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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR

INDEPENDENT

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October 2026 Volume 7 Issue 10

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Old Town Love members Julianne and Dennis Williams perform beside illuminated Hilltop letters during the grand-opening celebration for the Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall Oct. 1, 2026, in Litchfield Park. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

Prop. 320 could force schools to rethink spending

By Stacy Mantle
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Litchfield Elementary School District officials are warning that a November ballot measure aimed at putting more education dollars into classroom instruction could instead force districts to reconsider spending on transportation, student support, maintenance and other services that keep schools operating.

The Litchfield Elementary School District governing board received an extensive presentation Sept. 8 on Proposition 320, which would require certain Arizona school districts to spend at least 60% of their operational expenditures on what the measure calls “direct instructional expenses.”

Litchfield would be subject to the requirement. Under the Arizona Auditor General’s current accounting methodology, the district

• See 320 on page 11

Hilltop Theatre opens its doors

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Hundreds of residents and local leaders streamed through the new Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall in Litchfield Park Oct. 1, getting their first close-up look at a venue designed to bring professional entertainment and arts education together in the West Valley.

The grand-opening celebration included live music, a roaming magician, appetizers and a bar. During

a self-guided tour, guests explored the auditorium, backstage areas and dressing rooms before heading upstairs to an art gallery and a soon-to-open Modern Grind coffee shop.

“It’s beautiful,” said Mary Beth Kelly, who moved into nearby La Loma Village with her husband, Tom, eight months ago.

The theater, 5356 N. Litchfield Road, is part of

• See Hilltop on page 14



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News in Brief

Sun Health gives \$161,000 to Heritage Center

A \$161,000 donation from Sun Health will help the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center move into Paul W. Litchfield's historic hilltop home, giving the museum more room for exhibits, visitors and school groups.

Sun Health presented the gift Sept. 27 as the center marked its 25th anniversary with volunteers, supporters and local officials from across the southwest Valley.

The money will support the center's move from its current museum in Aunt Mary's house to the Litchfield-Denny home on the Rancho La Loma Hilltop.

The organization began as the Litchfield Park Historical Society in 2001. It moved into Aunt Mary's house in 2008, opened the museum there in 2012 and adopted its current name in 2023 to reflect its growing regional role.

Read more online: YourValley.net/litchfield-park-independent.

Excitement ignites over proposed Goodyear Fire Resource facility

The Goodyear City Council received an update on development plans for a new 30,000-square-foot Fire Resource Management Facility, which will be on city-owned property, centrally located to the fleet building.

Providing easy access for the fire crews citywide, the proposed fire resource management facility was discussed during a worksession at the Sept. 14 regular meeting where Fire Chief Paul Luizzi and Deputy Fire Chief Tim Wayne gave details about the project's designing and building schedule and budget.

When Goodyear voters approved a \$232 million general obligation bond initiative in November 2023, they authorized \$80 million in funding for Public Safety facilities.

Read more online: YourValley.net/litchfield-park-independent.

• See **Community** on page 19



P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center board members and supporters pose with a ceremonial \$161,000 donation check from Sun Health during the center's 25th anniversary celebration Sept. 27 in Litchfield Park. (Independent Newsmedia/Noah Flug)

AWARD



From left, PebbleCreek Irish American Club scholarship recipients Victor Muro, Jahmaria Flowers and Danielle Grumbling stand with a club representative and scholarship committee chair Ric Sarro during a 2026 awards ceremony. The club awarded nine \$2,000 scholarships to Millennium High School graduates. (Submitted Photo/Ric Sarro)

Irish Club scholarships help grads start college

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When Victor Muro learned he received a \$2,000 scholarship from the PebbleCreek Irish American Club, the first thing he did was call his mother.

"She was all happy for me and started crying," Muro said. "And to say that I earned it myself, that's what I like the most."

Muro, the first in his family to attend college, is attending Arizona State University. The award helped him buy a laptop and cover other school expenses. He plans to become a licensed civil engineer, building on the experience he gained through his father's construction company.

Muro was one of nine Millennium High School graduates selected from 17 applicants this year. Each received \$2,000. The club also allocated \$8,000 for scholarships to West-MEC students pursuing trade and technical careers.

Ric Sarro, the club's vice president, cultural director and scholarship committee chair, said 12 committee members worked in four teams to review applicants. They considered academics, community involvement and leadership, financial need and personal drive. Applicants also had to research college costs to determine the gap they needed to fill.

"We're really looking to help

• See **Scholarships** on page 21

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Litchfield Park council approves \$4.6M Hilltop Park contract

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Litchfield Park City Council voted unanimously Sept. 16 to approve a contract for the next phase of work at Hilltop Park, though city officials stressed that more work will need to be done.

"This is not completing the park," City Manager Matthew Williams told council members.

The contract, approved for a maximum of \$4.6 million, covers what staff described as "Phase 1A" of the park. Williams said the city already had slightly more than \$2 million allocated, meaning council only had to approve about \$2.6 million in additional funding this time.

The approved work includes site grading, utility construction, pathways, landscaping and irrigation, masonry, electrical work, fire access improvements and ADA parking upgrades near the historic area.

City Planner Randy Proch walked council members through a map of planned improvements, saying the work is meant to set up "future success."

