

MARCH 2026 ~ SPECIAL ART EDITION

MARICOPA LIFESTYLE

Magazine

*Dancing
in the desert*

Meet Maricopa's Instructors

Shaping
our future

State of our
community

Where We Are, What's
Working, and What Needs
Attention

Spotlight

Maricopa's Rising
Artists & Creatives

Special Edition

Art of Maricopa

CARLOS JIMENEZ

ARTIST | DESIGNER | EDUCATOR

INSIDE

-The City's Growing Art & Culture

-Kim Yarber - CEO/Delicious VibeZ

-AARP AZ Supports Maricopa Music/Arts

WWW.MARICOPALIFESTYLEMAGAZINE.COM



Chrystal O'Jon
Publisher/Owner

FROM THE PUBLISHER

“

This issue endeavors to be a celebration of culture, creativity, and community. As we honor our Local art community.

Stay inspired, stay connected.

”



FEATURING ART BY: CARLOS JIMENEZ



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Artist, Designer & Educator

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MARICOPA DESERT MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL IS BACK!

2nd Annual Maricopa Music & Arts Fest Presented by AARP AZ



LOCAL ART 14

MARICOPA'S OWN CREATIVES

Our own Maricopa Creatives
Featuring your favorite local artists!

DANCE

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DSPA GEMS: DANCING IN THE DESERT

Meet the DSPA Team & DSPA Dancers!



ART SPOTLIGHT

CARLOS JIMENEZ
ARTIST | DESIGNER | EDUCATOR



Creativity has the power to shape communities, inspire confidence, and leave a lasting impression long after the first glance. For Arizona native Carlos Jimenez, that creative impact has been unfolding for more than 25 years through art, design, and education.

A respected artist, graphic designer, and educator, Jimenez has built a career marked by both talent and purpose. His artwork can be found in homes and businesses across the United States, and his growing recognition has earned him the distinction of being an official artist of the Phoenix Suns. His work is displayed at the Mortgage Matchup Center and has also been featured on television programs, news segments, radio shows, and in national art magazines.

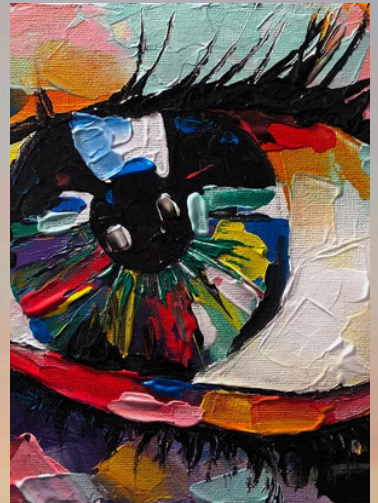
But Jimenez's creative influence extends far beyond the canvas. As a graphic designer, he has created logos and branding materials for more than 200 businesses around the world. His experience includes serving as a former graphic designer for GoDaddy, and he continues to help businesses strengthen their visual identity through professional creative services. His ability to blend artistic vision with practical branding has made him a valuable resource for entrepreneurs and organizations seeking to stand out.

“IMPERFECTIONS WILL MAKE YOUR ART PERFECT.”

-CARLOS JIMENEZ

Equally inspiring is his commitment to the next generation of artists. As an educator, Jimenez has helped more than 1,000 aspiring artists over the past seven years discover their artistic voice and develop the confidence to make their own mark in the art world. His passion for mentorship has guided students to win numerous national art competitions. In March 2025, two of his students received honorable mention in a worldwide art competition that included more than 1,500 participants from several countries—a notable achievement that reflects the quality of his instruction and encouragement.

Whether through fine art, business branding, or arts education, Carlos Jimenez continues to show that creativity is not only about producing something beautiful—it is also about leaving a meaningful impact.



FEATURED ART BY: CARLOS JIMENEZ

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DANCING IN THE DESERT

Sugar Plum Team / December 2025 / Photo Credit: David Garza

The stage came alive at the Maricopa Performing Arts Center as young performers from Sugar Plum Tea brought elegance, energy, and heart to Dancing in the Desert. Hosted by DSPA Gems, this beautiful community showcase highlighted the power of nonprofit arts programming in Maricopa, Arizona.

