



north central news

the voice of the north central phoenix community since 1999

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PMPC puts civic stewardship into action

By Kathryn M. Miller

The Greater Phoenix area wouldn't be known as the Valley of the Sun without the natural mountain boundaries that surround it. And in the city of Phoenix, the more than 41,000 acres of preserve land found in the smaller interior mountain ranges would not exist without forward-thinkers and collective effort. While Phoenix has a robust parks system, continued stewardship can be a heavy lift. That is where Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council (PMPC) steps in.

Any land designated as preserve within the boundaries of the city of Phoenix, which includes the Phoenix Mountains Preserve, South Mountain Preserve and Sonoran Preserve, fall under PMPC's advocacy efforts, said Stacia Hurst, board secretary for the organization.

"The Phoenix Mountains Preserve grew out of a grass roots movement, which began more than 50 years ago and continues today," Hurst said. "It has become a cause in which ordinary people are deeply and emotionally involved."

Efforts by individuals to save the mountains within Phoenix began in the early 1960s, but coalesced into a group effort when the Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council was founded in August, 1970.

"From land preservation to public education, the work of PMPC reflects a shared promise: that the Phoenix Mountains will remain open, protected and

please see STEWARDSHIP on page 8



Desert View Elementary School's Wayfinders robotics team, under the guidance of coaches Kevin and Lauren Locker, found success in competition and in life as they participated in their rookie year this school year (submitted photo).

Collaboration helps robotics team find its way

By Kathryn M. Miller

Kevin and Lauren Locker were looking for a volunteer opportunity where they could lend their skills and their time. Sunnyslope's Desert View Elementary School had eager learners who needed an opportunity to expand their horizons. When they came together last fall, all of the pieces clicked – literally.

"We became acquainted with the school through our church, Scottsdale Bible Church," Kevin said. "They have adopted a couple of schools in the area, to help out wherever they can. One of the Desert View staff members came to our church campus and I asked, offhand, if they were interested in doing any kind of STEM after school program. It was something that I had done previously. He was really excited about it – they had never done anything like that at their school."

Kevin is a recently retired semiconductor engineer. After spending 20 years at Honeywell Aviation, another 10 years designing semiconductors elsewhere, then the last 12 years at Intel working as a chip

architect – he had a lot of knowledge to pass on, and a willingness to give back to the community. As did his wife, Lauren, who picks up the story.

To gauge the student interest in creating a FIRST LEGO League team, the couple attended the parent-teacher open house at Desert View prior to the beginning of the 2026-27 school year.

"We set up a display at the open house and talked to parents," Lauren recalled. "And, of course, whenever you have LEGOs out, students are just drawn like bees to honey."

Next, they sponsored two days of LEGO game day

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From the Editor

This month, we are once again focusing on how community collaboration can bring positive changes to our North Central neighborhoods – and beyond.

On the cover, we explore how the Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council is working with stakeholders across the Valley towards the continued preservation and improvement of our Phoenix preserve lands. The group considers civic stewardship a part of community responsibility.



We also spoke with Kevin and Lauren Locker, a couple that believes in volunteerism and who have lent their skills and time to fourth, fifth and sixth graders at Desert View Elementary to create a FIRST LEGO League team. In its rookie year, this enthusiastic robotics team, the

Wayfinders, forged a path to a fourth-place win at the state competition.

In this month's Café Chat, Marjorie Rice explores the sensory symphony that is Thai E-San, a generational restaurant that brings the flavors of northeast Thailand to Phoenix diners. For our top story in Business, Trudy Thopson Shumaker sat down with the new owners of the Root Salon, where the goal is to provide a comfortable, welcoming environment for clients and a space where talented stylists can mentor those who are newer to the trade.

As always, you will find news from our North Central neighbors, businesses and schools, along with places to eat and drink, our pet of the month and a wide variety of things to do in Phoenix.

Finally, we encourage you to reach out if there is a North Central story that you feel needs told. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy our March issue. Until next month, all my best,

Kathryn M. Miller
Editor, *North Central News*



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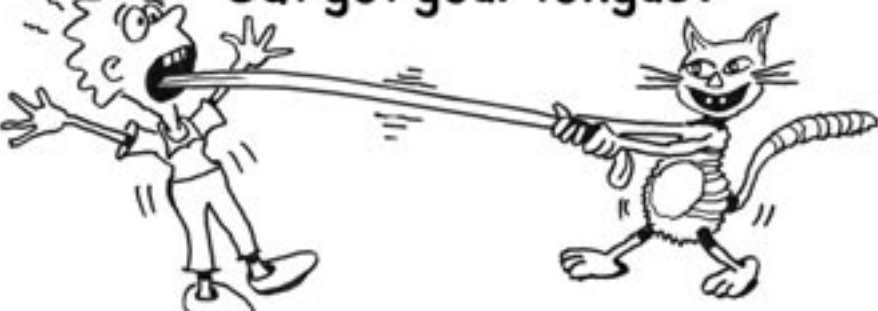
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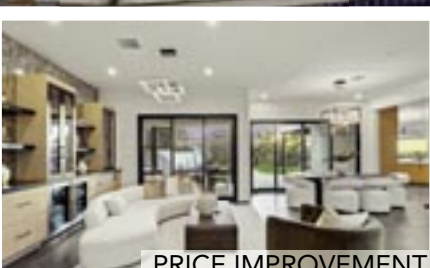
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After a Jan. 27 vote by Phoenix City Council, the next 10-mile extension of the Valley Metro Light Rail is planned to connect in North Central (photo courtesy of Valley Metro).

Light rail decision will impact North Central

By Kathryn M. Miller

With a 7-2 vote on Jan. 27, the Phoenix City Council chose to re-evaluate high-capacity transit options for west Phoenix and prioritize the proposed West Phoenix corridor along Indian School Road, putting a halt to current project development and the Capital Investment Grant process for the Capitol Extension (CAPEX).

The decision shifted away from the much-anticipated CAPEX project, which would serve as a connector between the existing downtown line and the future I-10 Extension. Both of these extensions have been supported by voters on multiple occasions, and there was significant support at the January meeting to stay on track with the projects, which could have seen completion by 2029 and 2033-34, respectively. There were also dozens of Indian School Road business owners who showed up to voice their opposition to light rail on that arterial road. Although, through the Valley Metro online survey, many expressed Indian School Road as a preference.

District 4 Councilwoman Laura Pastor, in a social media post following the meeting, said, “Last night, I voted in support of the Capitol Extension. West Phoenix and Maryvale deserve timely investment and the same opportunities other parts of the city have received. The decision made last night halted progress on a voter-approved project, put federal funding at risk, and stepped away from years of community feedback that helped shape the Capitol Extension. While this vote did not go the way I hoped, my commitment to fighting for equitable transportation investment in our communities has not changed.”

For their part, the city of Phoenix said that they and Valley Metro “remain committed to advancing high-capacity transit to west Phoenix to meet significant demand, support mobility in this corridor and to continue to deliver upon the community’s vision for transit and transportation.”

The city added, “We will advance planning of the West Phoenix corridor along Indian School Road. Comprehensive community engagement will be central to this work, ensuring we hear from all residents, business owners and stakeholders along the corridor as we develop solutions that serve the needs of west Phoenix.”

As the focus shifts to Indian School Road, the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) route approved in 2024 will need refined to select a connection point to the existing light rail in central Phoenix. As of its adoption by the city council (May 2024) and Valley Metro board (June 2024), that connection could be either at Central Avenue and Indian School Road or at 19th Avenue and Camelback Road, which would travel a mile south to Indian School Road. From there, the roughly 10-mile extension would travel to 75th Avenue, turning south to Thomas Road and terminating at the Desert Sky Transit Center.

Next steps will include a more refined right-of-way assessment, preliminary engineering including station locations and a refined operating plan. Construction could begin by 2032-33, with completion estimated in 2036-37.

Residents can stay up to date on next steps by signing up for project updates at www.valleymetro.org/emailnotices and visiting the West Phoenix Alternatives Analysis project page: www.valleymetro.org/project/west-phoenix-high-capacity-transit-alternatives-analysis.

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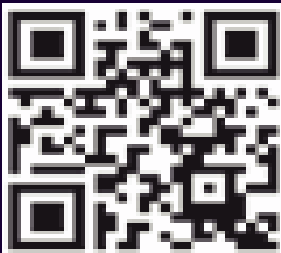


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COMMUNITY

COLLABORATION *continued from page 1*

events and invited interested fourth, fifth and sixth graders. Through Kevin's contacts at Arizona State University, they created LEGO pits, where students could build anything they wanted. Alongside that were robotics activities that would be used in the League.

"So, they got to dip their toes in the water and see what it would be like to be part of a team," Lauren said. Then, working with the school principal, John Mospan, and the after-school coordinator, they put together a team of 10 students, dubbed the Wayfinders.

The League competition has four aspects. First, there is the actual Robot Game – a timed event where the students take their designed robot and attachments and place it on a 4-foot by 8-foot game map where it autonomously interacts with a set of mission models.

"They do the programming, they do the designing of the attachments, they do the building; they're involved in every step of that process," Kevin said.

The team also is assessed on the robot design – how innovative it is; the way that the students solve the mission – not just the game score, but the process behind the solution; and the innovation project – where the kids have to solve a problem that aligns with a theme. This year, it was archaeology. With the Lockers leading and support and mentorship from members of the Brophy Robotics team, the students got to work.

Fast forward to the second week in December, when the Wayfinders attended the regional competition and earned second place out of 28 teams. This put them on a path to attend the state championship in January, where they earned fourth place overall among 66 teams.

In the Robot Game event, the rook-

ie Wayfinders scored an impressive 420 points – an increase of 70 points from their regional competition score and the third-highest total recorded at the championship.

Another big part of the League is demonstrating its six core values, said Lauren: Discovery, Innovation, Impact, Inclusion, Teamwork and Fun.

"We really saw them grow in these areas – they really caught on to that. It was one of the best parts of the whole season."

The students also found future inspiration – one sixth grader, who won the Innovation Award after visiting an archaeological site, said that he wanted to build the team idea when he grows up... "I want to be an engineer," he told the Lockers. Another student, who won the Most Valuable Teammate award at the end of the season, "rose as a natural leader," the coaches said.

John Mospan, who has served six of his 11 years in the Washington Elementary School District as principal at Desert View, explained what this kind of program means to his students.

"Our school is 98 percent free and reduced lunch, which means that we have an overwhelming majority of students that are facing challenges that some of their more affluent peers don't face," he said. "We have high confidence in all of our students. But they might not have the same opportunities that some of their peers have. So, bringing in this robotics club was a chance to provide them with some opportunities to really excel and shine in other ways that our district curriculum or our current school activity couldn't provide."

Beyond technical skills, the program offers an opportunity for students to develop life skills.

"The students are learning about what it means to develop teamwork, that camaraderie to work as a group and maybe achieve a goal that you could not achieve on your own," Mospan added. "And they're developing that skill within them that we hope will be able to translate for continued development and continuous growth over the course of the years to come."

As a small neighborhood school with only 275 students, Mospan says being a part of the community and connecting with the community is a big part of the school's identity – and its success.

"It's too hard for us to do the work that we're doing, which is critically important work, in isolation," he said. "We need to work together as a team, just like our students do in this club where they're developing that teamwork mentality and working collaboratively."

