



WHAM

Surprise art
house vision; 4

SURPRISE

INDEPENDENT

School

Teachers
attend educator
orientation; 6



July 29, 2026

Volume 29 Issue 30

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Primaries don't have much to settle in Surprise

**City council remains same,
most other races uncontested**

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Surprise went to the polls July 21 for a relatively drama-free election.

**More
online**
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Surprise news
at YourValley
.net/Surprise-
Independent

All three Surprise City Council races were unopposed, and primaries were not needed to settle Republican and Democrat races for Congressional District 9 and state Legislative District 29, both of which

touch Surprise.

The only competitive race came on the Democrat side of Congressional District 8, which also covers parts of Surprise.

Here is a look at four elections that affect Surprise. Note that all results

• See **Election** on page 12



Hunting for help

**Back-to-school shopping
spree helps local grandmother
prepare for new year**

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When Tempe Marketplace searched for a family to help out with back-to-school shopping as a way to give back to the community, the shopping center reached all the way to Surprise to aid a struggling grandmother.

Cherie Norris was making ends meet just fine as a heart monitor technician at Mayo Clinic Hospital-Phoenix when a big life change came out of nowhere.

Norris' troubled adult daughter dropped off her four kids to grandma one day — and did not plan on returning to get them.

All of a sudden, the 60-year-old Norris had to fend for five people, including the four most important people in her life.

• See **Help** on page 15

Surprise grandmother Cherie Norris is raising four grandchildren — from left, Jeremiah, Dene-co, Kash and Serenity Hughes — on her own but receiving community help to make it happen. (Courtesy Cherie Norris)

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Surprise art house shows off its Vision

WHAM center drawing in artsy West Valley residents

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

West Valley resident Jeff Howland looked forward to sketching the family cat with his daughter, "Mouse," during the Pet Portrait Character Drawing Night at WHAM Community Art Center in Surprise.

The father and his 15-year-old daughter, who preferred to be called by her nickname, sat beside each other in the last row in a room full of people prepared to draw their pets at the art venue located 16560 N. Dysart Road.

"It's a chance for us to spend some time together, and it's something she's interested in," said Howland, adding he wanted to indulge his daughter in her interests.

Showing pictures on their phone of their cat named "Biscuit," the father and daughter wanted to capture their cat's polar opposite personalities in their drawings.

The two-hour evening event on July 15, drew all ages, who wanted to create portraits of their cherished pet companions of various species, such as dogs, cats, horses, birds, fish and more.

Other than guests bringing favorite pet photos, all art supplies were provided thanks to sponsors, MidFirst Bank, Credit Union West, Waste Management, Thom and Shelley Gyder, Arrowhead Honda and CareScape.

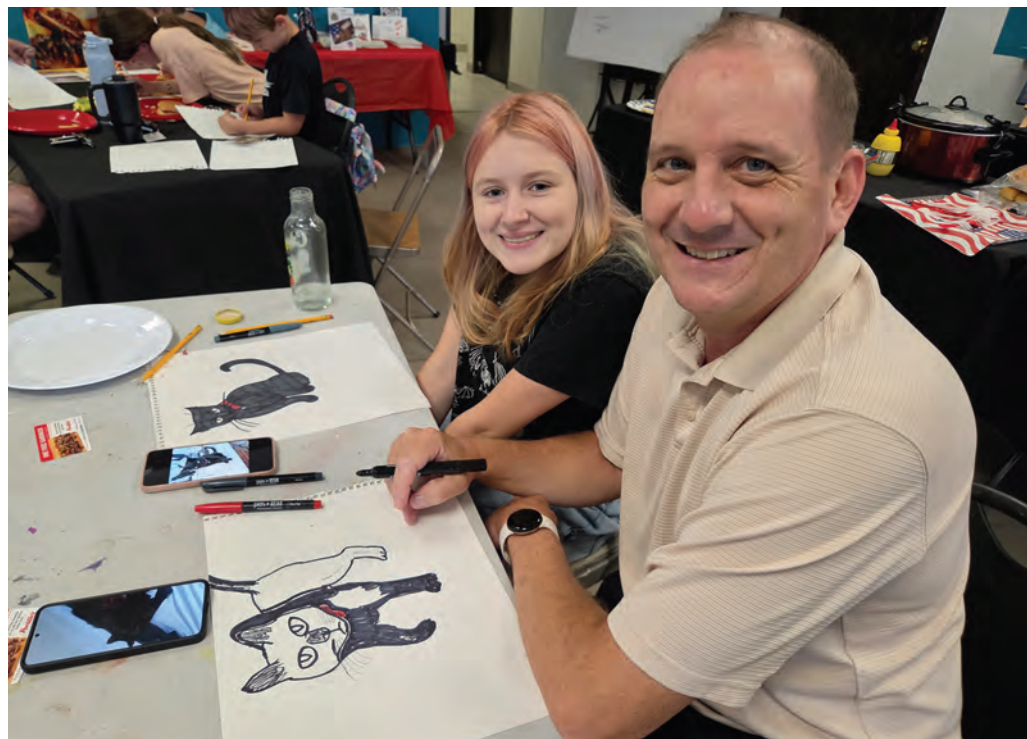
Complimentary refreshments included hot dogs, chips, cookies and drinks at the free event. Plus, Portillo's donated gift cards.

