



Food

Cheesecake
Factory coming
to Surprise; **5**



SURPRISE INDEPENDENT

Chorus

Barbershop
group to perform
in Surprise; **11**



September 23, 2026

Volume 29 Issue 38

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Surprise Arts is ready for first season staging events

Fall shows will begin with
Sons of Serendip at The Vista

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Surprise already has dipped its foot in the pool at producing professional shows at The Vista Center for the Arts with its soft launch in the spring and summer. But now, the city is ready to take the big plunge in bringing elevated entertainment to the growing region.

The initial performance of the first full season of Surprise Arts Presents shows is right around the corner with “America’s Got Talent” finalist Sons of Serendip ready to kick off the season at The Vista, 15660 N. Parkview Place on Saturday, Sept. 26.

The Billboard-charting classic-crossover quartet are the first of more than a dozen shows the city has on its first-year slate.

“I saw them live and teared up a little bit by how beautiful this man’s

• See **Arts** on page **20**

Group wants Grand solution to coyote problem



Grand resident Liza Rassner has started a grassroots group called the Arizona Urban Wildlife Alliance to educate Surprise residents on safety living with the coyote population. (Courtesy Liza Rassner)



Grand resident Liza Rassner took this photo of a coyote she recently spotted in The Grand. (Courtesy Liza Rassner)

**Woman pushing for alerts,
protection from wild animals**

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When a coyote attacked a Surprise woman and her 4-year-old daughter outside their home earlier this month, Liza Rassner’s heart sank.

The Grand woman had been fearing an incident like the one that happened

to the two victims — and she tried to sound the alarm about the dangers of coyote encounters before it happened.

Local mom Brittany Cardinal suffered lacerations and puncture wounds to her face on Sept. 6 when trying to shoo away a coyote that had nipped at her daughter while not looking. The coyote then Cardinal on the face when

• See **Coyote** on page **4**

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LASER VIDEO



DINING



Surprise Economic Development Department staff members play characters from TV's "Seinfeld" in a spoof video directed to get the attention of The Cheesecake Factory in 2025. This year, the city went with a "Mission: Impossible" theme. (Courtesy city of Surprise)

Cheesecake Factory coming to Surprise

No. 1 desired retailer finally makes plans for hungry city

By Jason Stone
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Surprise residents' long municipal hunger nightmare is over.

After six years atop the city of Surprise's annual retail survey for most desired restaurant, Cheesecake Factory is coming to the city.

Economic Development Director Jeanine Jerkovic dramatically revealed the news to the city council on Sept. 15 by spoofing the movie and TV show "Mission: Impossible" to make the announcement.

After Jerkovic showed a video to the council, the five members in attendance, city attorney, city manager and even the Youth Council members donned sunglasses as part of the act.

Mayor Kevin Sartor opened a "top secret" envelope with "permission" from City Manager Andrea Davis

When the mayor announced that

the restaurant was officially coming to the Prasada area, it brought cheers and claps from the audience.

"For our residents who have been asking, voting or reminding us here every year, we heard you — and our economic development team, and everyone who helped make this project happen," Sartor said.

Jerkovic told the council she had an "accomplice" in the mission and thanked Joshua Simon and his company SimonCRE for working with the city to bring the restaurant to Surprise.

There was no announced time table of when the restaurant would open. Currently, the closest Cheesecake Factory is at 16134 N. 83rd Ave. in Peoria

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

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Coyote

• From page 1

she tried to hit the animal.

Rassner is hoping more people pay attention to her concerns so attacks like that become even more rare. She has started a grassroots group with a couple of others called the Arizona Urban Wildlife Alliance.

She began reporting visibly sick and mangy coyotes entering private property in The Grand at the end of last year. Rassner said the coyotes she sees have wounds and lesions and leave feces that ultimately required professional removal from a professional hazardous waste company.

She has addressed the issue to The Grand HOA, the city of Surprise and the Arizona Game & Fish Department. Her next step is to take it Gov. Katie Hobbs' office.

