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August 2026

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Voters remake council, incoming members push ambitious agenda

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Gilbert voters delivered a sweeping rebuke to the Town Council in July, ousting all three incumbents seeking reelection and giving four challengers a majority on the seven-member council. Then the incoming members started acting on what they viewed as their mandate.

Beth Goulden, Bill Spence, Joel Coen and Bus Obayomi followed their July 21 victories by issuing an ambitious agenda calling for reviews of utility rates and spending, reconsideration of major capital projects and a moratorium on new bonds and tax increases.

Their actions also produced immediate friction with the council they will replace in part — and with town officials who emphasized the newcomers will have no policymaking authority until they are sworn in Jan. 5.

The election marked a dramatic turnover for Gilbert government. Goulden led the seven-candidate field

• See **Voters** on page 20

From heartbreak to hope

Gilbert father turns son's memory into Million Mile Challenge

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The first steps were never really about Montana.

They were about a father searching for somewhere to carry grief that had nowhere else to go.

Nearly two decades after Barry Adkins set out from Gilbert on foot with

his son Kevin's ashes in his backpack, the miles are still adding up. What began as a 1,400-mile walk has evolved into the Million Mile Challenge, an effort to invite people across the country to walk for loved ones affected by addiction while sharing stories they often keep to themselves.

For Adkins, every mile traces back to one July night in 2005.

Kevin had just graduated from Mesquite High School, bought a new truck and started his first full-time job.

"He was just your average kid,"

Adkins said.

He recalled a son who struggled in school but persevered. After graduation, Kevin hugged his father and thanked him for refusing to let him quit.

"Thanks for not giving up on me, dad," Kevin told him.

The night he moved out on his own, while celebrating the beginning of adulthood, Kevin died of alcohol poisoning at age 18.

The next morning, police officers

• See **Challenge** on page 18



Barry Adkins walked 1,400 miles from Gilbert to Kalispell, Montana, with his son Kevin's ashes to raise awareness about substance abuse. (Courtesy Barry Adkins)

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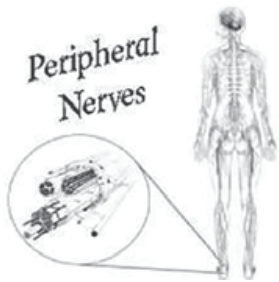
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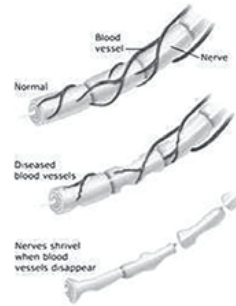
PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY AND CHRONIC PAIN WARNING!

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?
- 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained?

NOTE: Once you have sustained 95% nerve loss, there is likely nothing that we can do for you.

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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 September 30th, 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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ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Gilbert renews library district agreement

Gilbert residents will continue receiving library services through the Maricopa County Library District after town council approved a new intergovernmental agreement for the Southeast Regional Library and Perry Branch Library.

The new agreement began July 1 and runs through June 30, 2031, with an option for one additional five-year renewal. It replaces the previous agreement established in 2016, which also included a five-year renewal option.

Gilbert has assumed responsibility for operating costs at the Perry Library since 2007 and at the Southeast Regional Library since 2012. As the previous agreement approached its renewal period in 2021, town staff conducted an updated analysis of library operations and compared Gilbert's libraries with those in similar municipalities.

According to town documents, the review found Gilbert's libraries provide a high level of service despite having less physical space than comparable communities.

The town's libraries offer 0.28 square feet of library space per resident but average 3.65 visits per resident annually.

MEETINGS**Gilbert Town Council**

6:30 p.m. Aug. 11

6:30 p.m. Sept. 1, 15

50 E. Civic Center Drive, Gilbert
480-503-6871

www.gilbertaz.gov

COMMUNITY

Park University halves tuition for Gilbert residents

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Park University is expanding its partnership with the town of Gilbert by offering a scholarship that cuts tuition in half for Gilbert residents and employees of Gilbert-based businesses.

The new Gilbert Advantage Scholarship accompanies a three-year extension of the university's lease agreement with the town, continuing a relationship that began when Park University opened its Heritage District campus in 2018.

The initiative is intended to make private higher education more affordable while strengthening ties between the university and the community.

"We wanted to make sure that we were serving that community as best as we could," said Park University Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services Paul Orscheln. "We wanted to make sure on our end that we could provide what we consider as an incredibly affordable, private, higher education option for those living, working in the town of Gilbert."

The scholarship covers half of tuition for all degree programs offered through the Gilbert campus, whether students attend classes in person or online.

Eligible undergraduate programs include business administration, criminal justice administration, psychology, organizational communication and sport and exercise science. Graduate offerings include the Master of Business Administration, Master of Healthcare Administration and Master of Public Administration.

Students taking courses online also have access to more than 60 degree



Park University in Gilbert is deepening its partnership with the town with the "Gilbert Advantage Scholarship" for residents and those working in town. (Special for Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)

programs offered throughout the university.

For students attending classes at the Gilbert campus, Orscheln said annual tuition and fees are about \$18,000 before the scholarship.

"So what this is doing is cutting that in half," he said.

For online students, he said the scholarship reduces tuition to less than \$300 per credit hour.

University officials hope the reduced cost will encourage more students to pursue degrees while addressing what they say is the biggest obstacle facing many prospective students.

"And we know cost anywhere, it's always cost, cost, cost," Orscheln said. "We obviously want to look at it as an investment, but families are only equipped to invest so much, let's be honest."

