



A tiff over artificial turf may soon be resolved in a Warner Ranch neighborhood. PAGE 3



Big changes are under way on Warner Road from I-10 to the Price/101 Fwy. PAGES 14-15



Our page of support for those experiencing the tragedy of Ukraine may be cut out and displayed. PAGE 12

Live in Downtown Chandler

A festive, fun-filled afternoon . . . and all that jazz

Photo feature by
Billy Hardiman,
exclusive for
Wrangler News

Pages 16-17



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New state law may clear way for artificial turf use in HOAs

By Janie Magruder

Special for
Wrangler News



Warner Ranch resident Bob Wolfe, who hopes to install artificial grass in his frontyard, may finally get the chance after passage of a new state law.

— Photo by Billy Hardiman for Wrangler News

A tiff over turf may soon be resolved in neighborhoods across the state, thanks in part to Warner Ranch residents who for years have professed that, where grass is concerned, it is easy being green, even if not from nature.

Although the path forward remains a bit muddy. Gov. Doug Ducey in late March signed into law a bill that prevents Arizona homeowner associations from imposing blanket bans on artificial turf, if they already allow natural grass on members' prop-

erty. The law becomes effective 91 days after the end of this legislative session.

For longtime Warner Ranch residents Bob and Julie Wolfe, who take no credit for the unanimous passage of House Bill 2131, the ac-

—TURF, Page 6

Firefighters, paramedics gain a vital partner in combatting job stress

By Cliff Summerhill

Special for Wrangler News

The stress that comes with being a first responder cannot be overestimated. These occupations take a toll, mentally and physically.

For the well-being of its personnel, Tempe Fire Department has partnered with Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Health Sciences on a new wellness program that is designed to help firefighters and paramedics cope with job-related stress using non-traditional methods.

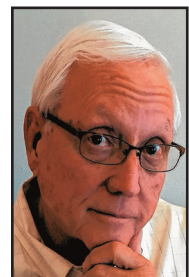
“We hope that the health-care services and educa-

— RESEARCH, Page 4

30 years as your neighborhood news source, updated Plus a welcome to our digital tomorrow . . . today

By Don Kirkland
Publisher

As a kid growing up in California, there never was any doubt about my newspaper aspirations. I launched my first neighborhood print endeavor at the ripe age of 10, transferring stories typeset with some sort of gooeey, purplish ink onto a thin, jelled sheet in a pie tin, and distributing the resulting pages to the houses on my street.



That was followed, at about age 14, by a stint with the Los Angeles Times, weighty copies of which I de-

livered to the homes of subscribers in the wee hours from one of those droopy canvas bags that hung over my bicycle's handlebars. It was an OK job, with the exception that the final stop on my route was the lobby of a local mortuary. And, yes, I thought that was pretty scary.

So, blah, blah, blah, here I am today, still delivering news (no bike, no purple-stained fingers and no mortuaries so far, thank you—not even the same hardy newsprint that we held in our hands in those prehistoric days.

The news, happily or not, still flows from a seemingly never-empty spigot, and it's there that those of us with ink in our blood continue to approach every

— DIGITAL, Page 8

CORRECTION: Tempe firm not deterred in quest to reduce gastric misery Wrangler News, Page 3, April 9 — A story about GoodNature in Tempe should have said that donations must be made at the facility and that bringing in a sample jar and dropping it off is not allowed. Also, the first name of Jennie Starr was misspelled in the story.

Stress

From Page 3

tion we offer will make a difference and positive impact for the fire and rescue workers who bravely serve our community,” said Dr. Kimberlee Blyden-Taylor, chief medical officer at SCNM.

Tempe fire and rescue crews can take advantage of a free first visit during a student shift at the SCNM Medical Center or Neil Riordan Center, both in Tempe. The visit can cover a wide variety of issues relating to physical and mental health.

XXXXXXX

According to TFD Deputy Chief Mark Manor, the department always is on the lookout for community partnerships that enhance the wellness of its personnel. After touring the medical facilities a few months ago, Manor believed that the services offered by SCNM could benefit his workforce.

“This new wave of pre-hospital care will help keep firefighters healthy,” Manor said. “This is just another avenue for folks to get some help and have somewhere to go to relieve stress . . . when needed.”

For SCNM, it started with a firefighter coming in for a sports-related injury.

“After a positive interaction, a representative from Tempe Fire reached out to us to see if we would be willing to provide information for their ‘Wellness Wednesday’ campaign, geared towards total wellness for their crews and staff,” Blyden-Taylor said.

“After we learned about this, we wanted to do more and make the partnership as robust as it could be.”

Now, SCNM contributes to “Wellness Wednesday,” an internal-communications campaign that strives to bring new and vital resources to crew members.

“We want them to think outside the box and out of their normal, everyday activities,” Manor said.

“They may not use it today, but maybe tomorrow or next week.”

It’s these one-on-one interactions that can be the real win, according to Manor.

“Sometimes, someone will come up to me and tell me they are better after learning something new,” Manor said.

“Talk about satisfaction, that’s where it’s at.”



Dr. Sarah Trahan discusses the structure of the knee with Zachary Moran.
– Photo courtesy of Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Health Sciences

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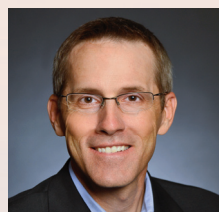
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For those who choose not to incur the added work and expense of overseeding their lawns for winter, the result is unsightly brown-out of dormant summer grass until heat returns in the spring. – Photo by Billy Hardiman for *Wrangler News*

Turf

From Page 3

tion signals the end of their lengthy crusade to lay a small patch of synthetic grass in their front yard.

“I want my property to look good all year long,” said Bob Wolfe, whose south-facing frontyard is shaded by a beautiful, large mesquite tree that also prevents his Bermuda grass from growing well.

“This is a win for homeowners who want the appearance of natural grass without the expense and the waste of water and the use of chemicals.”

Wrangler News reported in a June 3, 2016, story that Wolfe’s application to the Warner Ranch Phase One board of directors was denied, 5-2. The board ruled “artificial turf is not considered an organic/natural part of a front yard landscape.”

Julie Wolfe said dissenters used old data to suggest that synthetic grass has a short lifespan and poses health hazards, such as cancer.

“The manufacturing has changed in 20 years, and the grass is a better product now,” she said.

“And, if you want to talk about health and safety, there’s fertilizer, weed killer and pollution from gas-powered mowers and blowers (with natural-grass maintenance).

“You could have hazards from gravel. There are hazards everywhere if you look for them.”

After the board denied his appeal, Wolfe began circulating a petition to compel the board to allow synthetic grass in frontyard landscapes.

It was signed by nearly 80 percent of his neighbors, he said, but the board did not act upon it.

A bill to curtail HOAs from banning artificial grass, sponsored by Rep. John Kavanaugh, R-Fountain Hills, failed in 2017. Kavanaugh drafted a new measure this year. Wolfe called and e-mailed his neighbors to ask them to lobby their legislators to support the bill, but he doesn’t think that’s what led to its passage.