Founded in 2009, DSPA Gems continues to enrich our city by providing opportunities for youth to explore dance, performance, and creative expression. From vibrant costumes to joyful choreography, the evening was a reminder that the arts are thriving right here in our desert community.

Bravo to the dancers, directors, families, and supporters who make events like this possible — and to the passionate leaders behind DSPA Gems who continue investing in the next generation of artists.

*Hidden
Gems of
Maricopa*

“My daughters love DSPA! They grown as dancers and people in our years here. The teachers are supportive and helpful. We are so thankful that we found DSPA!”

5-Star Google review
from DSPA Gems Google
page from Parent

Meet the TEAM DSPA

Desert Sun Performing Arts

gems




Kathaline Wagner

President and Board Member



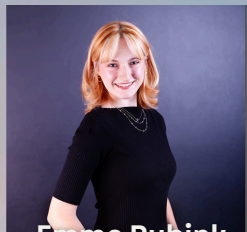
Shannon Wallace-Soto

Board Member

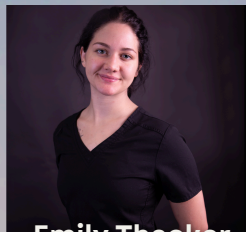
Founded in 2009, DSPA Gems, Inc. aims to enrich the Maricopa community through the arts. Our three main goals are community outreach, providing dance opportunities to our special needs population and offering tuition assistance to families who cannot afford dance education.



Alyce Laydon



Emma Rubink



Emily Thacker



Amy Rubink



Ceylan Gentilella



Vince Thacker



Velaine Jolle



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STATE OF OUR COMMUNITY

WHERE WE ARE, WHAT'S WORKING, AND WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

A FAMILY-FRIENDLY LOOK AT LIFE IN MARICOPA

Maricopa is a city in motion. With families, schools, businesses, and services evolving rapidly, it's important for residents to understand what's happening right here at home. This snapshot of the state of our community breaks down trends, challenges, and bright spots in clear, everyday language.

Family Takeaway:

Growth offers opportunity, but thoughtful planning is key so that families don't feel overwhelmed by change.



What's Working

Maricopa is one of the fastest-growing cities in Arizona, with an estimated population of over 76,000 in 2024, up roughly 30% from the 2020 Census. That growth brings new energy, more local businesses, and added services for families and workers.

What Needs Attention

Rapid growth also means pressure on roads, utilities, and services. While the pace has slowed to a more manageable rate than in the past, planning for future needs—like schools, parks, and infrastructure—remains essential.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS & FAMILY LIFE

What's Working

Maricopa's median age is around 36 years, and many households are family-oriented. The community is diverse and growing, with a strong sense of neighborly spirit.

What Needs Attention

As more people arrive, demand for community resources—like after-school programs, senior services, and youth opportunities—grows. Continued investment and community involvement will be essential to meet these needs.

Family Takeaway:

The mix of generations and backgrounds makes Maricopa a vibrant place, but services need to grow alongside population.

Article Sources:

<https://www.maricopa-az.gov/our-city/populations-demographics>.



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Author: Ronald Smith

maricopaseniorliving.org

Technology, Trust, and AI Ronald Smith's Perspective for Seniors

Where is AI currently applied? Easier to ask where it is not! Those of you still engaged in earning an income should be very aware and look to prepare yourself to be engaged. The more you know, the more you can benefit both in your personal competence and, frankly, your efficiency. AI is really a great tool to gather information and pose scenario questions. Learning how to phrase your questions is becoming a critical skill set. It is an artform!

Every computer browser as an associated AI tool. For fun and learning, try it. Ask a question . . . this is similar but not your Father's Google. Check the results. Then modify your question and ask it again. Modify question components like time, special conditions, how you want it organized. Keep checking the results against your expectations. You will start to get some specific feelings about your expectations. Now ask for conclusions, recommendations, or opinions. Like I said . . . this is not your Father's Google.

Another tool that is handy is AI's ability to summarize content for a quicker read and analysis. Again, included in your browser. Now this is very handy, but it is where my skepticism comes into play. Read a couple of articles and then read the corresponding AI summaries. The AI filters might be different than yours! Are you comfortable with the AI summary? The AI summary may not match your opinion . . . is that helpful to you?

