



north central news

the voice of the north central phoenix community since 1999

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Adaptive Tutti Choir welcomes all abilities

By Kathryn M. Miller

In Italian, “tutti” means all or together. In musical terms, the meaning broadens: with all voices and instruments together – and that is the idea behind the Phoenix Children’s Chorus’ Tutti Choir, an inclusive and adaptive program designed to welcome children of all abilities.

Founded in 1984, Phoenix Children’s Chorus (PCC) is open to children in kindergarten through 12th grade. Poco Voce offers music exploration class, and performing ensembles begin with those in second grade. Rehearsals are held on Tuesdays in downtown Phoenix. Flash forward 40 years and Tutti Choir enters the scene. The group rehearses on Wednesdays at Madison No. 1 Middle School.

“It is open to children with and without disabilities,” said choir director Anne Coryell, “So we actually have a good mix of students who participate in the downtown program that come and sing with us on Wednesdays, and all of the performance groups come together for winter and spring concerts.”

Tutti provides a supportive and nurturing environment where singers – regardless of physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities – can explore their musical talents and the joy of choral singing.

“We have no limits on who can join us,” Coryell said. “We have a chorister who is hard of hearing and

please see CHOIR on page 8



Through good times and bad, Teresa Dickinson’s Melrose Pharmacy has served neighbors in the Melrose District for 20 years by placing emphasis on community and customer service (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

Melrose Pharmacy celebrates 20 years

By Kathryn M. Miller

Adjacent to the busy corner of 7th and Montecito avenues in Phoenix’s Melrose District, a steady stream of customers drift in and out of an equally bustling business. Walk through the doors of the business – housed in a 1950s brick building with exposed rafter ceilings, where jazz plays over the loud speaker and the hum of a vintage refrigerator offering cold beverages adds to the background noise of busy phones and friendly employees – and you’ll be greeted by colorful product displays, whimsical gift items and more. Welcome to Melrose Pharmacy.

“We just loved the neighborhood and wanted to be a part of it,” said Teresa Dickinson, owner of Melrose Pharmacy, which opened in the building in a smaller suite in November 2005. Now, 20 years later, Dickinson, who owns the building that also is home to Restaurant Progress and Thunderbird Lounge, has moved into a larger suite but is still dispensing prescriptions and Melrose community spirit.

“We were one of the first four busi-

nesses that really started the revitalization of Melrose,” Dickinson recalled. “Copper Star Coffee and Wag N’ Wash, us and Figs all opened in the same year.”

Some of those businesses have morphed into others over the years, much like Dickinson’s building itself, which over the years housed a jeweler, a meat market, a Henny Penny and others. But the eclectically retro and independent spirit that is the general Melrose vibe has remained.

At Melrose Pharmacy, neighbors can fill regular prescriptions (they work with most insurance companies) get compounded medications and find support

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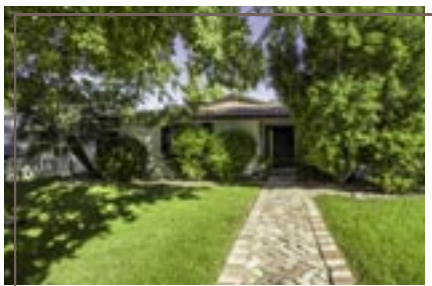
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COMMUNITY

From the Editor

Hello, North Central neighbors!

It is incredible to me that 2025 is coming to a close – what a topsy-turvy year it has been! Next year likely holds plenty of challenges, but right now I want to pause for a moment of gratitude.



We are, of course, grateful to you, our readers, and our advertisers, who sustain us. But on my mind right now are the communities that stepped up in November to make sure that those in need had food on the table.

The city of Phoenix launched a new food resource/donation webpage amidst the 43-day federal government shutdown – specifically to offset the impacts of the SNAP program suspension (see Community). It is gratifying

to see city leadership step up to assist residents, but it was the individuals who gave me hope for the future. Local businesses made donations and held food drives; neighbors created little food libraries and front-yard food pantries – communities came together to help one another.

Sadly, food insecurity did not end when SNAP benefits resumed. As we wrote in October, one in five kids in Arizona doesn't know where their next meal is coming from; one in seven families is classified as food insecure. Those numbers have seen a steady increase in recent years. During this time of giving, if you have extra, I encourage you to consider a monetary donation to your local food bank – St. Mary's is a good place to start.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy our December issue, and until next year, all my best,

Kathryn M. Miller
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COMMUNITY



Located at 1825 W. Montebello Avenue, the city is seeking to redevelop the 19th Avenue/Montebello Park-and-Ride to remove the parking amenity and allow for mixed-use commercial and residential on the 12-acre site (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

Montebello rezoning moves on to council

By Kathryn M. Miller

The city of Phoenix cleared another hurdle in its quest to redevelop the city-owned park and ride properties along 19th Avenue. Currently under consideration: redeveloping the 19th Avenue/Montebello Park-and-Ride to allow for mixed-use commercial/residential on the 12-acre site.

Located at 1825 W. Montebello Avenue, the site’s current zoning permits a maximum of 182 residential units at a height limit of 35 feet. The property, adjacent to the Montebello Avenue light rail stop, consists of 794 parking spaces and a bus bay. The city is seeking zoning that would allow for buildings between 56 and 100 feet in height that is intended for mixed-use development. No future light rail parking is currently being considered.

The staff report for the case, Z-83-25, states that no development plans are attached to the project; once the rezoning is approved, the city will release an RFP (request for proposal), which will outline their requirements for the redevelopment of the site. Once a successful candidate is selected and the preliminary site plan and elevations have been created, the plans will be presented to the Alhambra Village Planning Committee for review and comment prior to preliminary site plan approval. Once permits are issued, the sale of the property will take place.

Stipulation No. 2 of the staff report states that “The maximum building height shall not exceed 56 feet, except

that the maximum building height may be increased to 80 feet, if a minimum of 30% of the dwelling units are provided as Affordable Housing, as approved by the Planning and Development Department and Housing Department.”

The Alhambra Village Planning Committee (VPC) heard the rezoning case, presented by Jeff Stapleton, City of Phoenix Community and Economic Development Department, at its Oct. 28 meeting. During his presentation, Stapleton stated that the bus bay, located at the north end of the property, will be retained; however, parking spaces would not be set aside for park and ride utilization. This is a deviation from the rezoning case for the 19th Avenue/Dunlap Park-and-Ride, where a small percentage of spaces will be set aside for future use. Stapleton also noted that the city anticipates that the property will consist of market-rate housing.

Due to a lack of quorum at the October meeting, no recommendation was made by the VPC, and there were no residents or other stakeholders in attendance at the VPC meeting. When we reached out to neighbors, they told us that a major concern was affordability, as well as the addition of more multifamily housing to an already densely populated area.

One resident who lives in the adjacent neighborhood said, “It is well documented that this area has filled with multifamily rental units for decades, which has resulted in a high population density and high crime.

please see REZONING on page 6



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COMMUNITY

Blanket the Southwest offers comfort, warmth

Better Business Bureau (BBB) Pacific Southwest, Central & Inland California announced a heart-warming partnership with Sackcloth & Ashes for the Blanket the Southwest: Warm Hearts, Warm Homes campaign – a regional initiative to provide comfort, dignity and warmth to those in need during the 2025 holiday season.

Through this partnership, BBB and Sackcloth & Ashes will donate 2,000 blankets to local homeless shelters across the Southwest. The initiative is built on Sackcloth & Ashes' one-for-one model: for every blanket gifted to an employee, client or loved one, another blanket is donated to a local shelter, helping someone in need feel a little more at home. Founded in 2014 by Bob Dalton, today, the company's sustainable blankets – crafted from recycled materials – are distributed to shelters across the country through its giving campaigns.

Now through Dec. 14, shoppers can also enjoy 25 percent off any Sackcloth & Ashes blanket by using the code BBB at checkout on www.sackclothandashes.com. Every purchase with the code contributes directly to the goal of warming hearts and homes across Arizona and California.

REZONING continued from page 4

We have a police officer shortage where residents often wait hours for a response. Increasing the population density with multifamily housing high-rises will not help the 19th Avenue corridor long-term.”

They added, “I would like to see single-family, owner-occupied housing on this property that allows homeowners to have an aging parent move in. The housing should be affordable for people such as school staff, police officers, city, county and state employees who are forced to commute from the suburbs to downtown. We need housing in these neighborhoods that promotes stability and strong social ties for everyone who lives here.”

While the details of any redevelopment will be hammered out in the future, the rezoning case continues to move forward. The Planning Commission voted unanimously and without comment to recommend approval at its Nov. 6 meeting. The case

is scheduled for vote by the Phoenix City Council at its Dec. 3 meeting.

Read the staff report at www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/pdd/planning-zoning.html – search for the case at the “Rezoning Case Staff Reports” link.

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for women's hormone therapy, along with various vaccinations. They offer delivery and provide pill pack services – they even offer some pet prescriptions. And like drug stores of old, you can find a variety of over-the-counter medications and health aids, goodies and small gifts to pick up on the fly.

Keeping an independent pharmacy open for 20 years is no small feat. They have stayed strong through economic ups and downs but COVID took its toll on the business, and to some extent, the community.

“People just seem more comfortable being at home, not really going out as much. I don't feel that it is as community-oriented as it used to be,” she said. But she kept the doors open and continues to serve the community, and recently opened a second location, Bell Road Pharmacy at 40th Avenue and Bell Road.

“It's a lot of hard work, vacations always have interruptions, but I never give up. It has been rewarding to put work into something and then see the results. And I love my patients.”

Beyond her status as a local small business owner, Dickinson is a strong neighborhood advocate – she is known for her vocal opposition to the 7th Avenue reverse lanes that she feels hurt both the Melrose neighbors and businesses – and at the end of the day, she says, the health of communities depends on the residents themselves.

“I feel like Melrose is a small town within a big city, but you've got to show your face to be a part of the community. If you want to keep a good community, you need to participate.”

The business will celebrate its 20th anniversary on Friday, Dec. 6, during the district's First Friday activities, and neighbors are invited to stop by and say hello.

Melrose Pharmacy, located at 706 W. Montecito Ave., is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For additional information, call 602-277-4714 or visit www.melrosepharmacy.com.



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COMMUNITY

CHOIR continued from page 1

uses ASL to communicate, so we incorporate sign signals. We have students on the autism spectrum in varying levels. We have one student that doesn't speak, but she loves to sing and sings beautifully, and we are able to accommodate her needs. We have students with Down syndrome and varying levels of cognitive abilities, but we make it fun and engaging for all of the students so that everyone is engaged and excited to be there."

That inclusiveness is the driving force behind Tutti, and it is personal for Coryell, who has been a PCC parent for 10 years. Her oldest son, now a senior in high school, has participated since third grade, "It has just been the best thing that he could have been involved in," she said. Then, in 2017, the family adopted two little boys, "and one of my sons has Down syndrome and is hard of hearing," she added. "As soon as our other son was old enough, we signed him up for Poco Voce, and we saw so much growth with him. But unfortunately, there wasn't a place for our other son."

Coryell, a music educator since



The Phoenix Children's Chorus winter concert, "Comfort & Joy," is scheduled for Dec. 6 and 7 and brings together all of its performance groups to present selections of classic winter, Christmas and Hanukkah songs (submitted photo).

2002, brought the idea for an adaptive choir to Troy Meeker, the artistic and executive director for PCC, in 2020. It aligned with the organization's goals and Coryell was the right person to spearhead the program, but COVID slowed down the implementation. Finally, in 2024 a grant was secured

through Chorus America to fund the program for two years.

"So, we were able to just dive right in and offer this space that would be accessible for everybody and anybody that just enjoys singing, making music and community," Coryell said.

"I see so much benefit both as the

teacher, the director and as a mom," she said. "Outside of just the music education, those connections and the deep meaningful relationships that are being built have been fantastic. And those who join us from the downtown program are mentors and I see how it has impacted them and how they have grown as thoughtful, caring, empathetic human beings.

She added, "And musically, they are learning how to sing with proper technique and in an ensemble. They are learning music theory and they are getting access to different cultures."

Those techniques will be on display at the PCC winter concert, "Comfort & Joy," which is scheduled for Dec. 6 and 7. The concert brings all of the performance groups together to present selections of classic winter, Christmas and Hanukkah songs. Then, on Jan. 14, Tutti will return from a winter break and the class will begin rehearsals for a spring concert.

While the sessions have set dates that generally mirror the school year, Coryell welcomes students to join Tutti at any time.

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"Getting your children involved in the arts is so important," she said. "Phoenix Children's Chorus has been the best thing – it has provided for my children so many opportunities that they would not have received otherwise. I had a parent who said, 'I don't know if this is going to work for my kid.' But I said, 'Let's just give it a try,' and they have been so successful. So, to other parents, I say, just try it – you will be amazed at how it can change your child's world."

