ARCADIA NEWS

VOL. 33 NO. 9 ARCADIA • BILTMORE • CAMELBACK CORRIDOR DECEMBER 2025

FALL SPORTS ROUND-UP

Arcadia, Brophy, Xavier and Veritas each finished their fall sports seasons with records and recognition.

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THE WELCOME COMMITTEE

Ingleside Middle School's Student Ambassadors help incoming students feel inspired to thrive.

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A SCOOP OF KINDNESS

Scooptacular's new Scooping Kindness Campaign invites customers to pay it forward with ice cream.

PAGE 11

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acp Association of Community Publishers MEMBER PUBLICATION

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DECEMBER

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Kris McLaughlin helps students harness the power of the lunar cycle through her "Master the Moon" program that focuses on astrology, moon phases, and personal growth.

42 International superstars
Two Arcadia freshmen took their undefeated volleyball season to the international stage, earning a third-place finish at the Caribbean Beach Volleyball Championship.

Titans defensive back Broden Arnold attempts an interception against Combs High receiver Skyler Lawrence. The final score for that October game was 37-0; helping to cement their undefeated season.
PHOTO: RENEE STUCK

EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm going to let you in on a little secret: I've never seen *Die Hard*. My coworker let me know that there are in fact five separate *Die Hard* films, and I've never seen any of them, but I do love to hear people argue about whether it's a Christmas movie. We took a poll within the Arcadia News office and half of us say yes, it is, and the other half say no. Me? I'll continue sitting calmly on the sidelines, watching *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* for the 150th time.

The December edition is always a favorite of mine to put together, mainly because there's a jolly angle to almost all of the content: holiday offerings, of course, but also themed eats and drinks, giving campaigns and celebrations of all kinds.

The Ingleside Ambassadors are a group of seventh and eighth grade student leaders who represent their school by giving campus tours, supporting events, volunteering in the community, and sharing their IMS pride. Selected through recommendations, applications, and interviews, this year's cohort includes 40 students from a pool of 70 applicants – a giant hype-squad, if you will.

Xavier Prep's all-female engineering team, Access Play, won Tier 1 honors in the 2025 Makers of Change Assistive Technology Challenge for creating a 3D-printed, magnetized game board to help a Phoenix-based youngster with cerebral palsy play more easily with his siblings. The students' innovative design, research, and presentation impressed judges and highlighted how STEM creativity can make a meaningful impact in real lives.

Wishing you a December wrapped in warmth and holiday cheer – thank you for being part of the Arcadia News community, and we'll see you next year!

Mallory

– Mallory Gleich

UPCOMING THEMES:

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
Fitness	*History*	*Spring*

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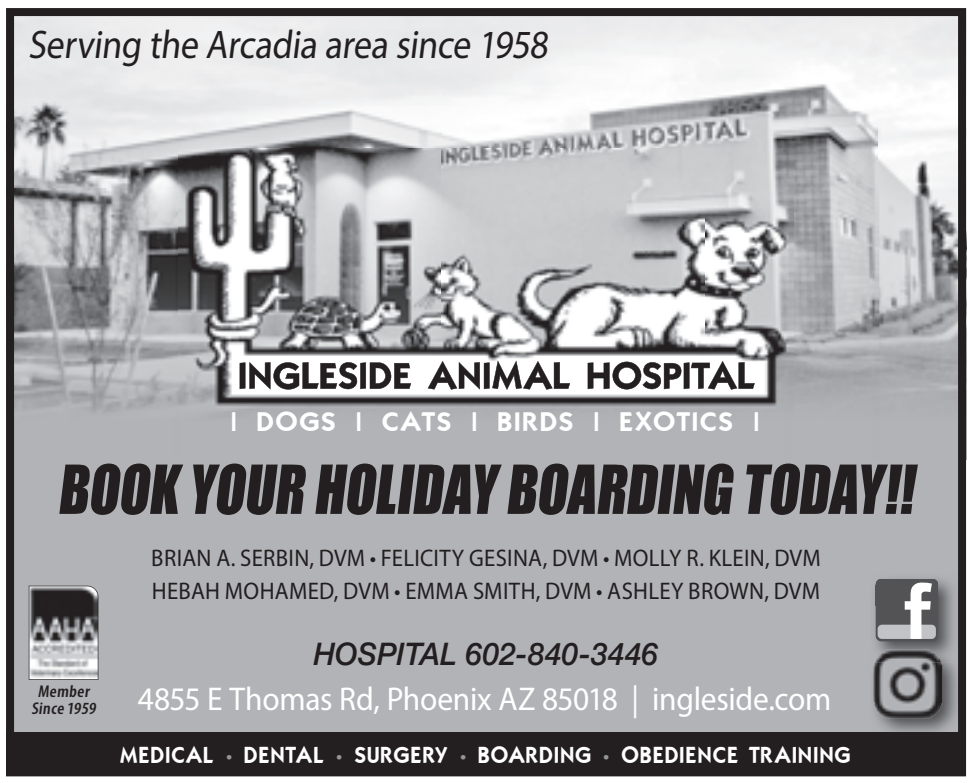
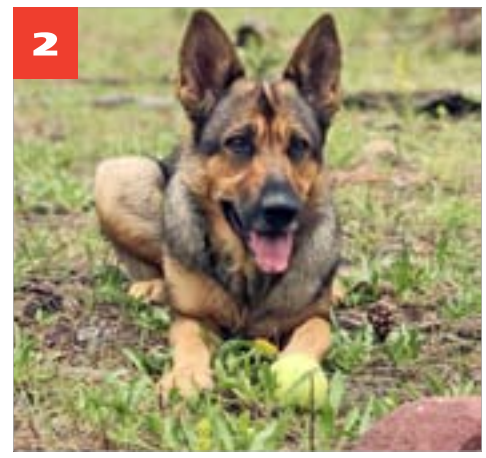
"December, being the last month of the year, cannot help but make us think of what is to come." *– Fennel Hudson*



ARCADIA'S PETS

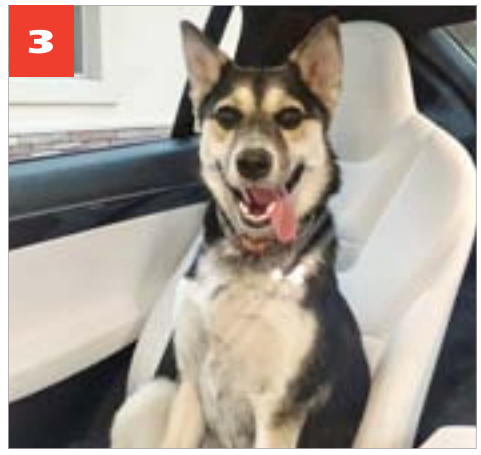
1. My name is **Goose** and I live in Camelback Canyon with my wingman and big brother who is a tricolor collie. Oh yes: some humans live there too; but I pretty much run the show. I'm hoping to attend U of A to complete my PhD in sock destruction. The title of my thesis is "I'm so darn cute, I get away with everything." See you at Postino's!

– Jeffrey T.



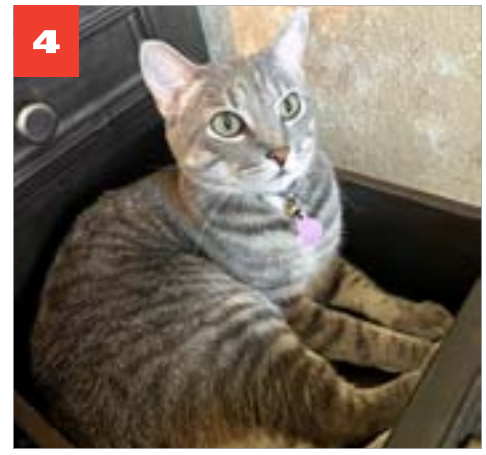
2. Zoe is a 12-year-old German shepherd. Her favorite toy is a trusty tennis ball, and while she's mostly fearless, she's scared of horses. Zoe is quite the explorer, having traveled all across Arizona – even visiting Montezuma Castle! Her birthday falls on the Fourth of July, which means extra treats and belly rubs while we try to avoid fireworks.

– Kari B.



3. I'm **Freya**, a six-year-old Husky-Australian Cattle Dog mix. I love a good W-A-L-K, road trips with my family, herding my best friend Callie Cat, playing my version of fetch, and nothing is better than a good belly rub.

– Amy A.



4. Thumper is a 2.5-year-old domestic shorthair tabby who loves to hang out in my desk drawer when I'm working from home. Anytime she hears a treat bag opening she will zoom to the kitchen – that's her favorite part of the day!

– Beth J.

*Would you like to share your pet? Send a photo and a description (50 words max) of your pet to **editor@arcadianews.com** or text it to **602.840.6379**. Include your pet's name and age, along with any fun facts about them you'd like to share. All animals are welcome!*

OWNER'S LETTER:

Gratitude in an Inflated World…

There's something about this season that feels different every year, yet always familiar. The holidays seem to slow the world down – or maybe they just remind us to notice what's been moving too fast. Here in Arcadia, the neighborhood takes on a gentler rhythm. Leisurely walks with family and friends, the glow of holiday lights on familiar homes, and the faint hum of laughter rises from porches and patios. As the sun sets casting its signature golden reflection on Camelback Mountain, you can almost feel the day take a deep breath. It's in that soft light that reflection comes easiest.

This past year, more than most, has invited reflection. Conversations across kitchen tables and coffee counters have carried a common theme – the economy, inflation, the feeling that everything costs more than it used to. Not just in dollars, but in energy, time, and attention. Inflation has a way of creeping beyond economics; it starts to touch how we define value itself. We measure what we've earned, what we've spent, what it's all worth – and sometimes find that the math doesn't quite add up like it used to.

And maybe that's because it isn't only prices that inflate. Maybe ambition does too. Humanity's formula for happiness – success divided by ambition – proves true in nearly every generation. When ambition grows faster than achievement, satisfaction and joy disappear. No matter how much we've built, it can begin to feel small. Ambition has a way of expanding quietly, like air filling a balloon – stretching expectations until even victories lose their weight.

Anyone who's grown up over the years in Arcadia has lived this, felt it, and watched it unfold with each new family that moves in. You see the energy, the pride, the endless motion – new projects, remodels, startups, goals, and dreams. It's part of what makes this community so special. Arcadia is built on the spirit of people who create, who work hard, who see what could be and lean into it. But even in a place so full of purpose, there's a quiet wisdom in slowing down. Because left unchecked, the same drive that builds beautiful things can also outrun the ability to appreciate them.

That's where gratitude steps in. Gratitude is the ballast – the counterweight that keeps achievement from drifting away. It doesn't come naturally in a fast-moving world; it has to be practiced. It's found in the pauses – a shared meal that lingers past the last bite, a neighbor's wave as you pull into the drive, the warmth of a home full of familiar laughter. It's in realizing that value doesn't always increase with effort – sometimes it deepens with awareness.

The older one gets, the more apparent this becomes. The memories that endure aren't the milestones, but the in-betweens – the moments that ask for nothing and give everything. The smell of orange blossoms in March. A golden evening spent with friends without an agenda. The gentle sound of sprinklers on a still night. These are the small dividends that gratitude pays to those who slow down long enough to notice.

So as this year draws to a close, perhaps the real reflection is not only on what has inflated – prices, ambitions, expectations – but on what has held its value. Gratitude, unlike currency, appreciates with time and attention. It grows stronger the more it's shared, and steadier the more it's practiced.

In a year when the cost of nearly everything seems to rise, it's a comfort to know that the richest things – love, kindness, family, friendship, community – remain available without price. And in that, Arcadia continues to be one of the most treasured places of all.

Aaron Klusman
Owner, Arcadia News

WHAT'S HAPPENING, *ARCADIA?*

BRIEFS

Arcadia Boy Scout Troop 6 is having its annual wreath sale at Prince of Peace (3641 N. 56th St., Phoenix) on December 6 and 7 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. or while supplies last. Proceeds from this fundraiser help Troop 6 fund backpacking trips, camp outings and community service projects. Wreaths – and other greenery and decorations – start at $30.

arcadiatroop6.org

Paul Komidina and Kristina Spellman are hosting the third annual **Arcadia Luminary Experience**, a display that will light up Lafayette in between 44th St.-68th St. The event will happen on Christmas Eve at 4:30 p.m., but the duo is looking for volunteers to help with a packing party to load supplies, drop them off, and help with decorating.

For more, email
arcadialuminaries@gmail.com

Chabad Lubavitch of Arizona is celebrating **Chanukah 2025** and inviting the community to join. Festivities begin on December 14, with a Chanukah Celebration at The Park at PV, followed by Chanukah on the Lawn at Biltmore Fashion Park on December 17. An adults-only "Drinks and Dreidels" Israeli Scotch tasting happens on December 18, there's a Chanukah Shabbat Dinner on December 19, and the Car Menorah Parade closes out the eighth night on December 21.

chabadaz.com

Glo30 Arcadia (3945 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix) is a physician-founded and female-led skincare studio that opened in the fall at the Arcadia Village plaza. The studio offers AI skin assessment, signature 50-minute SmartGLO facial, TOX, Clear + Brilliant Laser, and NanoGLO filler microinfusion. In December, new clients can receive 40 percent off their first SmartGLO facial by booking with referral code ARCADIANEWS.

glo30.com

Oh Clementine has released a new jewelry advent calendar featuring 12 daily surprises such as necklaces, earrings, and charms, available in five themes and in gold or silver. The calendar's artwork was created by Arcadia High grad Evelyn Ess, whose painting depicts the company's new neighborhood headquarters at 3743 E. Indian School Road.

ohclem.com

Author and artist **Sal Cosenza** will hold a signing and art exhibition for *Manhattan: The Rising War (Studio Edition)* on December 6 from 2-4 p.m. at Richau & Co Gallery + Boutique (8700 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Scottsdale). Signed copies will be available to the first 15 guests for $100, with all proceeds benefiting Nobody Fights Alone in AZ, a nonprofit supporting women facing ovarian and other gynecological cancers.

salcosenza.com

Hotel Valley Ho is bringing retro flair to the season with Ho Holidays, a festive roller rink experience transforming the iconic OH Pool into a vintage winter wonderland. The event features themed nights, holiday treats, and seasonal cocktails. Tickets are free for hotel guests and $25 for residents, including skate rental and event access. For a more elevated experience, guests can rent a rink-side cabana or firepit. Tickets must be purchased in advance.

hotelvalleyho.com

The **Christmas Store** (5620 N. 7th St., Phoenix) offers treasures from holidays past and present. Guests will find décor, decorated trees, garlands, wreaths, musical snow globes, lighted figurines, mugs, stockings, and more. Led by florist Joe Gregory – who designed Durant's holiday décor – the store hopes to evoke a sense of nostalgia and holiday spirit.

floral2u.com

GIVING

Wine Girl (4205 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale) is hosting its fifth annual holiday Fill the Bus toy drive on December 7 from 12-4 p.m. to benefit the Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children, offering a discounted glass of wine for each donated toy.

winegirl.com

NourishPHX (501 S. 9th Ave., Phoenix) is accepting donations for kids aged 2-13 until December 5. Donors can drop off new, unwrapped toys or gift cards or find ideas on the nonprofit's Amazon wish list.

nourishphx.org

Tristan's Trees is a new nonprofit dedicated to honoring the lives of stillborn babies and children who have passed away by gifting families a living tree to plant in their memory. Each tree offers a place of healing, reflection, and hope as their child's legacy continues to grow. The organization is seeking donations to help fulfill tree requests for grieving families and expand its impact.

tristanstrees.org

America First Credit Union (1511 N. Project Dr., Tempe) is running its "Warm the Soles" shoe drive through December 31, collecting new shoes for children in need. Donations can be made online or at any branch.

americafirst.com

ABC15 Arizona and Sanderson dealerships are hosting the 25th annual **Operation Santa Claus** through December 17, collecting food, toys, clothing, and donations for charities. Donors can give in-person or online for a chance to win weekly prizes and a live vehicle giveaway on December 19.

givetotheclaus.com

Brody's Italian (10810 N. Tatum Blvd., Phoenix) is partnering with the Sojourner Center for the Gifting Hope Holiday Program, running until December 15, collecting new, unwrapped items for survivors and their families. Donors receive a 10 percent meal discount.

brodysitalian.com

Streets of New York (214 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix) is collecting new, unwrapped toys, clothing, and comfort items for children and teens in partnership with Childhelp through December 7.

childhelp.org

Westside Concepts is supporting Marine Toys for Tots by collecting new, unwrapped toys at any location through December 10. Guests receive a $5 gift card as a thank you for their donations.

toysfortots.org

EVENTS

MONDAY 12/1

Oy to the World

7:30 p.m. at ASU Kerr Center, 6110 N. Scottsdale Road. This Hanukkah musical revue celebrates Jewish culture through song, stories, and humor in a cabaret-style setting. Oy to the World blends heartfelt Hanukkah songs with Broadway hits and "joyful winter tunes" by Jewish composers. There will also be trivia and a chance for audience members to be part of the show. Tickets start at $35.

asukerr.com

WEDNESDAY 12/3

Make-and-Take

6 p.m. at LDV Winery, 7134 E. Stetson Dr., Scottsdale. LDV's Tasting Room is partnering with Pour Your Own Epoxy for a creative, wine-filled evening. Guests will take part in a hands-on workshop to craft their own epoxy river charcuterie board or lazy susan using premium black walnut and other hardwoods accented with epoxy in the colors of their choice. The event includes all materials, instruction, and a glass of LDV wine. Tickets start at $144.

pouryourownepoxy.com

SATURDAY 12/6

FQ Story Historic Home Tour

11 a.m. on Culver Street between 7th & 15th Ave. in Phoenix. The F.Q. Story Home Tour and Holiday Marketplace features historic homes, creative gardens, an historic school, vendors, food trucks and the famous Cookie House with home baked goodies. Historic homes open their doors at 11 a.m. for the tour and the marketplace will be open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are $25 per person.

fqstoryhometour.org

Electric Light Parade

7 p.m., starting at Central and Montebello Aves. For more than three decades, the APS Light Parade has delighted the public with a two-mile long illuminated event featuring musicians, marching bands, trucks, floats, balloons and performances. This year's theme is "Let Every Holiday Shine!" Afterward, children can take pictures with Santa, participate in workshops, and engage in other fun activities.

phoenix.gov

Holidays with Orpheus

3 p.m. at Camelback Bible Church, 3900 E. Stanford Dr., Paradise Valley. This year's Orpheus Male Chorus program blends sacred works, holiday favorites, and surprises. From the Gloria, Op. 52 by William Mathias to the beloved First Noel arranged by Dan Forrest, audiences will experience a musical journey through tradition and celebration. Sing along, if you like! Tickets start at $20.

orpheus.org

SUNDAY 12/7

A Candlelit Christmas with Esteban

6:30 p.m. at the Hermosa Inn, 5532 N. Palo Cristi Road, Paradise Valley. Experience a live one-of-a-kind Christmas concert featuring holiday music from award-winning Spanish guitarist Esteban and his band amidst the glow of candlelight in Hermosa's garden venue. Light tapas and wine will be served. Tickets start at $175 per person.

hermosainn.com

MONDAY 12/8

ACFC Golf Classic

10 a.m. at the Biltmore Golf Club, 2400 E. Missouri Ave., Phoenix. The Arizona Cancer Foundation for Children will host its third annual Golf Classic, dedicated to raising money and spreading awareness for pediatric cancer patients and their families. The tournament offers breakfast, a Bloody Mary bar, swag bags, raffles and a post-tournament reception. Registration cost varies; $1,500 for a foursome.

azcancerfoundation.org

TUESDAY 12/9

Scottsdale Civil War Roundtable

6 p.m. at the Scottsdale Public Library, 3839 N. Drinkwater Blvd. The Scottsdale Civil War Roundtable will host historian, author and playwright Derek Maxfield, whose

WHAT'S HAPPENING, *ARCADIA?*

presentation is entitled "Sherman: Man or Monster." Doors open at 5 p.m. for meeting the speaker, book sale, and Civil War videos. This event is free.

scottsdalecwrt.org

FRIDAY 12/12

The Nutcracker

7:30 p.m. at Symphony Hall, 75 N. 2nd St., Phoenix. The Nutcracker is one of the most well-known ballets, and now, families can see it brought to life thanks to Ballet Arizona and the Phoenix Symphony. Audiences will watch scenes set to Tchaikovsky's familiar songs, complete with dancing mice, the Sugar Plum Fairy, the Nutcracker Prince, the Mouse King and the "Waltz of the Flowers." The show runs until December 27, and tickets start at $46.