Hosted by WHAM Teen Art facilitator/teacher/artist Ashley Dooley, she instructed participants through live demonstrations, showing techniques for all skill levels to create the character drawings.

Ranging from novice to experienced artists, no drawing experience was need-

*"It's a chance for
us to spend some
time together, and
it's something she's
interested in."*

Jeff Howland
Surprise parent



Jeff Howland and his 15-year-old daughter "Mouse" draw their family cat named "Biscuit" during the Pet Portrait Character Drawing Night at WHAM Community Art Center in Surprise. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

ed to enjoy Dooley's instruction on illustrating whimsical character-style portraits of their past and present pets.

"Ashley has created a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to come together through art, laughter and our shared love of animals," stated Connie Whitlock, WHAM founder and executive director.

Friends Vicki Sommers and Diane Johnson followed Dooley's guidance and encouragement to sketch their pets' portraits.

"I get emails from WHAM. We have taken different classes here before," said Johnson, while drawing her two-and-a-half-year-old dog, "Toby," who she described as a "stinker" with a big personality. She sat next to her friend, Sommers, whose "love for my dog," inspired her to draw "Woody."



WHAM Teen Art facilitator/teacher/artist Ashley Dooley instructs Jane Peddle and Sarah Walsh on how to draw their pets' portraits. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

Part of WHAM's month-long Vision 250 programs, free arts and entertainment events are scheduled through July to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. Whitlock and WHAM Literary

• See **WHAM** on page 18

SPONSORED CONTENT

Medicare And You™

Denied? Don't Panic — You Have More Power Than You Think!



Jim Schmidt, Medicare And You™

By Jim Schmidt
MEDICARE AND YOU™

This isn't meant to scare you. It's meant to prepare you — so if this ever happens to you or someone you love, you'll know exactly what to do next.

Here's the good news, right up front: you have rights, and you have allies. I'm one of them.

What's Actually Happening

Federal investigators recently examined Medicare Advantage plans and found something troubling. Some of the largest insurers in the country have been denying care that seniors were legally entitled to receive — things like MRIs, CT scans, and rehabilitation therapy.

Denials for prior authorizations have climbed 56% in recent years. But here's what matters most: when people appealed a denial for skilled nursing care — the rehab stay that often follows a hip replacement, a stroke, or major surgery — those denials were overturned 95% of the time.

Read that again. Ninety-five percent! Nearly everyone who fought back, won.

This wasn't a case of a few honest mistakes. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found a clear pattern, pointing to three of the largest Medicare Advantage carriers in the country. If you'd like to know which ones, I'm happy to share that with you privately.

Why This Happens

Insurance companies must approve certain treatments before they'll pay for them — this is called "prior authorization". In theory, it ensures care is appropriate, as a safety net against abuse. In practice, it has too often become a way to slow things down or simply say no.

The bigger problem is that most people don't know they have the right to push back. When you're recovering from surgery, need an MRI or CT scan, or facing any health scare, you're not exactly in the mood for a paperwork fight. So many people accept the "no" because they don't know what to do and don't have a trusted advocate in their corner. They go without care, pay out of pocket, or are sent

home before they're really ready — leading to setbacks, repeat hospital stays, and lasting harm.

As this Medicare advocate puts it: "This isn't a paperwork problem. This is a care problem."

New Protections Starting This Year

Medicare has stepped in. Starting in 2026, new rules require:

- **Urgent requests:** insurers must respond within 72 hours
- **Standard requests:** insurers must respond within 7 days
- **Transparency:** plans must publicly report their approval, denial, and overturn rates

Will these rules change everything overnight? Time will tell. When denying care has been profitable, a deadline alone doesn't always shift behavior. That's exactly why knowing your rights matters so much.

Three Things to Remember

- **A denial is not the final word.** You have the right to appeal, and given the overturn rates, the odds are genuinely in your favor.
- **Bring your doctor into it.** Your physician can submit supporting documentation and, in many cases, speak directly with the insurer's medical reviewer — a doctor-to-doctor conversation called a "Peer-to-Peer" review that can make a real difference.
- **Ask questions before you enroll — or re-enroll.** Not every plan handles denials the same way.

A good Medicare advisor should be able to tell you which plans in your area have a track record of high denials, along with much more worth knowing, before you sign anything.

Be good to yourself — don't let this happen to you. You have more power than most people think. If you don't know who your broker is, if you signed up over the phone with a stranger (something I strongly discourage), or if your broker simply doesn't have the knowledge to protect you, it's your health, your finances, and your peace of mind on the line. Please seek out a trusted Medicare advisor, post haste.

Next Month's Article

Come August, I will be diving into the brand-new Medicare GLP-1 program, called the GLP-1 Bridge Program (Pen or Pill). For those eligible, besides incredible dollar savings, this points to weight loss, better long-term dietary choices, and just feeling good both inside and out. Naming just a few, it's a better you! Watch for this next month!

