



**Football
preview**
Valley Vista; 8



INDEPENDENT

**Dress
code**

DUSD tightens
rules; 14



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DUSD teaches voters about latest bond proposition

Financial impact is about \$36 a year for typical homeowner

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Dysart Unified School District will attempt another appeal for the public to lend more support for facilities and growth as community stakeholders will be encouraged to vote for Proposition 421, which has been placed on the Nov. 3 ballot to “maintain safe, functional learning environments and support continued growth.”

Director of Communications and Public Relations Renee Ryon said the district will soon begin sharing factual information about Proposition 421 with the community, so voters can make an educated decision when they cast their ballots in the fall.

“The purpose of the ballot initiative is to maintain safe, functional learning environments and support continued growth,” Ryon stated. “Construc-

• See **DUSD** on page 3

Future golf star shining bright now



Area teen makes U.S. national team for Solheim Cup

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Aubrey Hilgers loves to play golf and travel. One day, the Surprise teenager is hoping to have a career doing both.

The fact that the 16-year-old champion junior golfer comes from Arizona is not too big of a shock, considering the state’s weather has helped produce several top golfers over the years.

But because she has become one of the top junior players in the nation from her exploits

• See **Hilgers** on page 10

Junior golfer Aubrey Hilgers of Surprise is one of the top junior golfers in the nation and will be representing the U.S. in the PING Junior Solheim Cup in the Netherlands next month. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

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FROM THE COVER



The Dysart Unified School is attempting another bond measure after it failed again last year. (Courtesy DUSD)

DUSD

• From page 1

tion of a new elementary school, land for a new high school, HVAC and fire panel replacements are among the items it would fund. Without these additional funds, aging safety equipment cannot be replaced, and the district will not be able to address the rapid growth in some parts of the district without adjusting school boundaries to balance enrollment."

The tax impact on the community will be about \$3 a month, or \$36 a year, based on an estimate for an average property owner in the Dysart district, with about \$0.17 tax rate on an average assessed home value of \$215,435, noted the district's website.

While the district relies on 90% funding from the state of Arizona and local sources, including property taxes, and 10% from the federal government, to request more money for a better education for students beyond what the government provides, the district can request an override or a bond, which is a tax on property from

the local community, and are two separate things that are not interchangeable.

A bond, which can only be used for capital purposes, covers things such as buses, school buildings safety and technology.

Dysart's last approved bond was in 2006. The district can ask for either a capital override or a maintenance and operations override.

Meanwhile, stakeholders are reminded to learn the facts about Proposition 421 and be sure to register and be ready to vote, according to the district's website, asking people to mark their calendars for the following:

- Monday, Oct. 5 — Last day to register to vote;
- Wednesday, Oct. 7 — Voting begins;
- Tuesday, Oct. 27 — Last day to mail ballot;
- Tuesday, Nov. 3 — Election day and ballot dropoffs.

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

"Without these additional funds, aging safety equipment cannot be replaced, and the district will not be able to address the rapid growth in some parts of the district without adjusting school boundaries to balance enrollment."

Renee Ryon

Dysart Unified School District
director of communications and public relations



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DUSD sets its usage rules for AI

Dysart Schools will phase in artificial intelligence plan

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Dysart Unified School District will roll out its artificial intelligence implementation plan next month, with administrators among the first to learn how to use the tool to assist in the educational environment.

After months of research, reviews and feedback, the governing board approved the district's AI Implementation Plan as presented at the Aug. 24 meeting. Implementing the plan includes adopting MagicSchool as the district-approved AI platform, acclimating administrators and teachers during the first year, eventually phasing in students' use and blocking free AI tools on district devices.

The district's guiding principals for AI use include:

- AI does not replace professional judgment, great teaching and leadership.
- AI will save time so educators can focus more on student learning.
- AI use will be ethical, responsible and transparent.

"We still need to do the work as individuals and as a team," said Andrew Frazier, director of curriculum and instruction 9-12, encouraging ethical use of AI in the district, and noting how it is more efficient for the teachers.

"It's come a long way and has a long way to go," said Superintendent John Croteau about using AI in education.

The district's first-year goals require all administrators to be introduced and trained on the MagicSchool platform. Every campus will have what is called trained AI Champions as the district



Teachers in the Dysart Unified School District will be trained on how to properly integrate AI into the classroom. (Courtesy DUSD)

continues to communicate its AI guidelines for using the tool responsibly. The district will develop a collection of Dysart-specific AI resources and prompts.

For the second year and beyond, pilot classrooms will begin to be identified for possible student implementation. Meanwhile, the phased-in roll out gives

a timeline to prepare from September to November, activate accounts, identify campus AI Champions and set the district parameters while learning happens through February for administration and AI Champions to be trained. Implementation plans will be drafted, and the models will be strengthened from February to May. The AI

Champions will offer onsite training to coach colleagues. Refining the plan will continue in the summer with workshops, reviewing the first year and planning for the second year.

The parameters and safeguards include the required training, although

AI use will not be mandated. Ensuring student privacy is protected remains important while using the district-approved tools. Security and data will be reviewed before the rollout to ensure the tools are aligned with the district and its priorities.