balletaz.org

Phoestivus

4-10 p.m. at 455 N. 3rd St. Downtown Phoenix presents the 16th annual Phoestivus craft market, presented by Community Food Connections. This outdoor event will feature small business vendors, music, food and appearances by Phreddie the Yeti and Hipster Santa. The free event is open to humans – and pets – of all ages. Donations will be accepted.

phoestivus.com

SATURDAY 12/13

Ignite Hope Walk

3-7 p.m. starting at North High School, 1101 E. Thomas Road. The Ignite Hope candlelit walk raises funds for Phoenix Children's while showing patients and their families they are not alone during the season. Attendees will walk from NHS to Phoenix Children's while patients watch from their rooms. There will be a pre-walk festival with activities and entertainment. Tickets are $40 for adults, $10 for kids.

phoenixchildrensfoundation.org

Mimosas and Monet

9:30-11:30 a.m. at the Hermosa Inn, 5532 N. Palo Cristi Road, Paradise Valley. Calling all painters, beginners and experts alike. Hermosa Inn welcomes Carrie Curran Art Studios for a morning of art and mimosas. Carrie will teach and guide guests with an acrylic on canvas painting of a "Merry Cactus." Enjoy a mimosa and snack on pastries while creating your masterpiece. Registration is $120.

hermosainn.com

A Watercolor Journey

4 p.m. at Anticus Gallery, 3922 N. Scottsdale Road. Watercolor artist Peter Freischlag is returning to Anticus with a new solo exhibition: A Watercolor Journey Through the Good, the Bad & the Legendary. Guests can check out the collection – which includes large-scale original works that reimagine Western history through color, emotion, and story – and meet the artist, who will be on-site for a discussion at 5 p.m.

anticus.com

Electric Light Parade *at Central and Montebello Aves.*

Fantasy of Lights Boat Parade

4-9 p.m. at Tempe Beach Park, 80 W. Rio Salado Pkwy. Tempe will be glowing from the water this year with the return of the Fantasy of Lights Boat Parade. There will be decked-out boats showing off their spirit, a marketplace, food trucks, beer and wine garden and live entertainment. The festival will end with a fireworks display. Admission is free.

downtowntempe.com

Board of Visitors Fashion Show Luncheon

JW Marriott Scottsdale Camelback Inn Resort & Spa, 5402 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale. Now in its 72nd year, this event celebrates the 2026 Flower Girls and members' grandchildren as they light up the runway. There will be cocktails, a raffle, live entertainment, and a program, all supporting BOV's mission to fund healthcare needs for women, children, and the elderly in Phoenix. Registration starts at $250.

boardofvisitors.org

SUNDAY 12/14

Holidays at Uptown Plaza

11 a.m. at Uptown Plaza, 100 E. Camelback Road. The man in red will be on-site at this celebration! Guests can get their photo taken with Santa while listening to live music and performances, and participating in a seasonal craft activity that you can take home. This event is free. In honor of the special milestone year, guests who are among the first to arrive will also receive a limited-edition 70th anniversary ornament.

uptownplazaphx.com

TUESDAY 12/16

Menorah Lighting

5:30-7 p.m. at Ragsdale-MLK Park, 24 E. 6th St., Tempe. Hosted in partnership with ASU Chabad, this special evening will feature a menorah lighting, traditional blessings, festive kosher treats, and kid-friendly games and crafts. This event is free.

downtowntempe.com

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2025 GLE 450e

A business that buys an SUV over 6,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) in 2025 may deduct up to $31,300 immediately under Section 179, and potentially the entire remaining cost using 100% bonus depreciation if the vehicle was acquired and placed in service after January 19, 2025.

2025 GLS 450

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WHAT'S HAPPENING, *ARCADIA?*

SATURDAY 12/20

The Arizona Nutcracker

1 p.m. at the Madison Center for the Arts, 5601 N. 16th St., Phoenix. This is "the only Nutcracker ballet in the nation performed entirely by dancers ages 3-18." Returning for its 26th anniversary season, audiences will be transported into a world where a nutcracker comes to life, plus falling snow, angels dancing on clouds, over 400 dazzling costumes, and a Christmas tree that grows through the roof of the theater. Tickets start at $45.

themadison.org

***The Arizona Nutcracker** at the Madison Center for the Arts.*

SUNDAY 12/21

A Merry-Achi Christmas

6 p.m. at the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, 7380 E. Second St. A fifth-generation mariachi musician, Maestro José Hernández and his platinum-selling Mariachi Sol de México will head to Scottsdale to perform various treasured holiday classics and favorites from the mariachi songbook. If you feel like dancing, no one will judge! Tickets start at $50.

scottsdaleperformingarts.org

Hanukkah Celebration

4:30 p.m. at Soleri Plaza, 4420 N. Scottsdale Road. Part of the annual Scottsdazzle events, families are invited to gather around the larger-than-life menorah and join the Chabad of South Scottsdale for a family-friendly public menorah lighting. There will be lots of music, singing and kids crafts. This event is free.

scottsdazzle.com

SATURDAY 12/27

Las Noches de las Luminarias

5:30 p.m. at Desert Botanical Garden, 1201 N. Galvin Pkwy., Phoenix. The gardens will be lit up by over 8,000 hand-lit luminaria bags and thousands of twinkle lights this year. Walk along the trails and be serenaded by live musical entertainment. Grab a cup of cocoa or cider and enjoy the beautiful weather and trails at Desert Botanical Garden. Tickets are $45.

dbg.org

SAT. 12/27 – WED. 12/31

Arizona National Livestock Show

Times vary; at the Arizona State fairgrounds, 1826 W. McDowell Road, Phoenix. The 2025 Arizona National Livestock Show returns with competitions, education, and family-friendly events celebrating the best of Western heritage and agriculture. From top-tier livestock showcases and ranch rodeos to youth contests in ag mechanics, judging, and public speaking, this annual event offers something for those interested in ranching and rural life. This event is free.

aznational.org

HAVE AN EVENT YOU'D LIKE FEATURED?

Contact editor@arcadianews.com

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OUT OF THE AREA, *BUT WORTH THE DRIVE*

THURSDAY 12/4

Pratt Brothers Christmas

6 p.m. at Rawhide Western Town, 5700 W. North Loop Road, Chandler. Featuring over seven million lights and a variety of attractions, this town isn't short on cheer. There will be a holiday train ride, a nightly parade, stunt shows featuring the Arizona Roughriders, shopping, a gingerbread house light show, live entertainment, meet and greets with Santa Claus and more. Tickets start at $33 per person.

prattbrotherschristmas.com

FRIDAY 12/5

Nitro Circus

7 p.m. at Desert Diamond Arena, 9400 W. Maryland Ave., Glendale. Nitro Circus features jaw-dropping stunts, top-tier athletes and unstoppable energy. Co-founded by action sports icon Travis Pastrana, Nitro Circus features freestyle motocross, BMX, skate, scooter, and everything in between. Prepare to see mind-blowing stunts, high-flying tricks, and heart-pounding excitement. Tickets start at $40 per person.

nitrocircus.com

FRIDAY 12/5 – SATURDAY 12/6

Winter Artisans Gift Market

10 a.m. at The Holland Center, 34250 N. 60th St., Scottsdale. This market offers attendees the chance to shop one-of-a-kind fine art, jewelry, glass, mixed media, and more, while meeting the creators behind each piece. A community fundraiser showcasing themed trees and wreaths created by local artists and businesses, plus an art raffle, will also take place. Food and bev will be available for purchase. This event is free.

hollandcenter.org

SATURDAY 12/6

Fuelfest

1-8 p.m. at 20000 S. Maricopa Road, Chandler. Fuelfest boasts more than 700 custom, exotic, rare, and exclusive cars and trucks. There will also be exhibits, drag racing, drifting, ride-alongs, food, drinks and live music. A portion of proceeds benefits Reach Out Worldwide, the nonprofit founded by actor Paul Walker. Tickets start at $45, with VIP packages available.

fuelfest.com

Festival of Tales

9 a.m. at Paradise Valley Community College, 18401 N. 32nd St., Phoenix. Presented in partnership with Engelman Berger, the Festival of Tales aims to inspire a love of reading and cultural understanding in all ages. Guests will find immersive storytelling sessions, live music and dance performances, interactive arts and crafts, free books, and food and drinks will be available for purchase.

paradisevalley.edu

SUNDAY 12/7

Hanukkah Holiday Bazaar

3 p.m. at the Pardes Jewish Day School, 12753 N. Scottsdale Road. The Hanukkah Holiday Bazaar is a festive celebration of community, culture and creativity. Attendees will find vendors showcasing handcrafted gifts and decorations, arts and crafts, games for the kids, a silent auction and a children's raffle. This event is free to attend but registration is required.

bjephoenix.org

FRIDAY 12/12

Christmas at the Princess

5 p.m. at the Scottsdale Fairmont Princess, 7575 E. Princess Dr. The resort has been transformed into a holiday haven for the annual Christmas at the Princess. Guests can go ice skating or slide down snow mountain, take photos with Santa and his elves, sip cider or cocoa and check out the ferris wheel. The lagoon lights and Princess Express are also available. Tickets are $40 for general admission.

christmasattheprincess.com

***Fuelfest** in Chandler.*

FRIDAY 12/12 – SUNDAY 12/14

Art at Anthem

10 a.m. at Outlets North Phoenix, 4250 W. Anthem Way, Phoenix. This three-day holiday art show features 60 juried artists and makers offering fine art, jewelry, pottery, photography, gourmet treats, and unique holiday gifts. Enjoy live music, festive shopping, Santa visits, and the iconic tallest fresh-cut Christmas tree in Arizona.

oakcreekartsandcraftsshow.com

SATURDAY 12/13

Tamale Class

3 p.m. at Macayo's, 8608 E. Shea Blvd., Scottsdale. Making tamales for the holidays is a longstanding Mexican tradition that is alive and well at Macayo's, and if you're curious to learn the art, now is your chance. During the event, guests will learn how to assemble tamales as they enjoy a three-course lunch and a top-shelf margarita. They will also take home the tamales they assemble during the experience. Registration is $60 per person.

macayo.com

SATURDAY 12/13 – SUNDAY 12/14

Olivepalooza Harvest Festival

10 a.m. at Queen Creek Olive Mill, 25062 S. Meridian Road. Guests can enjoy two days of live music, tastings, and tractor tours. Witness olive pressing and harvesting, take an olive oil 101 class, visit the vendor alley, play games in the grove, watch live cooking demos, and maybe grab a bite to eat and a little something to sip while enjoying that Queen Creek scenery. Admission is free.

queencreekolivemill.com

SUNDAY 12/14 – SUNDAY 12/21

Chanukah in Carefree

5:30 p.m. at the Sanderson Lincoln Pavilion, 101 Easy St., Carefree. The town of Carefree will celebrate all eight nights with specialty events, the lighting of the menorah, live music, vendors, philanthropic talks, games, and more. On December 14 there will be a special intro by Mayors John Crane and Robert Morris as well as performances, holiday treats and beverages. These events will also be livestreamed.

chanukahincarefree.com

SATURDAY 12/20

Christmas Concert

7 p.m. at the Ravenscroft, 8445 E. Hartford Dr., Scottsdale. Fans of jazz and Christmas songs won't want to miss this show. Valley Jazz Cooperative program alums join forces with of leading jazz artists and perform big band arrangements of the classics, infusing Ravenscroft Hall with the Spirit of Christmas. Tickets start at $35.

theravenscroft.com

Hi-Fi Holidays

7:30 p.m. at Hale Concert Hall, 50 W. Page Ave., Gilbert. The folks at Hale have enlisted the help of the elves to go through their vinyl record collection and create a night of everyone's favorite Christmas hits. The concert will feature guest stars from around the country and the North Pole, and include songs made famous by Judy Garland, Julie Andrews, Burl Ives, Bing Crosby, and more. Tickets start at $60.

haletheatrearizona.com

SUNDAY 12/21

A Christmas Carol

2 p.m. at the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, 10580 N. 83rd Dr. This timeless story of kindness, compassion, and redemption is the perfect way to finish out the season – and this is the last day to check out the Theaterworks version! Dickens' beloved characters – Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, and Tiny Tim – will come to life with all-new costumes, props and more at this evening's performance. Tickets start at $45.

theaterworks.org

Scooptacular pay-it-forward with kindness campaign

By Rachael Bouley

Scooptacular, a handcrafted ice cream shop founded in Laveen that expanded to Arcadia in 2024, has become a go-to spot to satisfy sweet tooth cravings. The neighborhood shop launched a new initiative to end the year on a high note: The Scooping Kindness Campaign.

Customers can purchase a star from the display wall and label it for someone else to redeem for free, so long as the person matches the description of that star. It could be the letter of their name, the color they're wearing, or how old they are. The possibilities are endless as locals are invited to connect and 'scoop it forward' at their locations.

"Our goal is to encourage community members to engage in small acts of kindness and to create a ripple effect of positivity," Owner Carissa Wadhwa said. "We hope people purchasing scoops for others will create a sense of togetherness in Arcadia and beyond."

Wadhwa was inspired by a similar campaign at a coffee shop she visited in Kentucky. The promotion is one way to deliver on the mission of encouraging kindness in the community through customer service, smiles, and, of course, ice cream.

This first-ever campaign will run through the end of January; however, the team hopes it could become a year-round initiative in the future.

"We are so excited that we have received more initial engagement than expected and look forward to seeing it continue to grow," Wadhwa added. "Supporting community connection and giving back helps create a stronger, more compassionate neighborhood. For us, it's about using our business as a platform to bring people together and make a positive difference."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARISSA WADHWA

The Scooping Kindness campaign encourages community members to create a ripple effect of positivity.

They are proud to play a part in encouraging acts of kindness, and employees are happy to see that even small gestures can have a big impact.

"We have been handcrafting our award-winning ice cream in Phoenix for 15 years with the same premium ingredients and love. What sets us apart is our commitment to cultivating a positive customer experience," Wadhwa said.

Arcadia's signature flavor, the Camelback Crunch – brown sugar ice cream with praline crumbles and dark chocolate shavings – is the most popular seller. Other big hits include Teddy Graham with a cookie butter base and award-winning Madagascar Bourbon vanilla bean. There's sorbet, shaved ice, and ice cream cakes, too.

In addition to the scooping kindness campaign, Scooptacular supports fundraisers for sports teams, schools, churches, and community groups. They also offer morning tours to get a behind-the-scenes look at how their ice cream is made.

"We love seeing our regulars and people who have never set foot in the store before," Wadhwa added. "Whether it's through events or everyday interactions, our goal is to make Scooptacular a place where kindness, creativity, and joy are always on the menu."

scooptacular.net

Arcadia LITTLE LEAGUE
SPRING 2026 SEASON
Registration Open
EARLY BIRD pricing ends Dec 10
REGULAR SEASON pricing ends Jan 15
LATE REGISTRATION pricing ends Jan 31
REGISTRATION CLOSES January 31
WWW.ARCADIALITTLELEAGUE.COM
baseball softball tee-ball
SCAN ME!

A little sparkle goes a long way for these moms

By Kylie de Best

Samantha Tradelius has always had a soft spot for single moms. Inspired by her grandmother, GG, who raised three children on her own, Samantha noticed something striking in her grandmother's stories… she never mentioned reaching out for help, or anyone helping her. That realization ignited the creation of the Sparkle Foundation.

Before officially founding Sparkle, Samantha and a group of friends quietly supported 17 families across the LA and Bay Area, raising $35,000 from their own homes between 2003 and 2015.

> ***After all, a small act of kindness can make a world of difference.***

Seeing the potential to make a bigger impact, they launched the 501(c)(3) Sparkle Foundation in 2016. Today, the organization has hundreds of volunteers across the Bay Area.

By 2023, Sparkle expanded to Los Angeles and Sacramento, raising more than $500,000 and assisting 5,500 single mothers. In 2024, Angeles Klein, founder of the group Better Together, teamed up with Samantha to start the Phoenix chapter.

"Being a single mother, I understand first-hand the unique challenges we face," Angeles said. "We give moms hope and are able to be a small part of their journey by making sure the sparkle brought to them has been life-changing."

This December, Sparkle will host its Holiday Gift Drive, the organization's largest volunteer event of the year.

On December 13, volunteers will wrap gifts at Fresh Start and deliver them to area moms. Every gift is personalized for the mother and child, taking into account the child's age, interests, and needs. In Phoenix, 26 single-mother families and 53 children will benefit, while all Sparkle chapters together will support 200+ children and their families.

The foundation also celebrates moms on Mother's Day with gift bags filled with beauty products, snacks, candles, handwritten notes, and gift cards; a small way to say, "We see you, and you matter."

Beyond gift-giving, Sparkle provides year-round opportunities to support single mothers. Their annual Sparkle Brunch sells out every year. Kids can also participate in volunteer events.

Sparkle doesn't just offer support and gifts – they also provide financial help. Enrichment scholarships cover costs for children's extracurricular activities, from registration fees to uniforms and supplies, giving kids the chance to explore new passions without financial barriers.

Whether you volunteer, donate, or spread the word, there's a place for everyone to help bring a little sparkle into the lives of single moms in the community. After all, a small act of kindness can make a world of difference.

sparklenow.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELES KLEIN

Angeles and Samantha purchase gifts, which are then wrapped and delivered with the help of volunteers.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
FROM DAY...

EXCLUSIVE
Interest Rates*
3.25%

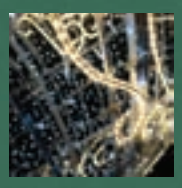
THE ARCADIAN
arcadianPHX.com
* Interest rates are introductory and subject to change. Contact our sales team for current rates.

...TO NIGHT
YOU'LL FIND IT AT THE ARCADIAN

Scottsdazzle

NOW – DEC 31

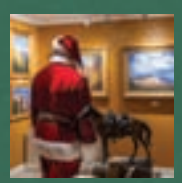
Experience a month-long holiday celebration like no other—complete with dazzling décor, exceptional dining and shopping, festive tours, and unforgettable events. Don't miss the magic!



SCOTTSDAZZLE STROLL AND SHOP

Saturday, Dec 6, 13, 20 | 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

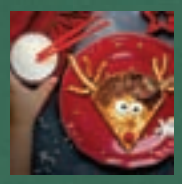
Stroll along the beautifully decorated canal to enjoy local musicians, sweet treats, a pop-up market by The Merchantile and entertainment illuminated with holiday lights and décor.



GOLD PALETTE ARTWALK

Thursday, Dec 11 | 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM

The Scottsdale Arts District gets into the festive spirit with this Scottsdazzle-themed ArtWalk featuring holiday and seasonal artwork, plus browse through dozens of stunning galleries.



PANCAKES & PAJAMAS WITH SANTA

Saturday, Dec 13 | 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Kids of all ages are encouraged to wear holiday-themed pajamas for a festive breakfast that features a meet and greet with Santa Claus, musical performances by Greasepaint Theatre and crafts.

CHOCOLATE WONDERLAND

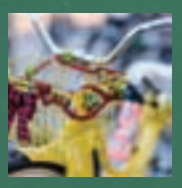
Saturday, Dec 13 | NOON – 1:00 PM

Press pause on the holiday bustle and learn how to create your very own chocolates by rolling, dipping and coating your signature flavor. Event hosted by b Naked Chocolates.

HOLLY JOLLY DIY DÉCOR

Saturday, Dec 13 | 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Enjoy live holiday music while professional artists from Scottsdale Artists' School lead attendees in decorating and creating their very own unique holiday decoration.



SPARKLE & SPIN SCAVENGER HUNTS

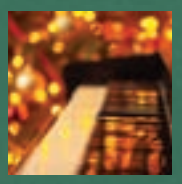
Sunday, Dec 14 & Saturday, Dec 20 | 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Discover Old Town in a whole new way! This holiday headscratcher invites guests to hop on their bikes and spin around Old Town for a seasonal scavenger hunt.

WRAPPED IN TRADITION: HOLIDAY TAMALES

Sunday, Dec 14 | 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

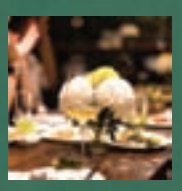
The Corral Family shares the art of holiday tamale-making! From preparing masa and savory fillings to assembling and steaming, you'll learn classic techniques. Event hosted by Los Olivos.



HOLIDAY DUELING PIANOS ON THE BRIDGE

Sunday, Dec 14 | 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Join us for a lively holiday-themed dueling piano event on the Marshall Way Bridge! Watch musicians, Mikey and Fouad, face off with festive tunes and even jump in for a sing-along or two.