Beyond ongoing partnerships with community organizations, the principal points to his team as part of the success equation.

"Over the last five years, our teachers have worked tremendously hard to support their students and have changed the school from a 'C' rating to an 'A' rating and then last year achieving an 'A+' rating. That speaks volumes to the hard work that our teachers and our staff have done to support our students."

And he had high praise for the Lockers, who have volunteered their time – spending two hours a day, twice a week for the past 20 weeks – and want to bring the program back next school year. After-school funding is always in question, the Lockers said, but they have been supported by generous sponsors this year, including Elaine Michaud, the FIRST Lego League Arizona representative, and Anna Prakash, the co-founder of Education

Empowers, in addition to their church. And the parents themselves were hugely supportive, Kevin said.

"The big encouragement for me was all of the people that rose to the challenge, saw the value in this and just made it possible for all this to work," he said.

Lauren added, "I think that Desert View is a real bright light in Sunnyslope. It's a really wonderful community and we're privileged to be a part of it."

Residents who would like to support the Wayfinders (team number 63924) or the school in general can make a tax credit donation to Desert View. Contact the school at 602-347-4000 or visit <https://desertview.wesd-schools.org>. Learn more about the Arizona FIRST LEGO League by visiting <https://azfll.engineering.asu.edu/fll-programs/discover>.

'Slope Fest celebrates community

Palma Park, 1135 E. Dunlap Ave., will play host to the annual 'Slope Fest and Tour de Sunnyslope, slated for Saturday, March 28, 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Organized by the East Sunnyslope Community (East Sunnyslope Neighborhood Association & Block Watch), which just celebrated its 10th anniversary as an organization, the annual event is a community gathering that celebrates everything that makes Sunnyslope special.

At the family event, attendees will enjoy live music from local entertainers and the opportunity to visit with local vendors and find information about city and county services, as well as area nonprofits. Food vendors are also expected.

Find event information and registration for the Tour de Sunnyslope online at www.slopestaz.org.



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COMMUNITY

STEWARDSHIP continued from page 1

cared for. This is civic stewardship in action, where love of place becomes responsibility, and responsibility becomes legacy.”

That understanding of community responsibility is part of what makes the organization unique. Their board is volunteer-led and their 80 members include hikers, conservationists, rangers and rescue teams, educators and volunteers, neighbors who live at the base of the mountains and families discovering desert ecology for the first time. PMPC brings these diverse voices together in collective action.

In the last year, PMPC strengthened partnerships that bring stewardship to life, Hurst explained. Working alongside the Save Our Mountains Foundation and the North Mountain Visitor Center, the organization supported educational and conservation-focused events that welcomed new audiences into the preserves. Behind the scenes, advocacy continued for land acquisition and preservation efforts, ensuring that key parcels remain public, protected and



There is nothing like a desert mountain hike after a rain, and one group of Valley residents is working to secure Phoenix preserve land for future generations, including North Mountain Park, which is part of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve (photo by Kathryn M. Miller).

free from incompatible development.

In 2026, the organization will continue to focus on building long-term resilience for both the preserves and the people who use them. That includes addressing one of the most pressing challenges the organization says is facing the Phoenix Mountains: the strain caused by extreme heat and inconsistent trail infrastructure.

“High use, undocumented trails, outdated mapping and limited signage contribute to safety risks, rescues and environmental degradation,” Hurst said. “These challenges affect not only park users, but also rangers, first responders, and nearby neighborhoods. At the same time, pressures including land misuse, rezoning efforts and incompatible development proposals, pose serious risks to ecological health and long-term preservation.”

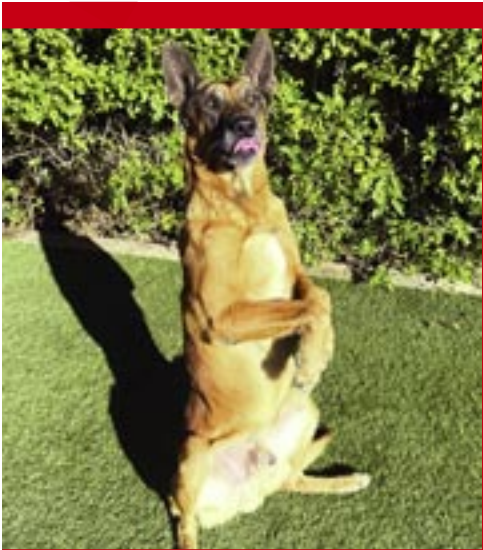
Other 2026 goals include supporting the development and implementation of a comprehensive Trails Master Plan with the Parks Department; expanding educational programming; increasing memberships, donations and event volunteer crews; and acquiring volunteer crews to lead GIS mapping and updates of unused land parcels between residential areas and preserve boundaries.

Residents who would like to connect with PMPC will find them at the Libby Goff Memorial Seed Ball Toss & Hike, scheduled for Saturday, March 14 at 9 a.m.

The organization also partners with Save Our Mountains Foundation for the Festival in the Mountains each October, that highlights authors, creatives, small businesses, guided hikes, educational workshops and wildlife education. The community driven event serves a fundraiser to benefit the overhead costs of operating the North Mountain Visitor Center and Save Our Mountains Foundation projects and mission.

PMPC meets the first Monday of each month at 7 p.m., at the North Mountain Visitors Center, 12950 N. 7th St. Find additional information at www.phoenixmountains.org or on social media: @phoenixmountains.

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COMMUNITY



This 1950 Santa Barbara-style ranch home, with lush gardens, a guest house and outdoor patios offering a serene indoor-outdoor lifestyle, is just one of 10 homes featured on the 2026 Windsor Square Home Tour (submitted photo).

Explore homes in Windsor Square tour

The Windsor Square Home Tour invites the public to step inside 10 stunning private residences in one of the city’s most desirable and historic neighborhoods.

Windsor Square is a 260-home neighborhood, where homes date back more than 80 years. Established in 1929, and bordered by Central Avenue, 7th Street, Pasadena Avenue and Oregon Avenue, the area is noted for its curvy streets and charming homes. It is one of the oldest suburbs of Phoenix, created when the city’s population was just 70,000 and the trolley line ended at Thomas Road.

During the 2026 Home Tour, scheduled for Sunday, March 29, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., guests will have a rare opportunity to explore homes that capture the architectural diversity and character of Windsor Square. From a neocolonial 1946 gem on Orange Drive, where original oak floors and crystal knobs coexist with terrazzo counters and a modern primary suite, to the eclectic 1942 ranch on Oregon Avenue, featuring Moroccan-inspired doors, custom woodworking, and a backyard retreat complete with a sparkling pool and even a small flock of friendly chickens.

Visitors can admire a Spanish Colonial Revival ranch, also on Oregon Avenue, with a newly added casita, modernized interiors and a beautifully landscaped pool area, or step into a

Santa Barbara-style ranch on 6th Street, where lush gardens, a guest house with full kitchen, and outdoor patios offer a serene indoor-outdoor lifestyle. For fans of mid-century modern design, the 1947 International/Art Deco-inspired home on 6th Street delights with geometric forms, full-height glass expanses, and a resort-style backyard complete with a restored swimming pool.

But the Windsor Square Home Tour is more than just a home tour, it’s a full-day community experience.

“Visitors are encouraged to stroll the tree-lined historic streets, browse jewelry, crafts and other offerings from local vendors at the street fair, and enjoy live music in a relaxed outdoor setting,” organizers said. “The popular beer garden provides the perfect place to gather with friends, while food trucks offer a variety of lunch options throughout the day.”

Just steps away, guests can also explore the shops and restaurants at Uptown Plaza, making the event an ideal opportunity to experience the best of North Central Phoenix in one outing.

Whether an architecture enthusiast, a lover of historic homes or simply looking for a vibrant and enjoyable day in one of Phoenix’s most charming neighborhoods, the Windsor Square Home Tour is not to be missed.

Tickets are available online at <https://tinyurl.com/ywz2femy>; \$25 in advance (plus small processing fee); \$30 at the door (plus fee). For more information, updates, and tour details, visit www.windsorsquarephoenix.com.

North Central Phoenix

JANUARY 2026

MARKET
UPDATE

\$1,234,297

AVG SALE PRICE
(+11.7% from last month)

\$434.41

AVG SALE PRICE/SQFT
(+2.4% from last month)

\$368.94

MEDIAN SALE PRICE/SQFT
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70

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150

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COMMUNITY



The Phoenix Public Works Department is recommending a multi-year solid waste fee increase, beginning July 1, to cover an expected budget shortfall (photo courtesy of city of Phoenix).

City proposes waste rate increase

The Solid Waste Division of the Public Works Department is expecting a budget shortfall of \$20.8 million this fiscal year. To address this shortfall and to keep revenue on pace with expenses in the future, they are recommending a multi-year fee increase.

The Public Works Department has presented a plan to City Council that would adjust the residential solid waste rate, which they say is needed to keep up with rising operating costs. The proposal outlines a \$6 monthly increase for 2026 and 2027, and \$5 for 2028. They are also proposing an increase the optional curbside green organics collection subscription fee to one-fourth of the applicable monthly Solid Waste rate, effective July 1.

The last time a solid waste rate adjustment was approved was in 2020. Since then, the department says that staff costs have risen 32 percent, vehicle costs have gone up by 52 percent, and construction and maintenance costs for critical infrastructure have increased by 40 percent. During the same time period, the monthly solid waste rate only increased by 2 percent annually.

If a rate increase does not go into effect to start the fiscal year in July 2026, the city says that the Public Works Department would be unable to provide solid waste collection and disposal services as they currently exist. The alternative to a rate increase would be large reductions in service.

Residents are invited to attend any of the community info sessions scheduled this month – with two presented in Spanish and one virtual only – where

they can hear directly from Solid Waste representatives and have their questions answered. In North Central, a session will be held Tuesday, March 10, 6 p.m., at Washington Activity Center, 2240 W. Citrus Way.

Council will vote on the proposed rate adjustment on April 22. For a schedule of the community info sessions, detailed rate charts and answers to frequently asked questions, visit www.phoenix.gov/swrate2026.

Pool fence program promotes child safety

In 2024, 79 adults and kids died from drowning in Maricopa and Pinal counties. That is the highest number since records started being kept in 2005, according to Child Crisis Arizona. To combat this crisis, the non-profit organization is partnering with Salt River Project (SRP), State Farm, the Independent Pool & Spa Service Association, Inc. and local firefighter charities on its 5th Annual Pool Fence Safety Program.

Through this initiative, now through April 5, Child Crisis Arizona welcomes parents or caregivers who are financially unable to afford pool barriers and have young children to apply for a free pool fence.

Families living in Maricopa County can apply for a free pool fence if they meet certain eligibility criteria. With applications available in both English and Spanish, those interested can apply on the organization's website, www.childcrisisaz.org/what-we-do/pool-fence-program. General inquiries may be directed to the nonprofit at 480-834-9424.

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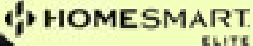
Jacob and I will be there so be sure to stop by, say hello, and grab some **BLONDIE SWAG** before the race.

