



**American Hero**

Veteran's 100th birthday; 4



**INDEPENDENT**

**Back to school**

Backpack event; 16



August 5, 2026

Volume 29 Issue 31

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

**10 school campuses to get SROs for upcoming year**

**Remaining schools to rely on subsidized safety officers**

By Jason Stone  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When schools start in Surprise next week, 10 city campuses will meet their school resource officer for the year.

The Surprise Police Department is sending officers to seven public schools and three charter schools to act as a positive role model on campus who helps keep the students safe.

Three of the four Dysart Unified School district high schools — Shadow Ridge, Valley Vista and Willow Canyon — and Paradise Honors High School will keep their SROs.

Cimarron Springs and Sonoran Heights are two middle schools to receive them, and Kingswood and West Point elementary schools will get them as well.

• See **SRO** on page 12



**Dysart Schools will educate students on guidelines for AI**

By Delarita Ford  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Educating teachers and students on the proper use of artificial intelligence in the learning environment is among subjects

the Dysart Unified School District has prioritized for the upcoming academic year.

The governing board continued its months-long discussions about AI guidelines to determine how it should be used in the school setting, from administrative purposes to all staff and students.

Ashley Longoria, director of research and achievement, and Andrew Frazier, director of curriculum and instruction 9-12, gave a May 11 presentation on “Generative AI Guidelines.”

From May 20-June 4, an AI stakeholder committee com-

• See **Learning** on page 3

Above, Naeli Ortiz, a sixth grade English Language Arts teacher at Luke Elementary School, is among the educators learning how to integrate AI into the classroom this year. (Courtesy DUSD)



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## FROM THE COVER

### Learning

• From page 1

prising students, teachers, parents and more, met with the governing board for three study sessions to talk about AI opportunities, challenges, staff and student use, data privacy and security discussed.

The committee evaluated and recommended using a district-approved AI platform instead of a free one to maintain student privacy. Developing guidelines, using a highly-vetted, district-approved AI platform and not having students use AI in grades K-4, was among stakeholder recommendations presented to the board during the June 22 meeting update from the committee.

DUSD Communications and Public Relations Director Renee Ryon told the Independent the district has plans to educate everyone on the guidelines. “Our plan is a slow, steady rollout to ensure everything is done well,” Ryon said. “First step is getting staff up to speed this school year. The student rollout will come much later in the process.”

For several months, district officials examined the pros and cons of teachers and students using AI for class. Some concerns were raised at the May meeting about how teachers will determine if students use AI for homework and learn proper grammar and sentence structure “if AI is going to correct all of their mistakes,” asked Board Member Mary Jane Ziola.

As questions loomed on how AI would impact the school setting for all district staff, not just teachers, and the effect on learning capabilities for students categorized in kindergarten through fourth and fifth through 12th grades, she and fellow board members, including Denise Destiche and Dawn Densmore, expressed worries about AI access for kindergarten through fourth grade learning.

“If the kids don’t learn the core basics, and that’s from K through three, then we’re doing them an injustice,” said Destiche, adding she supports teachers using it for lesson planning.

Densmore researched international concerns noting critical thinking skills declining from AI use, teachers reporting declines in writing, problem-solving, creativity, conversation abilities, students losing core skills and what was termed “cognitive offloading.” She said she is very concerned that if AI “doesn’t know something it will make it up.”

Meanwhile, DUSD Superintendent John Croteau, supported using AI in schools.

“Teachers’ interactions with students is the key in this situation,” Croteau said. “Again, this is a tool. This is not the teacher. It is very important that our teachers still make those connections, monitor student work, know what their students are doing, know what students are capable of and not just using an AI. Obviously, we cannot control when they go home, but we do know when they come to classrooms with an essay all written with their capabilities, and if they are capable of even producing that or by word use.

“Replacing the teacher it is not. It is a tool for learning, and that is what we are going to stress. We are never going to say that this is going to take place of the teacher, and it won’t, especially in this district.”

Frasier noted how the district’s AI guidelines will constantly change.

“One thing we know is AI is always evolving,” said Frasier of the “living document” established for the district as a regularly updated guideline.