“There was finally enough support from legislators because of the water problems we have,” Wolfe said, referring to the catastrophic drought situation in the West.

“That’s what drove this.”

Federal officials reported last week that they are considering taking emergency action because of a steep drop in Lake Powell, on the Arizona-Utah border.

The lake, on which a huge dam produces and supplies hydropower to an estimated 5 million customers across the West, fell below 3,525 feet for the first time in March.

Officials may need to reduce water deliveries to users on the Colorado River to prevent the dam’s shutdown.

“We have a problem with water here, and if we don’t solve it, it’s going to be rationed,” Wolfe said.

The new law allows HOAs to create “reasonable rules regarding the installation and appearance of artificial turf.”

These include the location and percentage of grass allowed and its removal or replacement if turf it is not maintained to an association’s standards.

The law maintains an HOA’s ability to enforce “both the express and reasonably implied intent” of any rules governing design standards to protect the

natural environment of a community.

Wolfe said he is “moderately” happy with the law, and is hopeful that the HOA board will create design standards for artificial turf that are fair.

Days after Ducey signed the bill, Wolfe sent a list of proposed guidelines to Diana Ebertshauser, the neighborhood’s HOA community manager, “that might make compliance with the law easy and avoid possible needless litigation.”

Among Wolfe’s suggestions:

- That turf be manufactured in the U.S.
- That it be installed by specifically licensed contractors.
- That the minimum warranty from the manufacturer be at least 10 years.
- Several proposed installation guidelines.

In an April 7 email that Wolfe shared with *Wrangler News*, Ebertshauser stated a resolution was being reviewed by an attorney, and that the board would vote on it on April 20.

However, Ebertshauser told homeowners in an April 15 email that the board decided to remove the item from the April meeting agenda and that it was being tabled until its July meeting.

There was no explanation for the delay. Ebertshauser did not respond to calls and emails from *Wrangler News* seeking clarification.

For the Wolfes, whose backyard pool is surrounded by hardscape and low-water-use plants, such as agaves, oleander, cactus and gorgeous pink bougainvillea, the new law can’t come soon enough.

“This just isn’t a place where you have to water all the time to have a beautiful yard,” Julie Wolfe said.

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Digital

From Page 3

day with the same excitement that I remember as a kid. In fact, that's despite—or because of—the remarkable changes that have occurred in what once seemed an industry that would never change.

Little did we know...

Now that fewer and fewer newspapers are delivered to driveways, the trend continues to propel itself into the digital future, aided by technology that allows us to hold the world in the palm of one hand.

In fact, our daily travels around this Tempe and West Chandler community reinforce what we already know: that our cellphones, tablets and computers have become, in many cases, the *preferred* way among many of learning what's going on around them.

This isn't, by the way, an assumption derived from mere casual observation. The numbers tracked elec-

tronically by proven measuring strategies tell us that digitized readership of Wrangler News continues to skyrocket, as well as the ongoing driveway delivery editions we're proud to have maintained over 3-plus decades.

Which, we should point out, is beneficial not only to our readers but to those companies and institutions, large and small, that use our pages to advertise and grow awareness of their local products and services.

Nor is that the only tool for gauging viewers' reactions to what we offer. The numbers relied on by most big ad agencies around the U.S. are measured in terms of what they categorize as impressions—a recognized way of going beyond just those figures' numeric value but by the presumed impact that each campaign has on influencing viewers to act accordingly based on the message they've seen.

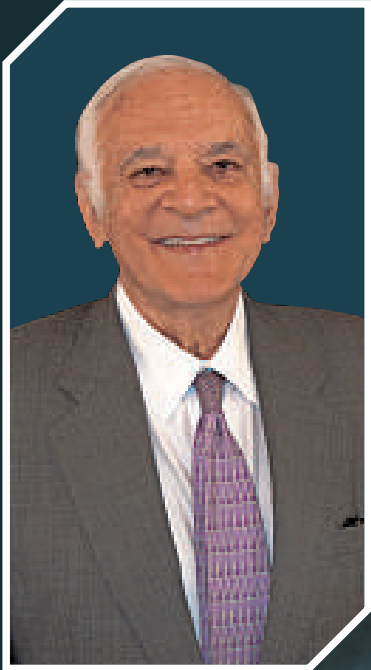
With Wrangler News, for example, that number in the most recent accounting was up by a staggering 47

percent over the previous month, which serves as a reminder—and, of course, huge encouragement—for us to continue to fine tune and expand our mobile accessibility.

Which we're doing at what we consider breakneck speed.

If you haven't tuned in yet to WranglerNews.com or clicked on any of the emailed links you might have received from us, we hope you will, and that you'll be pleased with the convenience and variety of local news, photos and business-focused messages you'll find—all updated on a daily basis.

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OPINIONS

Tempe City Council: Just say no to Coyotes' flawed arena proposal

By Ron Tapscott

Hopefully this is the final step in keeping Arizona Coyotes owner Alex Meruelo's icy fingers out of Tempe finances and politics. The City Council continues to weigh continuing with this questionable enterprise of building a \$1.7 billion arena with ancillary residential and retail development near Priest Drive and Rio Salado Parkway.

The Council can and should end this exhausting venture now.

Please consider writing a short email to Council and selected staff at the email addresses below and consider sharing with your friends:

corey_woods@tempe.gov; randy_keating@tempe.gov; jennifer_adams@tempe.gov; robin_arredondo-savage@tempe.gov; Doreen_Garlid@tempe.gov; lauren_kuby@tempe.gov; joel_navarro@tempe.gov; andrew_ching@tempe.gov; rosa_inchausti@tempe.gov; thomas_duensing@tempe.gov; steven_methvin@tempe.gov; sonia_blain@tempe.gov; jeffrey_tamulevich@tempe.gov.

If you have already written to them, please write again. We must emphasize our concerns. The Coyotes owners want everyone to believe that they have a done deal with Arizona State University and the city of Tempe.

Not so fast.

Their PR machine is working overtime to convince us that the deal (not concluded) for a meager 5,000-seat arena at ASU will seal the deal for the permanent arena on the city site.

What arrogance and disrespect for our residents and elected officials!

Skip the billionaire, gambler Meruelo PR spin. Here's the real bet we are looking at, and it's a losing one: Meruelo does not honor his financial commitments:

In 2019, Meruelo was sued for more than \$450,000 of unpaid license fees for his Las Vegas resort property: <https://www.rgj.com/story/news/2019/06/25/gsr-owner-alex-meruelo-sued-over-claims-unpaid-license-fees-sls-las-vegas-casino/1564658001>.

In 2021, the Coyotes were served with an eviction notice from Glendale, which was attempting to cut its losses, including outstanding past-due payments: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sport>

[s/hockey/nhl/coyotes-franchise-a-disaster-in-the-desert-575159162.html](https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/sport/s/hockey/nhl/coyotes-franchise-a-disaster-in-the-desert-575159162.html).

