LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR
INDEPENDENT
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Volume 7 Issue 11

INSIDE

Suzanne Allen brings skills to council; 6



NOVEMBER 2026
Your Nonpartisan Newspaper
FREE



Goodyear's dining scene finds its flavor

By Michelle Talsma Everson
SPECIAL TO INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For years, Goodyear residents have asked for more dining options closer to home. Now, many of those requests are starting to show up in actual restaurant announcements.

As Goodyear's population and employment base continue to grow, the city is attracting restaurant groups that may not have considered the West Valley five or 10 years ago. At the same time, residents are asking for more than simply more places to eat.

"The market is reaching a point where it is catching up with the growth in Goodyear," said James P. Smith, Goodyear economic development director. "We have experienced continued residential growth, a growing employment base and more people choosing to spend their time and money closer to home."

Smith said residents are looking for more

• See **Dining** Page **10**

From left, Chris Kienlen and Nicole Spinato-Kienlen join Jaime and Anthony Spinato in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Spinato's Pizzeria & Family Kitchen in 2024. The family-owned Arizona restaurant is known for its longtime Valley roots and Chicago-style pizza. (Submitted photo/Angela Moneyhon)

Litchfield Park plans tree donation program after storm damage

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Litchfield Park faces an estimated $425,000 bill to remove and replace about 50 palm trees damaged from recent storms, and city staff are developing a way for residents to help.

Public Grounds Superintendent Kevin Hamilton outlined a proposed tree donation program during an Oct. 21 City Council presentation, saying the palms identified for replacement were "confirmed dead or going to be dead."

Residents Kelly Bohm and Beth Jordan approached the city with a proposal to restore trees and create a long-term plan to protect and grow its canopy. Their idea helped shape the sponsorship program Hamilton presented.

"This program is a great way to celebrate their effort, instill pride in our city, and preserve our rich history," Hamilton said.

• See **Storm** Page **24**

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NEWS IN BRIEF

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Goodyear officer resigns amid license plate reader issue

A Goodyear officer resigned last month as the city's police department investigated the potential misuse of automatic license plate readers, authorities said Friday.

Kristopher Jackson submitted his resignation effective Sept. 17, but the department continued its administrative investigation "to ensure a thorough review of the allegations and appropriate accountability," according to a release. The investigation resulted in three "sustained policy violations," the department release stated. They included abuse of authority, violation of body-worn camera policy and dishonesty, police said.

Police Chief Brian Issitt determined termination would have been the appropriate disciplinary action had the officer remained employed by the department.

Goodyear technology chief receives leadership award

Goodyear Chief Information Officer Lisa Faison has received a 2026 Women Leading IT Award from Info-Tech Research Group, the city announced.

The research and advisory firm recognizes women in information technology for leadership, innovation, promoting inclusive workplaces and supporting future technology leaders.

Faison oversees Goodyear's technology strategy and operations, including systems that support city employees and services for residents.

Faison was selected from hundreds of nominees for the broader 2026 Info-Tech Awards program, according to the city.

Bullard Wash trail approaches complete design

The Bullard Wash Trail in Goodyear is approaching its final design, with city officials saying they are 95% complete.

The city's Parks & Recreation Committee was provided information on the $32 million project during an October meeting. City staff said the Van Buren Trailhead design will include restrooms, a classroom and a demonstration garden. There also will be adventure areas put in along McDowel Road and Van Buren Street as well as connections to nearby neighborhoods.

Construction is set to begin in December with a groundbreaking set for 10 a.m. Dec. 3.

Goodyear Community Park to get renovations

The city of Goodyear is planning renovations at the Community Park, including the moving of the dog park.

A Land and Water Conservation Fund grant will fund the $2.6 million to move the dog park from the park's northwest corner to its northeast corner, complete with shade structures, a chilled drinking fountain with dog bowls, waste stations, lighting and agility features.

The city also will spend $5 million on a playground renovation project, with the design expected to be completed in December and construction starting in January.

The playground will have an aviation theme, according to information from staff during a city Parks & Recreation Committee meeting.

10 ways to give back in Litchfield Park and Goodyear

Find local volunteer opportunities ahead of the holidays

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

If you've been meaning to volunteer, the holidays are a great time to get started and there are plenty of opportunities to give back around Litchfield Park and Goodyear. Here are five places in each city where you can get involved.