DAZZLING DISH & WINTERY WINE

Sunday, Dec 21 | 11:00 AM – NOON

Watch as James Beard Award-Winner, Chef Charleen Badman, brings one of her favorite winter dishes to life coupled with a wine tasting by Los Milics. Event hosted by FnB & Los Milics.

SCOTTSDAZZLE TOYLAND

Sun, Dec 21 | 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Join Scottsdale's elves at their enchanted workshop and be whisked away into the magic of the season! Have fun decorating Christmas and Hanukkah crafts and writing letters to Santa.

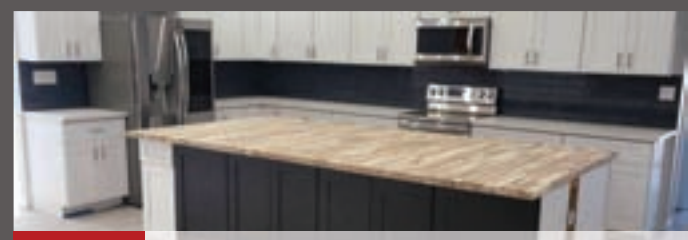
Check out the dazzling event lineup

CITY OF SCOTTSDALE | Old Town SCOTTSDALE

SCOTTSDAZZLE.COM

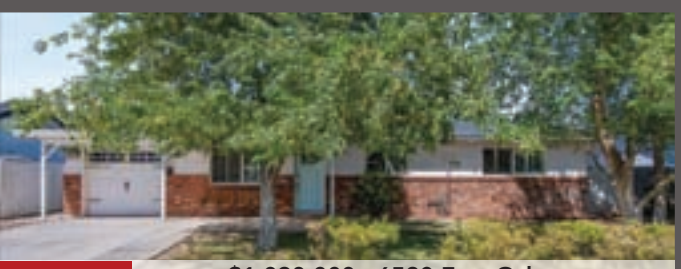
Nobody Sells More Homes in Arcadia Than The Joffe Group

$10,295,000 9790 North 56th Street
4 bedrooms, 5 baths, 8,000 square feet



NEW LISTING

$566,000 2511 East Broadway Road
4 bedrooms, 4 baths, 2,212 square feet



NEW LISTING

$1,090,000 6520 East Osborn
3 bedrooms, 2 baths, 1,751 square feet
6520osborn.com

$6,950,000 4350 North Jokake
5 bedrooms, 6 baths, 6,750 square feet
4350jokake.com

$2,395,000 3800 East Lincoln #54
3 bedrooms, 3 baths, 4,025 square feet

$5,895,000 6850 North Joshua Tree
4 bedrooms, 7 baths, 5,988 square feet

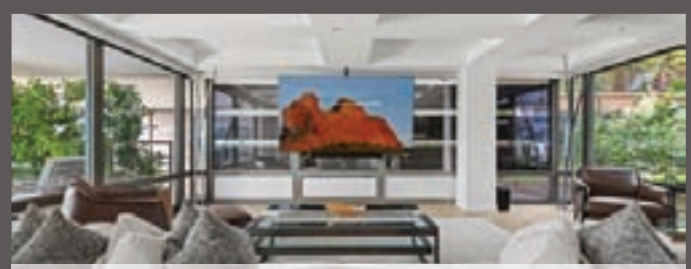
NEW LISTING

$12,995,000 2205 East Colter
7 bedrooms, 9 baths, 11,039 square feet
2205colter.com

$1,075,000 4154 North 35th Place
3 bedrooms, 2 baths, 1,898 square feet

SALE PENDING

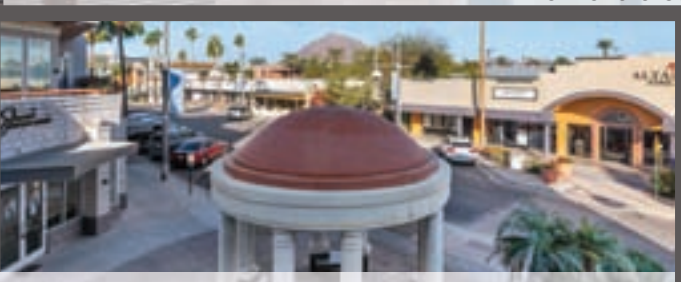
CALL FOR PRICING 8436 North Golf Drive
6 bedrooms, 7 baths, 8,216 square feet



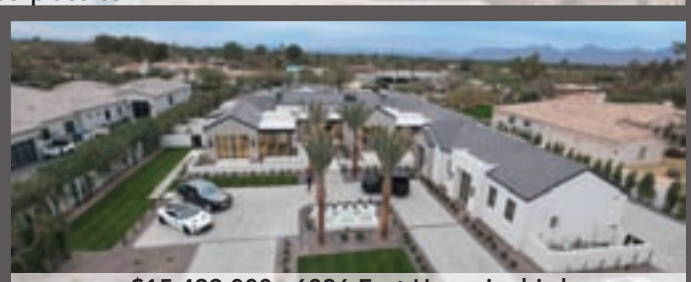
$1,875,000 7157 East Rancho Vista #4001
3 bedrooms, 2 baths, 2,213 square feet
7157ranchovista4001.com

$1,980,000 4843 North 72nd Way
2 bedrooms, 3 baths, 2,142 square feet
4843north72ndway.com

$7,699,000 6216 North 38th Place
5 bedrooms, 7 baths, 11,097 square feet
6216north38thplace.com



$1,400,000 7039 East Main Street A206
2 bedrooms, 2 baths, 1,865 square feet



$15,499,000 6836 East Hummingbird
6 bedrooms, 9 baths, 10,095 square feet
6836hummingbird.com

NEW LISTING

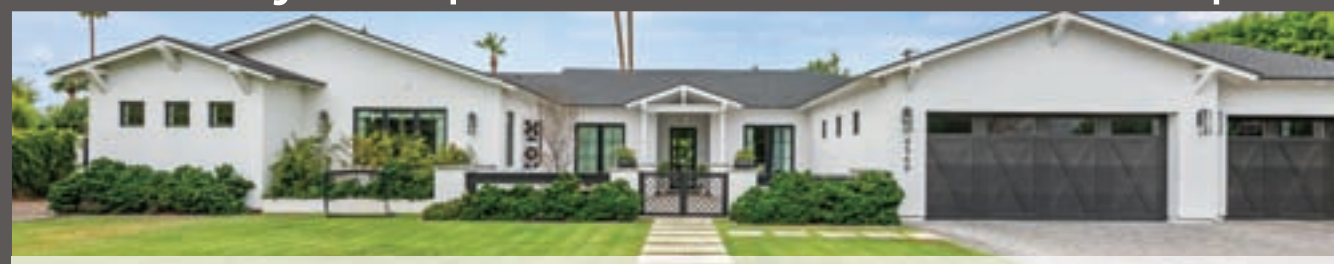
$3,450,000 8108 East Del Cristal
4 bedrooms, 4 baths, 3,136 square feet
8108delcristal.com

602.989.8300 | robert@thejoffegroup.com | TheJoffeGroup.com

Call To Learn Why So Many People Trust The Joffe Group

SALE PENDING

$6,595,000 5819 East Calle del Media
5 bedrooms, 8 baths, 6,695 square feet
5819calledelmedia.com

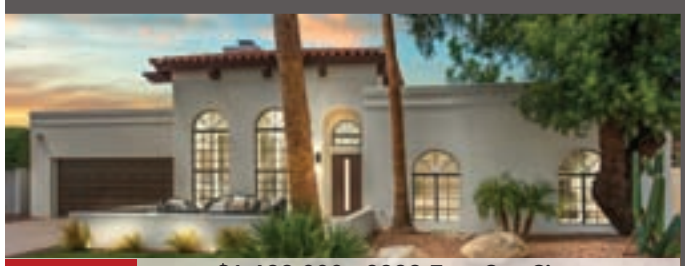


$3,995,000 4569 East Lafayette
5 bedrooms, 5 baths, 4,338 square feet

$9,950,000 5446 East Exeter Boulevard
5 bedrooms, 7 baths, 7,455 square feet
5446exeter.com

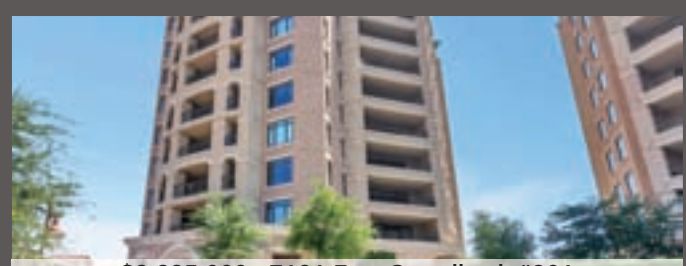
NEW LISTING

$2,400,000 7133 North 40th Street
1.33 acre lot



SALE PENDING

$1,699,000 8332 East San Simon
4 bedrooms, 3 baths, 2,556 square feet
8332sansimon.com



$2,295,000 7181 East Camelback #301
3 bedrooms, 4 baths, 2,503 square feet
7181eastcamelback.com

SALE PENDING

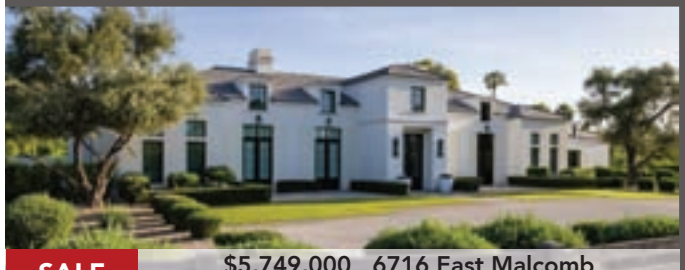
5115 East Exeter
CALL FOR PRICING AND INFORMATION

COMING SOON

$9,995,000 5715 East Monterosa
5 bedrooms, 6 baths, 6,500 square feet
5715monterosa.com

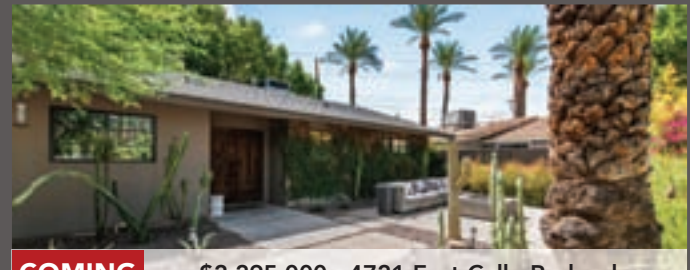
$1,994,000 7941 East Via De Luna Drive
5 bedrooms, 6 baths, 4,350 square feet

$4,295,000 5335 East Exeter
4 bedrooms, 5 baths, 5,119 square feet



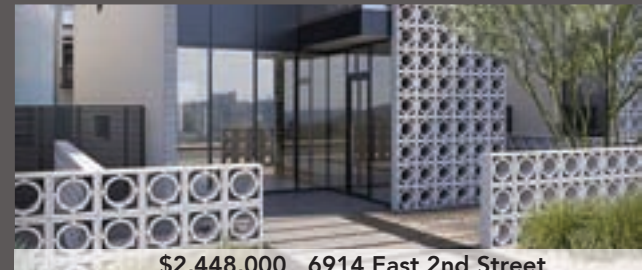
SALE PENDING

$5,749,000 6716 East Malcomb
3 bedrooms, 4 baths, 4,002 square feet
6716malcomb.com



COMING SOON

$2,295,000 4721 East Calle Redonda
4 bedrooms, 2 baths, 2,525 square feet



$2,448,000 6914 East 2nd Street
4 bedrooms, 4 baths, 3,014 square feet
oldtown5.com

Robert Joffe

Jonah Joffe

Adam Joffe

Andrew Mehlman

Ben Mehlman

Z. Jawanmardi

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In the Kitchen

with Chef Tandy Peterson of Tandy's Café

2320 E. Osborn Road • tandyscafe.com

Chef Tandy Peterson's path to the kitchen wasn't traditional: she started in agriculture before trading ranches for restaurants. Since then, she's trained under some of Arizona's best chefs, traveled the world to refine her craft, and developed a passion for chocolate-making along the way. Now, with the opening of Tandy's Café, she's blending those experiences into a welcoming space that celebrates food and community.

Tell us about you!

I grew up in Wyoming, but I've lived in Arizona for 17 years. I went to college for ag education and got my degree in animal science before I decided that I wanted to go to culinary school. I moved down to Arizona for that and I started at the Arizona Culinary Institute.

From there, I worked for Café Bink – Kevin's more casual restaurant – and from there I worked at Binkley's, then I was the chef at the café before becoming the "restaurant roundsman" (a chef available to fill in for any position when the need arises) for all the locations.

What was it like working for a big name like Kevin Binkley?

I like to tell people that I learned in five years, what most people learn in 10. It was a very hard kitchen, there were a lot of responsibilities. You came in early and did whatever you needed to succeed. Communication was key.

Out of culinary school, there are those who think they know everything right away, but you'll get checked if you think that right out of the gate [*laughs*].

Was there a specific incidence that cemented your plan for the culinary industry?

I had a full-ride scholarship for livestock judging so I went into agriculture. My family was more plant-based, so I wanted to go into animal agriculture. Growing up, we would camp, we'd work with Dutch ovens and we always did these unique themed dinners with my mom's 'crazy cookbook cabinet.' We'd pull out a random book and cook a recipe from that. My mom loved to entertain, my dad loved to grill; we always cooked at home.

When I went to college, I became the entertainer, and we'd host these big parties. After graduation, I didn't really know where to go and didn't have a specific passion in the ag part of things. It brought me back to what I love, so culinary school was the next step.

You've done a bit of traveling, too...

I went into resorts and worked at The Phoenician's Il Terrazzo. I was one of the chef de parties, sous chef and when the resort started doing a lot of renovations, I decided to go to Spain for three months, and I worked in a restaurant that focused on fire cooking. It was a super unique experience that took me back to the simplicity of food.

When I came back to the states, I opened Mowry & Cotton at The Phoenician. It focused a lot on timeless cooking techniques, wood-fired cooking, shared dining, a little more communal. I was there for 2.5 years before the pandemic.

I went back to Wyoming – my sister had just had a baby and her and her husband were juggling work and life – so I went back to help out and be out in the open air and beautiful skies. From there I went to work at a hunting camp in Alaska, which is where I met a gentleman who introduced me to the art of chocolate.

Being up there opened my eyes to real people and good conversation. Working in restaurants and resorts for a long time, you get caught up in the day-to-day, so you don't get a lot of time off. It was a good reset to realize that food is comfort, healing and a social thing rather than a transaction.

What happened when you came back to Arizona?

I went back to The Phoenician for a bit, decided to delve into the chocolate business and then I stumbled into private dining, which is a much more intimate experience where you're with a single family day-to-day. That drove me for the next five years.

When the [Tandy's] café building became available, I realized it was an opportunity to marry the two focuses I've had, restaurants and chocolate, and put them into one space.

Tell us more about the chocolate.

I first encountered chocolate made from scratch at the restaurant I worked at in Spain. They had netted baskets that the cocoa beans were in and we were roasting them over an open fire, then they were dumped onto a table, and seven of us were around this table hand-cracking the beans, and they would grind it and make the truffle for the end of the meal.

I have had terrible desserts all around the world [*laughs*] and they came after these really nice meals! If you're eating an intense meal and then you get this decadent sugar bomb at the end, it wipes out everything you've experienced.

I'm not a huge fan of sweet desserts in general so maybe that's just my mindset, because I'd rather eat a second entrée or cheese course. When I started making chocolate the goal was to create something that was a crescendo to the meal. Little more savory, more ingredient driven.

I started diving into where it comes from, the different flavor profiles, things like that. I wanted another way that wasn't, 'Oh, let's dip these strawberries into chocolate.'

What do you use for inspiration for new menu items?

I find inspiration all around me; I learn from everyone I meet. I think you start with borders and then push them, but also it's your experiences. I spent time in Thailand and while I was there I found so much inspiration in the cooking styles. I went to South Africa and I remember this peri peri sauce that we had and I wanted to figure out so badly how they made it. It was so good. I can't remember the last time I took a vacation and didn't stage somewhere because you can learn so much in other country's kitchens. I'm classically trained but I'm not a stickler for following rules when it comes to how to make a dish. I also think the team around you is important – it's beneficial to bounce ideas off one another.

Was there ever a recipe you came up with that didn't turn out the way you expected?

Of course. At Mowry & Cotton, we were trying to push a lot of boundaries. Chef Boyer and Chef Lee had to rein me in, but one of the biggest things to remember was, 'How will the customer eat it?'

Another thing was how the dish would be perceived, like, is there too much communication to explain what the dish is or what you're trying to do? They had to reel me in [*laughs*] because I was young and excited and still learning my crowd.

I did a 'beet ash,' where I pulsed beets in a food processor, then cooked it in oil in a pan until I had to scrape it off the bottom. Once it's almost starting to burn, add some moisture and blend it and it becomes a caramelized beet flavor. It's unique and I've used it on a lot of different items.

I remember having to teach one of my

mentors, Brandon Gauthier, how to make the beet sauce and saying, 'You burn it almost to the bottom and then scrape it off and then let it burn again,' and he was so uncomfortable; it was a defining moment for me because I was teaching one of my mentors something new.

What is your favorite part of the restaurant industry?

The food! I mean, the people too, but the food. I like everything about it. I love food as a vessel for conversation and community.

…and your least favorite part?

The politics, especially working in the resort industry. Food should be fun and sometimes when you have to go through five different barriers it makes it not as fun anymore.

What is one item you find yourself using in the kitchen all the time?

[*laughs*] I like to burn things intentionally and I like to use a lot of pickles. We had this charred carrot dish where we'd coat them in honey and char them in the oven over a long period of time, so they'd be almost like marshmallows. Then we'd dry those and turn them into a 'dust,' almost, and then we'd put that carrot dust on the carrot dish.

Another one was a burnt chicken dish that started with charred sesame bread that we crumbled and that was the breading that we tossed the chicken in… anyway, if you asked someone who knows me, they'd say I'm a huge fan of pickles and burning things [*laughs*].

Tell us about Tandy's Café.

I don't want to say comfort food because that always makes me think of southern food, but it's like…elevated comfort food. Counter service for breakfast and lunch in a light, bright, airy space; there will be salads and sandwiches that are inspired by the places I've worked.

As an example, the sloppy joe sandwich. It brings me back to my childhood! We also have a seared tuna melt that came from a dish I did at The Phoenician. Dinner service is a mix of comforting classics – like a meatloaf and a roast chicken dish – and a dessert menu.

There's going to be an awesome happy hour and industry specials, plus chocolate flights and chocolate tours; croissants and pastries, with chocolate in-house, of course! We'll have a coffee program and drinking chocolate…

…what is drinking chocolate?

Most people call it hot chocolate but there is a difference. Hot chocolate uses a defatted cocoa, which is the powder, whereas we use real chocolate in our drinking chocolate.

We'll have a spiced drink, a European-style, our version of a *champurrado* which is a corn-based drink that's popular in Mexico.

What spots would you recommend to someone who is new to the Valley?

For something unique, I'd recommend Glai Baan. Cat is extremely talented and Dan has a way about him that makes it feel like they're welcoming you home. For date night, my go-to place is Fire at Will. I have a lot of respect for Dom; the burger and croquettes are amazing. For modern Mexican, I'd go to Vecina!

When you're not working, what are you up to?

I love hiking – I take my two awesome dogs with me. I love backpacking with my sister, and I love to travel. I like spending time with my family. Every year I try to take a trip to a foreign country. Being immersed in a culture and being off the beaten path allows you to learn a lot about yourself.

What's next for Chef Peterson?

We just want a place where people can relax, enjoy themselves and have some good food. I wanted to create a place that people would seek out. A lot of what I learned in creating chocolate is 'slow down.' It should be mindful and not a rush. Enjoy the moment!

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Mrs. Claus

Everyone knows Old St. Nick, that genial, generous fellow from the North Pole. But as the saying goes, "behind every successful man is a woman." And that woman is usually the wife.

Mrs. Claus is a kindhearted, nurturing and helpful wife – and contrary to the legend, she does far more than just bake cookies.

The North Pole is a very busy place, bustling with activity all year long. Unlike Amazon distribution factories, there isn't a robot in sight. No, all the toy-making, painting, wrapping and packaging is done by hand – thousands of tiny hands belonging to a legion of energetic, happy elves.

> **"I love my job and, of course, everyone here at the North Pole."**

Who do you think manages all those rambunctious characters? That's right, Mrs. Claus!

"I love my job and, of course, everyone here at the North Pole, most of all my darling Santa," Mrs. Claus said. "These days, fewer women stay at home, choosing to pursue a career. That's fine of course, but I'd rather tend to things around the toy factory, feed our reindeer, and bake my famous chocolate chip cookies."

