



Literature

Sun City authors weigh in on book bans; **4**



INDEPENDENT

Stitchers

Sewing Club seeks donations for charity projects; **16**



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EPCOR proposes water rate increases for Sun City

By Zev Black
and Jennifer Jimenez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

EPCOR Utilities Inc. is beginning the process of raising water rates in Sun City.

The company is filing a rate case with the Arizona Corporation Commission for all of its water districts, excluding San Tan.

According to a statement from EPCOR officials, the proposal includes three primary components: consolidating smaller systems – Gateway, Sun City, Sun City West and Rio Verde – into the larger Sonoran district, introducing a more gradual approach to adjusting certain costs over time and revising the water usage tiers in Paradise Valley.

Sarah Skaggs, associate director of customer operations at EPCOR, said the company will file this month. Standalone rates with no consolidation and a three year phase-in will reach about \$54.41 for customers using about 7,000

• See **EPCOR** on page 8

Biggs absent as GOP gubernatorial candidates clash at Sun City West forum

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona's Republican gubernatorial primary took center stage June 27 as candidates Scott Neely and U.S. Rep. David Schweikert debated before a crowd of more than 100 Sun City and Sun City West residents, while frontrunner U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs skipped the event and instead addressed attendees through a prerecorded video.

The forum at Palm Ridge Recreation Center was originally scheduled to feature all three Republican candidates. Biggs did not attend, with cam-

• See **Debate** on page 9



Republican gubernatorial candidates U.S. Rep David Schweikert and Scott Neely debate at the Palm Ridge Recreation Center June 27. (Independent Newsmedia/Noah Flug)

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Sun City authors weigh in on book bans

By Zev Black
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Banning books in the United States is nothing new. In fact, the practice predates the U.S., when Puritan authorities in Massachusetts banned books they believed to be immoral. Later, in 1873, the Comstock Act was introduced as the first federal tool for censorship, prohibiting “obscene material” from being shipped in the country.

In the 1900s, books like “Lady Chatterley’s Lover,” “Tropic of Cancer” and “The Grapes of Wrath” faced bans for sexual content.

During the McCarthy era, many books with supposed Communist texts were barred from schools and libraries.

According to the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom, 4,235 books were challenged in 2025. This was the



(Submitted Photo/Metro Creative Graphics)

second highest number ever recorded by the OIF.

Additionally, the group found around 39% of those books are about the LGBTQ+ community and people of color.

Tom Haugsby, a Sun City author, stated in an email that he believes it is unwise to ban books.

While serving on an Ohio school board, a group of Black parents appealed to discontinue the teaching of “Huckleberry Finn” claiming the use of the n-word is “injurious to

their children.”

Haugsby did not believe banning the book was the correct answer, rather finding alternative options.

“Censorship intends to shield us from the total facts of our existence,” he stated. “Librarians, like teachers, develop options for readers. They do not, and should not, preclude curiosity, investigation or freedom of choice. The important task of literature is to free minds and people, not to censor them.”

Dick Waters, another Sun City author, echoed that concern in an email, pointing to a troubling pattern in history.

“If my memory is correct, communist countries tried confiscating books and burning them,” he stated. “It didn’t work out well for them and it won’t work out well for us.”

That said, he believes authors have a duty to carry responsibility

with that freedom.

“Authors have rights, but we also have responsibilities,” he stated. “I might drive over the speed limit, but I know the rules and the limits, along with the consequences.”

Creating more access for books is playing out locally in Sun City.

In mid-June, Sun City Church of the Palms, 14808 N. Boswell Blvd., unveiled a Free Little Library, focusing on books which have been banned in some capacity in the United States.

The library is open for anyone in the community.

Reporter Zev Black can be reached at zblack@iniusa.org. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AZOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

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 Jimenez

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Katherine Haley is a candidate for Arizona treasurer. (Submitted Photo/SCW Republican Club)



Abe Hamadeh is running for re-election for Arizona's 8th district. (Submitted Photo/SCW Republican Club)



Maricopa County Recorder Justin Heap. (Submitted Photo/SCW Republican Club)

Sun City West Republican Club to host US congressman, other leaders

The Sun City West Republican Club is hosting a meeting 9 a.m. Saturday, July 11, at Church on the Green, 19051 R.H. Johnson Blvd.

Social time begins at 8:30 a.m. with coffee and donuts available. The meeting starts at 9:00 am. Paid-up members are admitted without a donation. A \$3 do-

nation will be accepted at the door from non-members, which helps pay for the room rental.

July featured speakers will include:

- Abe Hamadeh, US congressman 8th District, candidate for re-election
- Justin Heap, Maricopa County recorder

• Katherine Haley, candidate for Arizona treasurer

All Republicans and Independents from the Sun Cities and surrounding areas are welcome to attend SCW Republican Club meetings.

For more information, go to scwrepublicans.com.

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Sun City's Dick Waters hated reading, now he's written 10 books

By Zev Black
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

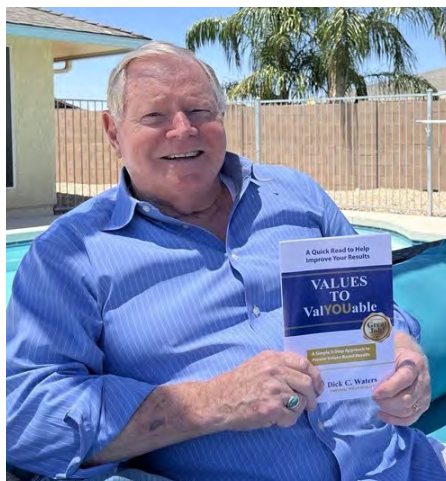
Dick Waters, a Sun City resident, hated to read. He dreaded English class, avoided books whenever he could and only started picking them up because his job demanded it. Then, in 2008 during his battle with cancer, he discovered Danielle Steel's romance novels and never turned back.