Not to replace expertise, judgment or human connection, the presenters pointed out how staff can use generative AI as a professional tool, while encouraged to use AI “ethically,

• See **Learning** on page 6

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# 100 reasons to celebrate an American hero

## Surprise veteran reaches his centennial birthday

By Delarita Ford  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The centennial birthday of a local U.S. Marine Corps World War II veteran was celebrated with just as much pomp and circumstance as the country's semiquincentennial year. Both history-making moments happened in July 2026.

Many came from all over the Valley and country — family, friends, veterans, dignitaries and more — to celebrate Cpl. John Morgan's 100th birthday on July 24 in Surprise.

Veteran David Samaniego, of VFW Post 285, planned a Rolling Thunder-style escort, noted for its thunderous sounds of a motorcycle motorcade.

"We have an opportunity to thank him — not just with words, but with our presence," stated Samaniego, welcoming motorcycle riders and all with "patriotic vehicles" for the morning's procession, which included various makes and models of newer and classic vehicles, motorcycles, police cars and fire trucks, etc.

Arranging "Operation 100: A Century of Courage" to honor the WWII veteran, who served with the Sixth Marine Division during the Battle of Okinawa, Samaniego spearheaded efforts that spread throughout the community on social media, flyers, and word of mouth to "help us line the streets and show John how much his service still means," noted his initial FaceBook



Participants sign a card circulating before leaving the celebration of the 100th birthday of U.S. Marine Corps World War II veteran Cpl. John Morgan. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

post.

Samaniego's wife, Evelyn, said their 12- and 15-year-old daughters were "ready and excited" to be at the event. The family sport-utility vehicle was decorated to display "100 Years Young" and "Happy Birthday

Marine" on the windows.

"They did a lot for us to make sure we are able to live comfortably. That is why we are the safest country," said Valley Vista High School marching band section leader, Charlotte Samaniego, 15, about honoring veterans.

Amid honking horns and waving signs, participants of all ages wished the veteran a happy birthday during the procession in front of his house as he watched and waved with loved ones and neighbors while people drove through his neighborhood in The Grand.

"I hope he feels the love from the city," said Surprise Mayor Kevin Sartor, who presented Morgan with a city proclamation and other memorabilia to recognize the cente-



Surprise Mayor Kevin Sartor shares a moment with U.S. Marine Corps World War II veteran, Cpl. John Morgan, as Morgan celebrates his 100th birthday on July 24. (Independent Newsmedia/Delarita Ford)

narian's life and service, adding, "We don't have many of them left."

Calling it a "special day when we can celebrate somebody who has given to our country," Sartor was joined by the Surprise Veterans, Disability and Human Services Commission representatives, Dr. Gwen Maxfield and Allison Wisnewski, who gave Morgan a commemorative coin in recognition of his service.

"He's always been a humble guy," said the WWII veteran's son, Ken Morgan, of how proud he is of his father, although he rarely talked about his military career.

"I can see he was moved about it," he added about his father's reaction to the display of supporters driving by his home and visiting him on his special day.

The centenarian's family from New Hampshire to California, and his hometown of

Iowa, traveled to participate in the momentous occasion.

Calling her grandfather her "favorite person," his granddaughter, Lindsay Battenberg of California, said she loves the stories he would tell her, but by far, "I told him he's my favorite story."

Adding how his grandfather is his voice of reason, Bradley Battenberg, said: "He's my sense of judgment. What would grandpa do?"

"I was the ring bearer at their wedding 95 years ago," said Bill Davis, of New Hampshire, who shared he was the ring bearer at his wedding when he was 5 years old.

Delarita Ford is the communications coordinator for The Grand and a reporter for Surprise Independent. She can be reached at [dford@iniusa.org](mailto:dford@iniusa.org). Submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters) or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto:AzOpinions@iniusa.org).

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R-Via Manana, L-Las Brizas, R-Pecos, L-Cochise Ln.

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**12727 W. Copperstone Dr., SUN CITY WEST**  
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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!



## FROM THE COVER

### Learning

• From page 3

transparently, and in compliance with district policy” for instruction and planning, administrative and operational support including human resources and student support.

“AI is just a tool. It is not a replacement for the work that we do,” Frasier said, adding anything put in to an AI tool should be analyzed and reviewed for what it is “spitting out to you and to others.”

The guidelines stipulate that staff and students should only use district-licensed tools and should protect student data when using AI.

