



Community

Homestead at Eastmark to have valet trash service; 4



INDEPENDENT



Neighbors

Mesa native on U.S. Parachute Team; 15

July/August 2026

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Candidates file to run for school boards

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Four school districts with schools in Mesa — Queen Creek Unified School District, Gilbert Public Schools, Mesa Public Schools and Higley Unified School District — have candidates running for school boards in the Nov. 3 election.

July 6 was the deadline for candidates to file the signatures needed to be placed on the November ballot.

Queen Creek Unified School District

Four candidates are running for two seats on the QCUSD governing board.

Samantha Davis, who serves as president of the board, is running for reelection. She has been on the governing board since 2018.

Current board member Kelli Anderson will be running for her first full term after being appointed in 2025.

They are being challenged by Michael Romero and Sarah Purcell.

During her time as a board mem-

• See **Candidates** on page 5

Therapy dog helps children read while healing a family's grief

By Tom Blodgett
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The purple blanket is Scout's signal.

When Jessica Etheridge pulls it from the closet, brushes the golden retriever's coat and gathers a bag of books, Scout knows exactly where she is headed.

Soon enough, the dog settles onto the blanket, waits patiently for young readers and prepares for another day helping children find confidence one page at a time.

For the students at Gilbert Arts Academy, Scout is a comforting reading companion. For Etheridge, a Mesa resident, the therapy dog has become part of a journey through grief, healing and purpose after the death of her son, Alex.

Scout entered the Etheridge family during the COVID-19 pandemic as a puppy and family pet. Alex, then

• See **Scout** on page 14

Mesa resident Jessica Etheridge and Scout have poured their grief over losing Jessica's son Alex into therapy service. (Independent Newsmedia/Tom Blodgett)



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Plan ahead before returning early ballot for the July 21 primary

The Mesa City Clerk's Office reminds voters to verify the location and hours of an official ballot drop box before returning an early ballot for the July 21 Primary Election.

Official ballot drop box locations and hours are available at locations.maricopa.vote. Drop box locations are established for each election and may change based on site availability and accessibility, so voters are encouraged to confirm their preferred location before heading out.

Early ballots may also be returned by mail. Voters should mail their ballot early enough to arrive by July 21. The deadline to request an early ballot was July 10.

Voters can track the status of their early ballot by texting JOIN to 628-623 or by visiting BeBallotReady.Vote.

The Mesa City Council has called a Primary Election for July 21, for the purpose of electing Councilmembers in Districts 4, 5 and 6, whose terms will expire in January 2031.

For information or questions, contact the Mesa City Clerk's Office at 480-644-4868 or visit mesaaz.gov/government/city-clerk.

Mesa holds regularly scheduled elections in even-numbered years in conjunction with Maricopa County elections conducted in July and November. The mayor is elected at-large and council members are elected from six geographic districts. Council members serve overlapping terms, with three council members elected at a time.

DEVELOPMENT

Homestead at Eastmark apartments in Mesa to have valet trash service

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A 261-unit, three-story apartment complex with valet trash service and 2.2 acres of retail and commercial development are planned at the southwest corner of South Signal Butte Road and East Rubidium Avenue in Mesa.

The Mesa Planning and Zoning Board recently voted 6-0 to approve a major site plan review for the 11.7-acre Homestead at Eastmark development. Board member Genessee Montes was absent, according to the meeting's minutes.

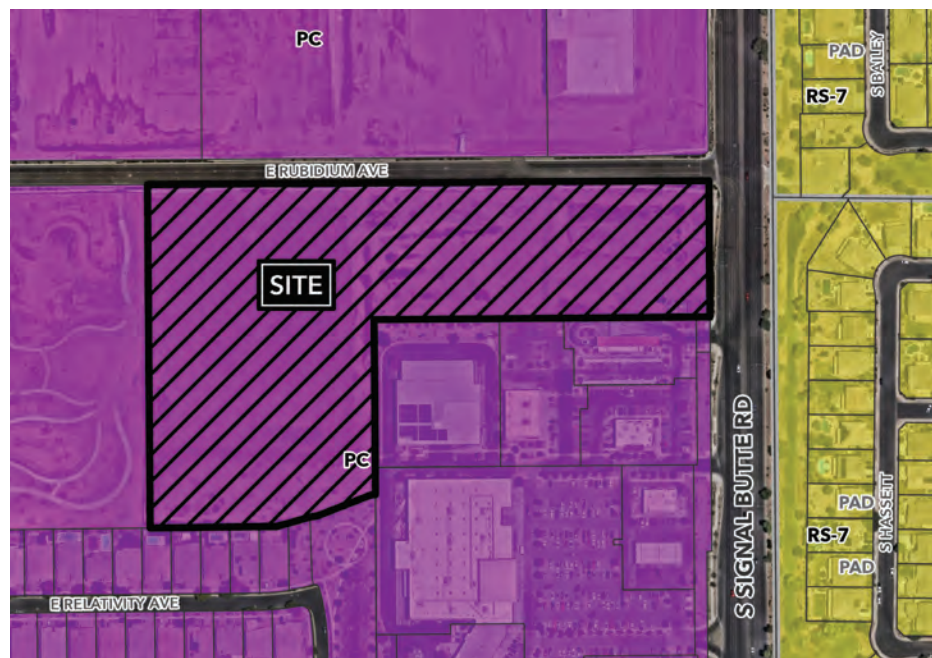
The city requires 488 parking spaces and 444 are to be provided. The commercial area is to have a 2,360-square-foot restaurant with a pickup window and an 8,480-square-foot retail/restaurant building with 59 required parking spaces and 99 spaces provided, according to a city document.

The landscape plan includes trees such as mulga acacia, palo blanco, palo verde, red push pistache and date palm; and shrubs such as purple hopseed bush, blue bells, rio bravo sage and bottlebrush.

Luke Ashworth of Evergreen is the applicant. DMB Mesa Proving Grounds LLC is the owner.

In accordance with the Mesa Proving Grounds Community Plan, Brookfield has reviewed and conditionally approved a revised site plan, preliminary landscape and conceptual architecture submitted by Evergreen with conditions of approval, Eric J. Tune, senior vice president of development at Brookfield Residential, wrote in a letter to the city of Mesa's planning director.

"Final submittals of all structures proposed are required for Eastmark Design Review and final approval by



The Mesa Planning and Zoning Board voted 6-0 to approve a major site plan review for the 11.7-acre Homestead at Eastmark development. (City of Mesa)

the Eastmark Design Review Committee prior city permit review submittal," he said.

