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publishes
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 TOWN OF PARADISE VALLEY
INDEPENDENT



SUSD
District head
gets contract,
raise; 20

July 8, 2026 Volume 43 Issue 27

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

NEIGHBORS

Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children helps families around the state cope

By J. Graber
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Haley Renfro and her five-year-old son Henry recently decided to put their cares behind them for a little while so they went to summer camp. What cares could a five-year-old have, you say? Plenty.

Diagnosed with Langerhans cell histiocytosis — a rare disease that behaves a lot like cancer — when he was three, Henry has had a tumor in his brain much of his young life.

“It’s okay,” Renfro says with a labored smile. “It’s okay.”

Being medically fragile, Henry can’t go to the same kinds of summer camps a lot of kids attend, but he still gets to have a similar experience through the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children.

It meant a two-hour drive because Henry and his mom live in Camp

• See **Foundation** on page 14

EPCOR proposes water rate increase for Paradise Valley



Since last rate increase

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The utility says higher rates would help pay for infrastructure and future water needs

By Allison Kotzbauer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

EPCOR held a community meeting at the Paradise Valley Community Room on Thursday, June 25, to discuss proposed water rate increases.

• See **Epcor** on page 19

EPCOR Associate Director of Customer Care Sarah Skaggs speaks to Paradise Valley community members on June 25. (Independent Newsmedia/Allison Kotzbauer)

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THE BRILLIANT STRANGER WHO FORGETS YOU EVERY TIME

BY GREG HAGUE

I expect you use AI the way I do, for writing, research, maybe a little creative work. But the more I've worked with it these past few years, the more I've come to realize something most people never stop to consider. Unless you've set it up to remember you, every time you open a new chat, you're talking to someone who has never met you.

Most AI programs let you build a permanent file on yourself, where you fill in who you are, how you write, how you research, and how you want it to help. I've done that with Claude, and it's uncanny how well it remembers my voice and the way I think.

But if you haven't done that setup, AI wakes up brilliant and empty, like a genius with amnesia who just wandered in off the street.

Most people never account for this. They type a quick request, hit enter, and get back something flat and generic. It's like they handed a brilliant stranger a blindfold and asked for his best work.

Each session, it wakes up brilliant and empty, like a genius with amnesia who just wandered in off the street.

I'm sure you already know the basic recipe for a good prompt. Tell AI who it is ("you are a veteran investigative reporter"). Tell it exactly what you want. Give it the background. Say what form the answer should take and what to avoid. One study found that simply assigning AI a role lifted its accuracy from 53% to 64%.



That's a free upgrade, and it costs you a single sentence.

But here's what almost nobody does, and it's where real magic can happen.

Make it ask you questions first. Before you have AI write a word, try this: "Ask me five questions before you begin." Suddenly the machine is interviewing you. It pulls out the details you forgot to mention, the very ones that would have made the difference. We're so used to ordering AI around that we don't think to let it lead first.

Ask it what it's assuming. End a request with, "Before you answer, tell me what you're assuming about what I want." You'll be amazed what surfaces. Half the time it's about to charge off in a direction you never intended, and now you've caught it before it burns through 500 words going the wrong way.

And here's the one that changed how I think about these machines entirely. AI doesn't give you the best answer. It gives you the most likely one.

It was built by reading nearly everything humans have ever written, and it answers by predicting what would most commonly come next. Which means its natural setting is average. The expected. The thing everyone else already thought of. When you ask for ten ideas and get back ten you could have guessed yourself, that isn't a glitch. That's the machine doing exactly what it was made to do, handing you the middle of the road.

So push it off the road. After the first batch, say, "Now give me ten more, and make them strange. Throw out anything obvious." Ask for twenty versions instead of one, since it never tires and you only need to find the single good one hiding in the pile. The people who pull remarkable things out of AI aren't smarter than you. They just refuse to accept the average.

AI doesn't give you the best answer. It gives you the most likely one.

None of this requires better AI. It requires a better way of asking.

Push past the average often enough and you notice something. The machine, it turns out, is a mirror. It hands back the clarity of our own thinking, no more and no less. Which means the hard part was never learning to talk to it. The hard part, same as it ever was, is knowing our own mind.

ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Hobbs vetoes bills covering speed cameras, teen drivers, more

Arizonans cited by speed cameras won't be able to get off with just \$75 fines. Teens won't be able to get a learner's permit at 15. And banks won't have to deny services to those who are not here legally.