While examples of appropriate use for generative AI included drafting, brainstorming and generating starting points; customizing individual student documents, verifying facts and data in AI-generated content; and administrative efficiency, prohibited use in-

cluded entering student names, IEPs, photos or birthdates, submitting AI output without thoroughly reviewing and revising information; replacing collaborative processes with AI; and using unlicensed AI tools.

“AI is a tool that we learn with not from. Students’ own thinking, creativity, and ideas are what matters most. We want to keep that central of course,” said Longoria about how students can use AI.

The district’s AI use roll-out plans include suggestions from the AI Advisory Committee that met to examine suitable AI options, then staff and student training, communications posted on the district website plus student handbook updates.

*“Our plan is a slow, steady rollout to ensure everything is done well.”*

**Renee Ryon**  
DUSD spokesperson

*Delarita Ford can be reached at [dford@iniusa.org](mailto:dford@iniusa.org). Submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters) or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto: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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# OPINION

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## Rep. Hamadeh needs to practice what he preaches

In Rep. Hamadeh's recent newsletter, I agree with much of what was written. However, the newsletter states, "We defend the freedom to speak, worship, assemble and petition our government."

As I understand it, Rep. Hamadeh hasn't met with constituents that are members of Northwest Valley Indivisible. They may not agree with his policies, but they are still his constituents.

The newsletter continues, "Too often today, the media and those who hate our country ask us only to dwell on its perceived shortcomings. We are told to apologize for our history rather than celebrate it."

## More online

Read more opinions at [YourValley.net/surprise-independent](http://YourValley.net/surprise-independent)

We are taught to focus on what divides us instead of what unites us."

Then, unfortunately, the newsletter continues, "As communist and socialist ideas

continue to gain traction in too many of our blue cities and states, we are reminded that freedom is never guaranteed." This is obviously a shot at the opposing party, trying to label it as something un-American.

This sounds like sowing division to me. I agree we should celebrate our history, but, warts and all, recognizing where we have fallen short as a nation as well as being proud of our successes. A nation can't improve it if doesn't recognize its shortcomings.

In short, Rep. Hamadeh should practice what he preaches.

**Arwin Roe**  
PEORIA

*Abe Hamadeh represents Congressional District 8, which includes parts of Surprise, Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City and Sun City West. Submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters), or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto:AzOpinions@iniusa.org). We are committed to*

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## Retiree says she believes APS rate hikes will hurt us

Summer in Surprise is sweltering, with temperatures routinely exceeding 100 degrees. Like every household in the state, my husband and I must run our air conditioner to stay cool. He is 83, I am 70, and we are both retired.

We played by the rules, lived within our means and saved carefully to retire in Arizona, which was once known for affordable living. Yet, it feels harder and harder to make ends meet.

The costs of basic necessities — food, gas, water and insurance — have grown to be astronomically expensive while our fixed income stays about the same. The value of our retirement is shrinking.

To cover bills, I face unbearable decisions, sometimes skipping medications for myself and my husband, or putting off necessary knee and dental work.

To add insult to injury, Arizona Public Service wants to raise utility rates by 14% this year. My monthly bill already jumped from \$70 to \$90. Over 12% of my monthly bill goes straight to APS as profit, yet I am already on a payment plan to avoid cancellation.

Arizona ranks 12th in retiree population, and this increase will stretch fixed-income families to the breaking point. We have already cut back everywhere we can. We haven't seen our grandchildren in Florida in years, and

## Speak Up

From Nextdoor & Facebook

Here are some comments about stories happening in Surprise:

## Chinese chain Panda Express has plans for north Surprise

"I'm sick of these chains with substandard food." — **Mary S.**

"We have enough Panda Express's in Surprise. Why not a good Chinese Restaurant like PF Chang's?" — **Barbara H.**

"Yuck. Too salty." — **Margaret S.**

"Gag." — **Julia P.**

"I am sick of the excessive restaurants everywhere you look because especially when they are blocking the view of the mountains from my home with their gigantic building and gaudy colors. And as far as taste, it's not as good as it was 15 years ago." — **Colleen S.**

I barely drive anymore.

Ordinary Americans are being squeezed by billionaire corporations, in my opinion. That is why I am calling on the Arizona Corporation Commission to reject APS's proposed rate increase and protect Arizonans' pocketbooks.

**Phyllis Hudson**  
SURPRISE

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## Retired power plant operator is OK with APS rate hike

I've lived in the Valley since 1970 and retired from the power company. I have been reading the concerns from folks about the potential APS rate increase.