The luxury rental community is designed to appeal to working professionals, employees and young families. It is to have a clubhouse with business and lounge area, swimming pool and spa, an outdoor lounge, barbecue areas, a fitness center, and recreation area, according to a written project narrative.

"Valet trash service will be provided for all residents. The service will begin in the evening and will be provided for five days a week. Valets will stop by each resident's door and pick up trash that has been left out and take it to the compactor," it states. "Building placement has been developed to interact with the streetscape and adjacent developments by varying the roof lines, styles and orientations, providing spa-

cious courtyards, amenities and landscape features, a variety of stories and architectural detail."

Rental price ranges were not included in the written narrative.

The seven-member Planning and Zoning Board conducts hearings and make recommendations to the City Council on requests for changes in zoning and on required site plans. It also considers and recommends changes in the city's long-range plans and in the municipal code concerning planning and zoning matters. Members are appointed for staggered terms of three years.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. 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, <https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/>.

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Candidates

• From page 1

ber, Davis helped establish norms and protocols to ensure efficiency and oversight. The Arizona School Boards Association has shared the Queen Creek Unified School Board norms and protocols with school boards across the state as an example of board excellence.

An Army veteran, Anderson, who homeschools her children, was appointed to the QCUSD board by Maricopa County School Superintendent Shelli Boggs after former member James Knox resigned in January 2025. Anderson is serving out Knox's term, which ends in December.

Following Knox's resignation, Purcell was one of three candidates chosen by a district team made up of Davis, QCUSD Superintendent Perry Berry, a teacher and members of the community to fill the vacancy. She was ultimately not selected by Boggs. Purcell taught at Gateway Polytechnic Academy and Faith Mather Sossaman Elementary and worked for Gilbert Public Schools.

Romero taught at Tempe High School from 2007 to 2015. He was chair of the

school's career and technical education department and served as an adviser to DECA, which aims to create future business leaders.

Gilbert Public Schools

Longtime Gilbert Public Schools Governing Board member Jill Humpherys will not seek reelection this year, ending a 14-year tenure and leaving two candidates for two open seats on the board.

With incumbent board President Chad Thompson and newcomer Whitney Pitt as the only candidates to file for the Nov. 3 election, the race is expected to be canceled under Arizona law, with both candidates instead appointed to the seats.

Pitt is a GPS parent and director of business services for the city of Scottsdale.

Mesa Public Schools

Four individuals are running for two MPS Governing Board seats. They are:

• Joshua Chilton, a parent to a Mesa student. Worked in the Maricopa County Superintendent's Office for over six years. He wants to make resources easier for students with disabilities. Chilton now works for the Center for the Future of Arizona on projects in partnership with the

• See **Boards** on page 7

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BUSINESS

David Sauer founder of SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance

David Sauer — who served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2010 to 2014 as an infantry rifleman and completed two combat deployments to Sangin, Afghanistan — started the SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance in February to help remove barriers that keep veterans and their families from getting mental health care when they need it most.

Whether those barriers are cost, long wait times, stigma, or not knowing where to turn, the nonprofit's goal is to connect veterans and their families with trusted local providers and community support.

Name: David Sauer

Age: 35

Occupation: Founder/CEO of SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance

Hometown: Jacksonville, North Carolina



David Sauer, founder of SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance. (SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance)

Family: Wife Lilian Sauer; three sons; expecting twin daughters in July.

What brought you to Mesa?: Work originally brought me to Mesa, but life gave me a reason to stay. This is where I met my wife, started building a family, and put down roots.

Over time, Mesa became more than just where I lived — it became home.

Business: SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance

Hours of operation: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday and on-call Saturday-Sunday.

How can people contact you? (Email, phone, website, etc.): david@sauerpowervets.org, sauerpowervets.org

When and why did you start a nonprofit focused on veterans and mental health?: I officially started SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance in February 2026, but the reason behind it started years earlier during my time in the U.S. Marine Corps. I served from 2010 to 2014 as an infantry rifleman and completed two combat deployments to Sangin, Afghanistan. When we came home, many of us thought the hardest part was behind us, but for several Marines and Navy corpsmen I served beside, the battle followed them home.

Over the years, I watched too

many veterans struggle with mental health, trauma, isolation, alcohol use, anger and the silent weight of what they carried. Some of the strongest men I knew lost their lives after returning home, not overseas, but here at home where they should have been safe.

I started SPVEA because I wanted to help remove the barriers that keep veterans and their families from getting mental health care when they need it most. Whether those barriers are cost, long wait times, stigma, or not knowing where to turn, our goal is to connect veterans and their families with trusted local providers and community support. This mission is personal to me, and it is rooted in the belief that no veteran or family member should have to fight alone.

DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS

Permit OK'd for transitional community residence

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A permit was approved recently to allow a Skybridge Harmony Homes transitional community residence north of the northeast corner of Signal Butte and Williams Field roads in Mesa.

The Mesa Board of Adjustment voted 4-2 to approve the request for a special-use permit. Dissenting were Vice Chair Shelly Allen and Board member Todd Trendler.

The transitional community residence is to be licensed to operate as a behavioral health residential facility by the Arizona Department of Health

Services for individuals 18 or older. The facility will serve a maximum of 10 individuals, it states in a written staff report.

See the story at: <https://tinyurl.com/36d6aw6b>

Neighbors speak against townhomes to be along canal

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A 30-unit townhome project planned along a canal about 2,000 feet north of the northwest corner of East Brown Road and North Greenfield Road in Mesa is drawing concerns from nearby neighbors.

The development's look and landscaping were recently discussed by the

Mesa Design Review Board. Board members David Winstanley and Megan Neal were absent.

The request previously came before the design review board in 2022, Staff Planner Jennifer Merrill said during the meeting.

"Similar layout, but different architecture. The request has gone through come changes," she said.

Several area residents spoke against the 1.9-acre project, including Kaye Hunsaker of the 4200 block of East Hackamore Drive and Richard Ruskin of the 4200 block of East McLellan Circle.

See the story at: <https://tinyurl.com/5fx7jcen>

2M-square-foot data center planned at Pecos, Crismon

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A 2,257,581-square-foot data center development with seven two-story buildings is planned on 170 acres at the northeast corner of East Pecos Road and the South Crismon Road alignment in Mesa.

The Mesa Planning and Zoning Board recently voted 4-0 to recommend the city council approve a use permit, major site plan modification and rezoning of the land.