What Rassner wants is a reliable coyote tracking system, more public education about the animals and better coordination of services.

She said improvements in those areas should have been done before someone got hurt.

To help the public education part, Rassner plans to host a series of meetings in community centers to talk about the issue.

Sick animals

It is not just the number and the fact potentially dangerous coyotes are showing up on the patios and yards of homeowners in The Grand.. But she said she is worried that many of the coyotes she spots appear sick.

"We have to do something because we don't know why they're getting sick," Rassner said. "We have to let residents know. This has been going on for a while at The Grand, that people are actually picking up the poop from these coyotes, and it could have mites and other things in it, and they don't know that."

Rassner said she believes the coyotes are feeding on small mammals like ro-



Coyotes are common near Grand resident Liza Rassner's home in The Grand, although she has not seen one on her porch in a couple of months. (Courtesy Liza Rassner)

dents, which may have consumed rat poisons from homeowners trying to get rid of them.

Rodenticides are chemical pesticides meant to kill unwanted rodents like rats, mice, gophers and squirrels, but they can also end up making coyotes sick after they eat them, Rassner contended.

"They know that these coyotes are sick, and there's not a good enough response from them, and everyone just looks the other way," Rassner said.

"I just want to get something in place where there's a good reporting system, and then just let the public know not to use rat poisons."

Alex Flickinger, public affairs community liaison for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, said four coyotes that were near where the Surprise biting incident occurred tested negative for rabies.

But Rassner said she feels many of the coyotes she sees are not in good shape.

"You could tell they're sick," Rassner said. "They have no hair. They have open wounds, and these elderly people shouldn't be cleaning this stuff up themselves. It really is a lack of education."

Flickinger said there is no overall problem with sick coyotes in the area.

"Sometimes there are small pockets of animal wildlife that will pass different viruses and stuff to each other, and mange is one of those that can be passed between canine species," Flickinger said. "That can occur, but there's not an issue. We don't have an ongoing issue or anything to that area or anywhere, really, that we're seeing an increase in these issues."

It's educational

Game & Fish officials plan to take part in an educational series that Rassner is staging. Rassner said she has already received a commitment from the group to talk to neighbors and educate them about coyotes.

She took an informal poll on Nextdoor of Grand residents and received more than 200 responses.

"Because I'm a Rotarian, it opened my eyes to how we could help as volunteers," Rassner said. "I feel responsibility to serve and help protect my community that's why I'm pushing for a practical reporting system."

Rassner wants a system like several cities in California have enacted.

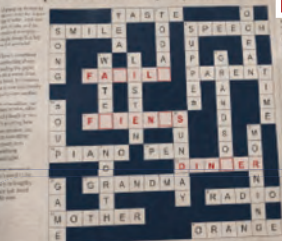
San Dimas and Huntington Beach have enacted coyote management plans to online a formal safety response process. Incidents in San Dimas are measured by using a threat level to warn residents as it and other cities throughout the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles County have experienced more human or pet incidents with coyotes over the past few years.

San Dimas adopted a coyote management plan that is based on "balancing respect and protection of wildlife without compromising public safety," the city wrote on its coyote webpage.

Residents in that city can report

• See **Coyote** on page 15

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OPINION

LETTERS

variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Arizonans deserve real bargaining power

Arizona workers deserve more than a “right to work.” They deserve the ability to bargain from a position of strength.

Since 1946, Arizona’s Constitution has prohibited denying someone employment because they do not belong to a labor organization. But our state’s broader labor policies have too often tilted the balance away from organized workers and toward employers.

That imbalance matters.

Large corporations and wealthy individuals have enormous resources to influence public policy, elections and the messages Americans hear every day. Individual workers rarely possess comparable power. Acting together, they can negotiate for better wages, safer workplaces, reasonable benefits and greater economic security.

That is the fundamental purpose of collective bargaining: giving working people a meaningful voice in decisions that directly affect their livelihoods.