Now, 18 years later, he has written 10 books spanning multiple genres. He said he's very comfortable writing in different styles.

"It's not so much the different genres," Waters said. "It's more give me a picture, I'll write a story."

His creativity stems from author James Patterson, famous for his books "Along Came a Spider" and "Kiss the Girls." Waters said he likes to emulate Patterson's style.

"I fell in love with [him]," Waters



Sun City resident Dick Waters sits in his backyard holding one of his books. (Independent Newsmedia/Zev Black)

said. "It was short chapters, changing points of view. As I'm reading I was like 'oh I have to go to bed. Okay, five more pages.' I fell in love with that style."

So, he started writing for his own

pleasure.

Early in his writing career, Waters discovered a group called Indies Unlimited. Each week, a moderator would post a picture prompt, and authors would write short stories based on it.

He uploaded a story each week.

Another inspiration came from his former math teacher and track coach, Francis P. Kelley. Three days before he died, Kelley and Waters met for lunch where Waters was able to tell Kelley how much he meant to everyone he interacted with.

"He was another dad," a teary-eyed Waters said. "I'm writing to give it back to Mr. Kelley... I'm trying to carry his staff. He helped so many people and never knew how much of an impression he had."

Waters dedicated his book "Values to ValYOUable" to Kelley.

Kelley's lesson — that real success

means helping other people succeed — became one of the core pillars of what Waters calls his "Compass of Values." The document, which he first wrote in 1990, lays out 33 moral principles that he said have guided him ever since.

While he writes for himself, he still has other people in mind.

"My real goal is to make other people successful," Waters said. "Everybody can be successful. If you've ever had success, what's the criteria of that success?"

What Waters wants before he dies is simple: to hear how his book helped someone else.

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John Goolsby, from Shepherd of the Hills, Roger Quan, Sun City West Posse, Deborah Gentry from Shepherd of the Hills and Sun City West Posse Cmdr. Carolyn Patterson gather together for the \$4,000 donation from the church. (Submitted photo/Shepherd of the Hills)

Shepherd of the Hills donates \$4,000 to Sun City West Posse

As Arizona temperatures continue to soar, staying hydrated can be more than just good advice because it can save lives.

Recognizing the increased risk of heat-related illness during the summer months, the congregation at Shepherd of the Hills United Methodist Church has donated \$4,000 to the Sun City West Posse to help provide bottled water, electrolyte hydration packets and insulated cooling totes for community members who may be vulnerable to extreme heat.

Health experts recommend drinking water before feeling thirsty, aiming for at least 64 to 80 ounces of water each day, with an additional 24 to 30 ounces per hour when spending time outdoors. Many residents and visitors venture outside for yard work, shopping, recreation or other activities without bringing enough water.

To help meet this need, members of the Sun City West Posse carry insulated cooling bags stocked with bottled water while patrolling neighborhoods and shopping areas, allowing them to offer immediate relief to

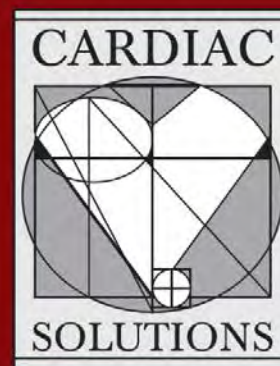
individuals who may be experiencing heat distress. The posse headquarters is designated by Maricopa County as an official hydration center where anyone can stop in for water and flavored electrolyte hydration packets.

While many of the posse's hydration supplies are provided through the United Way, additional community support helps ensure these lifesaving resources remain available throughout the hottest months of the year.

"Our community is strongest when neighbors care for one another," said Pastor Deborah Lerner from Shepherd of the Hills.

"We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Sun City West Posse in helping keep our neighbors safe, healthy, and hydrated during Arizona's challenging summer season."

This donation reflects Shepherd of the Hills' ongoing commitment to serving the wider community through practical acts of compassion and support, helping local organizations meet real needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the West Valley.



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FROM THE COVER

EPCOR

• From page 1

gallons per month. Current rates in Sun City are about \$30.99 per month, with Sun City West at \$39.15.

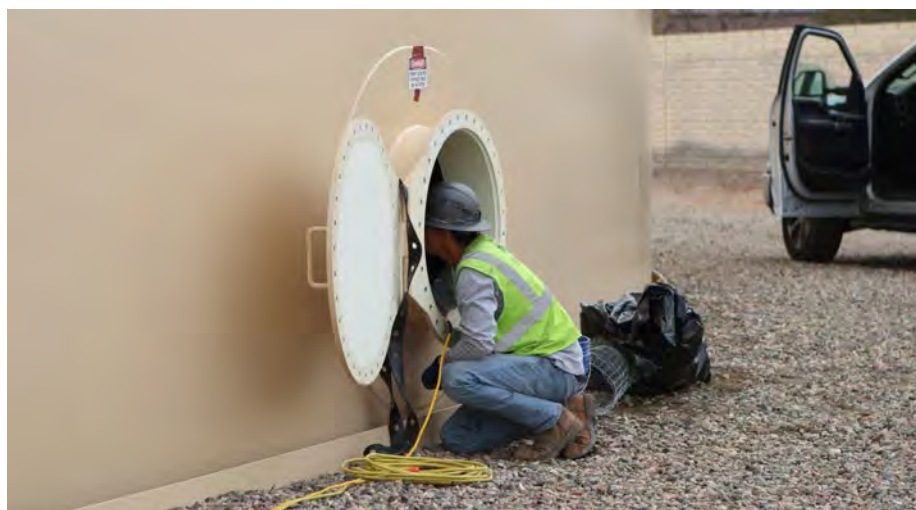
Sun City resident Jill Duckett said she's "very sad" about this proposal. "I have many rental homes in Sun City, and this puts an extreme taxation on tenants," she said.