Among Mrs. Claus' other duties include her very favorite: reading millions of children's wish list letters. Just last week she received a letter from a little girl who lives in a very special neighborhood known as Arcadia. It read:

Dear Santa Claus, my name is Jessy and I live in Scottsdale. Do you know where that is? I hope so because I would like a dollhouse for Christmas. I have been a very good girl and my teacher at Hopi says I am even one of her favorites. My little brother is in kindergarten but his teacher doesn't say that about him. I'm not sure what he would like for his present. I love you Santa Claus and I will leave you some milk and cookies. P.S. In case you lost my address, it is 5823 East Calle de Candy Cane. XO, Jessica Brown

Asked about how she keeps up with all the mail, Mrs. Claus chuckled and said, "It helps to be a speed reader. Besides, Santa snores so I seldom sleep."

When her better half is busy during the hectic holiday season, Claus darns the elves' slippers, tends to her strawberry gardens, needlepoints, and plays Mahjong with the gals down the way.

With just a few weeks to go before Christmas Eve, Santa and Mrs. Claus are busy getting the sleigh and reindeers ready for that magical trip around the world.

"That darn sleigh is older than I am," Santa laughed, "but it always comes through when it's time to take to the sky and deliver gifts to the children. And old

Rudolph? Well, he's as reliable as Mrs. Claus' cast iron skillet."

Arcadia families are scurrying to receive the jolly old fellow, setting up their Christmas trees and lights, decorating their homes with stockings hung with care, and of course cleaning out chimneys so Santa doesn't get soot on his red velvet cloak.

"No matter," Mrs. Claus said. "I've cleaned that coat so many times, I can do it with my eyes closed."

Merry Christmas, everyone!

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$2.8M renovation transforms St. Theresa Catholic School

By Michael P. Murphy

At first glance, St. Theresa Catholic School looks much like it did when it opened in 1957. But a closer look reveals vital improvements across the campus. It's all about taking what you have and making it better.

The vision for renewal began in 2022, when the school applied for a Shea Homes grant to help fund much-needed improvements. The project was temporarily postponed, but in 2025, St. Theresa was invited to reapply. In March, Shea pledged to cover 65 percent of the project's total cost: $2.8 million.

The remaining balance was met through the generosity of St. Theresa's families, parishioners, and benefactors. The community rallied together through fundraising initiatives such as Grandparents Day, Buddy Bingo, social media campaigns, and more.

The last day of the school year was May 23. The following Tuesday, Knipp Contracting and its trade partners rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

"The main focus was the classroom renovations," Principal Mary Pivonka said. "We updated the flooring and added large magnetic whiteboards. The younger grades got cubbies, and the older kids got lockers."

All 28 classrooms were completely gutted and remodeled to make the rooms more organized and efficient for students and teachers. A new, expanded teacher's lounge and conference room were added. The science lab, which also serves as an art room, received new, durable epoxy flooring.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ST. THERESA CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The gymnasium received upgraded flooring and more storage for the locker rooms, and the stage received new curtains and lighting.

"We did a complete renovation in the library," Pivonka said. "The whole room was gutted and replaced with new flooring, all new shelving, and additional storage. We did a lot of practical things. It wasn't as much cosmetic as it was intentional and organizational."

A year ago, the school received a grant to replace the old swamp coolers in the gymnasium with a new air conditioning system. With the new grant, they were able to upgrade the floor and add more storage for the locker rooms. The stage received new curtains and lighting.

The campus exterior now shines with fresh paint, fascia repairs, and a new tile roofing underlayment that protects against moisture and time. The ramada and lunch areas were renewed with eight-foot picnic tables. The preschool fence and block walls were replaced to strengthen safety and aesthetics, while an upgraded intercom and access-control system, along with enhanced camera surveillance, ensure a secure environment.

It took a lot of work to get the classrooms cleared out so the construction crew could get to work, then put it all back before the new school year began, but the job was completed by August 6, when St. Theresa's welcomed teachers to better-organized classrooms and excited studen ts.

"I think parents had different – perhaps smaller – expectations of what two months of work would look like, so they were surprised at what was done," St. Theresa employee Alex Read said. "What Shea did was so impressive, but this was also a testament to our community. Everybody came together to get this done."

When students and staff returned, they found a campus that felt both familiar and transformed – a place that honors its legacy while embracing the future.

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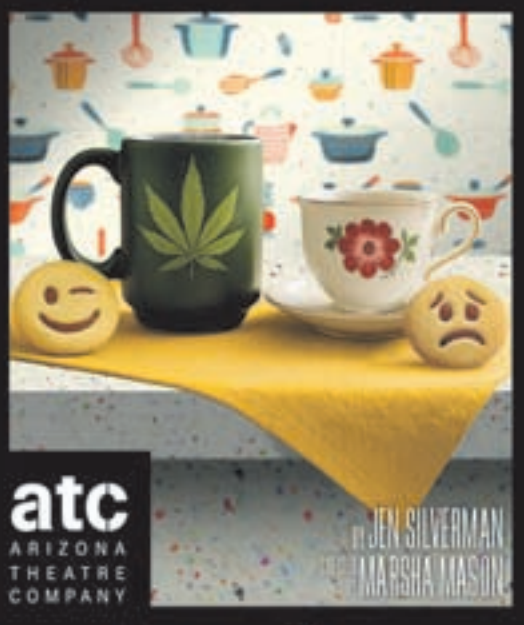

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Young innovators recognized with Tier 1 win at tech challenge

By Rachael Bouley

Access Play, Xavier Prep's all-female engineering team, won Tier 1 honors in the 2025 Makers of Change Assistive Technology Challenge, a Valley-wide competition that featured more than 100 high school teams combining creativity, compassion, and STEM skills.

This marked Xavier's first time participating in the annual challenge, now in its eighth year. Southwest Human Development organizes the competition as a partner of Easterseals, a nationwide nonprofit that provides disability support.

Participants were tasked with developing a way for Levi, a young boy with cerebral palsy, to play both independently and with his siblings.

"We learned what he liked to do and also about his limitations, such as difficulties with coordination. Levi uses a wheelchair and sometimes needs to lie back in the chair, so the solution had to be something he could use while sitting and at an angle," senior Shriya Tummala said.

The Access Play team quickly got to work, researching Levi's condition and sketching out a solution. They used a CAD diagram for the design, adding the grips and special features before 3D printing their final project: a magnetized game board with large, ergonomic pieces and multiple games to play. Their prototype was a success, as it addressed Levi's challenges with fine motor skills. It also made an impact with the judging panel and audience, as Access Play was the only all-female team among the finalists.

"It was surprising to win because we saw how competitive it is and how many great teams there were. It was amazing and validated all the hard work that went into it," Shriya said. "When we found out our board game would solve issues for Levi, like helping his coordination and motor skills, it was inspiring to know that we could make a difference in his life."

Shriya, who is interested in studying engineering at college, was joined by fellow seniors Emma Robescu, Stella Vinokur, and Sophia Fireman as the group brought their vision for an innovative, accessible gaming system to life. Leon Tynes, Jr., Computer Science Department Chair, mentored the team.

"These students are very creative, attentive to details and the needs of the 'consumer' and understanding the parents' needs as well to help Levi with his development," Tynes, Jr. said. "It's a huge achievement that our students can research, conceptualize, and prototype in five weeks an actionable device to help a young kid with cerebral palsy."

The Access Play team learned how to present to a panel of experts, explaining their concepts and ideas, while discovering they can drive change at a young age.

"STEM challenges are important because they require students to synthesize their entire base of knowledge in a multitude of subjects, from English, mathematics, statistics, and research, all coming together in a real-world context instead of a classroom environment," Tynes, Jr. said.

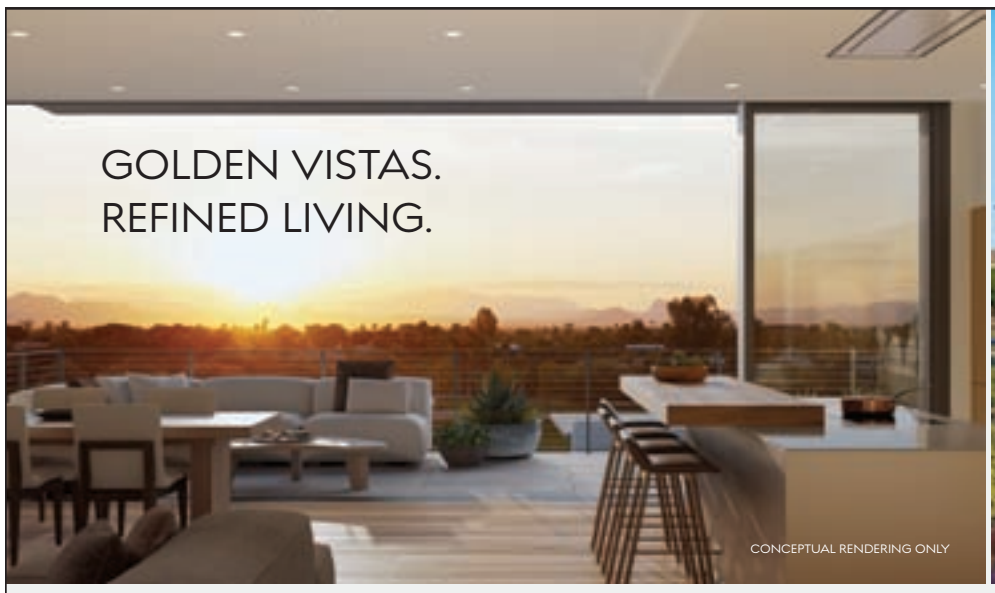
PHOTO: LISA ZUBA

Leon Tynes, Emma Robescu, Stella Vinokur and Sophia Fireman with Levi, Synthia, and Rudy Moreno.

"The Makers of Change allowed me to combine my passion for STEM with helping others," Emma said. "Designing a device that was accessible to Levi showed me how technology can make a difference in people's everyday lives. Winning the challenge inspired me to continue pursuing a career where I can use innovation to make a positive impact."

This challenge opened a world of possibilities for a future in STEM, inspiring students about what could come after graduation. Congratulations, Gators!

swhd.org/makersofchange



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Santa Claus is coming to town (and so are holiday events)

By Chrissy Doern

The Valley is bursting with festive events and family-friendly celebrations. If you're looking for ways to embrace the magic of the season, here are just a few can't-miss happenings taking place in December.

SCOTTSDAZZLE

Locations vary
scottsdazzle.com

Scottsdazzle's 10th annual celebration offers a variety of festive events. On December 6, catch an outdoor screening of *Home Alone* at Starlight Movie Night, then stroll through Old Town on December 6, 13, and 20 during the Stroll & Shop for live music, music box ballerinas, treats, and a pop-up night market. Art lovers can explore the Gold Palette ArtWalk on December 11, while the Holly Jolly DIY Décor on December 13 invites guests to craft holiday ornaments to the soundtrack of live seasonal music. On December 14, the Marshall Way Bridge comes alive with a free holiday-themed dueling piano performance.

There are also a few ticketed events: On December 13, kids can attend Pancakes & Pajamas with Santa, featuring breakfast on the bridge and a theater performance by Greasepaint, or join Chocolate Wonderland on the Waterfront to make their own chocolates. Families can participate in Sparkle & Spin Scavenger Hunts on December 14 and 20, while foodies can learn tamale-making with Los Olivos on December 14 during "Wrapped in Tradition." End the season on December 21 with Dazzling Dish & Wintery Wine, an outdoor event led by James Beard Award-winning Chef Charleen Badman.

SNOWLAND

Great Wolf Lodge
7333 N. Pima Road, Scottsdale
greatwolf.com

Holiday magic is in full swing at Great Wolf Lodge Arizona with its annual Snowland celebration running through January 6. Families can participate in festive crafts, holiday games, seasonal treats like a Peppermint White Chocolate Shake, and visits from Santa.

Scottsdazzle takes place throughout Old Town until December 31.

Guests can also experience the wonder of indoor snowfall in the Grand Lobby, starting the day with the "'Twas the Night Before Snowland" yoga session and ending it with a nightly celebration with live music, dancing and snow.

SIPPIN' SANTA

Bitter & Twisted
1 W. Jefferson St., Phoenix
bitterandtwistedaz.com

Sippin' Santa is back! This annual Tiki Christmas transforms the bar into a holiday wonderland, complete with kitschy décor, holiday palm trees, thousands of lights, and a playful tropical twist for guests 21 and over. Cocktails like the Sippin' Santa, Great White Christmas, and non-alcoholic Designated Sledder will be served in festive glasses that are also available for purchase.

Running through December 28, Sippin' Santa offers a $15 Sippin' Experience that lets guests skip the line, receive a secret Santa gift, and enjoy the seasonal tiki-inspired drinks at their leisure.

MIRACLE ON FLOOR 13

Hilton Garden Inn
15 E. Monroe St., Phoenix
miraclepopup.com

For a cozy holiday escape, head to Miracle at Floor 13, also known as Ski Club, featuring crowd favorites like the Christmapolitan and the Snowball Old-Fashioned, plus new drinks like Candy Cane Lane and Miracle Mouse. The Grinch will be making a special appearance on December 12, 19, and 22 from 7-10 p.m.

WINTER WATERLAND

OdySea Aquarium
9500 E. Vía de Ventura, Scottsdale
odyseaaquarium.com

OdySea has been transformed into a charming Winter Waterland, running through January 4, with admission included with a regular ticket purchase.

Guests are greeted by festive decorations and a Christmas-themed scavenger hunt for kids as they explore the aquarium, including "Voyager," a rotating aquarium exhibit, where Santa narrates a journey through four aquatic habitats filled with sea lions, sharks, and other animals. Families can also experience "SeaTREK Santa" in the Deep Ocean Theater, where St. Nick magically appears underwater after a reading of *The Night Before Fishmas*.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park
7301 E. Indian Bend Road, Scottsdale
therailroadpark.com

Step into a world of wonder aboard the Paradise Pacific Railroad at McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park, where the annual holiday lights transform the park into a sparkling wonderland. Guests glide through tunnels of twinkling lights and displays while "snow" flakes drift from above, bringing a whimsical touch of Christmas to the Valley.

The event runs from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. with four timed entry slots, and advanced reservations are required.

JINGLE AT JW

JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge Resort
5350 E. Marriott Dr., Phoenix
jingleatjwdesertridge.com

Jingle at JW is back until January 3. New attractions included in the Jingle Experience Pass invite guests to snow tube down real snow lanes and take a leisurely walk along the illuminated Lazy River Holiday Light Stroll at AquaRidge WaterPark. Returning favorites add even more fun, from gingerbread-themed bounce houses and a 147-foot obstacle course at Jingle Jump. There's also ice skating under the desert sky, virtual skiing or snowboarding at the Arizona Snowbowl simulator, and the resort's iconic gingerbread house display.

Families can also capture holiday memories with gondola and Santa's sleigh photo opportunities, visit the sugar chalet for seasonal sweets, or enjoy the Après Ski Pop-Up Bar with cocktails and mocktails. The celebration honors Hanukkah traditions from December 14-22 with nightly menorah lightings.

ZOOLIGHTS

Phoenix Zoo
455 N. Galvin Pkwy.
phoenixzoo.org

Ongoing until January 16, 2026, families will find four million twinkling lights and a music-in-motion light show. Check out the zoo's Wildlife Lanterns, the Glow Garden, photo booths, hot cocoa, s'mores and snacks, and photos with Santa. Sensory-friendly nights are also available. Zoolights is open from 5:30-10:30 p.m. at General admission is $35.

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McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park celebrates 50 years

By Rachael Bouley

What started as a small model train attraction has, after five decades, evolved into one of Scottsdale's most well-known family-friendly destinations. As the Railroad Park celebrates 50 years, it unveiled all-new play areas and exciting plans for the holidays.

The park began as part of the McCormick family ranch in the 1970s. Anne Stillman-McCormick and her husband Fowler McCormick (grandson of John Rockefeller, and both of McCormick Ranch history) donated the land to the City of Scottsdale with the vision of creating a public space everyone could enjoy.

"Their son, Guy, was a lifelong train enthusiast who built a 15-inch-gauge model railroad called the Paradise & Pacific Railroad on the property," said Alex Sanchez, Communications Supervisor with the City of Scottsdale. "His passion for trains and community spirit inspired him to partner with the city to develop a park centered around history and fun."

The park officially opened on October 4, 1975, and was later renamed to honor Stillman's contribution.

Over the past five decades, McCormick-Stillman has undergone significant changes, including the addition of the historic Scottsdale Charros carousel, the relocation of vintage train cars and depots, and the expansion of the Scottsdale Railroad Museum and model railroad building.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCCORMICK-STILLMAN RAILROAD PARK

The park officially opened in 1975. (right) Members of the McCormick-Stillman family were gifted special plaques honoring the park.

It's become a year-round gathering place with community traditions like free Sunday concerts and the park's signature holiday lights display.

"The Railroad Park is a place where history, imagination, and play all come together," Sanchez said. "Families can hop aboard the Paradise & Pacific Railroad, spin on a classic carousel, explore full-size train cars, and enjoy shaded playgrounds and picnic areas."

In 2019, the park won the #ELGLKnope Best Park & Open Space competition, beating 30 others and earning a prestigious title in local government across the country.

Kids get to enjoy the adventure as adults take in the nostalgia from years past, with free entry making it easily accessible. Although aging infrastructure has been a challenge over time, anniversary celebrations throughout the year have showcased major upgrades. Thousands of visitors came out for the Golden Jubilee in the fall, with family activities, entertainment, and a look back at the park's history.

"The celebration also introduced new amenities, including an upgraded playground, a train-themed space called The Roundhouse, and a new splash pad, marking the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the park," Sanchez said.

The Roundhouse is a 10,000-square-foot train-themed indoor playground with a locomotive-shaped play structure and a multipurpose event room. The 5,000 square-foot splash pad was one of the most requested additions. The new entry plaza offers shaded seating, public art, new restrooms, lighting, landscaping and pathways for a welcoming arrival.

The celebrations continued with the park's annual Halloween Spook-Track-Ula event through October, before preparations began for the Holiday Lights event. Running through December 30, this annual tradiation transforms the train rides and grounds into a winter wonderland with displays and brightly-lit locomotives.

"The park's long-term vision is to remain a place where history, recreation, and community connection meet – ensuring generations can experience the same wonder and joy that have defined it for half a century," Sanchez said.

Closing out the year in style is the annual Noon Year's Eve celebration on December 31, with a kid-friendly countdown, train rides, and live music. It's all part of McCormick-Stillman's ongoing commitment to families and visitors from near and far.

therailroadpark.com

Arcadia youth bring Christmas magic to the stage

By Katy Springer

Ten Arcadia area youth performers are stepping into Santa's workshop this season as Greasepaint Youtheatre brings "Elf Jr." to the stage. The family-friendly holiday musical runs December 5-14 and offers a sweet and silly take on the power of family, acceptance, and oversized Christmas cheer.

Based on the 2003 Will Ferrell hit movie, *"Elf Jr."* tells the story of Buddy, a young orphan raised by elves at the North Pole. When he discovers he's a human, Buddy embarks on a journey to New York City to find his father and sprinkle Christmas magic on everyone he meets.

"This show really gets me into the Christmas spirit," said Maggie Chandler, who plays the role of Deb. "We have such a talented cast and I'm so excited for the audience to see the amazing show we've put together."

Her sister, Betsy, shares her excitement.

"I really like getting my makeup done. I also really like costumes. 'Never Fall in Love (With an Elf)' is my favorite part of the show," said the 6-year-old, who plays Elf 3.

Director Jordan Cline says that the mix of feeling and fun is the point.

"'Elf Jr.' is a big-hearted, happy show that reminds us what the holidays are really about – connection, kindness, and believing in something bigger than ourselves," Cline said. "It's packed with laughter and lovable characters, but beneath the comedy is a message that really resonates, especially this time of year."

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATY SPRINGER

Lucy Woudenberg, Maggie Chandler, Pierce Seidenberg, Emily Brodie, Olivia Share, Betsy Chandler, Edel Pasquel, Siena Hardy. Not pictured: Sam Roalofs and Cecelia Conti Mica.

The stage version of the musical features a book by Tony Award winners Thomas Meehan and Bob Martin, with music by Matthew Sklar and lyrics by Chad Beguelin, the songwriting team behind *"The Wedding Singer"* and *"The Prom."* The junior adaptation includes several catchy favorites, such as "Sparklejollytwinklejingley," "A Christmas Song," and "Never Fall in Love (With an Elf)."