Arizona should examine its labor laws with that principle in mind. Lawmakers should strengthen protections for workers who choose to organize, remove unnecessary obstacles to collective bargaining and give local communities greater flexibility to establish labor standards

♦ See **Opinions** on page 9

Why Rep. Hamadeh has my vote

I have read some recent negative opinions in your editorials about Abe Hamadeh and I just say they obviously don’t know what this man has done for Congressional District 8.

He has especially helped the veterans in many ways, such as getting hospitals and medical centers to publish their actual performance. There are too many things to list that he has done for our forgotten vets.

He has fought for senior relief inside the Big Beautiful Bill to stop double taxation on Social Security income.

He also wrote the Kayleigh’s Law bill, passed unanimously by the U.S. House. It is long overdue, and will protect survivors of federal sex crimes and violent felonies permanently if passed by the U.S. Senate and signed by the president. Under the old practice, survivors had to go back and relitigate their own safety against the perpetrator.

If someone has an issue with the federal government they have been unable to resolve, that’s what his office does. He has helped thousands of people with their problems. He sure has my vote.

Helen Anderson
SURPRISE

Rep. Abe Hamadeh represents Congressional District 8, which includes parts of Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters, or email them to AzOpinions@inlusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide

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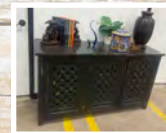
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Opinions

• From page 8

appropriate to their public projects. Voters should make this an election issue.

Ask candidates for the Arizona Legislature a simple question: Will you protect the ability of working people to organize and bargain collectively?

Then consider their answer when you cast your ballot.

A healthy free-market economy requires balance. Employers and capital already have powerful voices in our political and economic system.

Arizona's workers deserve a powerful voice, too.

Annarose Lilly
SUN CITY

The author is chair of Arizona LD 28 Democrats.

Thanks to Hamadeh for One Big Beautiful Bill support

I've been hearing a lot of negative comments about President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill. Thank God for it.

I want to share that my husband and I paid over \$4,000 in federal taxes in 2024, before the bill was passed.

The opposite was true for 2025. We received a refund for the first time in three years. Now we pay nothing.

And it's not just us. According to the Government Accountability Office, the average tax refund went up \$333, an 11% increase. The new senior deduction is giving real relief, so most retirees no longer pay federal tax on Social Security.

We should always hold our representatives accountable, but we should also give credit when it's due.

My congressman, Abe Hamadeh, didn't just vote for this bill, he fought for the senior tax relief that

made this possible.

He represents a district full of retirees like us in the West Valley and kept his promise to put Arizona seniors first.

I'm grateful he stood up for us.

Cherlyn Cates
SUN CITY WEST

Rep. Abe Hamadeh represents Congressional District 8, which includes parts of Glendale, Peoria, north Phoenix, Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise. Submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters, or email them to AZOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Grateful that Hamadeh supports veterans

Our freedom depends on the men and women who serve in uniform. Less than 1% of our population serve. Without them, we would not have a free country.

That's why I'm grateful for Congressman Abe Hamadeh's work on their behalf. As a veteran and member of the house Veterans' Affairs and Armed Forces committees, Abe has authored or sponsored legislation to expand education and job training opportunities for veterans, improve Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare access and staffing, protect benefits and retirement pay, update combat pay and advanced PTSD research.

He has also pushed for a stronger Community Care Program, home loan programs and suicide prevention efforts.

These are meaningful tributes to our heroes. I thank Congressman Abe Hamadeh for his service and for continuing to serve his fellow veterans in Congress.

Jacquelyn Loiselle
SUN CITY WEST

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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!



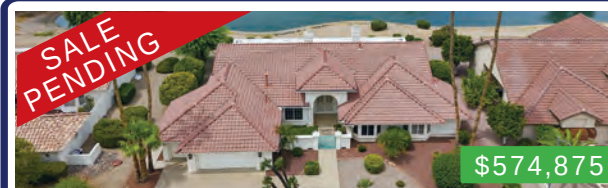
\$444,875

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 Montero 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!



News in Brief

Fitness giant wants another outdoor workout area in Surprise

EOS fitness wants to grow outside in Surprise.