See the story at: <https://tinyurl.com/mtyn8vyt>

Boards

• From page 5

Arizona Media Institute.

♦ Jennifer Echols, a lifelong Mesa resident who graduated from Mountain View High School. She has served in various teaching and instructional positions throughout the district and works for Arizona State University.

♦ Inger Hebert, a Valley Realtor and Gilbert resident. She is running following several ethics complaints to the board and a lack of communication with the public.

♦ Jason Smithson, a father to a student with special needs and says that he would like to make the district more accessible for all students. Smithson is an attorney and serves on the Mesa Public Schools Parent council. Smithson and Hebert have hosted campaign events together and both say they would like to see

more financial transparency from the district.

♦ Rachel Walden, the only incumbent running in 2026. She is a graduate of Arizona State University and has served on the board since 2023. She is also the vice chair of the Arizona Corporation Commission.

Higley Unified School District

Two incumbents will be joined by a newcomer in the election for two HUSD Governing Board seats this fall.

President Amanda Wade and Board Member Anna Van Hoek will seek second terms to the board. They each were elected in 2022.

Joining them in the race will be a newcomer: Michelle Morris, a district parent with a professional background in accounting.

Morris has one child who graduated from Williams Field High School, twins with one at Higley High School and the other at Higley

Virtual Academy, and the youngest child at Sossaman Middle School.

In a Facebook post, Morris indicated she wanted to use her background in accounting to help the district through its financial challenges. She also wants to advocate for the students with special needs as she has one child on the autism spectrum.

Wade and Van Hoek have been perhaps the highest profile board members with Wade in her second year as president and Van Hoek a frequent critic of district finances and policies. The two have often had philosophical clashes on the dais.

Janet Perez and Tom Blodgett contributed to this story. 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, <https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/>.



Four candidates are vying for two spots on the Queen Creek Unified School District governing board. (Special to Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)



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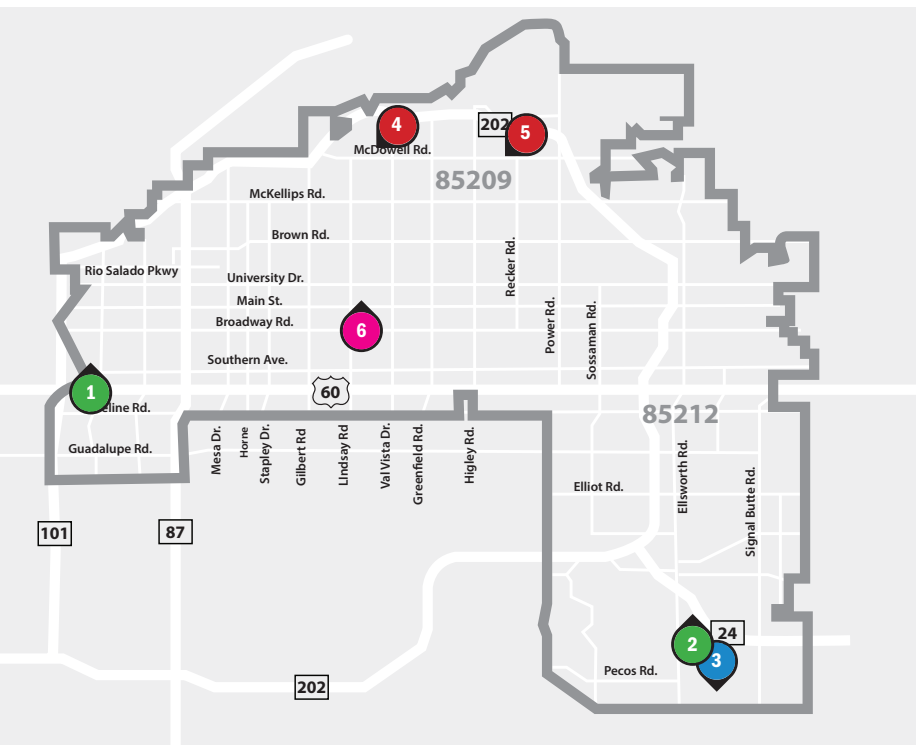
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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by **Richard H. Dyer**
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

IN THE NEWS

1 To celebrate America250, Mesa nonprofit **SauerPower Veterans Empowerment Alliance** and **Meineke Car Care Center** have teamed up for a fundraiser supporting veterans and their families. From July 1 to July 31, make a donation of \$10 or more to SPVEA using the QR code on the flyer or go to <https://tinyurl.com/yt55d5v2>. Then bring your donation receipt to Meineke Car Care Center, 2056 W. Southern Ave. in Mesa, and receive \$20 off an oil change, it states on Facebook @SPVEA26.

2 The Veolia Arizona Open will take place at the **Arizona Athletic Grounds**, 6321 S. Ellsworth Road in Mesa, Sept. 14-20. The professional pickleball tournament will be the second tour stop of the Carvana PPA Tour's 2026-27 season following the first "Slam" of the season, the Veolia Pickleball National Championships in

North Carolina. PPA's first tournament was held in Mesa in February 2020, according to a release. Founded in 2019, the Carvana PPA Tour is where pickleball's top athletes go head-to-head to determine the best male and female players in the world. Go to www.ppatour.com.

OPENINGS

3 **C2 Tactical**, an indoor shooting range and training facility, opened its first franchise location in Mesa July 2. Located at 9253 E. Willis Road Suite No. 101 in Mesa, the 23,000-square-foot space features a fully equipped shooting range with 23 lanes, a state-of-the-art sim room, classrooms and a dedicated VIP suite offering opportunities for training, recreation, business and group events. The franchise is owned and operated by Tina and Turner Drake, a mother-and-son team based in the East Valley. Visit C2Tactical.com.

COMING SOON

4 An approximately 3,808-square-foot office building with employee amenities such as a putting green and volleyball courts is to be constructed at the southwest corner of East McDowell Road and North Val Vista Drive in Mesa. The Mesa Design Review Board discussed the design, landscaping and a request for alternative compliance of the 1.3-acre **Udall Office Center** development. Absent were Chairman Dane Astle and board member Shelly Udall.

5 A three-story, 124-room hotel and commercial development are planned about 1,700 feet west of the southwest corner of North Recker Road and East Longbow Parkway in Mesa. The Mesa Design Review Board voted 5-0 recently to approve the design review and alternative compliance for the 3.3-acre **Longbow** development. Absent were Chairman Dane Astle and board member Shelly Udall. The hotel in a four-story configuration with a future commercial pad was reviewed previously by the design review board.