Councilmember Suzanne Allen asked how soon work could start and whether staff could prioritize pieces needed for park operations. Proch said the contractor was "very excited" and wanted to start work quickly, though coordination with utility providers, including Liberty and APS, could affect the timeline.

In other business, the council approved a conditional use permit allowing T-Mobile equipment on an existing disguised cell tower, or "monopalm," on the hill. The site is leased to American Tower Co.



City Planner Randy Proch describes planned work at Hilltop Park during a Litchfield Park City Council meeting Wednesday, Sept. 16. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

and the lease allows the company to seek co-location partners.

The council also tabled a proposed rezoning related to the Tierra Verde shopping center until its next regular meeting. Proch said the applicant had not agreed to proposed conditions, including a development agreement and parking provisions.

Council members also introduced Ordinance 26-304, a gift policy required under the city charter. City Attorney Joseph Estes advised officials not to let developers, or others with city business, pay for meals.

"We're just trying to be very transparent with this," Estes said.

The council also approved funding for sidewalk panel replacement after city engineer Keith Drunasky said a citywide evaluation found 259 panels with accessibility concerns.

Mayor Thomas Schoaf was adamant the city has a responsibility to fix sidewalks that could cause falls.

"It's our responsibility, as a council, if we've been informed there are panels that could cause someone to fall, we need to fix it," Schoaf said.

The next Litchfield Park City Council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., Oct. 21, in the Litchfield Park Community Room, 101 W. Wigwam Blvd.



LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR

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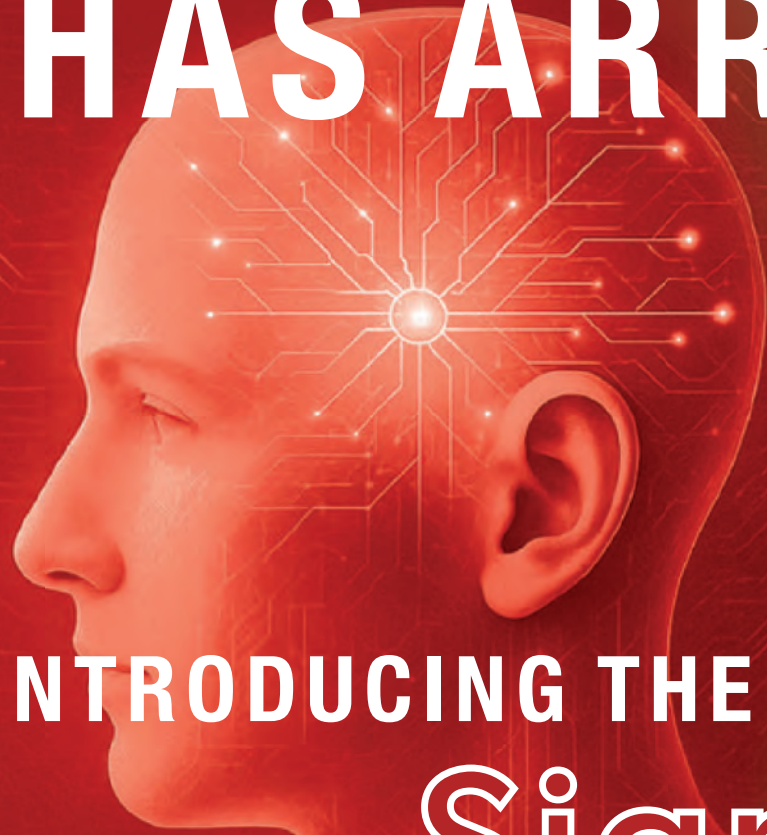
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FROM THE COVER

320

• From page 1

trict spent about \$61.6 million of its \$107 million in operational spending on instruction in fiscal year 2025, or 57.5%.

That is above the 51.8% average for Litchfield's peer districts, Chief Financial Officer Michael Vaughn told the board.

"We're in a much better position than most districts," Vaughn said.

However, one of the biggest questions surrounding the proposition is what will ultimately count toward the 60% requirement.

The measure directs the Arizona Auditor General to define "direct instructional expenses" and "operational spending." For its analysis, Litchfield used the Auditor General's existing instruction category as the closest available estimate.

"This is a planning assumption," Vaughn said. "We're not saying that the Auditor General will ultimately use this exact definition."

The distinction matters because the Auditor General currently considers instruction, student support and instructional support to be "classroom spending," but only the instruction category is included when calculating a district's instructional percentage.

That means expenses for nurses, psychologists, speech services, occupational and physical therapy, behavioral support, instructional coaches, curriculum, professional development and some special education services can be considered classroom spending without being classified as instruction.

"These are accounting classifications," Vaughn said. "They tell us where spending is categorized for reporting purposes. They do not necessarily tell us whether the spending is



Litchfield Elementary School District students wait for a bus to take them home. District officials are looking at ways to adjust its spending if Proposition 320 passes in November. (LESD)

important to students or necessary to operate our schools."

District sees few easy cuts

If Proposition 320 passes, districts below 60% would not have to reach the threshold immediately. Beginning in fiscal year 2027-28, they would generally have to increase the percentage devoted to direct instructional expenses by at least half a percentage point annually until reaching the required level.

Litchfield had about \$45.4 million in fiscal 2025 operational spending outside the Auditor General's instruction category, but Vaughn cautioned against interpreting that amount as money available for cuts.