Duckett added that, in her experience, EPCOR's bill is about \$70 per month. She said that generally doesn't change no matter how much or how little water she uses.

"This leads me to believe that there are too many fees on what EPCOR charges," she said. "I don't disagree that the price of water should go up because of the availability and supply and demand. However, the cost of servicing this water district is more expensive than I believe it should be."

EPCOR's current rates residents are based on 2019 and 2021 cost of service levels, while inflation has increased by approximately 25%-30%, Skaggs said.

Proposed consolidation helps to establish a shared rate structure, stabilizes rates with costs spread across customers, reduces large rate swings, improves reliability with connected systems and helps control costs and support long term water planning,



Work being completed on a water tank at EPCOR. (Independent Newsmedia File Photo)

said Skaggs.

Based on the information provided by EPCOR officials, the proposed water rate change for a 4,000 gallon water user is \$39.87

About 32 cents of that goes into capital investment, 31 cents covers operating costs and 34 cents goes to taxes and regulatory items. That leaves about 3 cents return on investment, but Skaggs said it is just an opportunity, not a guarantee.

"As costs increase, it directly reduces that margin, and at some point we cannot continue to absorb that," she explained.

She said \$56 million is needed annually to maintain the current service.

A formal rate request can take up to two years to review and is based

on the cost from 2025. Customers are notified to share comments and attend meetings. Every question will be reviewed, Skaggs said.

EPCOR officials believe the hike is needed to protect the community and water supply today and in the future by replacing aging pipes, well and facility and expanding the water systems and strengthening storage and delivery, Skaggs said. Water can be moved where it is needed, when it is needed.

Consolidation is being proposed between Sun City, Sun City West and Rio Verde.

"It is a shared grade structure sharing the same people, facility, customer services and access, which helps establish rates, reduces large rate swings and improves reliability,"

said Skaggs.

Other challenges include Arizona facing growing water supply issues, an ongoing drought and increase in demand. She said utilities like EPCOR must plan and invest, adding there is no risk whatsoever for water resources at this time.

Residents can review materials at epcor.com, where the entire rate application will be available for review.

Additionally, if individuals want to know how this will specifically impact a water bill that is not 7,000 or 4,000 gallon usage, they can contact EPCOR customer service and information will be provided about what this rate increase means specifically to an individual bill. Email mywater@epcor.com.

EPCOR officials believe growth pays for growth, and if a large industrial customer comes into the area, they must pay their own way.

"If we have to build infrastructure or upgrade, they pay for that and either they build it or give it to us to maintain," she added.

Cynthia Zwick, Arizona Resident Utilities Consumer Office director, said these in-person meetings provide an opportunity for customers to have a private conversation with company leaders.

"Kudos to EPCOR at this point for holding these information sessions before filing," she said. "I do believe

• See **EPCOR** on page 12

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FROM THE COVER

Debate

• From page 1

paign staffer Grant Steiber citing a “scheduling conflict” and declining further comment. His campaign instead submitted a prerecorded video that was played for the audience.

Biggs’ absence quickly became an issue during the forum, with both Neely and Schweikert suggesting the congressman was avoiding a live debate.

“Andy Biggs didn’t show up today because he doesn’t want to face me in a forum where my microphone is not muted,” Neely said.

Schweikert struck a similar tone, telling the audience, “You’ve got to show up at every group like this. You show up everywhere and you earn it.”

In his prerecorded remarks, Biggs

centered his campaign on Arizona’s affordability crisis, calling it “the loss of the American dream.”

“Young people going out, they don’t think they can afford to buy a home these days,” Biggs said. “And we need to make sure that they can, because that’s when they get on the ladder. They build families, they form families, which preserves our history.”

He argued that Arizona should reduce its dependence on California fuel by bringing additional pipelines from Texas into the state, saying lower fuel prices would ripple through the broader state economy. Biggs also blamed Gov. Katie Hobbs’ housing policies for increasing home prices and said Arizona should expand its housing supply.

Biggs highlighted his experience in state government and Congress, saying he knows “how to get things

done.”

“I know how to work with people across the aisle,” he said, citing legislative work with Democratic leaders including Hakeem Jeffries, Pramila Jayapal and Jerry Nadler.

Neely, making his second run for governor, focused heavily on education, skilled trades and housing affordability.

“I’m the candidate who’s going to bring back trade schools, wood shop, metal shop, vocational training,” Neely said.

“We’re going to cut the college budgets 30%. We’re going to have a carve-out for trades.”

He argued artificial intelligence will eliminate many white-collar jobs over the next decade and said Arizona should prepare students for skilled labor careers instead.

Neely also proposed eliminating property taxes for Arizona residents

65 and older, calling it overdue relief for longtime taxpayers.

“Sixty-five plus will not pay property tax under my administration. Period.”

The candidate repeatedly attacked Biggs throughout the forum, urging voters to examine what he called the “Biggs Files” on his campaign website.

“I want to point out the Biggs Files,” Neely said. “It’s his voting record. ... There are other things there too, and it’s quite alarming.”

Schweikert emphasized his record in Congress and argued Arizona’s affordability problem has become the state’s defining issue.

“We’re in rough shape,” Schweikert said. “Over 45th in affordability. In the last two years, wages have gone down in Arizona. Our

• See **Debate** on page 12

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Sun Citian wonders where singles' rec center fees go

This is in response to Donna Doft's June 10, 2026, editorial, Should singles pay the same rec fees as couples? I totally agree.