EXPANSION

6 An approximately 20,400-square-foot expansion is planned at an existing boat sales and service facility on Main Street east of Lindsay Road in Mesa. The Mesa Design Review Board discussed the **Century Marine** design and landscaping, and reviewed an alternative compliance request during a recent meeting. Absent were Chairman Dane Astle and board member Shelly Udall. Materials to be used for the new building include smooth-finish and scored stucco, prefinished steel and metal-stud screenwalls.

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



C2 TACTICAL



UDALL OFFICE CENTER



Longbow



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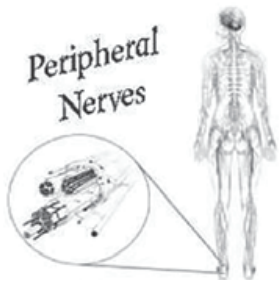
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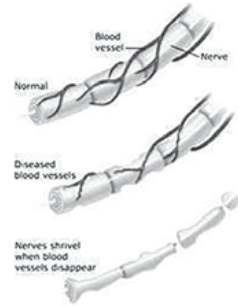
PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY AND CHRONIC PAIN WARNING!

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

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



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



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

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

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



Aspen Medical will be offering this chronic pain and neuropathy severity examination from now until August 31, 2026. Call 480-796-1136 to make an appointment to determine if your chronic pain and peripheral neuropathy can be successfully treated.

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QCUSD board approves \$126M budget

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Queen Creek Unified School District's governing board has voted to approve a \$126.2 million budget for the 2026-27 school year.

The board approved the budget by a vote of 2-1, with Board Member Kelli Anderson voting no. Board Members Patty Campbell and Matt Riffey did not attend the meeting.

The board also approved the primary and secondary tax levies for the district.

The budget will be revised in the fall to include state funds for Free Reduced Priced Lunch and District Additional Assistance programs. Both items were included in the state's 2027 budget signed by Gov. Katie Hobbs. Last year, the money added about \$1 million to the district's budget.

The new district budget's maintenance and operation limited expenditure is \$121.2 million, with an additional \$5 million carryforward, bringing the limit to \$126.2 million. That's a decrease of about 1% from the current expenditure limit for the 2025-26 school year of \$127.5 million.

The M&O budget includes \$16.5 million in override money approved in 2024 by voters. That money will fund:

- ♦ competitive teacher salaries
- ♦ academic programs that prepare students for post-secondary education and workforce success
- ♦ art and music classes throughout the district
- ♦ optimal student-to-teacher ratios across the district
- ♦ JROTC, Naval and gifted programs

EDUCATION

GPS, East Valley school districts tout a court win in EVIT lawsuit

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The overarching standoff continues nine East Valley school districts and the East Valley Institute of Technology in Mesa continues, even after the districts scored a victory in court about EVIT's attempt to reduce the funds it distributes for career and technical education satellite programs.

Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Christopher Coury ruled EVIT could not control the use of funds already generated by district satellite programs.

Under the satellite program, students can take CTE classes on their high school campuses rather than going to the two EVIT locations in east and west Mesa.

"EVIT was trying to freeze our Fund 596, which are funds that are generated for kids that are enrolled in satellite programs that attend classes on our campuses and actually don't go to the EVIT campus but are served completely by the districts," said Queen Creek Unified School District Chief Operating Officer Amber Bordes. "The judge ruled that that was not allowed and that we have the authorization to utilize those funds for any CTE-related classes that we provide on our campuses.

"It's a huge win because we've always felt like those are our funds," Bordes said.

Neither Gilbert Public Schools nor Higley Unified School District officials were available for comment, but GPS did send a communication to parents that struck a positive chord about moving forward with EVIT, calling the relationship a top priority.

"With clear legal guidance now established, we believe the path to a swift, positive resolution between EVIT and local school districts is wide open," the district wrote. "We are highly optimistic that an agreement serving the absolute best interests of all Gilbert students will be reached soon."

The judge also ruled EVIT retains authority over the content and quality of all Career and Technical Education District programs, but it could not dictate how the districts spend money on vocational classes outside of the CTED system.

"Today's ruling denied EVIT's application for a preliminary injunction and rejected EVIT's core legal argument: that districts can only spend vocational education funds on EVIT-approved courses. The court was unambiguous.



Under a new court ruling, the nine East Valley school districts suing EVIT can use the funds already generated through career and technical education satellite programs. (Courtesy Queen Creek Unified School District)

EVIT was wrong. The districts were right," according to a joint statement released by the districts.

EVIT Superintendent Chad Wilson stated in a press release that "we are grateful to the court for taking the time and the effort to sort out a very complicated issue regarding school finances and CTED funds. Unfortunately, this ruling does not provide clarity for the upcoming school year."

Wilson stated EVIT will spend the coming days review-

• See **Lawsuit** on page 11

Lawsuit

• From page 10

ing the ruling and determining its next steps.

By ruling that the districts have access to funds already generated, schools will be able to fund the satellite programs in the new school year but there will be no money for the following year unless an agreement with EVIT is reached.

Last fall, Queen Creek, Chandler, Gilbert, Higley, Cave Creek, Apache Junction, Fountain Hills, J.O. Combs and Tempe Union school districts sued EVIT when it attempted to reduce the percentage of state funds it doles out to the districts for satellite programs.

Under a now expired intergovernmental agreement, districts received 87% of their funding for satellite programs from EVIT. Under a new agreement proposed by EVIT, funding would be reduced to 83% with cuts continuing at about 2% to 3% each year for the life of the contract.

“In fiscal year 2024, EVIT collected more than \$36 million in state funding attributable to satellite CTE enrollment, the students enrolled in district-run programs,” according to the districts’ joint statement. “More than \$30 million of that was paid back to the districts, with EVIT retaining \$6 million. EVIT’s proposal would have reduced that pass-through, with EVIT keeping even more dollars inside an administration that serves a fraction of the student population.”

The nine districts serve more than 25,000 students in career and technical education programs, while EVIT’s centralized campus serves about 3,500, the joint statement continued.

In a letter sent to parents in August, EVIT stated the proposed funding and structural changes to the satellite programs were the result of an audit by the Arizona Auditor General’s Office.

“Our previous method of calculat-

ing costs and allocating funds does not align with best practices used statewide. We’re asking to adopt the same funding structure used by other large career technical education districts in Arizona,” the letter added. “To be clear, this isn’t about EVIT wanting more money.”