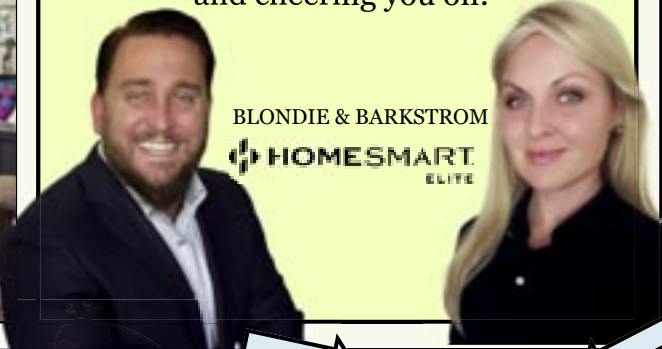
Don't forget - this Saturday, March 7th, is the annual Sunnyslope 5K Scamper!

There's still time to register, so grab your tickets, Go to: **BlondieRealtor.com** > Sunnyslope 5K and join the fun. This family-friendly event is perfect for all ages and is stroller and wheelchair accessible, making it a great morning out for everyone.

Be sure to stop by when you see the BLONDIE signs - Jacob and I will be there handing out BLONDIE swag, 2026 Scamper memorabilia bands, and plenty of cold drinks to help you rehydrate after the race. We look forward to seeing you there and cheering you on!

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Who We Are

We are a more-than-175-member-strong group of actively selling agents who have a vested interest in the community, the real estate market and North Central Phoenix. This tour is a cooperative effort among the active REALTORS of the Central Corridor. The tour has been in existence for more than 35 years and is an all-volunteer organization.

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,
visit our website at**

<https://northcentraltour.com/>

COMMUNITY

City budget hearings begin

The Phoenix city manager is scheduled to present the 2026-27 City Manager's Trial Budget for Phoenix City Council consideration Tuesday, March 24. The meeting, which will be held at City Council chambers and broadcast online, begins at 2:30 p.m. The Preliminary 5-Year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) will also be presented.

For more information, visit the Budget and Research Department's website at www.phoenix.gov/budget.

Photo enforcement citations start in March

In late January, the city of Phoenix announced that photo safety cameras would be returning to Phoenix roadways on Feb. 23. A total of 17 speed-monitoring cameras will be placed at various locations throughout the city aimed at changing driver behavior, supplementing traffic enforcement efforts by Phoenix Police and complementing the city's other Vision Zero strategies.

"The Photo Safety Program is an important step forward in our commitment to reducing fatalities on Phoenix roads," said Street Transportation Director, Briiana Velez. "Photo safety cameras are just one resource towards safer roadways – I'm proud that we are implementing a program that strengthens our safety efforts and aligns with our Vision Zero Action Plan."

The Photo Safety Program will include nine camera locations that will rotate through corridors with histories of speed-involved crashes. Camera locations will rotate after a six-month period. Eight additional cameras will be placed in 15-mph school zones, rotating weekly throughout the school year.

In and around the North Central area, corridor cameras will be placed mid-block at the following locations:

- Thunderbird Road: 35th Avenue to Interstate 17; Interstate 17 to 19th Avenue
- 7th Street: Thomas Road to Indian School Road
- Camelback Road: 24th Street to 32nd Street

The program will include a 30-day warning period, which began Feb. 23, during which violators will be sent warning notices instead of citations. Enforcement with citations will start

March 25, for drivers exceeding the posted speed limit.

The city says that the Photo Safety Program is focused on increasing roadway safety and not generating revenue. It operates on a cost-recovery system, any remaining funds will be invested in implementing the city's Vision Zero Road Safety Action Plan (www.phoenix.gov/roadsafety).

"Our goal is to reduce fatal collisions, and this technology is a proven tool to help achieve that," said Phoenix Police Commander Nicholas Diponzio. "Helping everyone who lives, works and visits Phoenix reach their destination safely."

For additional information, along with frequently asked questions and a map of locations, residents can visit www.phoenix.gov/photosafety.

Airport offers early bag check

Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport began offering Early Bag Check on Wednesday, Feb. 11. The free service is operated by Bags, a Metropolis company. It allows passengers to check their luggage before arriving at the terminal, helping them travel lighter and more easily on the PHX Sky Train and save time by skipping airline ticket counters, according to an announcement by the city of Phoenix Aviation Department.

Passengers flying domestically on the following airlines can use the service: Alaska, American, Delta, Frontier, Southwest and United. Early Bag Check counters are located at the Rental Car Center and East Economy Parking and are open daily from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., including holidays.

In addition to checking bags, passengers can also print their boarding passes at the Early Bag Check counters. Depending on the airline, passengers may check up to two bags per person. While there is no additional fee for the service, airline baggage fees still apply. Bags must be checked at least 90 minutes before the scheduled departure and no more than four hours before the flight, per airline policy.

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COMMUNITY

Pet of the Month
Sweet senior receives
second chance

Covered in dirt with muddy paws, Ophelia was found in dire straits when she was rescued in December of last year. Thanks to an Arizona Humane Society Emergency Animal Medical Technician, the seven-year-old Siberian Husky was given a second chance at life after she was hit by a car.

Ophelia was treated in the shelter's trauma hospital where she received a dental treatment and then went into a loving Foster Hero home for continued care until she fully recovered. Although she was hurt and scared while in the Arizona Humane Society's care, this sweet senior never lost her smile and bright demeanor.

A true testament to the work being done to help homeless pets in our community, Ophelia (pet number 834651) is a great example of a life saved thanks to the support of animal lovers throughout the Valley. Now, she is looking forward to a life full of long naps, walks full of sniffs and never-ending pets whenever she wants them.

Optimistic Ophelia's adoption fee includes her spay surgery, current vaccinations, a microchip and a follow-up wellness exam with a VCA Animal Hospital. Visit this gorgeous girl at the Arizona Humane Society's Papago Park Campus, 5501 E. Van Buren St., or learn more at www.azhumane.org/adopt to give her the loving forever home she deserves.



After being hit by a car and treated at Arizona Humane Society's trauma hospital, seven-year-old Siberian Husky Ophelia is ready for her next chapter (submitted photo).

prizes including luxury cars as hole-in-one prizes, high-end golf accessories and more. Guests can also enjoy fun activities like Beat the Pro and an air cannon challenge. Breakfast and lunch will also be provided.

The funds raised will benefit the nonprofit organization and its lifesaving programs including its state-of-the-art Lazin Animal Foundation Trauma Hospital and intensive care units, Field Team rescue efforts of abused pets, as well as spay/neuter initiatives and veterinary efforts for owned pets throughout our community.

Spots are still available for single golfers or foursomes to register, with sponsorship opportunities also available. For more information or to sign-up, visit www.azhumane.org/golf.

Tournament supports
homeless pets

The Arizona Humane Society invites residents to join the fun as it takes over the McCormick Ranch Golf Club on Friday, April 10, for its Sixth Annual Home in One Golf Tournament, sponsored by Candelaria and Schultz Development.

From puppies on the putting green to doggies on the driving range, Home in One is sure to be the cutest lifesaving golf tournament in town. The shotgun tournament is set to start at 7:15 a.m., with all proceeds going to benefit the more than 25,000 sick, injured and abused homeless pets that the state's leading animal welfare organization cares for each year.

The day's outing will feature exciting opportunities to win incredible

City promotes
feral cat program

The city of Phoenix uses a humane approach to manage feral cat populations through Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR); a method that helps both community members and cats thrive.

Through this program, cats are safely trapped, spayed/neutered and vaccinated and then returned to their original location. Ear-tipping shows a cat has already been fixed and vaccinated. TNR, the city says, reduces fighting, spraying and loud yowling, keeps cats healthier and closer to their food source, prevents new, unaltered cats from moving in and humanely reduces the overall cat population over time.

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Whether you're a resident needing help or someone interested in supporting this work, resources and nonprofit partners are available. Learn more about the Feral Cat Welfare Program by visiting www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/nsd/resources/Feral_Cat_Welfare.html.

Pet Project receives grant

The Arizona Pet Project recently received a \$150,000 grant from the Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation to support and expand its services through partner organizations, including those focused on veterans with pets. Dedicated to keeping pets with the people who love them most during times of crisis, The Arizona Pet Project provides critical services and resources to vulnerable community members.

The unrestricted grant funds will bolster the organization's ability to meet the growing demand for pet-inclusive support services across the state. As housing insecurity and homelessness continue to rise, many individ-



Veterans, who often rely on the companionship of their pets for therapeutic assistance, emotional support and companionship, are among the populations that will benefit from a recent grant received by The Arizona Pet Project (submitted photo).

uals, including veterans, face the heart-breaking choice between accessing essential human services and caring for their beloved animal companions. The Arizona Pet Project's model works to eliminate that choice by ensuring both

people and their pets receive the care and resources they need.

The Arizona Pet Project collaborates closely with a diverse range of social service and veteran support organizations to remove barriers to care for

individuals and their pets in crisis. Through key partnerships with UMOM New Day Centers, Central Arizona Shelter Services, Keys to Change in the Valley and in Tucson, Primavera and STAR Village, the organization provides services including emergency veterinary care, pet food and supplies, support meeting housing requirements (such as vaccines and licensing), temporary boarding and more – all aimed at keeping families together

Veterans, who often rely on the companionship of their pets for therapeutic assistance, emotional support and companionship, are among the populations served. The Arizona Pet Project bridges a vital gap by providing case management, veterinary care, pet-related financial assistance, and rapid support that allows veterans to meet shelter and housing requirement – services that have directly prevented delays in safety and stability.

For more information about The Arizona Pet Project and its work to support Arizona's most vulnerable pet families, visit www.azpetproject.org.

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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS



Childhood friends Jacqueline Moore (left) and Traci Barrett returned to North Central and recently launched a reimagined salon experience at The Root Salon (submitted photo).

Duo returns to roots at North Central salon

By Trudy Thompson Shumaker

If getting your hair cut in a room full of mirrors and fancy people gives you a sense of dread, and instead of going to a salon you head for the

kitchen shears, read this. There is a place for us, and it's right here in North Central. It's called The Root Salon.

"I avoided salons all my life, because they intimidated me," says now salon owner Jacqueline Moore. "Mirrors everywhere, stylish people with perfect makeup...not for me," she said.

But one day her bestie from elementary school, a successful stylist to the stars and national consultant to top brands, moved back home from Hollywood, "because I wanted to raise my little one here in North Central, close to my family and friends," said Traci Barrett, celebrity stylist and co-owner at Root.

Barrett left Hollywood and came home, renting a chair in a neighborhood salon and one fine day was pushing a stroller full of fussy toddler through the neighborhood with her bestie, Jacqueline. Many of Barrett's clients were flying to Phoenix for her haircuts and color, and she flew to them on occasion. It was "a little crazy."

"As my friend and I were walking with our little ones, I kept telling her about the problems in the beauty industry. Gone are the days of young stylists working in a salon where they learn and perfect their skills with the mentorship of older, experienced stylists. Instead, they graduate from beauty school and rent a booth somewhere and they are isolated, inexperienced and easily frustrated and they burn out. Not to mention that their clients don't have the benefits of a stylist who can offer truly top-notch services," said Barrett.

Cue Moore, the lifelong friend and salon-avoider.

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“I really like to build systems that work for established industries – and optimize them for success. I was listening to Traci and thinking, here’s what I’d do about that,” she said.

She had taken a break from business but was itching to get back to what she does best. “I’m a mom and a wife and a business builder – I see ways to change traditional ways of doing business and remake them to suit today’s markets.”