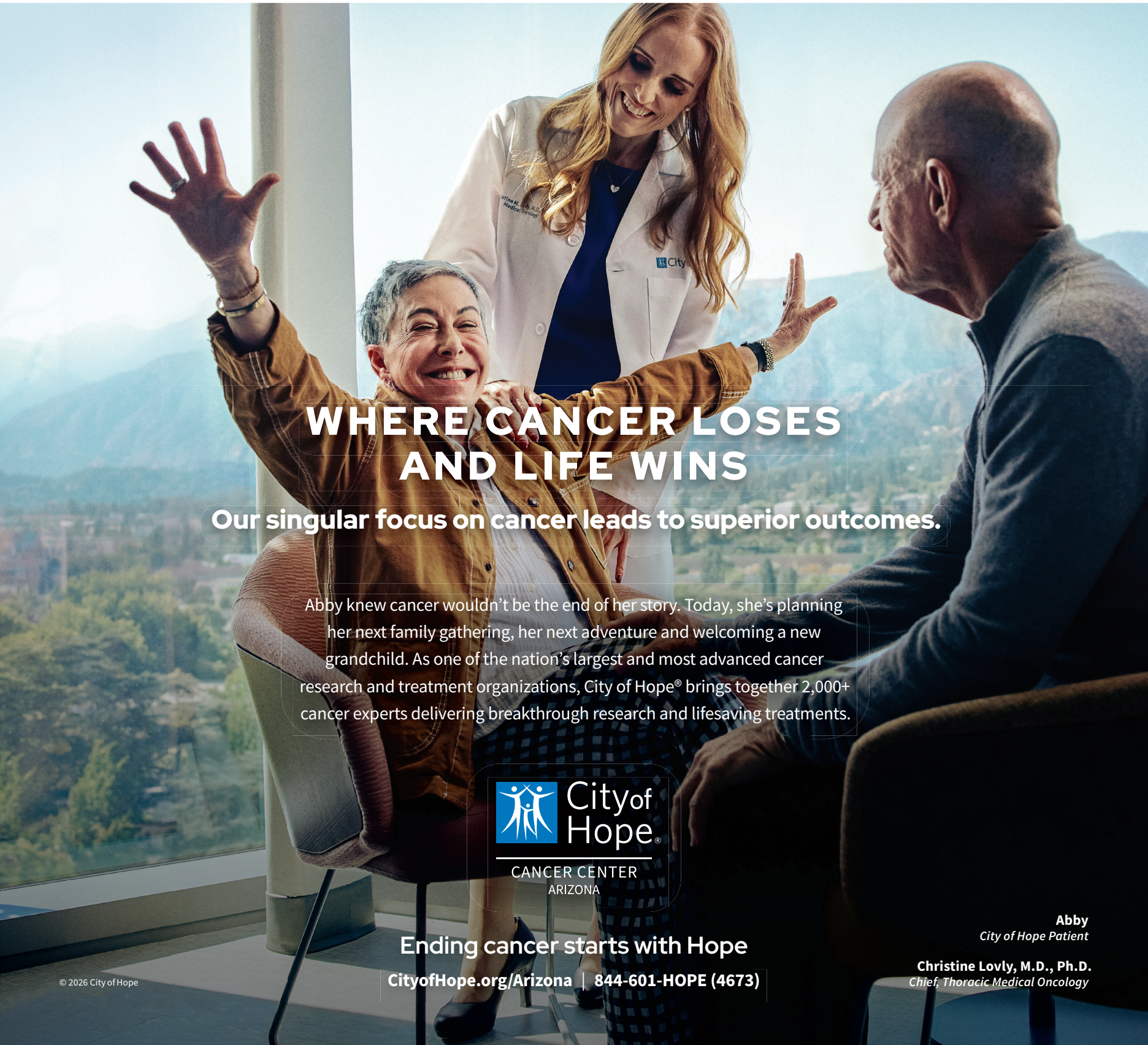
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• See **Volunteer** Page 9



Organizations in Litchfield Park and Goodyear offer opportunities to volunteer ahead of the holidays. (Metro Creative Connection)



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Former agent brings skills to council

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Suzanne Allen entered Federal Bureau of Investigation training as a certified public accountant with no firearms experience.

Today, the Litchfield Park City Council member brings lessons from a decade with the bureau to a different kind of public service, where asking questions and building relationships still matter.

As a special agent in the FBI's Phoenix Division, Allen used her accounting skills to follow the money in securities and investment fraud cases. The job also taught her how to earn the trust of the people affected.

"That's happened to me a lot where victims are not always comfortable coming forward and admitting that they've been defrauded of money," Allen said.

Her accounting background helped her investigate complex financial crimes, but becoming a special agent meant stepping into unfamiliar territory. A lengthy hiring process, including a hiring freeze, tested her patience.

Still, she was determined to pursue the opportunity.

"If I don't do it now, I'll regret not doing it," she recalled thinking.

Before joining the FBI in 2012, she worked in Arizona's General Accounting Office. Once with the bureau, she reviewed bank records, interviewed people and worked alongside forensic accountants.

Her days could include preparing for search warrants, testifying or helping another squad with an operation.

One early case she worked involved someone who defrauded fellow members of a religious organization. Allen recalled victims who had lost everything and appreciated having someone driven to hold the person accountable.

By 2021, Allen was the FBI's private sector coordinator, building relationships with businesses and sharing information about potential threats. She said that work helped prepare her to bring people together on City Council.



Suzanne Allen, right, receives her FBI credentials from then-FBI Director Robert Mueller. Allen joined the bureau in 2012. (Submitted photo/Suzanne Allen)

Allen left the bureau after about 10 years to spend more time with her children and help her husband open The Pilot Clinic, a direct primary care and aviation medicine practice in Goodyear.

"I had a great career. I was really happy about it," she said. "I was looking forward to the next step."

That step eventually led her to local government. A West Valley native, Allen served on Litchfield Park's board of freeholders before running for City Council in 2024. She was elected that year and sworn in Jan. 23, 2025.

Her investigative habits remain useful. She's not afraid to asks questions, sometimes several times, to make sure she understands an issue.

"I really feel like we are operating transparently, and that's why I'm not afraid to ask the questions that I think are important," she said.

Her accounting experience also informs her attention to capital improvement plans, spending priorities and the long-term consequences of financial decisions.

Looking ahead, Allen wants to support Litchfield Square's development and help Hilltop become a destination where community partners work together. She envisions a more connected city that welcomes neighbors from across the West Valley while preserving its history and sense of community.

"I want to make sure that we keep it special," she said.

Matt Paxton gives lessons on legacy in Litchfield Park

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For Matt Paxton, sorting through a lifetime of personal belongings starts with something that won't fit in a box: the stories.

The "Hoarders" personality brought humor and downsizing advice to Litchfield Park Oct. 21 during Sun Health's "Treasures & Tales" at the Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall. His message centered on what families pass down, from treasured possessions to the memories that give them meaning.