Governor Katie Hobbs recently vetoed 88 bills, bringing the tally to nearly 150 this session.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/jhnn2hdh>

Arizona teaching changing focus as AI gains foothold

Schools are rapidly integrating artificial intelligence as educators make it part of the educational landscape by helping students brainstorm ideas, summarize information and receive personalized academic support.

Supporters say the technology can improve access to learning and help teachers meet individual student needs. Critics worry students may be losing opportunities to develop patience, focus and independent problem-solving skills.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/3rmym6ey>

Maricopa County Supervisors approves primary, general election plan

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors adopted the 2026 primary and general elections plan during its June 24 meeting.

The plan includes having 237 voting centers open for the primary elections through July 21, and up to 260 voting centers open for the general election from Oct. 7 through Nov. 3.

Read online: <https://tinyurl.com/yc4tb3h9>

Paradise Valley author completes memoir after 18 years

Luanne Castle's 'Scrap' explores a decades-long search for family truth and forgiveness.

By Allison Kotzbauer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For nearly two decades, Paradise Valley author Luanne Castle worked to unravel a family mystery that shaped her relationship with her father.

The result is "Scrap: Salvaging a Family," a flash memoir that explores childhood trauma, generational secrets and the path to forgiveness.

Since its March release, the book has earned a starred review from Kirkus Reviews and was named a finalist in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards, bringing national recognition to Castle's deeply personal

story.

The unanswered questions surrounding her family history made it difficult to understand her father and the experiences that shaped him, Castle said.

"I had a lot of struggles growing up because of that," she said. "Getting along with him, for instance, and understanding him, which seemed impossible. And also, knowing that there was a secret that I wasn't allowed to know."

The memoir evolved alongside Castle's own search for answers, with many of the book's key revelations still unknown when she began writing.

"I had no idea what the ending of the book was gonna be. My father was still alive and I didn't yet know the secret of my grandfather," she

• See **Memoir** on page 16



Luanne Castle's memoir dives into a family mystery. (Photo submitted by Luanne Castle)

NEIGHBORS

Scottsdale man turns 100 after serving in WWII and Desert Storm

By J. Graber
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Four days after his 100th birthday party, Dominick "John" Andino is sitting at his kitchen table filling out a crossword puzzle.

The guy is making pretty good progress too.

"I'm just waiting for the Yankees game to come on later," he says with a shrug.

He's earned the right to slow down.

Incredibly, John's served in the Navy during World War II and the Army during Desert Storm.

He's been an airplane mechanic, policeman and a doctor, — even caring for people at ground zero immediately



Dominick "John" Andino with just a handful of his commendations after serving in two wars and the New York Police Department, which he followed up with a 52 year career in medicine. (J. Graber/Independent Newsmedia)

• See **100** on page 16

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Scottsdale unmanned vehicle maker pivots from space mining to battlefield

By Carsten Oyer
 CRONKITE NEWS

James Crowell, founder and CEO of unmanned ground vehicle manufacturer Crow Industries, did not go into business intending to build a machine of war.

When Crowell started his company in Scottsdale, he saw the vehicles commonly referred to as UGVs as a tool for exploring the cosmos. To make humanity's interplanetary expansion possible, his team built a rover designed for mining operations with hopes it would eventually help industrialize the solar system.

That initial focus expanded when friends in the Army saw the model — the first American-made UGV of its size, thousands of pounds smaller than competitors — and asked for a demonstration. Since then, the Army has become a primary customer.

"We're in a really exciting time right now, because we're able to help the Army write this new doctrine of, 'How do you fight with robots and people together?'" Crowell said.

Army officials have been increasingly interested in UGVs, a class of remotely-operated robots. The system's utility has been demonstrated on the battlefields of Ukraine. Among the applications are cargo transportation, reconnaissance, barricade breaching, evacuation of wounded personnel, detonation and engaging enemy combatants.

Earlier this year, the Army offered a contract for a UGV model that can support troops over the "last tactical mile," the most dangerous and complex phase of a mission, when forces face the greatest threat.

Brig. Gen. Anthony Gibbs, who leads the Capability Program Executive Office for Mission Autonomy, said the Army is pursuing "several commercial autonomous unmanned robotic capabilities" and working to get prototypes to soldiers for



feedback.

"The Army is implementing autonomous unmanned robotic capabilities to enable commanders to dictate the terms of the engagement by shaping and degrading threats across the multi-domain battlefield," he said by email. "The Army's strategy aims to leverage commercial technology that will address capability gaps, enhance operational readiness, and ensure rapid prototyping, fielding, and integration of affordable, scalable, interoperable, and mission-critical autonomous systems."