So, the pair hatched a plan. “We started looking for a space for our own salon, where we’d create a place for all people to feel welcome and safe, and we’d teach them to trust our stylists. They may come in unsure and a bit wary, but they leave with confidence and looking their best. And we’d make educating our stylists a top priority. Whether discussing cuts and color or how to best understand each client’s hairstyle priorities, we mentor and share information,” says Barrett.

The pair bought a long-time salon named “The Root Salon,” and changed everything except the name.

“The name ‘root’ describes us – we came back to our own roots here in North Central, and we’re firmly plant-

ed here to raise our families and build a business that serves our neighbors,” said Moore.

They gutted the salon at 5813 N. 7th St., #120, letting in natural light with floor to ceiling sliding glass doors that open onto a grassy courtyard shared with neighboring businesses.

Wednesdays at The Root Salon are especially interesting for clients and stylists alike. Clients can book services with a junior stylist at a special rate yet benefit from that stylist getting hands-on mentoring from a more experienced one.

Currently loyal to a long-time stylist you just don’t want to cheat on? Book a scalp treatment and zone out in a dimly lit room with a heavenly scalp massage, complete with gently cleansing shampoo and a red-light treatment.

Moore, the business mind at the salon, laughs when she remembers how dropped lemon wedges set her on a path of remaking established businesses and, eventually, to the beauty biz.

“Back in the day, I had left teaching and had gone to work as a hostess at Steamers. Remember Steamers at the Biltmore?

“We were at a team meeting and here I was, the new girl working as a hostess, admonishing servers: ‘Stop dropping the lemon wedges! They cost money!’ After the team meeting, the manager said ‘Come with me. We need to talk.’ And of course, I thought I was in trouble. But no, he liked what I had said because, apparently, lemon wedges do cost money. He put me on the management track and I learned so much. I had found my sweet spot. And now? Here I am remaking a hair salon,” she said.

The Root Salon invites neighbors to get to know them at a community celebration on April 26 at 5 p.m. Held in the courtyard, the event will offer music, product samples and fun. For more information, call 602-277-4072 or visit www.therootsalon.com.

Business Briefs
Name change brings mission into focus

Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona changed its name to Art Heals Arizona in February. The announcement was made Saturday, Feb. 21, at the

nonprofit’s Blooming in Hope Soiree at the office, located at 352 E. Camelback Road. The new name is designed to better align with its mission and help connect better with the community and supporters, the organization said.

According to Matt Sandoval, chief executive officer, the name change addresses several concerns that have come up in recent years, including the need to remove stigmatized language from the branding. Former volunteers and participants have expressed concern with the term “abused children” being a focus in the organization name. Removing it from the name allows for the name of the organization to focus on the solution – healing through art. Find additional information at www.freeartsaz.org.

Lavidge launches publishing division

Lavidge announced on Feb. 11 the launch of InkFox Publicity, a modern publicity firm designed to meet the industry’s evolving needs.

The company says that the launch of *please see PUBLICITY on page 20*

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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

PUBLICITY continued from page 18

the book publicity firm marks a strategic expansion of the agency's literary publicity practice. Built on more than a decade of experience working with authors, publishers and industry media, the publishing arm addresses how book publicity must operate in today's complex, but opportunity-rich, ecosystem.

The firm is designed to serve publishers, hybrid presses and professional, indie and self-published authors. Through customized strategies, their goal is to help books earn attention, trust, and readership in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

The launch also represents a significant growth milestone for Lavidge, reinforcing the agency's commitment to specialization, innovation, and industry leadership, the company said.

Learn more at www.inkfoxpublicity.com.

Kaya Holistic moves to new location

After six years at 6102 N. 16th St., founder Cathleen Mitchell moved her eight-year-old wellness business, Kaya Holistic, just up the street to 6522 N. 16th St., joining tenants Pie Snob, Linger Longer Lounge and others.

Mitchell, who grew up in the neighborhood, says that the new space will allow the company to expand its offerings and deepen its role as a community-centered wellness destination.

"Kaya is more than a retail boutique – it is a soft place to land," she said. "Rooted in care, connection and mindful living, the shop offers small-batch botanical products, handcrafted artisan goods and seasonally guided ritual kits. Each item is thoughtfully chosen to support self-care, nourishment, and alignment – honoring body, mind and spirit."

The shop offers a curated selection of products and heartfelt experiences centered around herbalism, energy healing, creative expression, movement, mindfulness and farming and gardening. Beyond the shop, Kaya thrives through community, Mitchell said.

"We collaborate with friends, local makers and aligned practitioners to host workshops, events and gatherings that nourish the collective spirit and cultivate meaningful connection."

Two months in at the new space, Mitchell says she enjoys seeing friends and families that she has known since childhood stop by, as well as meeting



Kaya Holistic, located at 6522 N. 16th St., offers small-batch botanical products, handcrafted artisan goods and seasonally guided ritual kits and more in a community-centric space (submitted photo).

new people from all over the Valley.

"I'm deeply grateful to continue growing Kaya here and look forward to welcoming our neighbors into our new space."

Kaya Holistic is open daily, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Find a list of upcoming events and other information online at www.kayaholistic.com.

Wespac completes Rosie's expansion

Wespac Construction has announced the successful completion of a facility expansion at Rosie's House: A Music Academy for Children, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing free, high-quality music education to young people across the Valley.

As Rosie's House continued to grow in both staff and student enrollment, the organization was at capacity. The 3,000-square-foot expansion was designed to support this growth while enhancing the overall learning and working environment for students, instructors, and staff alike. Now encompassing 18,000 square feet, the newly completed campus improvements provide much-needed space to accommodate increasing demand and allow the academy to further its mission of accessible music education for all.

The project added significant operational and instructional space, including multiple new music studios, two large classrooms, a boardroom, a mother's room, a community room and a piano lab. Funding for the expansion was made possible through the generosity of individual supporters, local foundations and national funders.

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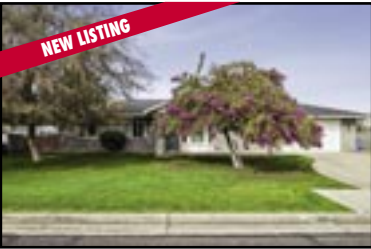
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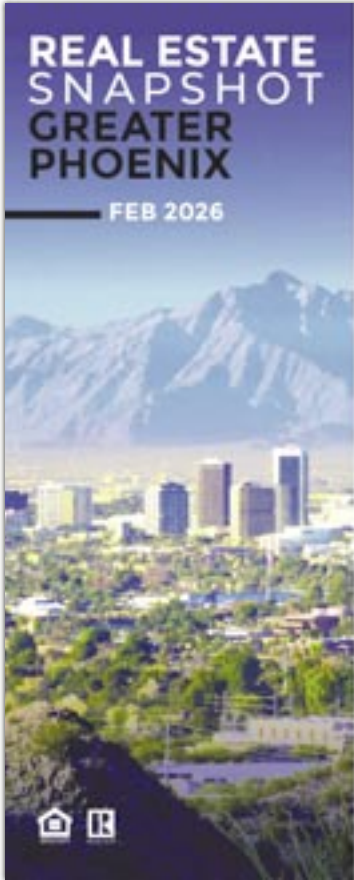
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I was asked recently by a group of newer real estate agents how I became so focused on the North Central Corridor and how they might position themselves to be among the top agents here in the next few years.

I completely understand the desire. Many of us live here, raised our families here, and genuinely love the community we serve. But the truth is, this business isn't about "paying dues" in some rigid sense, it's about commitment, consistency, relationships, and respect for the people who built the market before you.

I've been selling homes in Central Phoenix for more than three decades, and much of that foundation came from two outstanding mentors, Mark Moskowitz and Ronnie Gilbert. They taught me the business honestly including pointing out when I needed to improve, and that kind of guidance shaped the professional I became.

My roots in the corridor go back even further through my father, who lived in Central Phoenix for over 50 years. He owned women's dress shops at Park Central for two decades, operated clubs along Central Avenue, and later we owned the Jockey Club together. Those years introduced me to the community in a very personal way; the friendships, the business relationships, the families who still call this area home. That connection has meant everything to my real estate career.

Today, I'm proud to be part of Compass, a brokerage that truly supports professionalism, research, collaboration, and elevated marketing. There are several exceptional Compass agents working throughout the North Central Corridor, many of whom have lived here for years, raised families here, and built trusted reputations. We work cooperatively, share knowledge, and maintain a level of professionalism that ultimately benefits our clients and the community.

And none of us do it alone. I've been fortunate to have Kathy Wright alongside me for years, her responsiveness, attention to detail, and constant availability help ensure our clients feel supported at every step. Real estate is very much a team effort.

If I were to give newer agents advice, it would simply be this: learn continuously, respect the professionals who came before you, collaborate whenever possible, engage with a mentor(s), and focus on building trust rather than chasing quick success. The relationships you nurture today will sustain your career long-term.

As for me, I love what I do. Experience matters, but so does evolution. Our clients and colleagues value collaboration, and Compass has elevated the way we connect, giving us a powerful online network that makes transactions smoother and more efficient. I'm energized by the positive changes in our industry, while North Central continues to offer what it always has, a remarkable community, enduring character, and a landscape we're proud to call home.

Bobby Lieb



BOBBY LIEB, PC
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6455 N 17TH PL 5 BEDROOMS 4.5 BATHROOMS 2,714 SQ FT	\$859,900
114 E SAN MIGUEL AVE 3 BEDROOMS 2.5 BATHROOMS 2,630 SQ FT	\$840,000
6943 W TETHER TRL** 6 BEDROOMS 3 BATHROOMS 3,608 SQ FT	\$799,000
6425 N 17TH ST 3 BEDROOMS 2.5 BATHROOMS 2,070 SQ FT	\$709,900
7840 N 7TH ST 1 3 BEDROOMS 2 BATHROOMS 1,684 SQ FT	\$470,000
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Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM, who was recognized in April 2025 by Bishop John Dolan and the Xavier community for her five decades of service to the school, announced in late January that she will retire in June (photo by Rylee Weaver).

Sister Lynn to retire after 52 years

Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM, Xavier College Preparatory’s longtime vice principal and athletic director, will retire in June after 52 years of service to the school. She announced her decision to Xavier’s faculty and staff in late January, noting that “after prayer, reflection and meetings with my Sisters at the Xavier Convent and our BVM leadership” (the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary), she concluded that it is time to “pass the baton – and to support Xavier from the sidelines.”

She served as Xavier’s athletic director for 49 years before stepping down in August and naming the school’s associate athletic director, Tui Selvaratnam, to the position. She currently serves as the school’s vice principal for Activities and Athletics.

A proud alumna of both Xavier and Arizona State University, Sister Lynn has dedicated more than five decades to building the top women’s high school athletic program in both the state and the nation; advocating for Title IX opportunities for female athletes; serving the Arizona Interscholastic Association, the Arizona Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, and the National Interscholastic

Administrators Association in numerous capacities; and incorporating the Catholic faith, kindness and sportsmanship into athletics and activities across the state and the nation, the school said.

Because of her dynamic leadership throughout the decades, Xavier was recognized by Niche.com in both 2025 and 2026 as the best all-girls high school for student-athletes in America – and the fifth best among all of America’s high schools. Her astounding record of state and regional championships in the school’s numerous sports has brought national recognition to Xavier’s teams, securing many millions of dollars in athletic scholarships for the school’s student-athletes.