Natalya Upshur, of developers SimonCRE, has scheduled a required neighborhood meeting to discuss the gym giant's request for a conditional use permit for an outdoor accessory use for a location on the southwest corner of Pat Tillman Boulevard and 163rd Avenue.

If the city council approves an outdoor accessory use designation in the future, it would allow for the development of an outdoor gym, which EOS calls "The Backyard."

EOS already has three other Surprise locations — 16750 W. Bell

Road, 16475 W. Cactus Road and 13644 N. Litchfield Road.

Upshur is hosting the meeting 6-7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 22 at Asante Library, 16755 W. Vereda Solana Drive.

Call 623-222-3011.

Auto service center plans in Surprise up for neighborhood discussion

Developers have called a required neighborhood meeting to discuss a planned auto service facility west of the southwest corner of Cactus Road and Prasada Parkway.

Brandon Crawford, of Greenberg Farrow, will discuss the request for a conditional use permit with site plan

for the construction of an approximate 3,447-square-foot minor automotive service facility.

Crawford will host the meeting from 6-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 23 at Sonoran Heights Middle School Media Library, 11405 N. Greer Ranch Parkway.

Call 623-222-3011.

Hospice of the Valley earns top national honor for patient care

Hospice of the Valley has been recognized with the 2026 Hospice Honors Elite Award for exceptional patient care and family support. This distinction was achieved by every one of the agency's home and inpa-

tient care teams serving Maricopa and Pinal counties and surrounding communities. The award is based entirely on feedback from families who received care from a hospice provider.

MatrixCare, the organization that presents the awards, analyzes data from the Medicare hospice survey, which measures all aspects of patient care and family support.

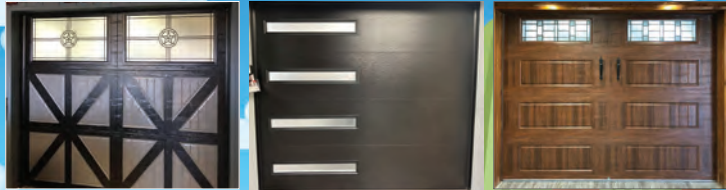
To earn the programs highest designation, Honors Elite, a hospice provider must score above the national performance benchmark on all 22 measures, including communication, symptom management and timely support.

Visit hov.org to learn more about its programs and services, including supportive and dementia care.



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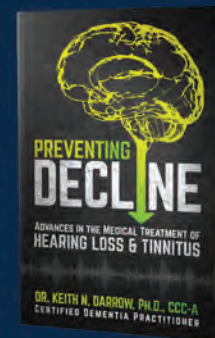
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EDUCATION

DUSD leaders discuss passing grade expectations for athletic eligibility

Considers grades for participating in arts, too

By Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Dysart Unified School District's athletic eligibility procedure on its Pass to Play requirement is under review as officials consider raising the eligibility floor from a D to a C grade.

During the Aug. 24 governing board meeting, a presentation was given regarding Pass to Play data from the spring sports season to help determine the potential impact of moving the goal post for participating in certain extracurricular activities. DUSD Athletic Director Kevin Cashatt presented statistics and information to the board on the pass to play eligibility process and data collected.

He discussed the current grade check process, spring data and athletic grade statistics.

"Grade checks are conducted every two weeks throughout the sports season," Cashatt said.

He explained the process with grade checks, starting with the first step as a probation for failing the same course at one check, followed by if a student athlete misses a game or competition failing the same course, two checks in a row, causing them to miss a game or competition and practice for failing the same course with three checks in a row.

Finally, a student could possibly be removed from the team or program for failing the same course, he said, with four consecutive checks.

Not only is the district considering raising the grade from a D to a C for

athletics, but will consider what the impact could be for the arts. According to the spring data, Cashatt noted out of 789 students from the four high schools, five grade checks were conducted throughout the spring, 12 sports and arts programs were examined with 304 athletes, 494 arts students and eight participated in both extra curricular activities.

