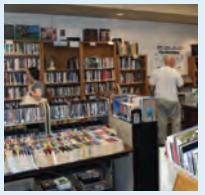
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Volume 29 Issue 47

INSIDE

Library Friends hosting annual sale: 4



NOVEMBER 25, 2026

Surprise's Nonpartisan Newspaper

Surprise PD wants to educate on e-bike, e-scooter ordinance

Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Surprise Police want to educate motorists on rules to safely ease on down the road with an updated e-bike and e-scooter ordinance.

The ordinance unanimously passed during the Nov. 17 Surprise City Council meeting, where officers discussed the benefits of educating the public about the city regulations for e-bikes, e-scooters, one-wheels, and similar mobility transports deemed "micromobility devices."

The ordinance describes "micromobility devices" as small motorized devices that are not otherwise classified as motor vehicles under Arizona law.

• See **Connect** Page **6**



All smiles at the Nov. 17 Surprise City Council meeting are Human Services and Community Vitality Director Seth Dyson with Surprise Librarian Ashley Ware and Surprise Public Library Director Kelsey Lamphier. (Independent Newsmedia/ Delarita Ford)

Surprise council stops one group to start 2 commissions

Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Before establishing two new commissions, one had to go, so Surprise City Council members dissolved the Veterans, Disability and Human Services Commission to create the Veteran and Service Members Advisory Commission plus a Disabilities and Human Services Advisory Commission.

The dissolution and revamping allows both new commissions to have a more concentrated mission for members to focus on issues, programs, services and policies recommended for their separate, but similar interests.

During the Nov. 17 meeting, although council agreed to dissolve the all-encompassing com-

• See **Council** Page **6**

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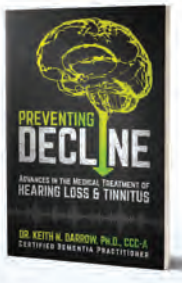
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NEWS IN BRIEF

MORE ONLINE
See more news at yourvalley.net

Resource provides housing support

Native American Connections operates the West Valley Housing Assistance Center, a community resource in Surprise providing free housing resources and support for youth, single adults and families experiencing housing instability.

Through WVHAC, individuals can connect with housing resources, schedule a housing assessment, access coordinated housing and shelter services, receive transportation assistance for shelter and assessment needs and work with staff to develop a personalized path toward long-term housing stability.

WVHAC is made possible through partnerships with the city of Surprise, city of Glendale, Maricopa County, Phoenix Rescue Mission and Terros Health.

WVHAC is at 12779 W. Grand Ave. and is open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Call 480-741-0976 or visit native-connections.org/WVHAC.

Friends of the Surprise Libraries hosts annual book sale

Friends of the Surprise Libraries is hosting its used book sale 9 a.m.-5 p.m. through Nov. 28 (closed for the holiday, Thursday Nov. 26).

Held at the Surprise Regional Library, 16089 N. Bullard Ave., over 12,000 sorted books are available, including gently used hardbacks priced between $1 and $3 and $1 paperbacks.

Some collectible books will be priced as marked. DVDs, craft books, cookbooks, spiritual, religious, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, fiction, nonfiction, romance, health and wellness, and more will be among offerings. Cash or checks only will be accepted for payment.



Friends of the Surprise Libraries will host a book fair. (File photo/Independent Newsmedia)

Visit booksalefinder.com and friendsofthesurpriselibraries.org for more information.

City offers eligible homeowners funding for plumbing issues

The city of Surprise is helping income-eligible residents address plumbing issues in their homes that may contribute to water waste.

Qualifying households can receive up to $1,500 toward approved indoor and outdoor plumbing repairs.

Qualifying plumbing issues can include:

- Dripping toilets, faucets, sinks, showers or tubs
- Issues with shut-off valves
- Leaking water heaters or hose bibs
- Leaking or malfunctioning swimming pool autofills
- Inoperable backflow prevention devices
- Domestic water line breaks after the meter
- Other indoor plumbing leaks

Irrigation repairs are not included under the program.

Eligible applicants must provide documentation showing their household meets the qualifying income guidelines, which are currently set at 80% of area median income. For 2026, income limits range from $62,950 for a one-person household to $118,700 for a household of eight.

Funding is limited and will be administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Permission to verify the leak with the applicant's water provider is required as part of the application process.

To learn more or apply, email a completed Plumbing Assistance Application to conservewater@surpriseaz.gov.

Call 623-222-7159.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

November 2016:
Following more than seven months of closure, a Bell Road bridge over Grand Avenue — the largest piece of a $41.9 million interchange project — reopened before the holiday shopping rush.



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14114 W. Whitewood Dr., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7068961
Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-Meeker, L-Echo Mesa, L-Whitewood Dr.

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



15108 W. Via Manana, SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7090877
Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, N-RHJ, R-151st., L-Domingo Ln., R-Baja Dr., R-Via Manana

Popular Havasu model. Home has 1547 sq. ft., 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, great room floor plan & a large block wall fenced private backyard. Owned solar. Cul de sac lot. No Neighborhood HOA fee. Call today to view!



23100 N. Drifter Way, SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7062138
Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-Meeker, L-135th, L-Deer Valley Rd., R-Dusty Trail Blvd., R-Drifter Way

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



15192 W. Las Brizas Ln., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7059982
Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-151st, L-Corral Dr., R-Acapulco. L-Las Brizas Ln.

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



12635 W. Eveningside Dr., SUN CITY WEST
MLS# 7040339
Dir: Bell Rd./RH Johnson, Dr. N-RHJ, R-128th, R-Sunglow Dr. which becomes Eveningside Dr.

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

Council

• From page 1

mission for veterans/disability/human services needs, the restructuring will offer more opportunities for those interested in serving on the two new advisory commissions.