♦ See **Opinions** on page 9

## Opinions

• From page 8

I'm a former power plant operator with many years of hands-on operating experience here in Arizona and I'd like to provide some feedback. Power plant generating equipment, the support system equipment and the downstream electrical distribution equipment all run nonstop 24/7.

Just like things at home, equipment reaches end of life due to constant use, wears out or breaks due to the loads placed on them. Some equipment needs to be replaced regularly to prevent power outages from happening at the worst times, especially noteworthy during the peak season when we all need ac to live here in the Valley.

It's true that it's not going to be easy on the wallet at times, but we all chose to live here and we are all are using the local electrical system unless you are off the grid.

The system needs to be maintained so we can count on it when we need it the most. I worked hard for many years to maintain our system and now I can enjoy having a reliable electrical system.

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**Mel Meter**  
SUN CITY

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## Hamadeh's rhetoric sounds more like old Syria than U.S.

Here are some quotes from the website of U.S. Rep. Abe Hamadeh from Congressional District 8:

"What makes this nation exceptional is its principles. ... We defend the freedom to speak ... assemble and petition our government. We recognize that the government exists to serve the people, not the other way around. ... It is time to ... defend the Constitution, protect our God-given liberties. ... (M)ay we always have the courage and conviction to fight for her future."

Sounds good, right? Sounds American?

But what did Hamadeh say behind closed doors? How did he characterize the American citizens who lined up peacefully on Saturday to petition for their right to vote without unnecessary restrictions, who protested the depredations of ICE against immigrants and who denounced Hamadeh's refusal to hold public meetings with his constituents?

He called us "crazy," "communists," those "who will ultimately destroy the country."

Hamadeh takes pride in being the son of immigrants who realized the American Dream after fleeing Syria. He didn't mention that his father overstayed his visa by seven years and

♦ See **Opinions** on page 10

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## Opinions

• From page 9

was not a U.S. citizen when Abe was born here.

Yet now Hamadeh supports an administration that has forced some 6,000 Syrians on temporary visas to self-deport or face imprisonment, an administration that wants to take away the citizenship of children who, like Hamadeh, were born in the U.S. to non-citizens.

He denies the most basic of democratic requirements, the validity of elections, by continuing to challenge his loss in 2020.

His disparagement of Democrats, the other half of our two-party system; his million-dollar donors and his reliance on the endorsement of a supreme leader to win an election sound a lot more like the old Syria than the exceptional United States.

Our founders in 1776 knew what tyranny was and they would recognize it today.

I hope we also know what real patriotism is and still recognize it today.

**Carole Parnell**  
SURPRISE

*Abe Hamadeh represents Congressional District 8, which includes parts of Surprise, Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City and Sun City West. Submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters), or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto:AzOpinions@iniusa.org). We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet*

*our Civility Guidelines.*

## Why could Abe Hamadeh be defending the Tate brothers?

U.S. Rep. Abe Hamadeh of Congressional District 8 has chosen an unusual cause: defending Andrew and Tristan Tate, dual United States-United Kingdom citizens who face 59 criminal charges in the U.K., including rape, sex trafficking, assault and offenses involving indecent images of children.

British authorities are seeking their extradition from the United States to the U.K. to stand trial there.

The Tate brothers deny all charges. They are entitled to due process. So are the alleged victims.

Instead, Congressman Hamadeh has publicly argued that the Tate brothers should not be extradited, portraying the prosecution as political persecution. Extradition is not a finding of guilt. It simply allows defendants to answer criminal charges where the alleged crimes occurred.

Congressman Hamadeh has previously supported legislation to restrict dual citizenship, yet he now publicly defends two dual U.S.-U.K. citizens. That inconsistency deserves an explanation.

Whether the Tate brothers are

♦ See **Opinions** on page 13

## BRIEFS

### Actors PLAYground to tell story 'Before Oz' next

The next Actors PLAYground production will take patrons to the land "Before Oz" this month.

Amber Ryan is directing both a mainstage and youth production for the story involving familiar characters Dorothy and others.

Before Dorothy can visit the land of Oz, one tight-knit family must embark on an adventure across America to discover it for themselves.