The study addressed questions surrounding the impact on students who fall below a C average at one or more grade checks and how the sports and arts programs would be affected. Noting the "students themselves were operating under the expectation of a D," but enough data was collected to reveal that out of a combined 427 students, 54% would be ineligible at one or more checks under a C requirement, according to

Cashatt.

Athletics data collection and analysis broken down by the program, including newly affected students as a share of each program's roster, and all levels combined:

- Baseball - 31.9% (Most affected)
- Softball - 30.1%
- Theater - 24.6%
- Choir 23.2%
- Band - 19%

By Grade is fairly equal, Cashatt said, showing newly affected as a share of all participants in each grade as:

- Grade 9 - 23.6%
- Grade 10 - 25.7%
- Grade 11 - 26.9%
- Grade 12 - 23.9%

• See **DUSD** on page 19



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CONCERTS

West Valley Symphony announces 2026-27 season

Two venues will host the West Valley Symphony's 2026-27 concert season, consisting of a six-program lineup that includes the orchestral repertoire, "Star Wars," Beethoven, the film music of John Williams, a festive holiday celebration of Handel's "Messiah" and a Judy Garland tribute. Single tickets and season packages for all six concerts are on sale.

The season marks a milestone for the orchestra, which has performed in the West Valley since 1968. For the first time, West Valley Symphony concerts will be presented at two venues. Four programs will be performed at the new Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall in Litchfield Park, a 750-seat hall opening Oct. 1 at 5356 N. Litchfield Road, while two programs remain at the Vista Center for the Arts in Surprise, the Symphony's longtime home at 15660 N. Parkview Place.

The season opens Oct. 18 with "The Music of 'Star Wars,'" an interactive celebration of John Williams's scores in which the audience competes in a live game of musical trivia. In November, Beethoven's "Symphony No. 8" is paired with Mozart's "Concerto for Flute and Harp," featuring West Valley Symphony principals Michelle Stolper,

flute, and Paula Provo, harp, alongside Emilie Mayer's "Overture No. 2."

The holidays bring Holiday Pops Dec. 6, with carols, sing-along favorites, Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride" and a narrated journey through "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" with guest vocalist Richard Ollarsaba.

On Dec. 8, the orchestra presents Part I of Handel's "Messiah" with the Hallelujah Chorus — a 75-minute performance without intermission, offered at a special ticket price, with soprano Amanda DeMaris and tenor Carlos Feliciano.

Tickets and season packages should be purchased in advance, and will not be sold at the venues on the day of the performance. Go to wvsaz.org/tickets. WVS Ticket Sales is the only authorized seller of tickets to West Valley Symphony concerts. Residents can support the symphony with tax-deductible contributions that sustain artistic programming, education and community outreach. Gifts may be made at wvsaz.org or by check payable to West Valley Symphony, P.O. Box 7328, Surprise, AZ 85374-7328.

This is the West Valley Symphony's 58th season performing in Arizona since 1968.

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Coyote

• From page 4

coyote encounters by calling an coyote reporting service or by email. They can also receive email alerts about coyotes in the area.

"They've been working on this for years," Rassner said. "They have materials to guide residents and what to do in case they see a coyote. They have a tracking system, so they can track where these coyotes are. And they have education about how to tell whether a coyote has mange and just general information."

State's role

Flickinger's Region 6 is responsible for most of central Arizona, including Payson. That means the region receives calls regarding elk and bears, instead of just wild desert animals.

Arizona Game & Fish responds

to an average of three calls a day to remove wildlife, including coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions, from developed areas.

For the Surprise biting incident, officers helped Game & Fish officials removed the four closest coyotes spotted near where the attack happened, but they are pretty sure the offending coyote got away.

Flickinger said her agency's crew will remove any offending animals in the area when they determine there is a public safety threat.

Unfortunately for pets, Flickinger said coyote attracts on them occur regularly.

"That's just part of pet ownership and living around here when you have these type of animals that live around us," Flickinger said. "But on people, it doesn't happen very often at all."

It is so rare for an adult human to be bitten when unprovoked that

the last time it had happened in Region 6 was three years ago.