After talking to a resident who lived in Sun City for over 25 years, she told me that they were grandfathered in to only pay the amount for singles. It was half the amount of the Recreation Centers of Sun City fees that we continue to pay as couples. Where are those additional fees that singles have to pay allocated to?

As residents, we need to examine and question why singles should have to pay the additional recreation fee when at one time they did not have to pay double the recreation fees.

Where are those additional fees allocated to? Are they going to those who are snowbirds who are coming in for a short time with their families to live in Sun City?

Are some residents delinquent in paying their fees due to the high costs of recreation fees, equipment and maintenance?

Recreation fees have skyrocketed over the years. I realize that prices for equipment and maintenance are costly. However, look at how many people live in Sun City and continue to move here because they enjoy all the amenities.

With this many people who live in Sun City, I would think that prices not just for recreation fees but other fees that Sun City residents must pay should be kept to a minimum.

Let the singles continue to question why they have to pay the double recreation fees. Let the singles question why was this change made when at one time singles only had to

LETTERS

pay half the recreation fee.

Ann Canto
SUN CITY

This writer is using a pen name.

Reader agrees RCSC should update bylaws

May I add my two cents' worth, i.e. experience, to Ken Litwak, who shared about efforts to acquire a Sun City privilege card for his companion?

My husband and I have a trust but because I am a beneficiary, and the deed to the house does not have both of our names on it, I, too, had to purchase a yearly privilege card and was told the same thing about the archaic bylaws, which may have been understandable in the 1960s and '70s but certainly not in this day and age.

The only thing that we and innumerable others can think of is that it is a great money-maker? It certainly does not make sense otherwise and I would love to hear the Recreation Centers of Sun City board's explanation.

Diane Spiger
SUN CITY

Why do voters keep electing those who don't serve us well?

Once again APS and EPCOR are asking for significant rates increases. Once again people rightfully are upset about how much these rate increases are. Now here is the irony of all this.

The elected representatives that sit on the board of APS and EPCOR are all Republicans. Year after year people complain about these rate increases and then go back and put the same people who approved these increases back in office.

Please send your comments to
AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

This reminds me of the old saying that the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting a different result.

Once again people voting against their own interests, to satisfy a political opinion.

Another question I have is since many Sun City residents do not pay school taxes, why do we keep electing Republicans to the State House who gave away a billion dollars in education vouchers with no receipt or proof of how the money was spent? Meanwhile, Arizona ranks 45th in school funding with our students ranked 40th in the nation.

What? You want poorly educated kids to graduate in Arizona and you don't care how poorly these students rank? Well, I can tell you businesses wanting to come to Arizona care about an educated work force.

Just another conundrum that us Arizona citizens must deal with because people don't bother to take the time to research who they are voting for and why.

James Kepler
SUN CITY

Photoshoot raises questions about Hamadeh

As a resident of Arizona's 8th Congressional District, I was embarrassed to see Congressman Abe

• See **Letters** on page 11



BOCCE WINNERS

The Sun City Bocce Club's May tournament winners are Tony Ariola, first place, Joyce Gottmann, second, Dennis Johnson, third, and Verna Johnson, fourth. (Submitted photo/Rhonda Nelson)

Letters

• From page 10

Hamadeh recently become the subject of national ridicule.

National media outlets mocked a series of highly staged photographs from Hamadeh's congressional office that looked more like a fashion shoot than the workplace of a member of Congress.

Rather than drawing attention to his work on behalf of Arizona, Hamadeh generated headlines that raised serious concerns about his judgment and priorities.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Over the past year, his official social-media presence has repeatedly produced distractions ranging from peculiar photo opportunities and questionable intern content to posts that appear designed to attract attention rather than inform constituents.

At the same time, comments are frequently blocked or restricted on his official congressional Facebook page, preventing constituents from publicly responding to much of the content he publishes.

Residents of AZ-08 deserve to be known for our communities, businesses, military veterans, retirees, workers and families — not for becoming the latest source of internet mockery.

Whether one agrees with Congressman Hamadeh's politics or not, surely we can agree that the goal of a congressional office should be effective public service, not social media stunts.

Arizona faces serious challenges. Residents of AZ-08 deserve a representative focused on solving problems and exercising the sound judgment required of a member of Congress.

As voters evaluate who deserves to represent AZ-08 in the future, they should ask themselves a simple question: Is this the judgment, seriousness and leadership they expect from a member of Congress?

Anne Whitmore
SUN CITY WEST

This writer is using a pen name. Congressional District 8 includes parts of Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise.

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COUNTY

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

Craig Wismer ●

CONSTABLE ARROWHEAD

Write-in Hunter Blake ●

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GOVERNOR

Andy Biggs ●

ATTORNEY GENERAL

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STATE

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STATE MINE INSPECTOR

Les Presmyk ●

SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Kimberly Yee ●

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FREE SUMMER MOVIE, LUNCH SERIES RETURNS

Shepherd of the Hills United Methodist Church, 13658 W. Meeker Blvd., invites the community to its free summer movie series. Held on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, through September, the series offers a complimentary lunch at 12:30 p.m. and a movie at 1 p.m. A love offering will be available to support the series. This year's movie lineup includes: July 8 - "The Help"; July 22 - "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel"; Aug. 12 - "Where the Crawdads Sing"; Aug. 26 - "Casablanca"; Sept. 9 - "As Good as It Gets" and Sept. 23 - "Fried Green Tomatoes." Call 623-584-2280 or visit shepherdumc.org for more information. (Submitted photo/Luna Lorenzano)

FROM THE COVER

EPCOR

- From page 8

the company is coming to those communities to truly hear what their customers have to say about it, and that is incredibly important. This is an opportunity to have customer concerns and support heard."