In October 2021, the Coyotes were placed on a \$50,000 a month payment plan to settle outstanding accounts with Tucson for back rent at the Tucson Convention Center, where their American Hockey League team plays. When the payment plan was initiated, the back rent owed by the Roadrunners, the Meruelo minor-league team, for the 2020-21 season totaled \$256,450:

[https://theathletic.com/3187030/2022/03/16/every-other-team-in-the-league-will-be-laughing-imagining-the-coyotes-future-in-arizona\[DMP1\]](https://theathletic.com/3187030/2022/03/16/every-other-team-in-the-league-will-be-laughing-imagining-the-coyotes-future-in-arizona[DMP1])

ESPN reported that the NBA denied Meruelo's offer to buy the Atlanta Hawks due to concerns about his finances:

https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/7190743/atlanta-hawks-market-not-sold-alex-meruelo

The Culinary Union is urging Nevada gaming regulators to fully investigate Meruelo's financial relationship with his brother Richard, Meruelo's use of tax shelters, and the legality of his proposed acquisition on the SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino: <https://www.culinaryunion226.org/news/press/culinary-union-urges-nevada>

Earth Day reflections from a departing Tempe councilmember

By Lauren Kuby

April 22 was the last Earth Day before I leave Tempe City Council – time to reflect on where we've been and where we're going. It's a time of gratitude, as well.

When I first ran for Council in 2014, the pundits warned me not to embrace a sustainability platform. But I knew Tempe was ready for sustainable solutions. Former Councilmember Onnie Shekerjian had paved the way. No matter that we were from different political parties, we embraced the same vision, and I was grateful to follow in her footsteps.

There were barriers, however. After the utilities killed rooftop solar – a punch to the gut for dreams of solarizing the community – I turned my attention to ridding the city of waste from single-use plastic and Styrofoam. Not so fast! As the Legislature stepped in and banned plastic-bag bans, I pivoted once again.

In 2015, we created a resident-led Sustainability Commission. We hired Dr. Braden Kay, who was among the first graduates of Arizona State University's School of Sustainability, to lead our Office of Sustainability. He set out to listen to every city department,

and we saw the culture of sustainability shift.

We created a pipeline of projects and people—from the university to local businesses, from long-time residents to Tempe youth. In 2018, Tempe adopted a 100 percent renewable-energy goal and, in 2019, we were the first Valley city to adopt a Climate Action Plan to reduce the threats of extreme heat and to lower carbon emissions from energy and transportation use.



Lauren Kuby

We recently updated that plan, and the process was extraordinary. Tempe residents, from students to retirees and local businesses and social justice organizations, took center-stage in our efforts to save money on energy, improve transportation, grow food access and shade the city.

"Climate Action Plan 2.0" turns attention to voices of community members and distills their desires for rapid-decarbonization and equitable climate action that will prioritize three actions:

Adopting green building and city infrastructure re-

quirements will ensure a cooler environment through shade cover, clean energy and water conservations, leading to a more livable community.

Traffic congestion is a continual challenge to quality of life – contributing to poor air quality and health outcomes. We will ensure that transportation is multi-modal, equitable and low carbon.

As temperatures rise, we will create solarized places of refuge – Resilient Energy Hubs – for those in our community who need shelter from the heat and human services.

Mayor Corey Woods and the Council envision a city that addresses the impacts of climate change. We work in step with the community and those who are most vulnerable: the very young, the elderly and those who are without homes to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

I have faith that the new Council being sworn in on July 1 will continue to turn our resident-led climate action plan into reality. After all, Earth Day should be every day.

Lauren Kuby is serving out her second term on Tempe City Council. She is a candidate for Arizona Corporation Commission in the November election.

regulators-to-investigate-alex-meruelos-financial-ties-to-his-brother-and-other-issues-that-raise-questions-about-his-suitability-to-own-and-operate-sls-las-vegas.

For Meruelo, the action is not on the ice, it's gambling.

The Coyotes want to change a new state law that legalizes sports betting to allow them to keep running their mobile sports-gambling operation when they move from Glendale to ASU this fall.

But what are the Coyotes really planning? How about the morsel of truth that came out during a hearing on a Coyotes plan to change Arizona's gaming laws?

The Coyotes don't plan to open a retail operation at ASU, but to just keep running their mobile gambling operations, according to the Coyotes' Andrew Diss, who testified for the proposal:

<https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2022/03/30/coyotes-seek-gambling-law-change/>.

Meruelo has invested heavily in online banking. He recently launched SaharaBets, a digital sports wagering platform. Sahara's vice president, Andrew Diss, has announced that the company would focus on Arizona's Hispanic community: <https://thenevadaindependent.com/es/article/indy-gaming-meruelo-launches-saharabets-in-arizona-what-about-nevada>.

Arizona is a good market for Meruelo

because our state offers a minimum tax rate, and up to 20 sports-betting platforms.

According to Geoff Fisk, senior analyst for ArizonaCasinos.com, "Lawmakers went all-out in the effort to make Arizona a major sports betting hub (through Arizona House Bill 2772)." <https://azbigmedia.com/business/experts-project-252-million-sports-betting-market-in-arizona>

Oh, yes, Tempe residents don't need more traffic at an already overburdened major intersection.

Coyotes games often take place during weekday rush hour and will greatly impact traffic — and airport traffic especially. Rio Salado is a congested thoroughfare. Look to the traffic study completed for the Carvana project across the street at Rio Salado and Priest).

Phoenix and its Sky Harbor International Airport are our regional partners. Why would we work against them? The southern runway will need to be extended due to climate change and Sky Harbor's interest in becoming a nonstop hub to Asia (bigger planes are needed and bigger planes need longer runways).

With overhead decibel levels over 64, housing is not suitable for these parcels. And Sky Harbor will likely sue, based on an Intergovernmental Agreement with Tempe.

Ron Tapscott is an activist and Tempe resident. Reach him at rontapscott@gmail.com.



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WRANGLER NEWS COMMUNITY

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National League of Cities hails Chandler's diversity

By Sally Mesarosh

Special for Wrangler News

Amid a fun atmosphere and diverse entertainment, delicious food and informative resources, Chandler's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Division threw a party – the inaugural Chandler Contigo Festival – that drew 1,200 people that the National League of Cities has recognized with a 2022 Cultural Diversity Award.

"It's one more big step toward building trust in the community and celebrating our rich diversity," said Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke.

Niki Tapia, Chandler's DEI program manager, said that Chandler Contigo, whose translation is "Chandler with You," came about when City Council gave the DEI program additional funding for community events. Her team brainstormed and selected an older, historic neighborhood with a high Latino population.

Partnerships were made among community, faith and educational stakeholders, including Latino community organization leaders and representatives from advocacy groups. It was Chandler's first — but won't be the last, according to Tapia — culturally driven community event.

"When you do something new, you never know, but so many city organizations had trust in us and our planning," Tapia said. "For everyone to respond as they did was really nice."

Among the highlights of Chandler Contigo was the food, representing a diverse variety, including Columbian, El Salvadorian, Mexican and barbeque. Local Latino musicians played as the crowd ate, chatted and danced.

"It was an atmosphere of fun and education, as well," Tapia said. "The city clerk's office had voter registration information, a small-business group had immigration materials, plus Chandler Pride had LGBTQ+ information. It was neat for people to find so many resources while having fun."