Human Services and Community Vitality Director Seth Dyson said dissolving the city's Veterans, Disability and Human Services Commission to make the two other commissions will "give more residents a chance to participate."

"We decided to do that after Vet Fest," said Dyson about stopping the Veterans, Disability and Human Services Commission, which was established to provide input and recommendations to council on concerns affecting veterans, people with disabilities and residents seeking human services benefits.

Dyson credited the former commission for the Surprise Veterans Day Parade, which was "phenomenal," and the Vet Fest, while noting more advantages of creating the Veterans and Service Members Advisory Commission and the Disabilities and Human Services Advisory Commission, both consisting of seven members to meet at least quarterly.

The alternative commissions will assist the council better in highlighting awareness and successes of the silos.

"This is a logical move," said District 4 Councilman Johnny V. Melton, adding talented community members will benefit the commissions.

District 1 Councilman Nick Haney said the "goal was not exclusion but inclusion" in creating the two new commissions.

HAVE AN OPINION ON THIS ISSUE?

Want to contribute to the conversation? Email us at **azopinions@iniusa.org**

The Veterans and Service Members Advisory Commission will celebrate and promote the quality of life of veterans and service members. Appointed commissioners will include veterans, service members, relatives of veterans or service members, reviewing and making recommendations to city council on issues, opportunities, programs and more to benefit Surprise residents like the Surprise Veterans Day Parade and Vet Fest.

Likewise, the Disabilities and Human Services Advisory Commission will, according to a staff report, promote quality of life, accessibility, inclusion, and equitable opportunities for all residents, including individuals with disabilities, regarding such things as housing, disability, human service needs and more.

The commission will also consist of people with disabilities, and/or relatives of those with disabilities and human service representatives and organizations for decisions on disability and human services concerns, opportunities, programs, services, etc.

The recruitment process will start at the beginning of the year.

Connect

• From page 1

This outlines regulations for such things as electric bicycles, electric miniature and standup scooters and other similar, one-person motorized devices. Wheelchairs and other protected mobility apparatuses classified as motor vehicles or motor-driven cycles under Arizona Law are excluded devices.

The police department, which offers bike rodeos as an education outreach, will add the electric modes of travel to the mix.

"It's been something we have had in the works for several months now," said Surprise Police Chief Evan Becher of the ordinance that will be limited to city streets and parking lots.

He was joined by Officers Mike Robbins and Severin Hall. They presented details from research that started in August when they visited communities and schools to gather information and feedback on perceived problems, safety concerns and more to help them construct rules in accordance with state laws that already exist.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Share your thoughts with us. Email **azopinions@iniusa.org**.

"It's something we researched. We attended many of your district meetings and schools as well," said Robbins, adding the importance of focusing on behavior and instituting enforceable regulations. "We didn't want to overstep any state laws."

While officers mentioned looking for traffic violations involving the devices, including recklessness, impaired operations, which can result in impoundment for criminal violations or unlawful actions if a collision is involved, they were conscious about not being too harsh on youngsters who are trying to enjoy being youths or possibly ruining someone's Christmas if given an electric bike or other mobile device for a present.

"What are these kids allowed to do?" asked Councilman Johnny V. Melton. "Are they supposed to be on the sidewalk?"

The right of way still goes to vehicles on the road, said Robbins, adding "you have to yield" to the cars.

Officers want to ensure people's safety through education and discussions as they review operators' behaviors.

"The goal will be how well we can educate...We can make it so kids can do these things and still have fun," Robbins said. "At the end of the day, it is to stop and have a conversation."

When District 6 Councilmember Chris Judd, who initially requested staff to review the city's regulations on operating the small electronic mobile devices, asked why helmets were not mentioned in the ordinance; officers said that is a decision that community members felt should be left up to the parents.

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

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YOUR OPINION

We hope to stimulate debate, not control it on our opinions pages. We reserve the right to edit submitted opinions. We insist on civility. Please include your name, physical address and phone number, so we can contact you for clarification or confirmation. We welcome your photo. All opinions must be no more than 300 words.

Letters judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month. Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. Letter content is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

SPEAK UP

We support the use of pen names. Too many people do not speak up because they fear intimidation or even danger to their families and/or careers. Pen names are an important part of our nation's history.

CORRECTIONS

We promptly correct factual errors. We offer a "right of reply" to the people we cover. Readers who disagree with a news story may respond with a letter.

Veterans Day Parade a celebration of community

The city of Surprise Veterans Day parade was a huge success. Thousands of residents lined the streets to celebrate our veterans, enjoy the beautiful Arizona weather and experience what makes our community so special.

With more than 100 entries, there was certainly something for everyone.

All of our city council members were in attendance, along with our police officers, firefighters, several Dysart Unified School District marching bands, car clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and many other community organizations.

Councilman Johnny Melton had the best car, a blue 1962 Chevy Impala. We even had plenty of four-legged participants, including an adorable dog train.

Of course, the children were having the time of their lives. Their faces lit up as parade participants tossed candy, handed out American flags and passed out patriotic necklaces. Watching their excitement was almost as much fun as watching the parade itself.

I especially enjoyed seeing all the beautiful classic cars. It was also wonderful to run into so many familiar faces, catch up with old friends and make a few new ones along the way.

But what I appreciated most was seeing thousands of people come together to celebrate our veterans and our country. In a time when we hear so much about what divides us, events like this remind us of everything we have in common.

A special thank you to the city of Surprise, the parade organizers, volunteers and everyone who participated. Most importantly, thank you to our veterans for your service and sacrifice.

This is the Surprise I love: A community that comes together, celebrates our country, honors our veterans and reminds us that patriotism is alive and well.

