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INDEPENDENT

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July 8, 2026 Volume 29 Issue 27

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Public safety needs boost as city grows

Master plan to set roadmap
for next 10 years of service

By Jason Stone

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Surprise already spends about half of its general fund on public safety.

But if the city wants to keep up with the explosive growth, it will have to do more.

Stu Gary, the fire practice principal at Citygate, a management consulting firm that specializes in public safety for local governments, told the city council this month that over the next five years the police department must have dozens of more people on staff, both the Police and Fire-Medical departments need numerous new stations and the departments need to start thinking more like those in bigger metro cities.

Citygate is helping Surprise put together an updated public safety master plan from the original 2017 one that was part of the 2030 general plan.

• See **Growth** on page 16



Future generations to wonder what's inside City Hall capsule

By Jason Stone

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A little bit of Surprise history was sealed up as the city celebrates America's 250th birthday.

Mayor Kevin Sartor created a time capsule

project where department heads and the city council placed artifacts in a two-by-three-foot wooden box that will be kept shut until 2076.

"A couple of years from now, there'll be anticipation and wondering what's in there," Sartor said at a box sealing ceremony at City Hall on July 1. "I want to capture this moment

• See **Time** on page 24

Items stored in a time capsule box that will be sealed at City Hall for 50 years include a copy of the Surprise Independent and various contemporary and historical Surprise artifacts. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)



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Write-in hopeful fighting against data center

Deakin is trying long-shot bid because of Project Baccara

By Jason Stone

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Carrie Deakin is running for Surprise City Council the hard way.

The 45-year-old content and software designer and gymnast is not on the ballot in the District 6 race.

She does not have a social media presence of any kind.

She does not have a budget to spend money, nor does she plan to put out any signs.

She has never been to a city council meeting, although she watches them on-line.

She has not even ever talked to any of the current councilmembers.

"This is very grassroots," said Deakin, who recently became an official write-in candidate, meaning her votes will count in the July 21 primary election. "I did not plan to do this very far in advance."

What she does have is passion about one subject: Project Baccara, the massive data center that is planned for Litchfield and Olive avenues, right outside the Surprise city limits.

She said the city council, specifically Chris Judd, the councilmember who currently serves the district and is running for reelection, is not doing anything to push back against the data center, even though it is not in Surprise.

To help affect change with only weeks to go, Deakin said she will likely hit places like grocery stores to introduce herself to the community and wants to do meet-and-greet or open-house type events.

"This is all new to me, so I'm trying to figure it out as I go along," Deakin said.

What has gotten Deakin so fired up are the plans for a massive AI data center and natural gas power plant just a mile from her Rancho Gabriela neighborhood.

The project would be located in an industrial area north of Luke Air Force Base, just 400 feet away from the closest home.



Surprise resident Carrie Deakin is vying for a spot on the city council through a long-shot bid as a write-in candidate. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

Deakin contends not only would Surprise not reap any of the tax benefits but the city would be burdened with pollution, safety issues and diminished property values.

Data centers have been hot button issues, not just locally but across the country. Deakin calls it a nonpartisan issue and a serious concern.

Michigan-based Takanock has invested \$10 billion for the 160-acre Baccara center, which will include two 1 million-square-foot buildings and approximately 700 megawatts of natural gas generators to supply power both to the data center and the regional grid.

The centers are expected to help store critical information like medical records

and financial software.

Construction of the first data center building is scheduled to start later this year with a 2028 target for going online. The second center is slated for a 2030 start date.

Dangerous project

Even though she does not personally post on social media, Deakin found out about the project from a Facebook group called "Project Baccara Opposition." It was a post from former Surprise City Councilmember Todd Tandy that caught her attention.

"It just appeared in my feed one day, and I wondered, 'What is this?'" Deakin

• See **Deakin** on page 18



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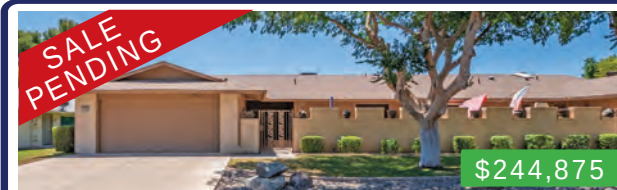


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Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-128th, R-Copperstone Dr.

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Speak Up

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

Corrections

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

Why reader will no longer spending money in Surprise

I live near Surprise. I shop, dine out, take visitors to baseball games and enjoy the arts in Surprise.

I am disappointed that Surprise would host a concentration camp (the regional U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement intake and processing facility that is coming to Surprise).

I am discouraged at the apathy of my neighbors.