Purchase concert tickets and learn more about Tutti at www.phoenixchildrenschorus.org.

Swing for a cause at golf event

The Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children will host its Third Annual ACFC Golf Classic, Monday, Dec. 8, 10 a.m. at Arizona Biltmore Golf Club. This event raises money and spreads awareness for pediatric cancer patients and their families.

Presented by Nolan and Madison Gorman, the tournament offers a day of golf complete with breakfast, a Bloody Mary bar, swag bags and a post-tournament reception. Attendees will also have the chance to win raffle prizes, all while supporting a meaningful cause. Register at www.azcancerfoundation.org.



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THE MOST EXPENSIVE PART OF YOUR CAR IS YOUR EGO



Black Friday just slid by like the last sip of your favorite latte, and now we're standing in that slow simmer of holiday shopping—the pressure to close out the year, the emotional tug-of-war of wanting to give, get, breathe, and budget all at once. Somewhere in this holiday chaos, your mind quietly shifts into spending mode—not by strategy, but by emotion. And while you're doing laps on that holiday hamster wheel, the thought creeps in: “Maybe it's time for another car.” You know the classics—“It's time,” “I deserve it,” “This car has cost me too much.” All valid. All emotional.

But here's the best gift you can give yourself this season: sensibility. Use my T.C.O. formula—True Cost of Ownership. Grab the last three years of repair receipts. Add them up. If you're under \$200 a month, you're ahead of the game. Do you know what the monthly payment for a new car is?—though most people don't even know there's a game. And when the truth shows up, as it always does, ask yourself: Do you want... or do you need?

Allow me to explain. I don't write about repairing cars—that's the easy part. The hard part is repairing how people think about cars. Ownership isn't mechanical. It's emotional. It's how we react when something breaks—not the car, but our sense of control. I see this every single day, and I've seen it for more than three decades.

No matter how many times I tell the truth, it only sticks about half the time. The rest come back months later with the same panic, and I'm right back on the soapbox—coaching them down before fear costs more than the repair.

People don't get taken because they're stupid. They get taken because they're scared. Scared of sounding dumb. Afraid of being wrong. Scared of pushing back. So they hand the fear to convenience—the smooth-talking salesman, the repair shop that “promises,” or the friend who watched one YouTube video and now thinks he's a foreman.

But the truth is simple: you decide when to spend money on your car. The question is whether it's from understanding or from panic. Every bad decision starts the same way—not with a wrench, but with a shrug and the words, “I don't know.” That's why I write about ownership, not oil changes. Cars don't need saving—drivers do.

You can tell a lot about someone by how they treat their car. Not the model—the behavior. I've watched people finance confidence and lease self-worth, then call it “car ownership.” We've created a culture where horsepower is mistaken for identity. The same crowd that thinks a \$50,000 Rolex makes them punctual. Let's be clear: the car doesn't make the driver. It just amplifies whoever is holding the wheel.

Modern drivers love bragging about “smart” cars. They'll tell you their SUV can park itself, avoid accidents, and detect pedestrians. Convenient—considering many drivers have stopped doing all three. If your dash tells you to “take a break” before you realize you're tired, the vehicle might not need diagnostics. Technology boosted confidence but stole awareness.

Then there's the consumer who buys a \$90,000 luxury car and instantly speaks fluent brag. They can't find the transmission filter, but they can pronounce “panoramic roof” with an accent. Luxury doesn't create better habits—it often hides worse ones. The pricier the car, the cheaper the mindset can become. When you pay for the illusion of perfection, you lose the ability to handle imperfection—and that's when the real bills roll in.

And of course, the collector. Four pristine vehicles, climate-controlled, barely driven. They call me once a year—always when something leaks, smokes, or clicks. Owning a car doesn't make you an enthusiast. It makes you a curator of depreciating artwork. Most “collections” are emotional clutter on wheels. You can't love a car you don't understand. That's not passion. That's possession.

Humans bond with their machines. Cars symbolize freedom and identity—ironic,

because most people have very little control over the machines they emotionally depend on. They don't read their manuals; they scroll TikTok for hacks. They trust influencers more than mechanics. Then they wonder why “the system is rigged.” It's not rigged. It's just designed for people who don't read the fine print—including the oil grade.

I've watched people spend five grand repairing a car they didn't even want, simply because they couldn't admit the original purchase was emotional. Consumer Reports says 60% delay maintenance because “it doesn't feel urgent.” You know what else doesn't feel urgent? Flossing—until it is. Cars are relationships. Ignore the little stuff long enough and one day you're explaining smoke to a tow truck driver while insisting, “It just started doing that.” Car ownership isn't expensive. Ignorance is.

The average American spends between \$1,800 & \$2,900 a year on avoidable repairs. That's not inflation. That's tuition for the School of Denial. Cars don't care about your title, your confidence, your following, or your ego. They respond only to input, care, and timing—the same three things most humans struggle with.

So, the next time you see a driver rev their ego at a stoplight, don't roll your eyes. Smile. You're watching a \$90,000 amateur perform a live demo in financial Darwinism. Cars, like watches, don't lie. They don't flatter or fake. They simply expose the truth: most people are more emotionally attached than mechanically aware. And that gap? That's where the industry makes its money.

You can lease luxury. You can't finance wisdom. Owning a car doesn't make you a car person. Knowing yourself well enough not to hand the keys to fear—that's where the real ownership begins.

SHAHE KOULLOUKIAN | Auto Industry Ambassador | Award-Winning Expert in Automotive Ownership & Emotional Car Care | Speaker, Best-Selling Author of *Car Confidential* | Host of *The Car Confidential Show*.

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COMMUNITY

Broadcasters host annual holiday concert

The House of Broadcasting, Inc. (HOBİ), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public and preserving and celebrating the history, personalities and paraphernalia of radio and television in Arizona, will host its 12th Annual Holiday Concert Friday, Dec. 12, at 7 p.m.

Featuring Mike Chamberlin and the “Living Legends of Broadcasting,” the concert will be held at the North Phoenix Baptist Church, Chapel Sanctuary, 5757 N. Central Ave. The event will include Pat McMahon, Rita Davenport, Jan D’Atri, Alice Tatum, Buddy Owens, Dr. Joyce Blair Buekers, Cory McCloskey, David Miller, Dave Munsey, Michael Dixon and Patricia Valencia.

Along with the concert, a raffle will be held as a part of the nonprofit’s fundraising efforts. HOBİ awards scholarships annually to students at ASU Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, ASU’s Hugh Downs School of Human Communication and the Eller College of Management at the University of Arizona.

Tickets are \$20; children under 12 may attend for free. To RSVP, call 602-944-1997 or send an email to pschu@q.com. Learn more about HOBİ by visiting <https://houseof-broadcasting.com>.

Connecting residents to food resources

In early November, to offset the impact of the suspension of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the city of Phoenix partnered with St. Mary’s Food Bank in launching a citywide food drive to ensure residents have access to nutritious meals.

While the government has returned to business, and SNAP benefits have resumed, many families and individuals continue to face increased food insecurity. A webpage launched in November, www.phoenix.gov/hungerrelief, details how residents can give monetary donations or food items to help neighbors in need.

The city said that monetary donations are strongly encouraged – food banks can stretch the donation through bulk purchasing, tax exemptions and

dollar matches from the community. Just one dollar can provide an estimated 10 meals for a food bank. Monetary donations can be made to St. Mary’s online: <https://fundraise.stmarysfood-bank.org/campaign/742144/donate>.

Residents who may qualify for SNAP can visit the Arizona Department of Economic Security website, www.des.az.gov, to apply for, manage and stay informed about benefits.

For those who need food assistance right away, several organizations in the Phoenix area provide emergency food boxes and hot meals. Residents can visit www.phoenix.gov/foodhelp for locations where they can receive food boxes and resources or dial 2-1-1 from any phone to access pre-recorded information in both English and Spanish about emergency assistance and other resources.

In addition, the Arizona Food Bank Network provides a statewide directory of food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and other organizations that distribute emergency food. Use the network’s “Find a Food Bank” tool to locate a nearby agency. Before visiting, verify hours of operation and eligibility requirements – details can change.

To learn more, visit <https://azfood-banks.org/get-food>.

Phoenix announces new CED director

In late October, the city of Phoenix announced the appointment of Ryan Touhill as the new Community and Economic Development (CED) director. Touhill, who will begin his new role on Dec. 1, succeeds Christine Mackay, who retired after 11 years to lead the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) as president and CEO.

Touhill brings nearly two decades of experience in local government and economic development, the city said, most recently serving as director of Arlington Economic Development (AED) in Virginia. There, he led the creation and implementation of AED’s Strategic Plan for Economic Growth. Prior to his role in Arlington, he served as senior vice president and chief of staff at the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership.

Ryan Touhill

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Fear ‘the floor?’ We can help!

By Bill Ross

I want to share a recent success story with you because I think it's important for many of you to realize that you don't have to be stuck in your body with fear.

Her name is Darcy. A lovely woman in her 70s. She has not had a very easy life. She's been a hard-working woman for many years and has always taken care of others before herself. Because of this and the stresses of life, she had let herself go. So, she had gained lots of weight, which doesn't help with her knees (which both have torn cartilage). In addition, she had had a shoulder replacement. So, getting around and attempting to better herself wasn't going to be an easy task. A big part of the problem, as with most, was working on the nutrition aspect.

Now, I can tell you how much weight and fat and inches she's lost in the past couple of months (which is a lot), but that's not the real story I want to share.

When we started the last program, I told her that she would now have to get down on the floor to do certain exercises. She looked at me almost in a panic. "I can't do that," she said, "and I certainly can't get off the floor." I simply told her that we've prepared her to do it. And that we're here to help, and we could lift her if we had to. Anyway, she was

game for it, and with hesitation, she got down and did her exercises. When it was time to get up, it wasn't pretty and she needed some guidance and a little help, but she did it. The next session was a little better, and by the third time, she did it completely on her own. You could see it in her eyes how happy she was and the joy of overcoming a fear and limitations exuded over her whole being.

Now, some of you may not see the big deal in this, but for those of you who've had knee replacements, hip or back issues, it is a big deal. I know what you're thinking -- you look at the floor with fear, as if it were a pool and you don't know how to swim. If you fell in, you'd drown. Well, people with poor balance or who are weak are afraid of falling because they don't have the confidence that they can get up off the floor. Just so you know . . . you're not alone. But know this, if you want to overcome the fear and limitations just like Darcy, you can do it too.

So, if you're ready and need our help, just call us at **602-230-8581**. Don't text, just leave a message if we don't answer.

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COMMUNITY

Uptown Plaza hosts holiday event

Residents are invited to join Uptown Plaza, Central Avenue and Camelback Road, on Sunday, Dec. 14, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. for festive family fun.

Celebrate the season, and Uptown Plaza's 70th holiday, with a visit from Santa, complete with a free professional photo sent straight to your phone. Enjoy live holiday music by The Jingle Belles and let the kids get creative at a holiday craft station making Pony Bead Candy Canes and Holiday Bead Key Rings.

While there, guests can check off everyone on their holiday list with a little shopping and dining. During their visit, guests can explore an array of local boutiques and specialty shops offering stylish gifts and thoughtful finds. Discover trendy apparel and footwear at Muse Apparel, Manor, and Local Nomad, or give the gift of relaxation with spa and grooming packages from CLOVR Life Spa, Boardroom Salon for Men, LATHER, or Hi, skin.

Guests who arrive early will receive a limited-edition 70th Anniversary ornament (while supplies last).

Find additional information online at www.uptownplazaphx.com.

Church hosts December events

Desert Christian Fellowship Church will host its seniors' potluck and annual white elephant gift exchange, Thursday, Dec. 11, at noon. Neighbors are invited to bring a friend, a favorite dish to share and a church appropriate gift to share with other seniors.

The church will host Celebrate Recovery beginning Dec. 16 at 7 p.m. New attendees are welcome. A monthly food distribution drive-through event will be held on Friday, Dec. 19, 7-8 a.m. Volunteers will fill your trunk with food provided in cooperation with St. Mary's Food Bank. The church will offer a family-friendly Christmas Eve service on Wednesday, Dec. 24, at 6 p.m.

Desert Christian will change its service times beginning in January. Traditional service will be held at 9 a.m., contemporary service will be at 10:30 a.m., and Bible study will be at 10:30 a.m.

Desert Christian Fellowship Church is located at 1445 W. Northern Ave. For additional information, call 602-861-4008 or visit <https://desertchristianfellowship.com>.



Get into the holiday spirit and enjoy photos with Santa and other family-friendly fun on Dec. 14 at Uptown Plaza (submitted photo).