Lisa Everett
SURPRISE

ATTENTION PLEASE!

We are committed to publishing a variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines

Please send comments to azopinions@iniusa.org. More letters are on **yourvalley.net**.

Collegiate, NFL flags could unite our neighborhoods

Why don't the people who run The Grand, formerly Sun City Grand, want residents to fly any flag but the United States flag?

When the Arizona Legislature ruled military flags must be OK'd, the powers-to-be had to allow them, but when some residents wanted to fly a collegiate flag or NFL flags on game days, the bosses said "no." What if they forgot and left it up a day or two? Heaven forbid if that happened!

If collegiate and NFL flags were allowed, it might bring more neighborhoods together. But, alas, the bosses rule.

Ted Storck
SURPRISE

Per The Grand's Nov. 6 newsletter, residents may fly holiday flags, but team and sports flags are not permitted to maintain the community's uniform aesthetic

Homeland security should halt Surprise ICE facility

I am writing to implore the Department of Homeland Security to please halt the dangerous plans to place an ICE detention facility in the middle of Surprise's residential area.

Dysart High School is not even a mile and a half from the planned ICE facility. Other schools, churches and businesses are just a stone's throw away.

In the event of a toxic chemical release from the nearby Rinchem chemical storage facility, GardaWorld — DHS's chosen contractor — appears to have no safety plan other than to have the detainees wrap themselves in plastic wrap while the guards run for safety, out of the danger zone and away from their responsibility.

I hope DHS officials reconsider. Would they want this facility next to their families?

Greg Cravens
PEORIA

Plastic won't protect ICE detainees from chemicals

Department of Homeland Security wants to imprison 1,500 people in the danger zone of a Surprise chemical facility, and ICE's answer to a toxic release appears to be plastic and a roll of duct tape.

Detainees would sit directly

• See **Opinions** Page 10

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Civility Checklist

How to engage in respectful, honest & civil dialogue about public issues

☐ **Take the high road.** Respond to the topic — not the person. Refrain from demonizing others for their opinions. Assume those you disagree with are, like you, genuinely interested in improving the community.

☐ **Be respectful.** Bullying, public humiliation, insults, name-calling, harassment, and threats directed at another person — or that person's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. — have no place in civil discussions. Find ways to respectfully disagree without questioning someone's character or motives.

☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes. When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.

☐ **Don't misrepresent.** Always identify your opinions as opinions (not stating opinions as facts). Never misrepresent the views of others or falsely claim your opinions represent someone else. If quoting the words of others, identify and credit the source.

☐ **Listen & learn.** It's both polite and respectful to listen to those we disagree with (as well as those we support) and be genuine in our attempts to understand their point of view. Expand your mind by thoughtfully seeking out views that don't agree with your own.

☐ **Look for common ground.** When disagreeing with others, look for even small areas of agreement — which can be the gateway to working together for the greater good.

☐ **Respect privacy.** Keep private things private — whether it involves your own information or those with whom you disagree. Revealing private information about someone else is rude, unethical, potentially harmful and, in many cases, illegal.

☐ **Set a good example.** Practice civil behavior online as well as in public and in your interaction with others. Encourage others to practice these civil behaviors. And it's OK to challenge disrespectful behavior — but be courteous, respectful and helpful in your approach.

*Now that you've read the checklist, take the Civility Pledge at **yourvalley.net/civility-pledge**.*

OPINIONS WITH CIVILITY

• From page 8

across the street from Rinchem's chemical storage facility in Surprise. If Rinchem has a chemical release, ICE's national detention standard tells staff to direct detainees to seal themselves inside a large interior room with plastic sheeting and duct tape.

That seems to be the only plan DHS has. Based on the draft environmental assessment from GardaWorld Federal Services, the company paid to run the facility, we have no reason to expect more than that in Surprise. The draft, released Nov. 9, never evaluates a chemical release from Rinchem.

Rinchem's federal Risk Management Plan details eight foreseeable chemical release scenarios. One estimates that a release of 20,000 pounds of anhydrous hydrogen chloride could reach 2.7 miles and over 73,000 people. The detention facility sits deep inside that zone. Hydrogen chloride is heavier than air and a severe inhalation hazard. Plastic sheeting and duct tape would not provide adequate shelter.

At the Oct. 20 City Council work session, City Manager Andrea Davis confirmed Surprise has received no emergency planning from DHS or GardaWorld. Vice Mayor Earle Greenberg said he expected an evacuation to look like staff running for their cars while leaving detainees locked inside.

This review exists because Attorney General Kris Mayes sued DHS over the facility, citing Northwest Valley Indivisible's research on Rinchem. It was supposed to address the danger that put DHS in court, but it ignored it.

DHS and GardaWorld must complete a full Environmental Impact Statement that accounts for Rinchem's release scenarios. Public comments close Dec. 9. I urge every area resident and local official to email icesustainability@ice.dhs.gov and demand one

Brent Peak
PHOENIX

Why are off-duty officers at construction sites?

Why are there off-duty law enforcement officers working at construction sites in the Valley?

I have only seen one officer controlling an intersection's traffic signals. I have seen officers in their cars either reading or on their phones. Ten years or so ago they were getting $35 an hour for this duty. That's thousands of dollars added to road construction sites throughout the state.

If they are not directing traffic, what is their duty? With cell phones everywhere it's not to report accidents, and I don't believe they run radar to stop speeding in work zones.

I am curious to know what the reasoning is to have them present and how much this adds onto the price of road construction yearly. There may well be a valid reason, but I can't think what it might be.

James Peer
SUN CITY WEST

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WHAM Art Center hosts Bowls of Hope event

WHAM Art Center will fill tables with more than 500 handmade bowls 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, at 16560 N. Dysart Road, in Surprise.