The true outsider, in my opinion, is Turning Point USA, with its undue influence on the city administration.

I will take my money elsewhere.

Skip Porter
SUN CITY WEST

This writer is using a pen name. 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.

Political signs are just blight on Surprise's landscape

Once again, political signs blight our city because lawmakers wrote a law that lets them do it. They annoy our sight lines and are meaningless regarding learning about them.

Years ago, I decided to not vote for the first politician who put up a sign. This year, it was across from Sunrise Boulevard as it exited on to Bell Road. Sorry, Jack.

Parker S. Sims
SURPRISE

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.

Abe Hamadeh: Is he making AZ-08 a national punchline?

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

Speak Up

From Nextdoor & Facebook

Here are some comments about stories happening in Surprise:

North Surprise convenience store on P&Z agenda

"Why not (have) commercial land? Services are needed." — **Rich B.**

"Terrible's is a good neighbor. They are clean stores. I lived in Las Vegas where they are based." — **Cathy J.**

"P&Z needs to pause on giving permits. It's ridiculous on how much development Surprise is experiencing. They need to focus on infrastructure, especially widening roads." — **Mary L.**

"I think this would be a 'terrible' idea. Goodnight folks, I'll show myself out." — **Jeff S.**

Council write-in hopeful fighting against data center

"It's not in Surprise, but it will throw tons of pollution into the air of Surprise, El Mirage and Waddell. The data centers are bad enough, but this is an awful place for a project like this." — **April B.**

"Data center is a lot better than some kind of subdivision." — **Kathy M.**

"Another day and something new to complain about." — **Stan G.**

"I don't believe all the rumors and propaganda that the extremists are throwing around to get you riled up." — **Richard D.**

"Since data centers create massive amounts of heat, why not build them up north? We already have massive amounts of heat." — **Karolyn C.**

"Nobody ever wants anything in their backyard but always wants the benefits of it." — **John S.**

"Never vote for a write in candidate." — **Karena J.N.**

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Music shows its power in Surprise community

Worldwide Make Music Day harmonizes through city

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

While people met in a drumming circle at the West Valley Arts HQ Gallery in Surprise, sounds of music happened simultaneously at various sites in the Valley and worldwide.

For the second year, West Valley Arts Council hosted Make Music Day across the West Valley on June 21 to welcome the summer solstice and encourage community involvement in the musical arts. A national event, free music performances and workshops with hands-on activities happened continuously from morning to evening at different venues.

The affair featured drum circles, an “instrument petting zoo,” local musicians singing and bands playing. “It’s a celebration of both music and community. It’s completely accessible,” said Kathy Knecht, WVAC executive director, before a woodwinds workshop held at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Surprise. “It brings people together to have fun. People are doing this around the world, across all cultures and time zones.”

Knecht said more than 78 people went to the Arizona Broadway Theater, which hosted the 602 Stage choir for a high-energy Musical Theater Review, including performing Broadway tunes.

“People stood up and danced. It was very fun,” Knecht said.

Make Music Day originated in 1982 in France as the Fete de la Musique, Knecht said, noting how the event became an annual worldwide celebration held in more than 2,000 cities globally.

The day is open to everyone. Musicians of all ages, skill levels and musical styles come together to share



Ava Whedon, right, enjoys Make Music Day on June 21, along with Cameron Kelly. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

their talents in parks, plazas, businesses, community spaces and neighborhoods.

Knecht said “there’s something for everyone to enjoy.”

A few miles away, WVAC Arts HQ Gallery Manager and Curator Daisy Brady was at the art gallery that transformed in to an “instrument petting zoo.”

“It’s like goat yoga, but with instruments,” Brady said. “It’s a chance for kids to touch, feel and try various musical instruments they wouldn’t get exposure to firsthand. It’s definitely a fun, hands-on environment.”

“You get to try all these instruments out. It’s fun to get to try all these instruments for free,” said Ava Whedon, 21, a senior majoring in civil engineering at Arizona State University.

She attended Make Music Day for the second year with her mother, Jetuan, and 7-year-old brother. The family said it looked forward to having fun again in the drum circle that Lydia A. Woods led.

“We frequent here,” Whedon’s mother said. “I have been coming here since she was his age. They have grown up here. It’s so nice to come to someplace so close.”

Woods was among the day’s lineup of musicians who shared her talents and offered participants a hands-



From left, Luis Centeno, Garrett Kelly and Cameron Kelly participate in Make Music Day in Surprise. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

on opportunity with instruments and to learn something new. She demonstrated how to do rhythmic beats on her hand-crafted African Djembe drums, described as a popular, rope-tuned goblet drum from West Africa.

