fest 2026

5-9:30 p.m.

July 4

Florence Multipurpose Fields & Aquatic Center

174 W. First Street, Florence

The music of Sheila E. isn't the only thing guests can look forward to a Freedom Fest 2026. There will be the second annual Your Behind BBQ Rib-Eating Competition, carnival rides, bungee trampolines, expanded food, resources and retail vendors, and a fireworks show. The town's pool will be open 1-10 p.m. with free admission, so folks can watch the fireworks while they float.



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Community

• From page 2

Community Chambers building.

It will bring all police operations under the same roof, provide enough room for future employees and eliminate the need for separate substations or satellite facilities. Read more: tinyurl.com/bp5v8cy9

DEVELOPMENT

Council to consider QuikTrip station

The Queen Creek Town Council will be considering approval for a QuikTrip fuel station on 2.6 acres of undeveloped land at the northwest corner of Cloud and Rittenhouse roads, adjacent to Schnepf Farms.

A public hearing for the project is set for the council's July 15 meeting.

The proposed QuikTrip would have a 7,152-square-foot fuel canopy with eight pumps, and a 5,312-square-foot convenience store that will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will have access from Rittenhouse and Cloud roads.

The property is currently zoned rural residential, and QuikTrip is requesting a rezoning to general commercial. The conditional-use permit is needed to allow fuel sales.

Read more: tinyurl.com/u94xyja7



The Queen Creek Town Council has approved another property tax rate decrease for the upcoming fiscal year. (Special to Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)

PROPERTY TAXES

Property tax rate lowered

The town's primary property tax rate is dropping again under a five-



The proposed QuikTrip will be incorporation design elements to complement the agritainment district. (Town of Queen Creek)

year freeze.

The town will enter the fourth year of the freeze when the new fiscal year starts on July 1. The primary property tax rate will drop from \$1.55 to \$1.46 per \$100 of assessed value.

In May 2007, Queen Creek voters approved a property tax measure to fund public safety, with the rate not to exceed \$1.95 per \$100 of assessed valuation. The town does not have a secondary property tax.

In November 2022, the council voted to freeze the primary property tax amount paid by existing homeowners for five years, meaning that even when the median assessed value of a home increases, residents will pay the same tax as they did the previous year. This in turn will continue to lower the property tax rate each year.

A Queen Creek resident whose home has a median assessed value of \$293,000 would pay taxes of \$429 in the upcoming year — no increase since the freeze started, according to a staff report.

The primary property tax on existing and new construction is expected to generate \$15.5 million in revenue, which is dedicated to public safety services. Read more: tinyurl.com/4yd8u6nac

RECREATION

First year strong for rec & aquatic center

With one year under its belt, the Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center is proving to be quite popu-

lar with residents logging more than 114,000 total visits and generating \$1.5 million in revenue.

Saturdays are proving to be the busiest days for the center at 22,343 E. Ryan Road. In its first year, 25,000 total visits were recorded on Saturdays. The busiest hours for the center are 5-7 p.m., with 28,000 total visitors throughout the year.

The busiest day of the first year was June 15, 2025, with 1,100 visitors, and June 6, 2025, averaged the longest visit duration at 111 minutes.

The highest number of monthly passes sold were at the height of summer in 2025, with 946 in June, 1,083 in July and 1,039 in August.

For daily passes, June 2025 proved to be the peak month at 11,458. The highest number of visits took place in July 2025 at 22,425, with the average number of monthly visits at 11,083.

Read more: tinyurl.com/4ujtfm8t

COUNCIL

Council honors nation's 250th

A proclamation honoring the nation's 250th anniversary provided the Queen Creek Town Council to show off new artwork.

"It's fitting that as we celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary this evening, we're also unveiling a brand-new piece of artwork here in our community chambers reinforcing our nation's motto of 'In God We Trust,'" Vice Mayor Bryan McClure said.

The town manager's office and the communications and marketing team worked with the QC Artist Guild to create a painting that would include the motto.

The painting features an American flag in a desert setting with the San Tan Mountains in the background. The town logo is placed on the top left of the painting, and on the top right, in script, is the phrase from the U.S. Constitution "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

The motto "In God We Trust" is placed on the bottom left-hand side of the painting. Read more: tinyurl.com/mt85k6hy



From left to right, Queen Creek Council Member Robin Benning and Leah Martineau, Vice Mayor Bryan McClure, and Council Members Dawn Oliphant and Travis Padilla show the proclamation recognizing the nation's 250th anniversary. (Town of Queen Creek)

Business

• From page 4

Founded by licensed aesthetician and certified laser technician Michelle Hays, Modern Grace Laser and Aesthetics was created as an aesthetic boutique that blends technology with individualized care.

