



# north central news

the voice of the north central phoenix community since 1999

volume 28, issue 1 • january 2026

www.northcentralnews.net

## Preserving a library and a legacy

By Kathryn M. Miller

Tucked back in a modest Sunnyslope neighborhood sits an equally modest-looking building. Designed by Bennie Gonzales & Associates and opened Jan. 5, 1969, the Acacia Branch of the Phoenix Public Library system has quietly served residents for more than 50 years. And now, the residents that it has served it for so long are seeking historic status for the building.

Designed to resemble burnt adobe and maintaining most of its original integrity, the library reflects the signature style of Arizona native Gonzales, whose “regionalism” style, according to Modern Phoenix, focused on “the culture, building materials, and climate of the region.” Step through the library doors and patrons are transported into a light-filled space with an airiness that defies its modest exterior.

The activity at the library, too, defies its small 6,600-square-foot footprint and humble demeanor, welcoming nearly 90,000 visits each year and circulating almost 72,000 items. One wonders if Gonzales imagined the impact the library would have on the community.

Acacia, located at 750 E. Townley Ave., was his second Phoenix library – Ocotillo Branch opened in South Phoenix in 1967 – and he designed libraries in Wickenburg, Scottsdale, Sedona and beyond. This represents just a small sampling of Gonzales’ work,

***please see LIBRARY on page 8***



At a Dec. 2 event, a handful of Sunnyslope business owners gathered at 3A Automotive to present a refurbished vehicle to Cleo Lewis, a longtime community advocate who, through his faith-based nonprofit, supports area families and veterans experiencing homelessness or dealing with drug addiction (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

## Sunnyslope business owners give back

By Kathryn M. Miller

On a bright morning in early December, a handful of Sunnyslope business owners gathered at 3A Automotive on Hatcher Road. The purpose? To give back to one of their own: Cleo Lewis of Cleo N. Lewis Ministries.

The call had gone out: “[Lewis] is a true gem and driving force for service in our community, leading with faith, compassion, and a heart for second chances,” a community letter read. “Through his faith-based nonprofit, Cleo has dedicated years to serving first responders, veterans, and families in need. Cleo has worked tirelessly for many years – often at his own expense – to improve the lives of those around us.” Lewis had invested endless hours of service in Sunnyslope, improving the community in ways that cannot be measured in dollars, the letter said, and an opportunity to give back was at hand.

His current vehicle, which was restored and donated by 3A Automotive in 2023, had served him faithfully, but

needed a new engine, and it was simply not worth the expense to repair it. To ensure his continued work, Jimmy and Nadine Alauria, owners of 3A Automotive, launched a community effort to raise \$3,000 to purchase and restore another dependable vehicle.

Giving back to the community through refurbished vehicles is nothing new for the 3A team – they have been doing it since 2008. In 2018, they launched a new community nomination process and have since given vehicles to two Sunnyslope school teachers, a homeless youth coordinator, and a neighborhood association/block watch leader. But this time was a little different, says

***please see GIVE BACK on page 6***

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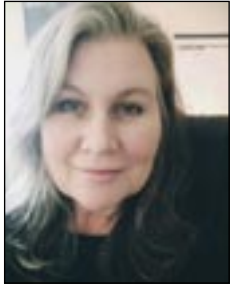
## COMMUNITY

## From the Editor

Happy New Year, North Central neighbors!

As we enter 2026, our cover stories are both looking back and celebrating a bright future ahead.

In “Preserving a library and a legacy,” we take a look at how the Acacia Library has served the Sunnyslope community since 1969 and a new



movement that is underway to preserve the building for the future. I have fond memories of this library: I got my first library card there, and my daughter hers. Our story is not unique – generations of residents have relied on this library and the hope is that it will continue to serve them for years to come.

Another Sunnyslope-centric story

celebrates the positive work that can be done when a community comes together. In this case, nearly a dozen local businesses teamed up to provide time, effort and money to refurbish a vehicle for Cleo Lewis so that he can continue the work that his ministry does in the neighborhood. It is just one example of how many hands, working together, can make a difference. We hope to tell more of those stories in 2026.

In addition, you will find more news from our North Central neighbors, businesses and schools, along with updates from the city of Phoenix, our adorable pet of the month and a wide variety of things to do in Phoenix.

As always, we encourage you to reach out if there is a great North Central story that needs to be told. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy our January issue, and until month, all my best,

Kathryn M. Miller

Editor, *North Central News*

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COMMUNITY

## City updates 911 protocol

People calling 911 in Phoenix are hearing a new option during the initial call intake. 911 operators on both emergency and non-emergency lines will ask callers during the call, “Do you need police, fire or behavioral health?”

Launched Dec. 15, this addition comes after the Phoenix City Council unanimously adopted a series of measures aimed at modernizing public safety services and expanding community-focused support.

If the caller requests behavioral health, operators will triage the call to determine whether a police or fire response is also necessary, or if behavioral health professionals can handle the call without assistance. When only behavioral health is needed, the call will be transferred to the Behavioral Health Dispatcher at the Phoenix Fire Department, who will deploy a Community Assistance Program (CAP) Team.

“The additional prompt will let callers know there’s an option to get mental health services to someone in need,” said communications bureau administrator Allie Edwards. “Our operators have been trained to ask additional questions in order to ensure the appropriate responders get dispatched.”

The goal is to ensure the right help is sent to the right calls, reducing unnecessary police responses while providing faster, more specialized support for behavioral health-related emergencies.

“This enhancement represents a critical step forward in ensuring individuals in crisis can quickly and clearly identify the behavioral health services they need,” said Phoenix Fire Department Community Assistance Program administrator DC Ernst.

### GIVE BACK continued from page 1

Nadine Alauria, who, beyond being a business owner, serves in a leadership role in theHUB (Hatcher Urban Businesses) and the West Sunnyslope Neighborhood Association Block Watch.

“What he does is beyond amazing and he definitely operates on a higher level of purpose and passion,” Alauria said. “We’re honored to be a small part of that and bring our Hatcher businesses together to help make this happen for Cleo. He literally is saving lives every day – whether helping a mom and kids who’ve been living in a park or in a parking lot in their vehicle or getting people into a rehab or a hotel for the night and then connecting them with services the next day.

“Cleo is the main resource, nights and weekends. The city of Phoenix and resource partners call on Cleo when everything else is closed. A lot of us call on him – we’re just so thankful and honored to know him and have him as a friend. He’s a real-life angel here on earth and a hero.”

The other business owners gathered that day were equally full of appreciation for the work that Lewis does in the community. And while some had never met him personally, they didn’t hesitate to contribute funds to the cause. Donors in attendance at the low-key gathering included Robin Peterman and Greg Barton with Arizona Fire Features, Kim Preach Abberton with Preach Building Supply, Derek Rogers with Aqua Therapy Tubs and Jason Boysel with Symmetry Construction. Other donors included Brian Fabig with Econolite and Marcia Veidmark with SSC Underground.

The community support was heartwarming for Lewis, and he will jump

right back into serving the neighborhood with the vehicle.

“What I’m going to do is a continuation of what I have been doing,” Lewis said. “I store a lot of stuff – extra water and supplies – and people do a lot of riding, and I need a comfortable vehicle to do that and to win somebody’s trust. This vehicle is durable; I can cover a lot of area. I already feel that I can increase my effectiveness. I am already imagining that I can carry four more cases of water – I can reach 23 or 24 more people every day and continue making contacts with people. So, I am just ecstatic.”

He added, “It shows another thing: You do a lot of work and it’s very tiring and sometimes you think you are all by yourself, but this community is so awesome – I am not by myself in what I do. They are alongside me in many things and this support is tangible.

“These businesspeople...we have changed this community with their support. They represent every type and part of our community, and it inspires me to watch them, and for them to contribute their resources to something that I do.”

3A says that it hopes to do another nomination/car giveaway in 2026. Learn more about the business and look for an announcement at [www.3aautorepair.com](http://www.3aautorepair.com). Learn more about the work that Lewis does by visiting [www.cleonlewisministries.com](http://www.cleonlewisministries.com).

### LIGHT RAIL continued from page 4

Voters have time and again supported light rail and these extensions specifically. So, why is the council once again reevaluating this route? One answer lies in SB 1102, signed into state law on Aug. 11, 2023, which

“prohibits public monies from being used to extend light rail service in Phoenix to the area of 17th Avenue on the East, Adams Street on the North, 18th Avenue on the West and Jefferson Street on the South, and any property within 50 linear yards of that area” – effectively cutting off access to the approved route.

The city and Valley Metro went back to the drawing board and came up with three alternative CAPEX routes that would satisfy the requirements of SB 1102 and allow connection to the I-10. Along with those three alternatives – created through community feedback and environmental and economic studies – came a question posed to Council: should the city choose an updated CAPEX route and stay on track with the funding request or should they reevaluate high-capacity transit options serving West Phoenix, thus stepping out of line for funding and further delaying high-capacity transit service to the area.

After the city and Valley Metro launched a fall public outreach campaign, the answer from the residents who weighed in was clear: 62 percent were in favor of moving forward with the current CAPEX timeline, which would put construction somewhere around 2028-29. The same sentiment was expressed to the subcommittee before it voted to reevaluate.

Three more public meetings will be held (two Jan. 8 and one Jan. 15) prior to the Jan. 27 Phoenix council policy meeting.

Residents who would like to participate in the discussion will find background information, a feedback form and a calendar of upcoming in-person and virtual meetings at [www.valleymetro.org/capex](http://www.valleymetro.org/capex).



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## COMMUNITY



The Acacia Branch library sits today much as it did when it opened in January 1969 – with a modest slump cement block exterior, resembling burnt adobe, that contains within its walls an airy feeling and a multitude of knowledge and resources (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

### **LIBRARY** continued from page 1

but he enjoyed designing libraries, Modern Phoenix says. Spending hours at local libraries as a youth and with aunt who was a librarian in Nogales, it seems as though he understood the value of public libraries.

Fast forward 50-plus years, and a movement is underway to preserve this Sunnyslope mainstay for future generations, spearheaded by Julia Taggart at the Sunnyslope Historical Society.

“In Sunnyslope, the first library they had was at the Desert Mission,” Taggart said. “This is the second library they had, and it still has both historical and architectural integrity of Benny Gonzales, who is a world-renowned architect. It is so beautiful to see and it's one of the smallest libraries in the city of Phoenix, but it has so much heart and people love it – it's their hometown library.”

It was the love that the community expressed that prompted the Historical Society to seek historic status for the library, which would protect it from future redevelopment.

She added that, while many have generational memories of going to the library, and they enjoy the diverse offerings they can find there, “not too many know the actual history of the library or the architect, which we are hoping to fix.”

The community will have the opportunity to learn more about Gonzales' legacy when his son, Barney, speaks at the Sunnyslope Historical Society, 737 E. Hatcher Road, at noon on Saturday, Jan. 3, and learn more about the library

and the services that it offers at an open house event scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 10, from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

The historic preservation case is currently under staff review, said Helana Ruter, Historic Preservation officer, “We do not have an existing historic context for libraries constructed in Phoenix in the post-World War II era, so we are having to compile some research on how Acacia compares to contemporaneous libraries,” Ruter said. “Should the Historic Preservation Office determine the Acacia Library property eligible for historic designation, it would go onto the Jan. 12, agenda of the Historic Preservation Commission for initiation of historic preservation overlay zoning (designation).”

For their part, the library supports the effort, says Lee Franklin, community relations director for the library system.

“Phoenix Public Library is pleased to have Acacia Library designated with this historical preservation status as it speaks to yet another unique community and generational connection the library provides to library users, neighborhoods, and members of the community,” Franklin said. “The library holds a special value to so many in the community, this acknowledges and honors how the library has been relevant and responsive throughout the years, based on the needs individuals have had at any given time throughout the history of Phoenix.”

For event information, visit [www.sunnyslopehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sunnyslopehistoricalsociety.org). Learn more about the Historic Preservation Office and find meeting information at [www.phoenix.gov/pdd/historic-preservation](http://www.phoenix.gov/pdd/historic-preservation).