Zwick said once EPCOR files, RUCO will file a motion to intervene in the case 30 days later. She said

throughout this process, it is unusual for a company to get everything they are asking for, but the exact outcome is unknown until the ACC votes.

Email ratecasequestions@epcor.com.

Reporter Zev Black can be reached at zblack@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.

Debate

- From page 9

working middle class is getting poorer here."

He outlined proposals to lower prescription drug prices, streamline state permitting through artificial intelligence and modernize government operations.

"We have the technology," Schweikert said, arguing permit reviews that now take months could eventually

be completed in minutes.

Schweikert also devoted attention to Arizona's long-term water supply, describing it as a management challenge rather than an immediate shortage. Closing the debate, Schweikert argued that Republicans face a pivotal election.

"As of a month ago, there are now more Independents in Arizona than there are Republicans," he said. "If we do not win the Independents, we are in dark, dark and troubled times."

Primary Election Day is July 21.

ENGAGEMENT

Resident stays engaged

When Michael Peters moved into Sun City West Assisted Living, 13810 W. Sandridge Drive, he didn't just settle in — he got involved and became engaged right away.

Peters is a fixture on the community's welcoming committee, greeting new residents and helping run events and programs. He calls Bingo. He shakes hands. He shows up. He even earned his food handler's license so he could pitch in at happy hour, a detail that says everything about the kind of resident he is.

"Michael is one of those people who makes this place better just by being here," said Carrie Kaye, life enrichment director of Sun City West Assisted Living. "He doesn't wait to be asked; he shows up, rolls up his



Michael Peters (Submitted photo/Dawn Miller)

sleeves, and does whatever needs to be done. Getting his food handler's license so he could help at happy hour? That's just Michael. We're lucky to have him."

Visit pegasuseniorliving.com/sun-city-west for more information.

WRITER

Local author a finalist for indie book award

Local author Rita Hanner-Ward has been named a finalist in the 20th annual National Indie Excellence Book Awards for her novel, "Tears of Iemanjá," recognized in the category of Multicultural Fiction.

The NIEA, now in its 20th year, is a program honoring books from independent authors and small presses across the country. Each year, the competition highlights works that demonstrate exceptional storytelling, craft and presentation.

"Tears of Iemanjá" has already been recognized as the winner of the International Impact Book Award in Romance, Multicultural & Interracial. This new honor marks another

milestone for Hanner-Ward, who writes under the pen name Kiva Wolfe and is currently expanding into screenwriting.

"This recognition is deeply meaningful," Hanner-Ward said, "and I'm honored to be included among so many talented independent authors."

The full list of winners and finalists is available at indieexcellence.com.

"Tears of Iemanjá" is available through major online retailers, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Google Play, and in large print through IngramSpark's global distribution.

Visit ritahanner-ward.com and kivawolfe.net for more information.



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WELCOME

Church welcomes new lead pastor

Dr. Jay Knoles is the new lead pastor at Church on the Green, 19051 N. R.H. Johnson Blvd.

Knoles began his Christian journey in the early 1970s as a graduate of Teen Challenge. He soon met and married his wife of 53 years, Doris.

Following his call to full-time ministry, Knoles was ordained with the Assemblies of God in 1978 while on active duty as a chaplain's assistant in the United States Air Force.

He has earned an M.A. in Biblical Studies at Fuller Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

He has served in a range of ministerial endeavors, including 42 years as a missionary to Native

Americans, Bible college professorships and pastoring in Winslow.

Knoles and Doris have lived in Sun City West since 2018.

She has served as administrative assistant to college presidents at two colleges and taught financial workshops.

She now serves Church on the Green as the executive administrator.

Sunday morning services are at 9:30 a.m. and the weekly Bible study takes place 6 p.m. Wednesdays.

From September through May, the church serves Sun City West, Sun City and surrounding communities with the following assistance on Thursdays: food distribution 8:30-10:30 a.m. and a soup kitchen with a free meal 10:30 a.m.-noon.

TRAFFIC



The PORA Roads, Traffic and Safety Committee meeting always draws a favorable crowd to express concerns to various local officials. (Independent Newsmedia/Jennifer Jimenez)

Signal light timing monitored by MCDOT system

Database keeps record of happenings at various intersections

By Jennifer Jimenez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The timing of traffic signals continues to be a concern for Sun City West

residents.

Specifically, individuals are inquiring about the timing of yellow lights, as well as the longer duration of what residents believe the red lights are running. This includes the inter-

• See **Traffic** on page 18



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MEETING



The Northwest Valley Democrat Club recently hosted speakers from Save Our Schools Arizona. (Submitted photo/Rudy Grom)

Save Our Schools representative briefs Northwest Valley Democrats

The Northwest Valley Democrats Club concluded its spring meeting schedule with a May 13 gathering featuring two speakers from the Save Our Schools Arizona organization.

SOSA is a nonpartisan, community-based organization dedicated to strengthening public education statewide. Two of their five core priorities include keeping public funds in public schools and ensuring accountability for all public education spending were addressed in their presentation.

At the national level, Arizona public schools rank near the bottom in several critical educational areas. The Empowerment Scholarship Account program now costs the state over \$1 billion annually.

The implementation of the program has come under fire for years, as large amounts of monies are being improperly spent without accountability. SOSA is working to tighten the qualification requirements for the ESA program and will continue its fight to improve Arizona Public schools, as it advocates for increased

teacher salaries and smaller class sizes.

Additional information about Save Our Schools Arizona can be found at sosarizona.org.