"The educator must edit, make sure it is read multiple times before it reaches students," said Frazier of how AI should be used as a draft for instruction, not the final piece.

Board member Dawn Densmore asked about the delay in introducing students to the tool. She said it would be beneficial if seniors could experience it before heading to college and their careers so they are aware of certain technicalities and ethics involved with using the tool.

"Seniors are at a disadvantage ... We work so hard towards their college and career readiness," said Densmore, adding that it is good service to provide that access to them.

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"It's come a long way and has a long way to go."

John Croteau

Dysart Unified School District superintendent



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Corrections

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

One vote does not make Hamadeh model of integrity

In her letter, Kudos to Rep. Hamadeh for supporting stop insider trading act, Nikki Colletti praises Rep. Abe Hamadeh for "putting principle first" and demonstrating "real public service."

Hamadeh deserves credit for voting to restrict congressional stock trading. So do the other 231 House members who voted for the bill. But one bipartisan vote hardly establishes exceptional integrity.

Colletti contrasts Hamadeh with politicians who "sell out to the highest bidder." Yet Federal Election Commission records show his campaign received \$269,960 from political committees, including corporate and special-interest PACs, from January 2025 through July 1, 2026.

More online

Read more opinions at YourValley.net/surprise-independent

Boeing's PAC gave Hamadeh \$5,500 in 2025.

Hamadeh sits on the House Armed Services Committee, helping shape defense policy and authorization. The contribution is legal and proves no quid pro quo, but voters have every right to scrutinize money from industries with enormous stakes in congressional decisions.

Hamadeh's campaign has also received money from CVS Health's PAC. CVS owns Caremark, which recently settled an FTC case alleging anticompetitive practices that artificially inflated insulin list prices. When corporations with major interests in federal health policy help finance congressional campaigns, voters should pay attention.

Then there is judgment. Just two days before this vote, Hamadeh publicly opposed extraditing Andrew and

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Tristan Tate to Britain. The brothers face serious charges, including rape and sex-trafficking allegations. They deny wrongdoing and deserve due process. Hamadeh's decision to intervene on their behalf is also relevant when assessing claims about his character and judgment.

Give Hamadeh credit for one good vote. Just don't turn it into a character reference.

Public service is a record, not a press release.

Anne Whitmore
SUN CITY WEST

This writer is using a pen name. Rep. 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 or email them to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Why is Hamadeh calling out Hobbs when he won't debate opponent?

Arizona Congressional District 8 Rep. Abe Hamadeh sure likes to throw stones at glass houses, but runs away afterward. He called out Gov. Katie Hobbs for not debating his fellow House Republican gubernatorial candidate, Andy Biggs, while Hamadeh running away from CD 8 opponent Bernadette Greene-Placentia's debate challenge.

It would be one thing if Rep Hamadeh would meet with the constituents in his district, but has failed to do so for nearly two years. This, from an elected

Speak Up

From Nextdoor & Facebook

Here are some comments about stories happening in Surprise:

Massie arrest is still bringing out passionate opinions

"I hope she finds closure in the courts on this. Surprise and old 'Skip' were so in the wrong." — James D.

"I live in Surprise and hate lawsuits. However, this is one I hope she wins. City council treated her terribly and suppressed others who may want to speak against their shenanigans." — Millie A.

"Too bad she couldn't read and follow the rules. A poor example in front of her daughter." — Susan R.

"That darn old First Amendment gets in the way all the time." — Thomas T.

"She's just waiting for her big payout." — Barb G.N.

"All the mayor had to do was let her finish her grievance (less than a minute?) and it would have been over. Just another very bad choice by the mayor and a silent council at the time." — Nate P.

"As a resident and as someone who will inevitably be paying her, I am shocked this woman hasn't been paid her lottery winnings from the city of Surprise violating her civil rights. It should be a slam dunk." — Randy R.

"Time to continue waiting. She violated the rules and was out of order. She created the situation." — Steve I.

Motorists could get more options at Cactus-Sarival

"Another car wash not needed." — Richard M.

"Another car wash! Just what we need, as the state is being forced by the federal government to reduce the amount of water that is being pumped from the Colorado River." — James D.

"No carwash! It seems if the spot can't sell then here comes a car wash, Goodwill, Burger King and now Circle K." — Rochell M.

"We need another car wash like a hole in the head." — John G.

Opinions

• From page 6

official who should be running for CD 1, the district he actually resides in.

He fails at hearing our issues, because he doesn't understand them. How could he if he doesn't live amongst us?

It's time for our representatives to represent us, not the lobbyists and deep pockets of D.C. It's also time for the state and local Democratic parties to spend money on races that can make a difference, rather than protecting safe districts.

We need to elect a representative that lives in the district they represent,

and one that understands our issues. That person is Bernadette Greene-Placentia. She has and will walk a mile in our shoes, not in the shoes of someone who hopes can advance his career, as Rep. Hamadeh does.

The West Valley has been overlooked for too long.

That stops Nov. 3.