"We like to say it's uncommon," Flickinger said. "They are predatory animals. And like any predatory animal, they can be unpredictable."

Numbers game

Game & Fish officials said it is too hard to determine how many coyotes are estimated to live in Surprise and specifically The Grand.

Flickinger said removing coyotes who may be causing problems sometimes has an opposite effect on the coyote population.

"A funny phenomenon that comes out of this is if coyotes in an area see coyotes being taken away — so, subtracting from their population — it kind of puts them into a survival mode where females will start having more babies," Flickinger said.

The Game & Fish website has a

page called "Living with Wildlife," which provides information on the animals that it encounters such as javalina.

It describes the animals and what to do for those who come across a coyote in somebody's yard or when on a hike.

"If you come across a coyote that is acting aggressive, it's not backing down from you, if it just is acting strange and it's not doing what normal coyotes do, then you would want to reach out to us," Flickinger said.

The 24-hour dispatch line to report a troublesome coyote or wild animal is 623-236-7201

"We kind of just have to learn to coexist with them," Flickinger said.

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

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NEIGHBORS

Surprise resident to speak at Ultimate Cat Conference

Animal shelter consultant and author Tim Crum of Surprise will be a featured speaker for the third annual Ultimate Cat Conference Oct. 2–4 at Cumberland University Alumni Hall in Lebanon, TN.

According to a press release, Crum will present two workshops: “The Boardroom Blueprint: Shelter Success Starts Here” and “Shelter Under Scrutiny: What You Don’t Know Is Hurting You.”

The three-day conference attracts animal shelter and rescue professionals, veterinarians, feline-focused organizations, and cat advocates for expert-led presentations, networking, and hands-on learning focused on improving cats’ lives and strengthening the organizations that serve them.

Crum has nearly three decades of experience in the animal welfare profession. He has worked with more than 300 animal shelters and organizations across the country and has presented at dozens of regional and national conferences.

He is the author of four books in the Animal Shelter’s Guide to series, including “An Animal Shelter’s Guide to Fundraising” and “An An-



Animal shelter consultant and author Tim Crum, will speak at the third annual Ultimate Cat Conference Oct. 2–4, in Tennessee. (Submitted photo)

imal Shelter’s Guide to Board Governance.”

Crum’s consulting company is a four-time award-winning organization, and he is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the animal sheltering profession.

His work focuses on shelter operations, organizational effectiveness, leadership, governance, fundraising and strategies for creating stronger, more effective animal welfare organizations, the release noted.

For more information, visit timcrum.com or animalshelterguides.com.



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Public safety awarded state Homeland Security grants

The Arizona Department of Homeland Security awarded the city of Surprise Fire-Medical and Police departments two grants totaling \$18,000, primarily to support training and equipment that enhance the Fire and Police department’s preparedness and response capabilities.

The funding will support travel and training-related costs to attend training courses, helping maintain personnel knowledge, skills and operational readiness. Police will be able to sustain its Terrorism Liaison Officer and Mobile Field Force capabilities, supporting regional information sharing, emergency preparedness and coordinated public safety response.

The city has received Urban Area Security Initiative-related grant funding since 2015.

LUNCHEON

Founder's Day Committee members Carla Maggio, Marcy Girard, Eileen Nelson, Barbara Krehl McKendall and Peggy Robbins. (Submitted photo/Nancy Alarcon)

PEO chapter slates annual luncheon

The Reciprocity Committee of the Sun City West/ Surprise PEO chapter will host the annual Founder's Day luncheon Saturday, Jan. 16, 2027, at The Colonnade 19116 N. Colonnade Way, Surprise.

A boutique starts at 11 a.m. with lunch at noon, according to a media release. All PEO members and visiting PEO sisters are welcome to attend.

The registration deadline ends Dec 18. Resident sisters must sign up through their chapter, submitting a check for \$28 made out to their PEO

chapter treasurer.

Visiting sisters may register by mailing a check for \$28 made out to "SCW/ Surprise Reciprocity," care of Paula Kramer, 17466 N. Escalante Lane, Surprise 85374, with their phone and email contact information included with the check.