"Sometimes legacies are big, sometimes they are small," Paxton

• See **Lessons** Page **15**



Matt Paxton, known for his appearances on "Hoarders," speaks during Sun Health's "Treasures & Tales" event Oct. 21 at the Hilltop Theatre and Concert Hall in Litchfield Park. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)



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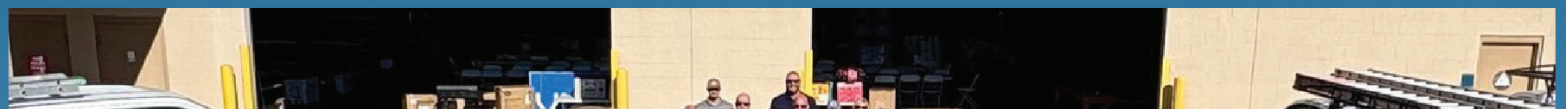
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BUSINESS IN BRIEF

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Goodyear leaders and representatives from Baywood Hotel pose with shovels Oct. 12, 2026, during the groundbreaking for an AC Hotel by Marriott at GSQ in downtown Goodyear. The 135-room hotel is expected to open in early 2028. (City of Goodyear)



Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo and West Valley Regional Chamber President and CEO Jeffrey Campos join a ribbon-cutting ceremony Sept. 24 celebrating the opening of Firebirds Wood Fired Grill in Goodyear. (ICR)

AC Hotel breaks ground in downtown Goodyear

Construction began Oct. 12 on a 135-room AC Hotel by Marriott at GSQ in downtown Goodyear, with an opening expected in early 2028.

The hotel will overlook the 2-acre Civic Square Park and include a lounge, bar, business center, outdoor pool and more than 1,200 square feet of meeting space. It is expected to create about 30 permanent jobs.

"The hotel will bring new visitors to our downtown, support local businesses and create new employment opportunities, while giving residents and visitors another reason to spend time in GSQ," Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo stated.

The hotel will add lodging to the district's mix of restaurants, retail, offices, health care and education. Recent openings include Black Rock Coffee Bar, Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, First Watch, Kura Revolving Sushi Bar and Trader Joe's. The district also includes Banner Health and Avila University Arizona.

Other businesses announced or under construction include CAVA, California Fish Grill, Fogo de Chão, Flower Child, J.Crew Factory Outlet, Lovesac, Nordstrom Rack, Postino, Sephora and Spinato's Pizzeria.

Jared Jewelers opens store at Gateway Crossing

Jared Jewelers has opened a store at Gateway Crossing and donated $20,000 to St. Mary's Food Bank to mark the opening.

The 9995 W. McDowell Road location is the first in the United States to feature Jared's newest store design, according to the company. Representatives from Jared and the West Valley Regional Chamber marked the opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 15. Jared presented a check to the food bank during the ceremony, saying the donation would help provide 100,000 meals to individuals and families across Arizona.

The store held a grand opening celebration Oct. 17. The location sells fine jewelry, engagement and wedding rings, and new and pre-owned luxury watches. Its Jared Design & Service Center offers custom design consultations, restoration and care for jewelry and watches.



Representatives from Jared Jewelers and the West Valley Regional Chamber take part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 15, 2026, outside Jared's new store at Gateway Crossing. (St. Mary's Food Bank)

Firebirds opens Goodyear location

Firebirds Wood Fired Grill celebrated the opening of its first Goodyear restaurant at 14848 W. McDowell Road with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The ceremony was originally scheduled for Sept. 8 but was postponed until the end of September after the opening was delayed. Goodyeary Mayor Joe Pizzillo and West Valley Regional Chamber President and CEO Jeffrey Campos attended. The approximately 5,600-square-foot restaurant serves hand-cut steaks and seafood prepared on an exposed wood-fired grill.

Volunteer

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Center: The museum will pause operations as it prepares for a new facility, but programs and events will continue.

Ask about helping through the volunteer form at pwlhc.org/volunteer-information or call 623-535-4414.

• TheShop@CLP: This thrift shop at The Church at Litchfield Park, 300 N. Old Litchfield Road, supports church missions.

Ask about available roles at 623-935-3411 or apply at clp.breezechms.com/form/shop.

• St. Peter's Episcopal Church: Volunteers regularly prepare meals for veterans 9-11 a.m. on the fourth Friday of each month at 400 S. Old Litchfield Road.

Call 623-935-3279 to confirm upcoming meal preparation shifts.

• Litchfield Elementary School: Support students and teachers at 255 E. Wigwam Blvd.

Volunteers must be 21 or older and receive approval before participating.

Apply through the district, lesd79.org/page/volunteer-at-lesd79, allowing at least two weeks for approval.

• Litchfield Park Recreation Center: Coach a youth sports team. Coaches must be 18 or older and complete screening and training.

Download a coaching

• See **Opportunities** Page **13**





Dining

• From page 1

variety, including locally owned and Arizona-based restaurants, trendy non-chain concepts, seafood, steakhouses, healthier options and places that offer more of an experience.

That demand is becoming especially visible at GSQ, Goodyear's downtown district surrounding Civic Square.

First Watch, Kura Revolving Sushi Bar and Firebirds Wood Fired Grill are already open. Other concepts in the GSQ pipeline include Fogo de Chão, CAVA, California Fish Grill, Flower Child, Magdaleña, Postino, Miel de Agave, Paris Baguette and Spinato's.

Goodyear regularly surveys residents about the restaurants and businesses they want to see, and Smith said that feedback is part of the city's recruitment strategy.

"We take that information directly to restaurant groups, real estate brokers and property developers," he said.

Postino, Flower Child and Spinato's all ranked among the restaurants most requested by residents and are now planned for GSQ.

"What has been interesting is that residents aren't simply asking for more restaurants," Smith said. "They want more variety and more distinctive concepts."

> "What has been interesting is that residents aren't simply asking for more restaurants," Smith said. "They want more variety and more distinctive concepts.
>
> **James P. Smith**
> **City of Goodyear**

Flower Child has consistently ranked among the city's most requested restaurants, Smith said, while Magdaleña reflects the kind of more distinctive dining experience residents have said they want.