Before the workshop started, she told the Independent how the Djembe drums have survived throughout history and unified people.

“The African Djembe is the most popular drum. At one point, you could be killed in this country for playing the African Djembe drums. It was illegal to play the African Djembe,” Woods said of the formerly enslaved who were prohibited from playing their drums to prevent them from communicating with each other.

“It’s a remarkable story that that drum has survived peace and love,” said Woods, adding how the Djembe drums is the most played drum in the U.S. and has drawn many people together in one place.

Meanwhile, the international Make Music Day, held on June 21 every year, unified people by connecting them “through the power of music,” described as the “universal language,” as attendees experienced live, free music in many forms and

settings.

Nonprofit organizations including Restore Arts and Global Academy of Phoenix were a part of the local event. The organizations promote giving children free opportunities to experience different instruments through such things as donated instruments and lessons.

“Give a student an opportunity to experience fine arts education that otherwise wouldn’t be possible,” said Garrett Kelly, of Restore Arts, which accepts donated musical instruments, reconditions them, then offers them to students and state-wide nonprofit partners.

Kelly and fellow musician Luis Centeno, of the Global Academy of Phoenix, filled their day showing off instruments. Centeno led the Woodwinds Workshop 101 at Unitarian Universalist Congregation, where he taught participants to play songs including “Hot cross buns” on the recorder, and gave away free harmonicas provided by EASTTOP.

Go to westvalleyarts.org/makemusicday.

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.

Teams set for next year's College Baseball Series

National power Vanderbilt among field in Surprise

Vanderbilt, Nebraska, Oregon State and UC-Santa Barbara will make up the field for the 2027 Surprise College Baseball Series.

REV Entertainment announced the field for the tournament from Feb. 19-21, 2027, at Surprise Stadium.

Matchups, game times and broadcast information for the tournament have not yet been set.

The city of Surprise partnering with REV Entertainment to host the tournament at Surprise Stadium for the second consecutive year after a record-breaking event in 2026. The facility has annually hosted college baseball since its inaugural season in 2003.

"We had tremendous success with the inaugural Surprise College Baseball Series and are excited to build on that momentum in 2027 alongside our partners at the city of Surprise," said Jared Schrom, senior vice president of REV Entertainment. "Next year's field features outstanding programs with passionate fan bases, creating another great opportunity to showcase high-level college baseball in Arizona."

Oregon State will make its 14th consecutive appearance in Surprise dating back to 2014. Nebraska, UC-Santa Barbara and Vanderbilt will each make their first appearances in the Surprise College Baseball Series, although the Cornhuskers and Gauchos have both played at Surprise Stadium in past seasons.

Three of the four teams in the 2027 field — Nebraska, Oregon State and UC-Santa Barbara — are coming off appearances in the 2026 NCAA

Tournament. Vanderbilt, a two-time national champion and one of college baseball's most accomplished programs, rounds out the tournament lineup.

"Surprise has always been like a second home for Oregon State baseball, and we're excited to continue the tradition of opening our season in Arizona," Oregon State head coach Mitch Canham said. "The crowds were even more impressive last year, and I'm looking forward to another great turnout to open the 2027 season."

More than 18,000 fans attended the inaugural Surprise College Baseball Series in 2026, establishing a college baseball tournament attendance record for the venue. The weekend was highlighted

by a single-day record crowd of 6,294 fans on Saturday, which featured No. 12 Oregon State versus No. 24 Arizona and Stanford versus Michigan, the eventual tournament champion.

"The city of Surprise is proud to partner with REV Entertainment once again to host the College Baseball Series at Surprise Stadium," said Kendra Pettis, director of Sports, Entertainment and Culture for the city. "This collaboration presents an exciting opportunity to continue building the tournament, elevate the fan experience and create a meaningful impact on our community."

Home plate reserved tickets go on sale at 9 a.m. Friday, June 26 at CollegeBaseballSeries.com.

This premium three-day pass includes reserved seating behind home plate, reserved parking, a commemorative souvenir hat and express entry into the stadium.

"This collaboration presents an exciting opportunity to continue building the tournament, elevate the fan experience and create a meaningful impact on our community."

Kendra Pettis

Surprise Sports, Entertainment and Culture
Department director



Michigan won the 2026 College Baseball Series at Surprise Stadium with a perfect 3-0 record. (Courtesy REV Entertainment)

Those tickets are \$126 for adults and \$75 for those 13 and under before taxes and fees.

Group tickets of 10 or more and suites are available by contacting the Surprise Stadium box office at 623-222-2222.