A volunteer member of Organized Solidarity Collective Arizona also spoke to the club about their mission, which includes supporting immigrant families who have had a family member deported. She thanked the club members who have volunteered their support, plus those who have donated items and/or made financial contributions.

Prior to closing the meeting, club president Maria Bears reminded all members to stay involved over the summer. The club website will have updated information on local events during the upcoming months, prior to the next scheduled club meeting in the fall.

A monthly happy hour will be 5 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month, June- August, with additional club information at northwestvalleydemocrat.com.

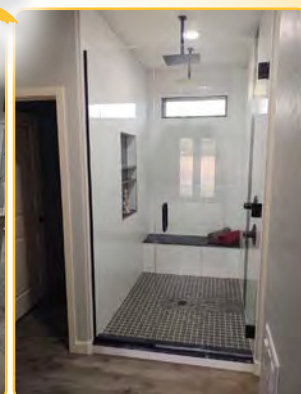
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CLUBS



Emily Dorazio, her daughter Bernadette, and club members Janet Fanning, Judy Holder, Mary Jane Grima and Brenda Piana. (Submitted photo/Mary Jane Grima)

Sewing club seeks donations for charity projects

The Bell Stitchers, a volunteer sewing club based at the Bell Recreation Center, is dedicated to creating handmade items for those in need. The group regularly donates to local nursing homes, Hospice of the Valley, veterans, the Navajo Nation, Foster Children Choices, Delivering Dreams and area elementary schools.

Recently, one of the club's lifetime members, Emily Dorazio, who celebrated her 105th birthday in April, was brought by her daughter, Bernadette. Dorazio was a very active member who sewed many children's clothes and crocheted and knitted other items.

The club also sells many items are on display in the room. Most popular items available are bowl cozies, scrubbies, hanging towels and

aprons. Members are starting to make jelly roll placemats and have them on display.

Members sew a variety of items, including children's clothing, adult clothing protectors (bibs), lab robes, quilts, teacher aprons, chair book bags and other requested pieces.

The club's stash of material is dwindling members need donations, especially of cotton fabric and batting and polyester material used in lap robes; Children's ponchos are made with fleece. Donations are accepted during opening hours. Summer hours run through Sept. 30: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday-Friday and the first and third Saturday.

Membership is open to RCSC cardholders. Annual dues are \$3 and run through Dec. 31.

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Civility Checklist

*How to engage in respectful, honest
& civil dialogue about public issues*

- ☐ **Take the high road.** Respond to the topic — not the person. Refrain from demonizing others for their opinions. Assume those you disagree with are, like you, genuinely interested in improving the community.
- ☐ **Be respectful.** Bullying, public humiliation, insults, name-calling, harassment, and threats directed at another person — or that person's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. — have no place in civil discussions. Find ways to respectfully disagree without questioning someone's character or motives.
- ☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes. When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.
- ☐ **Don't misrepresent.** Always identify your opinions as opinions (not stating opinions as facts). Never misrepresent the views of others or falsely claim your opinions represent someone else. If quoting the words of others, identify and credit the source.
- ☐ **Listen & learn.** It's both polite and respectful to listen to those we disagree with (as well as those we support) and be genuine in our attempts to understand their point of view. Expand your mind by thoughtfully seeking out views that don't agree with your own.
- ☐ **Look for common ground.** When disagreeing with others, look for even small areas of agreement — which can be the gateway to working together for the greater good.
- ☐ **Respect privacy.** Keep private things private — whether it involves your own information or those with whom you disagree. Revealing private information about someone else is rude, unethical, potentially harmful and, in many cases, illegal.
- ☐ **Set a good example.** Practice civil behavior online as well as in public and in your interaction with others. Encourage others to practice these civil behaviors. And it's OK to challenge disrespectful behavior — but be courteous, respectful and helpful in your approach.



Now that you've read the checklist, take
the Civility Pledge at [yourvalley.net/
civility-pledge](http://yourvalley.net/civility-pledge).

Sun City Lions honor food bank founder

The Sun City Midweek Bell Lions Club recently honored Jesse Ramirez, Valley View Community Food Bank founder, with the Melvin Jones Fellowship. One of the missions of Lions Clubs International is "feeding the hungry," which the Lions believe is epitomized by Ramirez. Each year, the food bank feeds hundreds of thousands of people.



Lion Jan Wagner and Valley View Community Food Bank founder Jesse Ramirez. (Submitted Photo/Jan Wagner)

Traffic

• From page 14

sections of R.H. Johnson and Stardust boulevards, as well as R.H. Johnson Boulevard and 151st Avenue.

Hasina Luna, Maricopa County Department of Transportation traffic design branch manager, said the operations department is in charge of the cameras and the performance utilizes measuring tools.

"They found everything is done according to standard and policies and there are no issues going on. I have mentioned it in my email with John (Quinn), there is a database and every single second is calculated and every minute captured. Someone did not go out in the field and just look," she explained.

The data shows the left turn demand is frequent and traffic clears before the light turns. Only 15% of cycles show use of all the available green time on a left turn. More data showed 23% of cycles

left turn ended the phase early and it looks like the standards are being met. Luna said the system is regularly monitored and that will continue to happen to see if anything drops off or goes bad.

Sun City West Poses Cmdr. Carolyn Patterson said she would like MC-DOT to provide the expectations at specific intersections, such as Camino del Sol and R.H. Johnson because it seems cars sit there a long time at a red light.

"If you provide the specific time, we can look into what occurred there exactly at that time using the database," said Luna.

John Quinn, committee chairman, said in 2024 the left turn lane at Meeker onto Camino del Sol went through a traffic study and any issues were addressed at that time.