About Jim Schmidt

Jim Schmidt has been a trusted Medicare Authority, Advisor, and Advocate here in the Valley since 2006 — and has never charged a fee for his services. For any Medicare questions, including anything in this article, reach Jim directly at 480-296-3900 or JimSchmidt@MedicareAndYou.Reviews.

Schools undergo final prep for new year

More than 200 teachers attend educator orientation

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Planning for the first day of school is similar for teachers and students in many ways.

From feelings of excitement to nervousness, and gathering supplies while getting mentally prepared, Dysart Unified School District staff have already begun gearing up to welcome students on Thursday, Aug. 6, for the 2026-27 academic year.

Orientations and open houses are set for the following dates:

- K-8 meet the teacher night is from 5-7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4;
- Freshman orientation starts 7:15 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 5;
- First day of preschool is Monday, Aug. 10, and
- High school open house is 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 11.

Meanwhile, over 200 Dysart teachers attended an annual new educator orientation July 20 to learn about the district, receive training, meet with their grade or subject level cohorts and work together on their school sites to get ready for the new school year.

“It runs two weeks prior to school starting to get them prepped and ready to start the year with us,” said DUSD Director of Communications



Dysart Unified School District teachers prepare for the first day of school Aug. 6. (Courtesy DUSD)

and Public Relations Renee Ryon, noting how new teachers in the district attend various training sessions and activities based on their subject matter and campus assignments during orientation.

About a week before the new teacher orientation, the district offered a training program, Ready2Teach, which is a new cohort offered throughout the Educator Preparation Program for people who want to become teachers with a non-education bachelor's degree.

“We train them, provide mentors, student teaching opportunities, etc,” Ryon said.

Each one teach one

Local teachers were recently happy to assist and give online suggestions for a first-year teacher who needed help supplying her classroom with books for a fourth- and fifth-grade special education classroom library. Many recommended going to Friends of the Surprise Libraries, located in Surprise Regional Library

on Bullard Avenue, across the hall from the main lobby, since free books are often given to Dysart teachers with an identification badge.

A third-grade teacher, who goes by Poya Summers on social media, answered the Independent's request to share how she and other experienced educators are already looking forward to not only helping their students, but new teachers in the field.

Summers noted having two drawers-full, multiple copies of a “bunch of books,” and a half-shelf of duplicate copies of other books to offer the new teacher if she wanted them from her classroom.

Excited about the new school year, she expressed gratitude for working with a “great team” and supportive administrative staff.

“My room is coming together nicely and I'm excited to see my students' growth this year,” stated Summers.

“This is the first year they take standardized testing, so I'm excited to teach strategies and algorithms for my students to master and apply to their academic careers.”

Visit dysart.org.

Delarita Ford can be reached at dford@iniusa.org. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AsOpinions@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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OPINION

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Your Opinion

Our opinions page is to provide an open forum for our readers. We hope to stimulate debate, not to dominate or control it. We reserve the right to edit our opinions, and we insist on civility. Please include your name and phone number, so we can contact you for clarification or confirmation. We welcome your photo. All opinions must be no more than 300 words. Those that are judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month. Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. The content of a submission is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

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.

Mayor misled about meeting with Gallego, Kelly staff

Did you know Mark Kelly's staff and Ruben Gallego personally came to Surprise to discuss how we stop the ICE "concentration camp" from opening in our city?



Taylor Bhone

That is not the way our mayor made it seem when he issued a misleading press release, showing only himself, one staffer, and Gallego in the room. He made it look like a private meeting for the purpose of discussing "public safety, infrastructure, and the pending proposal for a short-term (ICE) processing center" to quote the Mayor's press release.

More online

Read more opinions at YourValley.net/surprise-independent

It was not.

I spoke to District 6 councilmember Chris Judd about that meeting, within hours of it concluding. All seven members of

Surprise City Council were there. It was about stopping that facility from opening.

The building is already standing, in the midst of renovation and hiring, paused only thanks to Kris Mayes. The plan to prevent it from ever housing detainees is to provide the same data that residents have been referencing in city council meetings for the past four months, directly to Gallego's office.

Gallego suggested that Director of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin is likely to abandon Surprise if he is informed about just how problematic this facility will be. The majority of these warehouse conversions in other states have already been abandoned for one reason or another.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

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

The chemicals stored across the street from the Surprise DHS warehouse at Rinchem require unplanned, costly renovations to the DHS warehouse before it can house detainees.

This warehouse does not work as a detention center. Hopefully the conversation plans will soon be formally abandoned.

Taylor Bhone
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.

Sun City West reader supports Surprise ICE facility

I would like to respond to the writer of the letter, Why I'm no longer spending money in Surprise, published in the Independent. The letter-writer objects to the proposed ICE facility, calling it a "concentration camp."

The truth, in my opinion, is that the ICE detainees that are to be housed there temporarily until they can be deported back to their home countries will be treated better than some hard-working-Americans are.

They are given menus for three meals a day, they have clean bedding, recreational facilities, medical care, legal services, etc.