General admission tickets will go on sale at a later date following the release of the schedule.

Surprise Stadium will also host a bonus game the day after the tournament on Monday, Feb. 22, when Oregon State faces Kent State.

Fans who purchase a home plate reserved package will have the opportunity to add a \$10 general admission ticket to this bonus game.

Timing and single game general admission ticket information for Monday's game will be announced at a later date.

IF YOU GO

What: Surprise College Baseball Series

When: Feb. 19-21, 2027

Where: Surprise Stadium

Tickets: \$126 (14 and over) and \$75 (13 and younger) for home plate reserved three-day pass

Information: collegebaseballseries.com



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City wants to find community legends for award

Commission to recognize 4 local difference-makers

The Surprise Veterans, Disability and Human Services Commission invited the community to nominate those making a difference in the city for the annual Surprise Community Legend Awards.

The city is accepting nominations for individuals and groups who have contributed to improving the quality of life of others.

Examples could be measurably improving the lives of vulnerable Surprise residents through grass-roots efforts, promoting quality of life, accessibility and equity for all residents of Surprise or linking residents to programs that offer the support needed for a fuller, safer lifestyle.

Nominees must fall into one or more of the following four categories:

- ♦ Individual Legend (must be a Surprise resident for at least two years).
- ♦ Outstanding Youth (must be age 18 or younger).
- ♦ Volunteer of the Year (organizational affiliation must be in the application).
- ♦ Organization of the Year (private, nonprofit or faith-based).

The nomination form is at surpriseaz.gov/CommunityLegend.

All applications must be received



Albert Celozza, executive director of Arizona Interfaith Movement, discusses love and unity at the 2024 Interfaith Breakfast event at the Dysart Unified School District office. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, July 22.

A selection committee comprised of members of the veterans and disability commission will evaluate appli-

cations and award one recipient per category.

Award winners will be formally recognized at the city's annual Inter-

faith and Golden Rule Community Breakfast in September.

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FROM THE COVER



The Surprise Police Department will have to add more than 100 officers and staff members and open more stations within the next five to 10 years as part of a new public safety master plan the city is working on. (Courtesy Surprise Police Department)

Growth

- From page 1

“You have two high-capacity, high-quality, squared-away departments,” Gary told the council on June 16 during a presentation about the needs both departments must face in the next few years.

But with 35,000 new residents expected in five years — what the consultants called a “city within a city” — Surprise is dealing with the reality that it is no longer a small town.

“I’m glad that we’ve gone through this process, so that we know what we’re looking at,” City Councilmember Jack Hastings said

at the June 16 council meeting. “Sometimes it’s better to hear it from a third party.

“We’ve got some work to do.”

Here is what the consultants said Surprise must think about to not only keep up current service levels but to fight through future growth:

Police recommendations

Citygate listed 99 actionable items for the Police Department.

Those include the addition of 115 additional personnel over the next five years, including 53 officers needed for patrol alone.

The current percentage of staff assigned to patrol is at 38%, which

• See **Safety** on page 17

FROM THE COVER

Safety

• From page 16

is far below the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) standard of 60% of an agency's sworn officers being deployed in patrol.

Police Chief Even Becher told the council that the department is changing its patrol coverage because of this.

"This is the most officers that have been on patrol since I've been a part of the city of Surprise," said Becher, a two-decade veteran of the department. "We saw the need to really bring it home back to basics, and that's what we're focused on right now, is really beefing up patrol. And not only just increasing numbers but being strategic about that."

Over five years, the consultants

said Becher will need 64 officers, 13 police aides, 10 sergeants and other dispatchers, crime analysts and lieutenants.

An additional assistant chief is needed to plan, coordinate and implement needed growth.

For fiscal year 2027, 18 new workers are coming to the department, including seven officers, a sergeant and a lieutenant.

These will be added to the 58 full-time employees who joined Surprise Police between 2022 and 2026.

Tom Woodward, manager of the police portion of the study, said the leadership in the department was impressive.

"What we saw is a strong de-

partment, but it's very strained," Woodward said.

Woodward also said the department needs to scale up its "policies and its approach" to that of a metro-level department, which is said to be where Surprise is headed.

Vice Mayor Earle Greenberg asked the chief at the council meeting what happens if the city builds more stations but cannot find enough recruits to

staff them.

"As long as we're willing to invest, I think they'll come," Becher told Greenberg.

Capital needs for the Public Safety Center include an indoor shooting range, a new, upgraded 911 dispatch center and a fleet

maintenance facility.

"It's a large campus," Gary said. "You won't build it all in one year."