L. Frank Baum's spirited wife, Maud, recounts times of both laughter and tears on their journey together, as all the unique people they meet along the way inspire the magical characters Frank will bring to life in "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz."

As Maud reveals the man behind the curtain as the storyteller he is destined to become, the fantastical world of Oz is brought to life for audiences of all ages in this drama.

Actors PLAYground is at 11340 W. Bell Road, Suite 105.

The mainstage production will be performed at 7 p.m. Fridays, Aug. 7 and 14 and Saturdays, Aug. 8 and 15, as well as 2 p.m. matinees on Sundays, Aug. 9 and 16.

Tickets for those performances range between \$22.95 to \$89.10.

Youth shows will be performed the final two weeks. Four 7 p.m. shows have been scheduled for Fridays, Aug. 21 and 28 and Saturdays, Aug. 22 and 29. Two Sunday matinees on Aug. 23 and 30 will

begin at 2 p.m.

Those shows cost \$22.95 to \$59.70 for admission.

Tickets are available at [actorsplayaz.com](http://actorsplayaz.com).

### OUAZ releases fall men's, women's golf schedules

OUAZ men's and women's golf teams will compete in six tournaments across five states this fall, highlighted by a return to the NCCAA National Championship.

The 2026 fall schedules were recently released as the men's team looks to defend its 2025 NCCAA national title.

The fall slate opens Sept. 13-15 when the Spirit travel to West Palm Beach, Florida, to compete in the Keiser Home Invitational at PGA National Golf Club.

OUAZ will then head to Le Mars, Iowa, for the Northwest Iowa National Invitational, scheduled for Sept. 20-22 at Willow Creek Golf Course.

The Spirit will make their home debut Sept. 28-29, hosting the OUAZ Fall Invitational at Sterling Grove Golf & Country Club. The tournament will give both programs an opportunity to compete in front of a home crowd before entering the championship portion of the fall schedule.

OUAZ returns to Palm Coast, Florida, on Oct. 19-21 for the NCCAA National Championship at Hammock Beach Golf Club. The tournament carries added significance for the men's program, which enters as the defending champion.

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## FROM THE COVER

### SRO

• From page 1

For the charters, Highland Prep and Legacy Traditional School - West Surprise will be covered.

The city used 17 SROs at Surprise schools last year, but a tightening city budget slashed seven of those positions overall for the fiscal year 2027 budget, which started July 1.

Arizona's School Safety Program Grant will pay for school safety officers at the remaining Surprise schools. In that program, more than three dozen SSOs in Surprise will rotate between the remaining public and charter schools — meaning those schools won't have a specific officer monitoring the school every day.

SSOs are made up of officers who are on their day off and picking up extra side money.



Officer Moore interacts with Ashton Ranch Middle School students in Surprise during his time as a school resource officer there. (Courtesy DUSD)

The city council indicated during the budget process that it wants to find ways to bring back funding for the SRO program in future years to fully cover all schools.

The School Safety Program will

pay DUSD \$171,000 for each officer at each school.

In the SRO program, an officer is stationed at the school every day to serve as a resource for students and

• See **SRO** on page 15

## SCHOOLS RESOURCE OFFICER PLACEMENT IN 2026-27

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- West Point Elementary
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## Opinions

• From page 10

guilty or innocent is for the courts — not politicians — to decide.

The people of Arizona's 8th Congressional District elected Congressman Hamadeh to fight for us, not to spend his time and political capital defending internet celebrities accused of heinous sexual crimes. The Tate brothers have lawyers. We have one congressman.

Abe Hamadeh's choice of priorities raises legitimate questions about whether he is focused on the job Arizonans elected him to do.

This writer is using a pen name. Congressional District 8 includes parts of Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise. Please submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters) or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto:AzOpinions@iniusa.org). We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

**Anne Whitmore**  
SUN CITY WEST

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## Resident: Don't fight with ICE officers doing their jobs

Are self-respect and dignity still

valid attributes? My husband taught our son that you don't argue with a cop; he's just doing his job — and often risking his/her life in the process. You present your case to the judge for a hearing.

ICE officers are just doing their jobs. If they do it incorrectly, a judge should handle it. I have actively protested and marched for many causes — always respectfully and with dignity. Law-abiding people should never fight with officers, verbally or physically. That in itself would preclude these incidents of unintended consequences.