Black Rock Coffee is also expected to open soon, while Farmer Boys and several other restaurant projects remain in development. Some openings could still happen before the end of 2026, while others may move into early 2027 depending on construction and development timelines.

GSQ may be the most visible concentration of new dining, but restaurant growth is not limited to downtown.

McDowell Road remains Goodyear's primary retail corridor, while Canyon Trails and the PebbleCreek Parkway area, including Ballpark Village, continue to see activity. Smith said interest is also moving farther west and south toward Cotton Lane, Loop 303 and Estrella.

A Sprouts-anchored shopping center planned for Estrella is expected to create another opportunity for the city to recruit additional restaurants and retail to that part of Goodyear.

"With residential growth, major employers and destinations generating additional traffic in those areas, we expect the geography of Goodyear's dining scene to continue expanding," Smith said.

Spinato's Pizzeria & Family Kitchen is one example of an established Arizona company making a West Valley move.

The Tempe-based, family- and employee-owned restaurant plans to open its eighth Valley location at GSQ in the fourth quarter of 2027. The ground-up restaurant is expected to add 75 to 95 part- and full-time jobs.

Anthony Spinato, CEO of Spinato's,

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Food

• From page 10

said the company had heard for years from customers who were driving long distances to reach its other locations. "We are grateful that so many of our longtime, loyal guests have taken the time to drive far from their homes to dine at our restaurants," Spinato said. "We heard them, and we are so excited to welcome them to our new Goodyear location next year."

He said the Civic Square setting helped sell him on the location.

"I just fell in love with the civic square," Spinato said. "It's just a great place where families and friends go out and gather."

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo said Spinato's was one of the concepts residents requested most often through the city's retail survey.

"Their decision to open at GSQ reflects the continued momentum of our downtown and the strong demand for quality dining experiences in Goodyear," Pizzillo said.

Smith said the city does not wait for restaurant groups to come calling. Economic Development works with operators, brokers, property owners and developers to identify possible sites, provide demographic and market information, and connect companies with the appropriate city departments. Staff also attend industry events and meet directly with restaurant groups.

For entrepreneurs and smaller businesses, the city's InnovationHub offers mentoring, workshops, networking and one-on-one assistance, while Economic Development can help with site information, research and connections to other resources.

The final location decision belongs to the restaurant and property owner, Smith said, but the city tries to make sure companies have the information they need to evaluate Goodyear.





Proof Bread, Alhambra Credit Union pay it forward with pastries

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Community spirit came with a flaky crust Oct. 13 as Proof Bread and Alhambra Credit Union teamed up to treat Litchfield Park customers during Pay It Forward Day.

Alhambra sponsored a giveaway of miniature pastries from the bakery as part of the fourth annual Arizona Credit Union Week, which brought together 18 credit unions to support local businesses, nonprofits and financial education.

For these partners, the connection started just a few doors apart.

Jamie Pruett, Proof Bread's culinary director, said Alhambra employees first stopped by for pastries.

"It was kind of love at first bite," Pruett said.



Proof Bread pastries are displayed alongside Alhambra Credit Union materials Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2026, in Litchfield Park. The credit union sponsored free pastries during Pay It Forward Day, part of Arizona Credit Union Week. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

The credit union's focus on its surrounding community made the collaboration a natural fit, he said.

Sonia Cardona, Alhambra's vice president of operations, said the neighboring businesses had built a relationship by supporting each other. The giveaway offered a way to share that connection with customers.

"Honestly, at the end of the day it's about helping people in our community," Cardona said.

The miniature pastries showcased Proof's sourdough baking process. Pruett said the bakery uses a natural leavening process rather than commercial yeast.

"Sourdough is a technique, not a flavor," he said.

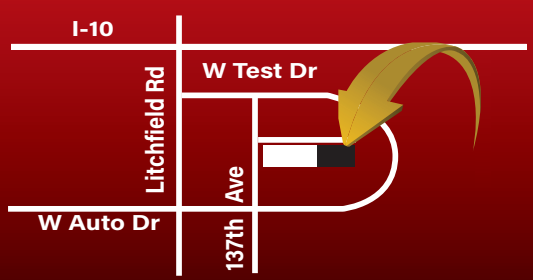
The partnership extended beyond the bakery counter. Alhambra also arranged to offer Proof pastries at its credit union offices, introducing members to the bakery while giving the neighboring business another opportunity to reach new customers.

Alhambra's community partnerships also extend to local schools and neighborhood events.

"A lot of what we do is financial education," CEO Eddie Moraga said, describing programs that help students understand everyday expenses before entering adulthood.

In Litchfield Park, Pruett hopes the partnership introduces more West Valley residents to Proof. The bakery has begun participating in area farmers markets and is exploring additional collaborations.

"We're always on the lookout for other opportunities to collaborate with other businesses in the area," he said.

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Opportunities

• From page 9

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Goodyear

• Hope's Closet: Sort donations and help shoppers at 415 N. Litchfield Road while supporting New Life Center's shelter.

Volunteers ages 14 and older can apply at newlifectr.org/get-involved. Minors need guardian consent.

• All Faith Community Services: Food distributions take place at Goodyear High School, 17300 W. Van Buren St., on the first and third Tuesday of each month.

Submit a volunteer application atallfaithaz.org/volunteer or call 623-386-3513 to ask about volunteering at the Goodyear distribution.

• Rescuing Unfortunate Furry Friends: RUFF seeks temporary foster homes for animals in Estrella Mountain Ranch and CantaMia.

Visit ruffemr.org or call 623-715-6916 to ask about fostering.

• Abrazo West Campus: Help patients and visitors at 13677 W. McDowell Road.

Volunteers must be 18 or older and serve at least 100 hours in one year. Apply atabrazohealth.com/about.