The Precinct 200 substation in north Surprise, which broke ground this spring, is expected to open in two years. However, the city will have to plan for two more stations long range.

Fire needs

In the near term, the Fire-Medical Department needs more staffing at its headquarters, a second ladder truck for the north part of the city and a peak-hour ambulance to relieve overloaded core-area medic and rescue units.

Over the next 10 years, about 74 full-time employees will have to be hired to help staff three new stations that will be needed to manage growth.

• See **Fire** on page 23



Jill Bliss

Jill Marie Bliss passed away on June 26, 2026, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, after a 23-year battle with Parkinson's disease.

Born on February 14, 1955, in Baltimore, Maryland, Jill was the daughter of James Wesley Cohen and Constance Cohen.

Jill shared a loving marriage of 27 years with her husband, Chuck Bliss. Together they enjoyed traveling, camping in their motor home, spending time with friends, and building a life centered around shared experiences and companionship.

Jill embraced the Christian faith and found comfort in her spiritual beliefs.

Jill is survived by her husband, Chuck Bliss; her daughters, Jennifer, Jessie, and Katie; her stepchildren, Chad and Shauna; her grandchildren, Lukas, Evie, Allura, and Hannah; her sisters, Joanna and Kathy; and her brothers, Rick and Glen.

Jill enjoyed many hobbies throughout her life, including music,

gardening, golf, mahjong, trout fishing, camping, and playing cards and games with family and friends. She especially enjoyed gathering with friends and participating in the activities and communities that brought her joy.

For more than two decades, Jill faced Parkinson's disease with determination and resilience. Despite the challenges the disease presented, she continued to pursue the activities she enjoyed and maintained the relationships that were important to her.

Jill's life touched many people throughout the years, and she will be remembered by family, friends, and all who knew her.



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Deakin

• From page 4

said. “I just started doing more research. I joined the group. I went to a couple other opposition meetings, and that’s kind of how I got involved with all of this and started learning more about the project and what it is.”

She wrote a letter to Maricopa County Supervisor Debbie Lesko to ask her to oppose a military compatibility permit to the project. But the five supervisors ultimately passed the measure in May.

“There was only one supervisor who voted against this project, and everybody else weren’t asking very tough questions from the developer,” Deakin said.

After striking out with the county, Deakin turned her attention to the city council, which she feels is not taking any stance on the project

SURPRISE CITY COUNCIL PRIMARY ELECTION CANDIDATES

District 1: Nick Haney (unopposed)

District 5: Jack Hastings (unopposed)

District 6: Chris Judd, Carrie Deakin (write-in)

and ignoring hundreds of residents who have signed petitions to stop the project.

“It just feels like they’re not representing us,” Deakin said.

She is particularly aiming for Judd, who is running unopposed on the ballot in District 6. Deakin said he is too quiet on the issue, especially for somebody representing the residents who live closest to the project. She also did not like that Judd used protecting Luke Air Force Base as a reason to oppose the planned ICE detention center in his district, but not

Project Baccara.

“Why are you quiet on Project Baccara, which is much closer, which in my opinion is more of a danger?” Deakin asked about Judd. “If they really care about Luke, why are we not being more proactive?”

With several regulatory items still remaining, the city of Surprise requested eight studies and reports as part of the review process. Those included an air quality report, a noise study and transportation impact analysis.

“I know that members from the ‘Project Baccara Opposition’ group have shown up to council meetings to speak out against this project, but there’s been no action item on the agenda,” Deakin said. “I just would like to see them advocating for us because it doesn’t feel like they are doing that right now.”

How she got here

The Wisconsin native has lived in

“This is all new to me, so I’m trying to figure it out as I go along.”

Carrie Deakin

Surprise District 6 council official write-in candidate

Surprise for three years.

She attended college at the University of Minnesota where she earned a degree in sociology and journalism.

After college she took a DJ job at a Clear Channel station in Phoenix but was laid off during the Great Recession. She decided to move up to Flagstaff to attend graduate school at NAU, where she got her master’s in history.

She picked up a tech job in California, a place she lived for about a decade, before settling in Surprise. She liked the city’s small-town feel, while still having things to do.

“I wanted to be away from all the

• See **Candidate** on page 25



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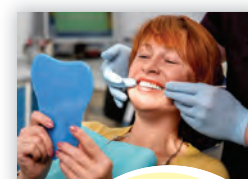
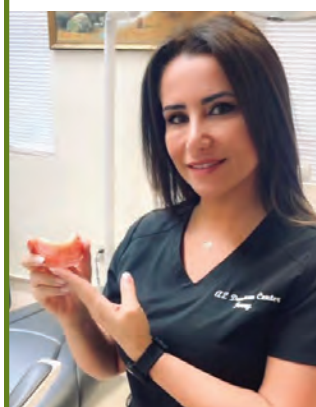
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BRIEFS

City names library card design contest winners

The city of Surprise announced the winners of this year's Surprise Public Library System library card design contest.