Perhaps. What is factual and what is a summary? Which biases were present, and which were absent? Would you accept the summary? Would you trust these summaries in the future?

My point is to have expectations and to evaluate them against the AI tools so that you can learn how you best want to utilize the generated output. Surprisingly, I taught this same concept 50 years ago when we were learning to read computer reports! We needed to learn to evaluate our expectations against the actual results. We should not necessarily accept results simply because they were computer generated. Discover how to maximize AI's benefits.

**"MOST PEOPLE USE AI LIKE A FANCY
TYPEWRITER. THE REAL POWER?
GETTING IT TO GIVE YOU ADVICE AND
IDEAS YOU NEVER HAD ON YOUR OWN".
- KIM KOMANDO**

A warning from Kim Komando - Microsoft's Windows update KB5077181 is trapping people in endless boot loops! The fix is to uninstall the update or wait for the upgraded fix from Microsoft. Kim Komando, a Phoenix resident, does an excellent job of helping us survive technology with her website: www.komando.com and her FREE newsletters.

Notice: She will try to entice you with some good "deals" along the way to help pay the bills. That is your choice.

Finally, I would like to continue my monthly recommendations to try out Senior Planet from AARP at the following address: Welcome to Senior Planet - Senior Planet from AARP This is a great place to learn and utilize some of the best technology resources available to seniors.

MHS DECA from classroom to *Command Center*



Students Step Into Real-World Leadership at the Maricopa Desert Music & Arts Festival

When most people attend a major music and arts festival, they see the stage lights, the headliners, the vendors, and the applause.

What they don't see? The students behind the scenes learning how a professional production operates.

At this year's Maricopa Desert Music & Arts Festival, DECA students from Maricopa High School are doing more than volunteering — they are being mentored inside a structured, executive-level event environment. And that matters.

The Festival operates under a clearly defined executive structure: — with dedicated departments for logistics, production, sponsorship, choir operations, vendor management, security, and artist relations. That structure creates something rare for students: A live business laboratory.

The Teacher Behind the Transformation

A strong student program relies on dedicated teachers like **Bernadette Russoniello**, who prioritize exposure over excuses. DECA leadership actively integrates students through various initiatives, including volunteer sign-up systems, custom promo codes for ticket sales, training days, content creation with Canva, and parent communication channels. This approach promotes coordinated and strategic participation, rather than passive volunteering.



Mentorship in Motion

Students are receiving training for the Maricopa Desert Music & Arts Festival, covering compliance with volunteer hours, position mapping, T-shirt distribution, rehearsals, and communication tools. A volunteer pack with maps and emergency exit info will also be created. This training fosters responsibility, accountability, and operational awareness, vital skills for the business world.

OUR OWN MARICOPA CREATIVES

Starting this year our quarterly will spotlight local creatives whose work is shaping Maricopa's evolving cultural voice across art, design, music, craft, and innovation.



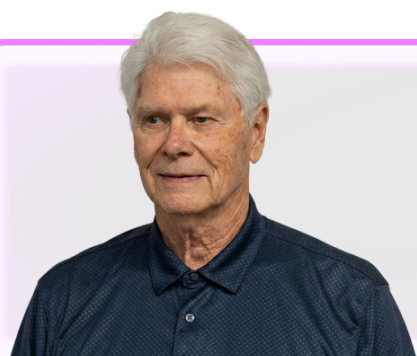
Meet Mariana Lass

Once, a curious girl named Mariana viewed the world with wonder, inspiring her journey through school and diverse cultures. Now a Maricopa-based digital creator and founder of Mariana Lass Designs, she embodies storytelling and meaningful creativity. Mariana's work in creation, teaching, and mentoring young artists reflects her passion, courage, and lifelong dedication to art.



Meet Pamela Thielen

Pamela is a Maricopa, Arizona-based acrylic artist and owner-operator of Pamela Thielen Fine Art. She describes her work as acrylic painting that uses the techniques of an oil painter, giving her pieces a distinct look and style. Pamela is active in the local arts community, sharing and exhibiting her work in Maricopa, and has also used her art to support charitable causes, including fundraising efforts for animal rescue organizations through her "Gallivanting Gurt" art platform.



