



Supervisors Shoot Down Helipad

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Panthers Football Preview

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Pinal County Public Hearing



County Zoning Ordinance Amendments
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Public Meetings

AJUSD Governing Board (school board) regular meeting
1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011
1575 W. Southern Ave.

Apache Junction Planning & Zoning regular meeting
7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2011
300 E. Superstition Blvd.

Superstition Mountain Community Facilities Dist. (sewer board)
6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2011
District Board Room, 5661 S. Ironwood Drive

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Council OK's New Police Motorcycles

Price tag for two specially equipped Victory Commanders is \$58,396

By Betty Swanson
The News

Two new Victory Commander motorcycles, equipped with the latest safety features, will be purchased as replacements to the Apache Junction Police Department's motorcycle fleet due to approval by the Apache Junction City Council at the Aug. 16 regular meeting. Cost of the two motorcycles equipped with the extra safety features is \$58,396.

The cost of these vehicles will be funded 100 percent through funds collected through the AJPD traffic enforcement program authorized under ARS 28-3511, according to Patrol Capt. Arnold Freeman, who made a presentation to the council during the work session held Aug. 15.

Approval of the purchase of the Victory models had been recommended by the police department after a careful, comparative study of the offerings of the two top contenders—Victory Motorcycles and

Harley-Davidson Motorcycles—by the patrol division.

Freeman explained to the council that the Victory Commander model was being recommended over a similar Harley-Davidson model based upon the bids received and the extra features and longer five-year warranty being offered by Victory. Both Victory and Harley-Davidson are built in America.

Harley-Davidson motorcycles have been "an icon" with police officers for years, said Freeman. "It was a tough decision, but our officers 'fell in love' with the Victory model."

Both the safety and economical considerations were cited as the most important factors in formulating the recommendation to the council, stated Freeman.

He explained that Victory motorcycles is the only company in the world that manufactures a "purpose-built" law enforcement vehicle with



The Victory Commander large displacement cruiser motorcycle is manufactured especially for law enforcement personnel use.

standard special features including extra front safety bars protecting the riders' legs, solid steel skid plates, solid steel engine guards, dual batteries and tenders, and

"top boxes" with fans to keep contents cool.

The Victory model also offers better mileage (42 mpg versus 36 mpg) and the company has offered to train a police department mechanic to be certified to work on the motorcycle and then reimburse the department at the rate of \$75 an hour for any warranty/repair work that the mechanic might find it necessary to perform on the motorcycles.

When asked, Freeman told the council that the motorcycle division currently is a four-man crew consisting of a sergeant and three fulltime motorcycle patrolmen. He noted that there are three other officers also trained as motorcycle patrolmen who could fill in if necessary.

In other business at the August 16 meeting, the council approved:

- entering a contract with Southwest Slurry Seal for street maintenance slurry sealing of select city streets

through a Pinal County cooperative contract for a total not to exceed \$121,514;

- an intergovernmental agreement with the Arizona Department of Transportation for inspection of bridges and culverts within the city of Apache Junction;

- award of a bid to Specialty Companies Group, LLC for material and labor to lower and raise manholes and valves at various locations throughout the city;

- awarding a bid to Mesa Materials, Inc. for pre-coated chips to be used in the chip seal project;

- awarding a bid to Mesa Materials, Inc. for paving materials for the city's street reconstruction.

The city council voted to move the executive session and possibly a work session that would normally be held on Monday, Sept. 5, to Tuesday, Sept. 6, in lieu of Labor Day, along with other meetings, if necessary.

Rice Sentenced To 12.5 Years

Gold Canyon resident conspired to kill fellow teen

By Christina Fuoco-Karasinski
The News

A 20-year-old Gold Canyon woman was sentenced to 12.5 years in prison on a charge of second-degree murder in connection with the 2008 stabbing death of Randall Davis-Mercier.

According to officials, Maeghan Rice, when she was 16, conspired with David Paulson, then 17 and one of her boyfriends, to kill Mercier out of jealousy.

Rice was sentenced in Pinal County Superior Court before Judge Boyd Johnson on Monday, Aug. 15, three years after 17-year-old Mercier died. Rice pled to second-degree murder and cooperated with authorities.