Bill Eikost
GLENDALE

Bernadette Greene-Placentia is seeking to unseat incumbent Abe Hamadeh in CD 8, which includes parts of Surprise, Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City and Sun City West. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Speak Up

• From page 6

"Why not a family place like rollerblading?" — **Lee S.**

"The city of Surprise sure loves car washes and mini marts. Would be nice if they branched out with something else." — **Sara L.**

"Surprise is now car washes, coffee and storage units." — **Amy P.R.**

High gas prices are still a hot topic of debate across city

"Getting gas from California has consequences." — **Louis T.**

"Crazy how it was \$4.60 in the morning, then \$4.79 in the afternoon." — **Ted S.**

"Yes, but isn't America great again." — **Gregg D.**

"My EV charges in my garage for less than one-tenth the price." — **David B.**

"I only run top-tier fuel 91 Octane in my Porsche and Supercharged Tacoma. Keep the engine clean. Cheap gas equals low quality. Top-tier QT, Costco, Chevron, Shell." — **Paul W.**

"Anywhere but in Surprise." — **Jason A.**

"My guess is the intersection will be surrounded by a nail salon, a storage facility, a fast food place and a gas station because Surprise has so very few of those businesses." — **Bill M.**

"Surprise needs to stop getting the same things on every corner. How about family-owned business with something different to make our city more unique?" — **Katie G.**

"Yes, because who wants to drive two blocks to a car wash? Can't we attract anything other than so-so food, car washes, gas stations and medical buildings?" — **Karen B.**

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Valley Vista Monsoon

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2025 record: 1-9
Playoffs: Did not qualify
Region: 6A Fiesta
Coach: Ed Cook (First year)

Valley Vista football ready to flip script in 2026

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For Valley Vista football, moving forward starts with not spending too much time looking backward.

The Monsoon enter the season trying to rebuild a program that has won four games in the past three seasons — with three coaches who are no longer there. Valley Vista went 1-9 last year, including 0-4 in the 6A Fiesta Region. Its lone victory was 36-28 at Desert Vista.

But with a new coaching staff led by head coach Ed Cook, the message throughout the offseason has been more about what comes next.

“I think our biggest priority to try and turn things around was just forget about the past,” senior running back and outside linebacker Nathan Hodgson said. “Just make sure we can rebuild something now that we can build positive things off of.”

That approach has resonated with a group that has endured plenty of change.

Players said Cook brought a noticeably different energy when he arrived before spring football. Cook and his staff have focused on building relationships and getting players invested in the program’s future.

“The first-time meeting Coach Cook, it was just a different vibe, a different energy,” Hodgson said. “There was nothing about the past, nothing about looking at what happened last season.”

Assistant coach Jay Nunez, who has been with the team for a little more than

a month, described Cook as “probably the most positive person I’ve ever been around in my life.”

He’s just a ray of sunshine,” Nunez said.

The early signs of a turnaround can be seen in the numbers.

Valley Vista had only 28 players at one point last year. This summer, the Monsoon were closing in on 50 varsity players, with approximately 30 incoming freshmen.

That growth could be important for a team that struggled with depth last season, particularly against a difficult schedule. Valley Vista allowed at least 40 points six times, including losses to Hamilton, Chandler and Pinnacle in which the Monsoon surrendered more than 50.

“We’ve got a four- or five-game stretch where we play the best that 6A has to offer in the state of Arizona,” Nunez said. “Being able to keep the kids fresh, that’s going to be huge.”

Not every loss last season was one-sided.

After beating Desert Vista, Valley Vista lost 37-29 to Shadow Ridge and 41-39 to Mountain Ridge in consecutive weeks. Those games have given returning players reason to believe.

“Last year we had a couple of close games that we lost that we could have won,” senior defensive lineman Zade Brown said. “Team-wise, I just want to flip the script on those things.”

Nunez believes consistency and depth can help the Monsoon finish those games this season. He said the staff wants to avoid relying on the same



Valley Vista senior offensive and defensive lineman Zade Brown looks at the camera during the Dysart Unified School District football media day on Aug. 14 in Surprise. (Courtesy Dysart Schools)

players for nearly every snap, allowing separate offensive and defensive groups to stay fresh.

Defense will be one of Valley Vista’s biggest areas to watch. The Monsoon have a new system which Nunez said is designed to get players moving quickly.

“They fly around, everybody’s tied together,” Nunez said. “You may see some guys that might look like they’re out of place, but they’re right where they need to be.”

Hodgson spoke about taking responsibility for younger teammates, whether that means helping them in the weight room, picking them up after mistakes or showing them how to prepare.

“For me, I focused a lot on my leadership ability for the team on defense

and offense,” Hodgson said. “Just to be that person, be the leader our team needs.”

Senior wide receiver and corner Everett Driver, who arrived from Pinnacle last year, said his biggest goal it to see effort translate to recognition.

“I want to see that all the hard work I put in go somewhere, and that I can be an all-region corner and receiver,” Driver said.

He should be the top target for small but mighty (5-7, 120 pounds) sophomore quarterback Dallas Spice.