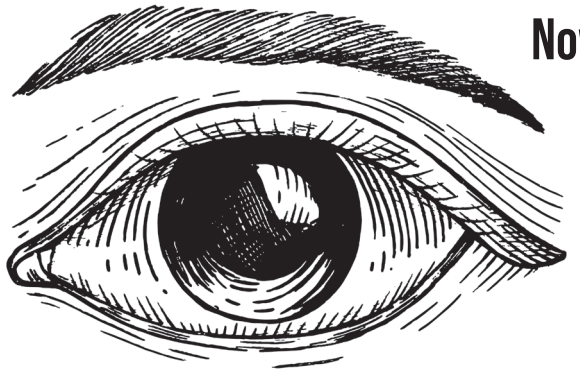
• Georgia T. Lord Library: Teens can stock books and help with programs at 1900 N. Civic Square. Start with the library's teen volunteer form, mcldaz.org/georgia-t-lord/volunteer/teen/.

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PNC branch banker Anthony Villanueva sings "Estos Celos" with Happy Mariachi Trio during the bank's Hispanic Heritage Month celebration Oct. 9, 2026, in Goodyear. (Noah Flug/Independent Newsmedia)

PNC's Goodyear fiesta brings neighbors together

By Noah Flug
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

PNC Bank branch banker Anthony Villanueva stepped into a different role Oct. 9, joining Happy Mariachi Trio to sing "Estos Celos" at the bank's Hispanic Heritage Month celebration in Goodyear.

"It was my first time singing that song, actually, so I was nervous," Villanueva said.

His performance added a personal touch to the Fiesta Fridays celebration, a free afternoon gathering that brought music, food and neighbors to the parking lot of the PNC branch at 1559 N. Litchfield Road.

Adults and children gathered around tables covered in orange, green and pink table covers to eat and chat. Even the mariachi musicians took a break to enjoy the food.

The celebration featured tacos from Taco Head, an Elotopia street corn bar, a prize wheel and giveaways, with PNC volunteers helping run the activities.

Behind the festivities was an effort to keep a neighborhood tradition going.

David Crummey, a PNC vice president and community development officer, said FirstBank had hosted the celebrations for several years. PNC acquired FirstBank earlier this year, he said, and was eager to keep the celebration alive.

"We live in a time when it's hard to get together with people that we don't know," Crummey said.

For him, sharing food and conversation gives the bank another way to be part of the neighborhood.

"Being part of the community means being there with people, even when you're not doing something that's part of a transaction," he said.

The gathering also offered a chance to share community resources. Crummey highlighted PNC Grow Up Great, an early childhood education program that provides free materials in English and Spanish for children from birth through age 5. He said the program works with the Fred Rogers Institute and Sesame Workshop.

"The children will become our future workforce and our future neighbors," Crummey said.

Looking ahead, Crummey said he hopes the tradition continues, giving families another reason to gather over food and music.

Lessons

• From page 6

said.

Paxton encouraged attendees to create a "legacy list" and think about what they want to leave behind. For older adults preparing to downsize, he urged families to talk about their belongings and share their stories while they still have the chance.

"Give it away now, don't wait until it's too late. Define your legacy now," he said.

Nora Hannah, Sun Health's chief engagement officer, opened the evening with the history of Paul W. Litchfield and the family's ties to the area. She described the family's gift of 300 acres to Sun Health and the responsibility of carrying that history forward.

"It's our turn. We are the stewards of the story, and of the many people who are in those stories," Hannah said.

Ticket sales benefited the Sun Health Foundation, supporting free or low-cost health and wellness resources. Megan Word of Sun Health said social connection is part of the organization's legacy.

Word said she wants Sun Health to help people reach old age and say, "I feel good and I'm proud of what I've done in my life."

Paxton connected the evening's message to Litchfield Park's growth and development. He said families sorting through a relative's home and communities weighing change can face similar tensions.

"I say to both sides of that argument, stop complaining, start communicating, tell the stories," Paxton said.

He encouraged younger people to listen to the history behind familiar places and older generations to hear what younger people want for the future.

Whether the legacy is land, a keepsake or time spent together, Paxton urged people to act while they can.

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Chandler • February 23, 2027 • Sun Lakes Country Club

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Sun City • May 3, 2027 • Sundial Recreation Center

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REAL ESTATE

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West Valley housing markets remain cool in September

By Philip Haldiman
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As temperatures start to dip in the Valley, so too has the greater Phoenix residential real estate market cooled.

In September, a slowdown in sales continued due to higher mortgage rates, and the month brought a sharper slowdown in new contract activity, according to a monthly report from Phoenix Realtors.

Closed sales dropped 4.9%, and new listings dropped 3.7% in September this year compared to last year, and pending sales fell 40.1%, according to their monthly report.

From a national perspective, closed sales went down 1.2% in September, and greater Phoenix was down 4.9% for the month.

Nationally, inventory of homes for sale rose to its highest level in more than 10 years, up 5.9% from last year, according to the data. In the local region, inventory rose 6.7% despite fewer new listings coming to the market.

"September often marks the start of increased fall activity, but this year people are navigating more affordability pressure and rate uncertainty," said Sammy Glassman, board president of Phoenix Realtors. "Buyers and sellers are still active, but when rates keep moving, it can cause people to pause before making a major financial decision."

Here is a round up of the real estate data in Goodyear.

Goodyear

Jen Taege, vice president of the Board of Phoenix Realtors, said Goodyear's housing market continues to feel the effects of slower buyer demand and competition from new construction throughout the West Valley.


Jen Taege

Pending sales have declined 27.7% year over year, and closed sales are down 13.8%. With inventory increasing 4.7%, buyers have more options, leading to downward pressure on home prices which is evident in the data, she said.