The Philanthropic Education Organization is a U.S.-based international women's organization of almost a quarter million members with a primary focus on providing educational opportunities for female students, worldwide.

Surprise opens registration for fall break camp

The Surprise Parks and Recreation Department is offering a one-week fall break camp for youth enrolled in kindergarten through seventh grade.

Campers can enjoy daily activities, arts and crafts, games and sports.

The camp runs 7 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 12, through Friday, Oct. 16, at Sierra Montana Recreation Center, 14861 N. Spring Lane.

Surprise residents can register for \$30 per day, plus a \$10 per child registration fee. Non-resident registration is \$34 per day with a \$30 per child registration fee.

Visit surpriseaz.gov/BreakCamps to download a registration packet, which must be turned in to the Parks and Recreation office, 15960 N. Bullard Ave., to finalize registration. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

There are a limited number of spots available.

Call Troyce Shelton at 623-222-2210, or email troyce.shelton@surpriseaz.gov.



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EDUCATION

Preschoolers celebrate 'Dot Day'

Students at Growing Minds Preschool, 17999 W. Surprise Farms Loop South, in Surprise, celebrated International Dot Day Sept. 15 with creativity and laughter.

Child care coordinator Amy Benton went around the school and read "The Dot," a children's book by Peter H. Reynolds.

Afterwards, she invited students to draw dots on her dress to make a one-of-a-kind canvas. Students also painted their own colorful dots.

Teacher Terry Shay introduced his classroom to the Reynolds story Sept. 15, 2009, and began International Dot Day to celebrate creativity, courage and collaboration.

The children's story is about "a caring teacher who dares a doubting student to trust in her own abilities by being brave enough to 'make her



Child Care Coordinator Amy Benton reads "The Dot," by Peter H. Reynolds, to Growing Minds Preschool students for International Dot Day, Sept. 15. (Submitted photo/Dysart Schools)

mark," noted the website internationaldotday.org.

What begins with a small dot on a piece of paper became a breakthrough in confidence and courage, igniting a journey of self-discovery and sharing, which inspired countless children and adults around the globe.

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DUSD

• From page 13

Actual Impact:

• 10.8% of students would be removed from program under current practice

• 24.1% of students would be removed from the program under a C

• Three baseball and softball teams would drop below nine players needed to field a game

• 18 arts program sections would have 25% more of a roster missing a competition or performance

“Overall reach, about one in four currently eligible participants or about 198 as I mentioned earlier would be newly affected at some point. Counting those already ineligible, about one in two or about 427 would be ineligible at one or more checks,” Cashatt said.

“The gap between rules is largest at probation and smallest at the removal.”

He added that a C catches more in the warning zone, with relatively few all the way out, but athletics are affected more than the arts. The four grades are affected about equally, he said, with the slightly highest in grade 11, and the most D records come from high-enrollment first-year courses like the freshman year.

Event risk. Three baseball/softball teams would drop below the nine players needed to field a game; 18 arts sections would have a quarter or more of a roster miss a competition.

“Moving forward, we are looking at continuing this study, bringing in football and volleyball to get a larger sample within the sports, and then we are going to be looking at the band, theater and choir for this semester and obviously, as we get into the spring, we will bring in baseball and softball again,” Cashatt said.

While DUSD Board President Stephen Skvara wanted more clarity on the probation period for anyone with a failing grade of a D or F, he was joined by fellow board members

with more concerns as Denise Destiche recommended grade checks on the K-8 sports teams as well. Dawn Densmore had concerns on the band data and wants more detailed information as it relates to how the marching band season would be impacted, and Jennifer Drake questioned the high number of failing grades in the first round of grade checks.

“When we look at eligibility components, obviously we are communicating Ds and Fs to coaches. So at that first pull then that kid becomes probationary, and then they have an opportunity to get that grade up. If they fall onto that second time, then that’s when we start to see the increased removal of games,” said Cashatt, adding students have an opportunity to fix their grades as coaches work with them to get them out of the warning zone.

