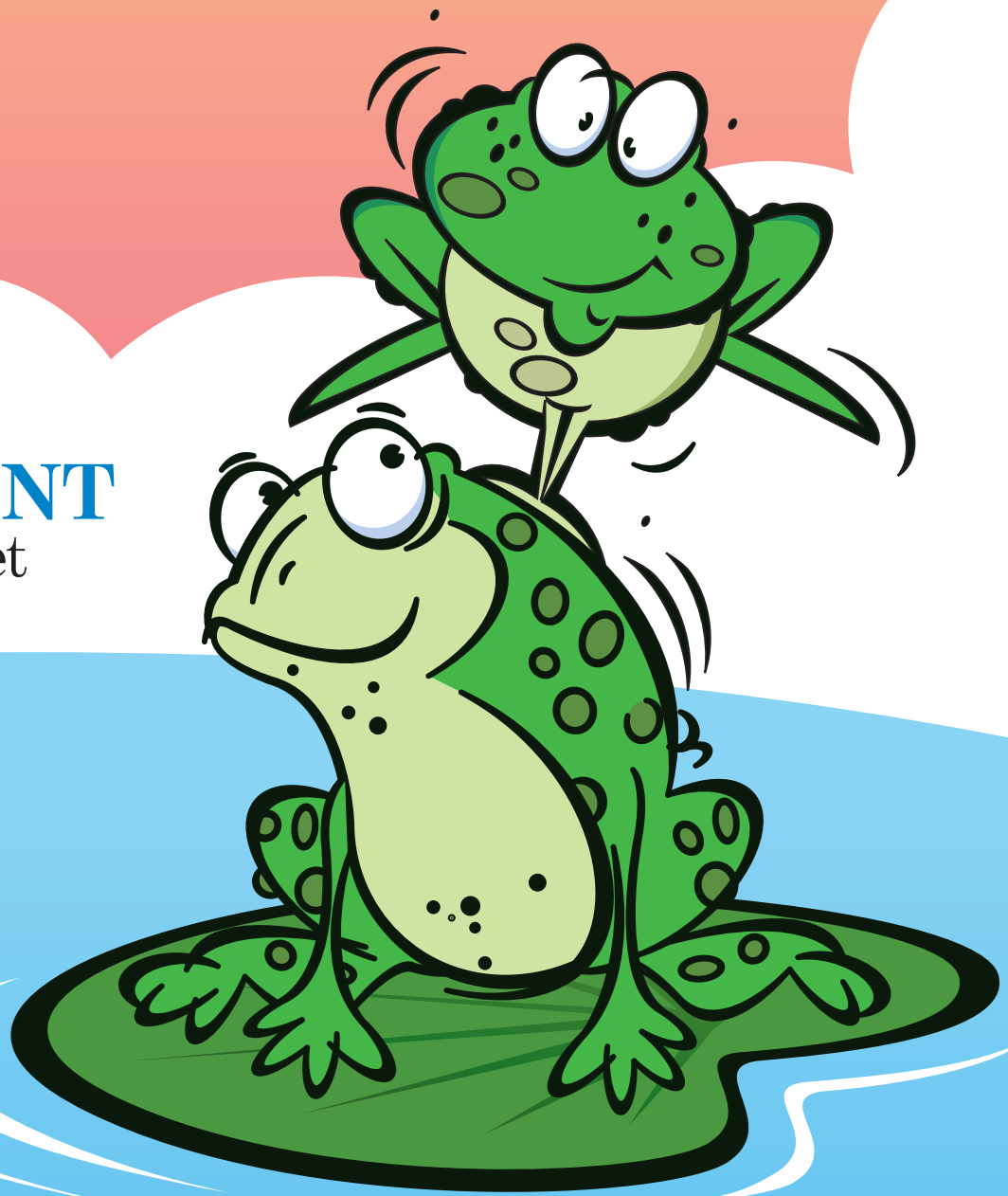


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A spring in your step

Jump through Leap Day with Arizona's frogs

By **MacKenzie Brower**
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

Where there is water, there are frogs — and Arizona is no exception.

With frogs a somewhat unofficial mascot of Leap Day, Arizona is home to 26 species of frogs and toads, 23 of which are considered native to the state. The state amphibian is a frog as well: the Arizona Treefrog.

Arizona Treefrogs live in the northern coniferous forests of the state and are in the same family as tree frogs of central South America, according to Michael Ring with the Phoenix Herpetological Sanctuary. It is one of his favorite species of frogs in addition to the Green Toad, Sonoran Desert Toad and Couches Spadefoot.

“A lot of the time, (the Arizona Treefrogs are) bright green whereas our other species of tree frogs and most toads are desert colored. It’s really cool to go up in the higher elevation of Arizona and find a bright green tree frog hopping around,” said Brett Montgomery, a recent graduate of Arizona State University with a master’s degree in applied biological sciences who specializes in amphibians.