Find holiday spirit in the Slope

Families and neighbors in the Sunnyslope area and beyond are invited to enjoy good cheer and community spirit at the annual Slope Holiday Market & Parade, scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 13, beginning at 2 p.m. with the parade kicking off at 6 p.m.

The event offers the opportunity to meet your neighbors and celebrate the holiday season together. Enjoy the community parade, interactive art and crafts for kids, holiday music, local vendors, food trucks and more. In addition, enjoy a drink in the Beer Garden hosted by North Mountain Brewing Company and O.H.S.O. & Little O's Sunnyslope.

Hatcher Road will be closed from 7th Avenue to Central Avenue to allow for the marketplace and parade route.

Find additional information at www.slopeholidaymarket.org.

Merriment in Melrose returns for 10th year

The Melrose Community Alliance invites residents to celebrate the season at its 10th annual Merriment in Melrose event, Saturday, Dec. 13, from 2-7 p.m.

The community event will take place on the west side of 7th Avenue at Montecito Avenue and will include vendors, food trucks, live entertainment, kids' activities and a tree lighting. A silent auction and raffle drawing will be held to support the Osborn School Districts Arts and Music program.

For more information, visit <https://melrosecommunityalliance.com/merriment-in-melrose>.

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COMMUNITY

Pet of the Month

Beautiful Buddy loves adventure

Adopting from a shelter not only gives a pet a second chance, says Arizona Humane Society (AHS), but also helps save even more lives, like sweet Buddy.

Buddy is an adorable one-year-old American Pit Bull Terrier mix who came to the Arizona Humane Society in October after his owner could unfortunately no longer care for him. Though a bit shy at first, Buddy blossoms with the companionship of other pets and warms up over time, especially if treats are involved.

Friends describe him as a playful pup who loves to fetch and snuggle after a long day of having fun. Of course, Buddy can never say no to a new toy or a new adventure – he especially loves going on walks and field trips to dog-friendly places.

The adoption fee for beautiful Buddy (pet number 801034) includes his neuter surgery, current vaccinations, a microchip and a follow-up wellness exam with a VCA Animal Hospital.



Buddy is a playful one-year-old American Pit Bull Terrier mix who loves to fetch and snuggle after a long day of having fun (photo courtesy of Arizona Humane Society).

Visit this handsome pup at the Arizona Humane Society's South Mountain Campus or learn more at www.azhumane.org/adopt to give him the loving forever home he deserves.

Get away at dog-friendly parks

For those who are contemplating getting out of the city with their canine companions, Arizona State Parks & Trails offers a guide to the best dog-friendly spots in Arizona's state parks.

Several state parks allow dogs to join in on the fun when it comes to tent camping, RVs, or even cabins. Enjoy the sunset with your dog by your side in your tent or RV at Lake Havasu State Park, just north of the dog beach at Cattail Cove. A little closer to the city, just outside of Phoenix in Apache Junction, lies Lost Dutchman State Park, an area jam-packed with hiking trails and outdoor areas to walk dogs and enjoy a tent or RV camping trip.

South of Phoenix are two incredible parks for outdoor recreation: Catalina State Park and Picacho Peak State Park. Both parks offer dog-friendly camping complete with some of the best hiking trails the state has to offer.

Several state parks offer camping cabins that are pet-friendly as well. Take your pup to the lagoons at Dead Horse Ranch State Park, where there are plenty of grassy areas and hiking trails for you and your dog to enjoy the outdoors together along the water. Alamo Lake State Park lets you camp in comfort with your dog, and you can take your leashed pup for a walk along the gorgeous waters of the lake.



Adventurous people and their pups will find dozens of dog-friendly parks and trails to explore year-round in Arizona (photo courtesy of Arizona State Parks & Trails).

Arizona's state parks and trails also offer cool places for day trips, where you and your companion can stretch your legs, as well as dog-friendly beaches – such as Cattail Cove State Park, Buckskin Mountain State Park and River Island State Park.

Find a comprehensive list of dog-friendly parks and trails, along with safety and travel tips during the winter months, by visiting <https://azstateparks.com/outdoor-resources>.

Keep pets safe during New Year's events

The Arizona Humane Society (AHS) reminds residents that the days on and around New Year's Eve are some of the busiest of the year for shelters across the country, and many pets, those frightened by the fireworks and festivities, end up wandering away from home.

To help keep pets in homes as we head into 2026 and keep much-needed kennel space open for sick, injured and abused animals, AHS offers these tips.

First, ensure pets have current ID tags and updated microchips. This will greatly increase the chances that a lost pet will be reunited with their family. Next, keep pets indoors and distracted. Fireworks and bursts of bright flashing lights can frighten pets and trigger them to flee or escape. Distract them from the loud noises by turning on the radio or TV.

Also, do not leave pets unattended while outside, as the sound of fireworks can startle them and prompt an escape. When welcoming guests, always make sure your pet is secured so they do not slip out of an open door.

Finally, report pets in distress. To report signs of animals in distress, call the AHS Emergency Animal Medical Technicians at 602-997-7585, ext. 2073. For more information on lost or found pets, visit www.azhumane.org/lostpet.

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Hello Friends and Neighbors,

Should I be predictable and just say it already?
I can't help myself, so here it goes...Holy smokes - 2025 flew by!

Somehow we've arrived at the final month of the year, and I'm still wondering what happened to 2025. If Kenny Chesney's song "Don't Blink" has ever felt true, it's now - he absolutely got it right.

As we wrap up the year, Jacob and I are feeling incredibly grateful for every client who entrusted us to help prepare, market, guide, and represent on their behalf. For those who don't know, we treat every listing like it's our baby. Our work goes far beyond putting a sign in the yard and placing a home in the MLS. We genuinely enjoy helping our clients get their homes ready for market - regardless the stage of preparation they're in, we're here to help. Whether that's coordinating estate sales, creating repair and sprucing lists, advising on packing, making staging suggestions, sharing trusted contractors and helping compare quotes to ensure quality and value - we understand that every seller has different needs and we are here to deliver.

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We never take a single opportunity for granted.

As the holidays draw near,
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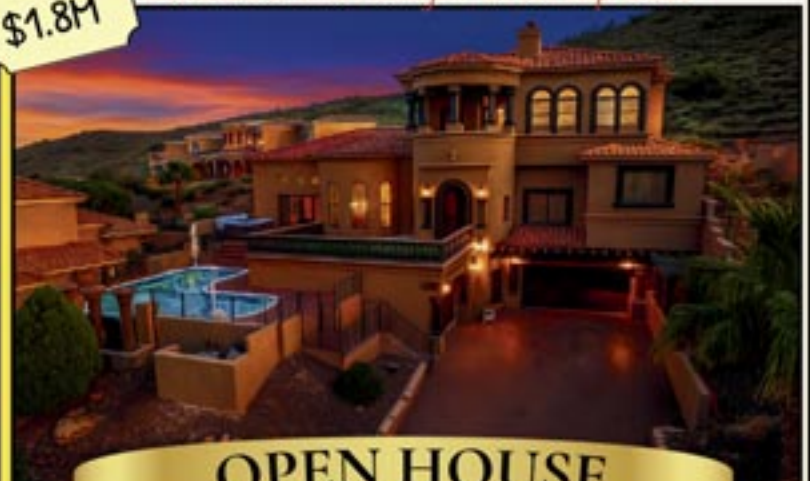
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Eric Herschede created a lounge space in his new Central Avenue menswear shop that encourages conversations, camaraderie and connection (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

Men’s boutique creates curated experience

By Kathryn M. Miller

Owner Eric Herschede says that his eponymous menswear shop is something of a second act for him.

“I always told my children, if they can find what they love to do, they’d be better off than most. And so, I thought for a second act I wanted to chase something that had kind of been ruminating in my brain for a while.

“I grew up going to Carter’s over at 44th Street and Camelback and always thought it was such an interesting thing – [Mike Carter] got to talk to people every day, be around clothes, which I love, and I was just always intrigued by it. But you know, life goes on and I thought about it for a few decades. But then this spot came up...I grew up in this area and I thought if there was a time to do it, this was the time.”

Located at 5068 N. Central Ave., the 3,800-square-foot specialty men’s clothing boutique Herschede opened to the public on Oct. 28.

It opened “with a lot of support from my family and my friends and my community,” Herschede said. “I saw this space in April and then in six months we opened the store. It’s hard outside these doors for a lot of people, and we wanted to kind of create an old barber shop where people hang out, see old friends, meet new friends but instead of based around getting a haircut, it is focused around clothes.”

The proprietor says that the store

was born from a belief that a store can be more than shelves and fabric, “It can be a space that engages every sense – sight, smell, touch and sound. A place where you can pause, breathe, and feel something real.” And walking through the store, he has achieved that goal. Curated music plays in the background – complimenting, rather than overpowering – and soft fragrance wafts through the well-stocked and eye-catching display racks and tables. Artwork of musicians and cultural icons grace the walls and at the back of the store is a lounge space that invites lingering.

Shoppers will find 58 brands from across the globe – Amsterdam, England, Italy, France, Colorado, Ohio. Whether someone is looking for an outfit for a dinner date, a game, concert, play, art museum, workwear, golf gear and more, “We tried to find stuff that is unique, that maybe you would not see in other stores.”

Herschede says that his job is to make customers look their best, however they are trying to present themselves to the world.

“If a guy is jeans and rock T-shirts and that’s who he is, I have that. But if he wants to go off, then I have some things I can suggest to him.”

He added, “Every piece, every note of music, every flicker of light was chosen to make you feel welcome. To remind you that style isn’t about performance – it’s about resonance. It’s about leaving with a sense of quiet joy that follows you long after you walk out the door.”

To learn more about the shop, visit <https://herschede.shop>.



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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Business Briefs

Single-family community opens in Midtown

The Bower announced the grand opening of its newest single-family community in Midtown Phoenix. The Bower Willo features 28 single-family homes for sale near the Roosevelt Row Art District in Downtown Phoenix.

With prices starting in the mid \$900,000 range, The Bower Willo offers multiple two- and three-story floor plans ranging from 1,800 to 2,400 square feet, three bedrooms, and 2.5 to 3.5 bathrooms.

The community’s Rooftop Residences include a rooftop patio with a view of downtown Phoenix, and its two-story detached Heritage Homes feature private yards and front porches, which the company says were crafted with the community’s historic architecture in mind.

Every residence is equipped with a gourmet kitchen, quartz countertops, stainless steel appliances, Ring doorbell and an oversized two-car garage pre-wired for EV chargers.

The Bower Willo is located at 132 West Willo Court at the intersection of Thomas Road and North Central Avenue. Learn more at www.thebower-living.com/communities/willo.

Bricks celebrates anniversary

Bricks & Minifigs Central Phoenix, located at 24 W. Camelback Road, Suite G, is celebrating its fourth anniversary, and residents are invited to the party.

Scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 6, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., residents can stop by and snap a picture with Santa and Mrs. Claus, enjoy fun specials and activities, then find a spot along Central Avenue for the APS Electric Light Parade, which steps off at 7 p.m.

The retailer is a one-stop LEGO toy shop. They buy, sell and trade all LEGO products. Shoppers can choose from a huge selection of new sets, retired sets, individual minifigs, bulk bricks, components and accessories.

For additional information, visit <https://bricksandminifigs.com/central-phoenix-az> or call 602-675-1392.



Just in time for holiday gifting, residents are invited to browse a huge selections of LEGO products while celebrating the fourth anniversary of Bricks & Minifigs Central Phoenix (submitted photo).

ATC announces new executive director

The Arizona Theatre Company Board of Trustees announced that Ana Rose O’Halloran, a nonprofit arts executive with more than 17 years of leadership experience in theatre and the arts, will be joining ATC as its new executive director.

O’Halloran currently serves as producing executive director of Antaeus Theatre Company in Los Angeles, where she has produced over 25 acclaimed productions and guided the organization through a period of

remarkable growth, ATC said. Under her leadership, Antaeus completed a successful \$3 million capital campaign, achieved record fundraising and launched “The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles,” an innovative podcast series that reached more than 100,000 listeners worldwide.

Waymo heads to Valley freeways

Autonomous car company Waymo announced in November that the company will begin offering rider trips on freeways in Phoenix. This is in addition to freeway service in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The company plans to add to the service over time, including expanding freeway capabilities to Austin, Atlanta and beyond.

Riders will continue to hail trips through the Waymo app as usual and can express interest in being among the first to experience a freeway ride directly in the app. When a freeway route is meaningfully faster, riders can be matched with a freeway trip, providing quicker, smoother, and more efficient rides, the company said.

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Growing up in Atlanta with my brother Michael and my mom, I always looked forward to our Christmas trips to Phoenix to see our dad, Herb. Those ten days were pure magic and probably gave Mom a much-needed break. Dad co-owned a women's clothing store called Kagel's at Park Central, with Geri Aron.