"\$45.4 million outside instruction does not mean \$45.4 million was discretionary," he said. "Much of that spending supports services that are required, operationally necessary, or directly connected to the student experience."

The district also may have less room to find savings than the numbers suggest. According to the district's presentation, the Auditor General already rates Litchfield's administrative spending as "very low" compared

with peers and its transportation costs as "low," while plant operations are comparable.

"There may not be one large category that can simply be reduced without creating an impact somewhere else," Vaughn said.

About 81% of the district's maintenance and operations spending goes toward employee salaries and benefits. Vaughn said significant changes in the district's spending mix therefore could affect staffing, staffing models or how services are delivered.

Among the possibilities the district could have to evaluate are changes to general education are transportation, instructional coaching and professional development, custodial and maintenance service levels, administration and student support services.

Vaughn stressed those were examples rather than proposed cuts.

Board members criticize proposal

Board members expressed concerns about the proposition, particularly because some expenditures outside the instruction category are legally required or essential to operating schools.

Board member Melissa Zuidema questioned how districts could reduce

spending in areas such as special education while continuing to meet federal and state requirements.

Vaughn cautioned that Proposition 320 does not prohibit spending on special education.

"What I am trying to show is, if you were to shift spending from other categories to instruction, these are the categories that your options are in," he said. "In many of those categories, there are legal requirements for us to maintain that spending."

Board member Michele Wallace called the measure "very misleading to the voter," arguing that expenses falling outside the instruction category are still being used to educate and support students.

Board member Scott Mikes questioned the origin of the 60% threshold and the uncertainty surrounding the definition of direct instruction.

"We have an arbitrary number that has been used in this proposition of 60% with a vague term for direct instruction, which is then left up for somebody to come along and decide whatever they feel like it to mean," he said.

Penalties could compound problem

Proposition 320 includes escalating reductions to Classroom Site Fund allocations for districts that fail to meet its requirements.

Vaughn said losing that funding could create a compounding problem: A penalty would reduce money already counted as instruction, potentially requiring the district to shift even more spending to reach the required percentage.

Using fiscal 2025 spending as an illustration, the district estimated it would need to shift about \$2.6 million to reach 60%. That amount could increase substantially if Classroom Site Fund penalties were imposed.

Arizona voters will decide Proposition 320 in the Nov. 3 general election.

News in Brief



An aerial photo shows Trader Joe's, the GSQ entrance and construction underway at the 150-acre mixed-use development near McDowell Road and Bullard Avenue in Goodyear. (Submitted Photo/J. Lauren PR)

Six new tenants sign leases at Goodyear's GSQ

Six additional retailers, restaurants and service businesses have signed leases at GSQ, the 150-acre mixed-use development surrounding Goodyear Civic Square.

V's Barber Shop is scheduled to open in October on the development's north side. Sephora, J.Crew Factory, Lovesac, Postino and Mexican fusion restaurant Miel de Agave are expected to follow in 2027.

Cavender's Boot City coming to Goodyear

Cavender's Boot City plans to open its first Goodyear store Oct. 9 at Market at Estrella Falls, the com-

pany announced.

The 15,086-square-foot store at 1805 N. Pebble Creek Parkway will be the western wear retailer's fifth location in Arizona.

Hours will be 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday.

AEO opens distribution center in Goodyear

AEO, the company behind American Eagle and Aerie, marked the opening of its new Goodyear distribution center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Sept. 15.

The facility expands the retailer's distribution network in the western United States.

AEO stated the center will help shorten delivery times to customers and stores while creating local jobs.

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo and West Valley Regional Chamber President and CEO Jeffrey Campos attended the ceremony with company leaders, employees and local economic development representatives.



AEO leaders and Goodyear officials cut a ribbon Sept. 15, 2026, to mark the opening of the company's new distribution center in Goodyear. (Photo Credit/ Rosalynn Bechtel)



West Valley Regional Chamber President and CEO Jeffrey Campos speaks to attendees before the awards presentation at the chamber's annual Awards Gala on Friday, Sept. 11, 2026, at The Wigwam in Litchfield Park. (Independent Newsmedia/Noah Flug)

West Valley Regional Chamber announces 2026 gala winners

By Noah Flug

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The West Valley Regional Chamber named its 2026 award recipients Sept. 11, recognizing businesses, nonprofits, schools and community leaders during its annual Awards Gala at The Wigwam in Litchfield Park.

Chamber President and CEO Jeffrey Campos told attendees the region's growth is driven by the people and organizations willing to invest in the West Valley.

"Our region continues to grow, and with the growth comes incredible opportunities," Campos said. "It's the business owners who take a chance and build something from the ground up. It's the organizations and individuals who continue to invest their time and energy."

Alice Cooper's Solid Rock Teen Centers received the Community Impact Award. Helping One Woman Goodyear and Northwest Valley YMCA were the other finalists.

PepsiCo was named Corporate Advocate of the Year, selected from a field that also included Blue Cross Blue Shield and Sun Health.

Tolleson Elementary School District received the Education Partner of

the Year Award. Arizona State University and West-MEC were also finalists.

The Wigwam, which hosted the gala, received the Excellence in Business Award. Credit Union West and Modern Grind rounded out the category.