Meet Russell Frank

Russell is a Maricopa, Arizona-based artist and creator behind Russell Frank Pastels and Pots. He describes himself as a pastel and ceramic artist, and his work includes both pastel artwork and fired pottery, which he shares through his artist page and albums such as "Pastel Pictures" and "Available Fired Pottery." Russell is active in sharing work for viewing and sale, and his creative practice reflects a hands-on focus on both color and craftsmanship.



Meet Simone Huskey

Once upon a time, in a growing arts community in Maricopa, there was an artist whose work spoke in color, light, and feeling. Simone Huskey has become part of the local creative circle, sharing her art and appearing in community gallery spaces alongside other area artists. Her work reflects the quiet confidence of someone who sees beauty in everyday scenes and turns it into something people can pause and feel.

OUR OWN MARICOPA CREATIVES

Maricopa's creative scene continues to grow through artists and makers who bring fresh perspectives, imagination, and talent to our community. This quarterly feature celebrates the voices helping shape Maricopa's cultural future.



Meet Brittany Lee

Brittany Lee is the artist of Desert Studio Art Co., blending painting, handmade projects, and community art. Her expressive style reflects imagination and daily life. Engaging with the community via social media and events, she serves as Secretary for Maricopa Friends of the Arts, supporting local arts and promoting accessible creativity.



Meet Lori McDonald

Lori McDonald, the artist of Seascapes & Shells, creates resin seascapes and shell décor that capture ocean beauty for desert homes. Her artwork combines shimmer, texture, and movement using fluid art techniques and natural materials. Known for her calming style, Lori blends coastal aesthetics with handcrafted artistry. Besides visual art, she is skilled in baking and writing. Through social media and her shop, she connects with customers and fellow creatives, enriching Arizona's artistic community.

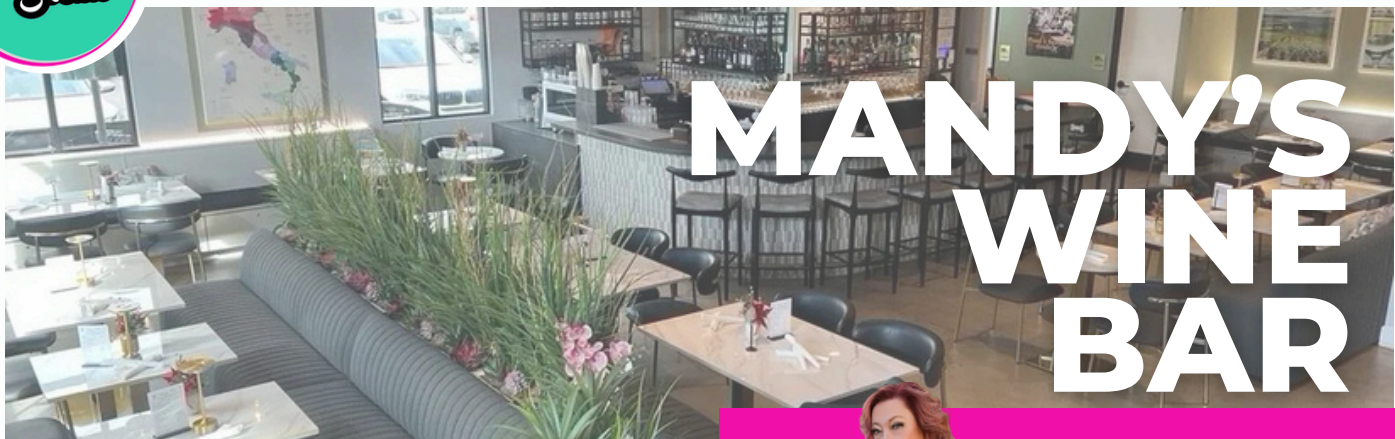


Meet Sasha Allen

Sasha is a local creative known for her bold and imaginative work that embodies personal expression and visual storytelling. She brings energy to the local arts scene and is part of Maricopa's emerging creative community, contributing to the city's cultural identity. Her journey reflects originality, promise, and a strong connection to artistic self-expression, as artists in Maricopa explore new ways to collaborate and grow.