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### Location & Meeting

Our meetings are held on the first and third Friday of each month beginning at 9:00 am. Our meeting spot is at The Casa patio, 7878 N. 16th St., Phoenix, AZ 85020. Following the meeting, we tour up to 10 homes new to the market. We require those REALTORS who have a property on the tour to attend the meeting and then participate in a tour of all houses on that day's tour. Each agent provides constructive feedback on price, condition, and key features of the home. The goal is to network with fellow REALTORS who also specialize in North Central Phoenix neighborhoods and help sell the property.

### Tour Boundaries

Tour boundaries are Campbell Avenue to the south, 40th Street to the east, 19th Avenue to the west, with the northern border running south of the North Phoenix Mountain Preserve (roughly Peoria) and just north of Lincoln from 16th Street east to 40th St. The Phoenix Country Club area also is included.

### Join Us!

We love working with new members. Join our team and receive news and information about new homes on the market in the North Central Region of Phoenix.

**For more information or to become a member,  
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**<https://northcentraltour.com/>**

## COMMUNITY

### Lura Turner holds annual spaghetti dinner

Residents are invited to Lura Turner Homes' annual Spaghetti Dinner, scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 24, at Cross Roads United Methodist, 7901 N. Central Ave. All proceeds from the event will benefit the men and women who live at Lura Turner Homes for Adults with Special Needs, a nonprofit agency that has served metro Phoenix' special needs community since 1965.

The first seating is 4 p.m., followed by a seating at 6 p.m. Advance tickets are \$20 for adults; \$10 for children under 12. These will-call tickets must be reserved by Jan. 22. Tickets at the door will cost \$25. To RSVP, call 602-943-4789, or email [dixiet@luraturnerhomes.org](mailto:dixiet@luraturnerhomes.org).

Learn more about Lura Turner Homes at [www.luraturnerhomes.org](http://www.luraturnerhomes.org).

### Festival celebrates Ukrainian culture

Area residents are invited to enjoy a vibrant celebration of Ukrainian culture at the inaugural Arizona Ukrainian Festival, which will be held Saturday, Jan. 10, at Dormition of the Mother of God Ukrainian Catholic Church, 3720 W. Maryland Ave.

From 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., attendees can experience the joy of Ukrainian dance, the melodies of traditional music, the flavors of authentic Ukrainian cuisine and the warmth of community spirit. Admission is free, and food, beverages – including Ukrainian beer and wine – and merchandise can be purchased directly from vendors with all major debit or credit cards and cash. Funds raised through a 50/50 raffle will support humanitarian causes in Ukraine.

For additional information, visit [www.arizonaukrainianfest.com](http://www.arizonaukrainianfest.com).

### Mother-daughter group seeks members

The Phoenix Chapter of the National Charity League (NCL) will host a membership drive from Jan. 15 to March 1. NCL is a mother-daughter volunteer organization that empowers young women and fosters strong mother-daughter bonds through volunteer work, leadership development and cultural experiences.

The national organization has more than 200,000 members and alumni

nationwide. Last year, NCL chapters contributed nearly three million volunteer hours, benefiting over 6,000 local charities and resulting in an \$87 million fiscal impact.

The Phoenix Chapter of NCL currently has nearly 300 members (moms and daughters from seventh grade through high school). The chapter is dedicated to serving philanthropic organizations such as Nourish Phoenix, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Miracle League of Arizona, St. Vincent de Paul and Cancer Support Community of Arizona, among others.

The membership application can be found online at [www.nationalcharityleague.org/chapter/phoenix](http://www.nationalcharityleague.org/chapter/phoenix).

### Speaker focuses on Pearl Harbor attack

Veterans and the public are invited to an informal talk to be presented by Captain Carol Culbertson, U.S. Navy, retired, scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 24, 9-10 a.m. A native of Honolulu, HI, Culbertson's presentation will focus on what happened when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

The free guest speaker program will be held at Cross Roads United Methodist Church, 7901 N. Central Ave. To ensure adequate refreshments, email your intention to attend, along with any questions about the presentation, to [caroleenculbertson@earthlink.net](mailto:caroleenculbertson@earthlink.net) no later than Thursday, Jan. 22.

### Registration open for tree workshop

Desert-adapted shade trees can lower cooling costs and improve air quality without using a lot of water, and SRP customers who attend an upcoming workshop can receive two free trees.

Registration is now open for two SRP Free Shade Tree Program virtual workshops. The program, offered in partnership with Trees Matter, gives customers two free shade trees after they complete the free online class that teaches them how to maximize the benefits of their trees.

Participants will learn more about the benefits of each species and how to care for them during the online workshop. Customers will be notified of the tree pickup date after completing the webinar. Events will be held Jan. 24 and Feb. 14, both at 10 a.m. To register, visit [www.srp.net/shadetrees](http://www.srp.net/shadetrees).



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COMMUNITY

## I Recycle returns In January

As part of Keep Phoenix Beautiful’s vision to create a vibrant Phoenix where each neighborhood is a healthy, beautiful place to live, the nonprofit will continue its 2025-26 season of I Recycle PHX events Saturday, Jan. 10, at Christown Spectrum Mall, 1603 W. Bethany Home Road. Enter off of Montebello (south of Bethany Home and east of the Target store).

The event will be held from 7 a.m. to noon, and accepted items include gently used adult and children’s bicycles, by Bike Saviours; sensitive documents to be shredded (not shredded onsite), by Friedman Recycling Companies; hard drives, laptops, computer towers, printers, cell phones, flat-screen TVs and monitors, by Full Circle Electronics; and new or gently used furniture, small working appliances, housewares and home improvement supplies, by Habitat for Humanity.

Other items accepted include garden supplies, by Keep Phoenix Beautiful; clean and dried soft plastic bags such as



Treasures 4 Teachers is just one of the Valley nonprofits that will be onsite to collect residents’ no-longer-needed items during the Jan. 10 I Recycle PHX event at Christown Spectrum Mall (photo courtesy of Keep Phoenix Beautiful).

grocery bags, bubble wrap, and Ziplock bags, by Mill/R.City; nonperishable food, kitchenware, hygiene products, toys, books, clothing, shoes, small working household appliances, by Nourish Phoenix; and arts and craft materials, school and office supplies, games, apparel for all ages, DVDs, books, and reusable items, by Treasures 4 Teachers.

Hazardous waste, batteries and light bulbs, CRT monitors/TVs, large appliances and mattresses will not be accepted. Phoenix residents may call 602-262-6251 or visit [www.phoenix.gov/hhw](http://www.phoenix.gov/hhw) for hazardous waste pick up.

Find additional event details online at [www.keepphxbeautiful.org/i-recycle-phoenix](http://www.keepphxbeautiful.org/i-recycle-phoenix).

## Volunteer in the New Year

As the calendar rolls from 2025 to 2026, HandsOn Greater Phoenix encourages residents to consider setting a goal to volunteer on a regular basis. Volunteering not only helps better the community, but also benefits for your own social, emotional and physical wellbeing, the nonprofit says.

From a Saturday “spruce up” at Maggie’s Place (Jan. 3), work on the Pierson Street Garden (Jan. 10) and multiple MLK 2026 Weekend/Day of Service opportunities (Jan. 17 and 19), to St. Vincent de Paul kitchen crew and St. Mary’s Food Bank meal packing opportunities throughout the month and more, dozens of volunteer opportunities are available.

Check out HandsOn’s volunteer opportunity calendar ([www.handson-phoenix.org/calendar](http://www.handson-phoenix.org/calendar)) to find opportunities that resonate with you, or apply to be a volunteer leader ([www.handsonphoenix.org/vleader](http://www.handsonphoenix.org/vleader)) and manage a recurring project once a month.



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North Central Phoenix

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UPDATE

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AVG SALE PRICE  
(+18% from last month)

\$480.45

AVG SALE PRICE/SQFT  
(+12% from last month)

\$392.15

MEDIAN SALE PRICE/SQFT  
(+7% from last month)

88

SOLD DAYS ON MARKET  
(+8% from last month)

153

SOLD HOMES  
(-6% from last month)

Featured Home: 3135 E Palo Verde Dr, Phoenix  
5 Beds | 6 Baths | 6,012 SQFT | \$5,300,000

COMPASS

SOURCE: ARMLS AND THE CROMFORD REPORT  
REFLECTING SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE FOR ZIP CODES:  
85012, 85013, 85014, 85015, 85016, 85018,  
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COMMUNITY



Bennie and her two “Jets” are in need of a loving Foster Hero who can provide respite while the family grows and prepares for adoption to a forever family (photo courtesy of Arizona Humane Society).

### Pet of the Month Trio of pups seek temporary respite

While every pet deserves a warm, loving forever home to start the new year, there are many pets who are not quite ready for a family to call their own. While on the road to adoption, many pets at the Arizona Humane Society (AHS) are in need of a Foster Hero to help them recover, destress or simply spend some time away from the shelter.

This is the case for Bennie and her Jets, a family of three who came to the shelter earlier this month as strays. Now undergoing care in AHS’ Mutternity Suites, the adorably unique family is in need of temporary respite from the shelter as they continue growing big and strong each day.

Fostering is a wonderful way to help give back to pets in need while not permanently adding to your home. It is also a great way to test the waters to see if you and your family are ready to welcome a furry family member, while knowing you are still helping to save lives of the Valley’s most vulnerable pets.

Being an AHS Foster Hero is a life-saving venture with cases that fit every family and lifestyle. By bringing in a foster pet(s), you allow AHS to continue caring for even more of the community’s sick, injured and abused pets by opening up much-needed kennel space. For more information on how to become a Foster Hero for Bennie and her Jets (pet number 830536) or any of AHS’ amazing pets in need of foster-

ing, visit [www.azhumane.org/foster](http://www.azhumane.org/foster) to take the online orientation and apply.

### County launches shelter pet nonprofit

In December, Maricopa County announced a new nonprofit that will benefit pets throughout the region. The Friends of Animal Care and Control will raise funds to enhance the resources available to pets in the community, while easing the pressure on public resources.

“I want to build a community where every dog has a home,” said Thomas Galvin chairman of the Board of Supervisors, District 2. “Providing a funding source for county animal shelters beyond what’s allocated in the general fund not only enables better care for animals in need, but it also saves taxpayer money. It’s a win-win for both our two-and four-legged residents.”

On Dec. 10, the Board of Supervisors voted to increase the expenditure authority for Maricopa County Animal Care and Control’s (MCACC) Donation Fund up to \$350,000, which will allow MCACC to explore the formation of the Friends of Animal Care and Control.

“The Friends of Animal Care and Control will allow MCACC to work more closely with donors, and it will provide opportunities for grants that are only available to nonprofits,” said MCACC director Debbie McKnight. “This new nonprofit will have a singular goal: funding programs and services that directly or indirectly serve the homeless pet population.”



COMMUNITY

This new endeavor is one of several ways MCACC says it is working to improve care for animals in the community.

This year, MCACC also launched their Evaluation & Enrichment Team, which helps ensure dogs receive both in-kennel and out-of-kennel enrichment – everything from stuffed Kongs to playgroups. In March, MCACC opened the Everyday Adoption Center (EAC) inside the PetSmart in Old Town Scottsdale (www.maricopa.gov/6155/ACC-adoption-center). The EAC can house more than 40 dogs, and the convenient location has helped more animals find homes. By November, the center hit 1,000 adoptions. And in July, MCACC expanded adoption hours by two hours every day of the week, giving customers more time during their busy schedules to come find their forever friend.

Learn more about Maricopa County Animal Care and Control by visiting [www.maricopa.gov/5268/animal-care-and-control](http://www.maricopa.gov/5268/animal-care-and-control).

AHS opens after-hours clinic

On Dec. 11, animal welfare organization Arizona Humane Society (AHS) began providing expert after-hours urgent veterinary care for owned pets at its Rob & Melani Walton Papago Park Campus, located at 5501 E. Van Buren St.