Modern Grace Laser and Aesthetics offers a range of services focused on skin rejuvenation, correction and long-term skin health. Treatments are designed to improve tone and texture, reduce signs of aging and address pigmentation concerns through customized treatment planning. Read more: tinyurl.com/ywyt5bpby

HOMES

Final Cresleigh Homes sales at Hastings Farms

Sales of the final 10 homes in the



Modern Grace Laser and Aesthetics is now open at 40975 N. Ironwood Drive, Suite 5. (Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce)

Cresleigh Homes at Hastings Farms subdivision have started.

Cambridge Properties is leading the final closeout sales for the community, according to a press release.

The remaining homes range from about 1,600 to 2,600 square feet

with prices starting at \$490,000.

Hastings Farms is near the Queen Creek Marketplace, Schnepf Farms, Frontier Family Park, Pecan Lake Entertainment, Queen Creek Olive Mill and a growing mix of dining, recreation and retail destinations

throughout Queen Creek.

Read more: tinyurl.com/2jp5n6c

JOBS

Chamber to host hiring event

The Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Maricopa County and Pinal County ARIZONA@WORK, will host a hiring event this summer.

The event will run 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 6, at Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Williams Field Campus, 7360 E. Tahoe Ave., Mesa.

Businesses from a variety of industries will have the opportunity to promote open positions and connect with potential employees.

Attendees will be able to explore job opportunities, network with employers and learn more about careers available throughout the region.

Read more: tinyurl.com/4ayr5zwr



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SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Compete in basketball tournament

Gather your squad to compete in the men's three-on-three basketball tournament sponsored by the town of Queen Creek.

This double-elimination tournament is all about friendly competition, teamwork and community connection.

The competition will take place 6-10 p.m., Friday, July 24 at the Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center gym, 22343 E. Ryan Road.

The tournament is open to men ages 18 and older. Register online at QueenCreekAZ.gov/RecRegistration.

LEAGUE PLAY

Summer basketball league starts soon

There's still time to join the adult men's summer basketball league.



The San Tanners took home the adult men's spring basketball championship. (Town of Queen Creek)

The league runs for seven weeks with a single-elimination tournament to conclude the season.

The league begins on Monday, Aug. 17, and all games will be played at the Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center gym, 22343 E. Ryan Road.

The league is open to men ages 18 and older. Residents and non-residents can register online at QueenCreekAZ.gov/RecRegistration.

QueenCreekAZ.gov/RecRegistration by Aug. 6.

SWIMMING

Take swimming lessons

The Queen Creek Recreation & Aquatic Center, 22343 E. Ryan Road, is offering swimming lessons to adults and kids all summer.

For adults 17 and older, a session

of swimming lessons will take place 7-7:30 p.m., July 6-16.

For kids ages 3-16, swimming lessons will be available 5:30-6 p.m., July 6-16. To attend, register online at QueenCreekAZ.gov/RecRegistration by July 6.

SPORTS CAMP

Summer sports camp for kids

Kids can now be enrolled in the town's All Star Multisport Camp.

Whether your child is new to sports or already a rising star, this camp is a great place to have a blast. Campers rotate through various games and sports. They will play camp favorites such as capture the flag, kickball, giant Jenga and water games.

The camp runs 8-11 a.m., July 6-10 at Mansel Carter Oasis Park, 19535 E. Appleby Road. The camp is for kids ages 3-5. Register online at QueenCreekAZ.gov/RecRegistration.

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RELIGION



Rock Point Church offers family-friendly activities during Saturday Nights at Rock Point. (Rock Point Church Facebook page))

FAMILY

Saturday Nights at Rock Point

Rock Point Church, 24759 S. Power Road, hosts Saturday Nights at Rock Point, offering waterslides, bounce houses and games every first and third Saturday. On other Saturdays, the church has other activities planned for families, plus a food truck each week-end. Saturday Nights at Rock Point run 4-7 p.m.