"The first Chandler Contigo was a kickoff for bigger city projects. The city is getting ready to do large-scale projects in that aging neighborhood, like park and street improvements, infrastructure work and more. So, we'll hold one more fun event in September 2022."

Four communities nationwide were honored with first-place awards based on population by the National League of Cities. Chandler was the winner in the category of 200,001-500,000 population. The awards celebrate programs that support the arts, community building and the history of communities of color.

Chandler City Councilmembers Mark Stewart and Christine Ellis accepted the award on the city's behalf during the National League of Cities Conference in Washington, D.C.

Photos by Sherrie Buzby



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The changing face of Warner Road

From I-10 to Price Road, busy S. Tempe thruway getting a needed facelift

By Lee Shappell

Wrangler News
Executive Editor

It is one of the main arterial ways across South Tempe that was overdue for an overhaul, and it finally is getting one.

Warner Road, which carries more than 30,000 vehicles a day on the 5-mile stretch from Interstate 10 on the west to Price Road on the east is morphing, starting with the pavement itself and extending to the businesses that front it.

The South Tempe stretch of Warner gives and takes high traffic from two major freeways. The daily pounding took a toll. Pavement was cracking and chunking out. Driving on Warner, especially from Rural Road east to Price, was getting to be a teeth-rattling experience.

That now has changed. Work on the one-mile segment from McClintock Drive to Price that further snarled traffic the past several weeks is nearly complete.

Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant curbs and sidewalks have been retro-fitted at every side-street crossing on each side of Warner. The top 2-inch layer of old pavement has been scraped away, replaced with new smooth blacktop. All that remains is to complete the lane striping.

That may be a relief to the thousands of drivers who endure it each day, but not so fast.

Starting April 25, the bottleneck moves a mile west, to the Warner Road stretch from Rural to McClintock. One break that drivers will get on this part of the project: ADA-compliant curbs and sidewalks already have been retro-fitted, saving several weeks of disruption. This phase of the project will be limited to removing and replacing the top layer of pavement, which should take no more than a couple of weeks.

Big changes are taking place along Warner, too. Perhaps the most visible was recent demolition of the former

Honeywell International six-story office building near Priest Drive. Minnesota-based Opus Development Co. bought the 18-acre property for \$9.3 million and plans to build two speculative industrial buildings with a combined 197,000 square feet.

On the southeastern corner at McClintock, Take 5 Oil Change is expecting to open the final week of April. It has been an arduous journey. Neighbors objected vehemently, saying they instead wanted a restaurant/wine bar or similar amenity.

Despite the property owner meeting every city requirement, he was denied a use permit for his oil-change shop by the city, which caved to the masses. He sued and won.

The ending is happy for the neighbors, though. Freely Taproom & Kitchen rolled out a soft opening on the northwestern corner of Warner and McClintock last September and has incrementally added services, the delay being the result of supply-chain issues, according to owner Paul Gillingwater. Freely has a large, east-facing (afternoon shaded), dog-friendly patio.

Warner Road is a local economic engine, and even Mayor Corey Woods remarked publicly last fall that the condition of the roadway had become unacceptable. That wasn't what spurred the project, though.

"We definitely do have an objective process to identify what streets we are going to resurface," said Ed Bond of the city's Engineering & Transportation Department. "In general, we survey all of our streets every three years. The pavement is given a score, a Pavement Quality Index. Work is assigned from those scores."

Tempe estimates the cost to be \$1 million per mile to resurface a road and do associated concrete work on manhole covers and curbs along the way. It lumped the Rural to McClintock and McClintock to Price projects into one and achieved a \$200,000 savings.

The project is paid for largely from Tempe General Obligation Bonds, but the city also received some state Highway User Revenue Funds.

Over the next five years, South Tempe major resurfacing projects are to include Elliot Road from Kyrene to McClintock and Priest Drive from Elliot south to the Chandler city limit, according to Bond.

Several neighborhood streets also recently have been seal-coated or soon will be, including Warner Ranch and Circle G neighborhoods, Bond said.

City Council, recognizing that Tempe streets overall are in decline, last year doubled Pavement Quality Index funding over the next five years to accelerate street improvements.

Beginning this fiscal year, \$10 million was appropriated, up by about \$5 million.



Freely Taproom overcomes difficult debut

Paul Gillingwater's intention was a soft opening of his Freely Taproom and Kitchen in September, to be followed in October by a formal grand opening of the South Tempe establishment.

That was assuming that everything proceeded on schedule.

Virtually nothing did.

First, kitchen equipment was late arriving. He had to limit initial offerings to bar service for several weeks at his shop at Warner and McClintock.

Patio furniture, perfect for the upcoming temperate autumn, also was delayed. So was the new electric sign out front. Service stayed inside through many patio-quality evenings and Gillingwater draped a banner across his entrance to let passersby know he was open for business.

Gillingwater said the series of supply-chain issues were a serious setback.

Then, he had difficulty finding anyone to work.

"I probably had 10 people schedule interviews, and then not show up or not call," he said. "I was spending \$200 a week just to advertise open positions."

The kitchen equipment finally arrived and food service commenced. Patio furniture now is in place and customers are enjoying mild spring evenings outside, some bringing their dogs.

And, finally, the new electric sign is in place.

Time for that big grand opening?

"Naw, it's been too long now," Gillingwater said.

The community longed for something like Freely since its uproar over the oil-lube shop that is about to open across the intersection. They wanted a restaurant/wine shop.

"I was driving around the neighborhood two years ago on Christmas day," Gillingwater said. "I'd seen an article about South Tempe. I just fell in love with this building. It's very distinctive, a great warm, inviting space. As I drove around the neighborhood, there was

nothing. It was like a restaurant desert in this little area around here. I thought the neighborhood deserved more than they have. Everything just kind of fell into place."

The icing on the cake for Gillingwater was that the neighborhood is affluent with disposable income, educated and hungry for this type establishment.

"One of the things I am excited about is getting to know the people of the neighborhood, and greeting regular guests," he said. "It's the connection I miss. I was more on the corporate side the last eight years, stuck in an office."

He spent years working at O.H.S.O. Brewery.

The Freely menu, primarily sharables like meat-and-cheese plates and flatbreads, as well as salads and hummus plates, is influenced by O.H.S.O.

"This is designed as a place to hang out with friends in comfortable seating," he said. "Share some food, enjoy a beer, or wine or a cocktail."

There are about 30 beers on tap with a focus on Arizona products and a select few from California.

"It's a pretty good selection," Gillingwater said. "That's the neat thing. If I'm in the mood for a stout, I don't want there to be just one stout. Try another one. Have some options."

The one thing that is not yet open is the bottle shop adjacent to the bar.

"There will be a whole bunch of cans and bottles. You can come in and browse like a supermarket," he said. "You can open them and enjoy them here, or take it home. It will be a retail area on premises."

He also envisions weekend brunch specials.

"I'm just grateful that, fortunately, through all of this, the public has found us," he said.