Bowls of Hope started in 2013 as a small pottery sale. For more than 13 years, it has become a fixture of the weekend after Thanksgiving, drawing hundreds of shoppers, dozens of artists, and families who return every year. Since the first sale, it has raised more than $40,000 for local organizations.

This year, Bowls of Hope proceeds will benefit eight West Valley charities to fight hunger and keep neighbors safe.

"Every bowl carries a story. It's thrown with intention, glazed with care, and sold with purpose. When someone chooses a bowl, they're not just buying art — they're feeding a neighbor, sheltering a child, and investing in hope," stated Connie Whitlock, WHAM's founder and executive director.

The bowls are made throughout the year by WHAM's clay artists together with volunteers from the Sun City and Sun City West Clay Clubs. They throw the pots, glaze them, and fire them in the studio.

Every bowl is different. Some wear warm terracotta and turquoise glazes inspired by the desert, some have carved or etched designs, and some have clean, modern lines.

All are food-safe and microwave-safe, and sturdy enough for everyday use, from a bowl of soup on a weeknight to the table at a holiday dinner.

Bowls of Hope is also a one-day art market. Local painters, jewelers, sculptors, and other makers can reserve a booth to sell next to the pottery. In past years, visitors have found handmade candles, woven textiles, and metalwork. An event for all ages, many longtime customers bring their grandchildren to select a bowl of their own.

Proceeds from bowls benefit:

• St. Mary's Food Bank (Surprise): Arizona's largest food bank, serving thousands of people each week.

• Valley View Community Food Bank (Sun City): Food assistance for Surprise, Sun City, and nearby communities.

• All Faith Community Services (Buckeye): emergency food and help with utility bills.

• Eve's Place Community Services: shelter and support for survivors of domestic violence.

• StreetLightUSA (Glendale): A safe place for girls who have been trafficked or are at risk.

• Homeless Youth Connection (Avondale): Help for teens on their own.

• Southwest Family Advocacy Center (Avondale): Support for children who have been abused, and their families.

• Sounds of Autism (Goodyear): resources for people with autism families.

Celebrating its 20th year, WHAM Art Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded by Connie Whitlock. Call 623-584-8311 or visit wham-art.org.



Jon Michael Sonstroem

Jon Michael Sonstroem died peacefully on October 29, 2026 in Fort Collins, CO. Born in Bristol, CT, on August 30, 1937, he was the second son born to Arthur Michael and Lillian Meyer Sonstroem, joining brother David and later, sister Norma (who died in infancy), and sister Susan.

He spent his childhood living in a modest house on an estate in Litchfield, where his father was groundskeeper. It was here that Jon developed a lifelong love of gardening and all things outdoors.

After graduating from Litchfield High School, Jon proudly served his country in the US Army. He later attended General Motors Institute in Flint, Michigan, and went on to craft a career with GM that spanned well over 30 years.

In 1970, his sister Susan introduced him to Theresa (Terry) Kerr, one of her first-grade teaching colleagues, and BINGO!, he was instantly smitten. They married on May 19, 1973, and from that day on, for the rest of his life, Jon referred to Terry as "my beautiful bride". The newlyweds began their life together in Bristol in a well-thought-out modern house designed by his cousin, architect Peter Stone.

Jon was a friendly fellow, known for his quick wit and warm smile, always ready with a joke to lighten the mood. He could strike up a conversation with anyone (and often did) and strangers quickly became close friends. He had a gift for making everyone feel welcome and valued. He also never met a dog he didn't like and would stop to chat and play with any dog he met along his way.

Jon was also an avid and impressive runner, having completed over 50 marathons including at least 15 Boston Marathons. He was a member of the Hartford Track Club for over 25 years and continued running competitively into his last decade. His most proud moments were winning his age group as the "fastest old guy".

Jon was also a UConn-certified Master Gardener and proudly referred to himself as "Dr. Dirt." Not surprisingly, he was generous not only with his horticultural knowledge but his annual crops as well. To visit his garden at his house on Pinehurst Road in Bristol was to come upon an impressive array of vegetables, all in great numbers. It wasn't a fussy garden, but a very productive one. Not surprisingly there was an impressive compost heap close by. (He learned the value of composting from his father years earlier.) Dr. Dirt was generous not only in sharing the fruits of his labor, but also his expertise. He delighted in answering all sorts of gardening questions and did so with gusto. Dr. Dirt was always on call.

Jon's involvement in the Bristol community extended beyond his backyard; he was a regular volunteer at the Bristol Nursery, a proud supporter of the Bristol Boys and Girls Club, and an active member of the Immanuel Lutheran Church, not just as a parishioner and choir member, but also serving as its president from 1968–1971.

And Jon was a singer! Boy, could he sing! And not just in church, either. For years he was a member of the Bristol Choral Society where he was often featured in its community concerts. His voice and joyful personality made him an audience favorite. One would not be wrong in describing him as a bit of ham, a delightful ham at that.

After his retirement in 1992, Jon and Terry moved to Estes Park, CO, where they thoroughly enjoyed all that the Rocky Mountains had to offer: skiing, hiking, white-water rafting, elk-watching, volunteering for the Rocky Mountain National Park, and warmly welcoming guests into their beautiful mountain home.

Eventually tiring of the long, cold and snowy Colorado winters, Jon & Terry moved to Surprise, AZ in 2016. But their time in the desert proved short and fragile, darkened by the glioblastoma that claimed his beautiful bride in 2018. After Terry's death, Jon moved back to Estes Park, and sadly, his own health began to decline. He spent his final years in memory care at MorningStar in Fort Collins, CO, where not surprisingly, and despite his illness, he continued to sing, entertain, and develop warm relationships with his caregivers.