Both median and average sales prices have declined, falling 5.2% and 4.3%, respectively, according to the monthly report.

But not all the data is showing negative trends Taege said.

"Despite this downward pressure, homes are selling 10% faster than a year ago, and sellers are receiving an average of 98.6% of their asking price, a slight improvement over last year," she said.

"For buyers, this data suggests that Goodyear remains an attractive option for those seeking newer homes that are affordable. For sellers that price competitively and properly prepare their homes, the data shows that they are attracting the buyers that are willing to make a move in this market."

• See **Real Estate** Page **17**



Real Estate

• From page 16

Litchfield Park

Taege said Litchfield Park's overall picture is a market experiencing slower sales activity, but relatively stable pricing.



Sammy Glassman

Pending sales have declined 29.8% year over year, and closed sales are down 12.7%, according to the report.

Taege said Litchfield Park's median sales price has remained stable, declining 0.6%, while the average sales price has increased 6.7%.

"One factor that may contribute to this relative resilience is Litchfield Park's mix of established neighborhoods, distinctive homes and higher-end properties. These characteristics can help differentiate portions of the market from newer home competition" Taege said. "It is worth mentioning that with only 55 closed transactions, a relatively small number of higher-priced sales can impact the median and average sales prices in a positive direction."

She added that for buyers, supply remains high leading to meaningful choices and negotiating opportunities, and that for sellers, positioning their property well, pricing competitively and marketing strategically remain important strategies to attract ready and willing buyers.

Senior News Editor Philip Haldiman can be reached at phaldiman@iniusa.org, or on X @philiphaldiman. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AzOpinions@inusua.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

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EDUCATION IN BRIEF

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Music industry pro helps develop Hilltop studios

Students at Agua Fria Union High School District's Hilltop School for the Arts have access to three professional recording studios developed with assistance from music industry professional Brandon Caddell.

District officials recognized Caddell during their Oct. 14 governing board meeting for approximately 18 months of work designing the facilities, selecting equipment and training staff.

His professional credits, according to district officials, include Disney projects and Grammy-winning recordings.

"He designed and helped build all of the three professional recording studios that we have in our school today," Hilltop Principal Julie Jones told the board.



Agua Fria Union High School District recognized Brandon Caddell for his work setting up the Hilltop School for the Arts' recording studios. From left are governing board member Trey Terry, Caddell, Hilltop Principal Julie Jones and Superintendent Dr. Manuel Valenzuela. (AFUHSD)

Caddell also connected the school with other recording industry professionals and helped prepare instructors to use the equipment.

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

Litchfield Elementary reports $11.7M in override spending

Litchfield Elementary School District spent approximately $11.7 million in maintenance and operations override funding during fiscal year 2026, supporting compensation for 704 employees.

Chief Financial Officer Michael Vaughn presented the figures during the Oct. 13 governing board meeting.

Vaughn said the district used approximately $2.25 million in carryover funds to support operations, about $1 million less than previously projected.

• See **Education** Page **19**



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Education

• From page 18

Approximately 80% of maintenance and operations expenditures went toward salaries and benefits, with another 12% supporting purchased services.

The district also reviewed spending from its voter-approved bond programs, including $2.1 million for security cameras, $917,000 for front-office remodeling and $4 million for modular classrooms at Palm Valley Elementary School. The governing board unanimously approved the district's annual financial report.

Agua Fria reports nearly $80M in bond funds

Agua Fria Union High School District reported approximately $79.9 million remaining from its $138 million voter-approved 2024 bond during an Oct. 14 governing board meeting.

Deputy Superintendent Tom Huffman said the funds support construction, renovations, security improvements and technology, including ongoing projects at Millennium High School and Hilltop School for the Arts. The district also reported spending its full $197 million authorization from a separate 2023 bond.

Officials said the district's existing 15% maintenance and operations override provided $11.4 million in fiscal year 2026. Voters will decide Nov. 3 whether to continue that funding through Proposition 438, which is expected to generate approximately $12.2 million annually for staffing, school safety and educational programs.

Bond funds are restricted to capital expenses and cannot replace operating revenue from the override. Read more online: yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/.

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Litchfield schools seek new framework for budget decisions as enrollment grows

By Stacy Mantle
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chief Financial Officer Michael Vaughn told the governing board Oct. 13 the Litchfield district is gathering feedback from parents, employees and administrators to identify which educational experiences families value most.

The findings will help guide future spending decisions, particularly when district leaders must choose between competing priorities.

"This isn't a budget cutting process," Vaughn said. "This is really an alignment process, but it certainly will assist if we ever have to decide to reduce resources anyway."



Board members Kimberly Moran, left, and Ryan Owens listen to a presentation from Chief Financial Officer Michael Vaughn during the Oct 13 Governing Board meeting. (LESD)

Four priorities emerge

The district began gathering input in May and June through meetings with administrators, the superintendent's advisory council and parent organization representatives.

Four preliminary themes emerged: learning pathways, a sense of belonging in smaller school communities, academic quality and high expectations, and trusted relationships between school staff and families.

Vaughn emphasized the themes are not final recommendations.

The district is comparing them against additional evidence, including feedback from all 15 regular district schools, surveys of families who have left the district, open enrollment applications and student enrollment patterns.

"No single source of evidence can answer the question all by itself," Vaughn said.

He said the district wants to develop one overarching statement describing the educational experience it promises families rather than adopt four separate priorities.

Decisions could involve trade-offs

Vaughn said the resulting framework would help administrators evaluate whether programs and services contribute to the district's most important educational commitments.

The approach could influence not only budget allocations but also how the district communicates with families and organizes its services.

He acknowledged some worthwhile programs may compete for limited funding.

Board member Moran expressed support for the process while cautioning against allowing districtwide priorities to reduce individual schools' flexibility.