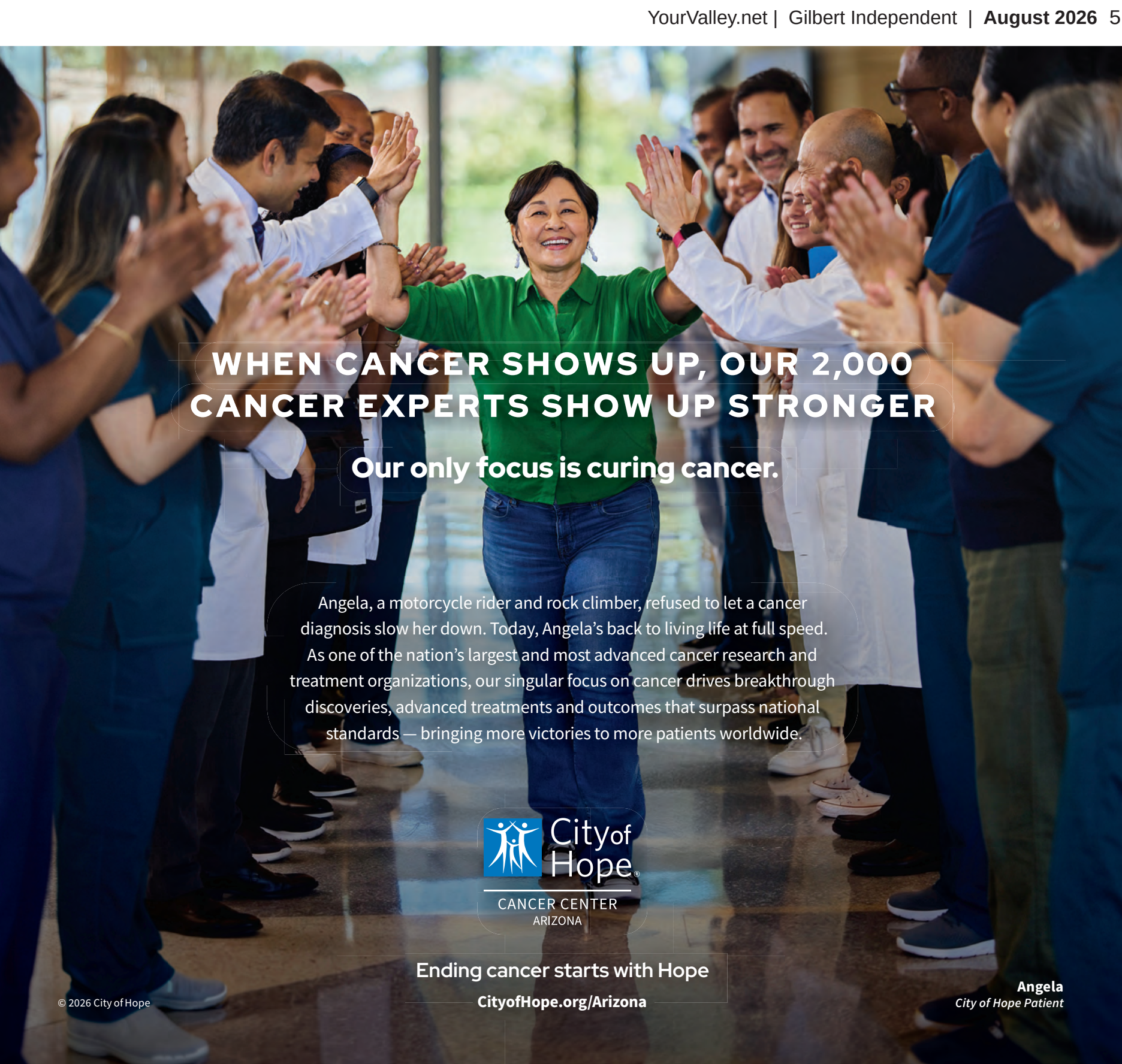
Park University's Gilbert campus has maintained enrollment of roughly

350 to 400 students for several years. Orscheln said the university believes the scholarship can help expand its reach in the East Valley.

"We want to be a private school option in the East Valley," he said. "To be able to play more on the affordability piece, which is the number one concern of families today when seeking out higher education, we thought this would be a good way to help make a Park education more affordable for them and attract more students to that Gilbert location."

Orscheln said the scholarship also reflects the university's long-standing partnership with Gilbert, which has included outreach to local schools, businesses and community organizations.

"I think what we're seeing now is we're going to have some action on some of this," he said. "It's not every day that you're going to have these



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ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Chamber celebrates members, foundation

The Gilbert Chamber of Commerce brought together more than 80 business and community leaders recently to celebrate a decade of impact by the Gilbert Chamber Foundation while unveiling priorities for the coming year during its inaugural REVEAL Gilbert event.

Held over a three-hour open-house format, the event combined networking with presentations on the foundation's accomplishments, the chamber's strategic direction for 2026-27 and opportunities for members to deepen their involvement through both organizations.

Built around the acronym R.E.V.E.A.L. — Reflect, Engage, Value, Experience, Activate, Legacy — the event encouraged attendees to reflect on the Foundation's first 10 years, engage with the chamber's business plan, recognize the value members bring to Gilbert's economy, experience networking opportunities, activate future involvement and leave a lasting legacy by signing a REVEAL Wall.

The event also showcased the foundation's work over the past decade, highlighting the involvement of students, entrepreneurs and community leaders whose programs have been supported through member and donor contributions.

Chamber President and CEO Sarah Watts said the event was designed to celebrate the businesses and people who help make Gilbert successful while encouraging even greater involvement.

Go to: tinyurl.com/2sk2wbmp

BUSINESS

Chef W returns to his own kitchen with Don Pastrami's

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The daughters of W Rieth's — known as "Chef W" to just about everyone — grew up in their dad's Gilbert restaurant, Not Your Typical Deli.

So when his 11-year-old walked into his new restaurant and told him, "Dad, this feels like right again," it hit him hard.

That new restaurant is Don Pastrami's in Mesa, at the Sheraton Mesa at Wrigleyville West near Sloan Park in the Riverview area, where the former Gilbert restaurateur is returning to his own kitchen after spending much of the past four years on the corporate side of the restaurant business.

"They grew up in the deli," Rieth said. "That was their whole life."

Her reaction, he said, choked him up.

Don Pastrami's is already open for catering, and Rieth is aiming to open the carryout sandwich shop to public customers by Sept. 1.