Park Central wasn't just a shopping center, it was a true neighborhood gathering place where everyone knew each other. Lou and Muriel Polett ran Polett's Sportswear for Men, Bernie Teck had a small boutique inside Switzer Jewelry, Gertrude Schwartz and her daughter Midge Galst had clothing boutiques, and the Grodzinsky's, later with the Garcia family owned the original Miracle Mile Delicatessen, now on 16th Street. Those names were part of the fabric of our city. The mall felt magical: festive windows, carolers strolling through, and full of community spirit. We loved our visits to Rocky's Hideaway, inside the old Ambassador Hotel (now a gated neighborhood at 4th Drive and Maryland). The staff kept our Coca-Colas endlessly refilled. Later we'd go to Gregory's Restaurant, part of the Embassy Suites chain. Gregory's uncle was Rocky, his holiday dinners were legendary, Governor Rose Mofford was often in attendance.

Those early experiences shaped how I see Phoenix today, a city built on relationships and local pride. Business owners were neighbors who cared about the community around them. That same spirit lives on with **Herschede**, a new men's clothing and gift boutique on Central Avenue, in the former Fairmont Pharmacy space, (our son Sean Lieb negotiated the lease). Owner Eric Herschede is no stranger to North Central. In his past life, Eric was a respected lender, and he and his sons are proud Brophy College Prep alumni. Herschede isn't just another retail shop, it's an experience built on authenticity and intention. Every detail, from the design to the scent, is chosen to make you pause, appreciate quality, and reconnect with what feels real.

Supporting local businesses like Eric's keeps the North Central tradition alive, the same spirit that once filled Park Central Mall. From my childhood memories to today's independent boutiques along Central, one thing hasn't changed: North Central Phoenix knows how to take care of its own.

What a great city we live in!

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Throughout the school year, Act One Arizona funds experiences at venues across the Valley for students in Title 1 schools to provide access and connect students to the arts (submitted photo).

Organization connects students with the arts

By Trudy Thompson Shumaker

More than 100 kids squealed with delight and surprise when Fabian Fontenelle danced onto the stage at Madison Center for the Arts in late October. Fontenelle wore his tribal ceremonial garments and called to the students from offstage after his wife, Shelley Morningsong, introduced him. The students, kindergarten through early college, were on a field trip, thanks to Act One Arizona.

The couple, nationally and internationally known for their music and art, captured the attention and imagination of every student in the performance hall. The students had traveled to the center from their Title 1 schools all over the Valley, and they knew they were in for a treat, but Merci wasn't prepared for what she experienced.

“Teacher said we would learn about Native American history and stuff, but we thought it would be a movie or somebody reading us a book,” she said. The first grader’s eyes were wide and dancing as she shared her reaction to *Morningsong* and *Fontenelle*, who spent their morning with the field trippers.

“The man wore really cool feathers that looked like tall – really tall – wings and the lady played different flautas – one sounded like a dove. She wrote songs that she sang. My tio is picking me up today and he won’t believe it! And my brother will be jealous he didn’t get to come.”

Act One Arizona funds experiences

like this one for students in Title 1 schools, and this performance is one of many the organization will host this year.

“Our mission is to connect arts and culture partners with Arizona educators who are seeking experiences for their students, many of whom have never seen a live performance,” said Dr. Beth Maloney, executive director of Act One.

The organization was founded in 2011 by Russ and Mac Perlich, and not only has funded tickets and transportation for hundreds of field trips, but also provided remote field trips using virtual reality sets shared with schools all over Arizona.

“This is called Arts Immersion, and it helps us provide arts and cultural experiences to children outside of Tucson and Phoenix. We also created the Culture Pass program, linking 175 academic and public libraries with cultural institutions in 12 of our state’s 15 counties. Families can check out a Culture Pass and use it to admit two people to an arts event. It’s really enabled a lot of families to see live performances or go to museums,” said Maloney.

Maloney taught in classrooms for 20 years, and in 2014 was named Arizona Teacher of the Year. She is also a board-certified teacher, and has been recognized with several other educational honors.

"I see how these experiences impact children, and I know these students will remember today's performance for the rest of their lives," she said.

Merci and her classmates will cer-

SCHOOL DAYS

tainly remember it. They sat in reverent silence as Fontenelle and Morningsong shared not only music and photographs, but also wise counsel: “Learn about your ancestors – the traditions in your families. Respect them. And respect yourselves. Your families are special, and so are you. Always remember that,” said Fontenelle.

The traditions the Native American couple shared came from their own tribes (Zuni and Omaha), each different but each a part of their cultures and their life together.

“We came here from New Mexico to get to know you all,” said Morningsong, as the students looked at slides from the couples’ home and listened to haunting as well as lilting songs from her flute.

“See that little church? It is very, very old, and it is across the street from our house! What is in your neighborhood? What is close to your school?” she asked. “I’m sure there are some very special places. Pay attention to them and learn about them from your families, your neighbors and your teachers. And from one another!”

The students, even the youngest ones, paid attention.

“They taught us to say ‘hello!’ in their native languages! And the costume the man wore was so cool. There were rattles made out of shells on his feet and lots of beads and stuff. He said it is sacred,” said Merci. “I wonder if those flautas are sacred? They sounded sacred to me.”

Contact Act One Arizona at www.act1az.org or 602-343-6239.



Glendale Union High School District marching band directors and student leaders gathered on the Glendale Community College field during the district’s Nov. 3 Marching Band Exhibition (photo courtesy of GUHSD).

School Briefs

GLENDALE UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT Exhibition celebrates student musicians

The Nov. 3 Glendale Union High School District Marching Band Exhibition was a celebration of music, talent and community spirit. From dynamic performances to inspiring displays of teamwork, student musicians across the district showcased their creativity and dedication on the Glendale Community College stage.

The event honored the hard work of passionate band directors, volunteers and supportive families, whose commitment makes these programs thrive.

GUHSD said, “Together, they create the harmony that makes Glendale Union High School District’s music programs truly exceptional.”

WHS marching band takes first place at competition

The Washington High School Purple Pride Marching Machine in October traveled to Canyon View High School for the Marching Band Association competition. The band marched away with a Division 2A first place award – plus three additional awards for Visual, General Effect, and Percussion.

GUHSD celebrates ‘A’ ratings for all schools

The Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) is celebrating an extraordinary accomplishment: all nine of its comprehensive high schools have earned an “A” rating from the Arizona Department of Education, the highest honor a school can achieve.

The recognition highlights exceptional student learning, academic

growth and strong preparation for success in college, career, and life after graduation, the district said. The ratings reflect excellence across multiple measures, including academic performance, progress toward graduation, and college and career readiness through advanced coursework, Career and Technical Education, and real-world experience.

District leaders credit this achievement to the dedication of students, the expertise of teachers and staff, and the unwavering support of families and community partners, affirming Glendale Union High School District’s deep commitment to keeping the promise in every student to reach their potential.

Thunderbird community members honored

The Glendale Union High School District Governing Board honored five members of the Thunderbird High School community during its annual Achievement Above All awards celebration.

This year’s recipients include teacher Lucy Maurer, who inspires students through her culinary arts program; student Owen St. Clair, recognized for his academic excellence, athletic leadership, and compassion; and the Thunderbird Marching Band, celebrated for its artistry, teamwork, and school spirit. Support staff member Mario Celaya was commended for his reliability and dedication to maintaining the campus, while volunteer Jenna Parris was honored for her contributions to school programs and events.

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SCHOOL DAYS

Educators recognized for 25 years of service

The Glendale Union High School District Governing Board honored Thunderbird High School educators Patrick Henry and Victor Vega for reaching an outstanding milestone of 25 years of service within GUHSD.

Henry’s work in CTE and Vega’s dedication to mathematics and student activities have helped shape Thunderbird’s culture of excellence. The district said that both educators have made a profound impact on campus through their commitment to student success, leadership in their departments, and active involvement in school programs and initiatives.

Sunnyslope announces athlete signings

Sunnyslope High School announced the early signings of several of its senior student-athletes.

Josie Portela will continue her volleyball career at the University of Portland, Rider Portela will play basketball at the University of Colorado Boulder and Lainey Johnson will compete in volleyball at Cal State Dominguez Hills. Aniyah Martin has committed to Arizona State University for track and field, Katherine Hartman will attend Merrimack College for soccer, Samantha Hyde will play softball at Missouri Southern State University, Jake Keebler will join Coe College for soccer, and Jack Petroff will play baseball at New Mexico State University.



Madison Meadows Middle School students were honored as the year’s Outstanding Chapter at the national Best Buddies conference. The Meadows club chapter is currently in its third year (photo courtesy of Madison School District).

MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT ‘Buddies’ club receives national recognition

Madison Meadows Middle School students were honored at the Best Buddies National Conference as the 2024–25 Outstanding Chapter, recognizing their dedication to creating a welcoming and inclusive community.

The Best Buddies program promotes inclusion and friendship between students of all abilities. The Madison Meadows club chapter, currently in its third year, is open to all students at the school and has more than 100 active participants.

The Madison Meadows Best Buddies Club focuses on building understanding and empathy by teaching

that everyone learns and experiences the world in their own way. Students in the club participate in hands-on lessons that help them better understand different disabilities and learn how to use various types of assistive equipment their peers may rely on. Through these activities, students gain a deeper appreciation for inclusion and acceptance of others.

Along with awareness activities, students of all abilities participate in connection-building opportunities such as arts and crafts, board games and other group activities that help build friendships among students and strengthen the school community.

The Meadows Best Buddies club also participates in the annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk in Tempe and, last year, was named the top fundraising school out of the 60 participating schools.

Enrollment is open at Madison schools

Madison School District is now accepting open enrollment applications for the 2026-27 school year.

The district says that it provides rigorous, engaging instruction led by high-quality educators, resulting in student performance that regularly exceeds state averages and earns local and national recognition. The district offers six Signature Programs to students in preschool through eighth grade, including Visual and Performing Arts, STEAM, Spanish Immersion, International Baccalaureate, REACH – Profoundly Gifted and a Traditional Academy.

Students are able to explore and develop their interests while building a strong educational foundation to become lifelong learners. Outside the classroom, Madison supports students with before and after-school programs, including the Madison Adventure Club (MAC), athletics, school clubs and a variety of on-campus activities led by partner organizations.

To learn more about open enrollment or submit an application, visit madisonaz.org/enroll.

OSBORN SCHOOL DISTRICT Learning space connects students to nature

Montecito Montessori School will soon have a new outdoor learning space...in the forest. Through a partnership with the Life Time Foundation



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SCHOOL DAYS

and the SUGi Project, Osborn School District is the first in the state and one of only about 25 pocket forests in the U.S. created by the group.

The forest was planted by students, staff and many volunteers. In addition to offering a habitat for native birds and pollinators, the space will act as a living outdoor classroom, fully integrated in to the schools Montessori-based learning.

Students will build a sense of ownership and connection while they take on responsibilities of watering, weeding and monitoring plant growth. Older students will support younger peers developing leadership through their mentoring. It will be a space for practical learning: scientific observation, journaling and exploring eco systems and life cycles. Through these experiences, students will build ecological literacy and a stronger sense of their relationship to the natural world.

In September, the district also reported that the school is undergoing a major renovation that will turn the outdated building into a state-of-the-art learning facility geared specifically



Ethan Bryson, a SUGi Forest Maker, helped a Montecito Montessori School student plant a tree as the school transformed campus space into a pocket forest learning space (photo courtesy of Osborn School District).

toward Montessori learning. The new learning space integrates into the Montessori method of education, which is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play.

Learn more about the Life Time Foundation at www.ltfoundation.org, and the SUGi Project at www.sugi-project.com.

PHOENIX UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXPO welcomes
prospective students

On Saturday, Nov. 8, Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) hosted its annual EXPO event at Phoenix College.

During the event, prospective high school students from across the city learned about all of the offerings that PXU schools have. The event had over 1,000 attendees and boasted many interactive experiences and performances from Phoenix Union’s talented students.

With 24 schools, tens of thousands of students, and over 3,500 employees, PXU covers 220-square miles of Phoenix. Prospective students who were unable to attend the event, but are interested in enrolling in a Phoenix Union school, are encouraged to visit the district’s website.

Find a list of schools on the enrollment webpage that is searchable by area, available programs and school size, as well as by clubs, groups and activities. Visit www.pxu.org/enroll.

WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL DISTRICT
Teacher interview fair
scheduled

WESD will host a Teacher Interview Fair on Saturday, Dec. 6, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. at the WESD Administrative Center, located at 4650 W. Sweetwater Ave. The district is currently hiring K-6 elementary, 7-8 middle school and special education teachers for the 2026-2027 school year.