Bordes countered that EVIT has yet to provide details on how they would use the additional funds.

“I can very clearly state exactly how we use those funds in our district and how they support satellite classes directly,” she said. “We have yet to hear from EVIT on how they would spend that money or why they needed more money for satellite programming for those kids that never stepped foot on their campus.”

The nine districts and EVIT have yet to negotiate a new intergovernmental agreement so neither the districts nor EVIT will receive any CTED funding this coming school year.

“We’ve been working over the last year, well actually 18 months, trying to get an (agreement) in place for both central and satellite programming because we know it’s important,” Bordes said. “We continue to come to the table trying to negotiate with EVIT and that’s been unsuccessful.”

For its part, EVIT stated that it has offered to fund the entire \$4 million cost of busing CTE students to the main EVIT campuses.

“Our position has always been that we want what is best for all students in the EVIT CTED. That includes students who take these programs at their high schools,” Wilson stated in the release. “We don’t completely agree with the court’s ruling. But we respect the court and we respect the law and will follow it accordingly.”

Tom Blodgett contributed to this story. We would like to invite our readers to submit their civil comments, pro or con, on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org. Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org. Tom Blodgett can be reached by email at tbladgett@iniusa.org or follow him @sp_blodgett on X.

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REAL ESTATE

Home prices steady as Mesa outpaces the nation in sales



The median sale price for Mesa homes held mostly flat in June 2026, just down 0.6% to \$486,250, according to data from Phoenix Realtors. (Independent Newsmedia, Richard H. Dyer)

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Home sales in the Greater Phoenix housing market — including Mesa — continue to outperform national trends as prices remain steady, affordability improves and buyer activity shows signs of stabilizing.

Closed sales increased 4.8% in Mesa for the first half of 2026 compared to last year, and the number of days on the market declined 1.5% to 65. The median sale price held mostly flat, just down 0.6% to \$486,250. New listings in the city declined by 4.7%,

and pending sales dropped by 2.3%, according to data from Phoenix Realtors.

Greater Phoenix more than doubled the national growth rate for single-family residential home sales in June compared to the same month last year. Closed sales rose 8.1% locally while increasing only 3.2% nationally, according to data from Phoenix Realtors.

Comparing the first half of 2026 to 2025, closed deals rose 5.4%. At the same time, the median price of a single-family home essentially held steady

MESA HOUSING BY THE NUMBERS

New listings: 448 (-9.7%)

Pending sales: 247 (-32.0%)

Closed sales: 455 (+15.2%)

Days on market until sale: 62 (-4.6%)

Median sales price: \$485,000 (-2.9%)

Average sales price: \$548,078 (-3.4%)

Percent of list price received: 98.5% (+0.2%)

Inventory of homes for sale: 1,178 (-7.2%)

Months supply of inventory: 3.0 (-11.8%)

Source: Phoenix Realtors market report for June 2026

at \$485,000, ticking up just 0.2% from last year's \$484,000. Phoenix's median single family home price sits well above the national average of \$429,300.

"There's a difference between how people believe the real estate market is moving and what the data is showing," said Sammy Glassman, board president of Phoenix Realtors. "Home sales were very strong in June, and even the pending sales slight decline was significantly smaller than what we've seen in previous months."

Phoenix Realtors has more than 10,000 members. It offers many resources, including a clearinghouse of up-to-date research, statistics and data, as well as insights into marketplace trends. Go to <https://www.phoenixrealtors.com/>.

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SPORTS

Register for parks and recreation fall programs

Registration is open for Mesa residents for the 2026 fall season — August, September, October.

Mesa offers programs and activities to people of all ages and abilities:

- ♦ Adult sports: pickleball leagues and lessons, co-ed and women's volleyball, softball, tennis leagues and lessons and Recess for Adults, which offers a new sport or game each week

- ♦ Youth sports and clinics: cheer and soccer clinics, co-ed and all-girls NFL flag football, NFL flag kinder clinic and Playball multi-sport

- ♦ Teen recreation: Tennis leagues and camps, pickleball and pickleball lessons, Flag football, junior tennis camps, Teen Pumpkin Paint Night and Teen H.Y.P.E. (Helping Youth Produce Excellence) teen leadership initiative

- ♦ Adaptive recreation: Swimming,



Recreation includes tennis leagues and camps. (Metro Creative)

bocce, golf, Game Room Night and TGIF activities

- ♦ Hobbies and special interests: Youth beginner's ice skating (ages 3+), Lego Masters (ages 5-11), all-star gymnastics (ages 4-6), Mat Monkeys – mar-

tial Arts for kids (ages 4-6), Tai Chi for Wellness (ages 16+) and belly dance basics (ages 16+)

Additional offerings include lap swim at Skyline and Kino Aquatic Centers; Drop-In pickleball, tennis, basketball and volleyball; swim lessons for all ages and after school programs.

Mesa Parks and Recreation will also host special events such as A Summer Birthday Party on Sept. 5, Skate Party at the Plaza Sept. 26, Celebrate Mesa Oct. 10 and Pumpkin Splash Oct. 25. A full list of programs and activities is available in the fall online PLAY-BOOKLite at <https://tinyurl.com/3x-h42fc3> available in English and Spanish.

Mesa Parks and Recreation also offers free, mobile recreation programs.

- ♦ M.O.R.E. (Mesa Outdoor Recreation Experience): Traveling to parks, trails and natural spaces Tuesdays through Saturdays with outdoor and

nature-based activities.

- ♦ Fun 'N Fitness: Hosted at Pioneer Park and Kleinman Park Mondays through Saturdays, offering sports, games, crafts and STEAM activities to encourage residents of all ages to stay active.

How to Register:

- ♦ Online using the Active Net Registration System at <https://tinyurl.com/bp5w5xxz>

- ♦ Phone: Call 480-644-PLAY (7529)

- ♦ In-person: Visit the Mesa Parks and Recreation Office at 708 W. Baseline Road. Office hours are Monday-Thursday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Registration forms are available in English and Spanish. For questions, call 480-644-PLAY (7529). Some Mesa residents may qualify for the Mesa Recreation Scholarship MRS Discount, which provides 50% off youth and adaptive programs.



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Scout

• From page 1

a young teenager, was especially excited when he was chosen to carry the puppy home.

A few years later, the family's life changed dramatically.

Alex was diagnosed with osteosarcoma in 2023 after weeks of unexplained knee pain. Doctors soon discovered the cancer had already spread to other parts of his body.