By Lee Shappell

Wrangler News Executive Editor



Jazz for the masses

April is Jazz Appreciation Month and Chandler was right on top of it with its annual Jazz Festival April 1-2. There were live performances as well as family-friendly activities at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park. Festival-goers brought blankets and lawn chairs to the outdoor concert to listen to local and national artists. The festival was presented by Downtown Chandler Community Partnership, Phoenix Blues Society, The Nash, West Alley BBQ, Waste Management and the city.

— Photo essay by Billy Hardiman for Wrangler News







DIVERSIONS

Your Tempe-W. Chandler guide to the perfect Cinco de Mayo — ¡Ole!

By Meghann Sepulveda
Special for Wrangler News

On May 5, people across South Tempe and West Chandler will gather with their amigos at Mexican restaurants/bars that feature food and drink specials, live music and other fun activities for the whole family in observance of Cinco de Mayo.

We've put together a list of our top picks of places in the area to check out that are perfect for your Cinco de Mayo fiesta.

1. La Casa de Juana

Step into this quaint and cozy restaurant, situated on Elliot Road at McClintock Drive in Tempe, adorned with a bright interior that not only looks like old-world Mexico but feels that way, too. The walls and tables are colorful, and the staff is warm and welcoming. Serving up traditional menu items such as flautas, mole and street tacos, along with chef specialties like lime shrimp avocado salad, cilantro cream chicken and steak ranchero, you'll feel like you're south of the border celebrating like a local. And don't forget about the margaritas! juanashouse.com

2. Sandbar Mexican Grill

If you're dreaming of white beaches and colorful cocktails, this is the place for you. Sandbar Mexican Grill, on Ray Road west of Priest Drive in West Chandler, features vibrant décor, a large outdoor sand patio – including cabanas you can rent – and authentic dishes.

Enjoy street corn, nachos and shrimp ceviche, along with specialty tacos, sizzling fajitas and traditional entrée favorites like burritos and enchiladas. Don't pass on the frozen margaritas, which come in a variety of flavors, including spicy mango! sandbaraz.com

3. Espo's Mexican Food

For more than 54 years, this West Chandler-based neighborhood hot spot, situated just west of Chandler Fashion Center, has been serving up fresh Mexican cuisine. Each dish is crafted from scratch and created from family recipes that have been passed down from several generations. Simple yet flavorful dishes, such as red-chili burros, bean tostadas and chimichangas, along with protein bowls, taco salads, and chips and

dip, will have you coming back not just in May but all year long. espos.com

4. Ghost Ranch

Looking for a more intimate setting? Try Ghost Ranch, at Rural and Warner roads in Tempe. There, you'll explore the sophisticated flavors of the southwest.

The modern touches and gorgeous finishings set the tone for an elevated culinary experience. Not only can you choose from Mexican staples like pozole, a delicious red-chili pork stew with hominy and cabbage, and taco platters with mesquite grilled sirloin steak or swordfish, but also house specialties, such as pollo asado or green-chile burgers. Explore the many varieties of tequila and don't forget the churro ice cream sandwich for dessert. ghostranchaz.com

5. Someburros

They've got the neighborhood covered, with shops in Tempe at 101 E. Baseline Road at Mill Avenue and in West Chandler at 3461 W. Frye Road just south of Chandler Fashion Center. Bring the kids (and grandma) for fast-casual Mexican food or grab your food to go.



Marg alert! Cinco de Mayo is just around the corner and many of our neighborhood establishments, including La Casa de Juana in South Tempe (top two photos by Billy Hardiman) and Espo's in West Chandler, are ready for the revelry!

Film Fare

with M.V. Moorhead

'Father Stu' an absorbing tale

Stuart Long was a failed boxer in Montana who became a failed actor in L.A. who became a Catholic convert and then a seminarian and ultimately a priest. Mark Wahlberg has turned Long's odd career trajectory into a Hollywood tale, and a juicy star vehicle, with the new biopic *Father Stu*.

After hearing the story from a priest who was friends with Long, Wahlberg developed it as a film project, but the writer-director is Rosalind Ross, better known as Mel Gibson's longtime girlfriend and the mother of one of his children. Early on, Ross endows the film almost with the flavor of a '70s-era friends-in-low-places comedy. It wouldn't seem out of character if Stu had Clyde the Orangutan as a sidekick.



M.V. Moorhead

While working the meat counter in a supermarket, like Mickey Rourke in *The Wrestler*, Stu beholds Carmen (Teresa Ruiz), a soulful local beauty, falls hard for her at first sight, and traces her to her church, where he learns she's a devout Catholic. A non-believer himself, he nonetheless hangs around and even converts to be near her, much to the shock of his fretful mother Kathleen (Jacki

Weaver) and bitter, distant father Bill (Mel Gibson). Gradually, Stu wears Carmen down. She responds to the intensity and seriousness of his passion for her.

She's prepared to marry him when, after recovering from a hideous accident, he announces that he's decided to become a priest instead. But his sufferings don't end when he gets to the seminary, quite the opposite. Church leadership resists his priestly ambitions, first because of his rowdy background and later, disgustingly, because they fear that the muscular illness with which he's been afflicted makes him unworthy to perform the sacraments.

Although I'm not Catholic, like the real Stu Long I went to a Catholic college. Perhaps because I didn't grow up in the church, but received the benefit of an excellent Catholic liberal education, it's possible I'm in a position to be more appreciative of the institution than my many angry lapsed Catholic friends. Besides, I've read too much Flannery O'Connor and Graham Greene not to respond to this story.

But Stu winning the glorious Carmen's heart seemed like miracle enough to me. It seemed outrageous that he would then break it off with her to go to seminary. Still, my annoyance with his choice didn't make the sanctimony and hypocrisy he faced from the church any less infuriating. In the end, I invested emo-

tionally in his struggle. It's enough that it's what Stu wants.

There's reason, however, to suspect that the movie commits its own sins of omission. Ross's script pares down the real Stu's life to its most turbulent aspects, seemingly to make him look less accomplished, more of a desperate screw-up. It leaves out, among other things, that he was a college grad before he went to seminary and spent years as the manager of the Norton Simon Art Museum before his calling. Wahlberg's portrait of him as a slovenly, drawly, dangling-cigarette barfly doesn't suggest this background.

All the same, it's an endearing characterization. Wahlberg blurts out his newfound spiritual insights with the cocksure authority of an eternally passionate novice. He's like an acquaintance that makes you roll

your eyes and smile at the same time when you see him coming. Ruiz is lovely as Carmen, and Malcolm McDowell embraces his straight-man role as a stuffy monsignor unable to discourage Stu. Taken on its own terms, as a peculiar, sweet yarn spun from truth, the movie is absorbing and engaging.

As for Gibson, he's rarely seemed happier. This movie puts him back in the world of masochistic, hardcore, fringe-Catholic body horror he so loves. His performance as Bill is potently baleful, and there's a startling moment in which he quips that Stu wanting to become a priest is like "Hitler wanting to join the ADL." That's a nervy and heavy-handed "meta" joke to put in that guy's mouth. After all, it works almost as well to say that it's like Mel Gibson wanting to join the ADL.