Valley Vista still faces a difficult climb. Now, though, there is a belief that the Monsoon can begin changing what Valley Vista football looks like.

“We really have the potential to be something this year,” Driver said.

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FROM THE COVER

Hilgers

• From page 1

outside of the state, she was named a captain's pick for the U.S. PING Junior Solheim Cup team, which will battle Europe next week in The Netherlands.

"She's definitely in the top five or six of the junior class in the nation. And the Solheim Cup is the top 12 juniors in the country — and she's one of them," her coach Warren Schutte said. "She's absolutely one of the best golfers in the country."

Hilgers recently won the girls Junior PGA championship and turned in a top-five finish at the U.S. Girls' Junior, which earned her the captain's nod to golf for the country.

"I was super excited," Hilgers said about the phone call she received earlier this month to tell her she was on the team. "I was kind of in disbelief because everything's kind of just happened so fast the last couple months. And when she called me, I didn't know which way the phone call was going to go."

The Junior Solheim Cup is a biennial team match play event that pits the 12 best female junior golfers from the U.S. against Team Europe, this year Sept. 7 and 8 at Bernardus Golf in Cromvoirt, Netherlands.

The Americans lead the all-time series, 8-4-1 and won the last won in 2024.

Good right away

Hilgers was 4 when she first swung a golf club. By age 6 she was already working with Schutte, who was an NCAA champion at UNLV in 1991. His claim to fame was stopping Arizona State's Phil Mickelson from winning three straight NCAA titles.

Schutte played on the PGA tour for nearly two decades and began teaching future pros when he stopped playing.

"Since she was little, I always knew she was different," Schutte said. "She was always very driven."

The coach likes to tell a story of when Hilgers was playing in a tournament at around 7 years old, and she needed to birdie a putt on the last of nine holes.

"I look at her and I say, 'Where are you gonna putt this?' And she said, 'Straight!' And I said, 'Well, I think it's going to break left to right.' And she looked at me and said, 'I'm going straight!' She had that kind of belief at that age."

Hilgers said she has always felt that fearless confidence. Warren said that fearlessness is just part of her strong mental game.

"Her desire to do something outweighs the fear not to do it," Schutte said. "I think a lot of other people, the fear will outweigh the desire to do it. That's something that you learn. Confidence comes, I believe, from preparation. That's why we work hard. So when we get there, we just trust."

Future games

Hilgers and her family have lived in Sterling Grove right off one of the holes of its golf course for the past two years. The family moved from a Litchfield Park home on the Red Course of the Wigwam Golf Course, where Hilgers still practices with Schutte.

She goes to school online through a program the American Junior Golf Association teaches. Several AJGA juniors use that school because of the extensive travel the sport requires. Hilgers uses a tutor to help keep her on track.

"She makes sure I'm learning all the right stuff because I feel like sometimes when kids do online school, they kind of tend to not learn too much and she makes sure I do what I need to do," Hilgers said.

Golf is Hilgers' social outlet since she does not have physical school-



Coach Warren Schutte works with Aubrey Hilgers on her swing at his academy at the Wigwam in Litchfield Park. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason Stone)

mates. She knows people from all around the world because of tournaments she plays in outside of Arizona. She sees a lot of the same players each week at tournaments somewhere in the country or abroad.

When she won the Junior PGA title on July 31 in Frisco, Texas, she defeated a player from China in a third-round playoff.

"Everyone's so different and I get to just see how everybody kind of comes together just because we all love golf," Hilgers said. "And it's pretty cool to see how different everybody is, and then how we're all connected by it."

Hilgers has already signed to play college golf at Auburn, despite getting looks from schools such as USC, Arkansas, Ole Miss and Texas A&M.

She said she has already felt a connection to the Auburn coaches there and fell in love with the area.

"To be honest, my heart was kind of already set on it," Hilgers said. "I didn't really see a point of staying with

the recruiting process if I already kind of had an idea where I was going."

Keep getting better

It is Hilgers' long game that draws attention with how straight and far she can whack it.

"I feel like that's really huge because people end up not being able to hit straight shots when they're under pressure, and I feel like that's something that I just really am good at," she said.

She has an improving short game and feels it started clicking this summer.

"Under pressure, you've got to have a good short game," Hilgers said. "I just feel like I made a lot of progress, but I can always be better than what I'm at right now."

Hilgers uses the aid of a sports psychologist, Debbie Cruz, to help her with the stress of playing pressure games.

"If you're a tournament golfer,

• See **Golfer** on page 12

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FROM THE COVER

Golfer

• From page 10

you've got to have one," Schutte said.

The coach and player usually work together three or four hours a day, and Schutte joked that he sees Hilgers more than her parents do.

The hard work resulted in the massive Junior PGA championship where she savored a last-putt win to secure the title.

"I feel like that kind of moment in golf is so nice," Hilgers said. "You're never really going to have something like that. It's very rare when you get that. And I feel that's so special."

Road show

Schutte, whose academy at the Wigwam has sent up to 70 golfers to the pros and college programs across the country, said he believes in taking his Arizona golf students on the road to help teach them to play in any conditions.