They came into our country thanks to Joe Biden. They committed a crime by just walking in, but also included amongst the inmates are rapists, murderers, pedophiles, gang members, terrorists, and drug and sex traffickers!

♦ See **Opinions** on page 10

Speak Up

From Nextdoor & Facebook

Here are some comments about stories happening in Surprise:

6 traffic signals to go live in Surprise over next few weeks

"For the last 30 years, Surprise has littered the West Valley with traffic light after traffic light. What a mess." — **Ron B.** "I hope they are speed cameras and not red light cameras. Where Litchfield crosses Waddell, every night after 8 p.m. on the green light for Litchfield it becomes a racetrack." — **Don J.**

"It's a racetrack on Bell by The Grand." — **Karen B.**

"Traffic lights don't bother me, but some of them could be a little shorter." — **Pamela H.**

"More stopping. More gas. More wear and tear on your vehicle. A waste of time. Another nightmare in Surprise to inconvenience people." — **Rob T.**

"More people, more traffic, more traffic lights. Depending on the time of day, the traffic lights will either speed up or slow down my commute." — **Linda C.**

"I wish the stoplights on Bell Road were synchronized all the time. I think they may be synchronize during rush hour. Most of the time I hit almost everyone red. Synchronized lights would save gasoline and reduce pollution." — **Chris W.**

"If people were intelligent enough to realize how smart signals work, unfortunately erratic driving negates their benefit." — **Randy W.**

"The traffic lights will maybe work on Greenway traffic. Now why they did not widen the road and make turn lanes? How about sidewalks for pedestrians on Greenway from 185th Avenue to North Verde Lane." — **Mike S.**

"Roundabouts work well in a lot of places. You just need to pay attention." — **Glen M.**



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6 traffic signals going live in Surprise

Heavy traffic in areas are expediting full functions

By Jason Stone

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As Surprise pushes out west and north, more intersections are in line for traffic signals going live over the next three weeks.

Six intersections total will soon have the signals to help monitor the flow of traffic as development continues across the city.

And because traffic is high in the areas getting the new signals, the city plans to bypass the flashing red phase that normally happens in the first 48

hours of activation. Instead, the signals will be fully activated right away.

The roads affected include Waddell and Greenway roads and the troubled 163rd Avenue in north Surprise.

The first two went active on Monday, July 20 on Waddell. Those intersections were at 157th Avenue and Legacy Parc Boulevard.

Two more went active on Monday, July 27 when the following two intersections got signals: 163rd Avenue and Country Club Drive and Peoria Avenue and Cotton Lane in southwest Surprise.

The final two signals will go live in the early morning of Monday, Aug. 3

along Greenway Road. Those are at the intersections of 175th Avenue and Verde Vista Drive.

"Because these two signals are in close proximity to one another, they will be timed to run as one system to maximize the efficiency of the road," city officials wrote in a news release.

City traffic staff plans to monitor the timing of the signals from the city's traffic control center and make adjustments where needed.

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.



Traffic signals are going live in six intersections across Surprise. (Courtesy of city of Surprise)

Opinions

• From page 8

Do we really want these people in our country?

I don't! Perhaps the letter-writer would volunteer to take some of them into his/her home and support them?

God bless America and God bless the ICE agents who face danger every day in their jobs.

Jean Goncalves
SUN CITY WEST

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.

Hamadeh protesters are not crazy, nor communist

Re: your article, Hamadeh labels protesters 'communists' at Sun City West GOP meeting. First, there were well over 50 protesters there, not sure why your count was so wrong. Second, why did Hamadeh feel the need to label the protesters as crazy and communist?

He's not spoken to us, he doesn't know us, he has no idea why we protest, except that he does know we do not support his views. He has had plenty of opportunities to meet with us, through town halls that have been requested, or by just coming out to see

what a good number of people think about his policies.

If he truly was our representative, he should talk to all of the people in his district, not just his supporters. Let's have less name calling and more direct communication.

As for the communist label, it appears he only started using that after his leader started calling his opposition that. It would be appreciated if our representative was able to think for himself, and not just reiterate the words of another

I, and I'm sure I speak for many of the protesters, are very much in favor of democracy. We just don't want autocracy, with one person acting as

a dictator, ruling by executive order. We appreciate the three branches of government, acting to keep each other in line.

Right now, we have a uniform party who supports one man, one idea, with no regard for our Constitution, our laws and the will of the people. This must change. Vote for sanity in November.

Jan Stittleburg
SUN CITY WEST

Abe Hamadeh represents Congressional District 8, which 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.

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Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-151st., L-Deer Valley, R-Executive Way, L-Black Gold Ln.

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NEW LISTING



\$279,875

22202 N. Cochise Ln., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7051608

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-Meeker, L-135th, L-Deer Valley Rd., L-Tom Ryan, R-Via Manana, L-Las Brisas, R-Pecos, L-Cochise Ln.

Popular La Paz model located in the Palm Ridge Rec. Cntr. area of SCW. Home has 1086 sq. ft., 2 bedroom, 2 bath, great room floor plan & a block wall fenced private backyard. New roof underlayment 2026. Neighborhood HOA allows pets & rentals. Call today to view!