Arizona Public Service and Salt River Project shared the Industrial Impact Award, with AES also named a finalist.

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo was named Outstanding Public Official. El Mirage Councilmember Ryan Eldridge and Surprise Councilmember Nick Haney were the other finalists.

"When I heard I won this award I thought to myself, finally," Pizzillo joked while accepting the award.

The Rising Star Award went to the COSIC Education Foundation. Desert Lights and Somos Al Natural La Michoacana were the other finalists.

Serina Valdez received the Spirit of the Chamber Award, selected from a field that also included Greg Garcia and Rob Lamb.

To close the ceremony, the chamber presented its President's Award to Brian Ellison of Black Box Consulting.

Editors note: Independent Newsmedia is a member of the West Valley Regional Chamber.



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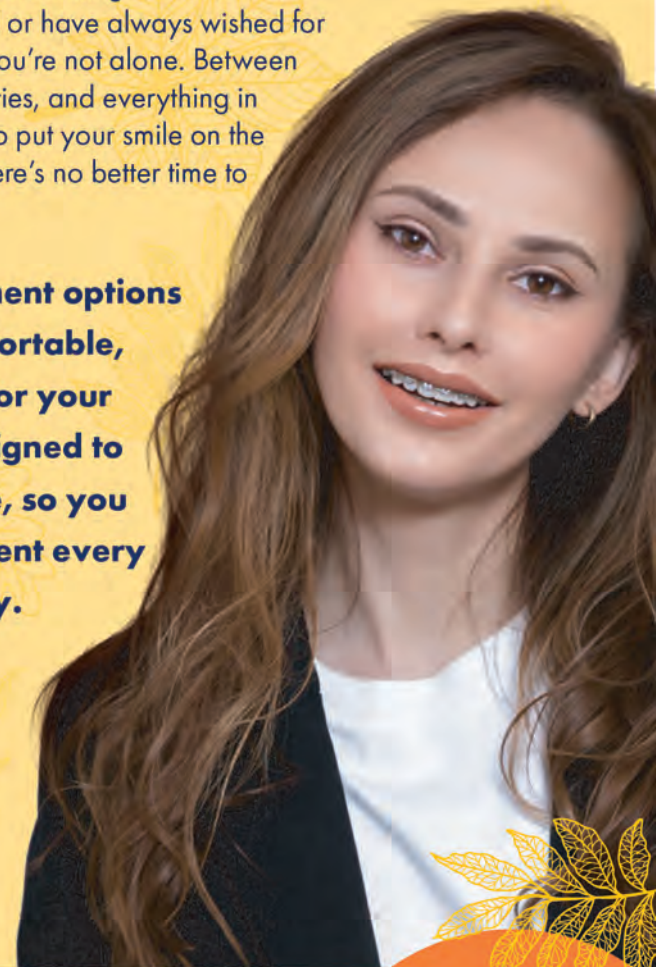
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FROM THE COVER

Hilltop

• From page 1

new Hilltop School for the Arts operated by the Agua Fria Union High School District.

The venue will host student productions, concerts, film screenings, community events and private functions.

The campus sits at the base of the city's historic 21-acre La Loma Homestead, once the retreat of Litchfield Park founder Paul W. Litchfield. It is part of a broader effort to transform the property into a center for arts, education, culture and local history.

"Agua Fria District came to us in the summer of 2024 with this idea of this campus," Litchfield Park Planning Director Randy Proch said. "To go from mapping sketches to reality is unbelievable."



Modern Grind employees serve samples to guests inside the theater's second-floor art gallery during the Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall open house Oct. 1, 2026, in Litchfield Park. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

Litchfield Park Councilmember Suzanne Allen said watching the project rise from the ground made the opening especially meaningful.

"To know that the kids in our

community are going to benefit from this amazing high school next door and concert hall, it's just a really special opportunity and moment for our city," Allen said.

Upstairs, Modern Grind founder and owner Daphnie Kelly introduced guests to a coffee shop surrounded by student artwork.

"It was just the right fit," Kelly said. "It was just so cool to get this opportunity to be in something so unique."

Modern Grind plans to operate 8 a.m.-2 p.m. daily and during theater events. Kelly said the location will make nearly all its food, syrups and sauces from scratch and roast coffee on-site.

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo also praised the finished venue.

"They did a heck of a job," Pizzillo said.

The theater's first major ticketed concert is scheduled for Oct. 10, when the Righteous Brothers bring their farewell tour to Litchfield Park.

"I'm looking forward to the 10th with the Righteous Brothers," Pizzillo said.

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Goodyear police seek public's help in teen homicide case

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Goodyear police are asking the public to submit photos, videos or information regarding an Aug. 15 house party where 19-year-old Jaguar Williams was fatally shot, with a reward of up to \$10,000 available for information leading to an arrest.

Police said the party was advertised on social media and drew about 100 people from across the Valley, including Queen Creek and Scottsdale. Investigators said attendees recorded an altercation that preceded the shooting and have seen images of people holding up their phones as it unfolded.

"We've seen clips of people holding up phones right at the time that this took place; however that information has not been shared with us," Goodyear Sgt. Mayra Reeson said.

Goodyear Police Chief Brian Issitt said detectives have pursued leads since



Jaguar Williams during a February 2024 visit to Wildlife World Zoo. Williams, 19, died after being shot Aug. 15 at a house party in Goodyear. (Photo courtesy/Goodyear Police)

Williams' death, but need more information to advance the investigation.