The event offers the opportunity to meet with district leaders and learn why the WESD may be the right place to grow a teaching career.

The district offers a salary range of \$53,100 to \$80,520 including approximately \$3,100 for performance pay, student loan forgiveness, school-age child care discounts, medical, dental and vision benefits, employer-matched retirement contributions and more.

To pre-schedule an interview, call 602-347-2622. Walk-ins are welcome. Arrive early as limited interviews will be available. To apply online, visit <https://jobs.wesdschools.org>.

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for more
information.

SCHOOL DAYS

Schools receive
'A' letter grades

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) released the school letter grades for the 2024–25 school year, and the WESD celebrated the accomplishments of its students and staff.

The district extended its congratulations to the 11 schools that earned an “A” letter grade including three in the North Central Phoenix corridor – Moon Mountain Elementary School, Orangewood School and Royal Palm Middle School. Overall, WESD earned a district-wide “B” letter grade and 87 percent of the schools are classified as excellent or highly performing.

The district said, “We are so proud of our schools’ dedication to growth and educational excellence!”

To learn more and view a complete list of the 2024-25 WESD school letter grades, visit www.wesdschools.org/24-25lettergrades.

Receive tax credits for
support of WESD schools

During this season of giving, WESD asks residents to consider making a tax credit donation to local schools – including Desert View Elementary School, Maryland School, Moon Mountain Elementary School, Mountain View School, Orangewood School, Richard E. Miller Elementary School, Royal Palm Middle School and Sunnyslope School.

A contribution makes a direct and meaningful impact on students by supporting field trips, extracurricular activities, uniforms, equipment and stipends for coaches and sponsors. Best of all, tax credit donations can reduce your Arizona state tax liability – up to \$200 if filing single or \$400 if filing jointly.

Visit the school’s front office to



Students at Madison Highland Prep are working towards achieving industry certifications that will prepare them for careers in engineering, robotics and other STEM fields (submitted photo).

complete a tax credit form or donate online at <https://bit.ly/3Ao6nZ7>.

Explore kindergarten
at sneak peek events

The WESD will host Kindergarten Sneak Peek events at 27 of its schools on Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026. This is a chance for families with future kindergartners to join their neighborhood school to explore classrooms, meet staff and experience firsthand what makes WESD a special place to learn and grow. Attend one of the informative sessions from 9 to 10 a.m. and/or 4:30 to 6 p.m. On-site registration will also be available. Be sure to bring your child’s birth certificate, immunization records and proof of residency to complete enrollment.

Families of children who will be 5 by Aug. 31, 2026, should attend, as well as families of children who will be 5 by Dec. 31, 2026 to receive information about the Early Kindergarten Entrance Program. Learn more at www.wesdschools.org.

PRIVATE AND
CHARTER SCHOOLS
Students work toward
industry certification

Nine students from Madison Highland Prep have achieved a significant milestone in their academic careers by passing the first of three RECF Engineering and Robotics Industry Certification exams. The students, who demonstrated exceptional knowledge and skills in the first Pre-Engineering exam, are Micah Wild, Kevin Pineda, Fernando Peralta, Noah Medina, Kane Rivera, Michael Syntax, Liam Steindler, Alaina Thompson and Abraham Rico.

The RECF certification program is a response to a global need for more students in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. By pursuing this certification, these students plan to demonstrate their expertise and enhance their college and career prospects, setting them up for success in an increasingly competitive career landscape.

School recognized
with 'A' grade

“Montessori Day School has done it again,” said Peg Huffman, founding director of Montessori Day School as the school received a grade of “A” from the Arizona Department of Education. The school also celebrated other year-end results and activities such as the “Favorite Character Costume Parade” in October; “International Day Celebration” in November; and the forthcoming “Winter Program,” scheduled for December.

Montessori Day School is located at 9215 N. 14th St. For additional information, call 602-943-7672 or visit www.mdpsc.org.

Students win honors
in Makers challenge

Xavier College Preparatory’s all-female engineering team, Access Play, won Tier 1 honors in the 2025 Makers of Change Assistive Technology Challenge, a Valley-wide competition engaging more than 100 high school teams in STEM, coding, robotics and technology design.

The annual challenge, organized by Southwest Human Development, a partner of Easter Seals, invites students to create real-world assistive technology solutions to improve the lives of young children with disabilities. This year, participants were tasked with developing a way for a young boy named Levi, who has cerebral palsy, to play both independently and with his siblings.

Team members Emma Robescu, Stella Vinokur, Sophia Fireman and Shriya Tummala researched Levi’s needs, learned about his condition, and designed an innovative accessible game.

please see CHALLENGE on page 32

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December 13th, 7:00pm

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December 3rd, 5:30pm-7:30pm
Evening begins with Mass followed by a talk with
Fr. Will Schmid: *Pilgrimage at the
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Penance Service
December 17th, 6:00pm

Advent Concert
December 4th, 7:00pm
\$10 per person; \$30 per family



Tickets available online: staphx.org
or scan the QR Code

Jingle & Mingle
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Join us in the parish ICT Classroom for light refreshments,
Bingo, and bring a \$15 White Elephant gift.
RSVP to reception@staphx.org

Immaculate Conception of Mary
Holy Day of Obligation
December 8th,
Mass Times: 6:30am, Noon, 5:30pm

Our Lady of Guadalupe
Mass and Reception
December 12th, 5:30pm



Christmas Mass Schedule

December 24th:
2:00pm (by special permission of
Bishop John Dolan due to construction),
4:00pm, 7:00pm, and Midnight
(music begins at 11:30pm)
December 25th: 9:00am & 11:00am



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SCHOOL DAYS

The Brophy Swim and Dive team won its 44th state championship with a state-record 582 points, extending its record total and earning its second consecutive title (submitted photo).

CHALLENGE continued from page 30

ing system that would allow him to engage in play more freely and joyfully. The Access Play team presented their prototype before a panel of judges and a live audience at the Helios Education Foundation, earning top recognition for their creativity, engineering, and empathy.

Access Play was the only all-female team among the finalists – and this marked Xavier’s first year participating in the competition.

Open house event scheduled

Valley eighth graders who are interested in learning more about Arizona School for the Arts (ASA), located at 1410 N. 3rd St., are invited, along with their families to an open house event Friday, Dec. 5, from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

Attendees will learn about ASA’s rigorous academics, college prep focus and performing arts education. During the event, families can meet the high school teachers, staff and leadership team and see what makes ASA an A-rated experience.

Learn more by visiting <https://goasa.org/applynow>.

Student-athletes achieve state victories

Congratulations are in order for Brophy golf and Brophy swim and dive on their AIA Division I State Championship victories in November.

The golf team captured the AIA Division I State Championship on Nov. 6, finishing 12 strokes ahead of Hamilton (549–561). The Broncos

shot 277 (-11) in the final round, with all four scoring golfers finishing in the top 10. The win marks the program’s 11th state title, tying for the most by an individual school in state history, and the first back-to-back championships since 1993–94.

Two days later, the Swim and Dive team secured its 44th state championship with a state-record 582 points, extending its record total and earning its second consecutive title. It was also the 13th championship under Coach Pat O’Neill, capping another dominant performance that showcased the team’s exceptional depth.

Xavier athletes sign Grant in Aid agreements

Fifteen Xavier student-athletes signed their Grant in Aid agreements during a November event at Xavier’s Virginia G. Piper Performing Arts Center. Previously called National Letters of Intent, Grant in Aid is a financial scholarship for a student-athlete to help pay for college. The Grant in Aid can be a full or partial scholarship. According to the NCAA, less than 2 percent of high school students are awarded a college athletic scholarship.

The student-athletes included Isabella Piazza, golf; Bianca Willis, soccer; Chloe Cundiff, soccer; Ivy Schuman, soccer; Kyleigh Carr, soccer; Nev Herzog, soccer; Olivia Yu, soccer; Myriam Lawrence, soccer; Francesca Diaz, soccer; Kylie Barr, beach volleyball; Kate MacDonald, beach volleyball; Vivian Hickman, volleyball; Selah O’Connor, volleyball; Allison Dunnion, volleyball; and Mattea Saunders, volleyball.

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Senior Living Classes help you get active, stay curious

Through its Creative Aging classes, JFCS (Jewish Family & children’s Service) offers a little something for every curious mind by encouraging adults aged 60 and over to engage, move forward and have fun. Registration is now open for classes beginning in January.

The winter session of Creative Color Art will help participants build on drawing skills by exploring charcoal, graphite, colored pencil, and pastel. Learn how to capture light, texture and shadow to add depth and realism to artwork. Whether a beginner or a continuing artist, all materials are provided to help you create expressive, high-impact pieces. The class begins Jan. 5

In Drums for Life, beginning Jan. 6, participants will discover the healing power of rhythm in this interactive drumming series. Perfect for adults of



Adults aged 60 and older will find a variety of activities available beginning in January through the JFCS Creative Aging classes (submitted photo).

all ages, enjoy stress relief, improved coordination, and the joy of community through percussion.

Line Dancing gets you moving and grooving to favorite country, oldies and contemporary tunes. Beginning Jan. 7, learn popular line dances like Cowboy Boogie, Stayin’ Alive, and Three Little Birds.

Those looking for a relaxing way to

improve balance, flexibility, and overall well-being are invited to sign up for Quang Ping Yang Tai Chi workshop, which begins Jan. 8.

Beginning Feb. 2, participants in Stage & Story: A Readers Theatre Series with Breona Conrad, will study a single play to explore acting techniques and text analysis, culminating in a live performance of selected scenes in chronological order. Performed in a readers-theatre style, the presentation relies on voice, posture, and facial expression rather than memorization or movement.

Finally, Move with Adriana – Zumba Gold will help participants feel fantastic with low-impact dance fitness to energizing Latin and international rhythms. Perfect for active adults and beginners, this class boosts balance, flexibility, and coordination. Class begins Feb. 17.

For complete program details or to register, visit www.jfcsaz.org/our-services/older-adults-services.

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HOV honors family traditions

Family traditions enrich the holiday season, and for Hispanic families in the community, Día de los Muertos is an especially meaningful observance, says Lin Sue Flood, director of community engagement at Hospice of the Valley

“Though the name translates to ‘Day of the Dead,’ this cherished Mexican holiday is not a morbid occasion. Instead, it is a vibrant celebration that honors those we hold dear through ofrendas (altars) adorned with photos, favorite foods and bright marigolds, alongside music and dancing,” she added.

Hospice of the Valley’s New Song Center for Grieving Children recently held its third annual Día de los Muertos event to help families remember and celebrate their loved ones. The free family-friendly event hosted over 300 attendees and featured a beautiful ofrenda, a mariachi band, Mexican folk dancers, face painting and food trucks. Organizer Dulce Rodriguez noted that the event helps reinforce family bonds across generations and strengthens cultural identity.

“This observance affirms that death is a natural part of life,” she said.

GENERATIONS

“Celebrating in this way provides immense comfort and helps pass down traditions, stories and values to the younger generations.”

Elvia Ramirez, who lost her husband a year ago, said, “New Song support groups helped a lot because I know I’m not alone. I see other people going through the same pain and it helps me get through my pain.”

New Song Center offers grief support groups for children, teens, young adults and parents at no cost. Families may enroll by calling 480-951-8985 or emailing info@newsongcenter.org. Looking for support in Spanish? Call 602-776-6789.

Senior service keeps generations connected

For Kelly Cornelius, owner of Home Instead, Home Care Service of Scottsdale & Phoenix, there is something extraordinary about watching seven-year-old Everly bound through the front door of her 98-year-old great-grandma Norma’s home. The moment she bursts in, two generations light up – one full of curiosity and wonder, the other radiating joy, pride and wisdom earned over nearly a century.

This simple family moment captures something profound: the power of connection between children and older adults, Cornelius says.

“At Home Instead, we see every day how meaningful these relationships can be,” Cornelius said. “For seniors, time with children brings energy, laughter and purpose. For kids, it teaches empathy, patience, and respect for aging – lessons our world needs now more than ever.”

Cornelius believes these small, intergenerational interactions – baking cookies, sharing stories, or simply spending time together – are vital to building stronger families and communities.

“When Everly barges through Grandma Norma’s front door, I see different energy and light radiate from each of them – it’s a rare and special relationship – and proof that love and laughter are ageless” she said.

Cornelius hopes her story inspires others to make time for those connections that remind us all: aging is something to be honored and celebrated, not feared. Residents who would like to learn more about services offered through Home Instead can find information at www.homeinstead.com/808.



Everly shared a moment of connection and fun with her Great-grandma Norma on a recent visit to the 98-year-old’s home (photo courtesy of Kelly Cornelius, Home Instead).