The selected artists were recognized at a city council meeting earlier this month.

The winners in each category were as follows:

- ♦ Mayor's choice: Claire Hol
- ♦ City librarian's choice: Timothy Mullet
- ♦ Youth (10 and under): Alexis Duran
- ♦ Teen (11-17): Naliza Amado
- ♦ Adult (18 and over): Harper & Summer Nitz
- ♦ America 250: Karina Lawrence

The winning designs were available beginning Wednesday, July 1.

Patrons can see the variety of card artwork created by talented artists from the community at surprisepubliclibrary.gov/Library-Card.

Signups open for Surprise fall youth rec leagues

The Surprise Parks and Recreation Department is offering youth soccer, tee ball, baseball, softball and volleyball leagues this fall.

Early bird registration runs from Monday, June 29 through Sunday, July 19 and offers a \$20 discount. After the early bird period, regular pricing will apply. Registration will stay open until divisions are full.

Youth soccer, tee-ball, baseball, softball and volleyball leagues are for boys and girls ages 4-17 (age determined on or before Nov. 7,

2026).

The season runs from early September through early November with games played on Saturdays and/or weeknights.

Practice times are up to the volunteer coach, usually one hour, once a week (5:30, 6:30 or 7:30 p.m.)

Visit surpriseaz.gov/YouthSports.

Voting deadlines coming up for primary election

The last day to request a ballot for this month's primary election is upcoming. Voters have until Friday, July 10 to request it and until Tuesday, July 14 to mail them back to reach vote counters in time for primary election day.

To make a request, visit the voter dashboard at BeBallotReady.Vote or make a selection at Request.Maricopa.Vote.

Surprise City Hall, 16000 N. Civic Center Plaza, is a designated vote center for anybody casting a ballot in Maricopa County.

The Community Room in City Hall will be open for in-person voting and ballot dropoff each day at 9 a.m.

There is not too much to vote on in Surprise. Voters in Districts 1, 5 and 6 only will have one candidate on the ballot for city council.

Surprise voters can access important dates and information at surpriseaz.gov/Elections.

To find a list of additional voting locations and drop box hours, visit Locations.Maricopa.Vote.

Voters may also track their ballot at BeBallotReady.Vote.



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Surprise neighborhoods like Marley Park can apply to receive money for community events, functions or improvements from the city's neighborhood grant program. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

Applications open for Surprise neighborhood grants

\$10,000 up for grabs to help community engagement

The application period for the Surprise neighborhood grant program is now open.

The program provides eligible neighborhoods with small grants to fund events, functions or community improvements.

The Surprise City Council designated \$10,000 for fiscal year 2027 to encourage community engagement and further strengthen relationships with communities in Surprise.

Interested communities should deliver the completed neighborhood grant program application to City Hall, attention Deb Perry or by email to Deborah.perry@surpriseaz.gov, by 5 p.m. on Friday, Aug 28.

A pre-application meeting explaining the program and the application process will be held virtually at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, July 22.

Registration is required by emailing Perry.

To be considered, projects must meet the following program criteria:

- Provide a public benefit.
- Result in a product, which benefits a neighborhood or the larger Surprise community.
- Be feasible for completion by June 2027.

- Involve the benefiting neighborhood in project identification, planning and execution.

- Emphasize neighborhood self-help; be educational or community-building.

Nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations are ineligible.

Additionally, a minimum of five neighbors within the residential area must sign the application and support the idea; neighborhoods governed by a homeowner association must have HOA approval, if required.

Visit surpriseaz.gov/NGP.



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BRIEFS

Exercise science students earn distinction online

Two Surprise students earned recognition on the chancellor's list at Lionel University.

LeAnna and Gregory Kohl each made the list for achieving a perfect 4.0 GPA while completing at least eight credit units with letter grades.

Lionel University is the only fully accredited, 100% online university solely dedicated to exercise science.

Surprise recreation skills classes available for kids

The Surprise Parks and Recreation Department is offering a variety of skills classes for ages 6-15.

Soccer, basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, football and speed and agility skills classes will be offered August through December.

For fall sports classes and camps dates, or for details, visit surpriseaz.gov/SportsClasses.

To register, head to surpriseaz.gov/SurpriseRec and click on "Youth Sports," or call 623-222-2000.