Throughout her tenure, Xavier’s teams have won 163 state championship titles and 73 state runners-up honors. Xavier’s golf team, which Sister Lynn coached for 47 years, holds the national record for high school state championship titles (40). Among the most recent highlights of her myriad awards and recognitions were her inductions into the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) National High School Hall of Fame (2023) and the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association Hall of



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SCHOOL DAYS

Fame (2021). She was also honored as the USA Today Studio IX Trailblazer Award (2025), the Arizona Republic’s Most Influential Woman in Arizona Sports (2022), and as the NFHS Title IX Woman Trailblazer of the Year (2021). She is the first religious Sister in history to receive these awards.

Sister Lynn concluded her announcement to the Xavier community by saying, “I love you all, and I will always be a part of Xavier College Preparatory. God Bless and Go Xavier Gators!”

School Briefs

GLENDALE UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vocal ensemble
excels at festival

In February, Washington High School’s vocal ensemble represented their school with distinction at the Northern Arizona University Vocal Jazz Madrigal Festival, a premier event that gathers more than 140 high school ensembles across Arizona and neighboring states.

Throughout the festival, students participated in performance evaluations and instructional sessions that focused on refining tone, technique, ensemble balance and musical expression. In its first year participating, the ensemble earned an “Excellent” rating, an accomplishment that reflects strong preparation, collaboration and commitment to artistic growth, the school said.

The district added, “Experiences such as this provide students with meaningful opportunities to perform at a high level, learn from expert clinicians and continue building the confidence and skills that define GUHSD’s performing arts programs.”

Students participate
in Jazz Clinic

Jazz ensembles across the Glendale Union High School District gathered at Sunnyslope High School for the District Jazz Clinic, an event designed to strengthen musicianship as students prepare for upcoming concerts and competitions.

Throughout the clinic, students participated in focused rehearsals, collaborative learning and specialized instruction that helped refine the techniques and styles essential to jazz performance.

This year’s clinic was led by Gordon Williford, a Glendale High School graduate and former band director at Moon



In their first year participating, Washington High School’s vocal ensemble earned an “Excellent” rating at the Vocal Jazz Madrigal Festival (photo courtesy of GUHSD).

Valley and Thunderbird High Schools, whose expertise provided valuable guidance in jazz interpretation and ensemble performance. The culminating sessions highlighted noticeable growth among participating bands and reflected GUHSD’s continued commitment to providing meaningful, professional-level performing arts experiences.

Tax credits support
local public schools

Arizona residents can support Glendale Union High School District students through the Arizona Public School Tax Credit, a dollar-for-dollar credit on state taxes, allowing contributions of up to \$400 for married couples filing jointly or \$200 for single taxpayers. Donations benefit extracurricular activities, student meal programs, wellness supplies and other initiatives that help ensure every student can participate in school experiences.

Contributions can be made even if the donor does not have a student enrolled in GUHSD, and all funds go directly to the school of the donor’s choice. The deadline to participate is April 15.

Learn more by visiting www.guhsdaz.org/taxcredit.

District hosts
student art show

The Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) presents this year’s Student Art Show, “Young at Heart,”

hosted at Glendale Community College from March 4 through March 31.

The exhibition features a collection of artwork created by talented students across all GUHSD campuses, including paintings, sculptures and mixed-media pieces. Community members are invited to view the exhibition throughout the month and join the GUHSD Art Show reception on March 31 at 5 p.m. in the Glendale Community College Student Union, 6000 W. Olive Ave. This special evening offers an opportunity to celebrate the remarkable artistic achievements of students and support the continued growth of visual arts education across the district.

Annual dance show
offers ‘Unity’

The Glendale Union High School District will present its annual district dance show, “Unity in Motion,” on March 5 at 7 p.m. in the Sunnyslope High School auditorium, 35 W. Dunlap Ave., with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. The performance will feature Advanced and Performance Dance groups from

please see DANCE on page 26

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SCHOOL DAYS

DANCE continued from page 25

all GUHSD campuses, showcasing a variety of themes and dance styles that highlight the creativity and talent of district students. Tickets will be available through GoFan for \$7. Families and community members are invited to attend and celebrate the artistry and dedication of student dancers.

MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT Meadows celebrates updated gymnasium

Madison Meadows Middle School recently celebrated the completion and opening of its newly renovated and expanded gymnasium.

The grand opening celebration featured performances by Madison Meadows students and a guest appearance by the Phoenix Suns Gorilla. The new gym includes a lobby with a trophy display case, a new multi-purpose room, six motorized basketball hoops and motorized bleachers. The facility also includes upgraded amenities including new locker rooms and a concession area.

The facility is designed for multi-use functionality, supporting daily physical education classes, school sporting events and community basketball and volleyball tournaments on weekends.

This renovation and expansion project was funded by voter-approved bonds, providing the school with modern athletic and community event space. The Madison School District



School staff, students and Madison District leadership were joined by the Phoenix Suns Gorilla and cheerleaders to celebrate the completed renovations at the Madison Meadows Middle School gym (photo courtesy of Madison School District).

said that it appreciates the community voters’ support and investment in high-quality facilities for Madison students.

Spanish immersion offered at summer camp

Madison School District will offer its Spanish Immersion Summer Camp from June 1 to 18.

Spanish Immersion Summer Camp offers students entering kindergarten through fourth grade the opportunity to strengthen their Spanish language skills through a full immersion experience. Students will be exposed to the language, food, music, culture and traditions through fun, hands-on activities and games from Spanish-speaking countries. Students will also complete weekly challenges using their commu-

nication skills in Spanish. The camp will be held at Madison Heights Elementary School, 7150 N. 22nd St., which is home to Madison School District’s elementary Spanish Immersion Signature Program. For more information and to register, visit www.madisonaz.org/spanishcamp.

Blood drive scheduled at district office

Madison School District, in partnership with Vitalant, will sponsor a blood drive at the Madison District office, 5601 N. 16th St., on March 6, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. In addition to helping to support those in need, donors will also be eligible for a chance to win Vitalant’s prize drawing. For more information and to

schedule an appointment, visit www.madisonaz.org/blood-drive. Walk-in donors will also be accepted.

District will host hiring fairs

Madison School District will host job fairs on March 18 and April 8. Individuals will have the opportunity to meet with school and district leaders to learn about available positions, benefits and more.

Madison is hiring teachers, guest teachers, bus drivers, before and after school program staff, as well as other district, school and student support positions.

Both events will be held from 4-6 p.m. at the Madison District office, 5601 N. 16th St. More information about working for Madison School District is available at www.madisonaz.org/jobs.

PHOENIX UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT Central students score in culinary competition

Phoenix Union High School District announced that a pair of Central High School students earned second place in the Blue Watermelon Project’s eighth annual “Feeding the Future” competition on Jan. 24.

The students, Victor Miranda and Tycen Feichter Bonini, were awarded \$5,000 toward their future education expenses. Their dish: a chipotle kick pulled pork tostada, fiesta jalapeño broccoli and fire-kissed grilled Tajín pineapple

please see COMPETITION on page 28

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SCHOOL DAYS

COMPETITION continued from page 26

ple, was inspired by their Latin culture. “This dish is because of our Latino heritage,” Miranda said. “We’ve both experienced what it is like to live in a Latino household, and the tostada is one of the most common dishes.”

More than 20 teams competed in the event, which challenges students to create meals from a list of ingredients that follow the federal guidelines for school meal programs so that the meals could be served in schools.

In addition to earning the second-place prize from the judges, a sold-out crowd of attendees who sampled each team’s dish voted the Central students’ as one of their favorites.

The Central Culinary program regularly participates in community events, often showcasing their talents and the strength of the program to thousands of people in the community.

Students interested in enrolling at Central High School and participating in their award-winning culinary program may visit www.pxu.org/enroll to enroll for the 2026-27 school year.



Orangewood School’s Jennifer Pfister was celebrated for her achievement in earning National Board Certification (photo courtesy of Washington Elementary School District).

WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Educator earns certification

Washington Elementary School District (WESD) congratulated Jennifer Pfister, academic interventionist specialist – reading, at Orangewood School, who recently earned National

Board Certification in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy: Reading-Language Arts.

To honor the achievement, Pfister received a celebratory pennant and congratulations from district leaders, colleagues and family members. National Board Certification is the highest credential an educator can achieve in the United States, reflecting

a deep commitment to excellence in teaching and student success.

The district said, “The WESD Family is proud of Ms. Pfister and grateful for her continued dedication to advancing academic achievement for all students.”

WESD celebrates students, staff

A group of outstanding students and employees from Richard E. Miller Elementary School and Royal Palm Middle School were recently honored as February 2026 SUPER Kids and SUPER Staff.

Since 2006, the WESD SUPER Kids and SUPER Staff program has celebrated exceptional students and employees from across the district for their achievements, dedication and positive impact. As part of this special tradition, Interim Superintendent Dr. Lupita Hightower personally surprised each honoree at their school with well-deserved recognition.

Students received a certificate and a free pizza courtesy of Peter Piper Pizza, while staff were awarded a certificate and a Starbucks gift card, generously donated by Veregy. To learn more about the February 2026 honorees, visit www.wesdschools.org.

Superintendent search underway

During its Dec. 11, 2025, meeting, the governing board selected the search firm McPherson & Jacobson to conduct a nationwide search for a new superintendent. At a special meeting on Jan. 22, the board finalized a timeline for the search, as well as criteria they are seeking for qualified candidates.

Finalists are expected to be presented at a March 16 board meeting, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. With interviews and board decision taking place in April. Community members are encouraged to stay informed by visiting the WESD Superintendent Search webpage at www.wesdschools.org/about-wesd/superintendent-search. The site includes regular updates, key timelines and more.

Board gains new member

WESD announced that Art Harding was recently sworn in to fill a vacancy on the governing board and will serve the remainder of the term through December 2026.

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SCHOOL DAYS

Harding was appointed by Maricopa County School Superintendent Shelli Boggs following an extensive process. He currently serves as chief operating officer at the Arizona Department of Education. The district said that he has redirected over \$40 million in previously underutilized federal funds to targeted tutoring programs, yielding substantial academic gains, and championed a return to core academics by enhancing school safety. Earlier accomplishments include helping school districts in financial trouble and promoting healthier school environments through statewide junk food bans.

CHARTER AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS
Registration opens for summer enrichment

Each year, Brophy College Preparatory offers a Bronco Summer Enrichment Program for boys and girls from any school who are going into fifth through eighth grades. The brochure is now available, and registration opens on March 6 at 8 a.m.

The summer enrichment program keeps students engaged in a variety of academic, fitness, STEM, creative and athletic camps. Campers get a glimpse of what life is like as a Brophy Bronco, with opportunities to get to know teachers and coaches, meet students from across the Valley, eat in the cafeteria and engage in classes with peers in the school’s state-of-the-art facilities.

Enrichment programs include Athletic, Academic, STEM Classes and Creative and Life Skills. Specialty night camps include Lacrosse Camp, Track and Field Camp and Girls Speed & Conditioning.

Contact Brophy at summer-school@brohyprep.org, or call 602-264-5291, ext. 6233, with questions. For details, visit www.brophyprep.org/academics/summer-school/summer-enrichment-program.