"Historically we have tried to maintain autonomy and agency at different campuses and even particularly down to the teacher level," Moran said.

She also warned that employees might interpret the initiative as a cost-cutting exercise.

• See **Growth** Page 21

Growth

• From page **20**

"I don't want staff or our team to feel rebellious against it if they think that it's going to then be used to dictate what they're doing," she said.

Vaughn said the process would incorporate input from a cross-functional working group, administrators and district leadership before recommendations reach the governing board.

Enrollment increases as district plans ahead

Superintendent Carter Davidson reported enrollment was approximately 150 students higher than at the same point last year.

"To me, that's a vote of confidence out in the community that we are doing good things for our students," Davidson said.

The district is also continuing efforts to gather feedback from students and families, including a new superintendent's student advisory team.

Vaughn said the maintenance and operations working group will meet Oct. 21, followed by additional administrative discussions through early November.

The district is targeting Nov. 17 to present a proposed value proposition to the governing board.

The proposal is expected to serve as a foundation for future resource decisions, although no specific budget reductions or program changes were announced during the presentation.

Editor's note: A grant from the Arizona Local News Foundation made this story possible. The foundation awarded 15 newsrooms to pay for solutions-focused education reporters for two years. Please 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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Primary Care is Getting a Makeover in Goodyear. And it's About Time.

Longer appointments, less waiting, and no fees. Corner Health is rethinking how primary care works in Arizona

Finding a primary care provider close to home shouldn't be this hard. Yet, nearly one in five adults in the state doesn't have a personal doctor or healthcare provider, according to 2024 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For those who do, getting an appointment can mean waiting weeks or months, only to spend a few rushed minutes discussing their health concerns.

A growing network of local providers thinks Arizonans deserve better, and they're working with Corner Health to build a different kind of primary care practice to prove it.

Through Corner Health, more than 100 local practices are putting the focus back on the patient-provider relationship, including several right here in Goodyear.

Their approach? Fewer patients. Longer appointments. And more time to actually listen.

Across the Corner Health network, appointments average 34 minutes and new-patient visits average 40 minutes. Instead of racing through a packed schedule, providers have time to ask questions, understand their patients' concerns and develop a plan together.

While this type of personalized healthcare is often associated with concierge medicine and expensive fees, practices on the Corner Health network accept major insurance plans, including Medicare, without requiring a membership fee.

The model gives highly vetted, experienced nurse practitioners the freedom to own and operate their practices, while Corner Health handles the behind-the-scenes work. Providers get to spend more time caring for patients and building lasting relationships instead of getting bogged down in paperwork and corporate red tape.

Meet Your Neighborhood Primary Care Providers in Goodyear.
These locally owned practices on the Corner Health network are welcoming new patients:

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Ware Health Matters Medical & Wellness
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Viviane Che, PMHNP-BC, DNP, AGNP-C
VSquare Health Services
13210 W Van Buren St, Goodyear, AZ 85338
Book an appointment:

Maceline Check, PMHNP-BC, DNP, FNP-C
New Phase of Life Treatment Center PLLC
2990 N Litchfield Rd, Ste #5, Goodyear, AZ 85395
Book an appointment:

Services vary by practice but may include preventative care, annual wellness visits, chronic condition management and women's health. Appointments across the network are typically available in under two days.

To find additional providers, visit CornerHealth.com.

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO-DO LIST

CHALK ART IN THE PARK

ABOUT: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 14 at Goodyear Recreation Campus, 420 S. Estrella Parkway

INFO: Community members and professional artists transform park walkways into colorful works of chalk art during this city-sponsored celebration. Activities include a tie-dye station, live DJ, food trucks and opportunities for visitors to create their own artwork.

WEB: goodyearaz.gov

'A NIGHT TO REMEMBER'

ABOUT: 6-10 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 14 at Flite Goodyear Historic Hangar, 1300 S. Litchfield Road

INFO: The P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center and West Valley Arts Council present a 1940s-themed fundraising gala celebrating the West Valley's role in American history. The evening features a swing band, dancing, live art, World War II vehicles, period cocktails and a red-carpet entrance. Guests are encouraged to dress in 1940s attire.

WEB: nighttoremember.org

MOVIE IN THE PARK

ABOUT: 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 14 at Jackie Robinson Ballfield, 14451 W. Camelback Road, Litchfield Park

INFO: Litchfield Park concludes its fall outdoor movie series with a free screening of "Hoppers." Guests are encouraged to bring blankets, lawn chairs, food and nonalcoholic beverages. The movie begins at dusk, and parking is available in the gravel lot off Camelback Road.

WEB: litchfieldpark.gov



Red Dragon Asian Food has been a regular at previous markets at Goodyear Ballpark. The Goodyear Farmers Market takes place Sunday, Nov. 15. (Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

GOODYEAR FARMERS MARKET

ABOUT: 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 15 at Goodyear Ballpark, 1933

• See **Entertainment** Page **23**

YOUR EVENTS, PLEASE

We welcome your events for our neighborhood To-Do List page. Please send the following for publication in our calendar: name of the event, time, date and location with address and if there is a cost to attend. Email us: **aznews@iniusa.org**

Entertainment
• From page **22**

S. Ballpark Way, Goodyear

INFO: Local farms and vendors offer fresh foods, handmade products and artisan goods during this community market at Goodyear Ballpark.

WEB: goodyearbp.com

INSIDE THE NATION'S OSTRICH EXPERIMENT STATIONS

ABOUT: 10 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 19 at Goodyear City Hall Council Chambers, 1900 N. Civic Square, Goodyear

INFO: Historian Janelle Molony explores Arizona's unusual ostrich experiment stations, including stories of espionage, political maneuvering and scientific experiments. Presented by the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center, the free lecture requires advance registration.