For Rieth, 50, it represents a return — but not an attempt to recreate Not Your Typical Deli.

"I'm ready for it again," Rieth said. "I think that I got a lot to offer still."

Not Your Typical Deli, which opened in Gilbert in 2016, became known as much for employing and training neurodivergent workers as for its food — and the food had its own acclaim.

Don Pastrami's takes its name from one of the deli's top-selling sandwiches, but Rieth plans to do even that differently.

He did not have a smoker at Not Your Typical Deli, using dry rubs to approximate smoke flavor. Don Pastrami's



Chef W Rieth is set to open Don Pastrami's in Mesa, hoping to do so by Sept. 1. (Independent Newsmedia/Tom Blodgett)

mi's has an in-house smoker, and Rieth plans to make pastrami in small batches of about 30 pounds.

"This is the artisan part of my career," Rieth said. "Everything's going to be high level, as best as I could get."

The menu also is expected to include smoked turkey, a pesto smoked pork tenderloin sandwich, Uncle Sal's brisket, cold-cut sandwiches and pasta salad bowls. Rieth's mother will make cheesecakes and the cookies familiar to customers of the old deli.

"I don't want to try to mock the deli because the deli was its own thing," Rieth said. "I don't think the deli could ever be done again like that."

Don Pastrami's also will be smaller and simpler.

Rieth expects to operate primarily

at lunch initially, with himself in the kitchen and perhaps one other worker at the register. There is no traditional dining room.

Catering is intended to provide the financial foundation. Rieth has spent the summer catering sports camps and hopes to develop office-catering business around Riverview.

"My goal is to have the catering pretty much carry the business," Rieth said. "I want to have fun with the sandwich shop."

Rieth began working with neurodivergent students years before Not Your Typical Deli opened, initially through cooking classes and life-skills training.

Those workers became central to the deli.

GILBERT INDEPENDENT

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Chef W

• From page 6

"That was Not Your Typical Deli, man," Rieth said. "I just made the recipes. They made the restaurant work."

Some will return at Don Pastrami's.

Rieth said one worker he began training at age 12 is now 23.

"I told him when he was 12 years old that he will always have a space with me, always forever," Rieth said. "So he will be here."

Not Your Typical Deli struggled after the COVID-19 pandemic and eventually closed. Rieth moved into food and beverage management at the sports complex now known as Arizona Athletic Grounds.

He eventually became director of food and beverage and said the experience taught him lessons he is bringing to his new business.

"Gosh, I learned more in those last four years than I have in my entire life," Rieth said.

He left his full-time position in February but continues contract work with Arizona Athletic Grounds.

Rieth also wants Don Pastrami's to fit a different stage of his life.

He has daughters ages 11 and 8 and said his corporate career sometimes required 90-hour workweeks.

This time, he plans to

serve lunch and close in time to pick up his children from school and make dinner for them.

"Instead of designing my kids around my career, I'm designing my career around my kids," Rieth said.

Rieth found the Don Pastrami's location while looking for a commissary kitchen for catering and mobile food operations. The kitchen was largely built out, reducing the investment needed to open.

He also has deliberately taken his time. Rieth said the necessary inspections and licensing are complete, but he does not want to rush another restaurant opening.

"Every time I've ever opened a place, I was under the gun and I was rushed to do it," Rieth said. "I don't ever want to do that again." The catering business is operating now. Sept. 1 is his goal for opening to sandwich customers.

When that happens, former Not Your Typical Deli customers will recognize pieces of the past — Rieth, some familiar workers, the cookies and the pastrami. But Don Pastrami's is not the old deli.

This time, there is a smoker in the kitchen.

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

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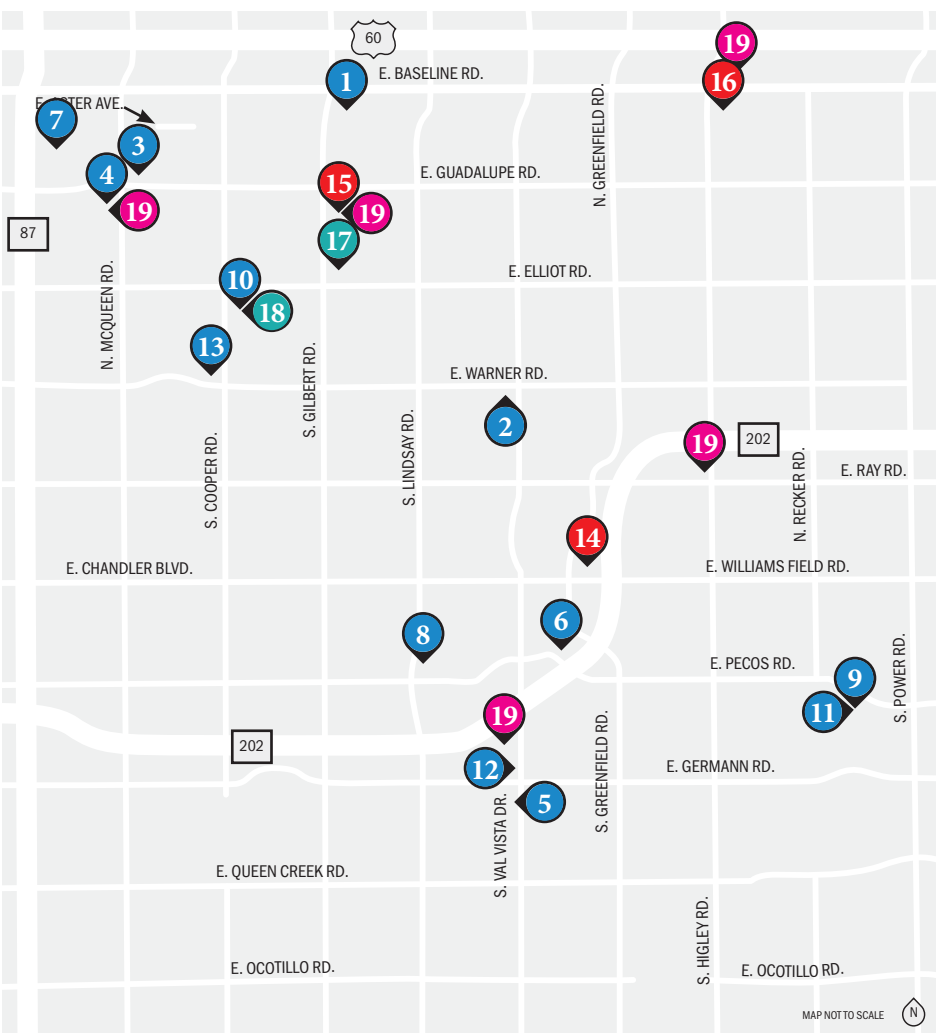
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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by Tom Blodgett