"We love Arizona, but sometimes the conditions are perfect," said Schutte, who learned the game in South Africa under some adverse weather. "I always wanted to my students to learn how to play on the East Coast. The grass is different. Let's go to the Northwest. It's cold and wet, and because you're going to have to play there at some point."

Of the maybe 25 tournaments Hilgers will play in this year, only about a handful are in Arizona.

"It's not because we don't want to play here," Schutte said. "When she goes to college, she's not playing in Arizona. And every tournament they play is not going to be at Auburn. It's going to be a different part of the country. I wanted all my students, especially her, to be able to play wherever."



Aubrey Hilgers of Surprise won the Junior PGA championship last month in Frisco, Texas. (Courtesy PING)

Schutte, who is just turning 55, said it also teaches future pros to learn to sleep in different beds and eat at different restaurants than they are used to.

"It's part of being a tournament golfer," he said. "It helps add to the psychology of what you got to do. We're always trying to stay ahead."

Hilgers' parents will stay ahead by making the trip to the Netherlands to see their daughter play.

She is hoping it is among many tournaments they will see her play over the years with a budding professional career starting.

"Just to be able to maybe even make it to the LPGA tour would be awesome," Hilgers said "I've been dreaming about that since I was a little kid, trying to swing a massive golf club."

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

"She's absolutely one of the best golfers in the country."

Warren Schutte
Golf coach

Officer cleared of Flock camera misuse

Police stop ALPR systems after cancellation of program

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Surprise Police Department has cleared the police officer who was suspended for an "anomaly" in the use of Flock Safety camera system, which preceded the city canceling the program.

Police said Wednesday the abnormality was caused when the officer accessed the Flock data through a web browser bookmark. Because the bookmark was used each time to access the system and it was attached to a particular vehicle, it appeared the officer was repeatedly tracking the same vehicle.

"When we found an anomaly in our audit, we immediately let the community know about it," Surprise Police Chief Evan Becher said in a news release. "I am thankful to report that



A Surprise police officer was cleared in an investigation over possible misuses of the city's Flock Safety camera system. (Courtesy Flock Safety)

there was no evidence of misuse. I appreciate the officer's professionalism throughout the investigative process, as well as his commitment to serving our city."

Police did not reveal the name of the officer who was suspended but said the officer will return to full duty status this week.

The suspension came after the department conducted a routine audit of

its Automated License Plate Reader system.

Surprise canceled its contract with the controversial Flock Safety cameras on Aug. 13, shortly after police announced the suspension of the officer. The city operated 28 cameras at main intersections across the city.

The cameras track vehicles' license plates and other important information like make and color and store the information in a data base for 30 days.

It has been used to solve crimes across the country, but it has also been prone to misuse, like in some other Valley cities.

Surprise began the program two years ago without apparent incident until the recent issue.

"Our employees entrusted with sensitive information from the ALPR

system have consistently demonstrated the integrity, judgment and professionalism our community expects of them," Becher said.

Since the cancellation of the Flock system, the police have also suspended access to all ALPR networks.

"The city understands the importance of using technology to achieve public safety objectives," the city wrote in the release. "Moving forward, the city plans to assess the needs of the police department and evaluate various public safety technologies based on that assessment, which may include ALPRs."

"I am thankful to report that there was no evidence of misuse."

Evan Becher
Surprise police chief

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The Dysart Unified School District Governing Board wants to tighten up its dress code policy. (Courtesy DUSD)

Dress code wears on Dysart Schools

Governing board debates tightening up loose policy

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Discouraging students from wearing pajamas to class, and dressing in business casual attire or uniforms are among recommendations Dysart Unified School District governing board members offered to tighten up a loose dress code policy.

Following a timeline beginning with a proposal, feedback from meetings and surveys in the fall of 1998 to the board approving Kingswood Elementary School's uniform policy in the spring of 1999, board members received a detailed history at the July 27 board meeting about how the blueprint was set for other schools to institute their own uniform policies.

A discussion based on if there should be stricter district-wide standards for what is considered acceptable dress, or if students should wear uniforms, classroom time spent on enforcing a dress code and disciplining any code violations were addressed by Craig Mussi, assistant superintendent of Support Services.

Presenting information on the history of school uniforms in the district, he noted where uniforms were worn early on: Surprise Elementary required uniforms in 1999, Luke Elementary in 2000, and West Point in 2001.

Throughout the years, schools started to adopt similar dress codes comparable to that of the initial schools, which began requiring students to wear uniforms, but chose different colors to represent their schools, and suggested what types of clothes to wear, etc.

"That's how it was filtering in to the district to establish school uniforms," he said of the early inception at some schools that require uniforms.

He compared and contrasted having boys and girls uniforms, restricting denim, but consisting of navy blue colors; and dress codes like specifying "sweat-shirts and sweaters, but no hoodies," allowing cargo pants, T-shirts with school logos on Spirit Days.