Kids & Families
Check out Phoenix activity centers

With winter break on the horizon, North Central families who are looking to keep children engaged and active on a budget are invited to explore the programs offered at city of Phoenix youth and activity centers.

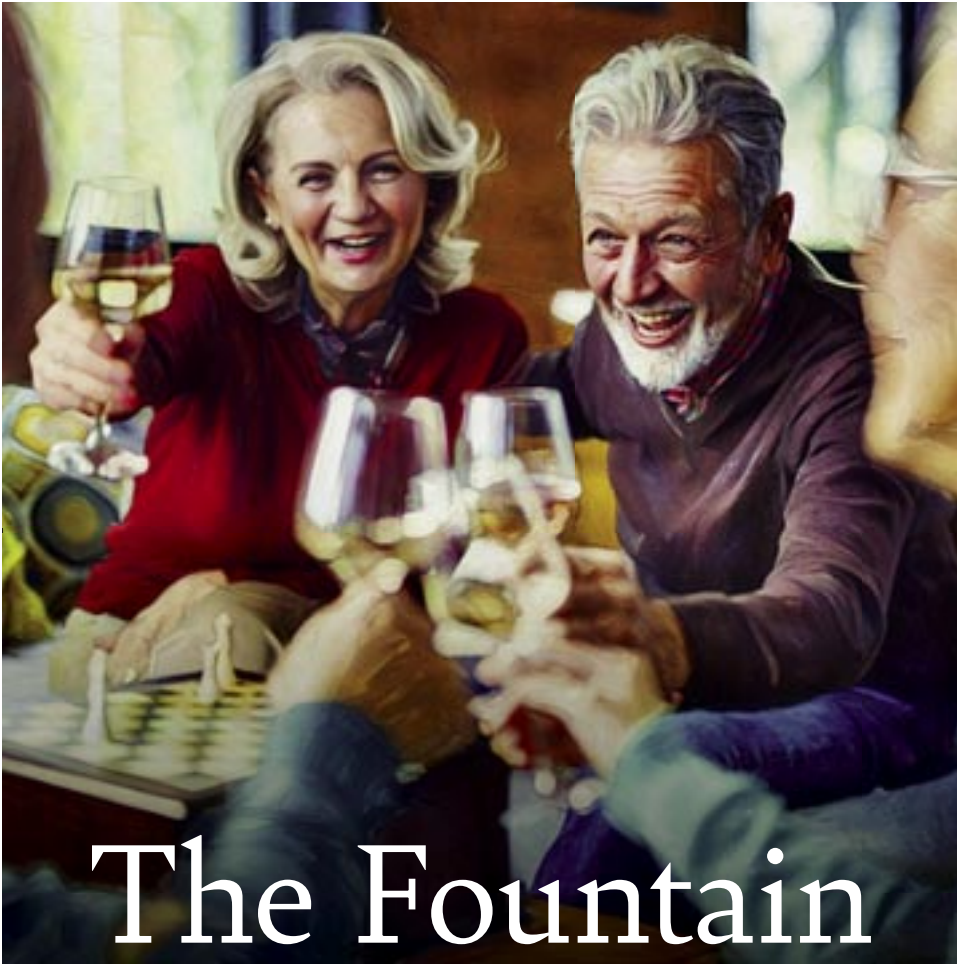
In Sunnyslope, stop by the Sunnyslope Youth Center at 1702 W. Peoria Ave. The center is the result of the Sunnyslope Village Alliance working with the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department to create a fun center for youth 17 and under.

Open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 3 to 8 p.m.; Wednesday, 2 to 8 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the center offers seasonal dance, art, sports and educational programs. It is adjacent to the Winifred Green Park, complete with a full sized basketball court, playground and sports field. Contact the center by calling 602-534-5088.

A little further west is the Washington Activity Center at 2240 W. Citrus Way. Built in 1969, it is a multi-generational facility with a full size gymnasium, seven activity rooms and an auditorium. The center offers a wide variety of activities and services to the public at a minimal cost, including programs for toddlers, youth, teenagers, adults and seniors.

The center sits adjacent to Washington Park, which boasts open green space and traditional park amenities (basketball and volleyball court, soft-

please see CENTERS on page 36



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GENERATIONS

CENTERS continued from page 35

ball and soccer fields). Young residents can sign up for a variety of classes at the center with a range of costs – from free to \$50 for programs and classes and \$75 for Spring Break Camp (March 16 to 20). Annual membership passes to Parks and Recreation Department community centers and neighborhood recreation centers is \$20 for Phoenix residents (\$5 for youth age 17 and younger). Day passes are available for \$1 (youth) and \$2 (adults). Learn more by visiting www.phoenix.gov/parks.

Arts academy opens spring registration

Spring registration at North Central Performing Arts opened on Nov. 1, and the Valley’s young residents are invited to step onto the stage and experience the performing arts in a collaborative, creative environment that is geared towards children from pre-K to sixth grade. Programs are open to children ages 4-14, and the spring session will feature “Adventures in Candyland” for Musical

Minis (pre-K to kindergarten); “Willy Wonka KIDS” for Rising Stars (first through fourth grade); and “The Little Mermaid Jr.” for Center Stage (fifth and sixth grade). Sessions begin in late January and run through May, with performances the week of May 25-31. All rehearsals are held at The Venue Student Center at First Christian Church of Phoenix, 6750 N. 7th Ave. In addition, families are invited to attend a performance of the fall session’s students, who will present “Mary Poppins Jr.” and “Annie KIDS,” at the Kroc Performing Arts Center Dec. 19-21. For additional information, visit www.northcentralperformingarts.com.

Free programs help Phoenix get fit

Residents of all ages are invited to get a jump on New Year’s resolutions by connecting to healthy community resources through the city of Phoenix FitPHX programs. FitPHX is a citywide initiative dedicated to improving health and wellness in the region and making Phoenix one

of the healthiest cities in the nation. The initiative connects the community to city of Phoenix programs and services, promoting all-inclusive health and wellness for the mind, body and spirit by providing no-cost community programs open to all ages, levels, and abilities. Programs offered include Morning Yoga at Encanto Park Clubhouse, 2499 N. 15th Ave., held the second Saturday of each month from 9-10 a.m. The final class for 2025 will be held Dec. 13. To learn about this program, call 602-262-6864 or send an email fitphx@phoenix.gov. Also available are a variety of free virtual classes that can be accessed at residents’ convenience. Access to all virtual programs is available 24 hours, 7 days a week. Programs focus on strength, flow, cardio, yoga, movement and more. Finally, grab your friends or family, head to your local park and look for the WalkPHX signs for a self-led walking program. WalkPHX walking paths feature detailed route signage and mileage markers to help participants track their fitness goals. In the North Central area, find paths at Los Olivos Park, North

Mountain Park, Rose Mofford Sports Complex, Steele Indian School Park and Washington Park, among others. Learn more at www.phoenix.gov/fitphx. **Event explores Indigenous culture** The 48th Annual S’edav Va’aki Museum Indian Market (formerly known as Pueblo Grande Museum Indian Market) takes place on Saturday, Dec. 13 and Sunday, Dec. 14, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 4619 E. Washington St. in Phoenix. This cultural event, held outdoors on the campus of the S’edav Va’aki Museum, allows attendees to experience Indigenous culture firsthand. The market features dozens of Native American artists vending fine art, crafts and cultural items, as well as main stage performances, cultural demonstrator area and food sales. All items sold at the Indian Market comply with The Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) of 1990 and are authentic and handmade. Call 602-534-2430 or visit www.phoenix.gov/svmuseum.

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From high school marching bands, dance crews and car enthusiasts to neighborhood groups, local leaders and Valley businesses, Phoenix will come together for the 38th annual APS Electric Light Parade on Saturday, Dec. 6 (photo courtesy of city of Phoenix).

Annual parade lights up the night

For more than three decades, the APS Electric Light Parade has been an event where families, neighborhood groups and businesses from across the city come together to celebrate the joy of the holiday season. For the 38th annual parade, which takes place at 7 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 6, in North Central Phoenix, Make-A-Wish Arizona will serve as grand marshal.

With a theme of “Let It Glow,” the free, family-friendly event will begin at Central and Montebello avenues and head south to Camelback Road, where the parade will turn east, travelling to 7th Street and continuing south to Indian School Road, where the parade ends.

Beginning at 6 a.m. on the day of the parade, street restrictions and closures will be in place in the surrounding area. For information, visit www.phoenix.gov/elp.

Attendees will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in hands-on activities, explore local vendors and food trucks and connect with Valley cultural organizations.

In addition, join the King and Queen from Medieval Times to read an enchanting story and participate in Junior Knights Training; marvel at our friends from the animal kingdom with Wild Man Dan; say hello to local artists and vendors such as Art by Jalila and Dragon Heart Hot Sauce; play in the kids’ activity area; wander through the Rosson House Museum; have tasty treats from Island Boyz Jerk Spot and Kabobski; and much more.

The Square PHX, at 113 N. Sixth St., is a striking reminder of the city’s vibrant Victorian past. Located on Block 14 of the original townsite of Phoenix, it dates back to the late 1800s, and the restored Rosson House Museum is its crowning jewel.

For additional information, visit www.thesquarephx.org.

Explore Medieval fun at Faire at the Square

The Square PHX will host its second annual Faire at the Square, a day of whimsical fun with food, local vendors and medieval-themed entertainment and activities, Saturday, Dec. 6.

The free family-friendly festival features a dynamic lineup of interactive activities, thrilling demonstrations, and engaging community partners, sponsored by Visit Phoenix.

Vocal group brings holiday magic to stage

An a cappella concert by Southwest Vocal Alliance will bring the warmth of classic carols sung in the Barbershop style, the energy of modern holiday hits and fresh twists on the songs you know by heart, to its “Holiday Magic” scheduled for 3 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 14 at First United Methodist Church, 5510 N. Central Ave.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Kids 12 and under are free at this family-friendly concert; adult tickets are \$20 online or \$25 at the door. Proceeds support the group’s mission to foster musical education and bring people together through the power of harmony. Learn more or purchase tickets online at www.svabhs.com

Orpheus chorus sings the season

The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix invites residents to celebrate the season with “Holidays with Orpheus,” a festive concert series filled with holiday warmth, global carols and timeless classics. Now in its 97th season, Orpheus continues its tradition of bringing communities together through song, this year joined by two exceptional guest artists: renowned organist Dr. Steven Gray and violinist Courtney Pinski.

This year’s program blends sacred works, holiday favorites and playful surprises, including “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year,” Irving Berlin’s Christmas medley, and the audience-favorite sing-along. And yes – the



The “reindeer” will make a return this season as the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix presents its festive holiday season concert (submitted photo).

reindeer will be back on the dance floor with Greg Gilpin’s lively Holiday Tango. In the North Central area, Camelback Bible Church will host a 3 p.m. performance on Saturday, Dec. 6. Performances also will be held Dec. 7 and 13. Tickets range from \$20 to \$35 (free for children 12 and under) and are available at www.orpheus.org or by calling the box office at 602-699-4556.

Shop and celebrate at Phoestivus market

The famously quirky holiday market Phoestivus, presented by Community Food Connections, is back for its 16th year, and this time with a brand-new location and a one-night-only celebration. Holiday shoppers can join the fun on

Friday, Dec. 12, from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Arizona Center, 455 N. 3rd St., for an evening of local shopping, live music, food and festive cheer. The annual market brings together more than 175 vendors offering handmade goods, artisanal gifts and locally grown treats. Guests can enjoy live entertainment, interactive holiday activities and photo opportunities with fan-favorite Phreddie the Yeti. Whether checking off a gift list or soaking up downtown’s holiday vibes, the market is a can’t-miss tradition celebrating community and connection. As the premier fundraiser for the Downtown Phoenix Farmers Market, the annual event supports Community Food Connections, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) dedicated to enhancing access to nutritious, locally grown food in the heart of the city. A suggested donation of \$5 per person is encouraged at the gate to support the Downtown Phoenix Farmers Market, but it is not required. The event is a family-friendly, all-ages event, and dogs are welcome too. Find additional details at www.phoestivus.com.



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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

On the Town

The holiday season has arrived and there are lots of ways this month to soak up the holiday spirit. Whether it is a lighted stroll through outdoor wonderlands, dance, choir and theater performances, or live music at a local venue, the season beckons. See you on the town in December!