Music Under the Stars

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Arts Center features noted vocalist in Jazz Month finale April 30

It's Jazz Appreciation Month, and Tempe Center for the Arts celebrates with a presentation of vocalist Lisa Fischer on April 30 in a 7:30 p.m. Jazz Month-ending concert. Tickets, priced at \$35 and \$45, are available at tempecenterforthearts.com.

Fischer is known for her remarkable vocal range, which allows her to be equally adept at jazz, soul, gospel, pop, folk and classical.

Perhaps her greatest gift, though, is Fischer's ability to connect with and reach the hearts of her listeners.

"Anyone familiar with Fischer's work will know that she sings with immense vocal dexterity," *The House That Soul Built* wrote in a review.

"She brushes lightly, harnesses low and rich tones, and soars into spectacular and resonant highs. She

can navigate a vocal line with jazz sensibility, and even operatic inflection,"

Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* wrote of Fischer,

"With a nearly vibrato-less, gospel-oriented voice that stretches high into the stratosphere and a strong, steady middle register, Ms. Fischer effused a pure joy and sometimes a pure anguish in the kind of singing that is rarely heard nowadays outside of church."

After four decades of featured background singing with icons like Luther Vandross, the Rolling Stones, Chaka Khan, Tina Turner, and Nine Inch Nails, Fischer takes center stage with her own humble, heartfelt concert.

Along with JC Maillard and Grand Baton, the organic fusion of Caribbean psychedelic soul and jazzy progressive rock has ignited her flexibility and freedom of expression, awakening her lifelong desire to make music that heals and rocks the house.



Tempe Center for the Arts presents acclaimed vocalist Lisa Fischer on April 30 to wrap Jazz Appreciation Month. — Photo courtesy of TCA.

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MCC costume designer lands off-Broadway play celebrating life of Arizona Dreamer

Adriana Diaz, Tempe resident and Mesa Community College Theatre and Film Arts Department faculty member, is designing costumes for *Americano: The Musical*, which



Adriana Diaz

“It’s something that people work towards for their entire career.”

Americano: The Musical is based on the true story of Tony Valdovinos, a Dreamer, who grew up in Phoenix, and

opened April 21 for a 12-week, off-Broadway run in New York.

“I am overwhelmed and proud to be a part of this project and elevating and celebrating Latino voices,” Diaz said.

discovers he’s an undocumented immigrant when he attempts to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps on his 18th birthday. Valdovinos was brought to the U.S. at age 2.

For the costume design, Diaz said it was important to capture the beauty of Arizona and Chicano culture, “but also really help us feel like we are part of Tony’s journey.”

Her greatest inspiration, she says, was her MCC students. Diaz managed to sneak an MCC shirt into her designs.

“This story reflects them,” Diaz said.

Diaz also is working with the MCC costume shop to prepare for the college’s mainstage production of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, opening April 29 at the MCC Theatre.

More information: mesacc.edu/arts.

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Interest spiking in 7th-ranked Corona boys volleyball team

The Corona del Sol High School boys volleyball team, with nine returning players, is on a roll, winning 12 of its first 19 matches and four of five to open 6A Central Region play.

The team's mantra after two COVID-19 restricted seasons is "We over me," according to coach **Geoff Horewitch**.

"We have had a lot of great learning moments throughout the season and the players are starting to believe in our process and win games," Horewitch said. "Each of the returning players ... understand how we want the program to function. They comprehend that the goals of the program come first. ... They trust in leaving our program and school better than they found it."

Among the key returning players is junior setter **Cade Banks**, who has 545 of the team's 562 assists.

"We trust Cade to put our team into the correct position offensively and control the court with his steady demeanor," Horewitch said.

It helps to have a setter who is tall and athletic, like the 6-foot-6 Banks.

"Cade is not only able to put us into our offensive system," said Horewitch, "but he is a tall offensive weapon, as well."

Having a setter who also can hit forces the opponent's defense to account for another weapon. Banks has 43 kills.

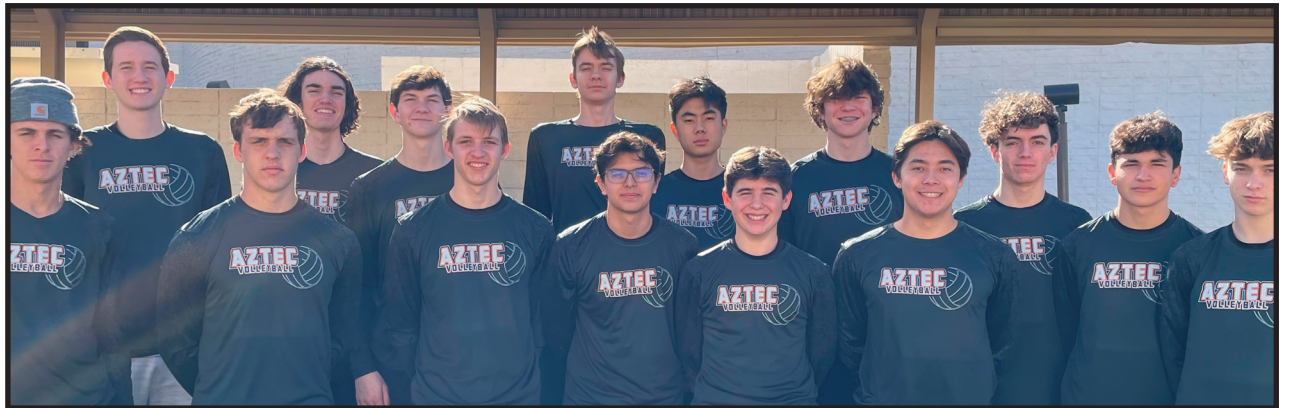
Junior hitter **Jon Seddon**, at 6-5, is the team's leading hitter with 119 kills.

"We have asked a lot more from Jon this year as an outside hitter, a position that we think better suits his talents, and as a leader on the team," Horewitch said. "We feel he can be one of the top outsides in the state."

The Aztecs' second-leading hitter is 6-4 junior middle blocker **Toby Lim** with 98 kills.

"Toby is one of the top middles in the state," Horewitch said. "He can control the game for us at the net. He is a fun player to watch."

Junior outside hitter **Walter Moffatt** and 6-8 jun-



The Aztecs' boys volleyball team is playing some of its best volleyball heading into the end of the season. Team includes Kai Becker, Omar Leon, Walter Moffatt, Connor O'Brien, Luke Vlcek, Jeremy Acedo, Carter Nicolson, Drew Nicolson, Drew Moraga, Nate Magro, Toby Lim, Ollie Hinder, Tim Hinton, Cade Banks, Jon Seddon.

— Photo courtesy Geoff Horewitch

ior middle blocker **Ollie Hinder** are new to varsity. Moffatt has 72 kills and Hinder, who was on Corona's varsity basketball team, has 14 kills.

"Walter played JV last season for us. He has a cannon for an arm and can make dents in the floor with his power," Horewitch said. "Ollie, on the other hand, is playing volleyball for the first time. He is very tall and extremely athletic. He has gotten so much better. ... He has a bright future in volleyball."