"I wanted to do this show because I thought it would be a good experience," actress Emily Brodie said. "I celebrate Hanukkah, and I wanted to know what it would be like to be in a Christmas show even though I don't celebrate that holiday."

Greasepaint's production includes a cast of nearly 30 performers, including 10 actors from Arcadia: Emily as Shwanda; Betsy Chandler as Elf 3; Maggie Chandler as Deb; Cecelia Conti Mica as Elf 6; Siena Hardy as Police/Security 1; Edel Pasquel as Elf 4; Sam Roalofs as Michael; Pierce Seidenberg as Jogger/Sam; Olivia Share as Elf 5; and Lucy Woudenberg as Emma.

Behind the scenes, the creative team includes Elise Kurbat as music director, Tawny Audi as choreographer, and Taylor Penn as stage manager. As part of its commitment to inclusion and accessibility, Greasepaint will offer a sensory-friendly performance at 2 p.m. on December 6. In addition, Greasepaint will host an ASL-interpreted performance at 7 p.m. on December 13, providing access for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Tickets are $25.

greasepaint.org

EMPWR Arizona helps families reconnect to healthy meals

By Mallory Gleich

What began as a routine school volunteer project quickly became a calling for Brophy Bronco Gavin Reddy. While volunteering at Native Health, he witnessed firsthand how obesity was affecting Native American families – and especially children.

"I learned that generations of displacement had cut populations off from their natural food ways. Fresh ingredients were replaced with processed rations high in sugar and fat. Over time, this changed what people ate," Gavin said. "The effects of that loss are still visible today. I also knew childhood obesity could shorten life spans and lead to serious health problems later on."

Gavin launched EMPWR Arizona, a nonprofit dedicated to improving health outcomes for vulnerable communities by reconnecting families with nutritious foods. From the beginning, community partnerships have shaped the organization's direction. Gavin credits Native Health's Susan Levy with helping the idea get off the ground.

"She connected me with several Native American chefs she had previously worked with, including Chef Mario from The Rez and Urban Eatery," Gavin said. "Chef Mario catered our inaugural event. I had also heard from many people that he is an incredible storyteller. His stories about food, culture, and growing up have added so much depth and meaning to our classes."

Levy also connected Gavin to the Phoenix Office of Indian Education, where Lynnann Yazzie helped spread the word to school districts. Martha Sullivan of Madison Elementary School District offered EMPWR its home base: the Madison #1 cafeteria kitchen.

EMPWR now runs hands-on parent-child cooking classes for students in grades 3-8. Each class is led by a Native American chef who teaches families to cook healthy, Indigenous-inspired recipes using organic ingredients. The kids chop vegetables, wrap tamales, and learn skills like proper knife technique, while parents and chefs weave in stories about food traditions and cultural resilience.

"We talk about the traditions, local foods compared to processed foods, and how reconnecting with these foods can bring health and pride back to the table," Gavin said. "We teach proper cooking techniques. I have actually learned quite a bit about how to prepare vegetables like butternut squash, something I had never cooked before."

Each week, every student leaves with a bag of fresh produce to continue cooking at home. The focus on traditional Native foods is intentional. The original Indigenous diet – beans, wild greens, seeds, squash, and cactus – was nutrient-dense, low in fat, and naturally protective against diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions.

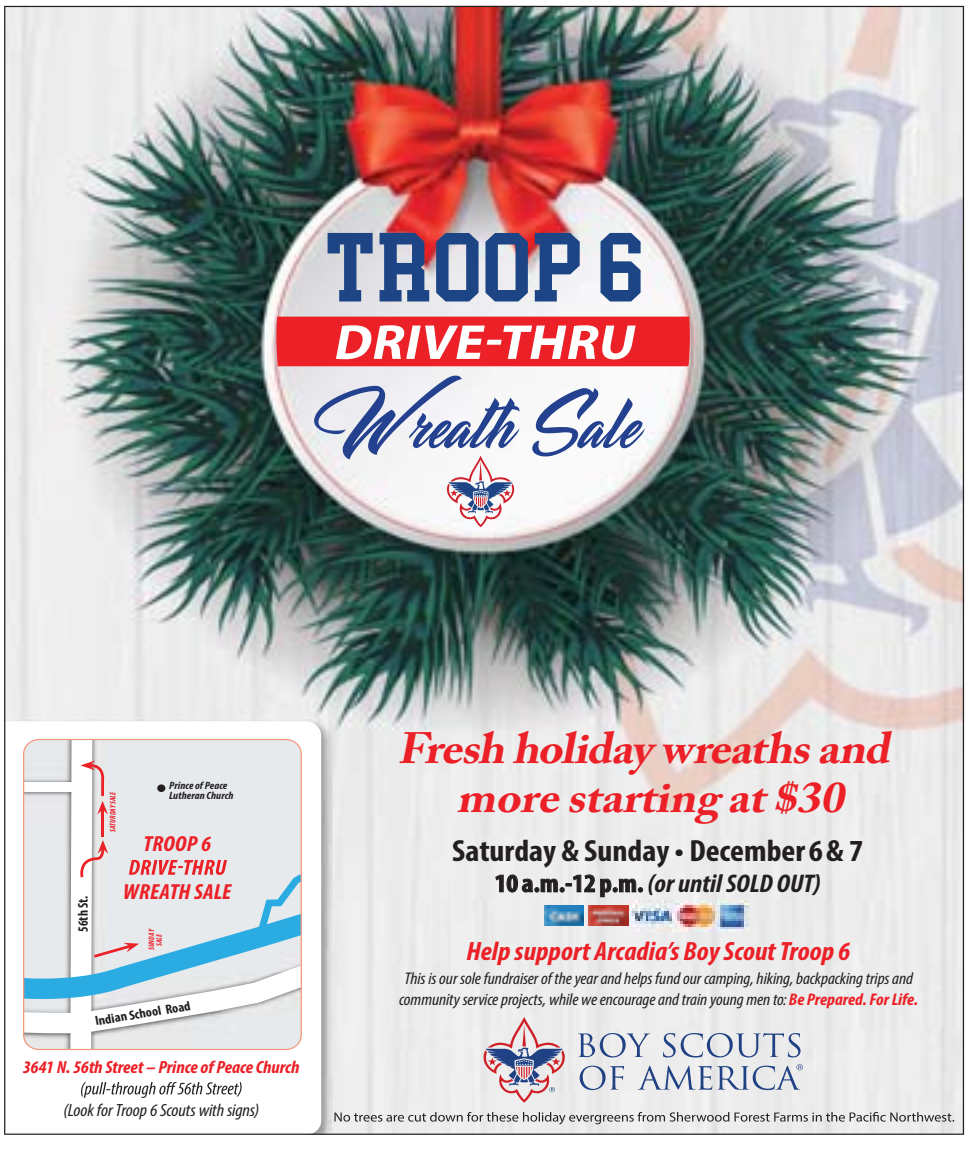
Families have responded with enthusiasm.

"One family sent us a photo of their dinner plate filled with colorful vegetables for our Rainbow Plate Challenge, where students were encouraged to include at least three different-colored vegetables on their plate to promote balanced nutrition," Gavin said. "Parents have also shared that they are learning alongside their children, which makes the experience meaningful for the whole family."

Though measuring community impact can be tricky, EMPWR looks at both numbers and stories. They've distributed more than 50 produce bags, classes fill with returning families, and students show genuine pride in the meals they make. To further strengthen data collection, EMPWR is working with three Arizona State University students from the Growing BioDiverse Cultures Humanities Lab to develop evaluation tools.

Building trust has been one of the program's biggest challenges. "As a youth-led organization, it's important that we engage with families and community members in a way that is respectful, culturally aware, and collaborative," Gavin said. "Earning that trust takes time and consistently showing up."

empwraz.org



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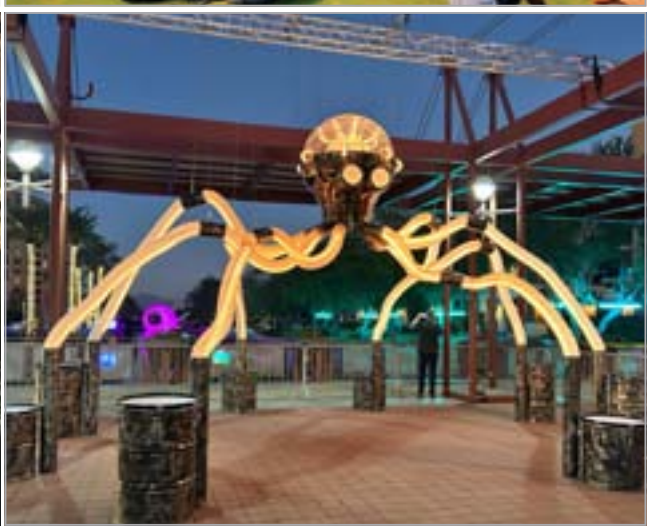

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SCOTTSDALE

2025 CANAL CONVERGENCE

Scottsdale comes alive with light, music, and interactive art

By Chrissy Doern

Canal Convergence took over the Scottsdale Waterfront in November with – simply put – a celebration of creativity. This internationally recognized annual arts extravaganza was packed with larger-than-life artworks that ignited the imagination, alongside a variety of engaging activities.

The theme, "SHOWTIME!" focused on performance as public art and the subject of performance itself, including history, cultural significance, and role in society. From mesmerizing performances that captivated the senses to interactive installations that encouraged exploration, there was something for everyone.

Numerous exhibits sparked imagination, along with a variety of engaging workshops and live performances.

Creativity and collaboration took center stage. At Canalogic with urbanSTEW, participants built their own musical instruments, then layered their sounds into a communal "sound scrambler" that blended noise, art, and memory into one installation.

CREATE at Arizona Science Center asked guests to design their own marquee signs using markers, chalk, and acrylic embellishments. Over at Masks with Zarco Guerrero, children and adults learned the art of expressive mask-making from the renowned sculptor himself, crafting colorful creations that reflected both imagination and emotion.

Hands-on workshops continued throughout the week. The Beat Making Workshop with AZ Beat Lab encouraged participants to experiment with rhythm, layering beats and sounds to produce original music to share with the group.

LED Creations, led by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale, gave kids a chance to build glowing bugs and crowns powered by tiny batteries, while The Walter Hive turned craft materials into finger puppets, headbands, and whimsical sculptures.

Adapting Together with Rumbo invited participants to explore how rising heat impacts our daily lives, sparking thoughtful discussions about resilience through art. Rounding out the lineup, Chroma – a site-specific dance performance by Scottsdale Community College Dance – transformed the Stargate artwork by Chalk River Labs, bringing motion, color, and connection to life.

The Herberger Stage came alive with an eclectic lineup of musical talent. Audiences were treated to the infectious rhythms of Jaleo's Latin beats and the dreamy sounds of Ang Sirena's indie-pop and alternative R&B. The Bad Cactus Brass Band brought funk and jazz, while Pijama Piyama infused the atmosphere with their signature psychedelic cumbia flair.

The lineup continued, from Seligo's electro-pop-rock fusion to Dylan Paul Thomas's heartfelt acoustic rock and Mo Maduro's folk and blues influences.

> ***From mesmerizing performances that captivated the senses to interactive installations that encouraged exploration, there was something for everyone.***

Featured exhibits blended technology, interactivity, and artistry. From Australia, Amigo and Amigo brought Octopoda, a towering octopus installation whose eight glowing, light-reactive limbs pulsed in time with the beat of giant barrel snare drums.

In Recognition by New American Public Art of Maine, participants found themselves quite literally reflected in the work – live facial tracking projected their images onto a massive polygonal face, prompting reflection on identity, surveillance, and digital life.

Returning favorites BIG ART of Canada presented B!G TV. This 16-foot LED screen invited audiences to step inside and become part of the show. Throughout the opening weekend, Javi Star Entertainment, featuring the coach for the Phoenix Suns Dancers and the Phoenix Mercury Hip-Hop Squad, surprised crowds with high-energy performances that lit up the canal.

Interactive workshops and performances kept creativity flowing throughout the weekend. The Marvelous Medium of Masking Tape, led by award-winning puppet builder Matt McGee of the Great Arizona Puppet Theater, showed attendees how to transform simple tape into dynamic 3D art. The theater also hosted Puppets with the Great Arizona Puppet Theater, where families and kids crafted colorful stick puppets to take home.

At Dress Up the Future – An Interactive Wearable Experience, visitors explored fashion-forward technology and imaginative design at The Dress Up Space, while the Arizona Theatre Company offered guests a chance to pose with real stage props for photo keepsakes.

Closing out the festivities, Walter Productions' Showtime Fire Show ignited the night with a breathtaking mix of fire, light, and music, a fitting finale to a celebration where art, innovation, and community came brilliantly together.

oldtownscottsdaleaz.com

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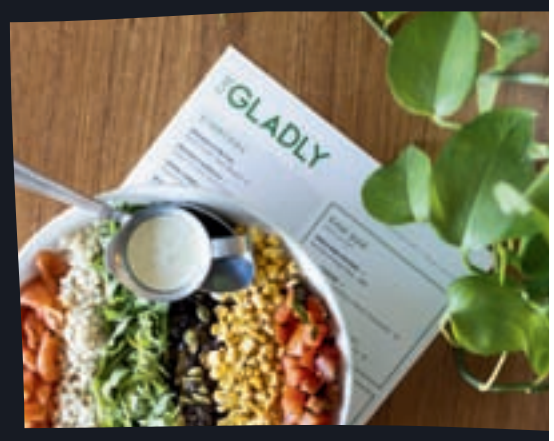

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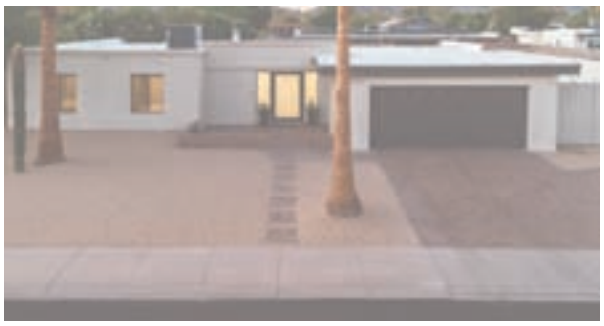

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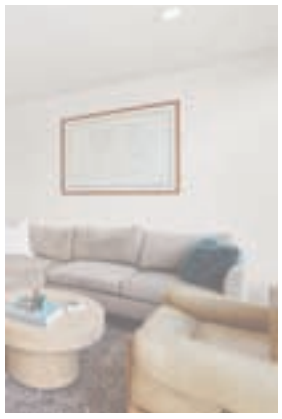
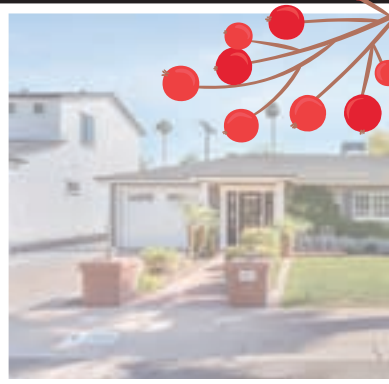


Brooke Fair / Meghan Marum / Shawna Warner / Rebecca Clayton-Hoyt / Lara Broadrick / Laura Ingram / Eliza Stooks



BYE BYE 2025 – GET READY TO RING IN 2026!

By Alex Gross

Arizona's New Year's Eve traditions are as diverse and unique as its residents, spanning from electronic music festivals to family-friendly holiday exhibits. No matter what type of fun you're looking for, every Arcadian can find a way to ring in the new year in style.

Decadence Arizona *at the Phoenix Raceway in Avondale.*

MIDNIGHT IN PARIS/ MIDNIGHT DISCO

The Global Ambassador

4360 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix

globalambassadorhotel.com

Celebrate New Year's Eve at the Global Ambassador, where indulgence meets festive flair. On December 31, guests can choose from elegant dining experiences at thea from 4:30 to 7 p.m., which includes a sparkling-wine greeting and access to the Lobby Bar's countdown festivities. Live music, DJ performances and access to the Midnight Disco party, plus a VIP experience, are also available.

BARTER & SHAKE NYE EXPERIENCE

Locations vary

bartershake.com

Barter & Shake is ringing in the new year with immersive, ticketed celebrations across its Phoenix concepts, each running from 10:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. on December 31. Guests can expect themed environments, specialty cocktails, curated food pairings, and a midnight champagne toast topped off with a caviar bump. Platform 18, Grey Hen, and both UnderTow locations will each offer their own distinct two-hour experience, from Prohibition-era elegance to moody apothecary vibes to nautical tiki escapism. Prices start at $129.

MOULIN ROUGE

FOUND:RE Phoenix Hotel

1100 N. Central Ave., Phoenix

foundrehotels.com

FOUND:RE is being transformed into a Moulin Rouge-themed New Year's Eve bash on December 31. Find high-energy entertainment, DJs, and Parisian-style sparkle beginning at 9 p.m. Guests can choose from all-inclusive general admission or VIP ticket packages that includes unlimited drinks and access to the exclusive Absinthe Den.

HAPPY NOON YEAR

Children's Museum of Phoenix

215 N. 7th St., Phoenix

childrensmuseumofphoenix.org

For families who might not stay awake long enough to watch the midnight ball drop, head to the Children's Museum for some sparkling cider and holiday-themed arts and crafts. Whether you choose to join in the morning or afternoon, you'll be home by dinner time!

NYE AT THE NASH

The Nash

110 E. Roosevelt St., Phoenix

thenash.org

This independent music venue in downtown Phoenix is the heartbeat of Arizona's jazz scene, and their New Year's Eve concert is a display of local talent. For $65, attendees will receive a treat bag, champagne toast and an opportunity to hear Phoenix musicians play some uplifting tunes.

NYE AT PRADO

Omni Scottsdale Resort

4949 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale

omnihotels.com

Ring in 2026 in style at Prado's New Year's Eve Celebration on December 31, featuring seatings from 5-6 p.m. and 8-9 p.m. Guests can check out live music, a midnight champagne toast, and a five-course prix fixe dinner. Menu highlights include tuna crudo and Albarino-brined quail, braised Australian bison short rib, and a triple chocolate torte with champagne and berries.

POSH PHOENIX

Caesars Republic Scottsdale

4747 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale

caesarsrepublicscottsdale.com

This 21+ event includes prepaid drinks, complimentary snacks and party favors, three DJs, three areas to mingle and dance, an LED screen for the countdown and lots of fun. Ticket prices vary.

CHAMPAGNE TOAST WITH THE SYMPHONY

Symphony Hall

75 N. 2nd St., Phoenix

phoenixsymphony.org

The Phoenix Symphony invites you to ring in the New Year on December 31 with its "New Year's Eve – All American Dance Party" concert at Symphony Hall. Under the baton of Stuart Chafetz, this performance promises joy and a complimentary champagne toast to welcome 2026.

CHIC NEW YEAR'S EVE

W Scottsdale

4428 N. Buckboard Tr., Scottsdale

marriott.com

This celebration spans the great ballroom, mingle, and social lounges at the W Scottsdale. Hosted by VIP Nightlife and Phoenix Nightlife, the event runs from 9 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. and features top DJs, two floors of music and themed décor. There will be drinks, light bites from 9:30 to 11 p.m., and festive party favors. VIP access includes premium drink tickets, an exclusive lounge, and upgraded amenities.

NYELECTRIC

Canopy by Hilton

108 E. University Dr., Tempe

hilton.com

Guests are invited to enjoy cabana spaces, a roaring fire pit, seats at a custom wraparound bar that features retractable climate-controlled glass walls, areas to mix and mingle, multiple DJs, party favors, casino games and more at NYElectric. Plus, this party takes place on the rooftop, offering unobstructed views of the city and the perfect place to see fireworks.

THE GREAT PINECONE DROP

The Weatherford Hotel

23 N. Leroux St., Flagstaff

flagstaffarizona.org

For the past two decades, the Weatherford has been dropping the giant pinecone from the third floor of their hotel. There are a few options for celebrating, starting with a kid-friendly visit to Charly's restaurant, which will host a meal and sparkling cider for those who want to celebrate early. Flagstaff encourages families to gather and watch as the pinecone drops at noon, 10 p.m., and midnight.

The Downtown Business Alliance even offers a "Noon Year's Eve" celebration. For grown-ups, the Zane Grey Ballroom, bar, and balcony will offer a VIP celebration with drinks, snacks, dancing and more.

TUCSON TACO DROP

Downtown Tucson

41 E. Congress St., Tucson

downtowntucson.org

Perhaps the most eccentric of Arizona's New Year's Eve traditions, the great taco drop in Tucson has developed a cult following that only grows every year. If a giant plastic taco falling from a crane isn't enough to draw your attention, then make sure to show up for the silent disco, food trucks, fireworks and live music.