This after-hours care is for non-emergency, but time-sensitive veterinary medical needs and by walk-in only, Thursday through Sunday, 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. In its first weekend, the team saw 45 pets.

“As Arizona continues to experience a veterinarian shortage, which has led to longer waits for pet owners seeking medical care, we’re excited to offer a convenient option to bridge the gap,” said Dr. Melissa Thompson, Arizona Humane Society vice president of Animal Welfare and Medical Services. “Our goal is to provide trusted pet care when our community needs it the most, often after they get home from work or on the weekends. Our services are focused on conditions and ailments that cannot wait for a regular appointment with a veterinarian, things like vomiting, ear infections, urinary tract infections, minor wounds and other non-life-threatening, time-sensitive situations.”

As one of only a handful of animal welfare organizations nationwide providing urgent care, AHS is building on

its preventive and wellness services – offered through two veterinary clinics as well as mobile and online vet care options – to take another vital step in addressing Maricopa County’s ongoing animal welfare crisis and keeping pets with the families who love them rather than in overcrowded shelters, the organization said.

“Pets and their owners deserve timely veterinary care,” said Thompson. “The sooner a pet is seen, the better their chances of healing. When we increase access to care in our community, we help pets get the treatment they need before an illness or injury becomes overwhelming and before families are forced into heartbreaking decisions about whether they can afford to keep their pet.”

Walk-ins are only available for owned pets, and veterinarians are unable to address emergency situations. If your pet needs emergency assistance, visit the closest emergency veterinary clinic. To find out what qualifies as an emergency, a list of emergency clinics in the Valley, as well as additional information about the urgent care clinic, visit [www.azhumane.org/urgentcare](http://www.azhumane.org/urgentcare).

New Year's Resolutions:

- ✓ START TAKING YOGA CLASSES
- ✓ LEARN TO KNIT OR SEW
- ✓ MAKE NEW FRIENDS
- ✓ PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS
- ✓ LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD

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### North Central Pet of the Month PUZZLE

**Owners:** Craig Deslauriers & John Spannagel

**Age:** 9 Years old

**Breed:** Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

**Nickname:** Puzz

**Tricks:** No tricks.... We are more a lady of leisure.

**Cutest Excited Behavior:** Will stare you down until she gets what she wants.

**Favorite place to go:** Starbucks drive thru!

**Biggest fear:** Liberty Mutual Emu on TV.

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Jacob & I would like to give an extra shout out to our local North Central Small Business Network Business Owners that have sponsored the 2026 Sunnyslope 5K Scamper!

C&S Sporting Goods & Barry's Ace Hardware located off 12<sup>th</sup> St & Northern & Uptown Medi-Spa located off 19<sup>th</sup> St & Northern!

Barry's Ace Hardware Phoenix Arizona

UPTOWN MEDI-SPA

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**Eternal Youth TANNING SALON**

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This month we want to take a moment to highlight our newest small business partner, Neil - at Eternal Youth Tanning Salon. Neil is the first person you'll meet when you walk in to Eternal Youth, he is both a neighbor and small business owner located next door to North Central's PCG Restaurant off of 16<sup>th</sup> St & Bethany. Neil offers a clean facility with Red Light Therapy, Cold Plunge, of course Tanning Beds, and more!

**Mention BLONDIE when you sign up and he'll give you a FREE Red Light Therapy Session.**

For Pricing Call Eternal Youth Tanning Salon - you'll speak with Neil at: (602) 908-1594

**BLONDIE REALTOR!**

**Hello Friends and Neighbors,**

WOW! Was December as full of fun for you as it was for Jacob and I? We sure hope so!

As North Central neighbors, we love the traditions and small businesses that make up the fabric of our vibrant community. When I think of North Central, I think: welcoming, beautiful, unique, and full of life. With our farmers markets, holiday parades, community movie nights in the park, and the many local business owners who live here, love here, and give back - North Central truly sells itself. It's a strong, connected network of homeowners and community members who genuinely care.

Speaking of strong North Central communities... This past year, Jacob and I were delighted to volunteer with the Royal Palm Neighborhood, assisting in the transportation and delivery of their annual Christmas Eve luminaries. Royal Palm - one of North Central's most nostalgic and united neighborhoods - comes together each December to assemble and deliver luminary kits to participating households. On Christmas Eve, homeowners line their curbs with glowing luminaries for a neighborhood-wide display that feels magical. This tradition, rooted in Spanish colonial customs, brings warmth, beauty, and a sense of hope to the holiday season.

Each year board members of the Royal Palm Neighborhood Council, organize the luminary supply purchase, and volunteers assist with assembly and delivery. All proceeds go right back into future community events such as concerts, festivals, movies in the park, parades, and neighborhood beautification efforts - strengthening the community in meaningful ways.

Royal Palm is bordered by Northern and Dunlap Avenues, and 19th to 7th Avenues. The neighborhood offers a wonderful mix of home sizes and price points, and it also sits within the boundaries of the highly acclaimed, A+ rated Sunnyslope High School. It's easy to see why so many buyers seek this community: rich traditions, strong neighborhood identity, and excellent schools.

Before I go, a quick community highlight: Sunnyslope High School is hosting its annual 5K Scamper on March 8th! "This is a timed event along the AZ Canal with finisher medals and age-group awards. It's family-friendly - strollers, wagons, and wheelchairs welcome - and includes event shirts, gift bags, vendors, food trucks, and activities for all. Rain or shine!" To sign up or learn more, visit: [www.BlondieRealtor.com](http://www.BlondieRealtor.com) > Sunnyslope 5K Scamper Sign-Up to be linked to the school's participation link. Jacob and I will be there so be sure to stop by, say hello, and grab some BLONDIE SWAG before the race.

Again, thank you to our North Central Small Business Network Business Partners C&S Sporting Goods, Barry's Ace Hardware & Uptown Medi Spa for rallying together and participating as sponsors in Sunnyslope's 2025 5K Scamper!

As the new year begins, Jacob and I are taking a moment to be grateful - not only for what's ahead, but for the days we're living right now.

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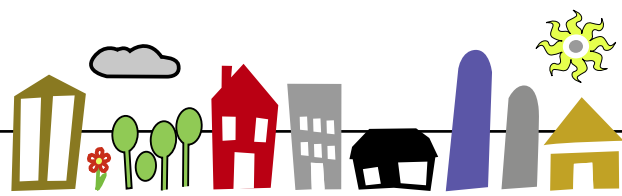
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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Influenced by Beatles and books

By Trudy Thompson Shumaker

Sharing a bottle of wine and tapas is a favorite way to connect with old friends and make new ones. But when the wine and tapas selections are guided by the friendly expertise of Craig and Danielle, owners, and staff at the Hidden Track Bottle Shop and Wine Bar, the wine and the food are elevated to a new level.

“We’re a small but mighty shop,” said owner Craig Dziadowicz. “We offer as much education about our food, wine and craft beer selections as possible, and that’s one thing that sets us apart.”

Dziadowicz became interested in wine when he was a teen, “People laugh because what teenager doesn’t become interested in alcohol? But my interest was a bit different,” he recalled. “My after-school job was working at a white tablecloth restaurant in my Wisconsin hometown. The owner asked me if I



The inviting space of Hidden Track Wine Bar and Bottle Shop is lined with interesting and colorful art, and bottles and bottles of wine, each with a “hidden track” (submitted photo).

wanted to learn bartending. I wasn’t old enough to drink but I was learning all about wine – he sent me home with books about wine and how it’s made, its history and how to pair it with food. I read everything he gave me.

“That was the beginning of my

career in wine and hospitality. I went on to work in the wine industry, and eventually opened my own wine bar downtown, with my partner Danielle Middlebrook, who also has long experience in the industry. Now we have opened our second location, and we

really enjoy teaching our team and our customers all about wine and craft beer.”

Where does the name “Hidden Track” come from? Think of the hidden tracks on an album – a concept first introduced by the Beatles. This shop offers “hidden tracks” about the wines they sell – they are different, and all have stories.

The bar and bottle shop is cozy, with couches and comfy chairs nestled in corners, and walls are lined with art and wine bottles from all over the world. Wine selections change weekly, and events like Wednesday wine tastings keep the experience fresh and fun. Dziadowicz and Middlebrook opened the first Hidden Track downtown in 2015. Their North Central location is tucked into a small development at 4700 N. 12th St.

The food? It’s as interesting and as tasty as the wine and craft beer. The owners call their menu “Iberian Franco inspired, with chef-driven tapas that pair with the many different global



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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

expressions of wine we curate.” Ingredients are locally sourced organic products, and the menu varies with availability of ingredients.

Customers from across the Valley drive to Hidden Track to meet friends for happy hour, couples meet for date night and work-at-home professionals meet clients here.

“It’s quiet enough to actually have a conversation, but lively enough to make you feel like you’ve ‘been somewhere,’” said Sal Romans, who walked in from her home in the neighborhood. “I’m meeting my neighbors for happy hour. We like to stay local but we love to go ‘out.’ This place is perfect for us.”

The shop has been named Best Bottle Shop in Phoenix, Best Wine Bar and Best Wine Shop by *Phoenix New Times* and *Phoenix Magazine*. The loyal crowd gathered on a chilly pre-holiday Tuesday was testimony to that. More than one customer purchased a bottle of wine to go, after enjoying a table of tapas and wine with friends. The outdoor patio as well as the bar and tables were almost full, and the aromas from the kitchen were spicy and added to the welcoming feel of the space.



Offering live/work opportunities in the Midtown area of Phoenix, the first phase of Soleil townhomes is now available to residents (submitted photo).

The owners understand the business as well as the customers who enjoy it.

“Wine is an agricultural product, and there are variations that come with weather and soil conditions, as well as how the vines are tended, and how the grapes are processed,” Dziadowicz said. “Wine and food are part of the human social scene over the centuries, and we’re continuing that tradition here at our shops downtown and in North Central.”

Learn more at [www.hiddentrack-bottleshop.com](http://www.hiddentrack-bottleshop.com).

Business Briefs  
Soleil comes to Midtown

Alice Blakely with The Brokery is now handling sales for Phase One of Soleil, a new 20-unit modern townhome community located at 312 E. Windsor

Ave. in Midtown Phoenix. Soleil is the first residential townhome development from architect developers John Labahn of Lab Design Collaborative and Chicago-based architect, Erik Johnson. The 2,097-2,359 square-foot four-story units include 2-3 bedrooms, 2.5-3 baths, spacious roof decks, and 1- 2-car garages. Pricing starts at \$850,000.

Labahn, who designed the Ocotillo restaurant just up the street, says he has a special passion for the 3rd Street corridor. He was a champion of the 3rd Street Improvement Project in 2021-22, working closely with the city of Phoenix to beautify the area with 150 trees, shade structures, crosswalks and bike lanes.

The townhomes offer energy efficiency and a clean modern design. The interiors are light and bright with “brise-soleil” – an architectural feature that deflects sunlight and reduces heat within the home. Other sustainable features include independently operated A/C units on each level, EV-capable garages and native desert landscaping.

The visitor center is open Thursday through Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. Learn more at [www.sellingsoleil.com](http://www.sellingsoleil.com).

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**TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS**

**One Camelback  
gets second life**

For years, One Camelback sat empty – a shimmering glass landmark at the corner of Central Avenue and Camelback Road. Now, in what some insiders are calling the most important residential revival in the Valley, the landmark building has a new champion and a long-awaited second life has officially begun.

Kinella Capital, LLC, led by developer TK Stratton, has officially taken control of the stalled project – and Stratton says the building’s future is no longer in question. Kinella Capital acquired the property from Acore Capital after the project stalled. To relaunch the project, Kinella partnered with Post Road Group for debt financing and supplied the equity needed to get the comeback underway.

Stratton, whose firm has restored and renovated thousands of distressed properties, said he knew immediately that the building deserved a second life.