For those looking to find or start a life group, the church offers Find Your Circle 6:30-8:30 p.m., July 9-30. The goal of the four-week event is to meet people and form a group in a familiar environment before transitioning to other locations. Free childcare is provided, but space is limited.

MEETINGS

Heart Cry Church offers meetings for adults and kids

Heart Cry Church, 9339 W. Hunt

Highway, holds a Celebrate Recovery meeting every Friday.

Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered recovery program aimed at all "hurts, habits and hang-ups," the church's website states. The meetings run 7-9 p.m.

The church also offers events for kids. The Collective Youth program hosts students in grades sixth-12th, Wednesday nights starting on Aug. 5. There are games, bible study and youth-led worship from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

For younger kids, there is Wednesday Night Worship and Workshops. The workshops cater to kids from kindergarten to fifth grade offering worship, workshops, games and more. Wednesday Night Worship and Workshops run 6-7:30 p.m., starting Aug. 5.

SENIORS

Single seniors social group at Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, 20615 E. Ocotillo Road, offers a Single Senior Social Group Ministry.

The ministry provides fellowship, compassion and friendship to single seniors.

The group plays cards and other games starting at 1:30 p.m. Mondays and Fridays. Ministry meetings are held at 1:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month, followed by games. For information contact Gail Biesen, 480-999-8744.

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AMERICA@250

Queen Creek celebrates America's 250th with summer activities

As the nation's semiquincentennial approaches, Queen Creek continues to celebrate with activities and programs recognizing the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Residents can take part in upcoming activities throughout July, according to a press release from the town.

Celebrate by being QC Neighborly and hosting a potluck on Sunday, July 5. As part of this national effort to organize potlucks in every neighborhood in America, Queen Creek is encouraging residents to gather, share food, build connections and celebrate what makes the town QC Neighborly.

Help neighbors in need by supporting the Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department's Water Bottle Drive. QCFMD will be collecting cases of water to provide essential hydration to those most at risk during the extreme heat.

The goal is to collect 250 cases, which can be

Queen Creek recently installed America250-themed banners along Ellsworth Road. (Town of Queen Creek)



dropped off at Fire Station 1, 20678 Civic Parkway. Water will be collected during the June 17 council meeting.

Queen Creek will again honor Constitution Week, Sept. 16-23. Queen Creek students are invited to participate in a Constitution Week Art & Poetry Contest that recognizes America250.

Students are encouraged to submit either an original poem or piece of artwork that depicts the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Eligibility and details are available on the town's Constitution Week webpage.

The town also recently installed America250-themed banners along Ellsworth Road, and town facilities will be lit red, white and blue the week of Independence Day.

Find more opportunities to celebrate throughout the year by visiting the town's America250 webpage.



A nation gets a name

September 9, 1776, may not be the first date Americans think of when pondering their nation's history, but it's a significant day nonetheless. According to the National Constitution Center, on September 9, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted a new name for a collective of colonies that had been referred to as the "United Colonies." The name chosen on that day in late summer 1776, the United States of America, has endured. While the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which was issued on July 4, 1776, refers to the "thirteen united States of America," it was a little more than two months later when the Congress passed a series of resolutions, including one in which it replaced "United Colonies" with "United States" as the fledgling nation's new name.

**Happy Birthday
United States!**



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Notable quotes from American presidents

Americans will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States throughout 2026. Many a notable leader has influenced the country in its 250-year history, and the following are some notable quotes from American presidents over the course of the nation's history.

♦ "If we can but prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people, under the pretense of taking care of them, they must become happy." - **Thomas Jefferson, 1802**

♦ "Peace is the best time for improvement and preparation of every kind; it is in peace that our commerce flourishes most, that taxes are most easily paid, and that the revenue is most productive." - **James Monroe, 1817**

♦ "Officeholders are the agents of the people, not their masters." - **Grover Cleveland, 1886**

♦ "In the history of mankind, many republics have risen, have flourished for a less or greater time, and then have fallen because their citizens lost the power of governing themselves and thereby governing their state; and in no way has this loss of power been so often and so clearly shown as in the tendency to turn the government into a government primarily for the benefit of one class instead of a gov-

ernment for the benefit of the people as a whole." - **Theodore Roosevelt, 1903**

♦ "Governments do not make ideals, but ideals make governments." - **Calvin Coolidge, 1926**

♦ "No government is perfect. One of the chief virtues of democracy, however, is that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected." - **Harry S. Truman, 1947**