"No piece of information is too small," Issitt said. "What may seem insignificant to you could be the piece of evidence that helps us understand what happened and identify the suspect responsible."

Officers responded just after 1:50 a.m. Aug. 15 to numerous reports of gunfire near West Sells Drive and Turney Avenue. They arrived to find people fleeing on foot and in vehicles.

Police said an altercation occurred in front of the home as the party was ending, followed by gunfire. Investigators believe multiple people fired weapons.

According to police, Williams and his girlfriend became separated as people fled. They reunited after the gunfire stopped and left in her vehicle.

When Williams' girlfriend realized he had been shot, she flagged down a responding officer near Loop 303 and West Indian School Road. Officers rendered aid before Williams was taken to a hospital, where he later died.

Williams' maternal grandmother, who asked not to be named because of privacy concerns, said she had raised him since he was five, after his mother died. She described him as kind and com-

passionate, and said he planned on studying business at Arizona State University.

"Someone knows what happened. Someone knows who killed him," she said. "Our family deserves answers. Jaguar deserves justice. Please do not stay silent."

Goodyear Police Detective Mike Fisher, who works with Silent Witness, a nonprofit that allows people to anonymously submit tips to law enforcement, said tips are encrypted and police do not receive any identifying information about tipsters. He pleaded with the public to send any information they may have.

"It's been over a month now, and we're waiting for that one call, that one tip, and we're going to work it regardless of how insignificant it may be," Fisher said.

Tips can be submitted anonymously at 480-WITNESS (480-948-6377) or silentwitness.org.

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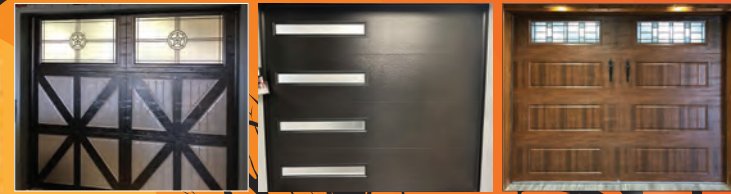
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Scouts seek community support for new lodge

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Supporters of Litchfield Park's 72-year-old Scout Lodge will invite the public inside Oct. 31 as they seek money, materials and labor for a \$1.2 million replacement in nearby Scout Park.

The current lodge at 299 W. Fairway Drive was built in 1954 by town founder Paul W. Litchfield for Troop 90, according to Meredith Stucky, president of Litchfield Park Scout Lodge Preservation Inc.

Stucky said Troops 90 and 99 serve nearly 200 youths combined, and that Girl Scout and Cub Scout groups also use the building.

The city eventually envisions a parking garage on the lodge site, but City Manager Matthew Williams said no governing body has

formally approved demolition of the existing scout lodge.

The city owns the existing lodge and land, but a memorandum of understanding with the scouting organization calls for the old lodge to remain until a replacement is built.

"The scouts have to have a place to meet," Williams said.

No final agreement for the replacement lodge has been made. Under the current proposal, the city would retain ownership of the Scout Park land and the scouting organization would own the building through a long-term lease.

Stucky said organizers considered moving the existing building, but learned that relocation would be risky and more expensive than starting over.

• See **Scouts** on page 17



Scouts and adult leaders with Litchfield Park's Troop 90 pose outside the current Scout Lodge. Troop 90 was chartered in 1929 for families working at Goodyear Farms. (Submitted Photo/Meredeth Stucky)

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Scouts

• From page 16

“A group of us just decided that it was time to build a designated Scout lodge that was owned by the Scouts,” Stucky said. “So we’re pretty excited.”

Plans for the new lodge include a 2,060-square-foot meeting hall, plus a covered patio and a 1,067-square-foot garage with two trailer doors.

Stucky said organizers have raised about \$440,000 in in-kind donations and commitments from various local contractors for the new lodge. She hopes donated labor and materials will cover at least 70% of the project.

Work on the building’s dry shell, once targeted for early 2027, could be delayed depending on fundraising, she said.

Joni Sheesley, whose two sons

are scouts, said her older son was disappointed about losing the lodge where he earned his merit badges but looks forward to the replacement.

“We can move the history over and have something that’s more streamlined for what our needs are,” Sheesley said.

The Litchfield Park Scout Lodge Town Hall is scheduled for 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 31, at the lodge. Visitors can tour the building, walk through a full-scale outline of the proposed lodge and meet local scouts.

Organizers also plan to offer bricks near the current lodge’s flagpole for \$100, including personalized engraving, with the bricks intended for a walkway or entrance at the new lodge.

Parking will be available at The Church at Litchfield Park, 300 N. Old Litchfield Road.



The current Litchfield Park Scout Lodge at 299 W. Fairway Drive. The city has identified the property as the site of a possible future parking garage, although demolition has not been formally approved. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

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REAL ESTATE

Southwest Valley residential real estate round up

Greater Phoenix housing market holds year-to-date gains through soft August

By Philip Haldiman
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Closed residential sales were down throughout Greater Phoenix in August, but experts say the dip fits the season as one of the slowest months in Arizona real estate.