Reporter Jennifer Jimenez can be reached at jjimenes@iniusa.org. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

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THEATER

TheaterWorks opens season with 'Annie' in Peoria

44-actor cast includes local young talent and therapy dog Bailey

TheaterWorks is opening its 2026-27 main stage season with the iconic musical "Annie" at the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, 10580 N. 83rd Drive.

With an uplifting message of hope, the show continues to inspire audiences of all ages more than four decades after its Broadway debut.

TheaterWorks Director of Patron Experience Paul Pedersen believes the musical's enduring popularity lies in its universal appeal.

Leading the production is Valley director and choreographer Molly Lajoie, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and AMDA New York. Lajoie has worked extensively throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area as a director, choreographer and performer. She currently serves as a faculty associate in Arizona State University's Music Theatre and Opera Program and is the director of Phoenix Theatre Company's Summer of Dance.

Music direction for the production is provided by TheaterWorks Music Director Lincoln Wright.

The title role of Annie will be played by Azra Kearns, who TheaterWorks audiences may remember from her performance as Matilda in the company's 2022 production of "Matilda." Joining her is Shani Barrett as Miss Hannigan. Barrett returns to TheaterWorks for the first time since appearing as Diana Morales in the company's 2018 production of "A Chorus Line."

The cast also features Scott Hyder as Oliver Warbucks, Lynn D'Ambro-

si as Grace Farrell, Vinny Chavez as Rooster, Savoy Antoinette as Lily St. Regis, and Everly McClurg as Molly.

The production features a multi-generational cast of 44 performers, including 17 young actresses portraying Annie's fellow orphans, creating a vibrant and energetic ensemble that showcases talent from across the Valley.

One of the production's most anticipated stars, however, may be its four-legged cast member.

For the role of Sandy, TheaterWorks has cast Bailey, an eight-year-old Golden Retriever from Sun City West. While this marks Bailey's theatrical stage debut, he is already well-known throughout the Northwest Valley as "Bailey the Book Dog."

Alongside his owners, Wendy and Sid, Bailey regularly volunteers at two local hospitals and three branches of the Surprise Public Library, where he helps encourage young readers through literacy programs. Bailey is also featured in the production's primary promotional photography alongside Kearns and Barrett.

Featuring beloved songs such as "Tomorrow," "Maybe," and "It's the Hard Knock Life," Annie tells the story of a determined young orphan whose optimism changes the lives of everyone she meets. Its themes of hope, perseverance and family have made it a cherished favorite for generations of theatergoers.

Tickets for "Annie" are on sale now and start at \$38. Tickets may be purchased online at theaterworks.org or by calling the TheaterWorks Box Office at 623-815-7930 (option 0). The Box Office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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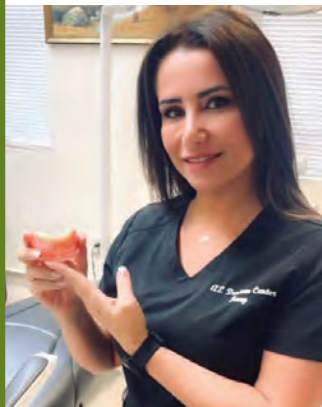
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SERVICE

Resident serves more than 33 years in Navy

Prepares to celebrate his 103rd birthday

By Jennifer Jimenez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Later this month, a 25-year Sun City West resident and veteran will celebrate his 103rd birthday and is a living testament to the values of duty, sacrifice and patriotism.

Wilfred E. Blessing is a retired captain from the United States Navy who was a pilot in both WWII and the Korean War.

His wife Suzanne Blessing said his experiences and stories are a treasure and gratitude to others.

"His life and service make him a blessing to many people," she said.

Wilfred will be featured on the Discovery Channel Healing Heroes Foundation, a program that preserves history by documenting the lives of U.S. Military heroes in January 2027.

Part of the interview he took part in includes his time serving in World War II and Korea for 33 and one-half years. Wilfred said he had two careers throughout his life, including the Navy and architecture.

Wilfred graduated from high school at age 16 and he needed a parent signature to join the Navy then.

In 1941 his father passed away and while his mother did not want him to go, she signed off and he went to San Diego.

Throughout his military career, Wilfred flew 17 different types of planes, which was pretty much everything the Navy had at that time. When he turned 19, Wilfred said he received his wings, but he became a stenographer where he was on active duty in San Diego with the fleet. Wil-



Suzanne and Wilfred Blessing celebrate his experiences in the military. (Independent News-media/Jennifer Jimenez) Wilfred Blessing and a crew of Navy members go over maps. (Submitted photo/Suzanne Wilfred)

fred said the only choice the Navy gave him was whether he wanted to fly single or a multi-engine planes.

"I became an instrument flight instructor, and after that tour of duty, I went into transport flying equipment and supplies into the islands as they were taken," he said.

When Wilfred graduated from high school, he was ripe for the draft, and he wanted to make his own choice.

After joining the reserves, he had to make a choice. Either go to college, compliments of the Navy or join the airlines because he was qualified as an airline captain but decided to continue with the Naval Reserves.

Blessing said in part, the Navy was a defining element of his life and he owes the Navy for a great deal of training and experiences.

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Resident raises concerns during emergency incidents

AFMA officials say ‘steer it and clear it’ when it comes to minor accidents

By Jennifer Jimenez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The common misconception when a vehicle collision occurs is to keep the vehicle in the exact place of the incident. However, Arizona Fire & Medical Authority officials suggest “steer it and clear it.”

Deputy Chief Kane Nixon said if the accident is a minor fender-bender, nobody is seriously injured and the vehicles can still safely drive, then it should be moved.