Student gets SkillsUSA cosmetology certificate

A Surprise student was among career and technical education students who were recognized with a certificate of accomplishment at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference from June 1-5 in Atlanta.

Jackelyne Castro Sanchez, a student at

the West-MEC Northwest Campus in Surprise, was awarded a certificate in cosmetology.

An all-time high of 7,000 students competed at NLSC, which is the largest gathering of the future skilled workforce.

To be invited to the SkillsUSA Championships, students first had to win their state-level competition, demonstrating their technical skills, workplace skills and personal skills.

The national competition featured state champions from middle school, high school and college/postsecondary divisions across the country in 115 hands-on career and leadership competitions including robotics, automotive technology, drafting, criminal justice, aviation maintenance, public speaking and more.



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New BTR community ready in Surprise

Mark-Taylor Residential offers 1, 2 bedrooms on Perryville

Mark-Taylor Residential announced the completion of Estia at Zanjero Trails, a build-to-rent community now welcoming residents in Surprise.

Owned and developed by Zilber Residential Group, Estia at Zanjero Trails brings luxury one- and two-bedroom detached rental homes to a quiet, family-friendly neighborhood.

The community sits at 12020 N. Perryville Road, offering direct access to Loop 303. Its location places residents close to the White Tank Mountains, along with an array of recreation, retail and everyday conveniences.

“This is one of our most quaint communities in the West Valley,” said Andre Rivas, managing director of Mark-Taylor Residential. “Estia’s cottage-style design, paired with premium offerings, makes it an ideal place for those starting a family, transitioning into retirement or anyone in between.”

Designed for a connected and relaxed lifestyle, the pet-friendly community features a resort-style pool and spa, fitness center, clubhouse with outdoor kitchen, community garden and optional carport parking. Dedicated pet features include a dog park, dog wash station and in-home doggie doors.

Blending modern suburban living with thoughtful simplicity, Estia at

“This is one of our most quaint communities in the West Valley.”

Andre Rivas

Mark-Taylor Residential managing director



Mark-Taylor Residential has completed Estia at Zanjero Trails, a build-to-rent community now welcoming residents in Surprise. (Courtesy Mark-Taylor Residential)

Zanjero Trails offers residents a balance of comfort, accessibility and outdoor lifestyle in one of the West Valley’s fastest growing areas.

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FROM THE COVER

Fire

• From page 17

New stations were recommended on both sides of U.S. 60/Grand Avenue in the north part of the city.

Citygate estimated the city will need up to eight new stations total over the next six to 10 years, but a public safety center is needed now.

The consultant warned that not adding more stations within the next five years would crush the city's response times.

"We have anticipated the growth, and we've been actively trying to work within our budget," Interim Chief Kevin Spirlong told the city council earlier this month.

Since 2022, the department has hired 50 people with 20 more coming on board in 2026 alone.

Spirlong said the department has

used "strategic overhiring" to fill spots of people anticipated to retire or leave for other reasons. The department currently has nine of those overhires.

"We've really been doing everything that's within our power to try to prepare for this," Spirlong said. "We're not able to, obviously, meet the demand. It's just an insatiable demand."

Gary said Citygate recommends Surprise add a citywide growth officer.

"An orchestra with that many moving parts needs a conductor and a master plan of the master plan," Gary said.

Jason Stone can be reached at jstone@iniusa.org. 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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FROM THE COVER

Time

• From page 1

because whoever opens this box in 50 years should know that we do this with passion, we do this with relentless effort, we do this with love.”

The box will be sitting in the Mayor’s Atrium of City Hall, 16000 N. Civic Center Plaza, presumably for the next five decades when America celebrates its tricentennial.

Several department heads and councilmembers wrote notes to the future city leaders.

Transportation Director Eric Boyles said his department’s note was to let future transportation workers know “we put you on the right path moving forward.”

Economic Development Director Jeanine Jerkovic also wrote a letter to the economic development director in 2076.

“It’s cheering them on and wishing them well,” Jerkovic said about the letter. “Because I think we have a bright future in Surprise.”

Jerkovic deposited into the time capsule a typical Economic Development swag bag that the city currently hands out to clients. Items in



Surprise Mayor Kevin Sartor drops items into a time capsule the city of Surprise will have sealed at City Hall until 2076 during a sealing ceremony on July 1. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

the bag included this year’s unique department spring training cap (an American 250 theme), an information packet about Surprise facts and figures and a “Surprise Surprise Surprise” marketing T-shirt.

“The shirt originated in Economic Development a few years ago because we wanted a work uniform,” Jerkovic said. “We want to have a casual day, but we want to do it with style.”