Sammy Glassman, board president of Phoenix Realtors, said even with slower buyer activity, fewer sellers entered the market in August, which helped to keep inventory relatively balanced. Months supply of inventory rose only slightly from 3.9 to 4 months, and August closed out with more than 20,000 homes for buyers to consider, she said.

“With that many homes on the mar-

ket, one would think that it’s not a good time to sell,” Glassman said. “However, even though August was a soft month, over 8,000 homes were in the process of being sold or closed during the month. That’s more than a third of the housing inventory that will be off the market and needs to be replaced with new listings.”



Sammy Glassman

Greater Phoenix and the West Valley overall outpaced the rest of the country, according to data from Phoenix Realtors.

Nationally, home sales dipped 1.7% from the previous month, while year-to-date sales were up 2.4%.

“Looking at the year-to-date numbers, homes are selling in the market,”

Glassman said.

Here is a breakdown of individual West Valley cities.

Goodyear

Charles Barrett, Phoenix Realtors member and spokesperson, said Goodyear and Litchfield Park numbers tell him buyers are still paying for homes they believe are worth it, and “sellers aren’t desperate... yet.”

In Goodyear, pending sales are down 24.1% from last August, and new listings are up 8.6%.

“If you are a seller, that’s more competition,” Barrett said. “Homes are also taking about two weeks longer to sell. But the median price is up 1.3%, and sellers are still



Charles Barrett

getting 98.9% of their list price, the exact same as a year ago. Buyers are more selective now. They are still paying for the house they deem ‘worth it,’ Barrett said.

Litchfield Park

Litchfield Park had a soft August, with pending sales down big year over year 58.8%, and the median price down 9.7% from last year.

At first, this looks concerning for a homeowner, but there is something different about Litchfield Park, Barrett said.

“The homes are larger than most homes in Maricopa County, the average closed home has nearly four bedrooms and is 2,700 square feet, and they sit at a higher price point also. A different kind of home means a different kind of seller,” he said.

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Community

• From page 4

Litchfield Park commission backs Oct. 24 volunteer cleanup

Members of the Litchfield Park Recreation and Public Grounds Commission will help to organize a community cleanup event Oct. 24 after a resident requested a local volunteer opportunity for National Make a Difference Day.

The commission unanimously approved participating in the effort during its Sept. 10 meeting. Exact project and registration details remain in the works.

Community and Recreation Services Director Tricia Kramer said the idea came from a Litchfield Park resident who volunteered at similar events in Goodyear and wanted an opportunity to serve closer to home.

Staff proposed a short Saturday-morning event modeled loosely on the city's spring orange tree glean-ing events. Commissioners suggested helping recruit and greet volunteers, making announcements and directing participants to volunteer sites.

Read more online: YourValley.net/litchfield-park-independent.

Abrazo West to mark 10 years of trauma care with free SafetyFest

Abrazo West Campus will mark 10 years of providing trauma services in the West Valley with a free community SafetyFest 9 a.m.-noon Saturday, Oct. 31.

The event will be held in the hospital's east parking lot at 13677 W. McDowell Road. It will focus on injury prevention, emergency preparedness and community safety.

Activities will include emergency response demonstrations, hands-on activities and programs for children and families. Attendees can also meet



The city of Goodyear has been named a finalist for a 2026 McLean & Company Excellence Award. (Independent Newsmedia file)

emergency care teams and local first responders.

Goodyear a finalist for 2026 human resources award

The city of Goodyear has been named a finalist for a 2026 McLean & Company Excellence Award, its first time receiving the distinction.

Goodyear was selected in the HR Management & Governance Excellence Award category from hundreds of submissions. The city stated the recognition highlights its use of diagnostic tools to assess alignment, effectiveness and accountability within its human resources team.

City officials stated those findings have been used to improve HR operations, employee morale and reduce turnover.

Andretti offers October discounts to Arizona teachers

Teachers in Litchfield Park and Goodyear can receive discounts throughout October at both Andretti Indoor Karting & Games locations in Glendale and Chandler.

Educators who present a valid school ID will receive 20% off Starting Line purchases, bowling, food and nonalcoholic beverages.

The Glendale location is at 6263 N. 99th Ave., and the Chandler location is at 1712 S. Cooper Road.

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Education News

Prop. 438 would continue Agua Fria's budget override

Agua Fria Union High School District voters will decide Nov. 3 whether to continue the district's 15% maintenance and operations override.

Prop. 438 is expected to generate about \$12.2 million annually for salaries, school safety, career and technical education, Advanced Placement, fine arts and other programs. At the district's average limited property value of \$258,390, the estimated cost is about \$108 annually.

If rejected, the override would remain at 15% through fiscal 2027-28, then decline to 10% and 5% before expiring. Approval would continue the 15% override through fiscal 2031-32.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.

Litchfield Elementary asks voters to continue override

Litchfield Elementary School District voters will decide Nov. 3 whether to continue a 15% maintenance and operations override expected to generate about \$12.7 million annually.

Prop. 437 supports teacher and staff pay, school nurses, safety, music, art, athletics and intervention programs. For a home with the district's average limited property value of \$289,630, the estimated annual cost is \$186.

If rejected, the override would phase out over three years, with the district losing about \$4.23 million annually until the \$12.68 million in override authority is eliminated. Approval would continue the existing override.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.