The diagnosis launched an 18-month battle that included chemotherapy, clinical trials and trips to MD Anderson Cancer Center. Throughout the ordeal, Scout rarely left his side.

"I have pictures of him laying on her and just resting," Etheridge said. "There's another image of her where he's bald and he's just sitting in the chair and she's just sitting right by him with her head up and just looking at him."

Alex continued pursuing the things he loved, including drumming with School of Rock in Gilbert, even as treatments intensified. But eventually the disease progressed beyond what doctors could stop.

In July 2023, Alex died at home under hospice care.

Scout remained there through his final hours.

"She was there throughout the whole entire process," Etheridge said. "I just really believed she saw

this — this is where I need to be."

After Alex's death, Etheridge found herself struggling to adjust.

A stay-at-home mother whose life had revolved around her children's activities, she suddenly faced an empty calendar and overwhelming grief.

Then she saw a television segment about Gabriel's Angels, now known as Paws for Youth, and its therapy-dog programs.

"I was like, 'Yeah, that's awesome. I need something to do,'" Etheridge said.

Within months, she and Scout began the certification process. The training focused less on teaching commands and more on evaluating temperament, calmness and how a dog responds to distractions and unexpected situations.

Scout passed.

Etheridge and Scout first participated in community events, including school finals weeks, mental health summits and visits to group homes. Eventually they joined the organization's reading program and were assigned to Gilbert Arts Academy.

There, Scout worked with small groups of students selected by teachers and counselors. Many were struggling readers or children who

had become withdrawn and needed additional support.

Each week, students spent 20 minutes reading aloud to Scout.

Not to Etheridge.

Not to a teacher.

To Scout.

"Scout can't hear you. Can you speak up a little bit?" Etheridge would tell students when they read too softly.

The distinction mattered.

The dog never corrected pronunciation. She never judged mistakes. She simply listened.

"When she saw the purple blanket, she always knew we were going to go," Etheridge said. "The kids would come in and do their reading and she would greet them and still stay

very calm."

Over time, students who initially arrived shy and hesitant began looking forward to the sessions.

One child would nearly run into the room to see Scout.

Another carefully tracked every book read during the 12-week program using stickers placed on a paper bookshelf. At the end, students received certificates, photos with Scout and recognition for their accomplishments.

Teachers also noticed measurable

progress.

"They got better with their reading toward the end of the 12 weeks," Etheridge said. "They were more comfortable with being able to read aloud."

During celebration ceremonies, teachers would compare reading assessments from the beginning and end of the program.

"Their teacher always reports at the beginning of the program what their reading fluency was at," Etheridge said. "And then they say, now when we check it, it's like double."

The results often left her emotional.

"It always almost brings me to tears," she said.

The program has benefited children, but Etheridge says it has helped her as well.

While Scout provided comfort during Alex's illness and after his death, the therapy work gave Etheridge a way to channel her grief into helping others.

"It's been really great seeing what we do for the kids," Etheridge said. "But it's more given back to me so much and been healing for me."

Tom Blodgett can be reached by email at tblodgett@iniusa.org or follow him on X at @sp_blodgett. 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, <https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/>.

"It's been really great seeing what we do for the kids. But it's more given back to me so much and been healing for me."

Jessica Etheridge
Scout's Owner



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Mesa native Harrison Murdock on U.S. Parachute Team

Harrison Murdock, a 2018 graduate of Red Mountain High School in Mesa, is proving that big dreams can take flight.

Now a member of the U.S. Parachute Team, Murdock has turned a first-time tandem skydive into a career, according to a release.

"I tried skydiving once and something just clicked," Murdock said in the release. "From that moment, I poured everything into it."

Today, Murdock works as a professional skydiving coach at an indoor skydiving facility in Oceanside, California, while continuing to train and compete at the highest level. His journey wasn't built on shortcuts, but on consistency; hours of training, learning through failure and pushing forward even on the toughest days.

"You don't have to follow a normal path if something else is pulling you," he said. "With consistent work and dedication, it's possible."

Murdock credits mentors from the Arizona skydiving community for helping him get started and hopes his story encourages others in Mesa to chase what drives them.



Harrison Murdock flies with his teammate Beau Kahler at Nationals. (David Cherry)

His message to aspiring athletes and dreamers back home: start now.

"You'll never feel fully ready," he said. "If you embrace the process, you can build something incredible." P

The U.S. Parachute Team has represented the U.S. in international parachuting competitions since the 1950s. The U.S. Team include aerial athletes in all disciplines. Go to www.usparachute-team.org.

Founded in 1946, the United States Parachute Association is a nonprofit association dedicated to the promotion of safe skydiving nationwide, establishing strict safety standards, training policies and programs at more than 200 USPA-affiliated skydiving schools and centers throughout the U.S. Each year, USPA's 41,000-plus members and hundreds of thousands of first-timers make roughly 3.65 million jumps in the U.S. USPA represents skydivers before all levels of government, the public and the aviation industry and sanctions national skydiving competitions and records. For information on making a first jump or to find a skydiving center, go to www.uspa.org or call 1-800-371-USPA.



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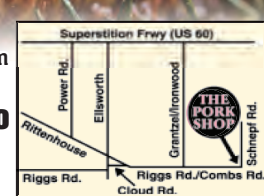
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THINGS TO DO

Americana exhibit celebrates the stories behind America



Kerrick James of Mesa has an affinity for automobiles and public art, and he's fascinated by how someone buried these Cadillacs under the stars at "Cadillac Ranch" west of Amarillo, Texas, where people paint them endlessly. It serves as a public palette that is always changing, and he's particularly drawn to photographing it under different lighting conditions—with setting full moons, sunrises, and thunderstorms. The photograph is one on display for the "Americana — Route 66 & Home of the Brave" exhibit at HD South in Gilbert. (Courtesy Kerrick James)

By Tom Blodgett
INDEPENDENT NEWS MEDIA

A weathered stretch of Route 66. A Gilbert Days parade. A chance encounter that transforms an ordinary highway marking into an unforgettable photograph.

Those are among the moments visitors will find in Art Intersection's "Americana -- Route 66 & Home of the Brave," an exhibition at HD South's Gallery 4 that celebrates the people, places and experiences that continue to shape America's story.

On display through Aug. 8, the exhibit brings together the work of veteran Arizona photographers Kerrick James and Neil A. Miller. While

James focuses on the history, nostalgia and enduring appeal of Route 66, Miller documents everyday life in communities close to home and across the country.

Together, their work offers two perspectives on Americana as the United States marks its 250th anniversary.