Seniors earn college credit

In February, Valley Lutheran High School announced that 83 percent of its graduating seniors are earning college credit before receiving their diploma, which they said is a distinctive academic achievement among Phoenix-area high schools.

“While many schools focus heavily on Advanced Placement (AP) pro-



Boys and girls from any school who are going into fifth through eighth grades are invited to register for the Brophy College Preparatory Summer Enrichment Program, beginning March 6 (photo courtesy of Brophy).

grams, Valley Lutheran offers both AP and dual enrollment pathways,” leadership said. “As a Silver Level AP Honor Roll school, Valley maintains strong AP performance while also partnering with Grand Canyon University and Concordia University Nebraska to provide official college credit through dual enrollment courses.”

Unlike AP courses, which require students to pass a national exam to earn credit, dual enrollment allows students to earn college credit through successful course completion. Valley’s university partnerships boast a 98 percent transfer rate, offering families both academic momentum and financial value. “By focusing on what is wisest for

students – not simply prestige rankings – Valley Lutheran continues to prepare graduates for success in college and beyond,” the school added.

‘Hollywood’ event supports high school

St. Mary’s Catholic High School will host its annual dinner and silent auction, Taste of St. Mary’s, on Saturday, March 21. This year’s theme is A Night in Hollywood and the event will offer an evening of “glitz and glam.”

The event starts at 5 p.m. with an exclusive tour of the newly remodeled gym, with cocktail hour starting at 5:30 p.m. Festivities continue until 9 p.m. with music provided by NTH-MIX, cocktails served by Passport Destilados, and dozens of silent auction items to bid on.

Money raised supports St. Mary’s Catholic High School, located at 2525 N. 3rd St., and its students, helping them achieve greatness in academics and athletics. Tickets and sponsorships are on sale now. For details, visit www.smknights.org.



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SCHOOL DAYS

Xavier athletes sign Grant in Aid agreements

It was an exciting morning at Xavier College Preparatory when seven Xavier student-athletes signed their Grant in Aid agreements. The event was the culmination of many years of hard work and commitment to their respective sports. The event was held at Xavier's Virginia G. Piper Performing Arts Center in February.

Previously called National Letters of Intent, Grant in Aid is a financial scholarship for a student-athlete to help pay for college. The Grant in Aid can be a full or partial scholarship. According to the NCAA, less than two percent of high school students are awarded a college athletic scholarship.

Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM, CMAA, vice principal for Activities and athletic director, spoke to the young women, their families, and coaches at the occasion, expressing pride in their accomplishments.

The student-athletes and their colleges are Adriana Lauterborn, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Swim); Raleigh Kaul, Marquette



Seven Xavier student-athletes celebrated their years of hard work and commitment to their respective sports at a February Grant in Aid signing ceremony (photo by Zachary Carlson).

University (Swim); Hayley Carrillo, St. Ambrose University (Dance); Kennedy Frakes, The University of Arizona (Cross Country & Track); Natalia Lamadrid, University of Northern Colorado (Golf); Courtney Ryan, Kansas State University (Crew); and Lucia Hansen, United States Coast Guard Academy (Soccer).

Students complete industry certification

Five standout students from Madison Highland Prep have reached a major milestone by successfully completing the RECF Engineering Industry Certification. The students – Fernando Peralta, Kane Rivera, Michael Syntax, Angel Urias and Micah Wild – achieved

this distinction through a rigorous, two-step process.

Building on the momentum of their first exam success in November, these students have now passed the second critical assessment, officially certifying their expertise in high-level STEM competencies. This achievement highlights the students' personal dedication and the high caliber instruction provided by the faculty at Madison Highland Prep.

The Robotics Education & Competition (REC) Foundation developed this certification program to address the global demand for skilled professionals in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. To receive the full credential, students must first pass the Fundamentals of Engineering exam before choosing specialized modules to secure their certification. By earning these credentials, these five students have not only validated their expertise but also significantly enhanced their competitive edge for college admissions and career opportunities.

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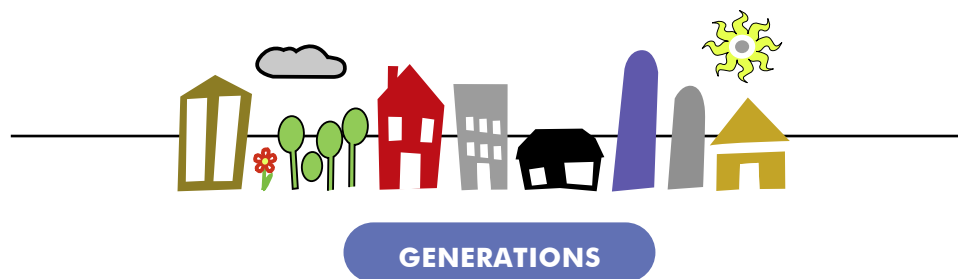
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Senior Living This month at city senior centers

The City of Phoenix Human Services Department manages 15 senior centers across the city, offering monthly events, classes and trips for the Valley's active older adults.

In the North Central area, visit the Devonshire Senior Center at 2802 E. Devonshire Ave., or the Sunnyslope Senior Center at 802 E. Vogel Ave. Both centers are open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Contact Devonshire at 602-262-7807; contact Sunnyslope at 602-262-7572.

This month, Devonshire members will enjoy three trips: Herberger Lunch Time Theatre (March 5), Fishing and BBQ trip to Steele Indian School Park (March 9) and to George Washington Carver Museum (March 19). Sunnyslope members will also enjoy a trip to Herberger Theater (March 11) as well as a tour at Cosanti Originals (March 18) and Lin's Grand Buffet (March 30).

An annual membership fee of \$20 for Phoenix residents and \$40 for non-residents provides access to all centers, where lunch is served Monday through Friday at 11:30 a.m. Meal reservations and cancellations must be made at least three business days in advance. Members aged 60 and older may give a recommended contribution of \$2.50 per meal. The cost of a meal for all others is \$5.

For additional information about Phoenix senior centers, as well as other city programs for seniors and older adults, visit www.phoenix.gov/humanservices/programs/older.

Library offers health resources

Phoenix Public Library is expanding access to health resources with the addition of American Heart Association Blood Pressure Kits, now available for checkout at 15 library locations across the city.

These kits allow residents to monitor their blood pressure at home using a clinically validated Omron BP7250 blood pressure monitor. Each Blood Pressure Kit includes an arm cuff, electronic monitor, quick start guide,

instruction manual and blood pressure logs. Materials are bilingual in English and Spanish at all participating locations, except for Agave Library, which offers bilingual English and Chinese (Mandarin) materials.

Kits can be checked out for free with a Phoenix Public Library card by requesting one at the service desk of a participating location, while supplies last. Blood Pressure Kits check out for a three-week period and are not renewable or holdable and must be returned to a service desk inside the owning library location during open hours and may not be returned through book drops.

For availability and participating locations, visit www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org.

Meal program supports older residents

The home delivered meal program is a referral-based program, which prepares and delivers nutritionally-balanced meals to homebound Phoenix residents age 60 years or older or disabled adults.

To qualify for this program, residents must contact the Senior Helpline at 602-264-4357 (HELP) or visit Area Agency on Aging for enrollment. Residents can find this and other resources available to them at www.aaaphx.org/area-agency-on-aging-programs/in-home-services. The city of Phoenix also offers resources to older residents. Information can be found online at www.phoenix.gov/humanservices/programs/older or by contacting the Human Service Department at 602-262-7379 or hsd.seniorservices@phoenix.gov.

Kids & Families Minifig event offers community creation

Bricks & Minifigs Central Phoenix will host a Minifigures & Milkshakes event on March 21 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Chick-fil-A restaurant at the southeast corner of Camelback Road and 16th Street.

During the event, LEGO fans of all ages can create a minifigure while enjoying a milkshake in the restaurant dining room. The cost to participate is \$5.

Bricks & Minifigs, located at 24 W. Camelback Road, Suite G, buys, sells

GENERATIONS

and trades all things LEGO. Learn more by visiting www.bricksandminifigs.com/central-phoenix-az.

Youth theater hosts spring camp, more

Aspiring young thespians are invited to attend the Valley Youth Theatre (VYT) Spring Break Camp, held March 9-13 and March 16-20, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily.

In addition, VYT also offers spring classes, beginning March 23, as well as a Musical Theatre Summer Camp. A four-week camp for performers ages eight and up will be held June 1-26. Those ages five and up can participate in a two-week camp (July 6-17) or one-week camp (July 20-24).

VYT offers a space where young people from diverse backgrounds can learn and grow as individuals, performers, and leaders through a transformational performing arts experience. Students can register online, or by contacting VYT's box office for assistance.

Call 602-253-8188 or visit www.vyt.com. Additional questions may be directed to VYT's education

director at 602-253-8188, ext. 302, or education@vyt.com.

Bootcamp prepares children for kindergarten

Parents with children entering kindergarten this fall are invited to join a Kindergarten Bootcamp at Burton Barr Central Library or Washington Activity Center.

This interactive series meets once a week for seven weeks and gives families a taste of kindergarten. Parents/caregivers and children learn together the social, academic and classroom skills needed for school success. Families will receive free tools and activities each week leading up to Bootcamp graduation.

Registration is required and by registering participants agree to attend all seven weeks. The next series meets on the following dates: April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 and May 6, 13. Burton Barr will offer both afternoon and evening programs; the Washington Activity Center program is held in the evening. An evening online series is also offered on the same dates.

please see BOOTCAMP on page 34

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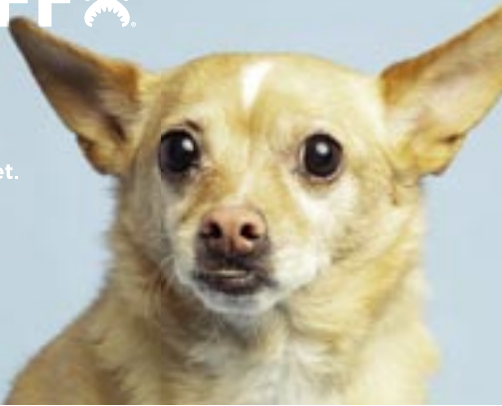
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GENERATIONS

BOOTCAMP continued from page 33

This program is only for children entering kindergarten in fall 2026. Other children may want to check out Tools for School, a school readiness program for three- five-year-olds and their grown-ups.

Support for early literacy programs is provided by a grant from First Things First, which partners with families and communities to give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. Learn more at www.firstthingsfirst.org. Search for Kindergarten Bootcamp and Tools for School program information online at www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org/kids/programs.

Nash hosts summer camp

Enrollment is open for the Nash Jazz Summer Camp at Arizona School for the Arts, a weeklong immersive jazz program for student musicians taking place June 14 to 20 on the ASA campus. 1410 N. 3rd St. in downtown Phoenix.



Student musicians ages 12 and up are invited to apply for the Nash Jazz Summer Camp, taking place June 14 to 20 in downtown Phoenix (photo courtesy of The Nash).