"There was a policy that existed, JICA, that schools lived under and Dysart lived under this policy, there was no mention of a school uniform," Mussi said, adding the policy prohib-

Uniforms

• From page 14

ited student dress or grooming practices that included things on clothing that promoted health and safety hazards such as anything drug-related, or interfered with school work, or cause a disruption like gang membership or language.

“Those were elements that were put in there but it didn’t say anything about uniforms,” Mussi noted. “It was a practice of that time.”

Other than what is considered the current practice, Mussi pointed out there is no definitive “school uniform for the district,” as there are inconsistencies between schools. He welcomed board feedback.

For the 2027-2028 school year, board member, Denise Destiche said a policy implementation should be set and started.

“I’ve been to a couple of schools and

some of the clothing is what I would consider kind of risqué in a sense,” said board member Denise Destiche.

She added how the current dress code policy is vague and she would like to revisit possible changes. Destiche asked about the number of suspensions related to dress code violations, which Mussi said he could get that number to her.

“Do we have an idea how many suspensions we have from dress code violations? There are some schools that really have a lot. Maybe we could look at this to reduce some of the incidents,” Destiche said of time away from class when suspended. “Maybe look at a pilot or something. Our school board policy is very vague. Or maybe we need to clarify our dress code policy a little better.”

She said when her grandchildren started in Dysart, there was a uniform, but “when they switched out of it,” she noticed such behaviors as bullying increased.

Mussi agreed with Destiche about the importance of eliminating class time loss if students are encouraged not wear the wrong clothing so they do not have to be sent home, get detention or suspensions. He also noted enforcing code violations if someone wears inappropriate clothing, may entail turning the clothing inside out or putting jackets on; pulling pants up to “fix them,” if they are low, and parents bringing other clothes to the school for their child to change.

Board President Stephen Skvara stated how the current dress code policy should be reviewed for more strict guidelines.

“Maybe tighten it up a little bit,” said Skvara, requesting that K-8 students and parents are surveyed about their thoughts on school uniforms. “Uniforms can be thrown on in two-to-three minutes. What kind of feedback can we get from a K-8 perspective?”

While noting potential legal restrictions on surveying students, and

possible policy updates needed, board member Dawn Densmore, said administration should be more “supportive of the teachers regarding dress code violations.”

“I think alignment is important. I do think the policy is a little too loose, but with that said I believe some of our schools are not supporting teachers to dress-code students. I think it is important to make sure our leaders are aligned and have the same understanding to work with each other across the district,” Densmore said.

Stating how “pajama days should be eliminated,” Mary Jane Ziola shared her research on positive feedback for school uniforms, which included unity and school pride, improving academic focus, eliminating peer pressure, preparing students for the professional world, reducing bullying and discrimination.

Likewise, Jennifer Drake noted

• See **Uniforms** on page 19



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STEER CLEAR TO OPEN

Southern Steer Butcher experienced a milestone day on Aug. 6 for the grand opening of its location at 16853 N. 145th Ave, Suite 161. Owner Scott Strelitz and General Manager Damon Anderson helped cut the ribbon in a ceremonial event with city leaders. Vice Mayor Earle Greenberg was on hand for the festivities, as was Councilmembers Johnny V. Melton and Patrick Duffy and Director of Economic Development Jeanine Jerkovic and Assistant Director of Economic Development Mike Hoover. Carefree Partners Investments, the group developing the downtown City Center area, was well represented at the event with Founder Rick West, Vice President Scott Phillips and Business Development Manager Rico West taking in the day. So did Nick Robello, the director of marketing for SimonCRE, the group helping Carefree Partners work on city center plans and the company behind the Prasada shopping area. Visit facebook.com/p/Southern-Steer-Butcher-Surprise-61584567974316. (Courtesy city of Surprise/Kris Cassens)



ON THE MANE LINE

A couple of months after its June soft opening, Mane Casa Salon finally cut the ceremonial ribbon on Aug. 17 at 16581 W. Bell Road, Suite 106. Co-owners Areli and Jake Hannah participated in the ribbon cutting with Surprise Economic Development Director Jeanine Jerkovic. Surprise Economic Development Project Manager of Spark Surprise Samuel Pena was also on hand. The salon is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and closed Sundays. Visit facebook.com/Manecasasalon. (Courtesy city of Surprise/Kris Cassens)



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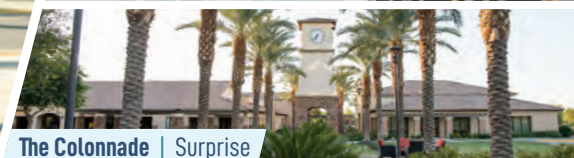
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AFL schedule includes 15 games in Surprise

Saguaros start season Oct. 4 in Surprise against Salt River

Major League Baseball announced its Arizona Fall League schedule, bringing top baseball prospects to Surprise Stadium this fall.

The Surprise Saguaros will start their season at home on Sunday, Oct. 4, against the Salt River Rafters, the first of 15 games in Surprise through Tuesday, Nov. 10.

This year's Saguaros will feature prospective candidates from the Kansas City Royals, Texas Rangers, Cleveland Guardians, New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies organizations.