“Carefully move the cars out of the travel lanes to the shoulder, a median, or a nearby parking lot. Leaving drivable vehicles in the middle of a roadway dramatically increases the risk of a secondary, much worse chain-reaction crash, and it creates massive traffic backups that delay our emergency vehicles from getting to other critical calls,” he explained.

Moving to safety doesn’t change who was at fault, but it absolutely keeps everyone safer, he added.

If residents are involved in a traffic accident, it depends on where the vehicle comes to rest, but the default rule of thumb is if the car is in the middle of a busy roadway it is generally much safer staying inside it with your seatbelt buckled until emergen-



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cy services arrives, Nixon said.

He described the vehicle as a multi-ton shield equipped with airbags and crumple zones.

“The moment you step out onto a busy street, you become an unprotected pedestrian exposed to passing traffic. Now, there are two major exceptions. If your vehicle is on fire, or if you’ve managed to safely pull completely off the roadway onto a wide

Sun City West resident Angie Jones captured this photo of a car accident near the intersection of Camino del Sol and Spanish Gardens. (Submitted photo/Angie Jones)

shoulder or a nearby parking lot, then it makes sense to exit carefully and move to a safe sidewalk or grassy area,” said Nixon.

Individuals stuck in a lane of traffic should stay there, turn on the hazard lights and wait for the big fire apparatus to block the traffic.

Sun City West resident Angie Jones said she is concerned with the way drivers approach accident scenes and think some are posing more of a risk.

When approaching an accident, Nixon said slow down and if at all possible, avoid the area entirely. In

fact, he said driving “as normal” past emergency scene is incredibly dangerous. In addition, if individuals hear of a blocked intersection, he said taking a different route is helpful because it keeps the perimeter clear so fire engines, ambulances and police cars can maneuver quickly.

“The absolute best way passing drivers and pedestrians can help us is by focusing entirely on their own safety and giving us the room to do our jobs. I know our community is incredibly caring, and people naturally want to see if they can lend a

• See **Emergency** on page 23

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Emergency

• From page 22

hand, which is a beautiful trait of Sun City West. But an active emergency scene is a complex, high-risk work zone,” he explained.

The exceptions are if individuals are directly involved or have a specific medical skill and witnessed the crash.

“Arizona law requires drivers to exercise caution whenever they approach a stationary vehicle displaying flashing or warning lights,” MCSO Sgt. Joaquin Enriquez stated in an email. The best thing a driver can do is change lanes to move away from a vehicle on the side of the road. However, should this not be possible, it is acceptable to maintain a safe speed under Arizona’s Move Over Law. “This law helps protect law enforcement (MCSO) firefighters, EMS personnel and stranded motorists who may be working or standing near moving traffic,” Enriquez stated. He added that personal safety is the number one priority should someone witness a crash. After that, she advised to call 911 if there are “injuries, vehicles blocking traffic, fire or other hazards.”

When calling 911, individuals should provide the location, number of vehicles involved, any injuries and immediate danger. Enriquez added that people should not place them-

selves in danger trying to help others unless it is “an immediate life threatening emergency and it can be done safely.

“Unless you are trained to provide emergency medical care, please avoid moving injured persons unless they are in immediate danger, such as from fire or oncoming traffic,” she stated. “Witnesses often provide valuable information that helps MCSO accurately determine what occurred. However, the public should avoid interfering with investigations or remaining at the scene longer than necessary once their information has been provided.”

Nixon said residents can protect emergency personnel by treating their workspace with the same caution as a high-risk construction zone. Put cell phones away, eliminate distractions inside your car and pay close attention to the firefighters or police officers who are directing traffic. In addition, drivers should never drive over a fire hose lying across the road. Nixon said it is an absolute lifeline for putting out fires and protecting crews.

“If the community focuses on protecting us, we can focus 100% of our energy on the emergency,” he added.

Reporter Jennifer Jimenez can be reached at jjimenez@iniusa.org. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



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INDEPENDENT NEWS MEDIA

HEALTH



Graham Johnson, CEO of Denova Collaborative Health, spoke at the grand opening for their newest location of its integrated health care clinic. (Denova Collaborative Health)

Denova Collaborative Health opens integrated care clinic in Peoria

Denova Collaborative Health, an outpatient behavioral health provider, celebrated the grand opening of its newest integrated healthcare clinic in Peoria, expanding access to primary care, psychiatry and therapy services in the west Valley.

The clinic held a ribbon-cutting event June 16.

Peoria Chamber of Commerce President & CEO Rhonda Carlson emceed the event, with Peoria Mayor Pro Tem Matt Bullock and Miss Peoria Charis Sothras also in attendance.

The new 4,094-square-foot clinic, located at 13128 N. 94th Drive, Suite 202, includes six primary care exam rooms and four psychiatry and therapy rooms. Patients can access in-person and virtual appointments now.

The clinic's integrated care model

brings together primary care and behavioral health providers to support patients' physical and mental health needs in one location. Services include preventive care, wellness visits, psychiatry, therapy and medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders, among many others.

"This new clinic reflects our continued commitment to improving access to high-quality, integrated healthcare across Arizona," said Graham Johnson, CEO of Denova Collaborative Health. "As the west Valley continues to grow, so does the need for accessible primary care and behavioral health services. By expanding our footprint in Peoria, we're making it easier for residents to receive coordinated care close to home."

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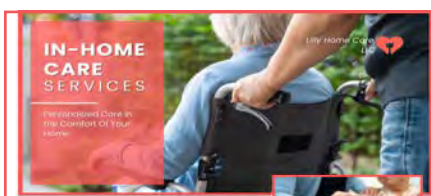
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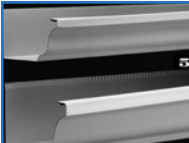
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