Jon is survived by his nieces and nephews: Eric, Sara, Jacob, Louisa, Michael and Kathy; brother-in-law Peter; many Sonstroem and Meyer cousins; and dear friends that became family: Bruce, Trisha, Paula and Jennifer. He was predeceased by his parents Arthur and Lillian, infant sister Norma, sister Susan, brother David, and his beloved bride Terry.

Jon will be interred alongside his parents and sister Norma at West Cemetery in Bristol, CT. A celebration of his beautiful life will be held at a later date.

WEST VALLEY PREPS

MORE ONLINE
Find high school sports stats online at YourValley.net.

Guardians boys beat Page in close race for title

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

LeVander morning runs will feature more than one first place medalist.

ALA-West Foothills junior Gwendolyn LeVander won her second straight Division III girls cross country title Nov. 14 at Cave Creek Golf Course in Phoenix.

Earlier that afternoon, the Guardians boys team made a dramatic breakthrough, winning their first state team title by two points, with a score of 101 to Page's 103 points.

"We were chomping at the bit to get up to first place. It's been there since our second year out," ALA-West Foothills Coach Jason LeVander said. "We changed our program after the first year, which was a learning experience. In the second year we came in and changed things up. We started to see a lot of success and kids responding."

While it is the fifth year of the Waddell school and its cross country program, the Guardians leaped to second place in 2023 and placed third in 2024 and 2025.



The ALA-West Foothills boys cross country team poses with the Division III team first place trophy Nov. 14 at Cave Creek Golf Course in Phoenix. (Independent Newsmedia/Richard Smith)

Page won the past four Division III team titles and has 21 championships in all. No team from the Valley had won Division III, or its predecessor 3A, since Arizona Boys Ranch — now known as Canyon State Academy — in 1996.

"We made our group chat name State Champs Project. Outside of the training, we've been keeping up on our team chemistry, just hanging out unlike we did the year before," senior Ryan Baum said.

Baum led the way for the Guardians, finishing ninth in Division II in 16:18.8.

LeVander's son Devin, a freshman, placed right behind them in 10th at 16:24.5.

"At the beginning, when the schedule came out for state, we saw we were racing at 12:45 p.m. Hopefully it would not be hot. We were all stressing," Devin LeVander said. "Two weeks ago, we saw on the weather app that it's going to rain and thought we were going to have to push through it. Then today, it was the most beautiful weather." It was so perfect."

Gwendolyn LeVander has a second medal to show off in the mornings in Waddell.

She repeated as champ by more than 20 seconds, 18:37.2 to Cave Creek Cactus Shadows senior Allison Reamer in 18:58.1.

"Our school has a first hour cross country class. So we practice at 6 a.m. and then it runs into our first hour," Gwendolyn LeVander said.

She said she raced with more belief in herself than last year.

That, plus more knowledge of the course, allowed her to improve considerably on her time of 19:04.5 in 2025.

• See **Sports** Page **15**

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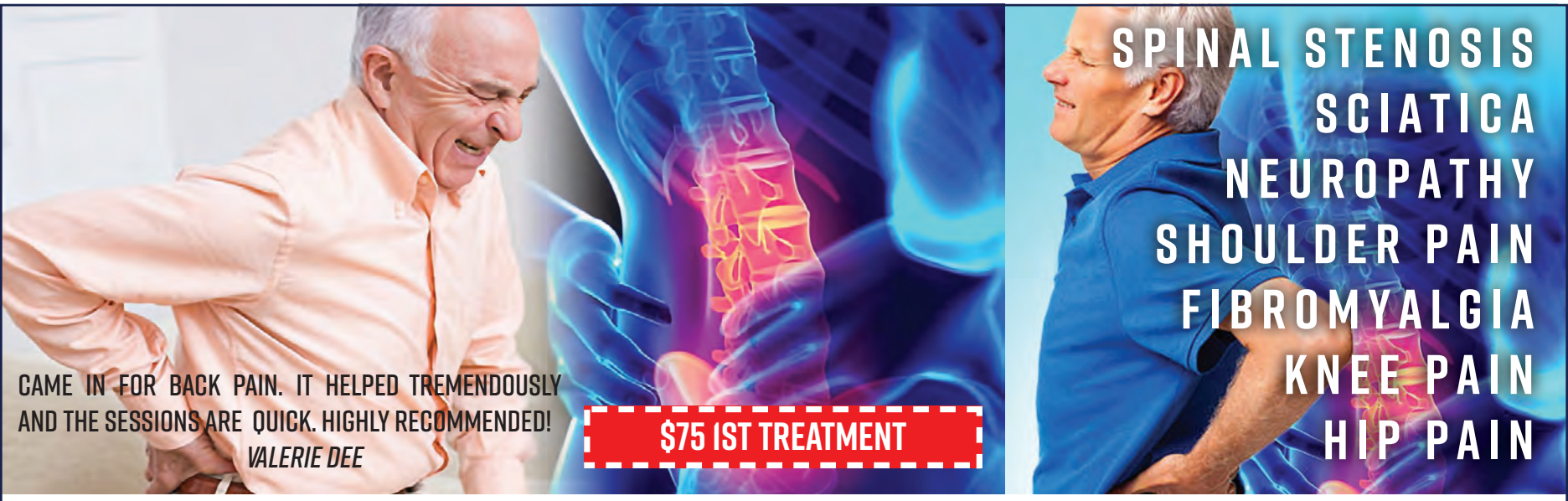
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LightRenew® is helping patients feel better, faster with the help of cutting-edge class IV deep tissue laser therapy, which reduces inflammation, boosts blood flow, and helps patients heal – whether they're suffering from chronic pain, recovering from surgery, or dealing with a recent injury. To do this, LightRenew® owner Dr. Caldwell uses LightForce® Therapy Lasers, which unlike widely available red light devices or cold lasers that only reach the surface of the skin, penetrate deep into muscle and bone tissue at 980 nanometers or higher, triggering a process known as photobiomodulation. "Every professional sports team and Division I program in North America uses this laser for good reason," he said. "It delivers 40 watts of energy per second to the area of concern, which allows the body to create new blood vessels - that's the magic ingredient. Blood is the catalyst that brings all the nutrients your body needs to heal."