NOW OPEN

1 Bottles and Boards held its grand opening July 25 at 1525 N. Gilbert Road, suite C108, in the space formerly occupied by Wine Down Lounge. The menu caters to a heavily curated pairing experience, curated bottle flights and small plates. It will have a retail bottle program, and a live music performance schedule that favors intimate, localized acts. 480-219-3546. <https://bottlesnboards.com>

2 Chicko Chicken opened July 10 at 1395 E. Warner Road, suite 100, Gilbert, in the space formerly occupied by Midnight Taco. It serves Korean-style fried chicken. Popular signature flavors include Yangyeom, which is a sweet and spicy flavor, Soy Garlic, the extra spicy Buldak and Cheese Snow. 562-508-0127. www.chicko-az.com

3 Fly Dance Fitness soft launched its Gilbert studio July 18 at 1520 W. Guadalupe Road, suite 103, Gilbert.

It is a hip-hop-style adult fitness studio with classes. 602-291-1662. www.flydancefitness.com/our-locations/gilbert-az

4 High Desert Studio opened June 11 at 1655 W. Guadalupe Road, suite 3, Gilbert. It is a waxing hair removal service. 928-275-2543. www.highdesertstudioaz.com

5 Knight Psychological Institute has opened at 4100 S. Lindsay Road, suite 113, Gilbert. It provides psychoeducational and diagnostic evaluations for children to give clarity on learning disorders, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder and intellectual giftedness. 602-830-2044. www.knightinstitute.com

6 Mindful Therapy Group opened a clinical office May 22 at 1760 E. Pecos Road, suite 307, Gilbert. It offers comprehensive mental health care through a network of independent licensed practitioners, providing individual counseling, group therapy, and medication management. 480-993-2754. <https://mindfultherapygroup.com/office/gilbert>

7 My Dr Now opened a clinic June 12 at 1295 N. Arizona Ave., suite 104, Gilbert. It is a walk-in clinic offering family medicine, pediatrics, and primary care services daily with no appointment needed. 480-677-8282. www.mydrnow.com

8 Phoenix Medical Trials opened April 22 at 3011 S. Lindsay Road, suite 111, Gilbert. It is a dedicated clinical research facility that conducts late-stage medical research and clinical trials. They partner with medical sponsors,



CHICKO CHICKEN

(Independent Newsmedia/Tom Blodgett)

physicians, and pharmaceutical companies to test the safety and effectiveness of new medications, vaccines, and treatment options. It is part of the Alcanza Medical Research network. 833-578-7425. <https://alcanzaclinical.com/location/phoenix-medical-trials>

9 Phoenix Pointe Psychiatry opened a second clinic Aug. 1 at 4365 E. Pecos Road, suite 103, Gilbert. Its first clinic is in Tempe. Services include therapy and counseling, medication management, spravato and esketamine treatment, and treatment for ADHD, anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression and PTSD. The clinic will have a grand opening July 31 to introduce the community to its services. 480-378-6323. www.phoenixpointepsychiatry.com

10 Radiant Esthetics opened in May at 725 W. Elliot Road, suite 101, Gilbert. It specializes in piercings and lashes. (520) 736-7770. www.radiantestheticsaz.com

11 RE/MAX Fine Properties opened an office at 355 E. Germann Road, suite 130, Gilbert. It is a co-working space for about 50 agents. 480-610-6500.

12 Safeway opened a new store at 3960 S. Val Vista Drive, Gilbert, on July 31, adding a 64,000-square-foot grocery store to The Gilmore mixed-

Moves

• From page 8

use development. As part of the grocery store's opening, the Safeway Foundation distributed more than \$280,000 in grants to local schools and nonprofit organizations. 480-347-0001. <https://www.safeway.com>

13 Stars Shawarma City opened this spring at 884 W. Warner Road, suite B109, Gilbert. It specializes in shawarma, crispy fries, and signature house made sauces. 480-284-4217.

COMING SOON

14 Cavender's Boot City anticipates opening Aug. 14 at 2817 S. Market St., Gilbert. It sells Western Wear, including boots, hats and jeans. www.cavenders.com

15 Silk & Stone anticipates opening Sept. 1 at 735 N. Gilbert Road, Gilbert. It will be a resale boutique for designer clothing, accessories, and diamonds and pays cash for clothes. It also creates custom engagement rings with lab-created diamonds. 480-992-1578. www.silkandstoneaz.com

16 V's Barbershop anticipates opening a location at 1495 N. Higley Road, suite 107, Gilbert, in the City Gate development. V's is an old-fashioned barber shop with authentic barber chairs, old-fashioned hot lather

and straightedge razor shaves and head and neck massages. <https://vbarbershop.com>

RELOCATIONS

17 Midnight Taco is moving its restaurant from Val Vista Drive and Warner Road to 339 N. Gilbert Road, Gilbert, in the Heritage District. It serves Sonora-style carne asada tacos, Sonoran hot dogs, nachos, burritos and quesadillas. No opening date has been announced. 480-450-8680. www.midnighttaco.com

18 TruSight Optometry is relocating from inside Target Optical at Ray and Power Road in Gilbert to a new facility at 725 W. Elliot Road, suite 103, Gilbert. Operated by Dr. Nolan Turk and Dr. Chelsea Cain, the new clinic offers comprehensive eye care and designer eyewear. 480-480-7338. <https://trusighteyes.com>

NEW OWNERSHIP

19 Five Dutch Bros Coffee locations in Gilbert have changed ownership from retiring franchisee Jim Thompson to corporate-owned stores. The five locations of the popular coffee drink chain are part of 29 East Valley stores that Thompson is selling back in a deal announced May 12. The five Gilbert locations are at 1835 N. Higley Road, 1370 S. Higley Road, 3670 S. Val Vista Drive, 459 N. Gilbert Road and 722 N. McQueen Road. www.dutchbros.com

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G Gerald Peters Jr.
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EDUCATION

EVIT, East Valley school districts reach deal

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After more than a year of legal wrangling, nine East Valley school districts and the East Valley Institute of Technology have hammered out a new agreement that affects thousands of career and technical education students this school year.