SALE PENDING



\$654,875

12635 W. Eveningside Dr., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7040339

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-128th, R-Sunglow Dr. which becomes Eveningside Dr.

Fabulous panoramic view of Stardust GC's 4th & 5th fairways & greens. Home has 2599 sq. ft., 3 large bedrooms (split), 2 updated bathrooms, golf cart garage plus an added 175 Sq. ft. art/crafts studio or office. This home is truly special & an absolute must see! Call today to view!



NEW LISTING



\$329,875

14165 W. White Rock Rd., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7010367

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, L-Trial Ridge, L- White Rock Dr

Highly desired Aspen model duplex located in the Grandview GC area of Sun City West. Home has 1866 sq. ft., 2 bedroom, 2 bath & an office/craft room. New interior paint 2026 & HVAC 2025. HOA allows pets & rentals. Being sold furnished. Call today to view!



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\$244,875

12727 W. Copperstone Dr., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7024624

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

Expanded duplex has 1697 sq. ft., 2 bedrooms, 2 baths plus a 19' X 9' glass enclosed AZ room/lanai. This home has been a successful seasonal rental & is being sold furnished. Neighborhood HOA also allows pets. Home is located close to SCW's Pebblebrook GC pro shop. Call today to view!



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lots of water and
if possible, stay
indoors.*



FROM THE COVER



From left, Nick Haney, Jack Hastings and Chris Judd appear certified to return to their seats on the Surprise City Council without needing a general election to decide it. (File photos)

Election

• From page 1

were unofficial as of the afternoon of Thursday, July 23. Check yourvalley.net for election updates.

Surprise City Council

Nick Haney, Jack Hastings and Chris Judd appear on their way to

holding their seats on the Surprise City Council as all of them ran unopposed on the ballot in Tuesday's primary election.

Haney, who first was elected to represent the north Surprise District 1 four years ago, earned 5,621 votes or 100% in unofficial votes.

Hastings looks like he will return again to serve the residents of the

CITY COUNCIL RESULTS

District 1: Nick Haney (100%)

District 5: Jack Hastings (100%)

District 6: Chris Judd (970%)

*Unofficial results as of July 23

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 9 RESULTS

Republican: Paul Gosar (100%)

Democrat: Danielle "Dani" Sterbinsky (100%)

*Unofficial results as of July 23

mostly centrally located District 5. He received 2,452 votes or 100%. Hastings first joined the council in a

• See **Election** on page 13

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 8 RESULTS

Republican: Abe Hamadeh (100%)

Democrat: Bernadette Greene-Placentia (64.6%), Raymond Keeler (35.4%)

*Unofficial results as of July 23

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 29 RESULTS

Republican Senate: Janae Shamp (100%)

Democrat Senate: Eric Stafford (100%)

Republican House (pick up to 2): Steve Montenegro (52.8%), James Taylor (47.2%)

Democrat House (pick up to 2): Christine Marie Scianna (100%)

*Unofficial results as of July 23

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FROM THE COVER

Election

• From page 12

special election in 2020 and earned his first full term in 2022.

In District 6, which is in the southeast part of the city and includes the site of the future ICE detention center, Chris Judd looks poised to win his third term in serving the district. He earned 2,522 votes or 97.0%. Judd first joined the council in 2018.

U.S. Congressional District 8

Preliminary results show Bernadette Greene-Placentia taking an early lead on Raymond Keeler in the democratic primary for Congressional District 8.

The two candidates are hoping to unseat incumbent Rep. Abe Hamadeh from the reliably red district, that covers a good portion of the northwest Valley, including Surprise, Peoria, Sun City, Sun City West, Glendale and parts of Phoenix.

The district also extends north to include New River and surrounding areas near Lake Pleasant.

Greene-Placentia has 65.7% of the vote and Keeler has 34.3%, according to unofficial results.

U.S. Congressional District 9

U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar will be taking on a new opponent in the general election.

In a race that has been determined for months, the incumbent Republican will battle Democrat Danielle “Dani” Sterbinsky in November’s general election after both candidates easily had leads in uncontested primary races.

Gosar, who is seeking his ninth term in Congress despite reports of poor health, earned 72,276 votes in unofficial results that the Arizona Secretary of State released late Tues-



Abe Hamadeh is vying for another term in the U.S. Congress in Arizona's District 8. (File photo)



Congressional District 9 Incumbent U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar, left, is seeking his ninth term in office against Democrat Danielle “Dani” Sterbinsky. (File photos)



Incumbent Republican Janae Shamp, left, and Democrat Eric Stafford are vying for the Legislative District 29 Senate seat. (File photos)

• See **Election** on page 14

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FROM THE COVER



From left, Republican Steve Montenegro, Democrat Christine Marie Scianna and Republican James Taylor are the candidates for the Legislative District 29 House race. (File photos)

Election

• From page 13

day night.

The former dentist was first elected in 2010 and took office in January 2011.

He has served in the First, Fourth and Ninth districts during that time.