Opera for Lunch

Dec. 3
Arizona Opera
www.azopera.org; 602-266-7464

Drunk Christmas Carol

Dec. 3 – Jan. 4
The Rose Theatre at Arizona Center
www.drunkchristmas.com

Dirty Yachtin' Scoundrels

Dec. 4
The Rhythm Room
www.rhythmroom.com; 602-612-4981

Santa's Country Jamboree

Dec. 5
Herberger Theater Center
www.herbergertheater.org;
602-252-8497



Las Noches de las Luminarias

Dec. 5-6
Desert Botanical Garden
www.dbg.org; 480-941-1225

'Black Nativity'

Dec. 5-14
Black Theatre Troupe at Helen K. Mason Performing Arts Center
www.blacktheatretrope.org;
602-258-8128

'A Winnie-the-Pooh Christmas Tail'

Dec. 5-23
Valley Youth Theatre
www.vyt.com; 602-253-8188

Jim Martinez: A Charlie Brown Christmas

Dec. 6
The Nash
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

Sydney Sprague

Dec. 6
Valley Bar
www.valleybarphx.com; 602-716-2222



La Santa Cecilia

Dec. 9
Crescent Ballroom
www.crescentphx.com; 602-716-2222

Andy Bell of Erasure

Dec. 9
The Van Buren
www.thevanburenphx.com;
480-659-1641

Daffo

Dec. 12
Valley Bar
www.valleybarphx.com; 602-716-2222

'The Nutcracker'

Dec. 12-14
Convergence Ballet/
Ballet Theatre of Phoenix
Herberger Theater Center
www.herbergertheater.org;
602-252-8497

'The Nutcracker'

Dec. 12-27
Ballet Arizona
www.balletaz.org; 602-381-1096

'Let Your Spirit Sparkle'

Dec. 13-14
Phoenix Gay Men's Chorus
at Orpheum Theatre
www.orpheumphx.com/events

14th Annual Phoenix Festival of the Arts

Dec. 13-14
Margaret T. Hance Park
www.phoenixcenterforthearts.org

"Nikki Claus and Merry Moose, A Holiday Ballet"

Dec. 13-14
DanceMotion Performing Company
at Madison Center for the Arts
www.themadison.org;
602-664-7777

Bad Cactus Brass Band

Dec. 14
The Nash
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

'Looking Over the President's Shoulder'

Thru Dec. 14
The Phoenix Theatre Company
www.phoenixtheatre.com;
602-254-2151

Ghost in the Willow

Dec. 18
The Rebel Lounge
www.therebellounge.com

Shannon and the Clams

Dec. 19
Crescent Ballroom
www.crescentphx.com;
602-716-2222

'A Chorale Christmas'

Dec. 19-22
Phoenix Chorale
www.phoenixchorale.org;
602-253-2224

The Ellington Nutcracker Suite

Dec. 20
The Nash
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

'Yuletide'

Dec. 20
Phoenix Boys Choir at MIM
www.mim.org; 480-478-6000

'The Arizona Nutcracker'

Dec. 20-21
Dance Studio 111
at Madison Center for the Arts
www.themadison.org;
602-664-7777

'Christmas Baroque'

Dec. 21-22
The Phoenix Symphony
at Orpheum Theatre
www.phoenixsymphony.org;
602-495-1999

'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer'

Thru Dec. 22
Childsplay
at Herberger Theater Center
www.childsplayaz.org; 480-921-5700



'The Muppet Christmas Carol'

Dec. 23
Orpheum Theatre
www.orpheumphx.com/events

Santo Perreo: Latin Dance Night

Dec. 26
The Rebel Lounge
www.therebellounge.com

Holidays at the Heard

Dec. 27-29
Heard Museum
<https://heard.org>; 602-252-8840

'A Christmas Carol'

Thru Dec. 28
The Phoenix Theatre Company
www.phoenixtheatre.com;
602-254-2151

New Year's Eve: All-American Dance Party

Dec. 31
The Phoenix Symphony
www.phoenixsymphony.org;
602-495-1999

Blues New Year's Eve

Dec. 31
The Rhythm Room
www.rhythmroom.com; 602-612-4981

New Year's Eve: Dennis Rowland & Delphine Cortez

Dec. 31
The Nash
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

ZooLights

Thru Jan. 16
Phoenix Zoo
www.phoenixzoo.org; 602-286-3800

All event dates are current at the time of publication. Check with individual venues for up-to-date show information. Find events throughout the month at www.northcentralnews.net/events.

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MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
NOVEMBER 2025						
24 	25	OPEN Thanksgiving Market 9a – 1p	26	27	28 OPEN Small Business Saturday 8a – 1p	29
DECEMBER 2025						
1 	2 OPEN Holiday Shopping 9a – 1p	3	4	5 CLOSED for the APS Electric Light Parade	6	7
8 	9 OPEN Holiday Shopping 9a – 1p	10	11	12 OPEN Special Holiday Market! 8a – 1p	13	14
15 	16 OPEN Holiday Shopping 9a – 1p	17	18 	19	20 OPEN Special Holiday Market! 8a – 1p	21
22 	23	24 CLOSED Christmas Eve	25 	26	27 OPEN Holiday Recovery 8a-1p	28
29	30 	31 OPEN New Year's Eve Market! 9a-1p	JANUARY 2026			
		1	2	3 CLOSED for the Fiesta Bowl Parade	4	

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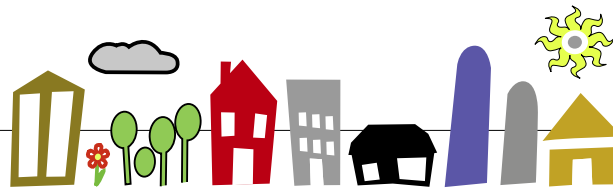
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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Café Chat

Bakery takes cakes to new heights

By Marjorie Rice

Twenties-era jazz plays in The Velvet Buttercream's small shop as chef-owner Aaron John Curiel spins a petite layer cake on a decorating stand, spreading on buttercream in a silky-smooth layer. The aroma of chocolate – cakes baking in the back kitchen – wafts through the small shop, filling every corner and triggering this chocolate into a salivating state.

Curiel's culinary roots go back to the 1940s, when his great-grandfather opened a bakery in Holbrook. Curiel's grandfather came back from the Vietnam war and went to work with his dad, and eventually he and Curiel's grandmother started adding lunch items such as burritos and sandwiches.

"That side of the business got busier and busier, and when my great-grandfather retired in the early '70s, my grandparents bought the business and phased out the bakery side of it and turned it into what it is today."

That would be Romo's Café, a Holbrook institution, known, among other menu staples, for its frybread.

"My grandfather made it bigger and more accessible to a restaurant crowd," Curiel said. "The building is still in the family."

Curiel, who grew up in Show Low, carried on with the family tradition.

"When you're close to a restaurant it becomes part of your life, and it's fun," he said. "I started doing culinary in high school and when I graduated, I wanted to continue going with it."

There were 24 grandkids, but Curiel is the sole professional cook among them. "I'm the only one who followed in my grandfather's footsteps," he said. "I think he would have been proud to see this place, to see one of his offspring do this. When I opened, three years ago, I dedicated it to him. My grandmother was here for the ribbon-cutting."

Curiel also credits Blue Ridge High School teacher Kay Shores for encouraging his career. "She was so hands-on with us, finding kids who wanted to do more, to be more, and give us that opportunity to continue growing," he said. "Unfortunately, they eliminated



Chef-owner Aaron John Curiel spins a petite layer cake on a decorating stand, spreading on a smooth layer of frosting at The Velvet Buttercream, his shop at 7th Avenue and Camelback Road (photo by Darryl Webb for North Central News).

her program. It hurts me to hear that because, had I not had that experience, I don't know if I would have been in this industry. It's really frustrating. I see what I was able to get out of it, and I wish that was something that everybody could continue with."

Curiel went on to culinary school at the Art Institute in Phoenix. "I tried to do culinary as a whole and I found I was better at baking pastry," he said. "That's what I aimed for."

Another mentor was Matt Simon, executive chef at Torreon Grille in Show Low. "He really took me under his wing and showed me the ropes," Curiel said. "I got my work ethic from him. Matt taught me design and how to do beautiful things."

Simon was a stern taskmaster. "One time he made me pipe little butter pats in squares and every one had to be correct. If any one was off, he made me take them all out and re-start. It only took me one time to mess up, and I learned. It made me a better chef."

His career continued with jobs including cake decorating at an Albertson's bakery and a wedding cake company in Maryland before moving back to Phoenix and back to Albertson's, then Whole Foods and La Grande Orange.

"At Albertson's, I learned to be really fast," he said. "The fastest I ever decorated was one cake every minute and 20 seconds – and still made it look really nice."

Perfection certainly shows in Curiel's baked goods, with a menu centered on his six-inch, three-layer cakes, which start at \$42 and go up with size and complexity of design for signature cakes.

While in those early jobs, Curiel began working on a concept for his own bakery. At age 30 he began visiting coffee shops, seeing how they operated, getting inspiration, and making cakes in his home kitchen.

A friend convinced him to contribute to the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce Festival of Trees in 2017, and he put out 500 mini-cupcakes for the event, his table decorated with ornaments from Goodwill. By the end of the event, every cupcake was gone, and "people were raving about them," Curiel said. "That put us on the map."

He left La Grande Orange and the next week COVID hit.

"It was a blessing and a curse," he said. "Grocery stores stopped doing custom cake orders, and there I was. We went from one or two cake orders every week to four or five cakes every day. The word started spreading like wildfire."

He saved up enough money over seven years to open his own shop, a small space with a front case filled with lemon tarts, ganache tarts, cookies, macarons and cupcakes, mini-cakes and rolls and other small bites. His grandfather's carrot cake is a favorite, along with Scarlett O'Hara, a red velvet cupcake with buttercream icing,

topped with cream cheese icing, bourbon caramel dark chocolate drizzle and toasted pecans. Customers also can order party platters, pies, Buche de Noel and other holiday favorites.

At press time, Curiel hadn't settled on a December special, but past years have featured his Joyeux Noel, a red velvet cake filled with chocolate ganache and peppermint buttercream, iced with more peppermint buttercream and decorated with chocolate macarons and other fancy designs.

"It's one of our big-time favorites," he said.

The Velvet Buttercream, 702 W. Camelback Road, Suite 5, is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sunday. For information, call 602-734-1408 or visit www.velvetbuttercream.com.

Dining Briefs

Sip the season at festive events

Heading into December, residents both young and old who may be ready for a little seasonal escape will find three festive ways to ease their way into the holidays.

First up is Miracle at Floor 13, at Floor 13 Rooftop Bar inside the Hilton Garden Inn Phoenix Downtown, 15 E. Monroe St. The pop-up bar, which boasts a holiday oasis featuring over the top kitschy, festive décor and a themed cocktail menu, launched prior to Thanksgiving and runs through Dec. 30.

Indulge in fan favorites such as the Christmapolitan and Snowball Old-Fashioned, along with new-this-year concoctions such as Candy Cane Lane, Dancing Sugarplums, Blitzen Barrel and Miracle Mouse. Hours are Sunday through Thursday, 5-10 p.m., and Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m. to midnight. The Grinch will be in the house on Dec. 12, 19 and 22 from 7-10 p.m. Visit <https://floor13rooftopbar.com/miracle-bar> to book.

Over at Bitter & Twisted Cocktail Parlour, 1 W. Jefferson, Sippin' Santa returns for its seventh year, transforming the space into a tropical holiday wonderland filled with rum-soaked cheer, festive décor and seasonal cocktails. Through Dec. 28, guests can book a \$15 experience to unlock two

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



The rooftop bar at Hilton Garden Inn will once again host its holiday-themed cocktail pop-up, running through Dec. 30 and featuring a seasonal cocktail menu (submitted photo).

hours of holiday magic – including a secret Santa gift and unforgettable tiki vibes. Walk-ins are welcome, but reservations guarantee a spot.

This year’s roster of cocktails features new creations such as the Coco Ho Ho, Frost Bite and Wreck The Halls. Beloved returning favorites include Jingle Bird, Sugar Plum Mai Tai, and the original Sippin’ Santa. Find details and book a slot at www.bitterandtwistedaz.com/sippin.

Finally, hop on Platform 18 for a cozy 45-minute journey through the Rockies, complete with hot cocoa, freshly baked cookies and surprise visits from Santa every Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 29 through Dec. 21.

Typically a space reserved for high-end cocktails, Platform 18 hosts this seasonal family-friendly event at its station in Century Grand, 3626 E. Indian School Road, which also houses UnderTow and Grey Hen Rx. For information or to book, visit www.centurygrandphx.com/platform18.

Cowboy Seafood eyes 2026 Park Central opening

The latest concept from Common Ground Culinary will bring barbecue and premium seafood together in a “hospitality-forward dining experience” at Park Central next year.

The team behind The Collins Small Batch Kitchen, Grassroots Kitchen & Tap, The Macintosh and The Neighborly, Common Ground Culinary announced in November that its newest concept, Cowboy Seafood, is coming to the Midtown Phoenix spot in 2026.