In exchange for reducing “pass through” funding to CTE satellite programs on various school campuses, EVIT will foot the bill to transport students from schools to its main campus in Mesa. Transportation had been a local district expense under past agreements.

Last fall, Queen Creek, Chandler, Gilbert, Higley, Cave Creek, Apache Junction, Fountain Hills, J.O. Combs

and Tempe Union school districts sued EVIT when the tech school attempted to reduce the percentage of state funds it doles out to the districts for satellite programs, citing a state audit as its rationale.

The nine districts had refused to sign any new contracts that called for the funding they received from EVIT for the satellite programs to be reduced from 87% to 83%, with the districts still paying for transportation.

Under the new deal, EVIT funding to campuses has been reduced to 76%, but EVIT will absorb \$5 million in transportation costs to get students to its campus.

“The EVIT Governing Board made a deliberate decision to invest in our stu-

• See **EVIT** on page 11



Thousands of students in the East Valley attend various CTE courses at district schools. Under the new deal, EVIT will reduce state funds to school districts operating satellite-campus CTE courses but will now pay the transportation costs for students attending classes at its Mesa campus. (Courtesy QCUSD)

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EVIT

• From page 10

dents and their futures,” EVIT Superintendent Chad Wilson stated in a press release. “This investment ensures that a student’s opportunity to participate in a career pathway is not determined by their ability to get to campus.”

For local districts, the deal is still a net gain.

For example, the reduced funding will cost the Queen Creek Unified School District \$266,780 this school year. However, the district will save \$450,000 in transportation costs for a net benefit of \$183,220.

“From a financial and operational perspective, this agreement represents a significantly stronger outcome than what was originally proposed. Had QCUSD accepted the initial terms, our district would have continued to absorb transportation costs while receiving less funding for student programs,” accord-

ing to a statement by Amber Bordes, QCUSD’s chief operating officer. “Instead, we negotiated an agreement that transfers transportation responsibility to EVIT, protects district resources and results in a stronger overall financial position.”

The protracted legal battle did clarify EVIT limits on controlling quality and funding for CTE courses.

On June 29, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Christopher Coury ruled that while EVIT retains authority over the content and quality of all Career and Technical Education District programs, it could not dictate how the districts spend money on vocational classes outside of the CTED system.

The judge also ruled EVIT could not control the use of funds already generated by district satellite programs.

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 by email at jperez@iniusa.org.

SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

Gilbert Public Schools

Canyon Rim Elementary and Mesquite High School were recognized as model schools and selected to present at the 2026 Model Schools Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Go to: tinyurl.com/4yzv4enp

Higley USD

The district is launching ParentSquare as its primary communication tool, replacing the patchwork of apps, emails and other platforms many parents previously used to stay connected with teachers, schools and district staff.

Go to: tinyurl.com/ydphbswx

Chandler USD

Chandler Unified teachers, administrators other longtime

East Valley educators and former students have been mourning the loss of Pauline Gray, who died July 17 from injuries suffered in a vehicle crash in Gilbert. She had retired from Hancock Elementary in May.

Go to: tinyurl.com/krczncy3

Meetings

Gilbert Public Schools

6 p.m. Aug. 11, 25
140 S. Gilbert Road, Gilbert
480-497-3300
www.gilbertschools.net

Higley USD

5:30 p.m. Aug. 11
2935 S. Recker Road, Gilbert
480-279-7000 • www.husd.org

Chandler USD

6:30 p.m. Aug. 19
1525 W. Frye Road, Chandler
480-812-7000 • www.cusd80.org

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SPORTS

Park-Gilbert's Ward becomes first MLB draft pick

Park University-Gilbert right-handed pitcher KJ Ward became the first player in Buccaneers baseball history selected in Major League Baseball's First-Year Player Draft when the Detroit Tigers chose him in the ninth round.

The 6-foot-5, 255-pound senior was selected with the 276th overall pick. The slot value assigned to the pick is \$204,400.

Ward, whose fastball regularly reached the upper 90s and touched 100 mph during the season, recorded 52 strikeouts in 40 1/3 innings in 2026. He finished his Park University-Gilbert career with 67 strikeouts in 50 1/3 innings.

A native of Houston, Ward transferred to Park University-Gilbert in 2024. His first season was cut short

after he underwent Tommy John surgery, which also affected his availability during the 2025 season. Although he was cleared to return late in 2025, the decision was made to continue his rehabilitation and strength-building program in preparation for the 2026 season.

In 2026, Ward averaged 11.7 strikeouts per nine innings and posted a 3.5-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio. Opponents batted .247 against him, while the batting average on balls in play against him was .248.

"It's an exciting day for Park-Gilbert baseball and KJ," Buccaneers coach Kelly Stinnett said. "The first draft pick in school history is an incredible accomplishment. Through the ups and downs these past few years he's kept his nose to the grindstone and kept working hard. Today is a great day for him to enjoy the benefits of all of his hard work."

Power Ranch Golf Club changes ownership

Power Ranch Golf Club, an 18-hole golf course in Gilbert, sold June 23 for \$17.1 million as part of a three-property golf course portfolio transaction totaling \$57 million across Maricopa County, according to commercial real estate website vizzda.com.