Features include a 150-foot glass atrium that feels more like a European gallery than an apartment lobby, floor-to-ceiling windows with sweeping views of Uptown, Midtown, Camelback Mountain and beyond, and a spectacular 1,800-square-foot, three-bedroom residence on Level 11 that Stratton describes as “one of the most breathtaking units in the entire city.” In addition, a future rooftop pool and lounge are engineered to capture the skyline, and modern fitness and wellness spaces, technology-forward amenities and secure parking add to walkable access to restaurants, retail and light rail.

Consisting of studios, one- two- and three-bedroom units, ranging from 522 to 1,819 square feet, visible progress at One Camelback is expected within 12 months, with phased occupancy to follow. For more information, visit [www.onecamelback.com](http://www.onecamelback.com).

**Harbor Freight to open  
7th Street location**

After Walgreens closed its doors in February 2024, a new tenant is set to open this year at 8911 N. 7th Street: Harbor Freight.

Founded in 1977 as a small mail-order tool business in Southern California, the retailer now offers an assortment of tools, including automotive, air and power tools, storage, outdoor power equipment, generators, welding supplies, shop equipment,

hand tools, and much more.

Construction has already begun at the location, using local workers and companies from the surrounding Phoenix area, the company said.

“We’ve been looking to open another location in Phoenix for a number of years so that we can provide the tools and equipment at tremendous values to the community,” said Trey Feiler, senior vice president, Real Estate and Construction for Harbor Freight. “In addition to finding a great location, we were attracted by the availability of great associates in the Phoenix area, and we look forward to having them join the Harbor Freight team.”

Anticipated to open towards the end of January, the store is expected to bring between 25 and 30 new jobs to the community, including sales and logistic supervisors, senior associates, sales Associates, and seasonal opportunities as well. Interested applicants can apply online at [www.harbor-freightjobs.com/retail](http://www.harbor-freightjobs.com/retail) and search “Phoenix, AZ” for information.

**InclusiCare Medical  
celebrates 2 years**

InclusiCare Medical, a family practice located in the heart of the Melrose District, is celebrating its two-year anniversary of serving the vibrant and diverse community.

As part of its anniversary, the clinic invites residents to get to know its president and primary care provider, Luis Carlos Gutierrez, PA-C. According to the practice, Gutierrez is committed to expanding access to high-quality healthcare for adults of all ages by providing accessible, compassionate and community-centered care

Available services include comprehensive primary care for chronic and acute conditions; HIV care and prevention, including accessible and judgment-free PREP services; culturally responsive care; and a welcoming, inclusive approach to serving all members of the Central Phoenix community.

In addition, Gutierrez is bilingual in Spanish and fluent in American Sign Language, which allows him to connect with and support patients who often struggle to find providers who can communicate with them directly and respectfully.

The practice is located at 700 W. Campbell Ave., Suite 15. For additional information, call 833-446-0586 or visit [www.inclusicaremedical.com](http://www.inclusicaremedical.com).





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Every year around this time, we all hear (or say) the same thing: “I’ll start working out in the new year.” But after seeing so many friends and clients over the years battle injuries, setbacks, or just the aches that come with everyday life, I’ve learned something important: the real key isn’t starting a workout, it’s getting your body ready so *you can* keep doing the things you love.

I love shining a light on the people and businesses that make North Central Phoenix such a special place. This month, I want to brag a little about one of them. On the modest corner of 16th Street and Missouri sits a place my family has relied on a very long time: **TOPS Physical Therapy**, led by Dr. Amy Brannon and her highly skilled team. I’ve often joked that my brother Michael and I would both be walking question marks without Amy. Dr Brannon has kept our family moving, kept us working, and kept us doing the things that keep us sane... including golf for over 20 years.

TOPS has helped everyone from neighborhood weekend warriors to folks traveling in from across the state, for more than 12 years. Whether you’re training for your first 5K, rehabbing after a surgery, trying to get your balance back, or simply wanting to stay mobile and independent as the years go by, they meet you *right where you are* and walk with you step by step. It’s serious care delivered with energetic and positive encouragement. You go in thinking about what hurts and somehow walk out realizing what your body is still capable of. Their team doesn’t just work on you, they genuinely believe in you. TOPS also has a long and proud history of caring for our police officers, firefighters, and first responders with the same focused attention you’d expect for professional athletes. That comes from Amy’s background working with Cal Football, pro athletes, and long-standing relationships with Brophy, Xavier, PCDS, GCU, ASU, and other athletic programs around the Valley. They’re also trusted by top physicians locally and nationally, which makes coordinating care seamless.

One of the neatest things I’ve seen over the years is how many young people start as patients and end up coming back as interns, staff members, or even future physical therapists or athletic trainers. When a business inspires the next generation of caregivers, that says a lot about the heart behind it. So instead of waiting until January to dive into that new fitness routine, maybe the best gift you can give yourself, and those you love, is a healthier foundation first. Get your body tuned up. Get ahead of the pain. Give yourself the chance to hit the ground running, literally. Because at the end of the day, **health really is wealth**, and it’s comforting to know one of the best resources for it is right here in our own backyard.

Bobby Lieb



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211 W KALER DR** <small>5 BEDROOMS   5 BATHROOMS   5,961 SQ FT</small>	\$2,625,000
1435 E RANCHO DR <small>4 BEDROOMS   4 BATHROOMS   4,169 SQ FT</small>	\$1,375,000
9046 N 28TH ST <small>4 BEDROOMS   3 BATHROOMS   2,844 SQ FT</small>	\$1,235,000
6105 N 12TH WAY <small>3 BEDROOMS   2 BATHROOMS   1,844 SQ FT</small>	\$395,000 (CBS)
1142 E KALER DR <small>3 BEDROOMS   2 BATHROOMS   1,196 SQ FT</small>	\$349,900

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6234 N 4TH DR	\$1,300,000
7519 N 12TH AVE	\$1,250,000
1555 E OCOTILLO RD #16	\$799,900
1123 E FERN DR S	\$799,900
7217 N 6TH WAY	\$799,000
6428 N 17TH PL	\$789,900
21 W BERYL AVE	\$739,900
502 W CLAREMONT AVE	\$725,000

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325 W SOLANO DR	\$3,375,000	1040 E OSBORN RD #1602	\$750,000
7631 N 20TH ST	\$1,500,000	6409 N 11TH DR	\$695,000
345 W GARDENIA DR	\$1,415,000	742 W PUGET AVE*	\$629,900
6727 N 9TH DR*	\$898,000	5347 N 2ND DR	\$605,000
1535 W WINTER DR	\$755,000	750 E NORTHERN AVE #1089	\$280,000

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SCHOOL DAYS

Meet the micro-Montessori at CHS

Before 2012, families in Arizona seeking to continue a Montessori education beyond middle school had no public options – Montessori secondary programs ended after eighth grade.

“The vision behind Camelback Montessori was simple but ambitious,” said Danchi Nguyen, Micro-School Leader, “to extend Montessori philosophy through high school in a tuition-free, public setting and to reimagine what high school could look like for adolescents by pairing rigorous academics with a learning environment that fosters independence, creativity and purpose.”

Camelback Montessori College Preparatory (CMCP) opened its doors in 2012 as a micro-school embedded within Camelback High School, enrolling 24 students and sending two pioneering teachers through the Cincinnati Montessori Secondary Teacher Education Program, home to the first public



A Camelback Montessori College Preparatory junior participates in one of the unique learning experiences the school offers – performing her personal narrative on stage in front of peers and families in a public setting (submitted photo).

Montessori high school in the nation.

Today, the school serves 180 students within a campus of nearly 2,000 and is staffed by six teachers, a dedicated counselor and led by Nguyen.

“The small size allows for deep relationships while the large campus allows

rich opportunities,” she said. “CMCP students participate in year-round athletics, choose from 70 and growing campus clubs, and frequently step into leadership roles that serve the entire student body – from Student Body president to lead cadet of JROTC to

president of National Honor Society.”

Inside a Montessori classroom, learning begins in familiar ways. The teacher reviews a visual agenda, outlines choices for the day, and may launch into a short whole-class mini-lesson. From there, students take ownership of the remaining 100-minute learning block as teachers circulate to confer, coach and observe.

In English, students lay sentence strips across the floor, physically moving semicolons as part of hands-on ACT preparation. Across the hall, juniors are circled, debating the merits and flaws of the Electoral College. The room feels structured yet alive, marked by intentional choices, quiet conversation and sustained focus.

“All coursework is honors-level and college-preparatory, designed to demand both depth and independence,” Nguyen explained.

Learning outside the classroom pushes students beyond their comfort zones and away from technology.



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SCHOOL DAYS

Sophomores sleep overnight during multi-day camping experiences, learning to cook meals using only two propane griddles, and applying math through orienteering challenges with compasses. At night, they gather by headlamp for Socratic seminars, discussing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and adolescent development in the dark. Biology lessons unfold outdoors, where students learn to fish while studying Arizona ecosystems.

“The work of the hands and heart is equally central,” Nguyen added. “Students hand-tie hundreds of blankets each year for local homeless shelters, read weekly to peers with exceptional learning needs, and assist custodial staff with post-lunch cleanup. Through both large acts and small gestures, students learn to create the world they want to see.”

College preparation culminates in voice. Juniors craft Humans of New York–inspired narratives, then stand on stage, microphone in hand, performing their personal statements for peers, families and community members. They learn listening is an act of love



On Washington High School’s 70th day of the school year of the school’s 70th year, students celebrated by giving back to the community through a clean-up effort (submitted photo).

and everyone has a story and know their community is one of trust and vulnerability.

The outcomes reflect the impact, Nguyen said. In the Class of 2025, 76 percent of students identified as first-generation college-bound, 91 percent enrolled in a two- or four-year college, and seniors earned \$7.7 million in scholarships, with one-third attending selective colleges out of state, including Williams, Swarthmore, Washington

University, Colgate and Davidson.

“Camelback Montessori College Preparatory represents what is possible in public education when adolescents are trusted with responsibility, supported by structure, and challenged to truly see themselves – and their power to build the communities they want to see,” Nguyen added.

Learn more about the school by calling 602-764-7000 or visiting [www.pxu.org/o/cms](http://www.pxu.org/o/cms).

School Briefs

GLENDALE UNION  
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
WHS students  
give back

More than 200 Washington High School students marked a special milestone by giving back to their community through a neighborhood cleanup in celebration of the school’s 70th year on the 70th day of the school year.

“Their efforts reflected a strong sense of responsibility, community engagement, and Ram pride as they worked together to make a meaningful impact,” according to the district. “Through teamwork and service, these Washington High School students demonstrated how caring for their community strengthens both their school and the neighborhoods they serve.”

District hosts  
hiring event

Glendale Union High School District invites Valley residents to join the district at a Career Fair on Saturday, *please see HIRING on page 26*

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SCHOOL DAYS

**HIRING** *continued from page 25*

Feb. 7, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Greenway High School to explore opportunities in a district known for academic success, strong community connections and support for its team.

District leadership said, “With competitive salaries, full credit for years of experience, and a culture that values innovation and growth, Glendale Union High School District is the place to build a meaningful and rewarding career.”

Learn more at [www.guhsdaz.org](http://www.guhsdaz.org).

**Rams celebrated by district board**

The Glendale Union High School District Governing Board recognized the 2025-26 Achievement Above All honorees at Washington High School, celebrating individuals and groups whose service, leadership and dedication had an extraordinary impact on the Ram community.

Honorees included teacher Tracey Holberg, student Carol Hanna, student group Rams United, support staff member Angela Maya and volunteer Stephanie Scott, with each representing excellence in academics, inclusion, service and school spirit. Together, these Washington High School recipients exemplify Washington’s tradition of success by strengthening connections, inspiring confidence and creating a culture where every student is supported and encouraged to succeed, according to the school.



Dr. Barbie Firkus, Madison No. 1 Middle School, was one of two dozen educators awarded grants by the Madison Education Foundation AZ (photo courtesy of Madison School District).

**MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT Foundation recognizes outstanding educators**

Madison School District celebrated the outstanding educators who were awarded teacher grants from the Madison Education Foundation AZ. These grants will help fund a variety of creative and engaging classroom projects, ranging from needle felting, a field trip to the Heard Museum, to a refresh of the Makerspace, and much more.

Educators recognized included Scott Sefranka, Courtney Flowers, Hugo Estrada-Duran, Cynthia Bradley, Michael Vontsolos, Sara Wingard, Marlo Johnson and Kaylene Bauman, Madison Meadows Middle School; Leigh Seibert, Sheila O’Connor, Crystal Di’Pede and Regina Francis,

Madison Traditional Academy; Nicole Belden, Hannah Roussin and Denyse Diehl, Deena Woods and Kimberly Grubler, and Kelly Borrego and Abbe Stormer, Madison Simis Elementary School; Sara Daffe and Julie Thibodeaux, Madison Park Middle School; 3rd Grade Team and Jessie McKinley, Madison Camelview Elementary School; and Dr. Barbie Firkus, Madison No. 1 Middle School.

**Madison launches kindergarten program**

Madison Elementary School District will launch its new full-day Gifted Kindergarten program, specifically designed to meet the unique educational and developmental needs of the district’s youngest gifted learners. The Madison Gifted Kindergarten program will be located on the campus of Madison

Heights Elementary School, with the first class beginning in August 2026.

This specialized program offers an enhanced and enriched kindergarten curriculum and differentiated instruction to ensure every student reaches their full potential. Flexible pacing of the program will allow students to learn at their own rate, and flexible grouping maximizes time for exploration of critical and creative thinking. Students in the Gifted Kindergarten program will also participate in the school’s special area classes and in grade-level activities and field trips.

To be eligible for the program, students must be five years old before Sept. 1, 2026, have been screened for gifted services between the ages of four and five years old, and meet either of the following criteria: gifted qualification at 95th percentile or higher in any of these areas: verbal, non-verbal, and quantitative; or an IQ of 128 or higher.

Space is limited. For more information about the program and enrollment, visit [www.madisonaz.org/gifted-kindergarten](http://www.madisonaz.org/gifted-kindergarten).

**District offers preschool tour**

Following the popularity of the annual Discover Madison Kindergarten and Discover Madison Middle School tours, the Madison School District is inviting families interested in exploring its variety of preschool offerings to attend the Discover Madison Preschool Tour on Friday, Jan. 16, from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

*please see TOUR on page 28*

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SCHOOL DAYS



The Osborn School District celebrated staff who represent the district values on a daily basis at a December meeting, including, left to right, Griselda Norzagaray, Allison Stachel, Tavon Rooks and Paula Quezada (submitted photo).

TOUR continued from page 26

This event is specifically designed for parents and guardians of current preschool age children or who are anticipating starting preschool in the upcoming fall semester.

The comprehensive tour will offer attendees a firsthand look at Madison's preschool programs at each of the district's elementary schools.

The event will begin at the Madison Center for the Arts, located at 5601 N. 16th St. For additional information, contact the district at 602-664-7900.

**OSBORN SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Registration open for 2026-27**

Registration for 2026-2027 is now open at all Osborn schools. Families who are looking for a Montessori school for their 3–6-year-old, Osborn's Montessori program also has a dual language offering with spaces still available in both programs.

To learn more about Osborn's programs or for the contact to schedule a tour, visit the website at [www.osborn-schools.org](http://www.osborn-schools.org).

**District celebrates inspiring staff**

At the Dec. 16 Governing Board meeting, the Osborn School district celebrated its December Spread L.O.V.E. Award (Living Our Values Every Day) recipients from Osborn Middle School.

Honorees included Allison Stachel (equity), Paula Quezada (growth), Griselda Norzagaray (integrity), Richard Landeira (joy) and Tavon Rooks (relationships).

**PHOENIX UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Scholarship offers near \$2 million for PXU student**

Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) announced that a student at Phoenix Coding Academy, Joseph Parra Miguel, has received nearly \$1.8M in total offered scholarships and counting.

"We anticipate that he will reach \$2M, pending acceptance from more schools," district leadership said. "He has been accepted to 18 schools, with colleges including University of the Pacific, Drake University and Elmhurst University. His current plan is to attend Arizona State University to study accounting."

**WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**District to host hiring event**

Residents who are looking to make a meaningful impact in education are invited to attend a Job Fair on Saturday, Jan. 24, 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 2026-27 school year, as well as support staff in the transportation, KidSpace, maintenance and nutrition services departments. WESD says that it offers a competitive teacher salary 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, vacation, paid time off and sick time, employer-matched contributions to Arizona State Retirement and so much more.



SCHOOL DAYS

To pre-schedule an interview, call 602-347-2622. Walk-ins are also welcome. To search open positions and apply online, visit <https://jobs.wesd-schools.org>.

Event welcomes future kindergartners

WESD will host Kindergarten Sneak Peek events at 27 of its schools on Wednesday, Jan. 21. This is a chance for families with future kindergartners to join their neighborhood school to explore classrooms, meet staff and experience district schools firsthand.

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 district's Early Kindergarten Entrance Program.

Give back to WESD students

WESD invites residents to help make a difference in the lives of its students by making a tax credit donation to local WESD 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.

To donate, visit the school's front office to complete a tax credit form or donate online at <https://bit.ly/3Ao6nZ7>.

PRIVATE AND CHARTER SCHOOLS Students give back during holiday season

In late November, Brophy's Broncos set a new standard for giving, the school said. The 2025 record-breaking Turkey Drive raised nearly \$16,000 for St. Vincent de Paul and local partners, with extra funds coming from 'Movember' participants. The drive culminated in a massive "Can the Man" victory, filling Principal Bopp's office with 10 full bins of donated food.

Robotics team advances to state championship

Madison Highland Prep's VEX Robotics Team 8373P has secured the coveted Tournament Champion title at the recent HPW third Annual VEX Robotics Competition, earning them a place at the state competition. The winning alliance included students Adebowale Rafiu, Rocket Rolando, Keelan Shardonofsky, Wayne Galloway and Tate Del Housaye.

The team attributed their decisive victory to their new strategy and significant modifications to their robot, which provided a distinct competitive edge in the tournament's complex challenges. The collaborative effort and hours spent on design and programming proved instrumental in their success.

With the Tournament Champion win, Team 8373P is now focused on please see CHAMPIONSHIP on page 30

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SCHOOL DAYS

CHAMPIONSHIP continued from page 29

delivering an outstanding performance at the VEX Robotics Arizona State Championship, scheduled to take place on March 6 and 7. The team is eager to take on the best competitors in the state, utilizing the skills and strategies developed throughout the season. Their ultimate goal is to secure a spot at the prestigious VEX Robotics World Championship, showcasing Madison Highland Prep’s innovation on a global stage.

Student performers show talent

Five members of Arizona School for the Arts’ (ASA) International Thespian Society recently competed at the Central Region Festival, and every student earned average scores of Excellent or higher.

“An incredible showing!” the school said in a December social media post. “Special shout-out to Alice Elder and Rob Foley, whose duo performance received three Superior scores and an invitation to continue on to the 2026 International Thespian Festival. Way to represent ASA with talent, hard work, and heart!”

‘Distinguished’ students honored

On Dec. 4, Brophy College Preparatory honored its Fall 2025 Distinguished Students, 16 seniors who live Brophy’s Mission and Vision in impressive, inspiring ways.

The Fall 2025 Distinguished



Five Arizona School for the Arts students recently showcased their talent at a Thespian Festival, where they earned excellent or higher scores (submitted photo).

Students are Carlo Bernardez, Seb Cevallos, Andres Garcia, Jeronimo Gomez del Campo, Hank Halaby, Mael Huarcaya, Cooper La Voy, Pablo Laurian Cantu, Graham Long, Leo Ochoa Armenta, Quinn Rassas, Nyle Rizvi, Finn Sheridan, Carter Walsh, Carter Weyrauch and Greg Zabor.

New Ahsan Center reflects commitment to the arts

In December, Phoenix Country Day School (PCDS) celebrated the grand opening of the Ahsan Center for Excellence in the Creative & Performing Arts, a new facility that the school says “marks a major milestone in

the school’s commitment to fostering artistic innovation, collaboration, creativity and student expression.”

The premiere event welcomed donors to the Play On! Campaign – including current parents, alumni, grandparents and friends – whose collective contributions made the \$24 million facility possible. The evening celebration began with a reception in the Taira Family Breezeway, accompanied by a strings performance by student Audrey Weinshel ’26 and PCDS strings faculty member Maurine Fleming. Guests then gathered for dual ribbon-cutting ceremonies led by the Ahsan Family – whose generosity

named the building – and the Salter Family, naming donors of the new Performance Hall.

The building will be fully operational starting in January. The Ahsan Center is the first major component of the multi-phase capital campaign, which will continue with the Reese House for Music, Art & Theater, opening in 2026, followed by expanded athletic and wellness facilities.

Xavier donates record one million cans

Each year, Xavier College Preparatory students give more than 30,000 hours doing volunteer work and community service as part of Xavier’s Christian Service Program. As part of the program, Xavier’s National Honor Society (NHS) started its Canned Food Drive to benefit St. Vincent de Paul in the 1980s. The goal back then was 10,000 cans. Each year Xavier breaks the record of food collected.

This year, the Xavier community donated more than one million cans for St. Vincent de Paul. Together, the school raised more than \$60,000 in cash donations.

St. Vincent De Paul CEO, Shannon Clancy, who graduated from Xavier in 1988, said, “This is not simply a food drive. A huge piece is homeless prevention because giving people food means they can put their dollars to housing. Xavier’s effort is one of the largest drives in the country and an extraordinary model for the community.”

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## GENERATIONS

### Senior Living Grant will support memory care training

In late 2025, Molina Healthcare of Arizona granted \$10,000 to Hospice of the Valley to support its Memory Care Training program. The grant will help Hospice of the Valley continue its program to train more than 4,000 memory care staff throughout the state – teaching effective communication techniques and strategies for managing challenging behaviors in people living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

The Memory Care Training program is offered at no charge to the community and shares best practices in dementia care through engaging role-playing videos that depict real-life challenges. The Arizona Department of Health Services recently appointed Hospice of the Valley as a provider of memory care training for dementia caregivers, validating the quality and importance of their program.

"Through this partnership with Hospice of the Valley, we're addressing a critical need in our community by providing caregivers with the tools and resources they need to improve quality of life for both themselves and those they care for," said Minnie Andrade, plan president of Molina Healthcare of Arizona.

With approximately 53 million unpaid family caregivers in America, many of whom care for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, this initiative addresses a significant public health need, the organizations said.

Visit [www.hov.org/dementia/memory-care-training](http://www.hov.org/dementia/memory-care-training) for more information.

### Tax help offered, volunteers sought

The city of Phoenix is looking for volunteers to help residents with their 2025 taxes. Each year, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program prepares free tax returns for low-to-moderate-income individuals and families.

Free certified training is provided for basic tax prep assistance. Volunteer greeters, screeners, bilingual interpreters and site coordinators are also needed. Learn more at



Hospice of the Valley's Memory Care Training program, which is offered at no cost to the community, received a boost late last year in the form of a \$10,000 grant from Molina Healthcare of Arizona (submitted photo).

[www.phoenix.gov/taxhelp](http://www.phoenix.gov/taxhelp).

Those who may need assistance with their taxes may visit the Phoenix Human Resources Department website for information. Click on the "Programs and Services" link found online at [www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/humanservices.html](http://www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/humanservices.html).

### Caregiver services included in new senior guide

Duet: Partners In Health & Aging announced the inclusion of two of its core family caregiver programs in the launch of USAging's first set of Caregiver Services and Supports Action Guides. These guides contain practical resources designed to help Aging Network organizations develop and strengthen innovative caregiver services and supports that meet the needs of caregivers.

"Family caregivers have so much on their plate, emotionally and logistically, and finding meaningful support isn't always easy," said Justin McBride, senior director of services and strategy. "Duet is honored to be included in these action guides as a trusted resource that family caregivers and community groups can use to navigate that often ambiguous path of caregiving."