The Agua Fria Union High School District is creating a pathway for students interested in nursing careers. Students shown above are among those participating in the work. (AFUHSD)

Agua Fria creates nursing pathway amid shortage

Agua Fria district students can begin college nursing prerequisites while in high school through a partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona and Accelerate ASU.

Blue Cross Blue Shield invested \$40,000 in the initiative, which uses ASU Universal Learner nursing foun-

dation courses. Credits can transfer to other in-state colleges.

Dr. Sarah Pearson said the partnership grew from conversations with health care organizations that identified a need for more West Valley workers and barriers students face entering nursing programs.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/

• See **Schools** on page 23



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Scholarships

• From page 4

fill a need," Sarro said. "It was just that bridge that really helped them. Maybe it's just getting a computer."

Two other recipients, Jahmaria Flowers and Danielle Grumbling, are now freshmen at the University of Arizona.

Flowers is studying biology and plans to become an obstetrician-gynecologist serving women who have been underserved by the health care system, particularly women of color. She said she has wanted to become a doctor since the fifth grade.

"I really want to deliver babies and help women as much as I can," Flowers said. "And so that kind of keeps me going."

Her mother did not attend college but helped her with the application process.

When Flowers received the award letter, she called her mother, who was so excited she shared the news with their family before Flowers even got home.

Grumbling enters UofA as a business student and plans to study finance or marketing. At Millennium, she served in club leadership roles and lead the school to win a Vitalant blood drive competition for collecting the highest number

of donations.

Grumbling learned about the scholarship through her mother and her older sister, Michaela, who received the scholarship in 2025.

"Receiving it made a huge difference," Grumbling said, encouraging current high school students to apply. "You won't know what's out there until you try yourself."

Founded in April 2007 by John Cronin, who emigrated from Ireland with his wife Peggy, the PebbleCreek Irish American Club now has 243 members.

It organizes its mission around the three leaves of a shamrock clover: culture, education and charity.

Sarro said the club connects its mission to the international aid Ireland received during the Great Famine.

The club has donated \$207,000, including \$108,000 for scholarships and grants at Millennium and West-MEC and \$99,000 to nonprofits. Its fundraising includes a St. Patrick's Day golf tournament, casino night and other Irish-themed events.

The club plans to add another Goodyear high school to the scholarship program next year.

"With all the negativity you hear about the next generation, these people give you a lot of hope," Sarro said. "They're pretty amazing."

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Linebacker mentality makes Bryant elite running back

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A junior that ranked third in Arizona in rushing yards and touchdowns last year is not only OK with less carries this season.

Millennium senior D'Mari Bryant asked to play outside linebacker — once again.

“Playing defense is something I’ve always done since youth football,” Bryant said. “I’ve been asking to do it since my sophomore year, so I’m glad it’s finally happened.”

This year, Tigers Coach Lamar Early was in a situation that he could say yes.

Bryant has 10 total tackles in spot defensive duty at the season’s midpoint.

“As a freshman I always said he was a running back. We always had the argument that he was a linebacker. If you watch him run and how physical he is,

he reminds you of a linebacker,” Early said. “His sophomore year I sat him down and said, ‘This is where you’re going to school at.’”

Early was correct. Bryant verbally committed this summer to play for Idaho.

He has 67 carries in six games, 48 less than at the same point last year. It has not hurt the numbers for Bryant, who is coming off 150 yards on eight carries against Verrado.

Bryant is once again close to 16 yards per carry, and his 15.9 average is a major jump from 11.4 yards a carry through five games last year.

“This year we have two offensive coordinators. I’m getting the ball a lot less, which is opening the passing game more and opening up the offense, making it more balanced,” Bryant said.

Millennium is 6-0 and its closest games were two 28-point wins.

• See **Bryant** on page 23



Millennium senior running back/linebacker D'Mari Bryant stands in the lobby of the Rise N' Roar Center on the Goodyear campus. After rushing for more than 2,000 yards last season, Bryant is averaging nearly 16 yards a carry. (Independent Newsmedia/Richard Smith)

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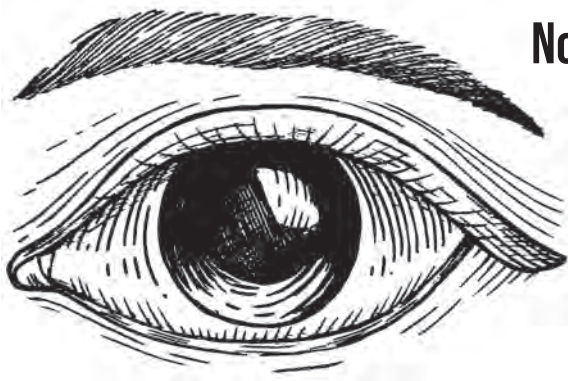
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Bryant

• From page 22

It is uncharted territory for the class of 2026. Almost all of that freshman class arriving in 2023 is leading the varsity as seniors.

"We haven't had anyone leave or transfer out. We've all stayed together. Now we're a big senior class that's starting or making a big impact," Bryant said. "We have a team built from the ground up, instead of everybody leaving or taking in everybody."

They absorbed a 3-7 season as sophomores, then reversed course at 7-4 last season, though a bitter first-round playoff loss against Yuma Catholic is moti-

vating the now seniors.