The Saguaros are one of six teams competing in the AFL, along with the Glendale Desert Dogs, Mesa Solar Sox, Peoria Javelinas, Salt River Rafters and Scottsdale Scorpions. Each of the other five teams will make three appearances in Surprise.

The city of Surprise has set the season's promotion schedule.

Friday games against Peoria (Oct. 9 and 30), Mesa (Oct. 16) and Salt River (Nov. 6) are "Friday Freebie" games.

Family Fun Day is set for Sunday, Oct. 11 against Glendale.

Fans can also secure autographs from their favorite prospects after Thursday games on Oct. 29 and Nov 5, both against Scottsdale.

The home season ends Nov. 10 against Scottsdale.

Game times are a mix of afternoon and evening



The Surprise Saguaros celebrate winning the 2025 Arizona Fall League championship. (Courtesy AFL)

starts.

Tickets for single games are \$14 for adults, and \$12 for seniors (60 and over) and children 11-17.

Kids 10 and under receive free admission and must be accompanied by an adult.

Individual game tickets will be available for purchase one hour prior to game time at the stadium

2026 SURPRISE SAGUAROS HOME SCHEDULE

Sunday, Oct. 4 — Salt River Rafters (5 p.m.)

Monday, Oct. 5 — Glendale Desert Dogs (6:30 p.m.)

Friday, Oct. 9 — Peoria Javelinas (1:30 p.m.)

Sunday, Oct. 11 — Glendale Desert Dogs (5 p.m.)

Monday, Oct. 12 — Peoria Javelinas (6:30 p.m.)

Tuesday, Oct. 13 — Mesa Solar Sox (6:30 p.m.)

Friday, Oct. 16 — Mesa Solar Sox (1:30 p.m.)

Monday, Oct. 19 — Mesa Solar Sox (1:30 p.m.)

Tuesday, Oct. 20 — Glendale Desert Dogs (1:30 p.m.)

Thursday, Oct. 29 — Scottsdale Scorpions (6:30 p.m.)

Friday, Oct. 30 — Peoria Javelinas (1:30 p.m.)

Saturday, Oct. 31 — Salt River Rafters (3:30 p.m.)

Thursday, Nov. 5 — Scottsdale Scorpions (6:30 p.m.)

Friday, Nov. 6 — Salt River Rafters (6:30 p.m.)

Tuesday, Nov. 10 — Scottsdale Scorpions (1:30 p.m.)

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BRIEFS

City wanting groups for Fiesta Grande celebration

The city of Surprise is seeking car show entries, promotional business vendors, nonprofit organizations and outreach groups to participate in the annual Surprise Fiesta Grande.

The free event will celebrate the culture and traditions that have shaped the city with an evening of live music, food and entertainment from 5-10 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 10, at Mark Coronado Park, 15960 N. Bullard Ave.

About 8,000 to 10,000 people are expected to attend to experience authentic Mexican food, mariachi music, folklórico dancing, a car show, Lucha Libre wrestling, a petting zoo and other attractions.

The event offers promotional opportunities for interested businesses, organizations and nonprofits.

The promotional booth fee is \$500 for business vendors and \$150 for nonprofits, which will need an EIN number to register.

Each booth includes a 10-by-10 vendor tent, one eight-foot table and two chairs.

This registration is intended for business vendors focused on promoting their business, not for selling goods or services. Space is limited, and the deadline to register is Oct. 5.

For \$25, the city is also accepting car show entries, which include a T-shirt, dash plaque and goody bag.

To reserve a spot for a promotional booth or the car show, go to surpriseaz.gov/SurpriseRec and create an account.. Then click the "Special Events" tab to register.

Contact 623-222-2287, or email eddie.lovett@surpriseaz.gov.

Visit surpriseaz.gov/FiestaGrande for full event schedule.

garten.

"If this board is to pursue some sort of change toward a uniform or uniformity, I strongly feel that could be implemented in kindergarten, the first year...I don't want to impact families that have been with us for so long. I don't want to put an extra burden on families," Densmore said.

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

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Following its June soft opening, AZ Turn & Burn RC got the official ceremonial opening treatment on Aug. 5 with a city of Surprise ribbon cutting. AZ Turn & Burn RC celebrated the expansion of its business into the adjacent suite at Crossroads Towne Center at 12851 W. Bell Road, Suite 114. The expansion features a new indoor RC playground where customers can rent RC vehicles, purchase memberships and enjoy an interactive remote-control racing experience. Tim Wikoff, of AZ Turn & Burn RC, participated in the ribbon cutting with Councilmember Johnny V. Melton. Visit azturnandburn.com. (Courtesy city of Surprise/Kris Cassens)





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Public Notice

Public Notice:

Dr. Sanjay Bommanati is no longer with CenterWell Surprise as of July 31, 2026. Current patients will automatically be transferred to another provider at the center. If you are a patient and you choose not to continue care at CenterWell Surprise, you can obtain your medical records by calling 623-428-8189.