Crow Industries produces the Fenris, a rover that can carry up to 500 pounds and wield a turret, detonate explosives, transport supplies, evacuate wounded soldiers or gather intelligence, according to the company's website. The vehicle can operate via teleoperations or autonomously.

True to its roots as a would-be space explorer, the Fenris retains its mining functionality.

The Army has been using it since September 2024.

Crow Industries started in 2018 and has just 12 employees. Crowell declined to disclose the magnitude of its contracts but said it is working on several Army contracts and is in talks to sell to U.S. al-

In this March 20, 2026, photo, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy inspects a Fenris at Fort Polk, Louisiana, with 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment "Geronimo" soldiers. The unmanned vehicle is equipped with a .50 cal simulator payload. (U.S. Army photo courtesy Crow Industries)

lies as well.

Retired Army Col. Ben Fernandes, a former National Security Council director of defense policy and strategy who has spent years researching robotics and autonomous systems for the Army and Navy, said the technology has a variety of military applications.

"It's going to end up being the first line of defense or first line of attack," said Fernandes, now an Arizona State University professor.

UGVs can offer offensive and logistical capabilities without endangering humans, he said. They're especially useful for "dull, dirty and dangerous" tasks — jobs like clearing land mines.

Gibbs pointed to the Army's creation of his own Mission Autonomy organization and three upcoming awards for autonomous unmanned systems as evidence of its dedication to adopting the technology.

"The Army is committed to delivering autonomous capabilities to ensure our soldiers continue to have a decisive advantage on the battlefield," he said.

This article was edited for length and can be read in full online at <https://tinyurl.com/ykt92b9e>. This article first appeared on Cronkite News and is republished here under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



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OPINION

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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.

Thomasson embodies qualities we expect of our elected leaders

Since the founding of the Town of Paradise Valley, its residents have been the beneficiary of many elected leaders that embody the qualities we as citizens expect of our elected leaders – honesty, integrity, competence, fiscal responsibility and respect for all people.

Anna Thomasson has been one of those leaders. She has devoted countless hours with distinction to honorably and unselfishly serve the town and its residents and is very much deserving of reelection to the town council.

Ms. Thomasson has put the interests of all of the town's residents first in every vote and every interaction as a council member to further the goals of maintaining and improving on the special place that is the Town of Paradise Valley.

As Ms. Thomasson's neighbor in the town for more than three decades, we have personal knowledge of her integrity, kindness, devotion to her community's wellbeing, competence and sound judgment. We are lucky to have her service and she much deserves to be reelected to the council.

Dale and Tia Danneman
PARADISE VALLEY

Leaf blower noise issue can't be ignored

I'm a 30-year resident of Paradise Valley and a physician. I wrote recently about concerns regarding gas-powered leaf blowers. At least three others have echoed those concerns. A recent article appeared regarding noise disruption from pickleball.

I see in literature distributed by multiple council candidates that qui-

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et and safety are in their top priorities.

I don't want to detract from the concerns of the pickle ball neighbors. These concerns aren't unique to our town and are being grappled with across the country. The nuisance in terms of decibels is not dissimilar, with leaf blowers only winning that ignoble contest by small numbers, but the constant ping-ping-ping of pickleball is apparently nerve-wracking. The difference I'd like to emphasize here, is that gas leaf blowers involve additional health risks which we ignore at our peril. The sound of leaf blowers is ubiquitous in our town, impacting all residents. Additionally, there are alternatives to gas blowers, including rakes, brooms and electric leaf blowers.

Here are a few of the documented health hazards associated with gas-powered leaf blowers.

1.Noise exposures frequently exceeding occupational safety thresholds.

2.Exposures to airborne pollutants including hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds.

a.Cardiovascular effects from particulate matter.

b.Respiratory Effects include increased asthma and COPD exacerbations

c.Neurological effects from carbon monoxide exposure are particularly concerning.

I recognize there are many issues to be deliberated on in our town, but few are as soluble as this one. Requiring that leaf blowers be electric or that alternatives such as rakes and

brooms be used appears straightforward and adds no cost to our community. When promising to protect our community's health, safety and quietude, this issue cannot be responsibly ignored.

Sarah Snell
PARADISE VALLEY

Paradise Valley needs Bill Nassikas on council

I have served our town as Planning commissioner, council member and mayor, and almost every land use decision before the council involved resorts. Density, viability, for-sale residential units and compatibility with established neighborhoods are all important considerations. And resort tax revenue (bed taxes, sales taxes) is a major source of revenue for the town.