The buyer was an entity affiliated with The Walden Group. The seller was an entity affiliated with Thompson Golf Group.

The acquisition included approximately 181.4 acres at 4415 E. Village Parkway. Financing for the transaction included \$15 million in equity and new debt provided by Davidson Kempner.

The property features a 6,932-yard golf course, a 14,034-square-foot clubhouse and a 7,371-square-foot service and repair garage. Both buildings were constructed in 1999.

The site is zoned public facility/institutional by the town of Gilbert. Property size and building square footage are based on assessor records.

The other courses in the sale were Dove Valley Ranch Golf Club, 33244 N. Black Mountain Road, Cave Creek, and Longbow Golf Club, 5601 E. Longbow Parkway, Mesa.

Shott's Tots hockey program opens fall registration

Registration is open for the fall sessions of Shott's Tots, a learn-to-play hockey program for children ages 5 to 10 at AZ Ice Arcadia, AZ Ice Gilbert and the Coyotes Community Ice Center in Mesa.

The program is scheduled to run from August through October, with dates and times varying by location.

Additional information is available through the Shott's Tots program website at azhockeylegacy.org.

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7:30 p.m., 4 p.m. Fri.-Sat.
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Hale Concert Hall, 50 W. Page Ave., Gilbert.

480-497-1181. www.haletheatrearizona.com

AUG. 15**Recreation**

GPD ON ICE

Families can join the Gilbert Police Department for its annual ice skating event.

12:30-2:30 p.m., \$13.50 for 12 and under, \$15 13 and up.

AZ Ice Gilbert, 2305 E. Knox Road, Gilbert.

480-503-7080. www.gilbertaz.gov

NEIGHBORS

Gilbert nonprofit Undie Chest tackles ‘hygiene poverty’ in Arizona schools

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A Gilbert nonprofit is tackling a basic need that often goes unmentioned among the barriers students face at school: having clean, properly fitting underwear.

The Undie Chest, founded by Gilbert resident Elaine Birks-Mitchell in 2021, works with schools and other organizations to provide new underwear and bras to children and adults in need.

In Arizona, the nonprofit works with the Tempe Elementary School District, Tempe’s Threads program serving high school students, the Glendale System of Care working with Glendale schools, and Roosevelt School District. Birks-Mitchell said the organization also is beginning to work with Gilbert schools, particularly Title I campuses.

Its Back to School Undie Drive runs Aug. 1-31 under the hashtag #UndieNeathItAll.

The issue is sometimes called hygiene poverty — lacking access to basic personal hygiene necessities. For students, Birks-Mitchell said, the consequences can include embarrassment, bullying and missed class when a school cannot provide a change of underwear.



Undies Chest works with several organizations, like Threadz in Tempe, to distribute clean underwear to students in need. At this delivery are, from left, Johnny Mitchell Jr., vice president of operations for The Bra Recyclers; Elaine Birks-Mitchell, founder and executive director for The Undie Chest; and Ann DiDomenico, chief program officer for Tempe Community Council representing the Threadz program. (Courtesy Elaine Birks-Mitchell)

“It’s an issue we don’t talk about,” Birks-Mitchell said. “We work with Title I schools and a lot of their funding goes toward programs and other things, housing, getting kids school lunches. So underwear falls off the list in most

cases.”

Birks-Mitchell’s work grew out of The Bra Recyclers, a social enterprise she founded in 2008. She created The Undie Chest as a nonprofit arm in

• See **Undie** on page 21

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REAL ESTATE

Gilbert home prices rise as pending sales tumble in June

By Tom Blodgett

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Gilbert home prices continued to climb in June even as a sharp decline in pending sales raised questions about whether the local housing market could lose momentum in the months ahead.

The median sales price reached \$627,500, up 4.6% from a year earlier, while the average sales price rose 3.3% to \$760,981, according to June market data from Phoenix Realtors.

Closed sales also increased, though only modestly. Gilbert recorded 284 closed sales during the month, up 2.2% from a year earlier.

But pending sales offered a much different picture. Only 163 sales were pending, a 37.5% year-over-year decline and by far the largest percentage change among the major indicators in the June report.

Sammy Glassman, board president of Phoenix Realtors, said higher borrowing costs and home affordability remain obstacles for prospective buyers despite Gilbert's appeal.

GILBERT JUNE MARKET DATA

New Listings: 306 (0.0%)

Pending Sales: 163 (-37.5%)

Closed Sales: 284 (+2.2%)

Days on Market Until Sale: 59 (-4.8%)

Median Sales Price: \$627,500 (+4.6%)

Average Sales Price: \$760,981 (+3.3%)

Percent of List Price Received: 98.4% (+0.1%)

Inventory of Homes for Sale: 874 (-0.2%)

Months Supply of Inventory: 3.6 (-5.3%)

"Gilbert continues to benefit from strong community appeal, excellent schools and a family-oriented lifestyle, but buyers are feeling the impact of higher mortgage rates and ongoing affordability challenges," Glassman said.

The decline in pending sales could be an early indication that closed sales will weaken later this summer because pending transactions generally represent homes under contract that have not yet completed the sales process.

"Although closed sales were up slightly in June, the significant drop in pending sales suggests buyers are taking more time to make decisions and future sales activity may soften in the coming months," Glassman said.

Prices move higher

Gilbert's price increases came despite a housing market that otherwise showed relatively little year-over-year movement in several measures.

The town had 306 new listings in June, unchanged from a year earlier. Inventory stood at 874 homes, down 0.2%.

The months supply of inventory fell 5.3% to 3.6 months. The figure estimates how long it would take

• See **Real Estate** on page 17



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Real Estate

• From page 16

to sell the existing inventory at the current sales pace if no additional homes came onto the market.

Homes that sold spent a median 59 days on the market before the sale, a 4.8% decrease from a year earlier.

Sellers also received an average 98.4% of their asking price, up 0.1% from the previous year.