Publish: Surprise Independent, August 26, September 2, 9, 16, 2026/47410_1

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Public Notice

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Please be advised, Brandon Crawford with Greenberg Farrow, 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: Brandon Crawford, 224-289-6621, bcrawford@greenbergfarrow.com

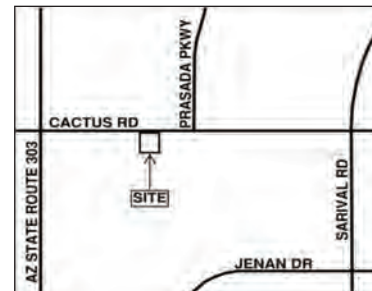
City of Surprise: Alex Ferruccio, 623-222-3164, alex.ferruccio@surpriseaz.gov

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING DETAILS

DATE: Wednesday, September 23, 2026

TIME: 6:00 PM

PHYSICAL LOCATION:
Sonoran Heights Middle School (Media Library)
11405 N Greer Ranch Pkwy.
Surprise, AZ 85379

MEETING LOCATIONPROJECT LOCATIONPROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A Conditional Use Permit with Site Plan for the construction of an approximate 3,447 square foot minor automotive service facility on a vacant pad located west of the southwest corner of Cactus Road and Prasad Parkway. Surprise Planning Case FS26-0421.

Publish: Surprise Independent, September 2, Phoenix Independent, September 4, 2026/48036_1

Public Notice

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Please be advised, Natalya Upshur with SimonCRE, 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: Natalya Upsher; (480) 566-8955; natalya.upshure@simoncre.com

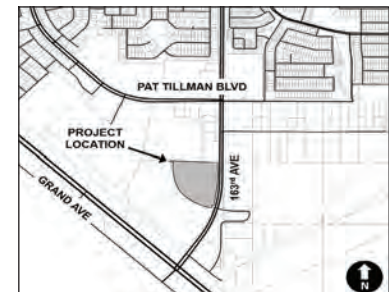
City of Surprise: Leslie Carnie; 623-222-3153; leslie.carnie@surpriseaz.gov

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING DETAILS

DATE: September 22, 2026

TIME: 6:00 PM

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

MEETING LOCATIONPROJECT LOCATIONPROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A Conditional Use Permit for an Outdoor Accessory Use to allow for the development of an EOS Fitness with an Outdoor Gym, on a site generally located on the southwest corner of Pat Tillman Blvd. and 163rd Ave. Surprise Planning Case FS26-0366.

Publish: Surprise Independent, September 2, Phoenix Independent, September 4, 2026/48038_1

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12759 W Ballad Dr., SUN CITY WEST

MLS# 7064685

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

Nicely maintained Gemini/Twin home just a half a block from SCW's Stardust GC club house. 1419 Sq. Ft., 2 Bdrms, 2 baths plus a large, screened patio. New HVAC 2023. Guest bath updated. Porcelain plank tile flooring. HOA allows pets (max 2) & rentals. Quick close of escrow possible. This one is one you'll want to see! Call today to view!



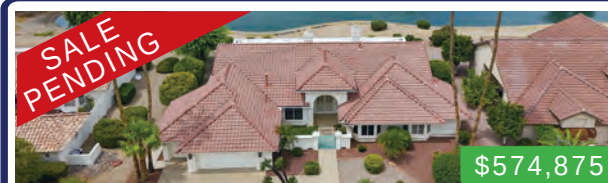
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15192 W. Las Brizas Ln., SUN CITY WEST

MLS# 7059982

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-151st, L-Corral Dr., R-Acapulco. L-Las Brizas Ln.

Highly desired Prescott model is located on the 7th fairway of Desert Trails GC. This 1856 sq. ft. home has 2 Bdrms (split), 2 baths plus a den. New roof underlayment 2022, HVAC in 2020 & kitchen appliances 2019. Quick close of escrow is possible. Home has been well maintained. This one is one you'll want to see! Call today to view!



\$574,875

14114 W Whitewood Dr., SUN CITY WEST

MLS# 7068961

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-Meeker, L-Echo Mesa, L-Whitewood Dr.

Expanded Montera model with panoramic views of SCW's Trail Ridge GC 3rd fairway/ green & lake with fountain. Approx. 3000 sq. ft., 2 Bdrm suites, 3 baths plus a den/office & golf cart garage. The large, covered patio, dining/family/living Rm combination is designed for formal/casual entertaining. Quick close of escrow is possible. Centrally located & in SCW's lower tax area this home is one you'll want to see. Don't hesitate! Call today to view!



\$359,875

23100 N. Drifter Way, SUN CITY WEST

MLS# 7062138

Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-Meeker, L-135th, L-Deer Valley Rd., R-Dusty Trail Blvd., R-Drifter Way

Popular Rio Verde model (expended). This 1612sq. ft. home has 2 Bdrms (split), 2 baths plus an added den/office/craft studio. Both bathrooms updated including walk in/roll in showers (2023). Paid off solar lease. Quick close of escrow is possible. No neighborhood HOA fee. This one is one you'll want to see! Call today to view!



\$654,875

12635 W. Eveningside Dr, SUN CITY WEST

MLS# 7040339

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

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