That's why I'm supporting Bill Nassikas for town council member in this summer's election. Bill has exceptional experience and understanding of how resorts are a vital part of our community. Future issues such as the Smoke Tree development, the stalled Ritz-Carlton, El Chorro Lodge and potential requests for the Kimpton (old Scottsdale Plaza), to name a few, will all need careful attention.

That's why we need Bill Nassikas and his hospitality experience on our town council. He can analyze new requests and make a meaningful contribution to the town in the form of practical resort knowledge and application that fits our town's General Plan.

Bill would be an excellent addition to our council. Ballots are in the mail, so please join me in voting for Bill Nassikas.

Scott LeMarr
PARADISE VALLEY

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FROM THE COVER

Foundation

• From page 1

Verde and the center is in north Scottsdale, but Renfro said it's worth it..

"A place like this means the world to my son," Renfro said. "My son has gotten to experience things most kids who are sick would never be able to experience. My son has a safe place to come and play and express himself in any way he wants to without fearing of getting sick or injured."

Henry, sitting in an inflatable canoe next to a rescue dog named Leah, puts it a little more simply.

"I love this place because they give toys," he said.

Now in its 12th year, the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children was started by Chrisie Abramo after her daughter Ava lost her battle with neuroblastoma.

The foundation helps kids from birth to 18 fight their diseases -- that's why they call the kids warriors.

The foundation provides social, emotional and financial help for those dealing with pediatric cancer.

Whether they need help with school or just need a friend, the foundation is there for the young warriors, but it's not only about them though.

Help with something like food can mean a lot, considering 81% of the families the foundation serves live below the federal poverty line.

"A ton of our services are not just wants but are necessities," said Paige Daniels, the foundation's community outreach coordinator.

The foundation is open to anyone dealing with pediatric cancer and their families in Arizona. Volunteers do take the mission on the road to places like Tucson and other cities.

And one of those necessities is something as simple as some quiet time for mom and dad to recharge.

"They've got massage chairs back there, and you can just sit in them and

know your child's safe," Elisabeth Hardy said.

Hardy is a mother of three girls and a 10-year-old son, Gordon, with Ewing sarcoma, an aggressive cancer primarily formed in bones which required the removal of his left leg..

Gordon is about five years post treatment right now. He ended chemotherapy in 2021, but that doesn't mean everything is fine now.

"We're done with treatment and everyone says, 'Oh, you guys are done,' but we're still going into the doctors every couple of months for pokes and scans," Hardy said. "We're dealing with the amputation still. He's permanently disabled, but when we come here they're still taking care of us.

"(The foundation's) like the only ones left that still care about us. Everyone else is like 'You're done, you're better.' You're not. I've still got to cry about it every time I talk about it ... and they know our financials aren't better. We're still maxing our out-of-pocket (costs) and paying for everything."

That's why the foundation does things like put on a summer camp for a few hours every Wednesday in June for the warriors and their families.

And while that may not seem like much, those who attend say it is.

"He's ... able to make friends who have disabilities like him," Renfro said. "Where we live, there are a lot of kids who aren't sick like him. He doesn't have friends who understand what it's like to just not feel good for no reason or to have medication that makes you angry and you can't control it, or sad. He doesn't have friends who know what it's like to have a port accessed or an IV placed. Here he gets to see other kids who are going through hard times so he understands it's not just him."

For more information, visit azcancer-foundation.org.

Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AZOpinions@inlusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



Five-year-old Henry and his mother Haley Renfro take time out of their Wednesdays in June to heal a little bit socially and emotionally at the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children's Warrior Wednesdays summer camp. The dog's name is Leah. (J. Graber/Independent Media)



Elisabeth Hardy and her son Gordon go to the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children's Warrior Wednesdays summer camp for a little rest and relaxation in a safe environment for kids fighting cancer. (Independent Media/J. Graber)

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Memoir

• From page 4

said. “I just started writing one memory after another.”

Uncovering the truth about her grandfather changed more than her understanding of family history, it changed her relationship with her father, Castle said.

100

• From page 4

after the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center.

“I didn’t leave the site for three weeks,” he said.

In other words, John got around.

“I’ve been busy,” he agreed.

It all started back in Brooklyn, New York, where he grew up, back in 1944.

He was sixteen-and-a-half years old and he was fast approaching draft age so he got signatures from his mother and father and headed down to the recruitment office.

“I wanted to go where I wanted to go, not where they wanted me to go,” Andino said.

Where he wanted to go was into the Marines, but they had met their recruitment quota for the week.

“They said, ‘Oh boy, we love guys like you, come back next week,’” he recalled.

No dice, he was signing up right then and there. He knew he didn’t want to join the Army because of the stories his brother had told him about his experiences, so John joined the Navy.