Corona has another weapon in its strong serving game (190 aces). Banks leads the way with 51 service aces. **Jeremy Acedo**, a senior defensive specialist, has 27. **Carter Nicolson** has 25 and Lim 24. Senior outside hitter **Nathan Moraga** has 17 aces.

"(Nicolson's) confidence in his play truly inspires the rest the team. He is consistent and the team feeds off of it," the coach said.

The Aztecs' defense really is the team's strength.

"The team plays gritty defense and does whatever they can to get the ball up," Horewitch said. "They have a never-give-up attitude and always believe that they will be able to come back."

Corona has five exceptional diggers, starting with sophomore libero/defensive specialist **Luke Vlcek** with 144 digs. Carter Nicolson and Banks each have 100 digs. Senior outside hitter **Connor O'Brien** has 94 digs and Acedo has 85.

"Connor, who just signed with Queens College to continue his academic and volleyball career, is one of our best defensive players," said Horewitch. "His overall excellence in the serve-receive aspect of the game will play a huge role in his success at the next level."

The Aztecs are stout at the net with 127 blocks, led by Banks' 21 solo and 48 total blocks. Lim has 42 total blocks, 12 of them solo. Senior middle blocker **Tim Hinton, at 6-4**, has 41 total blocks, 14 solo.

"It's Tim's first year playing volleyball but he is athletic and has become a good student of the game," said

Horewitch.

Other contributors include senior opposite hitter and setter **Drew Nicolson** and juniors **Omar Leon** and **Kai Becker**.

"Drew, a hard-nosed defender, is fully healed from his torn ACL from last season," Horewitch said.

Coming off a two-game streak, including a hard-fought 3-2 win over arch rival and 6A second-ranked Desert Vista, the Aztecs are poised to improve upon their No. 7 ranking.

Corona has a home rematch with Desert Vista on April 26, the night the team honors its seniors.

The season finale is at No. 9 Mountain Pointe.

Beach volleyball

Corona's beach volleyball team (7-0 Section 1, 10-2 overall), ranked fourth in Division I and 22nd nationally, was set to play the first round of the team Beach Volleyball Championships against No. 13 Sunnyslope on April 18.

With a win, the Aztecs would play in the quarterfinals at the higher seed on April 20.

The Aztecs' five pairs of players have won six matches, 5-0, meaning that all five Corona pairs won. They've also won 4-1 three times and 3-2 once.

Corona's listed No. 1 team is junior **Kierstyn Barton** and senior **Dominique Wofford**; No. 2, senior **Taylor Erickson** and junior **Ella Lomigora**; No. 3, sophomore **Maggie Beauer** and senior **Angelina Bour**; No. 4, freshman **Alyssa Aguayo** and junior **Kacie Bikofsky**, and No. 5, junior **Maddie Cohen** and senior **Heather Heimlich**.

Junior blocker **Brianna Mitchell** and freshman defender **Mia Bikofsky** are substitutes.

State-tournament qualifiers in pairs have not been determined. The tournament is to open May 2 at Cas-teel High. The second round and quarterfinals are May 4, the semifinals and finals May 5.

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Anna Battle inducted into Tempe All-City Sports Hall of Fame



Anna Battle is no stranger to sports. The former administrator and principal in the Tempe Union High School District was an NCAA All-American in track and field while a student at Arizona State and throughout her professional career has been a staunch supporter of high school athletics.

Battle, now superintendent of the Casa Grande Union High School District, on April 11 was inducted into the Tempe All-City Association Hall of Fame during the organization's winter sports awards banquet.

Battle worked in TUHSD for 33 years, including a stint as assistant superintendent of operations. She was principal of Desert Vista High for eight years and Tempe High for four years.

During 12 years as a high school teacher, she coached volleyball, basketball, softball, track and field and cross country.

Several student-athletes from South Tempe schools were named to All-City teams during the banquet:

BOYS SOCCER — Uriel Perez Quezada, Marcos de Niza; Aran Garza, Corona del Sol; Brandon Olivares, Corona del Sol.

GIRLS SOCCER — Allyson Wachtel, Corona del Sol; Rosalia Oyzerovich, Corona del Sol.

GIRLS BASKETBALL — Meghan Kirchhardt, Corona del Sol.

BOYS WRESTLING — Evan Soliz, Corona del Sol; Brayden Johnson-Brown, Corona del Sol; Sasso Villasenor, Corona del Sol; Micah Castro, Corona del Sol.

GIRLS WRESTLING — Julie Suarez, Corona del Sol; Miranda Ellsworth, Corona del Sol; Ana Jovanovic, Corona del Sol.

Marcos selects girls basketball coach

Marcos de Niza High School has hired Chris Crockett to be its new girls basketball coach.

Crockett joins the Padres with a 20-year track record of coaching high school sports around the Valley, including basketball, football and baseball.

He had a 27-year career in law enforcement and criminal justice, working for both the Phoenix and Yuma Police Departments. He is a former U.S. Marines Corps sergeant.

"Coach Crockett has a larger-than-life presence both on and off the basketball court, and I know he will have an immediate positive impact on our girls' basketball program," said Lenica

Ruiz, Marcos athletic director.

"This is an exciting hire for us and we are so pleased to welcome Coach Crockett to our Padre family,"

Crockett graduated from the University of Phoenix with a degree in Management. He also holds a master's in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University. He teaches criminal justice as an adjunct professor at Grand Canyon and Arizona State.





Tempe El adopts plan to spread kindness

Story & photo by Gabrielle Dunton
Special for Wrangler News

You've heard this before: A simple act of kindness can change a person's day, or maybe even their life.

But, have you ever stopped to think that because kindness can be felt when it is received by every person — regardless of age, background, culture or ability — it can be considered the truest form of inclusion?

That is the premise of Grace's Groupies, led by The Be Kind People Project, which was designed specifically to service special-education students and to inspire general-education students to be kinder, more welcoming and more inclusive.

The program is being implemented at 10 Tempe Elementary District schools, specifically focusing on special-education students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The program includes a Be Kind curriculum that engages students through music, dance and kinesthetic learning.

Recently at Laird School, students in Lori Miazga's SEALS classroom participated in a kick off with THE BE KIND CREW. Upbeat music played in the background as students spent the morning outside in activities to build positive relationships.

"I am so proud at how far my students have come since the beginning of the year," Miazga said. "We do dance and movement in our class regularly, and it's great to see them enjoying it outside with THE BE KIND CREW."

When The Be Kind People Project was founded in 2011, Grace Campbell, granddaughter of BKPP founder Marcia Meyer, was 6 and entering school as a child with special needs and Kabuki Syndrome, a rare condition with physical, developmental and behavioral implications.

At the time, The Be Kind Pledge was



Student Aalijah Hernandez Esquer (left) and Kayla Tomooka embody the Be Kind Curriculum.

being developed with input from stakeholders. The Be Kind Pledge represents what an ideal environment in school would be for Grace. If children most marginalized were treated with kindness and dignity, then the culture of kindness and respect for others would extend to all areas of a school environment, according to organizers.

A few days after her 16th birthday, Grace sadly passed away and The Grace's Groupies program at BKPP was created to pay forward her legacy of kindness.