DECADENCE

Phoenix Raceway

7602 E. Jimmie Johnson Dr., Avondale

decadencearizona.com

Decadence Arizona 2025 is set to light up Phoenix Raceway on December 30-31 with an electrifying lineup of music. Headliners include Zedd, Kaskade, GRiZ (NYE Countdown Set), FISHER, Adventure Club, Meduza, Green Velvet, Hayden James, Chase & Status, and Subtronics. Known as Arizona's biggest New Year's Eve celebration, the event transforms the desert into a pulsating playground of music, lights, and immersive production.

Two-day GA passes typically start around $180, with higher tiers available for those seeking an elevated New Years' experience.

Christmas Eve

AT REDEMPTION ARCADIA

ADVENT SERVICES *Sunday Mornings*

8:00am | 9:30am | 11:00am

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES *December 24th*

4:00pm | 6:00pm

During Advent, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. As he cried out with his first breath, the world would be forever changed. Yet that change was secured not by the trough he was laid in, but by the tree he was willfully nailed to. While Jesus' birth was necessary, it was the cross that ushered in the new creation and the Kingdom of God. It was his final breath that secured his work.

Therefore, our focus this Advent season is not merely this infant Jesus, but the infinite consequences of his saving act. As 1 Timothy 1:15 reminds us, 'The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' In other words, the cross is the reason for the season.

And so, as we stand between the birth of Jesus and his second coming, we wait for the Kingdom of God which has begun and is yet to fully arrive. The cross is the pivot point of history, come behold the wondrous cross with us this Advent season.

MORE INFO

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Inspiring students through lunar wisdom

By Kylie de Best

Arcadian Kris McLaughlin feels that she has always had an innate connection to the moon. After joining a Priestess Program taught by one of her mentors – yoga teacher Nicole Wiegman – Kris began to rekindle the connection that had diminished over adulthood.

As that connection grew, so too did the inspiration to begin living in alignment with the lunar cycle. Now, Kris shows others how to do the same, thanks to her program, fittingly called Master the Moon.

In this eight-week course, Kris teaches students how to identify and work with the moon phases, the zodiac, and astrology charts to ignite personal power, cultivate deeper levels of self-awareness, and support goals and desires.

There are weekly group meetings and four one-on-one meetings. Each consists of learning moon material, practice, personal shares, and meditation. Before classes start, a pre-recorded Basics Module is available so students can familiarize themselves with the information and reference it throughout the course.

Master the Moon has a packed curriculum, with key areas including the eight phases and how to use each one, how to combine those phases and Zodiac archetypes, the basic natal chart and personal natal charts, and learning about annual natural cycles. There is also information on how to organize a moon journal to keep students on track.

Kris wants to emphasize that, beyond the curriculum, this course helps students learn about themselves and enrich their lives by deepening their love, compassion, gratitude, and presence, and by strengthening their personal growth, intuition, and trust. Confidence and clarity are also enhanced in the part of the course where students define and actualize personal goals.

Kris McLaughlin

Master the Moon first materialized in 2020, after Kris had begun it on her own and achieved successful results. She initially shared the course with friends and members of nearby yoga communities, who responded positively to the experience. Since then, she has continued to lead new sessions and offer one-on-one mentoring and astrology readings.

"I realized that this was something everyone can benefit from and anyone can do because once students know the basics, it truly becomes their own practice," Kris shared. "The moon is free and available to everyone. You can see it from anywhere in the world, and it is the most consistent thing we experience on our planet."

According to Kris, leading this kind of course calls for a strong foundation in the lunar cycle, astrology, and natal charts, as well as at least a year of dedicated practice.

Kris tells her students that the moon offers a rare kind of reliability: it's never sick, never on vacation, and never late. Her own experience has shown others how the moon can gently guide people through life's ups and downs.

masterthemoon.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATIE WILSON

Katie Wilson, founder of Garage Boutique

Garage Boutique turns 25

By Sherry Sklar

Katie Wilson opened Garage Boutique & Concept Store in 2000, never imagining that a sharp life pivot – one that prompted her to re-evaluate nearly everything – would bring unexpected joy, creativity, and hard-won success in the competitive world of retail. More than a children's store, Garage Boutique was built on the belief that community, charity and style go hand in glove.

As the shop marks 25 years in business, Wilson reflected on a journey that began with a leap and continues to inspire generations of families and fashion-forward kids in the Valley.

"I had just gotten divorced and was still practicing law. I'd grown up traveling, but my former husband hadn't. I had always dreamed of going to Africa," Wilson said.

Packing her bags, she embarked on a six-week solo journey, during which she hiked around Mount Kilimanjaro and visited Kenya and Tanzania. Upon her return to Scottsdale, she quit her job and decided to pursue markedly different goals.

"When I came back, I realized I didn't need anything. I had left all my belongings with the Sherpas on that trip," Wilson said. "I wanted to live with more purpose and more balance."

Though she didn't have a clear plan at the time, fate stepped in. Wilson crossed paths with the owner of a children's boutique in Scottsdale, who was moving to a different venture. She purchased the business, took over the lease, and began transforming it into what would eventually become Garage Boutique.

Wilson began by changing her merchandise mix, focusing on European children's brands. While we may recognize these luxe lines from our own shopping excursions, many also produce clothing for youngsters.

Wilson travels the globe to bring Hugo Boss, Fendi, Dior, Scotch and Soda, and others, such as Perks and Mini, Bonton, and Bellerose, to her colorful boutique. She has remained ahead of the curve, adapting to the significant shifts in how retail operates today.

"Back when I opened the store, retail was different. There weren't a lot of boutiques or high-end shops," she said.

At the time, the Borgata, inspired by a market in San Gimignano, Italy, was an atmospheric, well-edited shopping center catering to an affluent clientele seeking upscale merchandise. That began to change as mass-market brands moved in, prompting Wilson to seek a new space.

"It was a bit of a 'build it and they will come' mentality," she said. "And that's what happened back then. Not so much now. These days, there's retail all over the Valley, and of course, the internet and social media have transformed everything."

A new opportunity emerged thanks to two of Wilson's boutique clients, Fred Unger and his wife, Jennifer Kroll.

Unger was developing Scottsdale's SouthBridge, a mixed-use development adjacent to the Arizona canal in Old Town. Wilson signed as a tenant in what would become The Mix, moving into her space in 2007.

The modern, forward-design space fueled new ideas and a renewed sense of creativity. Wilson became devoted to establishing a storefront and the customer experience that she is known for.

As a business leader, you own your decisions – good and bad – and must be willing to adjust.

"It's interesting. I've gone through ebbs and flows," Wilson said. "I love that I can curate my vision and see it all. I love that I can dream of something and see it come to fruition, knowing that I'm ultimately responsible for its success."

The Garage Boutique celebrated its silver anniversary in November. Collaborating with schools and philanthropic organizations, Wilson maintains a close connection within the community and expresses her appreciation.

"I've dressed the children in the PANDA Fashion Show for about 20 out of the 25 years they've been doing it," she said. "I would rather give than receive, and I love seeing the joy of a child coming into the store."

garageboutique.com

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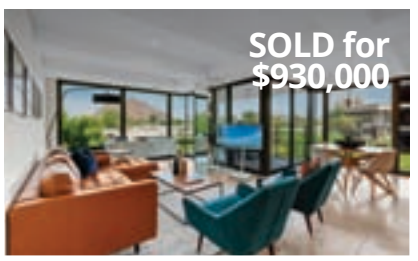
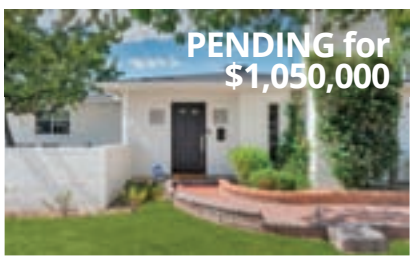
4 Beds | 3.5 Baths | 3,450 SF

115 W Rose Lane | Phoenix
4 Beds | 3 Baths | 2,897 SF



7117 E Rancho Vista Drive #4005 | Scottsdale
2 Beds | 2 Baths | 1,327 SF

5101 N Casa Blanca Drive #215 | Paradise Valley
3 Beds | 2 Baths | 1,663 SF



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- *Or call and we can pick up toys on an individual basis*.

Please donate before Tuesday, December 16th at 5 PM!

PHOTO COURTESY OF INGLESIDE PTO

The Ingleside Ambassadors are a group of 40 seventh and eighth-grade students here to support their school community.

Ingleside Ambassadors light the way for future students

By Sherry Sklar

We've all been there: a point when the world seemed much larger and more intimidating. For a wide-eyed 11-year-old, transitioning from a familiar elementary school to a middle school filled with "big kids" is a significant and anxious milestone.

The Ingleside Middle School Ambassadors want incoming fifth graders to know they are here to help – alleviating butterflies, easing nerves, and building confidence to take the next step.

This group of 40 seventh and eighth-grade students leads school tours, but they do much more to support the community. They're leaders and inside experts, spreading school spirit and helping incoming fifth graders and parents see what they know: that Ingleside is a great place to learn and belong.

The student ambassador program, which has been in existence for more than a decade, has undergone significant growth and development. Starting with a small group of 10 students, it expanded to include around 75 applicants this year, with 40 currently participating. This volunteer corps aims to raise community awareness through its unique student-led tours, attracting more visitors to the school.

Those with a 3.0 GPA or higher are eligible to become ambassadors and participate in leadership activities, providing tours of the school and the Comprehensive Gifted Program (CGP) to prospective incoming students from Hopi, Tavan, and other area schools. To be considered, these students answer a questionnaire and are interviewed each spring by program leaders and staff.

Ingleside parents Kelly Vasbinder, Nikki Ess, and Shayne Singleton volunteer to run the program, organize tours, and coordinate school events. Kelly emphasized that the kids participating in the program represent a diverse range of personalities. These students make for an engaging mix of opinions and viewpoints.

"Some are athletes, some are creative, and some are quieter," Kelly said. "We try to represent a variety of interests from Ingleside."

Ambassadors go beyond academic performance by incorporating leadership and communication skills.

"We thought that parents would want to hear from the kids themselves, and would enjoy listening to their perspectives when taking a tour," Nikki said.

"Our ambassador program has been vital to maintaining and growing our student enrollment, which is a key focus for every school," Principal Dr. Junior Michael said. "Families value hearing directly from our students about their experiences. The authenticity of a student-led tour holds far more weight."

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. The ambassador program nearly doubled in size this year, increasing from 25 students to 40. To provide a full slate of experiences throughout the academic year, they incorporate community outreach and invite speakers to the school. Students hand out flyers at fall festivals and picnics and participate in parades, such as Parada del Sol.

Jewelry designer Lexi Clement, owner of online jewelry brand Oh, Clementine, spoke to the students about cultivating leadership qualities and developing their personal brand. Lexi coached them through a design process to build a vision board, helping them map their individual paths.

Ambassadors take pride in sharing their experiences during the tours.

"I enjoy making a difference," student Allison Helmick said.

"I wish people knew how kind and caring the kids here are," Hannah Levin, a seventh-grade, first-year ambassador, shared. Her classmate Mia Greer added, "I love telling people that Ingleside has a 'No Place for Hate' program and showing how we really do put that into action."

With every greeting, hallway walk, and anecdote, these young ambassadors create meaningful connections that embody the spirit, warmth, and inclusiveness of their school.

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Goldfield Ghost Town is alive with history, haunts and heights

Just beyond the shadow of the Superstition Mountains is Goldfield Ghost Town – a place that the Arizona Highways Crew will attest is very much alive. As we wrapped a day of filming on those dusty streets, we discovered that Goldfield has become a fun, family holiday adventure.

Once a booming 1890s mining camp, today it's a wild mix of frontier history, oddball attractions, and enough spooky charm to keep visitors guessing.

Robin's Adventures

BY ROBIN SEWELL

Robin is the host and executive producer of the Arizona Highways Television, *Saturdays and Sundays on CBS.*

"We're so excited to welcome folks to our town," Tour Guide Casey Jackson, who greets guests in full Western flair, said. "People – from little kids to older folks – walk in and they're all so excited to see a little piece of history."

Goldfield welcomes hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people a day. Wooden boardwalks connect a mercantile filled with handmade fudge, an apothecary crafting Sonoran botanicals into skincare, a hat shop that can brand your Stetson on-site, and a photography studio where families dress up and pose like frontier legends. This ghost town isn't stuck in 1893. As Casey jokes, "People get surprised when they walk in and see a zip line."

This attraction suspends riders 115 feet in the air and sends them soaring 1,200 feet toward the towering Superstitions. Owner Todd Riches calls it his modern twist on an old mining adventure.

Lulu's Bordello

Goldfield zip line

Miners once rode ore carts up steep hills by the pull of gravity alone.

Today, riders go up backwards, down forwards with no helmet or harness, just a motorized seat, a little bravery, and seven seconds of "hang time" at the top to savor the panoramic desert views. The best part? You only have to be 42 inches to ride.

For a deeper look at Goldfield's past, you can head into Mammoth Mine on a guided tour. Guides will take you past old equipment and narrow tunnels while regaling tourists with stories of miners who earned five dollars, three dollars, or – unluckiest of all – two dollars a day pushing the infamous "honey pot wagon." Visitors learn that 13-year-olds once set dynamite fuses because they were the fastest runners!

After learning about life underground, you can wander into Goldfield's slightly less scientific attraction, the Mystery Shack. Inside, water flows uphill, pool balls roll in the wrong direction, and guests stand at angles that defy logic. Whether it's an optical illusion or pure desert mischief depends on whom you ask.

If illusions aren't enough, the bravest head upstairs to Lulu's Bordello, a Victorian-era "lights-out" ghost tour led by a self-described Victorian ghost host. Flickering lanterns lead guests through dark hallways and bedrooms, where guides share tales of long-ago residents and unexplained cold spots, energy spikes on EMF meters, and, on at least one occasion, a guide who left with three mysterious scratches.

Whether you are soaring over the desert, exploring underground tunnels, grabbing fresh fudge, testing your balance in the Mystery Shack, or tiptoeing through a haunted bordello, Goldfield Ghost Town proves the Old West still has a wild streak – and you'll find it all just off an Arizona highway.

DISTRICT 6 UPDATE

Let's get together!

As the holiday season settles over the Valley, residents have two spirited opportunities to connect with their community and celebrate the magic of December. The month begins with a relaxed chance to meet neighbors and local representatives at the upcoming December Coffee Chat, set for December 2 at Pecos Park (17010 S. 48th St., Phoenix).

From 6 to 7:30 p.m., attendees are invited to stop by for casual conversation, community updates, and a chance to ask questions about neighborhood projects, concerns, or upcoming initiatives. The gathering is designed to keep residents informed and engaged, providing a friendly forum where issues can be discussed in a welcoming, approachable setting.

KEVIN ROBINSON
Councilman
District 6
602-262-7491
District6@phoenix.gov

Whether you have a specific topic you'd like addressed or simply want to stay in the loop, the Coffee Chat offers an easy and informal way to connect.

A few days later, one of Phoenix's brightest traditions will once again light up the night. The 2025 APS Electric Light Parade returns on December 7, bringing dazzling floats, glowing performances, and thousands of twinkling lights to the heart of the city.

This annual event draws spectators from across the Valley who line the streets to watch the procession make its way from Central Avenue and Montebello Avenue to 7th Street and Indian School Road. The parade begins at 7 p.m., and while the exact ending time may vary, the festive atmosphere typically lasts well into the evening as families gather to enjoy one of Phoenix's cherished holiday celebrations.

Together, the Coffee Chat and Electric Light Parade offer two very different but equally meaningful ways to celebrate this December – one through conversation and connection, the other through lights, music, and shared seasonal joy.

Happy Holidays!
Councilman Kevin Robinson

30 YEARS AGO

How a simple idea sparked an annual holiday tradition

If you've ever plucked a paper angel from a tree at the mall, you've been part of a well-known Arizona tradition with heartfelt roots.

It began in 1979, in the small city of Lynchburg, Virginia. The Salvation Army was looking for a way to bring joy to children who might otherwise go without, and the Angel Tree program was born. The idea was simple: place tags on a tree representing children in need, each listing their Christmas wishes, and let the community become Santa's helpers.

Fast-forward to Phoenix in 1986. On her first day as community relations director at KTVK Channel 3, Marlene Klotz-Collins had an idea. A dedicated volunteer with The Salvation Army's Phoenix Advisory Board, she proposed bringing the concept of the Angel Tree into a mall. The idea got the green light, and that December, the "Secret Santa" program made its debut at Christown.

In partnership with KTVK-TV and KMEO Radio, the very first year was a triumph: 3,200 children received brand-new clothes and toys. The name evolved into something even more fitting, and the program spread through shopping centers across the Valley.

Each December, Arizona's Family helps rally volunteers, donors, and shoppers to make sure every angel tag is taken, and every child's wish fulfilled. Just before Thanksgiving, Christmas Angel trees appear in malls across the Valley, in Flagstaff and in Prescott. Each is adorned with hundreds – sometimes thousands – of Angel tags.

Today, more than 50,000 Arizona children receive Christmas Angel gifts each year, thanks to the generosity of neighbors, coworkers, and strangers united by the joy of giving. From its modest beginnings in Virginia to its warm embrace here in the Valley of the Sun, the Christmas Angel program continues to remind us of what the holidays are really about: hope, kindness, and the magic that happens when we care for one another.

ARCADIANEWSARCHIVES.COM

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARCADIA HIGH

Kingston Williams, Coach Brittney Blystone and Eva Bowling.

Arcadia High varsity football.

Arcadia athletes dominate with explosive fall seasons

By Mark Hays

As the fall season winds down, high school sports programs are celebrating milestones, record-setting performances, and some of the most competitive campaigns in recent history. From undefeated football streaks to postseason breakthroughs, athletes from Arcadia High, Brophy, Veritas Prep, and Xavier made their mark this season.

ARCADIA HIGH

Football

Arcadia athletics flourished across nearly every arena this fall, headlined by a statement season on the gridiron. The Titans football team, guided by first-year Coach B.J. Pasquel, stormed through the regular season with a 10-0 record to secure the No. 1 seed entering the playoffs.

"We have a strong group of seniors, including Zach Smith, Ian Slater, Jax Ashley, Nick McCormick, Ryan Jimenez, Julien Olshan, and Walter Driggs, who've led us all year," Pasquel said. With a first-round bye and a deep postseason run, the Titans focused on "one game at a time."

The undefeated regular season marked one of the program's most complete efforts in years, setting a tone of confidence and composure. The Titans entered the quarter finals against Marcos de Niza in late November and won 47-21.

"This season has been so much fun, being on a great team with great senior leaders with a chance to win State my first year of varsity football as a sophomore," defensive back Broden Arnold said. As of press time, the Titans were headed to game three of the playoffs against ALA – West Foothills on November 28.

Cross Country

On the trails, Coach Tyler Moore's squad surged into form. The Titans swept the Scottsdale Unified School District Championships, propelled by senior standout Chase Braden, who won the boys' race with a season-best 15:45, while Sam Gagnon paced the girls to victory.

"Our success reflects the depth and determination of this group," Moore said.

That depth showed throughout the postseason. With sectionals and state on the horizon, momentum continued to build as runners Evra Therien, Sydney Heath, and Branwen Thatcher delivered personal bests when it mattered most.

At the State cross country meet in November, both teams qualified and achieved their highest combined finish in several years. Chase Braden led the way, placing 10th overall to earn second team All-State honors.

Swim and Dive

Arcadia Swim and Dive produced one of its strongest collective seasons since 2020, highlighted by standout senior performances and breakout meets from underclass athletes.

In diving, Coach Brittney Blystone praised the progress of Eva Bowling and Kingston Williams, both of whom qualified for State.

"This season went well for both Eva and Kingston," Blystone said. "They each posted higher qualifying scores than last year, and we were hoping for even stronger results at State."

Those hopes paid off. Kingston earned a lifetime high score and secured ninth place in diving, while Eva posted her own career best to finish 11th. Senior swimmer Paul Huisman placed fourth in the 50 free with a time of 22.51 – Arcadia's first podium finish in swimming since 2020.

Relay teams also made their presence known, with the boys 200 medley and 200 free groups finishing 11th and 14th, respectively, and the girls 200 medley placing 12th. The girls 200 free relay – Zoë McClure, Elsa Nunley, Eloise Sepowitz, and Elle Stultz – finished seventh, the program's best showing since 2020.

Zoë added another highlight in the 100 butterfly, clocking a 1:01.88 for eighth place – the highest finish by an Arcadia girl in an individual event since 2021.