He never deployed overseas though, he figures because they didn’t want to send two brothers into combat and risk one family losing them both, so he was first stationed at

“What happens is that once the secret is pulled to the surface, communication can begin to happen,” she said.

Once the secret of her father’s past was revealed, Castle said the conversations that followed led to something she never thought was possible.

“I found that throughout that communication with my father, I was able to start to forgive him, something

that I had never really been able to do before,” she said.

Castle believes the memoir’s lesson is that this kind of healing is also possible for anyone willing to do the work.

“You can work on resolving these issues and it’s never too late,” she said. “Even if your parent has passed, it’s not too late for you to do the work yourself.”

Roosevelt Field in Long Island, New York, where he served as an airplane mechanic and later at Floyd Bennett Field, back in Brooklyn.

John stayed in the Navy until 1946, then served in the reserves for four more years.

When he was 20, he went back to his old stomping grounds to finish high school.

The vice-principal, a woman named Mary Hoffman, didn’t like John from his younger days, when he played on the baseball, basketball and track teams.

“I used to break (chops) when I was a kid,” he said. “I never did anything that she should hate me, but she did.”

Hoffman told him he was legally too old to old to go back to school so he told her about the Veterans’ Rights Bill that said servicemen and women could return to their jobs or schools after the war.

He got his diploma, then attended New York University where he studied premed. He was preparing to be a teacher in 1951 but two weeks later the results from his civil service exam came back and he became a police officer.

After serving on the force for 13 years, he decided to go medical school in Bologna, Italy, in 1967.

“(Medicine) was always my first love,” John said.

That’s where he met his second

wife, Jody. She was 19 years younger than him.

In other words, Andino robbed the cradle.

“Yes, he did and that’s what made him successful,” Jody said.

It was no tryst though. The two of them have been married 53 years now.

John was 47 and in class with kids but he graduated med school in 1972 and became president of the alumni association.

He was going to be a surgeon but at nearly 50, he figured he didn’t have time to go through the residency program, so he started practicing general medicine.

Being an ex-policeman, Andino was then appointed to the New York City Police Department Medical Board on which he served for 16 years.

Then in 1978 a friend encouraged him to join the Army because they needed doctors.

John was told he would go in as a major but when signed on the dotted line, the guy said “Congratulations, captain,” the rank below major.

At age 52, John was a junior officer but he worked his way up to a full colonel’s rank in seven years.

When Operation Desert Storm came along he was appointed to a five person panel handling all of the logistics of the medical side of things — two generals and three colonels.

To learn more about Scrap: Salvaging a Family or to purchase a copy visit: <https://elj-editions.com/scrap-salvaging-a-family/>.

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.

At 68, John was starting to get tired, and he didn’t like the general he was serving under so he retired from the Army.

But when the World Trade Center was attacked and the towers came down, John was able to get to the site because of his law enforcement credentials.

“I was triaging people,” he said.

A year later, he and Jody moved to Scottsdale.

“It was time for him to retire, he had too many jobs,” Jody said.

John filled his time with golf and swimming.

“I was playing racquetball until I was 78,” he boasted.

But eight surgeries on his knees have taken their toll, she said he’s slowed down a bit — physically, if not mentally.

He entertained 60 people — including his three children — at his 100th birthday party.

It wasn’t too wild though; there were no ladies popping out of a cake at the party.

“I tried to, but my legs wouldn’t let me,” said Jody, who is now 81.

So what’s it like being 100?

“Mentally, it’s fine,” John said. “As long as I have my marbles I enjoy myself.”

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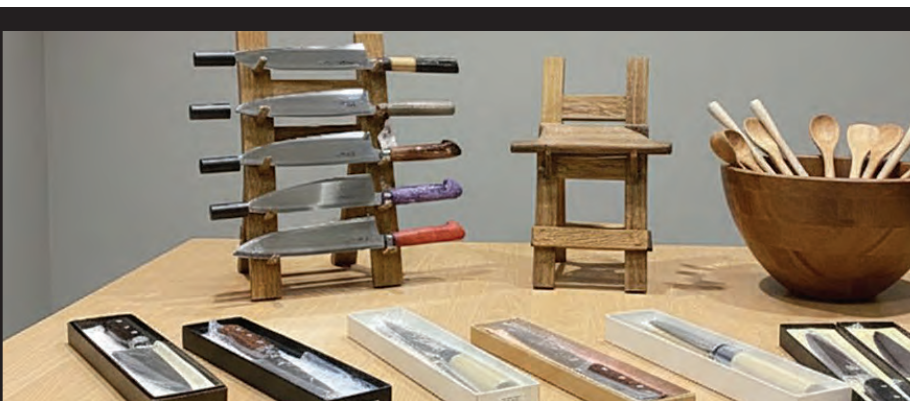
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ENTERTAINMENT

Western Spirit hosting movies about the American West

Fans of classic Western films are invited to experience the stories, stars and cultural impact of the American West through a new weekly film series at Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West.