The treatments have been shown to significantly reduce recovery time from injuries or surgery. In one case, Dr. Caldwell treated an airline pilot who broke her ankle, and after just a few weeks of intensive treatment, she was cleared by her surgeon to return to work four months ahead of schedule.

"My patients feel a difference after the first treatment, even adults in their 50s, 60s, 70s, or beyond," he said. "I explain it like watering a plant - you need water to carry nutrients down to the roots, or the plant starts to die. In the body, blood flow is what delivers oxygen and nutrients to muscles, nerves, and bone tissue. Without it, tissue breaks down."

While traditional healing protocols can require months of commitment, LightRenew's treatments are affordable and fast – with a typical treatment lasting just 10 minutes and often requiring only five to ten visits. For children, who are prone to fast healing, recovery can happen with a single treatment. For the best outcome, each patient receives a customized treatment plan from Dr. Caldwell during their consultation.

In addition to injury and surgical recovery, LightRenew treatments are also used to support stem cell therapies and relieve chemotherapy-related side effects. To further promote healing, Dr. Caldwell utilizes hyperbaric oxygen therapy chambers for some patients.

LightRenew has a location at 6025 E. McKellips Rd. Suite 101, Mesa, AZ 85215 as well as several other locations across the Valley. To learn more, visit www.LightRenew.com. To schedule a consultation, call Dr. Caldwell directly at (480) 370-0527.

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LASER VIDEO

DUSD students, officials give thanks

Delarita Ford
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In addition to gratitude expressed by students and administrators, the Dysart Unified School District has lots to be thankful for considering its A-rated rankings and a successfully passed $71 million bond to accommodate growth while ensuring "safe, functional learning environments."

Funds will be used to construct an elementary school in the "rapidly growing" Asante area and buy land for a future high school. Renovating facilities, replacing fire panels and aging air conditioning systems at all schools are also on the to-do list for planned projects.

During the Nov. 16 governing board meeting, Superintendent Dr. John Croteau thanked the community for voting to approve the district's capital funding measure, Proposition 421.

"It has been 20 years, and we finally got over that hump," said Croteau. "There are tons of people who I would like to thank, starting with the governing board. The community did an amazing job showing up."

He and board members took turns recognizing supporters and others who helped with grassroots efforts before extending holiday well-wishes to the community.

"Happy Thanksgiving to everyone. We hope you have an amazing week and come back strong," Croteau said.

"I also would like to wish everyone a very happy Thanksgiving," said DUSD Board Member Dawn Densmore, who lost her bid to return for another term.

Board President Stephen Skvara, who initially pushed the bond reattempt, noted his gratitude to those he felt were responsible for getting the bond passed.

"This allows us to address growth. This is the first school bond in 20 years. Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who helped...," Skvara said.

Meanwhile, students and staff involved in the district's notable Dysart Student Broadcasting (DSB Live) program, which produces "Toyota Game Day" onsite at Toyota of Surprise, and produced award-winning videos for the city of Surprise, recently shared why they were thankful during this holiday season.

"I am thankful for the opportunity and everything that this district has allowed me to do, even when doing not my best," said Sophie Booth, a senior at Valley Vista High School.

The aspiring broadcast journalist and her classmate, Eduardo Martinez Tostado, who wants to be a mechanical engineer, thanked their families for supporting them through their academic and extracurricular endeavors.

"I am thankful for my family for giving me the opportunity to do all this stuff. I am very glad they are giving me this opportunity," Martinez Tostado said, also thanking his teachers and the school.

MORE ONLINE
Find education stories online at yourvalley.net.





Sports

• From page 12

"Knowing the course really helped me know where to keep it conservative and where to push. That huge cement hill is the hardest one on the course," LeVander said. "Knowing if I have it there, just going so hard after that has really helped."

Devin LeVander said the first mile is the hardest, with several big hills, and runners need to stay patient.

The Guardians trained some in the heat for those potential conditions. Instead the clouds were just starting to break.

"The first mile was rough, but I knew I had my teammates behind me," Baum said. "So I was able to push it and give them a chance to push on me so we could all finish pretty tight."

Jason LeVander said since 2023 the program has a deliberate focus on running full speed on certain days, followed by a lot of rest, hydration and food.

Senior No. 8 runner Jesse Whiting made the biggest improvement percentage wise during the season, LeVander said.

Senior Oliver Waltman placed 14th, while sophomore James Taylor placed 23rd.

Freshman Andrew Kirkbride was a crucial new arrival. Every second counted.

"We have a freshman in his first year that came in from California. He's been great. He was our No. 5 today," Jason LeVander said. "Oliver's been consistent and Josiah (Levin) has been consistent. Literally it took an entire team effort to beat Page by two points," Jason LeVander said.

Senior News Editor Richard Smith can be reached at rsmith@iniusa.org, or on X @RSmithYWV.



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Dysart Schools get top ratings

All Dysart Unified School District schools earned an "A" or "B" rating in the 2025-26 state accountability labels. Seventeen district schools achieved an "A," and seven schools earned a "B" rating.

Dysart Unified School District Superintendent Jon Croteau commended the district for its "A" rating for the fourth consecutive year.