“Extracurricular is extremely important. It’s what gets a lot of these kids to come to school,” said Destiche, noting grades 9-12 is the pass to play requirement. “I know you guys were looking at this at the D level, but my concern is that we have kids in middle school who are participating in extracurricular activities. They are not being held to a grade standard or anything. They’re also not really being taught. that ‘hey, when you get in to high school, here’s where you’re at,’ so that D coming in they’re like ‘Oh that’s cool, I can keep a D,’ and realizing that I truly believe that I think it would be beneficial maybe look at a study or committee or something.”

Destiche added her concerns about how time management and study skills are implemented from K-8 to prepare them to participate in pass to play for high school.

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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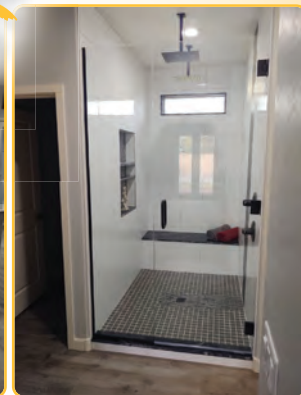
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Arts

• From page 1

voice was, so I strongly encourage anyone who is around to attend,” Surprise Arts and Culture Manager Julie Akerly told the city council during a Surprise Arts presentation on Sept. 15.

It is exactly that kind of word of mouth the city is hoping for to make the Vista successful.

As a soft launch in the spring and summer, Surprise Arts Presents produced six performances that attracted about 3,300 patrons.

“I’ve heard nothing but good things from the community,” Mayor Kevin Sartor told Akerly. “I have been to a couple of the Vista shows, and everybody loved it.”

Akerly told the council about a patron who told the city they felt like they were at a classy event in downtown Phoenix, except they felt more at home.

“I feel like that’s just the vibe we want with Surprise Arts,” Akerly said. “We want people to feel welcomed, but we also want them to feel like they’re getting an elevated and polished presented experience.”

The rest of the season schedule includes the following:

- Magic with Jason Bishop

- Ambrosia
- Comedy with Greg Fitzsimmons (two shows)
- Cirque Kalabante
- Mariachi Herencia de Mexico — A Mariachi Christmas
- Alfreda Sings — Divas of Soul with the West Valley Symphony
- The Little Mermen and the Princess Pals
- “The Odd Couple”
- Good Times Bad Times: The Led Zeppelin Experience
- Comedy with Andy Woodhull
- Swing Dance workshop with Good Co.

Surprise Arts has begun a membership program, which has 40 new members. The program provides member-only events, discounts to shows and exclusive artist content and meet and greets.

“I’m describing this as people who want to be more involved,” Akerly said. “We’re having a lot of fun events that are going to be coming up this year for people who are members.”

One of them is a happy-hour kick-off event, starting on Friday.

“That’s just going to grow and grow in what we’re offering of people who want to be more engaged with the community and more engaged with what we’re doing,” Akerly said.



Sons of Serendip, which appeared on “America’s Got Talent,” will start the first full season of Surprise Arts Presents shows when it performs on Saturday, Sept. 26 at the Vista Center for the Performing Arts. (Courtesy city of Surprise)

“I hope it becomes a friend group.”

The city offers three tiers of membership, ranging from \$60 to \$600 a year. Akerly said memberships could pay for itself for some members who plan to go to several shows The Vista.

About 65 volunteers are helping the city get the first year off the ground. Officials said their help has saved it more than \$8,000 in services.

“It was nice to see people from not only this community volunteering, but literally all over the Valley, which helps because the word of mouth that

they could provide will just help increase the viewership at the center,” Vice Mayor Earle Greenberg, who has spent decades in theater and musical arts, told Akerly.

Doors for Sons of Serendip open at 6 p.m., with live music from Groove Providers before the show. Tickets are on sale for between \$46 and \$59 at SurpriseArts.com.

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

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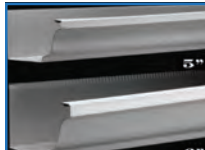
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