The majority of people overwhelmingly elected the presidential candidate who loudly and repeatedly voiced his intension to rid America of illegal immigrants.

The place to register your viewpoint is at the ballot box, not physically interfering with the law. This constant frenzy at the proposed ICE detention center is a sad portrayal of a person arguing the "dignity" of every person. You can be dignified in validating your cause. The person stopped by an ICE agent can be dignified by acquiescing at their arrest. If they are innocent of breaking the law, they can prove that in court. We are, after all, a nation of laws. At least, we are supposed to be.

**Carolyn Gelazela**  
SURPRISE

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## BRIEFS

### Surprise health center joins HealthyU Clinics

The Surprise office of Arrowhead Health Centers is now part of HealthyU Clinics, which announced the acquisition of locations in Glendale and Scottsdale as well.

HealthyU Clinics completed the acquisition of the location at 17061 N. Avenue of the Arts, Suite 100 on July 28.

"We are excited for this opportunity to bring Arrowhead Health into the family," said Vares Chaurasia, chief executive officer of HealthyU Clinics. "The providers and staff are deeply dedicated to providing comprehensive and quality care in the Valley. Joining HealthyU Clinics makes it possible for their patients

to access an even more extensive pool of resources to help them further maintain their health and well-being."

The other two Valley offices to make the switch over are at 16390 N. 59th Ave., Glendale, and 2629 N. Scottsdale Road, Suite 101, Scottsdale.

Arrowhead Health Centers has operated since 1997.

The care teams and staff at their three locations will remain the same.

"The acquisition by HealthyU Clinics helps current and future patients further personalize their care and take control of their health by providing seamless and connected access to a larger network of primary and specialty providers along with behavioral health services," the company

said in a release.

Visit [healthyuclinics.com](https://healthyuclinics.com) for more information.

### Tot Time program signups are around the corner

The city of Surprise is helping kids ages 3 to 5 enter the exciting world of learning through the Tot Time program.

This state-licensed program is designed for young children and focuses on kindergarten readiness through a blend of educational and recreational activities.

The Parks and Recreation Department is launching registration for its upcoming 2026-27 program, allowing Surprise residents to secure their spots starting on Monday, Aug. 10. Registration

will open to non-residents the following Monday on Aug. 17.

The Tot Time program starts Sept. 8 and runs through May 13, 2027.

This year, the program will be located at two sites: Sierra Montana Recreation Center, 14861 N. Spring Lane, and Countryside Recreation Center, 15038 N. Parkview Place.

Each location will operate from 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays.

Registration must be completed in person at the Parks and Recreation Office, 15960 N. Bullard Ave.

Space is limited, so early registration is strongly recommended.

Visit [surpriseaz.gov/TotTime](https://surpriseaz.gov/TotTime) or call Susan Dangerfield at 623.222.2210.



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## FROM THE COVER

### SRO

• From page 12

school personnel.

The SROs help the school with early intervention and crisis responses when needed.

The officers also help keep students safe by teaching skills such as crime prevention and social media awareness.

SROs work daily with school administrators, teachers, counselors and families and participate in threat assessment, crisis planning and emergency preparedness.

The officers leave all school discipline matters to the school administrators.

SROs are required to annual training the Arizona Department of Education and the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education provide.

They also keep an activity log tracking their time on campus. Part of that

time comes serving as a member of the school safety program team, where the officer works with school personnel on safety strategies on campus.

One interesting part of the agreement between the Dysart Unified School District and the city of Surprise is mention of the Arizona statute that calls for no boycott of Israel.

All parties agreed to not engage in a boycott of Israel, as that term is defined in state law. It has been part of state statute since 2019 and an aspect of the agreement between the city and school district the last few years, DUSD spokesperson Renee Ryon said.

According to the agreement, the officers started their jobs this week and will remain on campus until one week following the end of that school year.

*Jason Stone can be reached at [jstone@iniusa.org](mailto:jstone@iniusa.org). Submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](http://yourvalley.net/letters) or email them to [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](mailto: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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# Backpack event helps school return checklist

## Nonprofit stocks up students at West-MEC Surprise campus

Hundreds of Valley students are headed back to school with the supplies and confidence they need for a successful year thanks to Backpacks 4 Kids AZ, which hosted its annual back-to-school giveaway on July 18 at West-MEC's Northwest Campus, 13201 W. Grand Ave.