Finding Meaning and Hope was included in the Education, Counseling, and Peer Supports for Family Caregivers guide, introducing readers to the 10-session discussion series for family caregivers based on the book, "Loving Someone Who Has Dementia:

How to Find Hope While Coping With Stress and Grief" by Pauline Boss, Ph.D. Each session features videos with Dr. Boss in conversation with family caregivers and includes guided discussions, led by trained volunteer facilitators, that help caregivers build resilience while they unpack the complex grief of ambiguous loss – caring for someone who is physically present but psychologically absent or no longer who they used to be.

Duet's Peer Support Program was included in the Leveraging Volunteers to Support Family Caregivers guide, highlighting how the program connects volunteer mentors with new family caregivers or those experiencing stress to provide caregivers with a listening ear and safe space to discuss their concerns. Through this peer support, caregivers learn that their feelings are valid and receive companionship and guidance through the caregiving experience. Duet provides free-of-charge services to support older adults and family caregivers throughout the Valley. To learn more about these programs and additional caregiver resources, visit [www.duetaz.org](http://www.duetaz.org) or call 602-274-5022.

### Kids & Families Poetry Society seeks youth submissions

The Arizona State Poetry Society announced that it is accepting submissions for its 2026 Annual Youth Contest beginning Jan. 15. The dead-

line for submissions is April 1.

Open to all Arizona students, grades one through 12, there is no entry fee for the contest. Poems can be on any topic with a limit of three submissions per person. Poems written in other than English must include an English translation.

Cash prizes will be awarded to first, second and third place for winning poems in grade brackets: Grades 1-4, Grades 5-8 and Grades 9-12.

The winning poems will appear in "Sandcutters 2026," an anthology of Arizona State Poetry Society. Winners will be notified in May 2026 and will receive a complimentary copy of "Sandcutters" at the end of the year.

For complete information and permission form, send an email to outreach chair CChristy White at [christy-white.smp@azpoetry.net](mailto:christy-white.smp@azpoetry.net). To learn more about Arizona State Poetry Society, visit <https://azpoetry.net>.

### Garden hosts Seedlings events

Wednesdays in January, Desert Botanical Garden invites children ages 3-5 and their caretakers to experience the wonder of nature through hands-on lessons that teach kids and adults how to splash, dig, climb and explore together through nature play concepts.

Each week from 9:30 to 11 a.m., Jan. 7, 14, 21 and 28, the program will feature a new theme and new activities. Every Seedlings class includes songs, hands-on activities and learning materials for caretakers to continue exploring in nature together. The program will be hosted in the Cactus Clubhouse, located in the Weisz Learning Center. The classroom space includes an indoor and outdoor area. Following the program, participants are welcome to play in the Cactus Clubhouse for another hour.

Participants are encouraged to arrive 15 minutes early and wear comfortable clothing they don't mind getting dirty – the activities can be muddy, messy and wet.

The cost is \$9.95 for members or \$14.95, general admission. Admission to this experience includes full access to "FRAMERATE: Desert Pulse."

Desert Botanical Garden is located ***please see SEEDLINGS on page 34***





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GENERATIONS

**SEEDLINGS** continued from page 32

at 1201 N. Galvin Parkway in Phoenix. For additional information, call 480-941-1225 or visit [www.dbg.org](http://www.dbg.org).

**YouthBuild offers options, opportunity**

The YouthBuild Phoenix program provides at-risk youth aged 17 to 24 with the opportunity to earn their high school diploma or GED, receive job training and gain valuable work experience – all at no cost.

As part of the Chicanos Por La Causa’s (CPLC) Workforce Solutions programs, the goal of YouthBuild is to provide workforce development opportunities for young people, helping participants build leadership skills, engage in community service and develop career pathways that lead to long-term success in the labor market. With a focus on construction and other hands-on skills training, participants work on building affordable housing in their communities.

As CPLC celebrated one the program’s first graduating classes, they told



As part of the YouthBuild program, at-risk youth aged 17 to 24 have the opportunity to receive hands-on training and work experience that will help them develop the skills needed to be successful in the construction labor market (submitted photo).

the success stories of two students that reflect a cross-section of those participating.

Adriana Sanchez is a YouthBuild participant whose journey reflects remarkable resilience and growth, the organization said. Since joining the program, Sanchez has earned her High School Equivalency diploma and completed the Habitat for Humanity construction pre-apprenticeship, gaining hands-on experience and industry-ready skills.

She is now pursuing employment that aligns with her training and she’s working toward her long-term goal of joining the National Guard.

“Her dedication, determination, and vision for her future make her a standout example of what’s possible when youth are given the tools and

support to succeed,” CPLC said.

Hannah Benally joined the program at age 23 after dropping out of high school. She described herself as having “no hope, feeling stuck and lost.” However, through her determination and the support of the YouthBuild team, she began to regain motivation and a sense of direction, the organization said.

Benally earned her High School Equivalency Diploma at no cost, completed Habitat for Humanity’s Construction Pre-Apprenticeship Program, and gained real-world experience at residential build sites. She also earned key industry certifications including OSHA 10, CPR/First Aid, Flagging, NCCER Core, and Green Building Awareness. Today, Benally has successfully launched her career as an Industrial Apprentice at Ludvik Electric, building a stable and fulfilling future for herself.

While a start date for the new cohort has not yet been established, those interested can learn more about the program by visiting [www.cplc.org/programs/workforce-solutions](http://www.cplc.org/programs/workforce-solutions).

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## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT



Visitors to the Arizona Science Center's latest exhibit can explore the lives of residents of Pompeii before and after the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. (submitted photo).

## 'Pompeii' now open at Science Center

"Pompeii: The Exhibition" finishes its North American tour at the Arizona Science Center in downtown Phoenix. On view through April, the exhibition examines the lives of residents of Pompeii before and after the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius on Aug. 24, 79 A.D. Over 150 artifacts on loan from the collections of the Naples National Archaeological Museum in Italy and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii will be displayed.

Visitors to the exhibition will travel back in time to 79 A.D. when Pompeii bustled as a commercial port and strategic military and trading city. In a media-rich, object-based, immersive experience, they will learn how the people of Pompeii lived, loved, worked, worshipped and found entertainment.

On view: over 150 artifacts, including frescoes, mosaics, and statues, hidden from view and forgotten for centuries until rediscovery over 250 years ago. The sudden disaster that destroyed Pompeii also preserved it and over time archaeologists have uncovered a unique record of its daily life – roads, buildings, municipal services, paintings, mosaics, artifacts and even preserved bodies. Ongoing excavations at the site provide an ever-evolving picture of everyday life at the height of the Roman Empire.

The exhibition is a premium add-on experience and requires a separate

purchase from general admission. Arizona Science Center is located at 600 E. Washington St. For additional information, visit [www.azscience.org](http://www.azscience.org) or call 602-716-2000.

## Rock Lottery returns

Crescent Ballroom's Phoenix Rock Lottery returns for its 12th anniversary on Saturday, Jan. 24, which will bring unique performances and unexpected collaborations to Valley music lovers.

Twenty-five talented Phoenix musicians will come together to embark on a difficult challenge: form five new bands, having been randomly curated by drawing names from a hat, each will write three original songs, learn one cover song, and deliver a live performance – all within a single day. The performances will take place at Crescent Ballroom, 308 N. 2nd Ave. in Downtown Phoenix, that same evening.

The lineup promises to be as jam-packed with Phoenix music talent as ever, organizers said. A full lineup announcement is coming soon.

The event is dedicated to supporting Rosie's House, a local nonprofit organization that provides music education, instruments and free instruction to underserved youth in the greater Phoenix area (<https://rosieshouse.org>). The event not only celebrates the talent of Phoenix musicians but also positively impacts the community.

Find details at [www.crescentphx.com](http://www.crescentphx.com).

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## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## Trinity concert series continues

Music at Trinity's 2025-26 Concert Series at Trinity Cathedral, 100 W. Roosevelt will continue on Feb. 1, when audience favorite Kimberly Marshall returns as the Peel Memorial organist, and this season's global music concert on March 1 introduces audiences to Southwest Asia and North Africa ensemble Layali Al-Sham.

A performance by Urban Nocturnes on March 27 features three vast and wide-ranging works by 19th century composers. The season concludes April 24-25 with the launch of an entirely new series called ComposerFest, a two-day concert experience dedicated to the work of a single composer. For the inaugural season, Music at Trinity has chosen Franz Josef Haydn, a giant of the Classic Period.

Trinity Cathedral is located at 100 W. Roosevelt St. in downtown Phoenix. Parking is available in the garage just north of the cathedral and on surrounding streets. All concerts are free unless otherwise noted. For more information, visit [www.trinitymusicaz.org](http://www.trinitymusicaz.org) or call 602-254-7126.

## Annual gala honors ballet supporters

Ballet Arizona announced the return of its annual Dance With Me Gala, honoring board members, patrons, staff and charitable donors for their support of the organization. The event will take place Saturday, Jan. 17, at the Arizona Biltmore and will honor Joan and Charlie Berry for their generosity, philanthropic dedication and lifelong philanthropic partnership. The gala will be chaired by Carla Cohen, and attendees are invited to dress in innovative couture attire.

This year's theme is "ALICE (in Wonderland)," which Ballet Arizona will stage in February. Guests can revel in an exclusive sneak peek of "ALICE (in Wonderland)" before its premieres on Feb. 12 at Symphony Hall. The beloved classic by Lewis Carroll will come to life at Symphony Hall with live music performed by The Phoenix Symphony. This breathtaking production will blend ballet and contemporary dance for a whimsical journey that will delight audiences of every age.

All proceeds from the event support Ballet Arizona's performance season as

well as its education and community engagement programs. The evening begins at 6 p.m. with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres followed by the special performance by Ballet Arizona dancers. Following dinner, guests can take to the dance floor with the professional dancers for the remainder of the evening.

Reservations for tickets, sponsorships and more can be purchased by calling Alana Davis at 602-343-6517 or by email at [events@balletaz.org](mailto:events@balletaz.org). For more information about Ballet Arizona, visit [www.balletaz.org](http://www.balletaz.org).

## Beatitudes hosts Jazz Coffee House

Church of the Beatitudes, located at 555 W. Glendale Ave., will continue its Jazz Coffee House series into the new year. The concerts are less formal in nature in a café-style environment.

Coming up on Jan. 18 is West By Northwest featuring Dom Moio on drums and joined by other performers from the U of A music faculty. Feb. 15 will bring the Todd Johnson Quartet to the stage, followed by the Beth Lederman Quartet, March 15, and the Dave Schimdt Quartet, April 19.

All of the performances will begin at 6 p.m. in Nelson Hall, with two 45-minute sets with a 30-minute intermission. A \$10 donation at the door is suggested. Find additional information online at <https://beatitudeschurch.org/music-arts>.

## Museum continues Soundcheck series

Phoenix Art Museum announced the Spring 2026 lineup for Soundcheck, a new live-music series every Third Thursday of the month from 6-7 p.m. The event brings popular local and regional acts to the museum for unplugged, can't-miss performances.

Spring performances will be presented in the Dorrance Sculpture Garden, offering a stunning setting for live music with an outdoor backdrop. On Jan. 15, catch Phoenix Afrobeat Orchestra. Feb. 19 brings The Sunflower King to the stage, and the season wraps with The Hourglass Cats, March 19.

The bar opens at 5 p.m.; doors at 5:30. Tickets to Soundcheck performances are now live on [www.phxart.org](http://www.phxart.org) and include all-day access to the Museum's galleries.

## On the Town

Along with a new year comes new opportunities to get out of the house and explore the excellent variety of Valley entertainment venues. This month brings live music, theater and poetry performances, community gatherings and free family-friendly and First Friday events. See you on the town in January!