“Unlike many markets, Gilbert saw both median and average sales prices increase year-over-year, reflecting continued demand for the area,” Glassman said.

The median price, which represents the midpoint of sales rather than an average of all transactions, increased by \$27,500 for every \$600,000 in the previous year’s median price based on the reported 4.6% gain.

Affordability remains an issue

Higher prices can benefit homeowners by increasing their equity, but they also can create difficulties for owners who want to sell and purchase another home in Gilbert.

A homeowner who bought years ago at a lower price and refinanced or financed at a lower mortgage rate may face both a higher purchase price and a higher interest rate when trying to move into another home.

“That said, rising prices can make it more difficult for existing homeowners to move within the community,” Glassman said.

That dynamic can affect both sides of the market by limiting the number of homeowners willing to put their properties up for sale while also reducing the pool of potential buyers.

For sellers, the June figures suggest buyers remain willing to pay close to asking price, but the steep decline in pending transactions could make pricing and a home’s condition increasingly important if demand slows.

Tuition

• From page 4

kind of relationships with the community that you’re serving.”

Gilbert Mayor Scott Anderson stated in a release the partnership represents an investment in the community’s future.

“One of the most meaningful ways we can support our community is by investing in its people,” Anderson stated. “Education has the power to transform lives, and the Gilbert community deserves the opportunity to pursue it without financial barriers.”

Park University officials said the institution has long focused on serving adult learners, military members and working professionals by offering accelerated eight-week terms, evening classes, online instruction and credit for prior learning.

Orscheln said flexibility remains

central to the university’s approach as students increasingly balance education with careers and family responsibilities.

“They want the eight-week class,” he said. “They want the online opportunity to do their education when they can do it. That’s really our focus right now.”

Founded in 1875, Park University is a private nonprofit institution headquartered in Parkville, Mo.

In addition to its Gilbert campus, it operates campuses in Missouri and Texas, serves students at military installations across the country and offers an extensive catalog of online degree programs.

The Gilbert campus is located at 92 W. Vaughn Ave. in the Heritage District.

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

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Barry Adkins completed his 1,400-mile walk from Gilbert to Kalispell, Montana, with his son Kevin's ashes in four months. (Courtesy Barry Adkins)

Challenge

- From page 1

came to the family's door.

"They said it was Kevin and handed me his driver's license," Adkins said. "When they handed you your child's driver's license, you know he's gone and he's never coming back."

The days that followed left him struggling to understand how the rest of the world could continue.

"You're amazed that the world is still turning," he said.

Yet amid the grief, Adkins came to believe his son's death had to lead to something meaningful.

"The phrase that I always use is, 'Something very good will come from this,'" he said.

Months later, Adkins and his family planned to scatter Kevin's ashes in Kalispell, Montana, where Kevin had hoped to live someday. Inspired by the film "Lonesome Dove," Adkins decided he would walk there.

"A lot of people tried to talk me out of it," he said.

Planning the journey required coordinating speaking engagements at schools across four states, long before GPS and smartphones simplified travel.

In February 2007, Adkins departed from the then-new Gilbert Town Hall

campus.

Over roughly four months, he walked through snow, rain and relentless wind, battling plantar fasciitis, blisters, ingrown toenails and sore knees.

"I didn't end up having a single sick day or weather day in four months," he said.

Early in the trip, climbing a hill from Payson toward Flagstaff, he questioned whether he could finish.

Instead of thinking about the states still ahead, he focused only on the next few miles.

"I realized that I was thinking about it wrong because I was thinking about three states and I shouldn't think that way," he said. "I should think I'm going to walk another three or four miles."

His wife, Bev, met him every few miles throughout the journey, bringing supplies and handling the logistics.

Those small goals became a lesson that extended beyond the road.

"It's a great metaphor for life," Adkins said. "You don't realize those little steps will get to there eventually."

His employer kept him on the payroll during the four-month journey, while NotMYkid and former Major League Baseball pitcher Todd Stottlemyre helped cover other expenses.

When Adkins reached Montana

Father

• From page 18

and left Kevin's ashes there, the walk ended physically but not emotionally.

"I realized that the story doesn't really end, it just keeps going," he said.

During the next two decades, he continued sharing Kevin's story in schools, community events and podcasts before writing the memoir "Kevin's Last Walk: A Father's Final Journey with His Son."

His presentations eventually centered on three lessons: making wise decisions about drugs and alcohol, responding to adversity and embracing forgiveness.

"It took me 1,400 miles and five pairs of shoes, but I did find a way to forgive myself," he said. "Sometimes the most important person you need to forgive is yourself."

The Million Mile Challenge grew from people repeatedly asking what



Barry Adkins walked 1,400 miles from Gilbert to Kalispell, Montana, with his son Kevin's ashes to raise awareness about substance abuse. (Courtesy Barry Adkins)

came next.

Instead of another personal journey, Adkins wanted to create an opportunity for others.

Participants can log on the website whatever distance they choose, upload photos, map their progress and tell stories honoring loved ones affect-

ed by addiction or substance abuse.

"When somebody's in the middle of addiction or they've got substance abuse problems ... that's not something people want to talk about," Adkins said. "It makes you feel alone because you think you're the only one that has to deal with this. And the reality is it's far more common than you think."

The challenge launched July 1 with no deadline. Adkins hopes nonprofits and community organizations eventually will embrace the effort, but he is content to let it grow one participant at a time.

"I'm willing to go until we get there," he said.

His goal remains the same as when he first stepped away from Gilbert nearly 20 years ago.

"I want everybody to be a part of something bigger," Adkins said. "Let's give grief a place to go and awareness a way to spread."



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Voters

• From page 1

with 24,560 votes, or 17.42%, followed by Spence with 22,732, or 16.12%. Coen received 22,358 votes, or 15.86%, and Obayomi won the fourth seat with 20,942 votes, or 14.85%.

Vice Mayor Chuck Bongiovanni and council members Jim Torgeson and Bobbi Buchli, all seeking second four-year terms, finished fifth through seventh. Councilmember Yung Koprowski did not seek reelection.