Sterbinsky, who conducted an aggressive robo-text campaign in the weeks leading up to the primary, received 34,149 votes from Democrats.

She is a U.S. Navy veteran who lives in Wittmann.

In the 2024 election, Gosar won his eighth term with a big win over Democrat Quacy Smith, who also ran unopposed in the Democrat primary that year. Gosar earned 65% of the vote in the general election. He has not dipped below 60% of the votes in any of his previous general elections.

State Legislative District 29

The drama of who will be fighting it out for Arizona Senate and House seats in Legislative District 29 can get started now.

Republican and Democratic candidates have been known for months,

and that became unofficially official.

In four races that were run uncontested, incumbent Sen. Janae Shamp (R-Surprise), incumbent Reps. Steve Montenegro (R-Goodyear) and James Taylor (R-Surprise) and two challengers who ran uncontested in their primaries are all moving on the general election in November.

Shamp got 21,401 votes and will face off against Eric Stafford, who will be trying to unseat Shamp for the second straight election cycle. Stafford earned 13,959 votes in the primary.

In 2024, Shamp outpolled Stafford 59% to 41% in the general election.

Montenegro and Taylor will be back to try to keep their seats in the House for LD29.

Voters can pick two representatives every two years.

Montenegro earned 18,642 votes or 52.8%, while Taylor received 16,692 votes, or 47.2%.

The pair will take on a challenge from political newcomer Christine Marie Scianna, who earned 14,010 votes in her uncontested race.

Philip Haldiman contributed to this story. 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

Help

• From page 1

She picked up a second job at Banner-University Medical Center to help clothe, feed and house her new crew.

"I'm overwhelmed," said Norris, a resident of the North Copper Canyon neighborhood. "But I'm also thankful."

That is because Tempe Marketplace stepped up when she needed it most.

Thanks to the shopping center, her school-age grandkids Jeremiah (fifth grade), Deneco (second grade), Kash (first grade) will go on a shopping scavenger hunt on Wednesday, July 29 in time for the opening of school next week at Asante Preparatory Academy.

They will shop for everything they need to kick off the school year, in-

cluding new school supplies, backpacks, shoes and stylish new outfits.

The trio will search for clues to find items on a list of things they can receive at various retailers in the shopping center.

"The main thing is just wanting these children to feel like prepared for school and confident and going into a school a new school year and not feeling that they don't fit in or anything like that," said Heather Edge, the marketing director at Tempe Marketplace. "I think just being able to give them that experience of going back-to-school shopping and making it fun because we all know trying on clothes and things like that for kids cannot always be fun."

It comes at a perfect time for Norris, who has been trying to figure out

how to pay her mortgage when the kids were going back to school next month with a long list of needs.

Edge said the Norris family was singled out through the Arizona Community Action Association via the public relations firm the shopping center uses. Edge thought of an idea to extend its work with some foster children groups by finding a family to give them an afternoon of shopping for back-to-school items and Evolve PR helped hook them up.

"I can breathe just a little bit," Norris said about the news her family was chosen for the scavenger hunt. "I had to fall behind in the mortgage because they need to eat. The bills still have to be paid. The mortgage has to be paid, but the kids' needs came first for me."

Arizona's Children Association

"I know that there is a community out here that is willing and able to help."

Cherie Norris
Surprise grandmother

helped Norris get financial help and aid on behavioral issues the kids were having because of the anxiety caused by the separation from their mother.

She said the ACA made her not feel alone and understood her struggles.

"That made me feel like I know that there is a community out here that is willing and able to help," Norris said. "It's been a community. I'm telling you right now. It takes a village to raise children, and this has been a village for me."

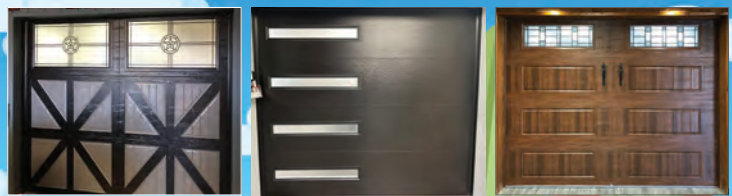
Norris has also received help from the Salvation Army and plans to check out the services at the new Surprise Resource Center that is opening later this summer.

Edge said details on the scavenger hunt are still being fine-tuned. But the basic plan is to have the family search for clues at various stores in the

• See **Help** on page 17

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Surprise grad now crewman for Navy helicopters

Shadow Ridge's Ramirez gets deployed on USS Cooperstown

MILLINGTON, Tenn. — Petty Officer 3rd Class Gabriel Ramirez, a native of Surprise, serves aboard USS Cooperstown, a U.S. Navy warship that recently went underway on a scheduled deployment.

Ramirez, a 2022 graduate of Shadow Ridge High School, said the skills and values needed to succeed in the Navy are similar to those found in Surprise.

"Wrestling in high school taught me grit and hard work," Ramirez said. "I also learned that life goes by fast, so do something fulfilling you can live without regrets. Home will always be there."

Ramirez joined the Navy four years ago and now serves as a naval aircrewman for tactical helicopters.