Dysart schools to receive an "A" rating are: Canyon Ridge School, Cimarron Spring Middle School, Dysart High School, El Mirage Elementary School, Freedom Traditional Academy, Kingswood Elementary School, Luke Elementary School, Marley Park Elementary School, Mountain View School, Rancho Gabriela Elementary School, Shadow Ridge High School, Sonoran Heights Middle School, Surprise Elementary School, Valley Vista High School, West Point Elementary School. Western Peaks Elementary School and Willow Canyon High School.

"B" rated schools are: Asante Preparatory Academy, Ashton Ranch Middle School, Countryside Elementary School, Dysart Middle School, Riverview School, Sunset Hills Elementary School, and Thompson Ranch Elementary School.



MINNESOTA CLUB WELCOMES MEMBERS

The Minnesota Club met Nov. 12 for a welcome back breakfast at Heritage Tradition. The next gathering is 5 p.m. Jan. 13, 2027, at in the R.H. Johnson Social Hall, 19803 R.H. Johnson Blvd. Call 651-238-9881 to become a member. Annual dues are $10 per person. (Submitted/Cheryl Jensen)

Desert Garden Church Christmas Cantata
"The Glory of Christmas" by Lloyd Larson

A beautiful Christmas musical performed by the Desert Garden Chancel Choir & Orchestra conducted by Dennis Marsollier



Sunday, December 13th at 9:30am

18818 N. 128th Ave.
Sun City West

Input sought on community hazards risks

Surprise residents are asked to share what natural hazards are most concerning to them, including their experiences and priorities through the Maricopa County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Public Survey, open through Nov. 30.

The survey is an opportunity to share perspectives on natural hazard risks and beliefs on what should be prioritized to help reduce those risks.

The MJHMP identifies natural hazards that could impact communities throughout Maricopa County and outlines strategies to reduce their effects.

The plan considers hazards including extreme heat, flooding and flash flooding, severe wind, drought, wildfire, earth fissures, subsidence, levee failure and dam inundation.

Maps and data can tell part of the story, but residents can provide insight into what happens on the ground, from roads or washes that regularly flood during heavy rain to areas affected by high winds, extreme heat or other hazards.

Survey responses will help identify community concerns and priorities and plan for strategies to reduce future risks to people, property, infrastructure and critical services. An approved Hazard Mitigation Plan also helps participating jurisdictions, including the city of Surprise, remain eligible for certain federal funding for future risk-reduction projects.

Take the survey at maricopa.gov/1760/Hazard-Mitigation.

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YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO-DO LIST

FARMERS MARKET

ABOUT: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Fridays at Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 13724 W. Meeker Blvd., Sun City West
INFO: The outdoor community market features more than 70 vendors offering produce, farm-fresh eggs, grass-fed beef, prepared foods and other products, along with craft vendors. Admission and parking are free.
WEB: Facebook—Sun City West Farmers Market & Craft Show

ALPHA XI

ABOUT: 1 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 1, in the library at All Saints of the Desert Episcopal Church, 9502 W. Hutton Drive.
INFO: Delta Kappa Gamma chapter meeting. Holiday gathering, assembling Christmas gifts for Alta Loma Elementary School.
INFO: alphaxi-az.weebly.com.

CRAFT FAIR

ABOUT: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday and Saturday Dec. 4-5 at Lakeview United Methodist Church, 10298 W. Thunderbird Blvd., Sun City.
INFO: There will be hand-crafted items, jewelry and home decor from local artisans and Lakeview members. Holiday baked goods will also be available. Breakfast and lunch proceeds benefit Lakeview Men's Group.
CONTACT: Cyndee LaFontaine at 480-242-2782 or azcyne@msn.com or Ila Lewis at 609-706-0377 or ilita3@yahoo.com.

TEA PARTY

ABOUT: 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5, First Presbyterian Church of Sun City, 12225 N. 103rd Ave.
INFO: Traditional holiday tea for women in Swain Hall. Proceeds go to Habitat for Humanity, Valley View Food Bank and Eve's Place. Holiday cookies will be served after the live entertainment program that follows homemade scones, savory sandwiches and black tea. Tickets are $20 per seat and must be reserved by Monday, Nov. 30.
RESERVATIONS: 623-974-3605.



OREGON CLUB KICKS OFF NEW SEASON

Eighty members of the Oregon Club gathered for the club's annual Welcome Back Party. This year, 13 Oregonians joined the club. Club vice-president Lisa Zollman organized the event, which included a lunch followed by Bingo. Six winners went home with extra cash. Members will next gather at Briarwood Country Club for a festive Christmas lunch and carols Saturday, Dec. 12. Registration and payment for this event must be received by Friday, Dec. 4. Visit oregonclubaz.weebly.com, email oregonsocialclub@gmail.com or call 503-261-1475. (Submitted/Margaret Oliphant)

BAKE SALE, CRAFTS

ABOUT: 9 a.m.-noon Saturday, Dec. 12, at Shepherd of the Hills United Methodist Church, 13658 Meeker Blvd.
INFO: The SOuL 11th annual Bake Sale and Craft Boutique. Smiling Out Loud is a philanthropic women's organization in Corte Bella. For more than 15 years SOuL has supplied financial and volunteer support for charities in the immediate area. The 2026 charities include Ryan's Case For Smiles, Valley View Community Food Bank, The Dream Center, Thompson Ranch Elementary School and The Community Fund of Sun City West.

SUNDAY MARKET ON ELM

ABOUT: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sundays, along Elm Street in front of Jet's Pizza in the Surprise City Center area.
INFO: The Sunday Market brings together local small businesses and features vendors offering handmade goods, treats, gifts and local produce.