The four winners will join Mayor Scott Anderson and council members Kenny Buckland and Monte Lyons, giving the newcomers a council majority.

Three will be serving on council for the first time. Spence previously spent nearly eight months on council after being appointed in 2020 to fill the vacancy created when Eddie Cook left to become Maricopa County assessor.

The results appeared to reflect voter dissatisfaction over issues including utility rates, water billing, town spending and communication.

Obayomi, who had run unsuccessfully for council in 2020 and 2022, attributed the result to residents



The newly elected council members are, clockwise from top left, Beth Goulden, Bill Spence, Bus Obayomi and Joel Coen. (Submitted photos)

wanting change.

"They feel like they're fed up and they've not been heard and they wanted a council that's going to listen

to them," Obayomi said. "And my hope is to be able to do a good job of working closely with our constituents."

Coen similarly pointed to communication as a central issue, particularly after Gilbert's water rate increases, billing software change and meter replacement program.

"I think the first thing is communication," Coen said. "I mean, I think that people in Gilbert are tired of being kind of blindsided by multiple situations."

Torgeson saw the results differently, attributing them to low turnout and an organized anti-incumbent movement driven by anger. But he acknowledged shortcomings in the town's communication.

"We weren't transparent," Torgeson said. "We weren't reaching out to the public and getting them in on it."

New council lays out plans

Eight days after the election, the four incoming members jointly declared "the status quo is no longer acceptable" and outlined steps they said they already had begun taking in preparation for assuming office.

The council members-elect said they had met with one another, Town Manager Mario Paniagua and

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Undie

• From page 21

2021, in part to make it easier to work directly with schools.

One experience helped convince her that schools needed to become a greater focus.

A teacher contacted Birks-Mitchell about a sixth-grade girl who was being bullied and did not have a properly fitting bra. After the school determined the girl's size, Birks-Mitchell sent six bras and a dozen pairs of underwear.

She later checked with the teacher. "They said she was just like a whole different person," Birks-Mitchell said. "Came walking down the hall, smiling, head up."

The experience helped lead to the Everyone Deserves Underwear program, or EDU, through which The Undie Chest partners with school nurses and administrators.

The organization provides underwear schools can give students who arrive without it, have soiled clothing or otherwise need a change. Boys also are served, including younger students who have accidents during the school day.

"We want to keep them in school," Birks-Mitchell said. "And again, it's something most teachers will tell you this is something that's pretty common, but we just don't talk about it."

Demand extends well beyond Arizona. The Undie Chest serves partner organizations in 29 states and eight

countries. In 2025, it distributed 9,414 pounds of new underwear, exceeding its distribution goal by 17.7%.

Birks-Mitchell said at least 50 organizations are on a waiting list, with the nonprofit limited by inventory, funding and warehouse space.

The organization accepts only new underwear and bras. Monetary contributions also help cover expenses, while retailers can provide overstock, returns, samples and merchandise with minor flaws that otherwise might be discarded.

The Undie Chest also is using August to recognize educators and school health professionals who help students facing such needs.

The Barbara J. Birks Above and Beyond Award is named for Birks-Mitchell's mother, a teacher and principal who died in 2024. The award honors a school nurse or teacher who goes beyond normal duties to help students.

"I saw how she went over and above for her students and her teachers in the school," Birks-Mitchell said. "And I remember she used to take people home sometimes, but there was always a need. She was always helping out."

The Undie Chest plans to highlight award nominees throughout August on its website, YouTube channel and social media.

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



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Council

• From page 20

community stakeholders.

"We believe leadership begins long before taking the oath of office, and we are committed to being prepared on day one," their statement said.

Among their priorities are reviewing utility rates, strengthening the Gilbert Police Department, seeking a moratorium on new bonds and tax increases, and pausing several major capital projects.

They also want to reduce the proposed fiscal year 2028 budget target to \$2 billion, more than \$500 million below the current fiscal year 2027 budget.

The four said they had requested a moratorium on non-critical spending, sought to halt future bond issuances and tax and fee increases under consideration and requested changes to the fiscal year 2028 budget process.

They also took credit for a pause in construction on Gilbert Regional Park

Phase 2.

That assertion prompted an unusual public response from the town.

Gilbert officials said the park project had been paused but said the decision resulted from direction by the sitting council as part of a broader review of the town's long-term financial priorities. Town officials also emphasized that the incoming members have no governing authority until Jan. 5.

Anderson followed with his own statement, congratulating the four but emphasizing the distinction between winning office and assuming it.

"I also want to be direct about how this transition works: the new members will be sworn in this January, and that is when their formal role in policy decisions begins, not before," Anderson said. "Until then, our current Council holds that responsibility and will continue to carry it out with the seriousness it requires."

Criticism follows

Bongiovanni was more pointed, sending the four incoming members a sharply worded text accusing them of overstepping their authority and suggesting they might have violated the law.

"The best thing for the town is for you to sit down and learn first before you make statements," Bongiovanni wrote.

The Town Attorney's Office subsequently reviewed allegations of possible violations but concluded an investigation was not warranted.

Torgeson also questioned whether the incoming council could deliver on its promises without damaging town finances or services.

"I mean if they can pull off everything they say without hurting this town, I'm going to be stunned," Torgeson said. "God bless them. I just don't see it."

Torgeson looks to 2028

Just a week after losing his council seat, Torgeson filed paperwork with the

state July 28 creating Torgeson for Mayor, beginning a potential 2028 campaign more than two years before the election.

Torgeson said his candidacy is contingent on Anderson not seeking reelection. Anderson has not announced whether he will run again.

Torgeson said decisions by the next council could threaten Gilbert's financial standing if members make major changes to utility enterprise funds or cut revenue sources without accounting for the services and capital projects they support.

He also expressed concern that significant changes in town financial policies could put pressure on Gilbert's bond rating and increase borrowing costs.

Torgeson said experience in municipal government carries its own learning curve.

"Me included," he said. "And I had more municipal experience than anybody else. And I still had things to learn."



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