♦ "Mankind must put an end to war — or war will put an end to mankind." - **John F. Kennedy, 1961**

♦ "A president's hardest task is not to do what is right, but to know what is right." - **Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965**

♦ "America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens." - **George W. Bush, 2001**

♦ "Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." - **Barack Obama, 2008** (delivered while campaigning for president in an election Obama ultimately won)

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D	N	E	M	E	E	R	T	O	A	P	E	H	T	O	N
N	O	M	F	T	T	H	G	H	T	R	I	O	T	O	O
S	R	O	L	O	C	Y	R	A	K	O	P	L	Q	F	W
I	Z	S	A	S	E	X	O	M	I	R	P	R	T	T	K

The letters of the movies or TV shows with an American presidential theme are hidden below. They are connected by tiles on top, below, right, or left, but not diagonally. Find them all.

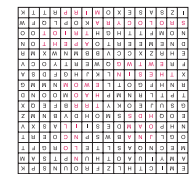
"JOHN ADAMS"

"LINCOLN"

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Violence

• From page 1

talk about justice, but no one wants to watch a teenager throw away years of his or her life and likewise victims of juveniles are often juveniles themselves.”

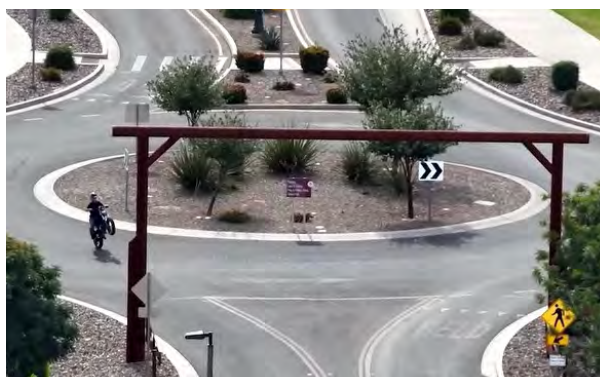
Last year, MCAO charged 150 juveniles as adults, with 17 of those cases being for first-degree murder, 39 for armed robberies and 60 for class 3 felony aggravated assaults, Mitchell said.

Queen Creek became a flash point for incidents of teen violence in the Valley when 16-year-old Preston Lord was assaulted during a house party on Oct. 28, 2023. Lord died of his injuries two days later.

Seven young men from Gilbert were arrested and charged in 2024 with Lord’s death. One has pleaded guilty to manslaughter and the remaining six are awaiting trial.

Last year, Gov. Katie Hobbs signed “Preston’s Law,” which allows for more serious charges to be filed against those who take part in a group attack.

“Since Preston’s Law took effect last September, we have charged 63 people — more than half of those, 34, are juveniles (and) of those juveniles, 21 have been charged just since April of this year,” Mitchell said. “I refuse to accept that this is just the way things are



Queen Creek police say e-bikes can be an aggravating factor in incidents of teen violence. (Town of Queen Creek)

these days. Young people deserve a brighter future than what a prison cell brings.”

Of particular concern is the use of social media by teens to publicize gatherings that can draw hundreds and quickly turn violent.

In Queen Creek, teens are using social media to get the word out on bike “ride-outs,” where teens gather in groups of varying sizes to ride their e-bikes through streets, parks and parking lots.

“Forty (teen e-bikers) surrounded a couple of adults and tried to engage in a fight,” Brice said. “Fast forward a couple weeks later, we had a situation

where a group of teens on e-bikes started to get into an altercation with some other older teens that were in vehicles ... and that then rolled over to one of our parks and they got into several assaults.”

Queen Creek has responded with an emergency measure that prohibits the use of e-bicycles and other motorized devices in town parks, establishes a specific process for impoundments, sets a 15-mph speed limit on sidewalks, multiuse pathways/trails and parking lots, and requires hands-free operation of phones and other cellular devices by riders.

“E-bikes aren’t inherently the problem,” Brice said. “The problem becomes is now you have the ease of them gathering quickly and they can move quickly and we can’t ... because we don’t necessarily want to pursue kids into streets for civil offenses.

From January 2025 to April 2026, QCPD reported there were 1,834 calls for service regarding juvenile disturbances, including those involving e-bikes. From Jan. 1 through April, an estimated 20 e-bikes were impounded.

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



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