Titled "Reel West Sundays," the weekly film screening and discussion series will be held every Sunday at 2 p.m. through Sept. 6 in conjunction with its exhibition, "Still in the

Saddle: A New History of the Hollywood Western."

Upcoming screenings in the Museum's newly renovated Virginia G. Piper Theater include:

- ♦ "Big Jake" (1971) – July 12.
- ♦ "The Cowboys" (1972) – July 19.
- ♦ "The Train Robbers" (1973) – July 26.
- ♦ "The Shootist" (1976) – August 2.

- ♦ "The Long Riders" (1980) – Aug. 9.
- ♦ "Heaven's Gate" (1980) – Aug. 16.
- ♦ "The Legend of the Lone Ranger" (1981) – Aug. 23.
- ♦ "Silverado" (1985) – Aug. 30.
- ♦ "The Grey Fox" (1982) – Sept. 6.



Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West is showing Western movies every Sunday through Sept. 6. (Courtesy Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West)

ON TOUR



Evanescence will bring their world tour to Talking Stick Resort Amphitheatre in Phoenix on July 15, 2026. (Photo provided by Live Nation)

Evanescence will bring summer world tour to Phoenix

Grammy-winning rockers Evanescence will bring their 2026 world tour to Phoenix.

Special guest Spiritbox and Nova Twins will open on the North American leg, which will include a stop at Talking Stick Resort Amphitheatre on July 15, 2026.

"This year has been so inspiring in so many ways, creating so much new music, playing some bucket-list shows and working with so many artists that give us life," frontwoman Amy Lee shared in a press release. "We are taking all of that fire and energy and inspiration and building it into an epic 2026 for our fans."

Tickets are available at evanes-

cence.com.

Their 2003 record "Fallen" holds steady as the sixth best-selling album of the 21st century (ranking just behind Lady Gaga's "The Fame" and ahead of Coldplay's "A Rush of Blood to the Head") remaining one of the best-selling albums of all time, with more than 17 million copies sold worldwide.

The album's singles, including "Bring Me to Life," broke the Top 10 in more than 15 countries and topped Billboard's Mainstream Top 40 and Alternative Airplay charts. "My Immortal" was a Top 10 hit in over 10 countries, including the US, UK, and Australia

LIVE MUSIC

Toto, Christopher Cross planning summer tour stop in Valley

Toto, Christopher Cross, and The Romantics will tour North America together this coming summer with a stop planned in the Valley.

The run begins in July in Bethel, New York, and will make a Phoenix stop at Arizona Financial Theatre on Aug. 11.

Ticket sales are online at <https://totoofficial.com/events/>.

Toto's largest hit "Africa" has achieved the milestone of 2 billion plays at Spotify alone, while "Hold The Line" exceeds 1 billion streams. On the sales side, "Africa" has been certified diamond by the RIAA (10 million sold). Cumulative Toto album sales are 50 million-plus copies.

In 2024, Cross performed as direct support for Toto at the Hollywood Bowl. Subsequently, the two artists have toured the world together performing across Europe, Australia, New Zealand and The U.S. this past summer.

Cross burst onto the music scene with his 1980 self-titled debut album winning five Grammy Awards, including – for the first time in



Toto has sold more than 50 million albums. (Photo provided by Live Nation)

Grammy history – the "Big Four" most prestigious awards: Record of the Year (for the single "Sailing"), Album of the Year, Song of the Year ("Sailing"), and Best New Artist. In a career spanning more than four decades, Cross has sold more than 12 million albums.

Bred on the streets of Detroit's east side in the late 70s, The Romantics are known for their MTV video hits including "What I Like About You," "Talking In Your Sleep," and "One In A Million."

FROM THE COVER

Epcor

• From page 1

EPCOR plans to file its rate case with the Arizona Corporation Commission on Monday, June 29.

After the filing, the proposal is expected to take at least a year to receive a final decision, said Sarah Skaggs, EPCOR associate director of customer care.

During that time, the Arizona Corporation Commission will review EPCOR's finances, infrastructure projects and proposed rate increases to determine whether they are justified before making a final decision.

Customers will also have opportunities to attend public hearings and submit comments before the commission rules.