COOKIES AND CRAFTS

ABOUT: Between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, at the Parks and Recreation Office, 15960 N. Bullard Ave.
INFO: The city of Surprise will present Cookies and Crafts with Santa. Families are invited to a program filled with festive activities, crafts and a visit from Santa Claus. Registration is required, with a fee of $5 per person for Surprise residents and $7 per person for non-residents. Space is limited.
CONTACT: surpriseaz.gov/SurpriseRec and search through "Special Programs." Call 623-222-2249.

HAVE AN EVENT?

Have something happening in or near Surprise? We welcome submissions from clubs and groups, as well as nearby nonprofits, churches and community organizations. Include the event name, date, time, location, a brief description and contact information.
Email: **jcarr@iniusa.org.**

IN EVENTS

The Surprise Independent will host a senior expo 9 a.m.-noon Jan. 19, 2027 at The Colonnade, 19116 N. Colonnade Way, Surprise. Individuals wishing to participate may reach out to the sales team.
Email: **azad@iniusa.org**

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO-DO LIST



CRAFT FAIR

ABOUT: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday, Nov. 30, at the Colonnade 19116 N. Colonnade Way.
INFO: This craft fair will feature local artists and crafters showcasing one-of-a-kind creations.
CONTACT: Krystal.Flippo@sunhealth.org.



NORTH DAKOTA CLUB

ABOUT: 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 10, at the Beardsley Rec Center, 12755 W. Beardsley Road.
INFO: Holiday gathering with a sandwich buffet plus games and other activities. Bring beverages.
CONTACT: 701-527-5827.



CHRISTMAS MUSICAL

ABOUT: 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, at Desert Garden United Church of Christ, 18818 N. 128th Ave.
INFO: "The Glory of Christmas." This musical will be performed by the Desert Garden Chancel Choir and Orchestra, conducted by Dennis Marsollier.
WEB: desertgardenucc.org.



CHORALE ANNOUNCES DECEMBER CONCERTS

The West Valley Chorale, directed by Ken Goodenberger, with Christine Kyhn, principal accompanist, will soon perform John Rutter's "When Icicles Hang," plus select holiday music. The first concert is 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 1, at American Lutheran Church, 17200 N. Del Webb Blvd., in Sun City; the second is 7 p.m. Thursday Dec. 3, at Shepherd of the Hills United Methodist Church, 13658 W. Meeker Blvd., in Sun City West. Tickets are available at westvalleychoraleaz.org/reserve-tickets. The West Valley Chorale is a Surprise 501(c) nonprofit performing arts organization comprised of auditioned singers from 10 communities throughout the West Valley. (Submitted/ Laura Ager)

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CLUES ACROSS

1. Perceive a sound
5. Pretends to be
10. Type of guitar
14. Actor Idris
15. A citizen of Iran
16. Creative
17. Keep under control
18. Weight unit for precious stones
19. You better call him
20. Fanatical
22. Male cat
23. Jewish spiritual leader
24. One who takes risks
27. A way to nail
30. Cool!
31. Progressive policy supporter
32. "Losing My Religion" rockers
35. Step-shaped recess
37. Round globular seed
38. Somewhat
39. Butterhead lettuces
40. Color at the end of the spectrum
41. Lines where fabrics are sewn together
42. Dodgers great Hershiser
43. Floor covering
44. Traveled aimlessly
45. Rocker Stewart
46. Body art
47. Congressman (abbr.)
48. No seats available
49. Categorizes
52. Iraq-Syria border town
55. Ballplayer's tool
56. Type of sword
60. Baseball team
61. Upper bracts of grass
63. Italian seaport
64. Ancient city in Syria
65. Shoelace tube
66. U. of Miami mascot is one
67. South American nation
68. "Nebraska" director Alexander
69. Upper body part

CLUES DOWN

1. German courtesy title
2. Ancient Greek City
3. Skin care manufacturer
4. A long-legged frog
5. Photo
6. Delivered a speech
7. Lute in northern Indian music
8. Decorated
9. Take a seat
10. Bottom layer
11. Type of horse
12. Ticket part
13. Defunct currency of Guinea
21. Challenges
23. Popular BBQ food
25. Subway rodent
26. By way of
27. Shady garden alcove
28. City in Egypt
29. __ and flowed
32. Large quantities of paper
33. Eurasian wheat
34. Act incorrectly
36. Layer of water right above sediment (abbr.)
37. Al Bundy's wife
38. Ocean
40. Large, round root
41. Sound units
43. Knock
44. Soak in water
46. Hot drink
47. A cotton fabric with a satiny finish
49. Rumanian city
50. Come back from being down
51. Vaccine developer
52. Canadian law enforcers
53. Wings
54. "Perry Mason" actor Raymond
57. Small fry
58. __ Clapton, musician
59. Gamble
61. Semi-liquid food
62. Consumed food

Solution Page **26**

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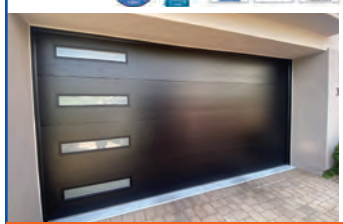
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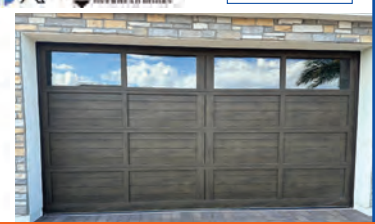
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Miscellaneous



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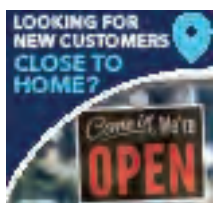
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PUZZLE ON PAGE 22

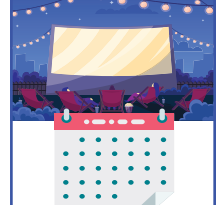
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