VERITAS PREP

Football

At Veritas Prep, fall proved to be a season of breakthroughs and firsts. The Falcons, coached by Region Coach of the Year Mike Sanfratello, completed the program's first-ever undefeated regular season at 10-0, earning the No. 1 seed in the 2A State Playoffs.

"The boys committed during the off-season to pursue a higher standard going into this year, and the team clearly bought in," Athletic Director Chase Beebe said.

The signature moment came with a 34-21 win over No. 3 Phoenix Christian to clinch the Metro 5 Region Championship, the second title in school history. Veritas hosted the AIA 2A bracket reveal and kicked off postseason play in November. Game one was a success against Santa Cruz Valley, 35-6, but Tanque Verde High overtook game two, with the Falcons losing by a mere five points, 23-28.

"I loved playing with these guys," Baylor Arnold said. "I'm so proud. It didn't end how we wanted, but we are proud of who we became this year and that says a lot."

Volleyball

The indoor courts brought more success for the Falcons. Under Region Coach of the Year Brooks Dockter, Veritas captured the 2A Valley Region Championship with a 14-3 overall record and a perfect 8-0 mark in region play. Senior libero Bella Espinosa anchored the back row, while the Hamann sisters – Mary, a senior, and Grace, a sophomore – helped power the attack.

"The girls showed tremendous grit, especially in that five-set win over No. 1 PCDS," Beebe said. Entering the State tournament, the Falcons held a strong No. 5 ranking statewide. Game one was a 3-0 win over St. Johns; game two saw Trivium Prep win with three.

Cross Country

The Falcons cross-country teams also found their stride late in the season. Senior leaders Rachel Barney and Hazel Haggerty pushed the girls' team – last year a top-six state finisher – back into contention, while Declan Travis and Dominic Heil led a steady boys' lineup.

BROPHY PREP

Football

Brophy's football program continued to uphold the school's proud tradition under Head Coach Jason Jewell. The Broncos entered the postseason ranked No. 6 in 6A following a tight region race with Williams Field.

"We had a solid season," Jewell said. "The last two years we've made the state semifinals – this group broke through to reach the championship game."

Armed with seasoned leadership and depth across the roster, Brophy positioned itself for a deep playoff run through November, winning game one against Casteel High 51-42, but ultimately losing game two to the Chandler High Wolves, 34-45.

Cross Country

With more than 75 athletes, the Brophy cross-country program fielded Arizona's largest running squad this season.

"We won multiple large freshman and JV races behind the strength of frontrunners Peter Vietor and Spencer Nick," Head Coach Oscar Borboa said.

The depth and tradition carried the Broncos to their 18th straight top-10 finish at the Division 1 State Championship Meet in November. Even more promising for the future, six of seven runners from the State lineup will return next fall.

Swim and Dive

Brophy capped fall with a historic splash.

"The team scored a state record 582 points to win their 44th State Championship in school history," Athletic Director Steve Shaff said. "It is the school's second consecutive title, extending its state record total and the 13th state title under Coach O'Neill in his career."

The Broncos surged through the state meet,

PHOTO COURTESY OF BROPHY PREP

Brophy cross country runners Max Fabyanic, Vincent Laba, and Clark Gilbert.

beginning with a win in the 200 medley relay behind Finn Conley, Brayden Harrison, Mark Heffern, and Noah Heimer. Heffern went on to defend his title in the 200 IM with a 1:51.38 and added a second-place finish in the 100 butterfly. He also contributed to the 400 freestyle relay's runner-up performance.

Junior Patrick Dunn placed third in the 500 freestyle, while freshman Nolan Guidry emerged as a newcomer to watch with second in the 100 free and fifth in the 50 free.

XAVIER PREP

Cross Country

"We had a complete summer of training," Head Coach Nissa Kubly said, noting top-three finishes at major meets including Peaks in Flagstaff, Western Equinox, and Desert Twilight.

The Gators followed with a runner-up team finish at the Epic Tourneys, facing top competition across the state.

"We worked toward a top two finish at sectionals and a top three finish at State," Kubly said.

The results came through. Xavier placed third on November 15 at Cave Creek Golf Course. Senior Kennedy Frakes finished third overall, while senior Ella Wadsworth placed 17th. Additional scoring came from Chantel Newman, Jenevieve Jacques, and Nova Rodriguezcrespo.

Swim and Dive

In the pool, Xavier enjoyed a dominant dual-meet season, finishing 5-0 and earning titles at the B/X Invite, AMDG Invite, and Last Chance Invite. Twenty-one swimmers qualified for State.

Coach Glen Coy highlighted standout Adelyn Burns, who entered the meet seeded first in the 100 breaststroke and as part of the state's top 400 free relay. XCP ultimately finished second to Desert Vista at the State Championships.

Two Gators captured individual state titles: Adelyn repeated as champion in the 100 breast and freshman Ainsley Boerckel won the 100 fly, signaling a bright future for the program.

Flag Football

Xavier closed its fall flag-football regular season with a strong overall body of work, highlighted by steady offensive development and a defense that consistently generated turnovers.

The team finished with 10 wins and showcased a balanced roster led by senior quarterback Ana Matuz, who emerged as one of Arizona's top new talents after only beginning her football journey last year. The Gators demonstrated an ability to rebound quickly from setbacks, responding to their late-season loss to Desert Vista with a composed, disciplined performance in their finale.

Defensively, Xavier established itself as a takeaway-driven unit, with veteran leaders Ava Portillo, Imani Campbell, and Zoie Alexander anchoring a group that routinely swung momentum. On offense, Matuz's chemistry with receivers including senior Gigi Bulkley and freshman Evie Maas gave the Gators multiple scoring threats and helped fuel a high-output passing attack. With a playoff berth secured, Xavier entered the 6A postseason positioned as a strong contender.

Volleyball

The Gators capped a fall season by winning the 6A State Championship and completing 24-0 campaign. Under Head Coach Lamar-Renee Bryant, the Gators finished 8-0 in the 6A Central region, and 16-0 in conference, and ultimately sweeping all four State tournament opponents. Their postseason run was marked by consistent, high-level execution, culminating in a straight-sets championship victory over Corona del Sol at the Arizona Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Ahead of the final rounds, Coach Bryant explained the team's approach, noting that the goal was "to finish strong and compete for every point."

The Gators delivered exactly that, sustaining their standard of play through the postseason and affirming their No. 1 ranking.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERITAS PREP

Veritas varsity football.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA ZUBA

Xavier's Nova Rodriguezcrespo, Ella Wadsworth, Chantel Newman, and Kennedy Frakes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA ZUBA

Xavier volleyball squad.

Arcadia volleyballers shine on international sands

By Alex Gross

After not dropping a single set in what was a breakout freshman season, Alitza Turley and Jade Smith decided to test their talents on the world stage. Traveling to San Juan, Puerto Rico, to compete in the Caribbean Beach Volleyball Championship, the duo placed third in their under-16 age group.

"There were a lot of different styles of volleyball that we saw," Jade said, noting the competition of countries like El Salvador and Italy. "I feel like it helped me see not just how different countries play, but also made us a lot better at communication."

Their 16-0 match record and 32-0 set record at Arcadia last year can be attributed to the chemistry the pair built through playing on the same club team. Alitza and Jade both joined RPM Sand four years ago, learning the intricacies of beach volleyball from Ryan Mariano, a former No. 1 ranked recruit out of high school.

"We already have that connection outside the sport," Alitza said. "It's just fun to be able to bring it over when we play together."

Make no mistake, this duo takes their version of "fun" extremely seriously.

"When the opportunity came to go to Puerto Rico and compete and not just represent RPM, but represent the United States, they were all over it," Coach Mariano said. "Those two have that 'put your head down and grind' mentality, and that's exactly what they did."

Interest in beach volleyball has exponentially grown in the Valley since the AIA introduced it as a sport in 2012. Many indoor athletes have transitioned to the sand, but some, like Jade, continue to juggle both sports.

"It's definitely different because the beach court is a little bit smaller, but it's still super hard because there are only two people compared to six, and it's hard to run in the sand," Alitza said.

With college recruitment looming on the horizon, the pair is still grinding out tournaments and college camps with their next steps in mind. Both Alitza and Jade have tailored their class schedules to end at lunch and allow them to train in the afternoons.

Jade, who recently won 4A Desert Sky Region Player of the Year and First Team honors for indoor volleyball, still isn't sure which variation of the sport she wants to pursue.

"I want to play both in college," she said. "Whether that's at the same time or splitting time, like two years and two years."

There might not be a better person to have in your corner throughout the recruitment process than Coach Mariano, whose RPM Sand has put over 100 athletes in college volleyball programs across the country.

"I would anticipate their career moving them into a Division 1 college," he said. "Where that is will be predicated on the decisions that they make that best fit their life, needs, wants, and aspirations for the future."

Balancing athletics and academics is a hereditary trait for the two. Both were raised in athletically inclined families, with Jade's dad inspiring her to follow in his footsteps in volleyball, and Alitza's sister, Vessa, pursuing professional tennis aspirations at San Diego State University (and recently winning the Mountain West Conference fall doubles title).

Perhaps the most exciting part of their young careers isn't their accomplishments, but their potential to grow as competitors. Alitza and Jade are ready to improve upon an undefeated record with a level of resolve and tenacity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREA SMITH

Alitza Turley and Jade Smith.

HOME FOR THE Holidays

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$7,250,000

3710 N. 48th Pl.
$1,400,000

8780 N. Arroya Grande Dr.
$1,950,000

4145 E. Campbell Ave.
$1,575,000

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Black Cat Coffeehouse

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The Dining Scoop

The holidays are here, and Valley restaurants, coffeehouses, and bakeries are decking the halls – and their menus – with festive flavors. From glittering cocktails to nostalgic desserts, here are a few spots to eat, drink, and be merry in December.

Black Cat Coffeehouse (4730 E. Indian School Road, Phoenix) is keeping things sweet and simple with peppermint bark mochas, eggnog chai, and a blended treat called Santa's Cookies – because sometimes, the best part of the holidays is found in a warm mug!

blackcatcoffeeaz.com

At **UnderTow** (3626 E. Indian School Road, Phoenix), visitors can enjoy limited-time twists on fan-favorite cocktails, including the Holiday Champagne Punch, a blend of Wheatley vodka, aperol, allspice, lemon, lime, spiced pineapple, and cranberry. Also on the menu is the Poquito Coquito, a Puerto Rican-inspired creation that blends creamy coconut, sweet spices, and rum for a festive twist on classic eggnog.

bartershake.com

Coffee lovers can find cheer at **Better Buzz** (717 E. Glendale Ave., Phoenix), where the menu is overflowing with cozy creations. Choose from the peppermint white mocha, toasted marshmallow cold brew, eggnog latte, snickerdoodle latte or go green with the peppermint matcha.

betterbuzzcoffee.com

The Henry (4455 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix) will feature a lineup of signature cocktails until December 30. Guests can enjoy offerings like the Whiskey & Doughnuts with Tincup bourbon, sweet vermouth and spiced apple, or the Spiced Pear Cosmopolitan made with Belvedere vodka, St. George pear liqueur, cranberry reduction and lime.

thehenryrestaurant.com

At **LON's Last Drop at the Hermosa** (5532 N. Palo Cristi Road, Paradise Valley), the signature Ornamentini is back to steal the spotlight. This drink is served in a shiny red ornament you pop open to pour – revealing a mix of Absolut Elyx vodka, house-made cranberry syrup, orange zest, vanilla, cinnamon, and fresh lemon.

azhideawaycollection.com

Over at **Fellow Osteria** (1455 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale), the holidays take an elegant, European turn with Le Belle, a pear cognac and amaretto cocktail that tastes like a winter walk through an orchard. Lemon and absinthe add brightness, while black tea and black lemon bitters bring a touch of earthy mystery.

fellowosteria.com

Wine Girl (4205 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale) is ringing in December with seasonal drinks, including the Mistletoe Mimosa Tree, a tower of six flutes filled with prosecco and cranberry juice, each garnished with a fresh cranberry. Guests can also enjoy it as a frozen espresso martini tree.

winegirl.com

Bar Blitzen at **Culinary Dropout** (5632 N. 7th St., Phoenix) will stick around until January 3. Guests can sip whimsical creations like the Espress Ho Ho Ho Martini with Gran Centenario reposado tequila or Three Olives vodka, Italian espresso liqueur, Spanish vanilla and spiced cold foam and the Dropout & Mrs. Mint with vanilla-infused Belvedere vodka, white chocolate, cream and peppermint schnapps. Signature dishes will be available, including the wagyu pigs in a blanket and BBQ pork belly nachos.

culinarydropout.com

32 Shea (10626 N. 32nd St., Phoenix) offers a trio of winter-ready creations: The caramel apple butter old fashioned blends Four Roses small batch bourbon with house-made caramel apple butter and warming bitters. The mint white chocolate espresso martini pairs vanilla vodka and espresso liqueur with white chocolate and a hint of mint. For a spirit-free option, the non-alcoholic sparkler shakes Ritual rum alternative with caramel apple butter, lemon, and apple cider, served over ice with a roasted cinnamon stick.

32shea.com

Nobu (7014 E. Camelback Road, Scottsdale) Bartender Robyn Kim's Tamarind Setsu Sour combines Macallan Sherry Cask 12-Year scotch with Pierre Ferrand Dry curacao, a Sudachi and lemon citrus blend, tamarind spiced agave syrup, and Fee Foam. Inspired by childhood memories of tamarindo candies, Kim crafted this elevated take on a scotch sour, using the Fee Foam to introduce a "snow element" that gives the drink a festive feel.

noburestaurants.com

Flaviar, a luxury spirits club, unveiled its 2025 advent calendar in partnership with Carry On (2 N. Central Ave., Phoenix), a cocktail bar known for its immersive, aviation-inspired experience. **Carry On** is offering a festive 1970s-themed Christmas flight experience until December 24, complete with a welcome cocktail and holiday treats. Guests can book standard table seating for $30 per person or upgrade to the $115 Captain's Club for an all-inclusive experience featuring three craft cocktails and a four-course light-bite menu.

flaviar.com or carryonphx.com

For a luxurious toast, **Mastro's** (6991 E. Camelback Road, Scottsdale) is offering its limited-edition Under the Mistletoe cocktail: a mix of muddled raspberries, rosemary, pomegranate syrup, lemon juice, and Rémy 1738 Cognac. Served on the rocks with a sugared rim and sprig of rosemary, it glimmers like freshly fallen snow.

mastrosrestaurants.com

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Mastro's

Blitzen's Bar at Omni Scottsdale Resort & Spa at Montelucia (4949 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale) transforms the Oasis Bar into a tinsel-trimmed winter wonderland. Now through January 11, guests can cozy up with festive sips like the Sleigh Ride, Naughty or Spice, and Espress-Ho Ho Martini, paired with snacks like the Nordic Nights Crunch or Santa's Secret Cookie Stash.

omnihotels.com

CHRISTMAS THINGS

For those planning a feast at home, **Common Ground Culinary** is baking up crave-worthy holiday pies, from pumpkin and key lime to butterscotch pecan and chocolate mousse. Orders open December 1 and run through December 21, with pickup on December 23 and 24. In Scottsdale, all pie orders go through Sweet Provisions, either in person or online.

sweetprovisionsaz.com

Miracle Mile Deli (4433 N. 16th St., Phoenix) is bringing back its holiday meals for Christmas and Hanukkah. Family feasts serve six and include roasted turkey or brisket, classic sides, and a whole pie, while individual dinners and à la carte desserts are also available. Hanukkah celebrations run December 13-22 with favorites like latkes, challah rolls, and matzoh ball soup. Orders for Christmas pickup must be placed by December 20 for pickup on December 24.

miraclemiledeli.com

Chompie's (9301 E. Shea Blvd., Scottsdale) is also keeping spirits bright with its Chanukah and Christmas To-Go Packages. For Chanukah, choose between the brisket dinner or roast chicken dinner, complete with challah, latkes, matzo ball soup, roasted carrots, and cookies. The restaurant also offers an in-house dinner from December 14-22. For Christmas, choose from traditional or basic dinner packages, each serving up to 15 guests and featuring oven-roasted turkey, sides, and fresh-baked pies.

chompies.com

Phoenix City Grille (5816 N. 16th St., Phoenix) celebrates Christmas Eve with a prix fixe menu. Start with choices like roasted butternut squash soup, crab cake, or beet salad, then move to entrées like prime rib, buttermilk chicken, or pan-seared Chula bluenose bass. End on a sweet note with apple empanadas, turtle cheesecake, or espresso pot de crème. The three-course meal is $85 per person, with add-ons priced separately.

phoenixcitygrille.com

WHAT'S NEW?

Rhinestone beverages are the brainchild of Dustin Johnson, a Scottsdale native looking for a flavorful drink that "keeps the night going" without calories, carbs or tomorrow's hangover. With 0.0% ABV, gluten-free brews and a team of seasoned beverage experts, Rhinestone wants to "redefine" non-alcoholic drinking.

drinkrhinestone.com

Heritage Kitchen + Cocktails (10121 E. Bell Road, Scottsdale) is the newest concept from Eric J. Greenwald, Mark Goldberg, and Executive Chef Christopher Brugman, blending the flavors of Southern Italy and Spain with seafood, meats, and seasonal produce. Brugman's Piatta – a dough perfected over 14 years and baked in an eight-foot hearth – anchors a menu that offers comfort food and small plates like burrata with heirloom tomatoes, melon with pistachio, and roasted cauliflower with brown butter.

heritagescottsdale.com

In Old Town Scottsdale, **Pinyon** (7363 E. Scottsdale Mall, Scottsdale) brings coastal Mediterranean cooking to life inside a reimagined space crafted by Aline Architecture, Social Design Studio, and MCI Builders. Its centerpiece is a Josper Grill, a live-fire charcoal oven from Barcelona that infuses dishes like whole roasted turbot, prime flat iron steak, and a signature porterhouse with smoke and depth.

pinyonrestaurant.com

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A Festivus (meal) for the rest of us!

Plant-based Wellness

BY MIRIAM HAHN

Owner of YouCare-SelfCare, a private wellness practice specializing in plant-based lifestyle and disease prevention. youcare-selfcare.com

If you grew up watching *Seinfeld*, you know Festivus isn't just a quirky subplot, it's a whole mood. Dreamed up as an antidote to holiday frenzy, Festivus trades tinsel and stress for laughter and simplicity. There's the plain aluminum pole, the "Feats of Strength," and the unforgettable "Airing of Grievances." Because sometimes, the best way to spread holiday cheer is to say exactly what's on your mind.

This month, I'm bringing the spirit of Festivus to the kitchen with three plant-based dishes inspired by the show's most memorable moments. A savory lentil loaf reimagines the classic "meat" loaf dinner: hearty, savory, and satisfying. A roasted cauliflower and butternut squash soup gives a nod to the Soup Nazi episode, comforting, creamy, and worth shouting "No soup for you!" And the holiday salad with citrus dressing takes its cue from Elaine's "big salad;" colorful, fresh, and unapologetically abundant.

Whether you celebrate Festivus, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza or just a quiet night in, these recipes are here to make your December a little more delicious, a little less stressful, and a lot more fun. And if you happen to air a few grievances while the lentil loaf bakes, well, Festivus wouldn't be complete without it.

Join my monthly membership for printable recipes, health videos and live Zoom cooking classes – fall classes are available now! Only $10 a month!

Holiday salad with citrus dressing *Serves 6*

• INGREDIENTS •

- 1 large box (10 oz.) of spring greens
- ½ cup shaved almonds, toasted
- 1 can drained mandarin oranges
- ½ cup pomegranate seeds
- 1 large avocado sliced
- ¼ cup sliced red onion
- Optional: 1 cup white beans (makes it heartier!)