For James, Route 66 has been a source of inspiration for more than three decades.

"I'd say it's a cornucopia of visual delights and decay and all kinds of things going on," James said.

His fascination with the Mother Road began in high school af-

• See **Exhibit** on page 17

Exhibit

• From page 16

ter reading John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath." Curious to see how the places described in the novel had changed, he eventually devoted decades to photographing the historic highway, producing two books on Route 66 and leading photography workshops throughout the Southwest.

Arizona remains one of his favorite sections of the route, thanks to its concentration of historic roadside landmarks and distinctive desert scenery.

Even after photographing the highway for years, James said it continues to surprise him as old landmarks disappear, new attractions emerge and travelers from around the world seek out the road that has become synonymous with American travel.

"I love the open road," said James, a Mesa resident and Arizona State graduate. "I love driving, and I love meeting people along the way."

One of his favorite discoveries came unexpectedly along the 13-mile Kansas section of Route 66, where he spotted a painted Route 66 highway shield with a tire burnout that, from the right angle, resembled the body of a guitar stretching down the roadway.

"That called to me more than probably any image I've ever shot along the route," he said.

Miller's photographs take a different approach to Americana.

A Gilbert resident, retired television news photographer and long-time photography instructor, Miller has spent decades documenting candid moments as people go about their daily lives. His images in the exhibit include a Gilbert Days parade and scenes from other community events.

• See **Exhibit** on page 23

THROUGH JULY 26

The Circus Farm

Escape the summer heat and attend a family-friendly experience at Mesa Arts Center July 12-26. It features a 60-minute air-conditioned family circus with games, balloons, juggling, unicycle stunts, a hula hoop, LED lighted props, a giant robot and Aerial Lollipop. Also, be sure to come early to enjoy a pre-show experience hosted by MABEL (Mobile Arts-Based Engagement Lab). Get tickets at <https://boxoffice.mesaartscenter.com> for the event at Mesa Arts Center, 1 E. Main St.

AUG. 23

Roger Daltrey

The deeply personal show blends The Who classics, rare gems and solo favorites from his career. Backed by a semi-acoustic, rock-driven band, the performance offers a fresh, intimate take on iconic songs, alongside candid stories that give you an inside look into rock history. 7:30 p.m. at the Tom and Janet Ikeda Theater at

AUG. 13-15

Mesa International Film Festival

Over 130 films are to be shown at the premier celebration of independent cinema, drawing filmmakers, audiences and industry leaders. What brings the festival to life is its vibrant and diverse selection of films from around the world. From short films and documentaries to music videos and experimental works, there is something to captivate every filmmaker and film enthusiast.

Beyond screenings, the festival offers filmmakers invaluable opportunities for professional growth and connection. Filmmakers can engage in panels and workshops covering a wide range of topics, including screenwriting, cinematography, casting, entertainment law, and film marketing—all led by seasoned industry professionals.

4-10 p.m. Aug. 13, 2-10 p.m. Aug. 14, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Aug. 15. Ticket prices vary. Go to mesainternationalfilmfestival.com for full details.

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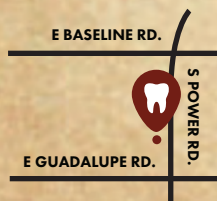
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RELIGION

Food pantry distribution at Mesa church

Families can receive food twice a month at a food-pantry drive-thru distribution at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 22 N. Horne in Mesa.

The next distribution is 8-10:30 a.m. Tuesday, July 28. The process includes an interview with the family and they are referred to additional community resources when appropriate. There are both English and Spanish speaking interviewers, it states at <https://www.stmarksmesa.org/calendar.html>.

Contact the church at office@stmarksmesa.org or 480-964-5820.

American Red Cross blood drives planned at Mesa churches

Several Mesa churches are hosting American Red Cross blood drives in July, August and September.

Every day, blood donors help patients of all ages — accident and burn victims, heart surgery and organ transplant patients, and those battling cancer. In fact, every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood, it states at <https://www.redcross-blood.org>.

The blood drives are:

- The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, 514 S. Mountain Road in Mesa, is hosting an American Red Cross blood drive 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, July 25.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Mesa Stake Olive Ward, 525 E. Second Ave., is hosting an American Red Cross blood drive 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 1.
- Hosanna Lutheran Church, 9601 E. Brown Road in Mesa, is hosting an American Red Cross blood drive 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day



The food-pantry process includes an interview with the family and they are referred to additional community resources when appropriate. (Metro Connection)

Saints and Paloma church community are holding a blood drive at Paloma Community Church, 3215 S. Sossaman Road in Mesa 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 5.

Sign up for a time at <https://www.redcross-blood.org/give.html/find-drive>

Vitalant blood drives planned in July and August at Mesa churches

Several Mesa churches are hosting Vitalant blood drives in July and August.

Donors of all types are needed to help patients in emergencies and for planned treatments for cancer and blood disorders. The need is greatest for type O, the most transfused and most compatible when there's no time to test a patient's blood type, it states at <https://www.vitalant.org>.

They are:

- Christ The King Catholic Church, 1551 E. Dana Ave. in Mesa is hosting a Vitalant blood drive in Presentation Hall from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.



Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood. (Metro Creative)

Sunday, July 26.

- Victory Lutheran Church, 5946 E. University in Mesa, is hosting a blood drive with the Vitalant bloodmobile in the parking lot 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Wednesday, July 29.

- Via Church, 740 N. Power Road, is hosting a blood drive with the Vitalant bloodmobile 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 9.

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Mesa Eastmark Stake, 10725 E. Point Twenty-two Blvd. in Mesa, is hosting a blood drive in the Cultural Hall 8 a.m. to noon Saturday, Aug. 22.

Sign up for a time at <https://donors.vitalant.org/dwp/portal/dwa/appointment/guest/phl/find-Drives>

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LEGACY RETIREMENT

Mesa offers steps to stay safe during summer storms

Summer brings monsoon season and storms can develop with little warning. High winds, heavy rain, downed trees and power lines, power outages and flooded streets can occur within minutes, making it important to be prepared before severe weather strikes.

Mesa residents are encouraged to have an emergency plan and a disaster kit stocked with essentials such as water, nonperishable food, flashlights, batteries, medications and first aid supplies, according to a release.

Pet owners should also prepare emergency supplies for their four-legged friends. Residents are encouraged to stay informed by monitoring weather forecasts and signing up for emergency alerts throughout the monsoon season.