A first-of-its-kind restaurant pair-

ing BBQ Belt-inspired, “competition-level” barbecue with an elevated seafood and raw bar program, the restaurant represents the next major evolution in founder Christopher Collins’s culinary journey, and the boldest expression yet of his signature hospitality philosophy, he said.

“Cowboy Seafood is the culmination of everything I’ve learned in my career,” Collins said. “It’s two programs that Common Ground already does exceptionally well, both seafood and barbecue, brought together and taken to their absolute peak. This is food I love to eat, cooked with intention and served in a space designed to feel alive.”

At the eatery, guests will experience barbecue smoked over a custom dual-spit Santa Maria grill and a state-of-the-art J&R Manufacturing smoker, the same Texas-built equipment used by some of the nation’s top pitmasters. Collins and his culinary team traveled to Mesquite, Texas to collaborate with J&R’s fourth-generation team, ensuring Cowboy Seafood’s smoke program is both authentic and technically precise. True to his competitive drive, Collins plans to take the program on the road.

“We’ll be entering competitions, attending festivals, and developing a mobile rig for catering and events,” he said.

The restaurant’s signature smoke flavor comes from a blend of oak, pecan and dried corn husk, a technique Collins describes as giving a “sharp, bright smoke at the start that fades into a long, clean burn.”

Balancing the barbecue is the *please see COWBOY on page 44*

Coming in 2026
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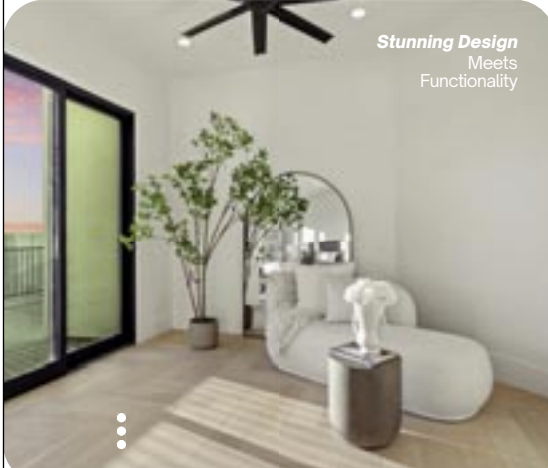
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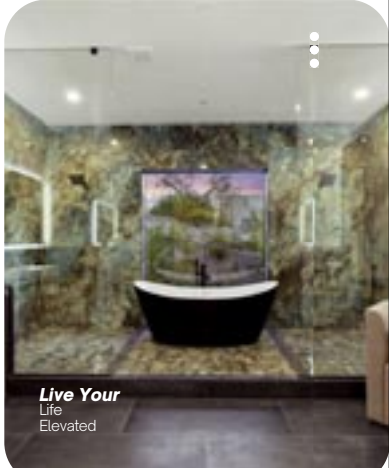
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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

COWBOY *continued from page 43*

Saltwater Saint Raw Bar, an evolving in-house concept within Common Ground Culinary's portfolio. This full raw bar will feature oysters, shrimp, pokes and sushi rolls, alongside eight fresh cuts of fish, daily prepared grilled, pan-seared, broiled, or blackened.

The space is designed in collaboration with Ideation Design Group and developed with Plaza Company, to create a 5,000-square-foot space they hope captures both the rugged charm of a Southern smokehouse and the freshness of a coastal eatery. The interior blends raw wood textures with blue-and-white tile, glass and neon signage.

Among its distinctive design elements: an eight-foot taxidermied swordfish wearing a cowboy hat will be visible through the Central Avenue-facing window, an emblem of the restaurant's playful duality. Inside, guests can gather at a 12-seat community table, a 22-seat island bar, or booth-lined dining areas that accommodate 80 guests indoors and another 80 on the patio.

Visit www.cowboyseafood.com for more information.

New taco shop promises 'escapist lounge' energy

Poolhouse Group, the family behind Gadzooks Enchiladas & Soup and The Green Woodpecker, will give their popup and food festival favorite a brick-and-mortar home of its own this December, when Poolboy Taco opens in the former Camelback Gadzooks, which closed Nov. 8.

Born from a chalkboard brainstorming session in 2014, the Poolboy Taco was created by brothers Aaron and Jared Pool. The new restaurant, located at 4031 E. Camelback Road, reimagines the 1950's-era quick-service experience with a "cheeky, design-forward vibe that blends festival energy with midcentury, poolside nostalgia." With interiors conceived in collaboration with local design firm House of Form, owners describe the space as "a refined, escapist taco lounge where indulgence meets irony, where Slim Aarons meets Palm Springs."

Guests will be met with pastel neons, terrazzo flooring, brass accents, and sculptural banquettes that channel both retro diners and poolside cabanas. Expect cushy red vinyl banquettes, terrazzo tables, playful murals, and a PHX heart wall installation. A golden seal



At the new 5,000-square-foot Cowboy Seafood at Park Central, the Common Ground Culinary design team aims to capture both the rugged charm of a Southern smokehouse and the freshness of a coastal eatery (photo courtesy of Ideation Design Group).

sculpture serves as a tongue-in-cheek mascot, while outside, a cabana-style patio lined with hedges and striped seating creates a breezy extension of the dining room.

At just over 2,100 square feet, the space will seat 45 to 55 guests, split between the interior lounge and dining areas and the outdoor patio. The kitchen has been enclosed in glass, giving diners a glimpse of the action. Ordering takes place at a new counter, accented with brass rails, striped fronts, and a retro marquee. Drinks, including frozen cocktails, margaritas and draft beer, are picked up at the counter and enjoyed in branded 32-ounce cups, designed to be collectible.

The menu builds from the taco that started it all: the Poolboy Taco, also known as the "festival taco," which has won multiple awards. Offered in both soft and crunchy versions, it will be joined by options including a beef taco, a breakfast taco, nachos, a composed enchilada, a salad and a bowl option. The eatery will also feature a Taco of the Month program, designed to showcase collaborations with other local chefs, and limited-time creations. A salsa bar, featuring five house salsas ranging from pico de gallo to habanero, offers exploration. For dessert, the restaurant will rotate cake varieties including carrot and German chocolate, alongside seasonal specialties that build on the Pool family's tradition of craveable sweets.

For Aaron Pool, this new permanent location fills a gap in the area dining landscape.

"People here want a place that's fun, social, and not overly expensive, but

still feels special," he said. "Poolboy is built to be that third space and a spot where you can grab a margarita, hang out on the patio and feel like you're somewhere completely different."

Poolboy Taco is expected to open this month. Guests can follow @poolboytaco on Instagram or visit www.poolboytaco.com for updates and information.

Farmers market celebrates the holiday season

With the holiday season kicking into high gear, the Uptown Farmers Market is ready to help residents prepare with two special holiday markets.

Currently open on Wednesdays (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and Saturdays (8 a.m. to 1 p.m.) at North Phoenix Baptist Church, 5757 N. Central Ave., the market will hold Saturday holiday markets and Dec. 13 and 20. The market will also be open the Saturday after Christmas, Dec. 27, for those prepping to ring in the new year.

Shoppers will find everything from pantry essentials, bakery items and sweets, fresh fruits and vegetables and vegan offerings, beef, fish and other meat products, health items, coffee, tea and other beverages and artisan gifts perfect for holiday giving.

In addition, residents should be aware of two Saturday closures for upcoming parades, which are staged at the church – Dec. 6, for the APS Electric Light Parade, and Jan. 3 for the Fiesta Bowl Parade.

For additional information about vendors and upcoming Uptown Farmers Market events, visit www.uptownmarketaz.com.

Chula announces special at Uptown location

Diners looking for shrimp tacos can catch a fresh batch every Tuesday at Chula Seafood Uptown Phoenix, 100 E. Camelback Road, Suite 172.

The Shrimp Tacos Dorados dish features two crunchy tacos stuffed with chopped shrimp, diced tomato, onion, red bell pepper, poblano and garlic, all topped with crispy iceberg lettuce and fresh tomato. The tacos are accompanied by a cup of tortilla soup made with tomato, guajillo, ancho chiles and onion, topped with crema, queso fresco, tortilla strips and cilantro. The cost is \$21 (plus tax and gratuity). Guests can add a frozen margarita to the mix for \$10.

Coming in the second quarter of 2026, diners will find a fourth Valley Chula location when the brand opens a new space at the Arizona Center, 455 N. 3rd St., Suite 1180, in downtown Phoenix. Chula Seafood Downtown will feature a full bar, fresh and unique seafood selections and specials, much like its sister locations in Uptown Phoenix, South Scottsdale and North Scottsdale.

Contact the Uptown location at 602-354-3599 or visit www.chulaseafood.com for additional information.

Salt & Straw opens at Uptown Plaza

Ice cream brand Salt & Straw opened a new scoop shop in North Central's Uptown Plaza, 100 E. Camelback Road, Suite 104, on Nov. 7. The shop is the brand's third Arizona location.

The founders, cousins Kim and Tyler Malek, say that the shop puts a spin on the traditional ice cream experience by using the treat as a medium for storytelling and connection: "At the core of each artfully created flavor is a story about a local purveyor, farmer or artisan who helped bring it to life," the owners said.

Head ice cream maker and co-founder Tyler Malek created a menu of 13 classic, always-available flavors, including Sea Salt Caramel Ribbons, Honey Lavender, Arbequina Olive Oil, and Chocolate Gooey Brownie. Beyond its menu mainstays, the monthly rotating menu series invites guests to explore new ideas and ingredients by highlighting regional partnerships and culture moments, in unexpected and delicious ways.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The monthly rotating menus tell the stories of artisans, farmers and seasonal food moments. For example, in keeping with the brand’s ethos of championing local culinary players, for its November opening, the shop debuted an Arizona-exclusive flavor in collaboration with Chef Lawrence Smith from Phoenix’s acclaimed Chilte – the Mole de Novia with Brown Butter Plantains, featuring brown butter plantains and mole novia white chocolate fudge. Follow the shop on social media to see what new flavors are on the horizon.

The Uptown Plaza shop is open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. For more information, visit www.saltandstraw.com.

Restaurant group serves up holiday cheer

Fox Restaurant Concepts is serving up holiday cheer across its family of restaurants with limited-time menus, handcrafted festive cocktails and celebrations made for every occasion.

Doughbird makes holiday dining effortless with festive to-go offerings. For Christmas Eve, the eatery offers Prime Rib To-Go, complete with horse-radish dauphinoise potato, broccolini and caramelized onion, Caesar salad,



Adding to its variety of classic, always-available flavors, ice cream brand Salt & Straw, now open at Uptown Plaza, will feature a monthly rotating menu of tasty treats that focus on local connections (submitted photo).

peppercorn thyme au jus and butter-scotch cream cake. Orders will be accepted Dec. 3 through 23, with pickup available Dec. 24. For New Year’s Eve, pre-orders open Dec. 26 with pickup available Dec. 31. To order, visit the online ordering or catering site at www.eatdoughbird.com.

From Nov. 28 to Dec. 31, Blanco Cocina + Cantina is shaking up the

holidays with limited-time cocktails and its popular Margarita Trees, perfect for sharing and celebrating. Guests can enjoy festive cocktails like Primo Eduardo’s Eggnog, with holiday spiced Tincup bourbon, eggnog, cream, nutmeg and cinnamon dust; and Don Juan’s Spiced Cider, with 1800 Reposado tequila, honey whiskey, chai leaf, pressed apples, Mexican cinnamon

and roasted five spice, among others. Find them at Biltmore Fashion Park. Visit www.blancococinacantina.com.

The Henry will feature a lineup of signature holiday cocktails at both its Arcadia and Uptown Phoenix locations from Nov. 28 to Dec. 30. For a limited time, guests can enjoy festive offerings like the Whiskey & Doughnuts, with Tincup bourbon, sweet vermouth and spiced apple, or the Spiced Pear Cosmopolitan, made with Belvedere vodka, St. George pear liqueur, cranberry reduction and lime. Visit www.thehenryrestaurant.com.

For those seeking light and balanced fare amid the festivities, Flower Child will offer fresh, flavorful dishes during the busiest time of year. New additions this season include, the Green Chile Beef Colorado Bowl, with jasmine rice, avocado, cilantro, radish and pico de gallo; Fall Ingredient Salad, with butternut squash, roasted Brussels sprouts, organic apple, toasted grains, cauliflower, cranberry, pecan and maple miso vinaigrette; and others, all available for a limited time. Seasonal favorite, Pumpkin Muffins will also be available for the remainder of the year. Find them in Arcadia and Uptown. Visit www.iamflowerchild.com.

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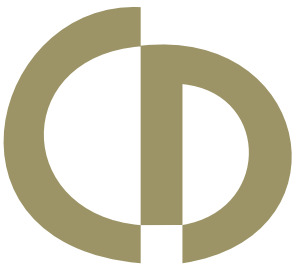


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