• DRESSING •

- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 2 tbsp. diced shallots
- 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp. maple syrup
- 1 tbsp. stone ground mustard
- ¾ tsp. pink salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ¼ tsp. garlic granules

• DIRECTIONS •

1. ***To toast the almonds, place in a dry skillet on medium heat for six to eight minutes.***
2. ***Give the spring greens a rough chop, then put in a large bowl with the other salad ingredients.***
3. ***Mix up dressing in a small jar.***
4. ***Right before serving, add half of the dressing to the bowl and toss. Add more dressing if needed.***

Savory lentil loaf *Serves 8*

• INGREDIENTS •

- 3 tbsp. ground
- 2 cups cooked lentils
- ½ onion, finely diced
- 1 red pepper, finely diced
- 2 small carrots, finely diced
- 1 celery stalk, finely diced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tsp. each: fresh sage, fresh rosemary, and Italian seasoning
- 1 ½ tsp. pink salt
- 1 tsp. each: cumin, garlic granules, onion granules
- ½ tsp. pepper
- ¾ cup rolled oats
- ½ cup oat flour
- 5 tbsp. ketchup, divided
- 1 tbsp. apple cider vinegar

• DIRECTIONS •

1. ***Preheat oven to 350F.***
2. ***Mix ground flax with water and set aside.***
3. ***Add 1½ cups of the lentils to a food processor and pulse to break down. Mix with the remaining lentils.***
4. ***Sauté the onion, red pepper, carrots, celery and garlic for five minutes. Add fresh herbs and spices and cook another minute.***
5. ***Add the vegetables to the lentils and add the oats, oat flour, two tbsp. of ketchup and the flax mixture. Stir.***
6. ***Fill a loaf pan that is lined with parchment. Stir the remaining ketchup with the vinegar and brush it on top of the loaf. Bake 50 minutes.***

Roasted cauliflower and butternut squash soup *Serves 6*

• INGREDIENTS •

- 1 carton chopped butternut squash
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 cup cauliflower florets
- 1 tsp. dried thyme + salt and pepper
- 2 ½ cups vegetable broth
- 2 tbsp. white miso paste
- ¼ cup chopped scallions + more for garnish
- 1 cup canned coconut milk
- 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar
- ½ tsp. salt

• DIRECTIONS •

1. ***Preheat oven to 400F.***
2. ***Add the butternut squash, red pepper, garlic, and cauliflower to a baking sheet. Spray with cooking spray and shake on the thyme, salt, and pepper.***
3. ***Bake for 45 minutes, stirring halfway.***
4. ***Add the cooked vegetables to a blender with the broth, miso paste, and scallions.***
5. ***Blend until smooth, then pour back into the pot.***
6. ***Now add the coconut milk, balsamic vinegar, and salt. Simmer for 10 minutes and serve. Season with salt and pepper to taste.***

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DID YOU KNOW? CHRISTMAS MOVIES

HOW MANY HOURS?

FOUR *Jim Carrey's transformation into the Grinch took over four hours each morning in prosthetics and animatronic facial pieces, and the 60-pound costume took 90 minutes to remove each night.*

To nail the role, he lost 20 pounds, stayed in character on set, and improvised many of the film's funniest moments (cut, print, check the gate, moving on!). Weeks of studying Dr. Seuss illustrations and practicing exaggerated expressions helped him bring the mischievous green icon to life, while motion-capture and prosthetics preserved his signature physical comedy.

HOW MUCH?

$514M

The 2018 animated The Grinch *tops the list of highest grossing Christmas movies, earning approximately $514.6 million worldwide.*

On the opposite end, Santa Claus: The Movie *(1985), only earned only about $23.7 million in the U.S., failing to recoup its estimated $30-50 million budget and earning a reputation as one of the biggest holiday box-office disappointments.*

HOW MANY STREAMS?

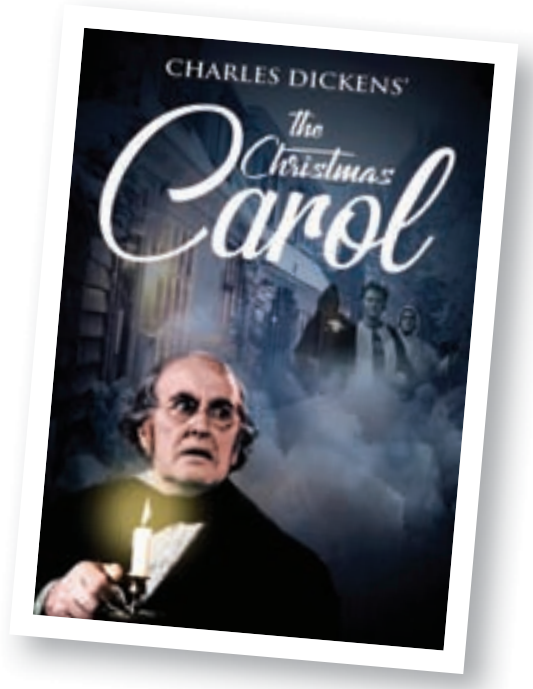
1.5B

Frozen's soundtrack, especially "Let It Go," was a massive commercial phenomenon. The song alone has been streamed over 1.5 billion times worldwide on platforms like YouTube and Spotify, and the soundtrack sold over 10 million copies globally – making it one of the best-selling animated film soundtracks of all time.

WHAT YEAR?

1949

The first Christmas movie specifically made for television is widely considered to be The Christmas Carol, *which debuted on CBS in 1949. Early TV broadcasts were often live adaptations, and this one is credited as the first feature-length Christmas story produced for the small screen rather than theaters.*



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DID YOU KNOW? CHRISTMAS MOVIES

It's a Wonderful Life *almost didn't happen. The 1946 film nearly went unmade because the studio was worried audiences wouldn't respond to the sensitive storyline.*

Before starring in **The Santa Clause**, *Tim Allen was considered for the live-action remake of Miracle on 34th Street, but the role went to Richard Attenborough.*

Home Alone *was inspired by a true story. John Hughes, the writer, drew inspiration from his own childhood fear of being left home alone.*

The Nightmare Before Christmas *took over three years to make, and animators had to move characters slightly frame by frame for over 100,000 frames.*

Disney's **Mickey's Christmas Carol** *reused the melody of* "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" *in multiple character songs.*

In **Elf**, *filming the snowy scenes in New York caused real disruptions, and the production team sometimes had to shovel through real city streets.*

Polls show that over 60 percent of fans consider **Die Hard** *a Christmas movie. For the 30th anniversary in 2018, the film was shown in over 700 theaters across the U.S.*

The 24-hour marathon of **A Christmas Story** *began in 1997, when TNT ran it from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day.*

Miracle on 34th Street *helped cement the modern image of Santa Claus, influenced partly by Coca-Cola's 1930s depictions of a jolly, red-suited Santa.*

When the limited-edition Talkboy hit stores after the release of **Home Alone 2: Lost in New York**, *parents camped out overnight, some even for days, just to get one for their kids.*

The Polar Express *was one of the first major Hollywood movies to be made entirely using performance-capture technology. Tom Hanks played the conductor, the father, the hobo, and Santa, all through motion capture.*

WORD SEARCH

F	H	C	T	Z	S	T	K	A	N	M	Q	S	S	F	G	Y	J	A	B
R	O	I	K	S	Z	J	R	W	M	O	T	D	N	A	I	B	K	Y	Z
Q	G	J	Z	R	M	L	Z	V	D	H	O	M	E	A	L	O	N	E	Z
Y	R	P	J	S	R	E	T	A	E	H	T	V	C	V	X	C	F	E	C
K	I	Z	D	Y	A	Y	M	K	A	B	S	I	E	G	T	H	B	N	R
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J	Z	F	H	I	R	F	E	N	I	A	G	H	T	O	U	M	G	P	A
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U	B	B	T	M	N	R	X	B	L	Z	P	X	D	O	Y	X	E	C	U
M	L	L	K	G	U	H	W	F	E	Z	I	Z	N	H	U	N	X	S	D
W	R	I	X	U	O	Q	P	N	H	I	X	A	O	E	N	U	T	I	D
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L	K	V	E	I	V	O	M	H	G	P	C	O	J	Y	D	G	J	J	H

BRUCE
CHRISTMAS
DICKENS
ELF
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GRINCH
HOME ALONE
LIFE
MACAULAY
MIRACLE
MOVIE
POLAR
RUDOLPH
THEATERS
WONDERFUL

SAY WHAT?

BLINDED BY THE LIGHTS

If you've ever watched **National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation** *and wondered how Clark Griswold's lights could possibly work, you're not alone. Can a home really support 250 strands of 100-bulb "imported Italian twinkle lights" without catastrophic results? In the movie, the lights cause chaos: the power meter spins wildly and the power station even taps an auxiliary nuclear generator. One Redditor sat down to do the math so we don't have to:*

Looking at the power meter itself, calculations from screenshots suggest Clark's display draws 547 megawatts – over 400,000 times the energy a typical modern U.S. home uses. That's roughly the output of a small nuclear power plant. Assuming each bulb is a 5W C6 size and wired in parallel across several branches, the current would exceed 200 times the circuit breaker limit.

In reality, the breakers would trip immediately, or the bulbs wouldn't even glow properly. Clark bypasses them, allowing full power to flow, which in theory would turn every wire – likely standard 14-gauge copper – in the house into a dangerous source of heat. Within fractions of a second, the wires would reach temperatures far above copper's melting point, ultimately vaporizing and causing a catastrophic electrical fire. In short, Clark's dream light show would literally set the house on fire!

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The wonder of Christmas: Do you hear what I hear?

With times what they are, it has become difficult to separate the holidays and adequately savor each of them on their own merit. Gone are the days when it felt like an expanse of time separated each month. As July rolled around, fall decorations appeared on store shelves, followed by Halloween, Thanksgiving and then Christmas. It became natural to unconsciously exclaim to total strangers how emotions as well as recipes and decorations had drifted in a myriad of different directions and had only now solidified into focusing on one holiday: Christmas.

Christmas is so much more than a word or day or date. It's a season, a feeling, a spirit that's as infectious as laughter. As poinsettias begin to appear in place of pumpkins on the front porch, and oranges and pomegranates replace bowls of fruit on the kitchen counter, the scent of evergreen and simmering cider quickly fills the air. There are so many strands of our lives coming together to unlock the storehouse of memories.

The Christmas tree represents the power of nature to regenerate, flourish and encourage us to embrace the same spirit of renewal and growth in our own lives. Each branch links family, friends, and loved ones together. Whether fresh cut or artificial, choosing the perfect tree uplifts your spirits. When you see it, you'll know "this is it!" Decorating a tree that has no theme offers a canvas for creativity. Classic elegance or whimsical and quirky, each style infuses the tree with character and charm.

The tree doesn't need to be color-coordinated. No matter its shape or size, it's still beautiful with its cherished mismatched ornaments that showcase heartfelt moments of our lives, traditions and story. The allure of heirloom ornaments lies in their ability to transform a simple tree into a tapestry of personal history. They bridge cherished times, reminding us of people who are no longer present, and often take us back to the wonder of our childhood. The age-old psychological phenomenon of nostalgia awakens that sensory cue that triggers a strong, emotional memory. The beauty of hanging each ornament is transient and timeless, in essence, turning the Christmas tree into a visual scrapbook. When the magic is felt, the tree becomes a festive centerpiece.

Sensory overload is inescapable at this time of the year. There is nothing grander than a tree that lights up a home and engages the senses. As with my desire to gaze into a roaring fireplace to witness 'fireflies' rise from the flames, the tradition of sitting next to a Christmas tree watching the lights dance on the walls, reflect on the tile floors, and bathe the room in happiness comforts me. The tree provides moments to pause and celebrate life's blessings.

Our homes magically transform into wonderlands and ornaments act as storytellers whispering tales of hope and joy. Emotions become untethered when Christmas ornaments are received. They're like a little memory in a box and for that reason I rejoice in giving them. They're more than mere trinkets, they become powerful "memory makers." Holding an ornament causes me to pause, reflect, and instantly engrave an emotion to a specific moment in time.

As a child, I was entrusted to unwrap my grandmother's antique ornaments. The anticipation had built up and it felt like I was unwrapping my Christmas presents. Prayer, intention, and mindfulness transformed this act into something profound. I held each ornament up to the light to admire its shine and intricacy, and then carefully selected the perfect place on the tree to hang it. Each ornament found a way of taking me on a magic carpet ride. I was fascinated by the grandeur of our Christmas tree. I gazed in awe at this 'towering' evergreen that stood proudly in front of the picture window. Large multi-colored lights, glistening ornaments, silver tinsel, and soft red velvet bows were a symbol of love, unity, and celebration.

Thyme in My Kitchen

BY SHERRY KLUSMAN

thyme.in.my.kitchen

Removing belongings from my childhood home where so many memories resided was heartbreaking. Every corner was filled with the lives of the two women I thought the world of. Their books, ribbon-tied air-mail letters written during wars long ago, porcelain knick-knacks, stationery and fountain pens, cookware – everything had its place. I could visualize mom hiding Easter eggs in the bushes, could taste root beer floats being enjoyed on the glider in the backyard, heard soft voices and smelled the aroma of chop suey being prepared in the kitchen, and saw myself sitting at the dining room table. Yes, even the Christmas tree came into view.

My reality saw belongings tucked away in clearly marked boxes. Trash! Sell! Goodwill! Keep! Somehow my grandmother's antique tree ornaments made their way onto the Goodwill pile and got whisked away. It was only through the grace of God days later that I questioned where the box labeled "1540 antique Christmas ornaments" had been placed. Panic stole the breath from my lungs as every movement got retraced. Goodwill was called, and an individual listened to my tale of despair.

Time and effort were needed to search the building and within hours I received a call saying that the disintegrating, tattered and taped box had been located. Blinding tears escaped my eyes when the words on the box were read out loud. Fortunately, no speeding

tickets were incurred driving to Goodwill's front door.

Since that day I have come to believe that Christmas ornaments do "speak" to you. Have you ever paused to listen to the stories they carry? Being young, questions never got asked, yet to this day, I hear their voices and recognize that these ornaments held a cherished place in my family's holiday décor. This box wasn't filled with mere decorations; they were personal artifacts reflecting the soul of prior generations, shared family prayers, moments of gratitude, and the good intentions held in the hearts of others.

Spheres representing perfection and eternity, or apples, reminding us of the original sin, and bells which symbolize the call to bring lost sheep back into the fold. Other symbols like doves, acorns, candy canes, holly, mistletoe, the humble pinecone, wreaths, fruit, evergreens, Christmas carols, Santa Clause, stockings, gifts, and candles remind us that we are to be a light to others. Sweet Christmas cookies, breads, pastries and mouth-watering meals contribute to the enchantment of the season.

Writing this article transported me back to visions of my grandmother making her classic version of stuffing for Christmas. Her recipe comes to mind after having watched the process year after year. A roasting pan heaped with varieties of hearty torn apart bread always found its way into the laundry room where it was covered with a linen cloth and allowed to dry naturally. Delectable herbs were added, followed by sautéed onions and celery.

Years ago, I discovered the savory taste of chestnuts, which have been popular around Christmas for a long time but before that, were consumed for their nutritional value in places along the Mediterranean Sea where grains would not grow. Before they became a Christmas staple in the States, they were commonly consumed in Portugal and Modena, Italy. They were one of the most popular ingredients in American dishes throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and for good reason: the eastern seaboard was covered in chestnut trees.

This was '*the*' tree of early America and there is tremendous nostalgia around them. Chestnuts are the edible fruit of the tree and in parts of the country where they grow, they're ripe for harvesting in late autumn through November.

Curing the nuts after harvest converts their starches into sugars, which intensifies their natural sweetness. Dried, canned, jarred, chestnuts work just as well in most recipes. The flavor is not overly sugary, making them versatile for both sweet and savory dishes. When cooked, chestnuts release a pleasantly aromatic, earthy, and nutty flavor.

Their high starch content gives them a satisfying, dense chewiness that's slightly meaty with a texture that's closer to a sweet potato – luxuriously soft, buttery, and creamy. They are loaded with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants making them super healthy. Chestnut stuffing was the first recipe published in the United States in 1772 and has now become the flavorful next generation in my grandmother's recipe. Enjoy!

Chestnut herb stuffing

INGREDIENTS

- 1 16 oz. combination Italian and French bread, crust removed, diced into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter (plus 5 tbsp. melted)
- 1 cup celery, small dice
- 1 cup sweet onion, small dice
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. snipped chives
- 1 tbsp. sage, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. thyme, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. marjoram, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. rosemary, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. tarragon, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. basil, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. nutmeg
- 1 small Fuji apple, grated (reserve liquid)
- 2 cups homemade chicken broth
- 2 eggs (lightly beaten)
- 4 oz. heavy cream
- ¼ cup dried cranberries, plumped
- ¼ cup dry sherry (do not use cooking sherry)
- ½ pound chestnuts, medium dice
- Minced garlic (measure with your heart)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven 350 degrees.

2. Butter 9x13" casserole dish.

3. In a small bowl, soak cranberries in sherry.

4. In a five-quart saucepan, melt three tbsp. butter on medium heat. Add onions, celery, and garlic. Sauté with salt and pepper until translucent. Remove from heat.

5. In a large bowl add diced bread. Add herbs and blend. Add grated apple followed by chicken broth, beaten eggs, heavy cream, cranberries, sherry, chestnuts, remaining melted butter. Mix thoroughly. Bake covered for 40-45 minutes until golden-brown. Remove foil last 10 minutes for crisper top.

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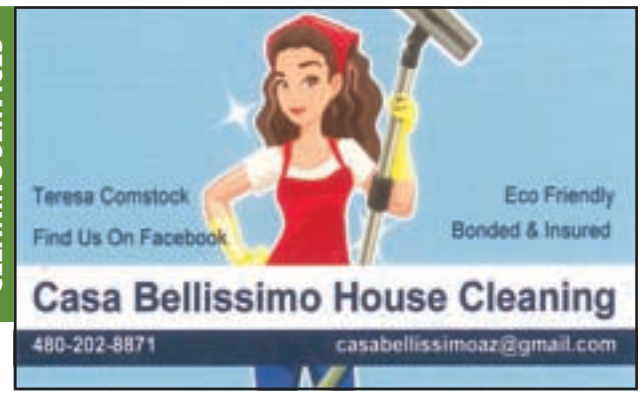

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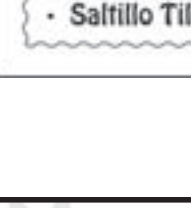

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Titan Times
VOL. 3 NO. 2 DECEMBER 2025
From the students of Arcadia High School

Wake Up in Vegas: Arcadia's 2025 Winter Dance Show

By Tatum Klock

Get ready to "Wake Up in Vegas," because Arcadia's annual winter dance show is right around the corner. This December 3 and 4, Arcadia's Dance Department will take the stage for the biggest show the school has ever seen. Themed to channel the excitement and extravagance of Sin City, this year's show promises a night of bold, captivating performances.

"Every single year, we try to go bigger," Dance Teacher Tracy Puddy said. "Why not do it with Vegas?"

This year, she and the team are certainly going big, pulling out all the stops to make these upcoming performances truly showstopping. From expressive choreography to eye-catching costumes, the dancers are guaranteed to be nothing short of spectacular. And just like Las Vegas productions, Arcadia's show will be complete with brilliant lighting, colorful confetti, balloons, and so much more.

Arcadia's dance program is full of technique, rigor, and creativity. It includes a wide range of dance styles, such as Latin fusion, hip-hop, and jazz – all of which will be showcased in the upcoming performance.

The dancers not only have an impressive range of abilities; they also learn everything from choreographing their own pieces to preventing injuries. This makes Arcadia's dance program unique because it provides students with everything they need to be successful, well-rounded dancers.

When asked what she was most proud of regarding the program, Puddy said: "When I see them happy and shining and feeling proud of themselves, that's what makes me proud."

Countless hours of choreographing, rehearsing, and refining go into these shows, and it's certainly reflected on stage. The hard work and dedication of the dancers certainly shows in every piece. Arcadia dance is a huge part of the community that all students, staff, and families enjoy experiencing.

PHOTO: LOLA LUNSWAY

Dance teacher Tracy Puddy talking to her Dance 3 class.

Titan Times' very own Francesca Mena, Leila Bender, Braya McCormick and Ana Redzic will be on stage giving the performance of a lifetime, so don't miss the chance to see them and other amazing dancers in action this winter during a night of dazzling lights and even more dazzling performances.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT: MS. CAMERON ADAMS

Arcadia High's new math teacher, Ms. Adams, is loving her first semester as a teacher, but she said the transition from being a student at a desk to an educator leading a classroom is not easy. She's still trying to find a routine that works for her, but her students think she's doing an excellent job!

Adams has learned to navigate a classroom, connect with and support her students, and keep up with her work. Luckily, this is not an adjustment she's had to make on her own.

Cameron Adams

"I'd be lying if I didn't say I leaned on the math department very heavily," Adams said. Last year, as many Arcadia students fondly remember, she was Mr. T's student teacher. Mr. T is the head of the math department. With this established relationship, Adams has continued to lean on him as a mentor.

The process of being a teacher has been quite the journey, one that Adams is still growing in every day. She said she finds herself implementing skills she developed in the classroom into everyday life, such as being more assertive and not being afraid to speak up when she has a problem. Arcadia is so lucky to have Ms. Adams, and we can't wait to see what her plans hold.

– Braya McCormick

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