“Monsoon storms can develop

quickly and bring dangerous conditions with little warning, so taking time now to prepare can make a big difference,” Mesa Emergency Management Director Robert Campa said in the release. “We also encourage residents to check on elderly neighbors, family members and others who may need extra assistance before, during and after a storm. A simple phone call or visit can help ensure they have what they need to stay safe.”

The elderly and homebound individuals are among the most vulnerable during the monsoon. You can help your older and homebound neighbors by making sure they have sandbags and other supplies available. Also, check to see if they have a backup source for power for medical equipment requiring it or a way to keep refrigerated prescriptions

cool during a power outage.

Sand and empty bags are available for Mesa residents at the following locations (bring your own shovel):

- ♦ Fire Station 202, 830 S. Stapley Drive
- ♦ Fire Station 208, 4530 E. McKellips Road
- ♦ Fire Station 209, 7035 E. Southern Ave.
- ♦ Fire Station 212, 2430 E. Ellsworth Road

The Mesa Transportation Department has both pre-filled sandbags and sand and empty bags at the following locations for Mesa residents:

- ♦ West Mesa Service Center, 300 E. 6th St. (west side of Transportation Building)
- ♦ East Mesa Service Center, 6935 E. Decatur St. (front parking lot)

For additional storm preparation information and a complete list of contact numbers, visit mesaaz.gov/storm.

The city of Mesa also uses X and Facebook to provide updates related to emergency situations. Follow the city on X @cityofmesa and on Facebook @CityofMesa.

NOAA's National Weather Service recently renewed the City of Mesa's StormReady Community certification for another four years. The StormReady program recognizes communities that are prepared for severe weather and flooding and can quickly share accurate, life-saving information with the public. Mesa earned the renewal by continuing to invest in planning, communication and coordination to help keep residents safe before, during and after hazardous weather events.





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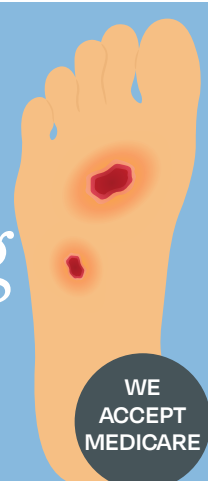
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NEIGHBORS

Council member appointed to serve on national committee

Councilmember Alicia Goforth has been appointed to the National League of Cities 2026 Transportation and Infrastructure Services Committee Federal Advocacy Committee.

She was elected to a one-year term and will provide strategic direction and guidance for NLC's federal advocacy agenda and policy priorities including local access to transportation programs for roads, safety, transit, rail, bridges and more, according to a release.

"Smart transportation policy is essential to Mesa's quality of life, public safety and economic growth," Goforth said in the release. "I'm honored to serve on this committee, to help ensure cities like ours have a strong voice in federal infrastructure decisions that shape residents' daily lives. I look forward to advocating for practical, locally



Alicia Goforth (City of Mesa)

informed solutions that improve safety, expand opportunity and keep Mesa moving forward."

As a member of NLC's Transportation and Infrastructure Services Committee, Councilmember Goforth will

play a key role in shaping NLC's federal policy positions and advocate on behalf of America's cities, towns and villages before Congress, with the President's Administration and at home in Mesa.

Go to <https://www.nlc.org/advocacy/federal-advocacy-committees>.

Mesa senior living community opens greenhouse

Growing things is serious business at Pegasus Landing of Mesa.

The Mesa senior living community at 7231 E. Broadway Road has opened Harvest House, an on-site greenhouse where residents cultivate brain-healthy produce and herbs that feed directly into hands-on cooking activities in the community's activity kitchen.

The project took root as a team effort. Life Enrichment Partner Rodger Martens championed the greenhouse from the start and heads the commu-

nity's gardening club, while Maintenance Director Joseph Severs managed construction from the ground up. Residents marked the milestone with a naming contest. Resident Faye Ganzerla's submission, "Harvest House," won out, and a sign now stands at the entrance.

First up from the garden: fresh homemade salsa when tomato season peaks. Next up: a hydroponic growing system set to expand year-round production and bring new variety to resident activities.

"This is truly a community effort," said Teresa Hadley, the life enrichment director of Pegasus Landing of Mesa. "From the residents who tend the plants to the team members who built it, Harvest House belongs to everyone here."

Go to <https://www.pegasus-senior-living.com/pegasus-landing-of-mesa>



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Mesa native Jessica Wert recognized

Jessica Wert, who is a native of Mesa, AZ and a Financial Advisor with Wert Wealth Management at UBS in Phoenix, was recently recognized on the 2026 Forbes Top Women Wealth Advisors Best-In-State list. The Forbes rating is compiled by Shook Research and awarded annually in February based on information from a 12 month period ending June of the prior year. Eligibility is based on quantitative factors and is not necessarily related to the quality of the investment advice.

She prioritizes client service and relationships, and is focused on advising clients on social security strategies, college savings while providing a comprehensive wealth management plan.

"Jessica is dedicated to her clients and committed to helping them develop strategies to achieve their financial life goals," said Ryan Lurie, Market Director at UBS.

To schedule a consultation with Jessica, visit <https://advisors.ubs.com/wertwealthmanagement>, email jessica.wert@ubs.com or call (480) 443-5454

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Jessica Wert

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Exhibit

• From page 17

"I try to capture the scene the way people are living," Miller said.

Rather than arranging photographs, he waits for genuine moments, like shopping at a grocery store, to unfold naturally.

"I find that's one area of photography that people isn't really covered," Miller said. "It's part of life that you just don't think about until you really just start looking at it."

Although their subjects differ, both photographers see their work as reflections of the freedoms and experiences that have defined the nation.

James believes Route 66 remains one of America's most enduring symbols.

"I do think of Route 66 as ... the all-American road," James said.

Its reputation extends well beyond U.S. borders, he said, recalling Route 66 memorabilia displayed in places around the world.

"It does have a very strong hold on world consciousness," he said.

Miller hopes visitors will leave with a renewed appreciation for the freedoms reflected in American life.

"I hope the photographs kind of can pass on," he said. "Some of them might be controversial, but at least we talk about these things."

Both photographers are members of Through Each Other's Eyes, a Phoenix-based nonprofit cultural exchange program that connects photographers from sister cities around the world. James has participated in exchanges in Japan, France and Australia, while Miller recently joined after years of involvement in Arizona photography organizations.

For James, those experiences reinforce the universal power of photography.

"Photography's the world's visual language," he said.

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