Open to instrumentalists and vocalists ages 12 and up, the camp offers an intensive, hands-on jazz experience led by a nationally respected faculty of professional performers and educators. Hosted by jazz club The Nash, the camp is led by legendary drummer Lewis Nash and features an accom-

plished roster of jazz artists including Rodney Whitaker, Camille Thurman, Pat Bianchi, Typhanie Monique, Corcoran Holt, Rachel Eckroth, Clark Gibson, Ashlin Parker, Mike Kocour, Jeff Libman and Deborah Weisz. Campers participate in full-day jazz intensive studies, including theory

classes, combo rehearsals, improvisation workshops and masterclasses with faculty. Each day concludes with a live faculty concert exclusively for students, allowing campers to connect classroom learning with professional performance practice. The week culminates with two concerts at The Nash, giving students the opportunity to perform on a professional jazz club stage. A faculty concert takes place on Friday, June 19, at 7 p.m., followed by a student showcase on Saturday, June 20, at 1 p.m. A limited number of partial and full scholarships are available for students under 18 or currently enrolled in high school or college. Scholarship consideration requires a written statement, with additional performance materials requested for full scholarships. All scholarship materials must be submitted prior to registration. Application details are available by contacting Director of Education Clark Gibson at clark.gibson@thenash.org. Full details, tuition information and registration materials are available at www.thenash.org/2026-summer-camp.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Folklorico dancers will bring their colorful costumes, authentic choreography and powerful storytelling to the third annual Phoenix Mariachi & Folklórico Festival (photo courtesy of Herberger Theater Center).

Festival celebrates music, dance traditions

The third annual Phoenix Mariachi & Folklórico Festival, presented by C.A.L.L.E. de Arizona in partnership with the Herberger Theater Center, 222 E. Monroe St., will be held Saturday, March 7, at 7p.m.

This evening celebrates the vibrant music and dance traditions of Mexico with a star-studded lineup featuring the Grammy Award-winning mariachi ensemble Mariachi Los Camperos. With roots in the state of Jalisco and a legacy shaped by the legendary Nati Cano, Los Camperos has elevated mariachi to the grandest stages, captivating audiences around the globe. Their music carries dignity, soul, and generations of tradition that continue to inspire.

Ballet Folklórico Quetzalli-AZ, known for their colorful costumes, authentic choreography and powerful storytelling through movement, will add to visual splendor to the night. Additional performers and surprises will round out a night.

Find information and tickets online at www.herbergertheater.org/events. Contact the Herberger Theater Center at 602-252-8497.

M3F: Where art and community collide

M3F Music Festival returns to Phoenix March 6-7 with a weekend built for movement, connection, and

sound. Experience world-class performances, immersive art and next-level production across multiple stages.

Held at Steele Indian School Park, 300 E. Indian School Road, this year features Signal 33 at COSMIC, an art-driven stage where sound and design come together for total immersion, plus an expanded Main Stage (VISTA) with massive lighting, bold visuals and unforgettable energy from sunset to close.

Find tickets and a full line up of this year's performers online at www.m3ffest.com.

Program offers networking, inspiration

On Thursday, March 12, Phoenix Art Museum (PhxArt) presents the return of Women Powered. The program, which offers guests the opportunity to network amongst peers and hear from dynamic women leaders, brings global fashion designer, entrepreneur and women's empowerment advocate Rebecca Minkoff, live to the museum.

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of PhxArt's fashion program, the museum will host a special edition of Women Powered, featuring an inspiring conversation with the nationally renowned New York-based designer led by Valley entrepreneur and fashion icon Chrissy Sayare. Minkoff will share stories of her own success, building bold ideas, navigating business and living at the intersection of entrepreneurship and cre-

please see PROGRAM on page 36

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

PROGRAM *continued from page 35*

ativity. This event welcomes all ages and industries.

At 5 p.m., the museum, located at 1625 N. Central Ave., will host a cocktail reception with a cash bar in the Dorrance Sculpture Garden. Then at 6:30 p.m., attendees will enjoy a fireside chat with Minkoff and Sayare in Whiteman Hall. Copies of Minkoff's newest book, "Fearless: The New Rules of Unlocking Creativity, Courage, and Success," will be available, and an exclusive dinner opportunity also is available.

Find tickets and additional information at www.phxart.org/events/lectures.

Environmental film festival debuts

The inaugural SkyFire Environmental Film Festival is set to debut across the greater Phoenix-area from March 27 through 29. The film festival combines powerful storytelling with community engagement to inspire environmental action across Arizona and throughout the world.

More than 150 films have been submitted to the festival by directors of all ages, backgrounds and parts of the world. The films' subject matters are just as diverse as their directors and span topics such as climate action, food systems, waste reduction and community education. The finalists will be shown in venues across Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa, including the Arizona Science Center and the ASU Mix Center.

Organizers say that the activism shown on-screen will come to life on the streets of Arizona during the festival. Through public transit partnerships, zero-waste initiatives and service projects, SkyFire will be fighting some of the many environmental challenges Arizonians face every day.

Tickets are on sale at www.skyfireff.org.

Spring brings Art in the Garden

Shemer Art Center, located at 5005 E. Camelback Road, will host Art in the Garden, Saturday and Sunday, March 28-29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Set on Shemer's front lawn in the sculpture garden, this free, fun, mid-morning and afternoon event will feature a colorful display of garden-themed artist tents with bright umbrellas, live music,

food and beverages and a silent auction.

As part of the annual Art in the Garden event is a ticketed Sparkling Tea, Saturday, March 28, 1-3 p.m. A shade structure created of colorful umbrellas sets the tone for this afternoon tea, to be held on the back garden patio. Live music and a menu of scones, finger sandwiches and petite pastries will be complemented by a short program with guest speakers, and of course, tea and a "sparkling accompaniment." An award is also presented during the tea for the most artistic garden hat.

Funds raised from the Sparkling Tea will be used to help support the Shemer Art Center's Summer Camps, held for four weeks in June, to help underwrite the cost of scholarships, instructors and supplies. Find additional details at www.shemerartcenter.org/happenings/events.

Rockabilly band releases album

Riding high off the success of their 2025, 7-inch vinyl release, "Race Ready Rockabilly," North Central Phoenix's own rockabilly band, Downhill Fast, is headed back to Rips Bar on Saturday, April 4, to offer fans a full album of Rockabilly hits. "Gears, Greasers and Gasoline" is described as a high-energy, foot-stomping good time from the second the (digital) needle drops on track one, "Hot Blooded Mama."

"We are stoked to release a CD full of original material," said Rodd Mas, vocal and rhythm guitarist for the band. "We have been playing songs like 'Slippin' In' and 'All Alone' for years and have been wanting to make them available to our fans. 'Gears, Greasers and Gasoline' was the perfect opportunity to combine them with our newer songs like 'Downtown' and 'Greasier'."

Downhill Fast invited long-time Arizona swing, bop, and roots rock icons Kenny Love and the Rockerfellas, as well as DJ Tank and DJ Woof, to help celebrate the 14-song CD release on April 4. The 'Gears, Greasers and Gasoline' CD release party will be at Rips Bar, located at 3045 N. 16th St. The show starts at 2 p.m. with tickets only \$10 at the door. The CD will be available for purchase for \$10 in person. Downhill Fast's CD and 7-inch record, along with shirts and stickers, also are available for purchase at the show and through the band's website, www.downhillfast.net.

On the Town

Spring is here, offering the perfect opportunity to get out and about before summer heat rolls in. This month, experience live music, dance and theater, along with First Fridays and plenty of family-friendly events. See you on the town in March!

The Strumbellas

March 3
The Van Buren
www.thevanburenphx.com;
480-659-1641

Indigo De Souza

March 3
Crescent Ballroom
www.crescentphx.com;
602-716-2222

'Tenderly: The Rosemary Clooney Musical'

March 4 – May 3
The Phoenix Theatre Company
www.phoenixtheatre.com;
602-254-2151

Acoustic Open Stage Thursdays

March 5-26
Fiddler's Dream Coffeehouse
www.fiddlersdream.org;
602-997-9795

First Friday: The Ken Hales Quartet

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

First Friday Fiesta

March 6
Herberger Theater Center
www.herbergertheater.org;
602-252-8497

Exhibit: 'Barrio'

March 6-29
Herberger Theater Center
www.herbergertheater.org;
602-252-8497

68th Annual Indian Fair & Market

March 7-8
Heard Museum
<https://heard.org>;
602-252-8840

'Back to the Future' in Concert

March 7-8
The Phoenix Symphony
at Orpheum Theatre
www.phoenixsymphony.org;
602-495-1999

Candy Men Duo

March 8
The Rhythm Room
www.rhythmroom.com; 602-612-4981

The Moth StorySLAM: Fumbles and Fouls

March 12
Crescent Ballroom
www.crescentphx.com; 602-716-2222



Truly

March 12
The Rebel Lounge
www.therebellounge.com

Jihye Lee with The SCC Jazz Orchestra

March 13
The Nash
www.thenash.org; 602-795-0464

43rd Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade & Faire

March 14
<http://stpattricksdayphoenix.org>

Phoenix Old Time Music Society

March 14
North Mountain Visitor Center
www.northmountainvisitorcenter.org;
602-343-5125

Marissa Nadler

March 17
The Rebel Lounge
www.therebellounge.com

Donavon Frankenreiter

March 18
Crescent Ballroom
www.crescentphx.com; 602-716-2222

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Forever Motown
March 19
Madison Center for the Arts
www.themadison.org; 602-664-7777

**Soundcheck:
The Hourglass Cats**
March 19
Phoenix Art Museum
www.phxart.org; 602-257-1880



Radium Dolls
March 19
Valley Bar
www.valleybarphx.com

Cacti & Other Works
March 19-22
Ballet Arizona at Orpheum Theatre
www.balletaz.org; 602-381-1096

The Haymarket Squares
March 20
Last Exit Live
www.lastexitlive.com;
602-271-7000

CaZo Dance Theatre
March 21
Herberger Theater Center
www.herbergertheater.org;
602-252-8497

‘American Mosaic’
March 21-22
Phoenix Boys Choir
www.boyschoir.org;
602-264-5328

Omnium Circus
March 22
Madison Center for the Arts
www.themadison.org;
602-664-7777

The Shake Bombs
March 22
The Rhythm Room
www.rhythmroom.com; 602-612-4981

‘Three Sistahs’
March 27 – April 12
Black Theatre Troupe
at Helen K. Mason
Performing Arts Center
www.blacktheatretroupe.org;
602-258-8128



Camille Thurman
March 28
The Nash
www.thenash.org;
602-795-0464

**Cowboy Prom 4 with
The Hourglass Cats**
March 28
The Rebel Lounge
www.therebellounge.com

**Coffee House Saturdays:
Fossil Creed**
March 28
North Mountain Visitor Center
www.northmountainvisitorcenter.org;
602-343-5125

Rainbows Festival
March 28-29
The Square at Heritage and Science Park
www.thesquarephx.org; 602-258-0048

Ratboys
March 31
Valley Bar
www.valleybarphx.com

The Growlers
March 31
The Van Buren
www.thevanburenphx.com;
480-659-1641

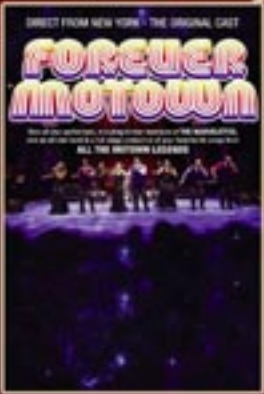
All event dates are current at the time of publication. Check with individual venues for up-to-date show information. Find events throughout the month at www.northcentralnews.net/events.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT



For Thai E-San owner Pui Pongtratic (left) and her daughter Jan Pongtratic, forming close ties to their customers is the garnish on the main attraction: an extensive menu of traditional Thai dishes (photo by Darryl Webb for North Central News).