Maricopa's creative scene continues to grow through artists and makers who bring fresh perspectives, imagination, and talent to our community. This quarterly feature celebrates the voices helping shape Maricopa's cultural future.



Mandy's Wine Bar has become one of Maricopa's standout dining spots. The space is light and airy, classy yet comfortable, making it just as fitting for brunch as for date night. The strawberry burrata salad is fresh and vibrant, and the lasagne, including a vegetarian poblano pepper version, has quickly become a local favorite. The wine list is thoughtfully curated and approachable, offering everything from crisp whites to bold reds without feeling overwhelming. With gluten-free and vegetarian options woven throughout the menu, Mandy's welcomes everyone to the table.

When I was asked by Maricopa Lifestyles Magazine to share about local restaurants, I realized how many truly good options we have now, unlike 20 years ago when my family first moved here. Back then, dining out usually meant heading to Chandler or Phoenix. Today, Maricopa has grown into its own, and we have restaurants that genuinely reflect our community.

One place I immediately fell in love with is Mandy's Wine Bar. The space is light and airy, with soft neutrals, welcoming seating, and a feminine touch that's classy without being overdone. It's the kind of place where you can dress up for date night or come in relaxed for brunch and feel equally at home.



By Shannon Powers-Kleinjans
Owner of Actually Social
actuallysocialmedia.com

The food is where Mandy's really shines. The strawberry burrata salad is fresh, vibrant, and perfectly balanced with creamy burrata and bright seasonal flavors. Their lasagna has quickly become a local favorite, rich and comforting, and their vegetarian poblano pepper version is just as intentional and satisfying as the classic. Gluten-free and vegetarian options are thoughtfully woven into the menu, so no one feels limited.

The wine list is curated with care, offering crisp whites, expressive rosés, and bold reds that invite you to try something new without feeling intimidated. Mandy's welcomes everyone. It's warm, inclusive, and a fantastic example of how far our dining scene has come.



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PEOPLE & PLACES

BENJAMIN BITTER **MARICOPA CITY MANAGER**

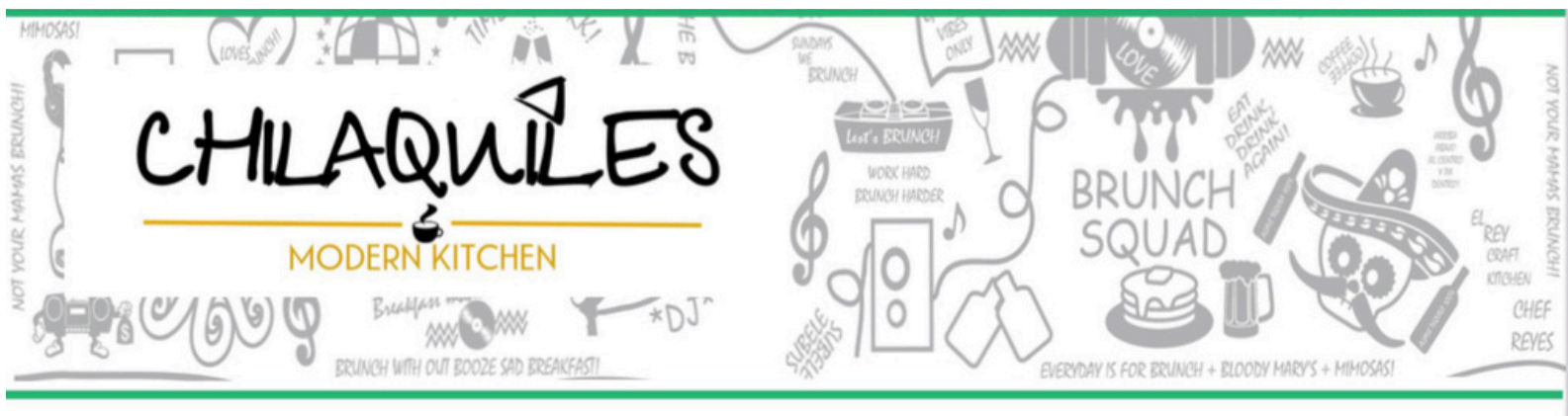


Maricopa City Manager Benjamin Bitter has been elected President of the Arizona City/County Management Association (ACMA), a statewide organization representing professional local government leaders. Bitter began his term recently and will serve through January 2027, remaining on ACMA's Board as Past President through January 2028.