### First Friday: Michael Jaramillo Quartet

Jan. 2  
The Nash  
[www.thenash.org](http://www.thenash.org); 602-795-0464

### First Friday: The Transformational Power of Movement & Art

Jan. 2  
Heard Museum  
<https://heard.org>; 602-252-8840

### Rattlesnake Garage

Jan. 3  
North Mountain Visitor Center  
[www.northmountainvisitorcenter.org](http://www.northmountainvisitorcenter.org); 602-343-5125

### Buena Vista Social Club performed by Café Jaleo

Jan. 4  
Crescent Ballroom  
[www.crescentphx.com](http://www.crescentphx.com); 602-716-2222



### Lorraine-Dietrich

Jan. 8  
The Rhythm Room  
[www.rhythmroom.com](http://www.rhythmroom.com); 602-612-4981

### 'So Good! The Neil Diamond Experience'

Jan. 8  
Madison Center for the Arts  
[www.themadison.org](http://www.themadison.org); 602-664-7777

### Chris Housman

Jan. 8  
Valley Bar  
[www.valleybarphx.com](http://www.valleybarphx.com)

### Jamie Anderson & Bernice Lewis

Jan. 9  
Fiddler's Dream Coffeehouse  
[www.fiddlersdream.org](http://www.fiddlersdream.org); 602-997-9795

### Scarlette and the Little Deaths

Jan. 9  
The Rhythm Room  
[www.rhythmroom.com](http://www.rhythmroom.com); 602-612-4981



### 'Pictures at an Exhibition'

Jan. 9-11  
The Phoenix Symphony  
[www.phoenixsymphony.org](http://www.phoenixsymphony.org); 602-495-1999

### Nick MacGregor + The Source

Jan. 10  
The Nash  
[www.thenash.org](http://www.thenash.org); 602-795-0464

### Family Fun Day

Jan. 10  
The Square at Heritage and Science Park  
[www.thesquarephx.org](http://www.thesquarephx.org); 602-258-0048

### Bonsai for Beginners

Jan. 10  
Japanese Friendship Garden  
[www.japanesefriendshipgarden.org](http://www.japanesefriendshipgarden.org); 602-274-8700

### Gold'n Delicious Birthday Bash

Jan. 10  
Last Exit Live  
[www.lastexitlive.com](http://www.lastexitlive.com); 602-271-7000

### 'Heist'

Jan. 10-25  
Arizona Theatre Company  
[www.arizonatheatre.org](http://www.arizonatheatre.org); 1-833-282-7328

### Watercolor & Land: Outdoor Art-Making

Jan. 13  
Heard Museum  
<https://heard.org>; 602-252-8840



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

- Rehash**  
Jan. 14  
The Rebel Lounge  
www.therebellounge.com

**Soundcheck: Phoenix Afrobeat Orchestra**  
Jan. 15  
Phoenix Art Museum  
www.phxart.org; 602-257-1880

**Buckets N Boards**  
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www.themadison.org;  
602-664-7777

**Rattlesnake Milk**  
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www.valleybarphx.com

**‘Jane Anger’**  
Jan. 16 – Feb. 1  
Order Chaos Theater Company  
at Herberger Theater Center  
www.herbergertheater.org;  
602-252-8497
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**Sudan Archives**  
Jan. 17  
Crescent Ballroom  
www.crescentphx.com; 602-716-2222

**Sharel Cassity Quartet**  
Jan. 17  
The Nash  
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

**Tucson Folk Festival Showcase**  
Jan. 17  
The Rhythm Room  
www.rhythmroom.com; 602-612-4981

**Nature Sketching Workshop**  
Jan. 17  
North Mountain Visitor Center  
www.northmountainvisitorcenter.org;  
602-343-5125
- ‘How to Train Your Dragon’ in Concert**  
Jan. 17-18  
The Phoenix Symphony  
www.phoenixsymphony.org;  
602-495-1999

**‘The Diary of Anne Frank’**  
Jan. 17-31  
Childsplay at Herberger Theater Center  
www.childsplayaz.org; 480-921-5700

**Acoustic Open Stage Thursdays**  
Jan. 22  
Fiddler’s Dream Coffeehouse  
www.fiddlersdream.org; 602-997-9795

**Whitney Hanson**  
Jan. 22  
The Rebel Lounge  
www.therebellounge.com

**Hot Dogs & Jazz**  
Jan. 24  
The Nash  
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464
- ‘Come From Away**  
Jan. 28 – March 29  
The Phoenix Theatre Company  
www.phoenixtheatre.com;  
602-254-2151

**‘The Three Little Pigs’**  
Jan. 29 – Feb. 15  
Great Arizona Puppet Theater  
www.azpuppets.org;  
602-262-2050

**‘Spamilton’**  
Jan. 30  
Madison Center for the Arts  
www.themadison.org;  
602-664-7777

**‘Madama Butterfly’**  
Jan. 31 – Feb. 1  
Arizona Opera  
www.azopera.org; 602-266-7464

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](http://www.northcentralnews.net/events).



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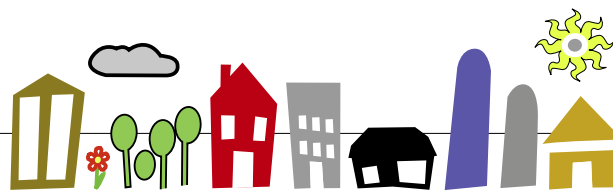


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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## Café Chat

**The vibe at O.H.S.O. is vintage Sunnyslope**

By Marjorie Rice

For Sunnyslope residents, it seems there's always been a restaurant on Central, just south of the canal. It began as Russ's Arbor, and through the decades has had a parade of different names and concepts.

Today it's O.H.S.O. & Little O's, evoking an old-time Sunnyslope vibe infused with memorabilia and historic photos, vintage table lamps, typography and graphics and a distinct mid-century modern ambience, thanks to a collaboration with the Sunnyslope Historical Society.

"It took us nearly two years to renovate the building," said General Manager Vinny Francini. "The society did all the photo wallpaper in the café, the timeline, the original menu from Russ's Arbor – they had it all for us and did a really great job. One of our owners who worked with them was pretty blown away by all they had."

The restaurant opened in March 2024. It's part of the group that began in Arcadia and has grown to include locations in Arcadia, Gilbert, North Scottsdale, Paradise Valley, Sunnyslope, Surprise and Sky Harbor and Mesa Gateway airports, the latter three in partnership with KIND Hospitality.

The Sunnyslope O.H.S.O. reflects its Arcadia origins, located on a canal and handy to bike and walking paths.

"I would say this store is maybe the most specific to the neighborhood, because of the history of the building and us being tucked in the neighborhood," Francini said. While O.H.S.O. got its start as a brewpub, there isn't a brewery on-site at the Sunnyslope location.

There still is a strong connection with beers and spirits, however, with a multitude of O.H.S.O. labels on tap, and custom cocktails made with O.H.S.O. spirits. During Arizona Beer Week in February, they'll do doughnut days, with tastings of six to 12 doughnut-inspired beers, such as blueberry or Boston Cream, paired with treats from Bosa Donuts. Then on March 14, Pi Day, they'll do something similar with pies.

The Sunnyslope O.H.S.O. is unique among the group in another



Sunnyslope's O.H.S.O. & Little O's General Manager Vinny Francini is pictured with deviled egg toast, the AZ burger and hot honey pizza. The beer is a West Coast Hoppy IPA (photo by Darryl Webb for North Central News).

way, Francini said, the only one with a Little O's café and retail shop.

At Little O's, starting at 7 a.m., seven days a week, customers can stop in after a walk or bike ride, cool off with beer, wine and cocktails, pick up apparel and other merch, order breakfast at the quick service counter, and pop open the laptop to do some work or streaming at the outdoor tables.

"People drop in all day," Francini said. "Kids come in after school for an energy drink and pizza. It's very much a neighborhood vibe."

At 11, the restaurant opens for full-service dining and what may be the longest happy hour in town.

"We've always been known for our happy hour," Francini said. It stretches from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday for drinks, including all the Arizona-made beers at \$8 for a 32-ounce pitcher. The food happy hour is 3 to 6 p.m. including pizzas and a "plain Jane" Burger.

"Our menu is unique from the other four O.H.S.O.s," Francini said. "We're the only one serving pizza."

On Saturdays and Sundays, the restaurant opens for brunch at 9 until 2 p.m., then goes back to the regular lunch and dinner menus.

"Our menu is pretty big, so we have a lot of options," Francini said.

Customer favorites include the hot pastrami sandwich, blackened salmon, and deviled egg toast – deviled egg salad on country loaf toast, topped with

crispy prosciutto, bagel seasoning and chili oil, served with a salad of corn, sun-dried tomatoes and arugula. Then there's the buffalo chicken dip, served with tortilla chips; the AZ burger with jalapeño cream cheese, poblano aioli and crispy onion strings; and pizzas including hot honey pizza with white sauce, the house four-cheese blend, pepperoni, ricotta, crushed meatballs, caramelized onions, pesto, red chile flakes, fresh basil and hot honey.

And if all that makes you thirsty, there are O.H.S.O.'s beers, including Popcycle Blonde fruit beer, Park Life Mexican-style lager and Handlebar Hefe wheat beer; and cocktails made with O.H.S.O. spirits, including the bloody Mary served with homemade beef jerky, and made with a choice of vodkas including Arcadia Horseradish, Arcadia Rosemary and Arcadia Jalapeño versions.

At lunch and dinner, the patio is a favorite spot. It's also dog-friendly, with a special entrance with a dog bar with water taps, and dog treats made from the spent grain from the brewing process.

"We've always been dog-friendly," Francini said, "dogs, bikes, beers, casual and neighborhood friendly."

O.H.S.O. & Little O's, 8525 N. Central Ave., is open every day, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Brunch is 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday and Sunday. For information, call 602-844-1186, or visit [www.ohso-brewery.com/sunnyslope](http://www.ohso-brewery.com/sunnyslope).

## Dining Briefs

**Wholesale bakery celebrates 30-year legacy**

Phoenix-based commercial bakery Strictly From Scratch, which has been producing sweet and savory breads and pastries for large-scale wholesale distribution across the country for 30 years, aims to continue its legacy by "sticking to its proven formula featuring ingredients like simplicity, integrity, consistency and a passion for excellence," leadership said.

"As we approach 2026, our focus is on smart, sustainable growth. We're expanding into new sweet goods categories and introducing exciting new products, including traditional and flavored Kringle varieties, which are already paving the way for expanded commercial opportunities," said Thomas DePaola, senior vice president of Strictly From Scratch. "Additionally, we're actively exploring strategic acquisitions that could create meaningful collaborations and broaden our capabilities and reach."

DePaola credits the company's longtime success to a relentless commitment to quality and consistency, but more importantly, to decades of refining and mastering their craft.

"As my father – founder, CEO and president Rudy DePaola – has always said, 'Know what you do and do it well.' We've built a highly versatile research and development team and achieved a balance between smart automation and hands-on craftsmanship. This combination enables us to take on complex projects that many large bakeries either can't or won't pursue, while remaining highly competitive on price."

This philosophy has driven the company's success over the past 30 years. Today, it's the largest niche commercial bakery in Phoenix and ranks among the top 20 nationally. It is also one of the top three suppliers for the airline industry. The company employs just under 200 people and serves a broad range of clients in foodservice and commercial channels, supporting both regional and national partners.

Looking ahead, DePaola said he is positioning the brand to significantly expand its capacity and capabilities, which will benefit both the local mar-



FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Food and beverage enthusiasts will gather to sample some of the best that the state has to offer at this year's A Taste of Arizona festival (photo courtesy of A Taste of AZ).

ket and the company's growing commercial customer base. Ultimately, DePaola said, their core goal has always been simple: deliver exceptional quality that aligns with the budgets and needs of their foodservice partners across Arizona and their national clients.

For more information, visit [www.sfscratch.com](http://www.sfscratch.com).

Explore local flavors at A Taste of AZ

Food enthusiasts and beverage connoisseurs alike are invited to *A Taste of AZ* magazine's A Taste of AZ Food and Drink Festival, presented by Talking Stick Resort and taking place on Saturday, Jan. 31, at Salt River Fields.