Café Chat A sensory symphony at Thai E-San

By Marjorie Rice

At Thai E-San, a server brings a bubbling bowl of coconut soup to a table as a cloud of steam – fragrant with coconut milk, lemon grass, ginger, curry, mushrooms and fish sauce – wafts behind her, causing heads to turn at nearby tables. A burner under the metal bowl keeps the soup piping hot as diners dip in.

That aroma just adds to the sensory symphony that is Thai E-San. Opening the front door, the air is perfumed with aromatics that form the basis of the cuisine, including lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, Thai basil, galangal, ginger, cilantro and curry.

Owner Pui Pongtratic is at a table nearby, chatting with customers who are digging into a plate of pad Thai – a beautifully balanced dish of chewy rice noodles tossed with tamarind, Thai soy sauce, scallions, mung bean sprouts, fish sauce and crunchy peanuts.

Moving to another table, Pui urges the guests to try the chicken satay, juicy skewers flavored with coconut milk and those aromatics, and served with peanut sauce and cucumber sauce. During her interview for this article, she continually springs up to welcome new arrivals, greeting most of them as old friends.

Pui and Rodger Pongtratic opened Thai E-San in 2011, naming it for Isan, a region of northeast Thailand. Rodger retired a couple of years ago and today, their daughter, Jan Pongtratic, helps to manage the marketing, sales and other business aspects of the restaurant.

Rodger and Pui were immigrants in Los Angeles, when they met and married. Rodger worked in insurance and Pui worked at a bank.

“My dad had a conference at the Biltmore and loved the area, and they moved here,” Jan said. They bought several businesses in the Valley, including the Bali-Hi Motor Hotel, a 60-room hotel with a 24-hour restaurant, owning it from 1980 to 1988.

They had other jobs as well, Pui as an interpreter for the state and Rodger pursuing his love of the West, especially vintage Levis. Western culture and clothing are popular in Thailand, and Rodger started a business exporting Western duds to Thailand and bringing back Thai art, another of his special interests.

“When my sisters and I were younger, we were either working at food festivals because Mom wanted to be with us, or were sourcing vintage Levis,” Jan said. “We thought it was so terrible at the time but now it’s cool.”

They eventually sold the Bali-Hi and retired, but that didn’t last long. Pui was at lunch with a friend when she discovered the Thai restaurant where

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

they were dining was for sale. “I was bored,” she said, so she bought it. Rodger did the interior design for Thai E-San, selecting traditional Thai art as well as more modern paintings.

From the first, forming close ties to their customers was a priority, Jan said. “It’s not that we just know the customers, but we know their kids, their whole family, if they went on vacation. We want to have a high-return clientele.”

That personal touch is the garnish on the main attraction at Thai E-San: a menu so extensive that it would take weeks of steady dining to work through it. The coconut soup is a can’t-miss selection.

“This is one of the most popular foods in Thailand,” Jan said. “Thai food makes your taste buds dance, and I think coconut soup is one of the best representations of that because it has all the flavors – sweet, spicy, salty, sour and umami.”

Other favorites include that satay and pad Thai; green papaya salad; larb (ground chicken, pork or beef with rice powder, lime juice and mint); spicy green beans with phrik-khing curry paste made with lemongrass, galangal, shrimp paste and kaffir lime leaves); yellow curry; and a deliciously refreshing Thai iced tea.

Tuesday and Thursday, rice soup, a sort of porridge, is served with the lunch special, and some customers come just for that soup, Pui said.

The selections highlight fresh ingredients – a result of Pui’s meticulous shopping. As often as three times a week, she’s picking the freshest produce. On trips back to L.A., she’ll pick up several bags of fresh Thai chilis, kaffir lime leaves and lemon grass grown by friends, along with her favorite brand of coconut milk.

“Thai people are really big about relationships, and some of the vendors treat her like a mom,” Jan said. “They’ll say ‘this is the best bag of Thai basil I saved for you.’ Every mango is hand-picked. Every dish is made to order. Chicken broth is made from scratch – it’s all the little things.”

When Jan came back to Arizona from California 10 years ago, she began to modernize some of the restaurant’s operations, for example, transitioning from old-style credit card payment systems to computerized operations and online ordering.

She also suggested that Pui do some



Still & Barrel, an intimate bar that opened last month next to its sister concept, Phoenix City Grille, offers fine bourbon, rare liquors, specialty cocktails and more (photo by Cliff Gragg).

ordering in bulk, but that didn’t make it off the ground. Pui’s old-school passion for freshness and authenticity is definitely remaining on Thai E-San’s menu.

Thai E-San, 616 W. Indian School Road, is open 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Monday through Friday; 12 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday. For information, call 602-297-8888 or visit www.thaiesanphx.com.

Dining Briefs

PCG duo launches intimate Still & Barrel

Sheldon Knapp, founder of Phoenix City Grille (PCG), and Dennis Shaw, owner of PCG have launched their latest collaboration – Still & Barrel, which opened at 5812

N. 16th St. on Thursday, Feb. 5. This intimate bar, located by its PCG sister concept, is a nod to the owners’ mutual passion for fine bourbon, rare liquors and unique specialty cocktails, combined with their expertise as longtime restaurateurs and desire to create a community for fine spirits enthusiasts.

Diners can enjoy expertly crafted wine and spirits flights complemented by the cuisine they have come to know from PCG. The menu features small plates for sharing as well as full meals that complement any liquor selection.

The space also will feature specialty cocktails and, in addition to a carefully curated selection of rare finds, local favorites and timeless classics, guests will find an elevated bar program highlighting expertly crafted cocktails. Guests can take in a modern wine experience by the glass and have access to Still & Bourbon’s full retail bottle shop featuring premium, hard-to-find spirits and select wines for purchase to enjoy at home.

The spot is open for walk-ins only Thursday through Saturday, 4-11 p.m. For more information, visit www.stillandbarrelphx.com.

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The 20th Press Coffee location will open this spring at 3133 E. Camelback Road, featuring 38 indoor seats, a bookable conference room and 48 outdoor seats with ample shade throughout the patio (photo courtesy of Dalke Design Group/PRESS Coffee).

Press set to open
Camelback location

Phoenix-based specialty coffee roaster Press Coffee announced that the opening of a new location in Phoenix’s Camelback Corridor is anticipated for spring 2026. This will mark the company’s 20th location across the Valley, and the expansion of the specialty coffee experience into one of the most dynamic business and retail districts.

Located at 3133 E. Camelback Road, the 2,029-square-foot space will feature 38 indoor seats and a bookable conference room, with 48 outdoor seats and ample shade throughout the patio.

The café is designed to be a welcoming, all-day community hub with a full drink menu, including specialty drip and cold brew coffee, shakers, hot and iced tea, and nitro cold brew. Other offerings include breakfast sandwiches, burritos and empanadas, as well as grab-and-go food items, such as pastries, sandwiches, small bites and a range of retail products.

For more information, visit www.presscoffee.com.

Pita Day supports
nonprofit Waste Not

This year, in celebration of National Pita Day, Pita Jungle will host a week-end-long celebration on Saturday, March 28, and Sunday, March 29. Guests can enjoy their favorite pita dishes while supporting a good cause. This annual fundraiser benefits Arizona nonprofit Waste Not, whose mission is to create sustainable food systems that help both people and the planet flourish.

For more than 36 years, Waste Not has been reimagining and reinventing the food rescue process in Arizona by bridging the gap between food waste and

hunger. A team of drivers and volunteers collects fresh food from local food businesses that would have gone to waste and delivers it that same day to nonprofits that provide critical community services.

In 2025, Waste Not successfully diverted over 2.9 million pounds of food from landfills. To learn more about opportunities for volunteering and food donations, visit www.wastenotaz.org.

During the Pita Day celebration, for every pita sandwich sold at participating locations, Pita Jungle will donate \$1 to Waste Not. This promotion is valid for dine-in guests and take-out orders. Restrictions apply. For more information, visit www.pitajungle.com.

Wine festival
set for Biltmore

Biltmore Fashion Park, 2502 E. Camelback Road, will play host to the Arizona Winegrowers Festival, scheduled for Saturday, March 28. General admission entrance begins at noon, with VIP early entry at 11 a.m.

Biltmore Fashion Park will be transformed into a world of wines grown and nurtured in the Grand Canyon State. Forty Arizona wineries will line the center court and walkways from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., with attendees immersing themselves in artisanship, and broadening their taste buds with locally sourced reds and whites, of a dozen or more varieties.

Participating wineries include Verde Valley AVA – Caduceus Cellars, Chateau Tumbleweed, Cactus Cru, Garage East, SW Wine Center, DA Vines and Cove Mesa Vineyard; Willcox AVA – 1764 Vineyards, Bodega Pierce, LDV Winery, Omphalos Winery, Strive Vineyards, Soaring Wines, Carlson Creek Vineyard,



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Find tickets and additional information online at <https://azwinegrowersfestival.com>.

Cheese ‘n Stuff offers high school happy hour

Every weekday from 2 to 4 p.m., Cheese ‘n Stuff, located at 5042 N. Central Ave., will offer a high school happy hour that is open to students, teachers, staff and coaches. Just show

your High School ID at the register for a 10 percent discount on your meal.

In addition to classic sandwiches and specials, the owners say that the shop is “a great place to get some work done after school!” They offer space to hang out in a friendly atmosphere, with free Wi-Fi and plenty of seating.

Cheese ‘n Stuff is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday. They are closed on Sunday. For additional information, call 602-266-3636 or visit www.cheesenstuffdeli.com.

Camello opens at Esplanade

151 Hospitality, a restaurant group co-founded and led by Phoenix restaurateurs Rick Phillips and Peter Hearn, opened Camello, the flagship of their

three dining concepts at The Esplanade, on Feb. 2. The “luxurious and theatrical high energy Mexican restaurant” is named after its panoramic views of Camelback Mountain.

Spanning across 6,000 square feet and accommodating 150 guests, the concept features elevated Mexican cuisine. Executive Chef Julio Mata, who got his start at the fabled Barrio Café, is leading the culinary direction at Camello. Mata hails from Guaymas, Mexico and describes his style of food as based on his roots growing up, but modernized to today’s diners.

The cocktail program focuses on what the owners call a discerningly crafted list and fan favorites, putting its real energy into creating a variety of signature frozen drinks taken to a mixology level, “not just your typical

poolside slushy.”

The main dining room is built for large parties with its flexible seating, and the indoor/outdoor bar also serves an al fresco dining experience with a patio adorned with a sea of pink umbrellas, sofas, firepits and more.

Camello will be open for lunch, dinner, brunch, and late-night cocktails from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. during the week and until 1 a.m. on weekends, welcoming daytime guests with a relaxed lunch menu of tacos, bowls, salads, and of course chips and salsa, before transitioning to a more formal, elevated evening experience and into late-night lounge party hours.

The Esplanade is located at 2425 E. Camelback Road. Find information about Camello at www.camellobiltmore.com.

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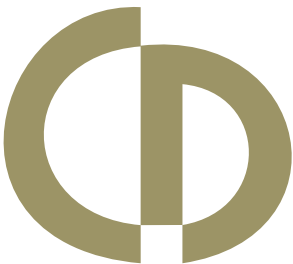


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