"I wanted to continue the family tradition of serving in the armed forces," Ramirez said. "I also wanted to be able to travel the world, and I've always wanted to fly."

Navy officials said the Cooperstown is a fast, optimally manned, mission-tailored surface combatant that operates in near-shore and open-

ocean environments.

Littoral combat ships integrate with joint, combined, manned and unmanned teams to support forward presence, maritime security, sea control and deterrence missions around the globe.

Littoral combat ships are hybrid surface combatants that lead manned-unmanned teams using unmanned aerial systems like the Fire Scout and Expeditionary Ordnance Disposal forces' unmanned underwater vehicles.

They conduct forward and maritime security missions like the Secretary of Defense Oceania Maritime Security Initiative.

The ships also strengthen partnerships through port visits in small island nations like Tahiti and Fiji due to their shallow-depth hull.

With 90% of global commerce traveling by sea and access to the internet relying on the security of undersea fiber-optic cables, Navy officials continue to emphasize the

prosperity of the U.S. is directly linked to recruiting and retaining talented people from across America.

Ramirez has several opportunities to achieve his goals during military service.

"I would say going through the aircrew pipeline, completing and graduating rescue swimmer school, is my proudest accomplishment," Ramirez said.

The Navy operates around the world at all times, promoting the nation's prosperity and security.

"Serving in the Navy, for me, means making unforgettable memories and experiencing new things around the world," Ramirez said.

Ramirez said he is grateful to his father, Steven, and his mother, Desiree Burciaga.

The Navy Office of Community Outreach wrote this story. 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.



Petty Officer 3rd Class Gabriel Ramirez, a native of Surprise, serves aboard USS Cooperstown, a Navy warship that recently went underway on a scheduled deployment. (Courtesy U.S. Navy)

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FROM THE COVER

Help

• From page 15

shopping center to lead them to other retailers. As of press time, organizers were still trying to firm up which retailers were participating and allowing video in their stores.

Stores that are already booked include the Nike outlet, where the children will be able to pick out shoes and an outfit — of whatever is on the list from which to choose.

For stores that will not allow videos, the family will still receive gift cards. There will also be backpacks filled with their school supplies.

“The thought process is that they will get a clue to go to each of the stores,” Edge said. “And then when they go to those stores, there’ll be something in particular, they’ll be able to pick out. We want them to feel like they get to pick out what they want.

We know individual kids all have their own kind of style and what’s cool and hip and all that stuff.”

After shopping, the crew will head to Dave and Buster’s for lunch and playtime in the arcade.

Norris said the kids are excited for their big day and heading back to school

“The kids are just thrilled,” Norris said about their reaction after telling them about the hunt. “They were just jumping around, and they were so excited.”

Norris said making them happy is not hard.

“They just want to be treated well and eat — and play,” Norris said with a laugh. “I’m going to put the excitement in them. Let’s go have some fun!”

Jason Stone can be reached at jstone@iniusa.org. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to A2Opinions@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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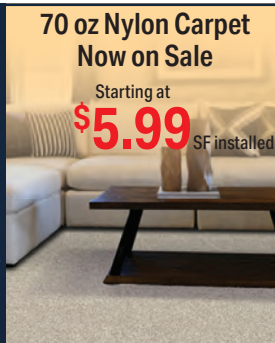
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WHAM

• From page 4

Arts Manager Maggie Gautier invited people to the arts expression site designed for creativity and community connection.

Live art and interactive creativity to celebrate freedom and expression in the country will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, July 25, at WHAM's 250th All Day Grand Celebration Open House. From 2 to 4 p.m., there will be live entertainment and an auction ceremony, plus silent auction winners presented.

"As WHAM celebrates our nation throughout the month of July, we also celebrate the community that has supported us for more than 20 years," said Whitlock,

noting the organization's 20th anniversary gala is Nov. 20. "We have been helping the community for all those years. A lot of people don't know about us."

WHAM Art Association welcomes donations for the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which provides "innovative, multidisciplinary, arts-inclusive programming, exhibits, and projects for the diverse communities it serves," according to its mission.

Visit WHAM-art.org for information about WHAM classes, workshops, exhibits and programs.

Delarita Ford can be reached at dford@iniusa.org. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to A2Opinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



Friends Vicki Sommers draws her rescue dog "Woody" while her friend Diane Johnson draws her dog "Toby." (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

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BRIEFS

City council cancels work session for Aug. meeting

The Surprise City Council will not have a work session when it returns from its summer break on Tuesday, Aug. 4. A regular meeting has been scheduled for 6 p.m. at Surprise City Hall Council Chambers, 16000 N. Civic Center Plaza.

The council typically meets on the first and third Tuesdays of every month, except July. The meetings are carried live on Surprise TV as well as streamed at surprisetv.surpriseaz.gov.

Agendas will be available no later than 48 hours before the meeting at surpriseaz.gov/agendas.

Pair of Surprise students excelling at Ohio school

Two Surprise students were named to the provost's list at Ohio University

for the spring semester.