This elevated food and drink festival pairs flavors from across the Grand Canyon State and backdropped by the scenic McDowell Mountains. Hosted from 1:30 to 5 p.m. (or noon to 5 p.m. for VIP ticket holders), attendees can enjoy food samples and more from dozens of local chefs and restaurants, plus live music, cooking demos, and drinks from Arizona's top wineries, breweries and distilleries.

All tickets to the festival will include unlimited food samples, plus 15 drink samples (beer, wine and cocktails), and free parking. Guests who upgrade to a VIP ticket will receive early event access, as well as one complimentary ticket to a Diamondbacks vs. Angels Spring Training game on Feb. 22 at Salt River Fields.

A portion of this year's festival proceeds will benefit Healing Hospitality, an organization that helps hospitality professionals manage stress and fosters

personal growth through educational, wellness-focused events. Founded in 2021 by hospitality veteran David DeLorenzo, Healing Hospitality has become a resource for industry workers seeking support and balance.

The festival features some of the state's best restaurants and chefs where guests can expect food samples from purveyors such as the Caldwell County BBQ, Chula Seafood, Élephante and The Italian Daughter. In addition to the diverse culinary offerings, attendees can look forward to indulging in locally produced wine, beer and spirits like Cider Corps, Iconic Cocktail and The Shop Beer Co. This is the perfect opportunity to discover and experience the exceptional craftsmanship and quality of Arizona's beverage industry. The official lineup of all the food and drink vendors will be available online.

This year's fun will include live music, interactive cooking demonstrations, and voting for best bite and best cocktail. The festival aims to foster a sense of community and appreciation for the local food scene that is an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Tickets are available now. Salt River Fields is located at 7555 N. Pima Road in Scottsdale Visit [www.azfoodand-drinkfestival.com](http://www.azfoodand-drinkfestival.com).

Durant's reopens under new ownership

After much anticipation and in what the owners say may be the most significant restoration of a Phoenix restaurant, Durant's Steakhouse officially reopened for dinner on Wednesday, Dec. 17.

*please see DURANT'S on page 40*

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**DURANT'S continued from page 39**

Now owned by James Beard-nominated brothers Mike Mastro and Jeff Mastro, along with their father Dennis Mastro and longtime business partner Scott Troilo, the next chapter begins for the legendary restaurant, which opened in 1950.

Durant's has been closed while the restaurant was restored and underwent a year-long renovation. The ownership team – who also own and operate Dominick's Steakhouse, Steak 44, Ocean 44 and Steak 48 and Ocean 48 in cities across the country – completed the refresh of the restaurant just in time for its 75th anniversary.

All the finishes and everything from the kitchen to the dining rooms have been restored, including a brand new and high-end gourmet kitchen, new signature red booths, the iconic red walls, plus refurbished vintage neon signs and even the famous pink exterior paint has been redone, the team said. Jeff Mastro and Mike Mastro also reopened Durant's private dining room which had been closed since the '70s.

"This was really more of a restoration than a remodel," said new owner Jeff Mastro. "We think everyone will be incredibly pleased that we preserved what was here and enhanced the restaurant. The look is every bit Durant's but with some upgrades that complement the legacy brand's character, look and feel."

Among the dishes that have been enhanced, the porterhouse steak for two, Durant's prime rib, caviar service, lobster thermidor, crispy veal parmesan, plus the famous mouth-watering sides like Durant's scalloped potatoes and mushrooms in a rigatoni vodka sauce.

"We have a great new porterhouse on the menu and all the classics that Durant's is known for, plus a few new dishes," said Mastro. "The food is very much Durant's but even better. We have really taken it up a notch and can't wait for everyone to come in and try it."

Durant's also refurbished the porterhouse plaques that have hung on the walls for the last seven decades and the restaurant will still honor the famous tokens that grant the bearer a free dessert.

At the helm will be the restaurant group's longtime Chief Executive Chef Marc Lupino, who will work alongside Executive Chef Felix Ruiz.

With the addition of the Mastro family's culinary and hospitality team,



Just in time for its 75th anniversary, Midtown's Durant's reopened its doors to the public on Dec. 17 after a months-long restoration by the Mastro family, the iconic steakhouse's new owners (photo courtesy of Durant's).

guests can expect enhancements to the menu, improved kitchen operations and elevated, luxury personalized service – all while honoring the timeless Durant's experience. And, yes, patrons will still enter through the kitchen's back door.

For more information, visit [www.durantssteakhouse.com](http://www.durantssteakhouse.com).

### **Festivin returns to Wrigley Mansion**

The Wrigley Mansion will host the sixth annual Festivin, a four-day festival of wine, food, and education, Jan. 15-18.

Returning to the historic hilltop estate, the multi-day event will feature four distinct wine dinners, interactive seminars, a chef's cooking demonstration, and the signature Grand Tasting, showcasing more than 150 exceptional wines alongside chef-driven cuisine. A portion of proceeds will once again benefit Almost There: A Mom and Pup Rescue, with adoptable puppies on site during the Grand Tasting.

Launched in 2019, Festivin has evolved from a boutique gathering into a wine event that draws enthusiasts, collectors and industry professionals from across the state and beyond, organizers said. Guided by owner Jamie Hormel's vision, the event creates a setting where chefs, winemakers and sommeliers come together to educate, entertain and inspire guests in an intimate, approachable environment.

"Festivin has become a playground for curious wine lovers," said Jason Caballero, advanced sommelier and CEO of Wrigley Mansion. "In 2026

we're building on everything guests already love – great wine, incredible food and genuine hospitality – while adding new seminars and dinners that make wine feel both world-class and wonderfully fun."

Event highlights include Unplugged & Uncorked Dinner & Dancing at Geordie's and Dom Pérignon Dinner at Christopher's, Thursday, Jan. 15; Collaboration on the Knoll Dinner at Geordie's, Friday, Jan. 16; Battle on the Hill Dinner and afternoon seminars, Saturday, Jan. 17.

The event culminates with The Grand Tasting, Sunday, Jan. 18, from noon to 4 p.m. Featuring more than 150 wines, many rarely poured for the public, this walk-around experience invites guests to explore exceptional bottles across regions and styles – all available for purchase. Chef Nick Kennedy and the Wrigley Mansion culinary team will offer elevated bites, including caviar tastes, throughout the afternoon. Guests will also enjoy the opportunity to meet and snuggle adoptable puppies from Almost There.

For tickets and more information, visit [www.wrigleymansion.com/festivin](http://www.wrigleymansion.com/festivin).

### **Festival brings celebrities to Valley**

The We-Ko-Pa Celebrity Wine & Spirits Festival returns to Scottsdale Civic Center, Sat., March 21, offering the opportunity to sip, sample and indulge in a rare collection of celebrity named wines and spirits.

Presentations and tasting seminars will be hosted by Rock n' roll Hall of

Famer Neil Giraldo with his Three Chord Bourbon collection; star of the TV Series "Yellowstone," Ryan Bingham, with his Bingham's Bourbon; Erik Segelbaum, *Food & Wine* Sommelier of the Year; WWE and reality TV stars Brie and Nikki Garcia with their Bonita Bonita Wines crafted in the heart of Napa Valley; Phoenix Suns NBA All-Star Tom Chambers and Bajaribba Tequila; LPGA champion Cristie Kerr with Kerr Cellars; former NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe with Bledsoe Family Winery to present a virtual seminar; MLB legend Dusty Baker with Baker Family Wines; actor Woody Harrelson presenting a virtual seminar; and more to be announced.

Kerry Dunne, partner, R Entertainment, said, "We couldn't be more excited to collaborate on this exceptional one-day experience with Scottsdale Arts again. The outdoor venue boasts the ideal location in Scottsdale for a tasting event, and we look forward to another successful event."

A portion of event proceeds goes directly to Scottsdale Arts, supporting its mission to present traditional and contemporary arts of interest to worldwide audiences.

General admission is \$65 and includes 10 samples from over 40 celebrity wine and spirits, up to three seminars with celebrity discussion and additional tastings, a souvenir sample glass and lanyard. VIP and non-drinker tickets are also available. Visit <https://scottsdalearts.org> and click on the "Events" link.

### **Sushi spot launches winter month specials**

With the arrival of the winter months, Sushi Brokers Arcadia is offering limited-time specials that include seasonal bites and craft cocktails – perfect for friendly January gatherings.

Dishes include The Trio appetizer (potstickers, krab rangoons and spring rolls); The Popo-Pop Sashimi (six-piece yellowtail sashimi topped with jalapeño, crunch garlic, micro cilantro and yuzu sauce); and Tempura Tango (yellowtail, cucumber and avocado topped with tuna, eel sauce and tempura jalapeños).

In addition, whet your whistle with two drink specials: the Cranberry Mule (Deep Eddy Cranberry, fresh lime juice and ginger beer) or the Horchata Espresso Martini (Celaya Reposado, horchata liqueur and Owen's Espresso).



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Sushi Brokers Arcadia is located at 4419 E. Indian School Road. The restaurant is open Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. For additional information, call 480-515-5000 or visit [www.sushibrokers.com](http://www.sushibrokers.com).

Raise a glass at Arizona Wine Festival

The Square PHX (formerly Heritage Square) will play host to the 2026 Arizona Wine Festival, scheduled for Jan. 24-25 and featuring 20 Arizona wineries, 70 artist, craft and artisan vendors, food trucks and live entertainment.

Along with attendance by some of Arizona’s best wineries, the event introduces new activities, including Barrel Tastings. The Laft Pavilion will be transformed into the Barrel Room where attendees can do barrel tastings with six different wineries. Talk to the winemakers about how the wine was made, learn about the barrel aging process and taste the difference of barrel wine versus the finished wine in a bottle. In addition, a grape stomp competition will pair teams of two will compete to see who can stomp the



The 2026 Arizona Wine Festival, which will be held at The Square PHX Jan. 24-25, will feature 20 Arizona wineries, artists and craft vendors, and food trucks and entertainment (photo courtesy of the Arizona Wine Festival).

most juice out of grapes. Prizes and fun are guaranteed, organizers said.

The event takes place Saturday, Jan. 24, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (\$35 per person pre-sale/\$45 at the gate); and Sunday, Jan. 25, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (\$30 per person pre-sale/\$40 at the gate. Each ticket includes a commemorative wine glass and 10 tasting tickets. Beer

Tasting tickets are also available for \$20, pre-sale, and \$25 at the gate, and include a beer tasting glass and 10 tasting tickets.

The Square PHX is located at 113 N. 6th St. in downtown Phoenix. For tickets and information, visit <https://willcoxwinecountry.org> and click on the “Events” link

New mocktail menu offered

For those looking for a healthier way to imbibe, Picasso’s Healthy Italian Kitchen has introduced a selection of new drinks and an expanded mocktail menu with two new non-alcoholic sips. During the eatery’s Healthy Hour, offered daily from 3 to 6 p.m., guests can enjoy \$3 off all mocktails and \$6 off all cocktails, along with specials on select pizzas and appetizers.

New non-alcoholic offerings include the white grape cooler, with Fre non-alcoholic pinot grigio with peach puree, pineapple tidbits, and orange juice, finished with a splash of soda and an orange wheel garnish, and the grapefruit “Mock-Jito,” with fresh mint, lime juice, and simple syrup, combined with Fever-Tree Ruby Red Grapefruit soda and a splash of sparkling water, then garnished with a mint sprig and lime wheel for a bright, refreshing finish.

Picazzo’s fusion approach to a modern-Italian cuisine incorporates the flavors of Asian, Mediterranean and Mexican ingredients into its menu. In Phoenix, visit Picasso’s at 4669 E. Cactus Road. Visit [www.picazzos.com](http://www.picazzos.com) for details.

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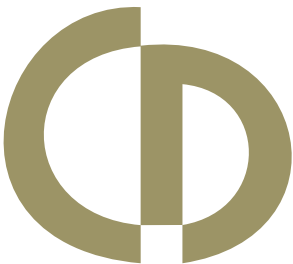


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