While the 2,000-yard season made the state take notice, the bigger-name Division I schools did not offer him.

Bryant's commitment to Idaho cleared his head a bit.

"I came into this season planning to prove everybody wrong — coaches, schools people, even myself," Bryant said. "Last season I was pretty frustrated. Honestly, I was like, 'I'm a 2,000-yard rusher with 30 touchdowns. Why aren't the schools offering me? Why aren't they talking to me?' I feel like I don't have to worry about any of that anymore. So it's been good."

Read more online at YourValley.net/litchfield-park-independent.

Schools

• From page 20

goodyear-independent/.

Palm Valley Elementary FFA program sees growth

Palm Valley Elementary's FFA program has doubled in size after launching last school year with one combined class of sixth- and seventh-graders.

The school offers separate seventh- and eighth-grade classes through a partnership with AAEC Estrella Mountain students and agricultural educators.

Students have competed in regional events and are developing a land lab with garden beds, chickens and composting. The project received more than \$5,000 from the Agua Fria Conservation District. Students eventually hope to add livestock and expand middle school FFA opportunities within the Litchfield Elementary School District.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.

Litchfield Elementary district grows open enrollment

Litchfield Elementary School Dis-

trict has 1,579 students attending through open enrollment this school year, up 53 from last year.

The district received 2,997 applications, Chief Financial Officer Michael Vaughn told the governing board Sept. 22. Kindergarten open enrollment increased from 145 students last year to 188 this year. The district serves approximately 10,400 K-8 students.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.

District recovers \$34,000 in outstanding facility-use fees

Litchfield Elementary School District has recovered nearly \$34,000 in outstanding facility-use fees since August while modernizing how organizations reserve and pay for district facilities.

The planned system eventually could connect reservations with district operations, automatically triggering services such as air conditioning for approved rentals. The effort was part of broader summer work that included processing nearly 2,700 invoices, 1,267 requisitions and more than 1,700 employee stipends.

Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.

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ARTS

Goodyear exhibition invites artists to 'Make Believe'

By Steve Stockmar
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For Sydney Storment, the invitation to "Make Believe" sounded almost as if it had been written for her.

The 22-year-old Tempe artist and Arizona State University student gravitates toward fantastical imagery, vividly rendered figures, bold colors and patterns.

So when she discovered Goodyear's call for artists for its new "Make Believe" exhibition, the connection was immediate.

"I thought it was a perfect fit," Storment said. "Things that are a little bit out of the ordinary, kind of fantasy inspired. That's right up my alley."

The exhibition opened Oct. 7 at the Georgia T. Lord Library and runs through Jan. 20. It features 42 works by 29 artists, according to Goodyear Arts



Goodyear's Arts & Culture Coordinator Layne Ruiz stands in the Georgia T. Lord Library exhibition space where public art, like the "Make Believe" exhibit, is on display. (Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

and Culture Coordinator Layne Ruiz.

The city-created theme encourages artists to let imagination take over. Its call for entries suggested everything from "castles in the sky" to talking animals and creatures of the artists' own invention.

Storment, a Tempe native and 2022

Marcos de Niza High School graduate, has been making art since childhood. She now studies art education at ASU and works primarily in oil, though she also incorporates acrylic and mixed media.

Her work frequently celebrates bright colors and femininity, which she

describes not as frivolous but as "bold and strong and powerful." She also rejects the notion that meaningful art must necessarily be dark or somber.

"I love making happy, joyful artwork because you spend so much time with an art piece, and that's what I want to invite more into my life, and that's what I want to invite into the lives of the viewers," Storment said.

The exhibition also arrives during a milestone year for Goodyear as 2026 marks 20 years since the city established its Arts & Culture Division.

Ruiz said the anniversary has prompted the city to consider how its arts programming has developed and where it might go next.

"We really are trying to tell our story right now of how important arts and culture is, how much we've grown," Ruiz said.



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Things to Do

Goodyear movie night brings 'Toy Story 5' outdoors

Goodyear will host an outdoor screening of Disney and Pixar's "Toy Story 5" from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17, at Goodyear Community Park, 3151 N. Litchfield Road.

The family event will include appearances by Woody and Buzz Lightyear along with food trucks, face painting, arts and crafts, yard games and a themed photo opportunity before the movie. Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets.

Goodyear Fall Festival brings Halloween fun to ballpark

Goodyear will celebrate Halloween with its annual Fall Festival

from 5 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24, at Goodyear Ballpark, 1933 S. Ballpark Way.

This year's family event takes its inspiration from the classic monsters of the silver screen and will feature trick-or-treating on the ballpark field and Halloween-themed entertainment. Attendees are invited to wear costumes and compete for trophies in categories including best overall, youth, adult, group or family, creature and most creative costumes.

Litchfield Park to screen 'Monster House' outdoors

Litchfield Park will host a free outdoor screening of "Monster House" at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24, at Jackie Robinson Ballfield, 14451 W. Camelback Road.

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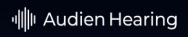
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Litchfield/Goodyear • February 17, 2027 • Tuscany Falls Clubhouse(Pebble Creek)

Chandler • February 23, 2027 • Sun Lakes Country Club

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Pictured: *Hopi Pots with Quails*



John Morey Photography
Pictured: *When Happiness Awakens*

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