His election highlights Maricopa's strong commitment to professional, ethical city management.

Bitter, who has served the city since 2021 and was appointed City Manager in April 2024, oversees operations for more than 500 employees and a municipal budget exceeding \$340 million.

As ACMA President, Bitter will focus on leadership development and advancing best practices for city and county managers across Arizona. He is the first City Manager from Maricopa to serve on ACMA's Board of Directors.





MEET KIM YARBER OF DELICIOUS VIBEZ



In every community, there are creatives who don't just make products — they create experiences. In Maricopa, one of those dynamic creators is Kim Yarber, founder of Delicious Vibez, a candle brand that is as bold, layered, and expressive as the woman behind it.

Kim describes herself as “unapologetically sassy and dynamic,” and that energy isn't just a personality trait — it's the heartbeat of her brand.

Leading with Authenticity

For Kim, being unapologetically sassy and dynamic means leading with authenticity and energy. Delicious Vibez candles are not designed to blend into the background. They're created to stand out.

“These aren't your everyday basics,” Kim shares. Her candle scents are bold and layered, thoughtfully crafted to reflect mood, personality, and vibe. But Delicious Vibez is about more than fragrance — it's about expression.

From cheeky product names to creative expression jars, every detail is intentional. Kim wants her customers to feel seen, empowered, and encouraged to show up fully as themselves. For her, the brand represents something deeper than wax and wick — it's about claiming space and owning your vibe without apology.

A Creative Comeback

Kim's journey back to candle-making is one marked by intuition, resilience, and reinvention.

Before relaunching Delicious Vibez, Kim had built a 25-year corporate career. In 2023, long before her layoff in March 2024, she sensed that change was coming. The idea of revisiting candle-making resurfaced after a simple but powerful nudge from her best friend: “Why don't you revisit the idea of candles again?” That moment became the catalyst.

By the time her friend returned from vacation, Delicious Vibez was already in motion. What began as a creative outlet quickly revealed itself as something much bigger — a pathway back to expression and purpose.

While navigating the emotional and practical challenges of career transition, Kim found clarity in creativity. Reclaiming her candle business felt like giving herself permission — permission to grow, to honor the challenges she was facing, and to build something meaningful that could also inspire others.

“It wasn't just about candles,” she reflects. “It was about expression.”

More Than Comfort — A Statement

Candles are often associated with calm, relaxation, and comfort. But Delicious Vibez brings something extra to the table: positivity, wit, resilience, and empowerment.

Lighting one of Kim's candles isn't just about fragrance — it's about claiming your vibe.

Whether it's a bold scent that feels different from the ordinary or a playful name that makes you laugh, Kim hopes each product becomes a reminder that joy and resilience can coexist. That energy deserves space. That individuality is powerful.

Her goal? That every candle becomes a tool for self-expression — a small but meaningful way for people to connect with who they are in the moment.

A Brand Rooted in Empowerment

Delicious Vibez is a reflection of a woman who refused to shrink during transition. Instead, she leaned into creativity, embraced reinvention, and built something vibrant in the process.

And perhaps that's what makes Kim's story resonate so deeply in Maricopa. She represents the spirit of entrepreneurship so many in our community embody — courage, creativity, and the willingness to pivot when life demands it.

In a world that often encourages blending in, Kim Yarber is choosing boldness. Through Delicious Vibez, she invites others to do the same.

Because sometimes, the most powerful thing you can do...
is show up unapologetically.

—
Chrystal Allen-O'Jon

Publisher, Maricopa Lifestyle Magazine



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JUST IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

A week before Valentine's Day, **Maricopa Historical Society** was feeling the love from the community at their 4th annual "Tales and Treasures" benefit.

Brenda Campbell introduced and recognized some of the city's philanthropists who sponsored tables of 8. Families that have graced our community for decades were in attendance, including Oliver Anderson, who has been in Maricopa since 1954.