The Sports, Entertainment and Culture Department deposited the inaugural program for the new Surprise Arts division, which is producing shows at the Vista Center for the Arts for the first time this year.

A copy of the 2040 general plan was inserted in the box, giving future leaders a look at the vision of the city

• See **Capsule** on page 26



Surprise Marketing and Communications Manager Virginia Mungovan shows off the Progress magazines her department was contributing to the Surprise time capsule to be opened in 2076. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

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Candidate

• From page 18

hustle and bustle in a nice, small, quiet neighborhood,” Deakin said.

Now that she has chosen to run as a write-in candidate, she knows she has her work cut out for her to win election. Surprise only counts write-in votes for “official” candidates who have submitted paperwork.

In 2020, Surprise featured an election for mayor and a city council position with an official write-in candidate for each.

In that year’s mayor’s race, businesswoman Cheryl Packham earned only 495 votes, or 1.79%, in a loss to Skip Hall, who ran unopposed on the ballot.

Another 386 other names that did not count were cast.

In the two-way District 5 race between current Councilmember Jack Hastings and former Councilmember David Sanders, only 112 votes were written in for official candidate Kawika Henderson. That came out at only 2.93% of the vote.

And in 2024, businessman Ed Cunningham only earned 5.5% of the vote despite plastering the city with signs

Targeted platform

Other than Project Baccara, Deakin does not have too many other platform issues she would like voters to consider.

She is a big proponent of public safety as she was raised by a father in law enforcement for 25 years. She cares about safe roads and would like to see traffic enforcement stepped up.

Also, she said the intersection at Reems Road and Cholla Street needs a traffic signal.

“It gets really scary, especially during the school day, when kids are trying to cross that crossover at Reems,” Deakin said.

“It’s just being more proactive and more responsible about putting in stoplights where they need to be — cutting down or trying to cut down on dangerous and reckless driving. It kind of feels like the Wild Wild West out here when it comes to driving around town.”

She knows her candidacy may only bring attention to the Project Baccara issue, which she said would also be a win.

“I was not planning to do this until I felt like I have got to do this because I have got to at least try,” Deakin said. “I would want my constituents to feel comfortable talking to me about their concerns and feel confident that I will advocate on their behalf. I don’t know what I don’t know. I’m not afraid to admit I’m wrong. I would see the relationship being very cooperative.”

*Jason Stone can be reached at jstone@iniusa.org.
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FROM THE COVER

Capsule

• From page 24

36 years before they opened the box.

"It's a visionary document that's helping guide the development of the city," City Planner Trevor Fleetham said. "It will be updated a few times before we open this time capsule, so we're excited to see how that changes over time."

City Councilmember Johnny V. Melton placed in the box a photo of the city's first grocery store, where the then-town's first mayor, Bill Williams, organized the incorporation of the town in 1960. The store was also the first polling location.

Melton said the town's first-year budget was \$11,000. For fiscal year 2027, Surprise's budget has top \$1 billion.

Melton joked that he will help

open the time capsule in 2076 during his "13th term."

Surprise Public Library System Director Kelsey Lamphier put in an active library card for Flora Mae Statler, the woman who founded Surprise in the 1930s.

"She is now our oldest library patron," Lamphier said. "This represents how far we've come and the stories that have yet to be told."

City Manager Andrea Davis wrote a sealed letter to the future city manager and staff.

"It was basically saying, 'Right now, we're going through a lot of growth, and we're hoping the love, the passion that we have currently shows 50 years from now,'" Davis said. "The decision we make today will lead to a great future community that we want to see."

The Surprise Youth Council left photos and a letter to a future youth



Surprise Interim Assistant City Manager Brenden Espie, left, has a laugh with Police Chief Evan Becher when describing the Surprise Independent clip he was putting inside the time capsule. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

council group.

Other items placed in the box included the fiscal year 2026 budget book, the last four issues of Progress — a city-produced news and information magazine — a Fire Department America 250 patch, a water chart detailing the current service in Surprise and the contemporary portfolio for the city and the July

1 edition of Surprise Independent, which was catered to the time capsule project.

Sartor asked Phoenix-based Full Draw Carpentry, a company that builds high-end custom cabinets, to create the two-by-three foot box.

Surprise resident Eric Boyles, a man with the same name as the city's transportation director, and Darrel Mumau, created it out of all solid walnut.

It features a panels on all four sides — the city logo, the America 250 logo, the state flag and a list of the main administrators at City Hall.

The men called it an honor to create the box for the event.

Jason Stone can be reached at jstone@iniusa.org. 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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