"We want to make sure that you understand that this is not final, and it is ultimately subject to Corporation Commission approval and a final decision, which we expect maybe next year," she told Paradise Valley residents.

EPCOR is also proposing an Annual Rate Adjustment Mechanism which would adjust rates each year using a set formula rather than through larger rate cases, allowing customers to better predict future changes, Skaggs said.

"This helps to avoid large, unex-

pected rate changes by making smaller, predictable updates," she said.

As part of the review process, the Arizona Corporation Commission requires EPCOR to show how an ARAM would have affected customers if it had been in place in previous years.

The analysis shows the mechanism can both increase and decrease rates depending on costs and is neither automatic nor unlimited, Skaggs said.

"There are years of up and there are years of down, so it does go both ways," she said.

EPCOR is requesting a rate increase because Paradise Valley has not had one since 2019.

Without additional funding for preventive maintenance now, residents could face more costly repairs in the future when infrastructure fails, Skaggs said.

"If we don't replace things and work with cities to dig up roads when it's convenient for both of us and we have to do it ad hoc, it causes more disruption to you. And ultimately, it creates greater increases to your bills," Skaggs said.

The average Paradise Valley customer with a 1-inch meter uses about 57,000 gallons of water each month because of the community's large residential lots.

The average monthly bill is about

\$189 and would increase to about \$229 under the proposal, Skaggs said.

Of every dollar customers pay, about 32 cents goes toward infrastructure such as pipes, wells and treatment facilities, while 31 cents covers operating costs including electricity, treatment chemicals, employees and customer service.

Another 34 cents pays for taxes, insurance, regulatory costs and debt used to finance major infrastructure projects, Skaggs said.

"That leaves about three cents for Epcor, and this is just an opportunity to earn a return and I want to emphasize that it is not guaranteed and because our rates are regulated, as costs increase, it directly reduces that margin," she said. "At some point, we can't absorb those increases any longer, which is why we file a rate case; It's to reset and return."

EPCOR is also planning for the long-term future to ensure its service areas continue to have safe and reliable water for decades to come, Skaggs said.

While the company has planned for future water needs for years, those plans require continued investment, she added.

"There's an ongoing drought and uncertainty around the Colorado River and increasing demand as communities continue to grow," she said.

"Utilities like Epcor must plan to invest now to ensure water remains reliable and in the future."

Skaggs encouraged residents to stay involved throughout the rate case process by attending public meetings, contacting EPCOR with questions and participating through the Arizona Corporation Commission and the Residential Utility Consumer Office.

Residents can also email EPCOR to receive estimates showing how the proposed rates would affect their bills based on their highest and lowest water usage.

Although EPCOR also serves many of Paradise Valley's churches, resorts and other commercial properties, commercial rates were not discussed during the meeting.

When Councilmember Anna Thomasson asked about commercial rates, Skaggs said representatives of commercial organizations can contact EPCOR directly to learn how the proposal would affect them.

To learn more about EPCOR's water rate case and potential increases visit: <https://tinyurl.com/2yevww76> or email ratecasequestions@epcor.com.

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In September 13, 1:00 - 3:00 we will have a Dining Etiquette Course for Adults. For more information, go to our website www.itsallaboutetiquette.com and click on Adult. The fee is \$400, Lunch and manual.

The classes are held at the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church 8202 E. Cactus Rd. Scottsdale. Advanced registration is required. For more information, visit our website click on the Kids tab and scroll down to Summer Camp or call (480) 510-6346 or visit www.itsallaboutetiquette.com

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SUSD Superintendent Menzel gets raise, contract extension

By J. Graber

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Scottsdale Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Scott Menzel got a raise and a three-year contract extension at the June 23 district governing board meeting.

The board voted 3-2 to give Menzel a raise from \$225,000 annually to \$245,000 in his base pay. Menzel is not eligible for a performance pay bump next year, according to the vote, but is eligible for a boost of \$5,000 each in the next two years.



Dr. Scott Menzel

Board President Dr. Donna Lewis, Vice President Mike Sharkey and board member Dr. Matthew Pittinsky voted in favor of the raise and contract extension.

"As a reminder, SUSD has had seven superintendents in the 12 years preceding Dr. Menzel, seven," Pittinsky said. "The level of instability that creates is indescribable. I think under Dr. Menzel's leadership we are in the midst of several critical initiatives, all of which are multi-year, and he deserves the opportunity, and we need his leadership and his expertise to see them through."

Board members Carine Werner and Amy Carney were the two votes against the move.

"Scottsdale Unified School District continues to face significant challenges," Carney said. "Enrollment has declined by approximately 6,000 students over the past decade resulting in ongoing budget pressures and difficult decisions about closing and consolidating neighborhood schools. At the same time, district academic performance indicators, including ACT scores are still declining.