Entertainment was provided by Jeanne Hoeh, Ed Lamoreaux and Nathan Webster. A silent auction, 50/50 raffle and centerpiece raffle brought in a combined 10k, which will cover the operating expenses for the coming year, for the museum located on the Maricopa/Casa Grande Highway.

By Paulette Burton



**MARICOPA
HISTORICAL
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Photo Credit: Sara Alexander

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With multiple televisions, a relaxed neighborhood atmosphere, and community-centered events like bingo nights, it has become a popular gathering spot for families and sports fans alike.

Consistently earning ratings around 4 stars across major review platforms, guests frequently praise the generous portions and flavorful wings that have helped solidify its long-standing presence in Arizona's dining scene.



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Your Quarterly Real Estate Tip

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THINGS ARE HAPPENING ON SR347!

The 347Facts team continues to monitor the progress of the ADOT team. As you may have heard, ADOT has selected Sundt Construction as the vendor to complete all of the work. The official contract signing is expected this month.

We also participated in a one-hour meeting with members of ADOT's engineering team, Mayor Smith, and several City employees and council members. The ADOT team provided a detailed briefing as to how the decision was reached on Casa Blanca vs Cement Plant grade separation, as well as who made the decision.

They highlighted/discussed the 4 criteria used to evaluate projects. Some of the key points were:

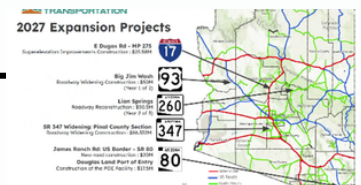
1. Casa Blanca does not have any foreseeable growth in the future. There are additional cement plant opportunities in the future.

AUTHORS: RON ANGERAME & JAMES SINGLETON

2. The cost of upgrading the Mammoth Way ("Cement Plant") intersection is \$17 million. However, due to the proximity of the wash, the build for Casa Blanca is 3 times more complex. The Casa Blanca upgrade was estimated at \$50 to \$60 million, plus another \$10 million for right-of-way payments.

Another piece of good news is that the Governor's first pass at budget reductions does not include any "claw backs" to the planned work on SR 347. There will be additional reviews in the future; however, so far, so good.

More good news: there was a review of the ADOT 2027-2032 5 Year plan, and we are STILL on the plan.



Assembly of God – Maricopa (also known as Christian Center Church) – 21400 N Santa Rosa Dr, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Be Community Church - 41614 W Smith Enke Rd., Maricopa, AZ, becommunitychurch.com

Blaze Ministries AZ- Saddleback Elementary, 18600 N Porter Rd, Maricopa, blazeministries12@gmail.com

Calvary Chapel of Maricopa – 20038 N Taft Ave, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Christ's Church of the Valley (CCV) – 19475 N Porter Rd, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Church of Celebration - Maricopa High School Performing Arts Center, 45012 W. Honeycutt Ave. Maricopa, AZ 85139, (520) 494-7714, office@churchofcelebration.com, churchofcelebration.com

Community of Hope Church – 18700 N Porter Rd, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Desert Springs Church – 42202 W Rancho El Dorado Pkwy, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Faith Baptist Church – 19845 N Costa del Sol, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Grace Community Church – 44971 W. Hathaway Ave., Maricopa, AZ, (520) 586-2340, danlmichael@gccmaricopa.org

Grace Fellowship Church – 21400 N Santa Rosa Dr, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona- 51293 W Teel Rd, Maricopa, AZ, Arizona, (520) 568-9881, info@ganapati.org, ganapati.org

Maricopa Springs Family Church – Meeting location 16200 N Murphy Rd, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Mt Moriah Amec Maricopa - 9275 N Gunsmoke Rd, P O Box 541, Maricopa, AZ 85138, 520-208-5491, <https://www.mtmame.org>

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church – 18700 N Saint Gabriel Way, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Propel Church – 18700 N Porter Rd, Maricopa, AZ 85138

Want your church listed? Send a request to
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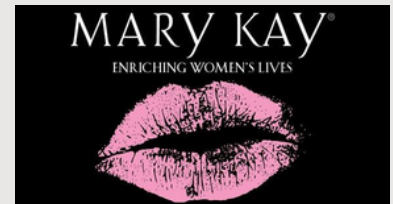


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