WEB: pwlhc.org

SONORAN DESERT PLANT HIKE

ABOUT: 8-9:30 a.m. Friday, Nov. 20 at Estrella Mountain Regional Park, 14805 W. Vineyard Ave., Goodyear

INFO: Ranger Olivia leads a guided, approximately 2-mile hike along the Horseshoe Trail, introducing participants to native Sonoran Desert plants. The route is mostly flat, with some rocky and sandy sections. Closed-toe shoes and drinking water are recommended. No registration required.

WEB: maricopacountyparks.net

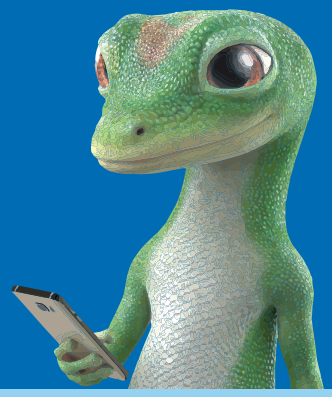


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Storm

• From page 1

Under the proposal, residents could sponsor a tree to honor a loved one, celebrate a milestone or support the city.

Businesses, community organizations and civic groups also could participate.

Proposed sponsorships include approximately $500 for a community tree, $1,000 for a shade tree and $8,500 for a palm replacement. General contributions of any amount also would be accepted, giving people a way to participate without sponsoring an entire tree.

Hamilton said the initial pricing was based on a 20-foot fan palm. Mayor Thomas Schoaf suggested looking at smaller palms to see whether the city could stretch its dollars further.

"I would suggest for palms that we might want to look at something a little shorter and see how much difference there is in cost," Schoaf said.

Hamilton said staff had selected the priced trees after residents raised concerns that replacement citrus trees were too small and took too long to grow.

The city would oversee planting, long-term care and locations. Details about tree sizes, sponsorship options and planting arrangements are still in the works. Hamilton said sponsorship details would be announced on the city's website.



At right, palm trees stand outside Litchfield Park City Hall. (Independent Newsmedia file photo)

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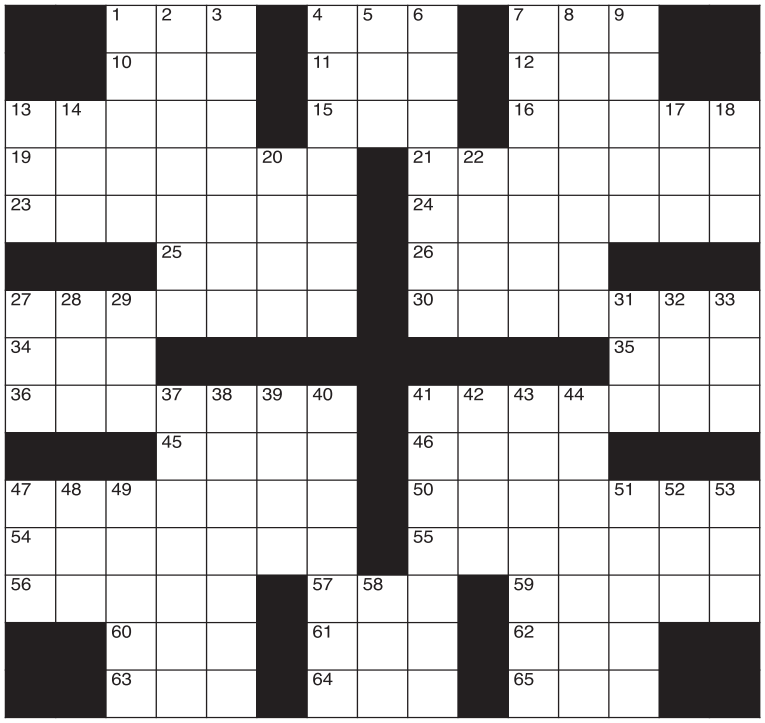

Grandview Terrace | Sun City West


La Loma Village | Litchfield Park


The Colonnade | Surprise


Sun Health At Home | Your Home

CROSSWORD BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES



Answers on page 27

CLUES ACROSS
1. Tire pressure metric
4. Request
7. Clairvoyance
10. 007Õs creator Fleming
11. Male adult
12. Norse mythological figure
13. Coffin cloths
15. Breeze through
16. Ladyfish genus
19. We all take them
21. NoblemanÕs jurisdiction
23. Members of U.S. Navy
24. Rummy-like card game
25. Unable to move
26. Type of horse
27. Parted
30. WomanÕs cloak
34. South American plant
35. Prohibit
36. Something one takes
41. Dish detergent manufacturer
45. Romanian river
46. Personification of pity
47. Makes upset
50. Discuss again
54. Medical instrument
55. Support
56. Informal term for money
57. Catch doing something wrong
59. Prehistoric people
60. Large African antelope
61. Automobile
62. ÒLosing My ReligionÓ rockers
63. High-resolution scientific instrument
64. A major division of geological time
65. Attempt

CLUES DOWN
1. Indoor plant
2. Fit to be sold
3. Rather
4. Collected
5. A baglike structure in a plant or animal
6. Irish rap group
7. Ageless
8. Lists indicating curriculum
9. Pokes at
13. Public television station
14. They __
17. Cooking tool
18. Separately managed account
20. Iron-containing compound
22. Swiss river
27. Former French coin
28. Electronic countermeasures
29. Taxi
31. Helps little firms
32. Unhappy
33. Midway between northeast and east
37. Glowing
38. Lists of items to be discussed
39. An informal body of friends
40. Indispensable quality
41. Neural structures
42. Brews
43. A place to dock
44. Festive singer
47. Sino-Soviet block (abbr.)
48. Northernmost point of mainland Wales
49. Most worthless parts
51. Type of ÒbearÓ
52. Take or consume
53. Defunct European organization
58. Swiss river



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