Kayla Tomooka, BKPP national manager of special care and stewardship, was at Laird participating as part of

THE BE KIND CREW and having a great time building relationships with students.

"We know how important it is to be seen, to be heard and to include everyone," Tomooka said. "This is one way we knew we could give back in honor of Grace. It's a very powerful visit for us and it's a very reciprocal relationship that we are building with these students."

Next steps for Tempe Elementary students in BKPP Grace's Groupies will be to meet with THE CREW members to continue social emotional learning sessions and continue building relationships.

Collaboration rewards Kyrene schools chief with national kudos



Kyrene School District Superintendent Laura Toenjes was among the nearly 25 Arizona superintendents recognized on April 8 for successfully completing the AASA National Superintendent Certification Program.

"As a life-long learner and educator, I am grateful for the professional development provided through the program," Toenjes said.

"Given the uncertainty of today's times, I felt the program provided me with ample opportunities to work with peers from across the country who challenged each other to improve and to strengthen our public schools."

The program, administered by the School Superintendents Association, is a collaborative effort with AASA state affiliates and business and corporate leaders.

The master teachers and guest instructors have been sitting superintendents and have proven track records of success.

The AASA National Superintendent Certification Program sharpens skills that successful superintendents identify as essential for leading in today's complex and challenging education environment.

The program was developed exclusively for superintendents.

"Excellence in public-school leadership

has never been more important than it is today," said Mark Joraanstad, executive director of Arizona School Administrators.

The AASA National Superintendent Certification Program provides superintendents with opportunities to engage in a world-class professional learning opportunity.

"I am pleased to congratulate Superintendent Toenjes for completing the program, an initiative that provides on-the-ground coaching, mentoring and support from individuals who are experiencing the same challenges and successes that superintendents from across the country are experiencing," said Joraanstad.



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BUSINESS

Wildhorse Pass Motorsports Park closing to make way for 'mini city'

By Lee Shappell

Wrangler News Executive Editor

When plans were released in January of 2021 for what amounts to a mini city to be built on the Gila River Reservation at Interstate 10 and Loop 202, some with an eagle eye noticed on the map of proposed development that Firebird Lake mysteriously had disappeared.

More than a year later, Wildhorse Pass Development Authority has confirmed that Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park – including Firebird Lake and the drag strip that hosts a National Hot Ros Association championship each year – will be closing in 2023 after more than 40 years to make way for the 3,300-acre entertainment-retail-office complex.

The closure, however, does not include the 1.6-mile road course adjacent to Interstate 10 that is now home to Radford Racing School, which bought out Bondurant School of High Performance Driving. Radford intends to continue operations.

The proposed complex would bring West Chandler and Tempe a major influx of other sports, entertainment and recreation options as well as job opportunities in the massive development:

- An 11-story second hotel tower at Wild Horse Pass Hotel, nearly doubling capacity to 447 rooms, opened last fall.
- A 3,300-acre mini-city commercial development, headlined by an events center and concert amphitheater, that will be rolled out over a decade. Included in the plan are five more hotels,

a theme park, water park, timeshare complex, third golf course, vastly expanded equestrian center, villas, retail and office space.

- Interstate 10 widening to four lanes plus a High Occupancy Vehicle lane in each direction from the Interstate 17 split near downtown Phoenix to Loop 202 at the Wild Horse Pass doorstep in under way. Planning also has begun to expand the freeway to three lanes each way south to State Route 387 in Casa Grande, the final 26-mile stretch of two-lane freeway between Phoenix and Tucson, making access to Wild Horse Pass easier from central and southern Arizona.

This comes just over two years after the Loop 202 segment connecting I-10 in West Chandler to I-10 in west Phoenix opened, making the drive for West Valley residents faster and easier.

- And, the championship-caliber Phoenix Rising soccer team moved into a new 10,000-seat stadium a year ago at Wild Horse Pass.

The projects will provide new revenue streams to the Gila River Indian Community and create thousands of jobs at buildout over the next 10 years.

“The new development plan will create exceptional entertainment and lifestyle experiences, new jobs for community members, and will evolve our culture and legacy,” David White, Wild Horse Pass Development Authority General Manager, said when plans were rolled out.

The development will enhance an already vibrant Wild Horse Pass area that includes high-end resorts Gila



River Hotel & Casino and Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass, Aji Spa, Phoenix Premium Outlets mall, Radford Racing School, Rawhide Western Town & Event Center, Whirlwind Golf Club, Huhugam Heritage Center and KOLI Equestrian Center.

The goal at build-out is to make Wild Horse Pass the premier destination for sports, entertainment and recreation in Arizona.

The stadium and training complex for Phoenix Rising was the first to open, last March.

“This partnership with the Gila River Indian Community allowed us to quickly expand our capacity, improve our fan experience, which is extremely important to our organization, and also allows for long-term exciting things,” said Bobby Dulle, Rising general manager.

“So it checked a lot of boxes for us. We’ve had a great four years where we were but this is just an opportunity for us that made a lot of sense.”

The second tower at Wild Horse Pass Hotel is 11 floors with 205 guest rooms, including 37 suites – two of them 1,500-square-foot Platinum Suites, and increases the hotel’s inventory to 447 rooms. The new tower

boasts a rooftop restaurant to provide a dining venue with views of the sun setting over the Estrella Mountains.

“This expansion furthers our vision to provide additional economic development opportunities for Wild Horse Pass, GRIC and the greater metropolitan Phoenix area,” Donald Antone, chairman of the Wild Horse Pass Development Authority Board of Directors, said.

John Graham, chairman and CEO of Sunbelt Holdings, added that the firm is grateful to have been selected to partner with Wild Horse Pass Development Authority and the Gila River Indian Community “at a pivotal time for the development.”

“We are committed to honoring the legacy and culture of the community and creating a sense of place that will pave the way for the future,” Graham said.

Just as completion of Loop 202 opened access to Wild Horse Pass from the West Valley, the three-year I-10 Broadway Curve project, which began last summer from the Interstate 17 split near downtown Phoenix south to Loop 202, will enhance access from the city center and North Valley.

The project will add an additional

lane in each direction and a new interchange at State Route 143 to enhance connection to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

Expansion of I-10 south to Casa Grande would come farther down the line, but Arizona Department of Transportation has begun studies, in cooperation with the Gila River Indian Community, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Highway Administration and Maricopa Association of Governments, with a goal of reducing traffic congestion on the freeway at the Wild Horse Pass exit.

The study includes whether to extend the High Occupancy Vehicle lane on I-10 south from Loop 202 to the Riggs Road interchange and improvement options for existing interchanges and roads that cross over I-10 along this corridor.

Pinal County cities Casa Grande, Coolidge and Florence are growing rapidly. Soccer is especially popular in Tucson and Casa Grande.

I-10 bridges over the Gila River are part of a separate project that is now under way.



The days of boat racing at Firebird Lake, facing page, are numbered. It is closing to make way for massive development. The drag strip at Wildhorse Pass Motorsports Park, above, has hosted major National Hot Rod Association events for decades.

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