Paulson is scheduled to be sentenced at 1:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 12, in front



Maeghan Rice

of Judge Gilbert Figueroa in Pinal County Superior Court in Florence. The judge could sentence Paulson to one of two sentences: 25 years to life or natural life, which is life in prison without parole, said Heather Murphy, public information officer for Pinal County.

On June 20, 2008, Paulson stabbed Mercier 20 times be-

tween 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. The attack began in Gold Canyon and ended in the 1000 block of North Tomahawk Road.

Rice was directed by Paulson to go and pick up Mercier, while Paulson hid in the back seat of a crew cab truck under a blanket. Paulson waited for Rice to utter a code word before he lunged from the back seat stabbing Mercier up to 20 times in the chest and leg.

Mercier was able to escape from the truck after he was attacked. He then staggered down North Tomahawk Road and collapsed.

Police Chief Jerald Monahan said the body was found in the early hours after the AJPD and Pinal County Sheriff's Office were looking for the vehicle.

Kelly said the AJPD learned that Paulson fled Arizona to his mother's home in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was later extradited.

School Tax Rate Higher Than Anticipated

Lower cash reserves causes rate to rise to \$5.49

By Betty Swanson
The News

An eleventh hour change in the overall tax rate for the Apache Junction Unified School District has caused the 2011-2012 tax rate to be set at \$5.49, a 20-cent increase over the earlier estimated rate of \$5.29.

The new amount, ratified by the Pinal County Board of Supervisors on Aug. 12, is an overall increase of \$1.26 over the 2010-2011 rate and marks the first time in 14 years that AJUSD has seen its overall tax rate rise over the previous year's.

According to Associate Superintendent Dr. Jim Lockwood, a less than expected amount of cash reserves was the reason for the unforeseen climb. "When all of the encumbrances and bills had been cleared for the fiscal year in late July, we just didn't have the cash reserves to carry over that we had anticipated," he said. "Thus, the tax rate needed to be raised higher to

collect the tax monies needed to support the budget which we had already cut nine percent for the upcoming year."

Having some cash in reserve is not unusual for school districts who have done this historically in order to keep from having to register warrants (borrow money) to meet payroll and pay bills when state aid payments are late, or tax collections lag, explained Lockwood.

According to Lockwood, this practice may become obsolete because the State of Arizona "swept" (took) all of the state school districts' cash reserves two years ago, and now the tax formula law has been altered so that levying for money to go into this "rainy day fund" will be nearly impossible in the future. "We're most likely going to see districts operating in the future with no reserves," commented Lockwood.

This move, combined with unprecedented drops in property valuation, a declining enrollment, and reductions in

state assistance, made lowering, or even stabilizing, the tax rate for the upcoming year impossible, according to a press release on this matter that was sent out by district spokesperson Brian Killgore.

Lockwood pointed out that AJUSD is not the only school district to see a rise in their tax rate this year and emphasized that AJUSD's tax rate is still among the lowest of neighboring school districts in the East Valley. The Queen Creek School District saw their tax rate rise \$2.69 to a total of \$7.61 for 2011-2012, according to the release. Mesa Unified School District had to raise its rate to \$6.75, an increase of \$1.53.

This unforeseen hike in the AJUSD rate raises the overall combined tax rate for Apache Junction area taxpayers (as cited in the Apache Junction/Gold Canyon News Aug. 8 issue) to \$13.89 per thousand, up \$1.74 per thousand from last year, an approximate 14 percent increase.

City Cuts Budget By 10%

Almost \$4 million trimmed for FY 2012

By Betty Swanson
The News

Culminating several weeks of examination and discussion, a 2011-2012 Apache Junction City budget of \$38.3 million was approved at a special meeting of the Apache Junction City Council held prior to the usual Monday night work session on Aug. 15. No one spoke at the Public Hearing prior to the vote.

The resolution containing the 2011-2012 budget was passed

by unanimous vote with all council members present and contained an emergency clause, necessitated because Arizona State law requires that cities adopt their upcoming fiscal year budget by the third Monday in August, the day of the special meeting.

The 2011-2012 budget is approximately \$4 million less than the 2010-2011 budget of \$42.3 million and reflects a cutback of 9.9 percent.

The News Kidcast

Cloudy with rain later in the week.
Highs around 105 and lows around 80.

This week's
Weather
"Artoonist"

Gabrielle
Warner

Age 6

Four Peaks
Elementary
School