"This year the superintendent received a lower evaluation score from the board than he received in previous years. Despite that decline, the board majority has approved both a salary increase and a three-year contract extension. I believe contract extensions should be earned through demonstrated results. When academic goals have not been met over a long span of time and the district is operating in a season of budget deficits, extending a contract is wrong."

Pittinsky commented on the declining enrollment, saying, "If you look at retention, which is the number of students in our schools who continue in our schools, every single year that Dr. Menzel has been superintendent our enrollment has grown. We've had more than 100% of our students renew, which means we are attracting more students."

"Our (declining) enrollment trends are a function of starting kindergarten classes that are much smaller than graduating senior classes and that is largely a function of demographics"

Pittinsky also pointed out that while it is a difficult financial time for the district, it has had clean audits and has an award winning CFO.

He also noted that 88% of district families say they are satisfied with their child's school experience, and that Menzel has been named superintendent of the year by Save our Schools Arizona three years in a row.

"I think by any measure, Dr. Menzel has done a tremendous job running our district," Pittinsky said.

Sharkey put it in a little simpler terms.

"I think (Menzel) has done nothing but put his heart and soul towards this district to make it as good as it can be, and I support that," Sharkey said.

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OPINION

Opinion

• From page 8

Accountability following water service failures

Last week marked the fourth unplanned or inadequately communicated water service disruption affecting our neighborhood. After repeated complaints, residents finally received advance notice of another planned shutdown from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with assurances it would be the final interruption.

Instead, the shutdown extended well beyond the announced timeframe, and water service was not restored until after 8 p.m. Throughout the day, repeated requests for updates produced inconsistent and inaccurate information. Despite further assurances that no additional interruptions were expected, another planned shutdown was announced only days later.

The greatest concern is not simply the repeated outages but the lack of accountability and communication. On-site crews have been courteous, but they have been unable to explain the cause of the delays or provide reliable restoration times. Residents have heard multiple explanations, including water line breaks, excavation damage, aging infrastructure, staffing changes, and coordination issues

with the City of Phoenix. None has been accompanied by meaningful corrective action or improved communication.

Attempts to contact the town have produced little more than recorded messages and no visible follow-up. This reflects a continuing breakdown in planning, coordination and accountability.

This pattern is not new. Last year, residents experienced prolonged electrical and internet outages with similarly poor communication. This year, repeated water shutdowns have made the situation even worse.

We hope those residents downstream are spared the disruptions we have experienced. The town should identify the responsible project manager, improve communication during service interruptions, and implement better planning and oversight to prevent similar failures from occurring again.

Tom DeMark
PARADISE VALLEY

Why I'm running for Arizona state treasurer

Arizona's state treasurer holds one of the most important roles in state government — not for headlines or politics, but for safeguarding billions

of taxpayer dollars. This responsibility requires discipline, restraint and the judgment to avoid risky decisions with public funds.

As an Arizona native, I believe in our state's independence, opportunity and responsibility to leave it stronger for the next generation. I'm running for state treasurer because what's



Katherine Haley

at stake is too important for careless or reckless management.

My priority is simple: protect taxpayer dollars, keep them secure and accessible and grow them responsibly. Throughout my career — advancing policy on Capitol Hill, managing investments and building organizations that support families and workers — I've been trusted to manage resources with care. Every public dollar represents someone's hard work and future, and that must never be forgotten.

The treasurer serves as Arizona's chief banking and investment officer with a clear mission: protect principal, ensure liquidity and earn a responsible return. This is not a role for experimentation. Risky investments can directly impact education, public safety, infrastructure and taxpayers themselves.

As treasurer, I will prioritize pre-

serving capital, maintaining strong reserves and preparing Arizona for economic challenges. Responsible financial management also protects freedom — keeping taxes low and allowing families to make their own decisions.

My service as president of the Arizona State Board of Education reinforces this commitment. I help oversee a \$1 billion Empowerment Scholarship Account program serving over 100,000 students. Families deserve a system that is secure, transparent and accountable.

The treasurer also oversees Arizona's 529 education savings program, which helps families plan for education and workforce training. Expanding awareness of this tool will empower more Arizonans to invest in their future.

This office doesn't need a salesman — it needs a steward. I will protect your tax dollars, promote efficient government and keep Arizona financially strong.

Katherine Haley is a conservative Republican, small business owner, President of the Arizona State Board of Education running for the office of Treasurer. Learn more at KatherineHaley-forAZ.com.

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