Backpacks 4 Kids AZ is a local nonprofit dedicated to supporting children and families through school supplies, food assistance and community outreach. By partnering with local businesses, organizations and volunteers, the nonprofit works year-round to help ensure students have the essential resources they need to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

"This year's event was an incredible success and we were honored to supply more than 500 Arizona students with backpacks, school supplies and other essentials to help them start the school year prepared," said Michelle Tallberg, director of Backpacks 4 Kids AZ. "There is nothing more rewarding than seeing young



Students pick up backpacks and school supplies during the Backpacks 4 Kids AZ giveaway July 18 at West-MEC's Northwest Campus. (Courtesy Lavidge/Emma Wolff)

students walk away excited, confident and ready to tackle a new school year."

West-MEC served as the venue for this year's drive, opening its Northwest Campus in Surprise to families while students and staff from the medical assisting and cosmetology programs volunteered throughout the day.

"We have partnered with Backpacks 4 Kids AZ to support them on their incredible mission to provide school supplies to Valley families in need," said Stacy Ray, West-MEC medical assisting instructor. "We are so grateful for their generosity and vision. They change lives every



Haircuts were part of the day at the Backpacks 4 Kids AZ event July 18 at West-MEC. (Courtesy Lavidge/Emma Wolff)

year during this event. Watching our students walk hand in hand with elementary schoolers as they picked out their supplies was incredibly heartwarming. We saw middle school and high school students with the biggest smiles as they made their selections. There is nothing more rewarding than giving back to the community."

In addition to receiving school supplies, families were invited into West-MEC's student salon for complimentary back-to-school haircuts.

West-MEC hairstyling students worked alongside Valley beauty professionals, providing free haircuts to over 100 participants, helping students begin the school year feeling

confident and ready for the classroom.

"Events like these remind our students why they chose this profession," said Allison Bearden, West-MEC cosmetology instructor. "A fresh haircut can give a child confidence as they walk into a new school year. We're grateful to Backpacks 4 Kids AZ for allowing our students to be part of such a meaningful day while gaining valuable hands-on experience serving real clients alongside experienced industry professionals."

The annual Backpacks 4 Kids AZ event demonstrated the impact that can be made when nonprofit organizations, volunteers, local businesses and educational institutions come together to support families across the Valley.

"Our mission doesn't stop here. We host events throughout the year to continue supporting local families and we encourage everyone to get involved," Tallberg said.

For information about Backpacks 4 Kids AZ or to support its mission, visit [bp4kidsaz.com](http://bp4kidsaz.com).

To learn about West-MEC's Medical Assisting and Hairstyling programs, visit [west-mec.edu](http://west-mec.edu).

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Dysart Unified School District will be participating in the National School Lunch Program and Community Eligibility Provision at 11 schools this upcoming year. (Courtesy DUSD)

## Reduced, free meals return to Surprise schools

### Select campuses operating free breakfast, lunch program

Dysart Unified School District will be participating in the National School Lunch Program and Community Eligibility Provision at 11 schools this upcoming year.

As part of the National School Lunch Program program, DUSD will offer meals every school day for \$1.50 (breakfast), \$2.75 (elementary/middle school lunches) and \$3 (high school lunches).

Children may also qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Students at eligible CEP schools will receive free meals. Those students will receive one free breakfast and lunch every school day without having to submit a household application.

Second meals and a la carte items will still be available to purchase at their paid rates.

In lieu of a household application, families should submit an alternate income form at [schoolcafe.com](http://schoolcafe.com).

The following 11 schools have been approved to operate Community Eligibility Provision:

- Countryside Elementary School
- Dysart High School

- Dysart Middle School
- El Mirage Elementary School
- Kingswood Elementary School
- Luke Elementary School
- Riverview School
- Surprise Elementary School
- Thompson Ranch Elementary School

- Valley Vista High School
- West Point Elementary School

As part of this program, meals are provided at no cost to students attending the schools above.

Children can get free or reduced-price meals if the household's gross income falls at or below the limits on the Federal Income Eligibility Guideline chart.

To apply for free or reduced-price meals, the school district recommends applying at [schoolcafe.com](http://schoolcafe.com).

Paper applications are available in each school office and can be returned to the school once completed unless the household has already received notification that their children are approved for free meals this year.