Crystal Dey and Dzeneta Perviz were among 2,300 students at the Athens, Ohio, university to make the list. Qualifying students for the provost's list must possess a 3.5 or greater GPA.

Native desert plants focus of city workshop

Join Melanie Cooley, of Watershed Management Group, from 6-7:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 30, for an introduction on the uses and benefits of native desert plants.

As part of the city of Surprise's Hydrate Series, a workshop called "Cultivating Native Edibles" will explore how to incorporate these resilient species into a landscape.

It is held at the Surprise Water Education Center, 16126 N. Civic Center Plaza.

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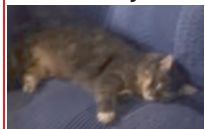
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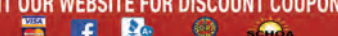
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PUBLIC NOTICE

Take notice that at the date, time, and place listed below, the City of Surprise Planning and Zoning Commission will hold a Public Hearing at the request of Brennan Ray with Ray Law Firm, on behalf of Circle K Stores Inc., relating to the proposed Conditional Use Permits.

FS24-1579: A Conditional Use Permit (CUP) with Site Plan for a car wash to allow for the development of a Clean Freak carwash. The site is generally located at the southeast corner of Cactus Road and Sarival Road.

FS24-1580: A Conditional Use Permit (CUP) with Site Plan for a gas station to allow for the development of a Circle K gas station with convenience store. The site is generally located at the southeast corner of Cactus Road and Sarival Road.

PROJECT LOCATION



MEETING DETAILS

Planning & Zoning Commission

Date: August 20, 2026

Time: 6:00 pm.

**Place: Surprise City Hall
16000 N. Civic Center Plaza
Surprise, AZ 85374**

At these meetings any member of the public may appear and be heard relative to this request or may submit written comments at any time prior to the Public Hearing. All written comments regarding this request will be made part of the record of the City. Any interested party may obtain an agenda 24 hours prior to the Public Hearing at the Surprise City Hall. Please note that this item will be placed on the next available agenda should the meeting be canceled or quorum be lost. Contact Jani Wertin with the City of Surprise at 623-222-3151 or jani.wertin@surpriseaz.gov for additional information.

Publish: Phoenix Independent, July 31,
Surprise Independent, July 29, 2026/46326_1

Public Notice

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Please be advised, Ruben Rodela with GWA Architecture, will host a Neighborhood Meeting to discuss the project referenced below. Any member of the public may participate in this conversation as it pertains to this project by utilizing the access information provided under Meeting Details below. According to Surprise Municipal Code, the applicant is required to host a Neighborhood Meeting to present their project to the public while soliciting feedback and providing answers to questions. Please note, the City of Surprise is not the host of this meeting; however, the assigned City Planner will be available to provide information as needed in response to inquiries received from residents.

Applicant: Ruben Rodela; (626) 282-6898;
ruben@garywang.com

City of Surprise: Leslie Carnie; (623) 222-3153;
leslie.carnie@surpriseaz.gov

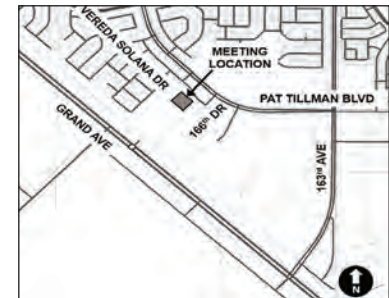
NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING DETAILS

DATE: August 12, 2026

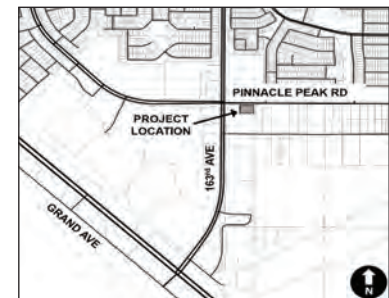
TIME: 6:00 PM

PHYSICAL LOCATION:
Asante Library
16755 W. Vereda Solana Dr.
Surprise, AZ 85387

MEETING LOCATION



PROJECT LOCATION



PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a Panda Express Restaurant with a Drive-Through Facility on a site generally located on the southeast corner of 163rd Avenue and Pinnacle Peak Road. Surprise Planning Case FS26-0313.

Publish: Phoenix Independent, July 24,
Surprise Independent, July 29, 2026/46228_1

CLASSIFIEDS

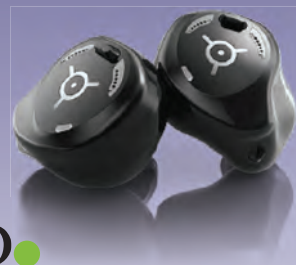
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3 VALLEY LOCATIONS

Surprise

(623) 269-8067

15341 W Waddell Rd, B 106

In Bashas' Plaza - Next to Marley Park Dentistry

Sun City West

(623) 320-1799

14300 West Granite Valley Dr, Ste B-6

Across from Hospital, next to Webb Medical Plaza

Goodyear

(623) 253-0369

15557 W Roosevelt St, Ste 105

In Parkway Village Plaza - In Between Pizza Hut and Motor Vehicle Services

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