Applications include a letter informing households of the availability of free and reduced-price meals for their children and what is required to complete on the application.

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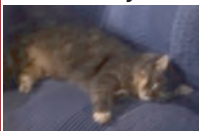
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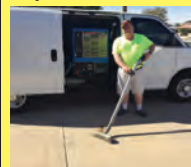


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## Public Notice

### NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Please be advised, Tyler Carr with RKA Architects, Inc., 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: Tyler Carr, 602-955-3900, tcarr@rkaa.com

City of Surprise: Alex Ferruccio, 623-222-3164, alex.ferruccio@surpriseaz.gov

### NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING DETAILS

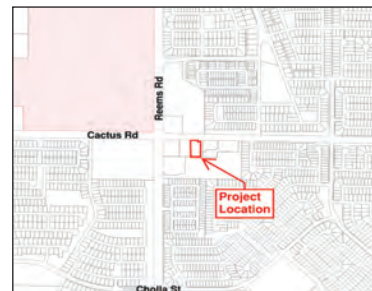
DATE: Wednesday, August 26, 2026

TIME: 6:00 PM

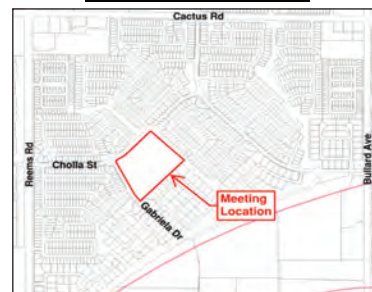
PHYSICAL LOCATION:

Rancho Gabriela Elementary School (Media Room)  
15272 W Gabriela Dr., Surprise, AZ 85379

### MEETING LOCATION



### PROJECT LOCATION



### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A Conditional Use Permit with Site Plan for the construction of an approximate 2,311 square foot drive through restaurant on a vacant pad located east of the southeast corner of Cactus Road and Reems Road. Surprise Planning Case FS25-1014.

Publish: Phoenix Independent, August 7,  
Surprise Independent, August 7, 2026/46579\_1

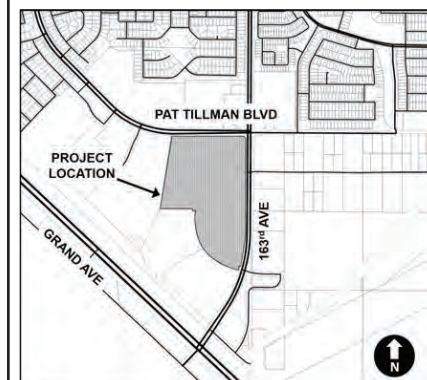
## Public Notice

### CITY OF SURPRISE PUBLIC NOTICE

Take notice that at the date, time, and place listed below, the City of Surprise Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council will hold Public Hearings at the request of Kimberly Euers of YESCO, LLC., on behalf of SimonCRE Asante, LLC., relating to the proposed Comprehensive Sign Program (CSP) Amendment.

**FS25-1042:** A CSP Amendment to add Lot 3 and associated sign design standards to the existing Asante Trails CSP. The site is generally located on the southwest corner of 163rd Avenue and Pat Tillman Boulevard.

### 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

#### City Council

Date: September 15, 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. Leslie Carnie with the City of Surprise at 623-222-3153 or Leslie.Carnie@surpriseaz.gov for additional information.

Publish: Phoenix Independent, July 31,  
Surprise Independent, August 5, 2026/46518\_1

## Public Notice

CITY OF SURPRISE  
PUBLIC NOTICE

Take notice that at the date, time, and place listed below, the City of Surprise Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council will hold Public Hearings at the request of Withey Morris Baugh, PLC relating to the proposed project.

**FS25-1081:** The project requests a Minor General Plan Amendment from Neighborhood Character Area to Commerce and Office Character Area and a Rezone from Rural Residential (RR) to Regional Commercial (C-3) with a Planned Unit Development (PUD) overlay. The request is to allow a flex business-tech park on a 7.52-acre vacant site generally located at the southeast corner of the Happy Valley Road and 157th Avenue.

**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

**City Council**

**Date:** September 15, 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. Chris Sexton with the City of Surprise at 623-222-3134 or Christina.Sexton@surpriseaz.gov for additional information.

Publish: Phoenix Independent, July 31,  
Surprise Independent, August 5, 2026/46515\_1

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