Frogs have always been important to the people of Arizona because their presence means water is near, according to the Arizona Historical Society. Many Native American



Brett Montgomery, a recent graduate of Arizona State University with a master's degree in applied biological sciences who specializes in amphibians, shows off a Chiricahua Leopard Frog, one of the state's indigenous frogs. (Photo courtesy of Brett Montgomery)

people in Arizona use frogs to symbolize water or rain, and the sound of frogs signals monsoon season.

“The Sonoran Desert is the wettest desert in the world,” Ring said. “We get the most rainfall of any desert. As spring starts, we’re definitely going to see plenty of amphibian action leaping into the new year with this leap year.”

Frog and toad habitats depend on the species and elevation but they always involve water.

Toads that need less water are able to survive in an area and then emerge during monsoon season or spring rain events.

The most common amphibian in the state and Phoenix metropolitan is the Colorado River Toad, also called the Sonoran Desert Toad.

“They come out in force during monsoon season,” Montgomery said. “They can survive in pretty arid landscapes and water just activates them.”

Afterward, the Col-

orado River Toads will bury themselves and go into aestivation — a dormancy during a hot or dry period.

Colorado River Toads eat primarily beetles but are known to eat other insects and small vertebrates such as other frogs and toads, according to the Arizona Historical Society. They provide the music of summer with their croaking, but they also secrete bufotoxin, which is highly toxic to cats and dogs. Big doses of bufotoxins

are even dangerous to humans and can result in heart attacks.

“It’s known very widely through folklore stories of licking frogs that have hallucinogenic toxins,” Ring said. “It’s a gorgeous frog and has big yellow eyes with these odd, horizontally slanted pupils. It looks a lot like hypnotoad from ‘Futurama.’”

It’s important to learn how to identify the Colorado River Toad. Local places such as Rattlesnake Ready can also

train dogs to avoid the animal, Ring added.

If you’re not sure whether a frog or toad is toxic, the safe rule of thumb is to give it their space. Don’t touch any toad and then put your hands in your mouth, and always wash your hands after coming into physical contact. Try not to handle toads because they absorb air and water through the pores in their skin and chemicals in human hands are also toxic to them.

Many Red-spotted Toads, Couches Spadefoots and Great Plains Toads can also be found in the Phoenix area.

Red-spotted Toads have a singing chirp that Ring says sounds orchestral like a violin. He’s once spotted 30 to 40 Red-spotted Toads gathered around a little bit of a rain puddle, or overnight accumulation of rainwater, calling to each other for courting and breeding.

“The Red-spotted Toad has perfect, circular shaped parotid glands, which is different because a lot of our toads’ parotid glands will be ovular or sausage shaped,” Montgomery said.

In the Grand Canyon National Park, the most common amphibians are the Red-spotted Toads, Canyon Treefrogs and Woodhouse Rocky Mountain Toads. They are all riparian species that rely on the Colorado River and its perennial tributaries for breeding, because their

• See **Frogs** on page 19



Arizona is home to various species of frogs that include, from left, the Arizona Tree Frog and the Chiricahua Leopard Frog. (Courtesy of Brett Montgomery)

Frogs

• From page 18

egg-masses and tadpoles are water-bound, according to the National Park Service.

Additionally, the Great Basin Spadefoot is a common species in the coniferous forests on the rim of the Grand Canyon, along with the Great Plains Toad, which is rare and seldom seen, according to the National Park Service. Northern Leopard Frogs are also native but rare to the Colorado River corridor. Efforts to reintroduce this species that experienced population declines following the building of Glen Canyon Dam are underway.

Of all groups of vertebrate animals, amphibians face the most threat of extinction, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest

Service. Nearly a third of all amphibian species face extinction. Threats to amphibians and their habitats are pollution, wetland destruction or loss, climate change, invasive species, disease and parasites.

Road mortality and even feral cats also are threats to amphibians, according to Ring.

“Really anything that you can name, it probably has an impact on amphibians; they are very

sensitive,” Montgomery said. “A lot of times with frogs it’s disease, which can be proliferated by non-native species carrying that disease and then spreading it to our native species.”

The American Bullfrog is the most threatening non-native amphibian in Arizona because it’s a big disease carrier of chytrid fungus and it eats whatever it can fit in its mouth, Montgomery said.

It will also eat other tadpoles, Ring said.

The Chiricahua Leopard Frog is one of 14 species of greatest conservation need identified in the Arizona Wildlife Conservation Strategy of the Game and Fish Department.

They’re a “true frog,” which means they need access to water continuously. Livestock grazing, urbanization, water diversion, and groundwater pumping all threaten

the Chiricahua Leopard Frog, according to the Arizona Historical Society.

The Phoenix Zoo has conservation efforts to breed captive tadpoles of the Chiricahua Leopard Frog and repatriate them in the Chiricahua Mountains, according to Ring.

After 2008 was commemorated as the Year of the Frog, the global conservation community has done a lot of work to implement safety protocols such as bleaching boots and disinfecting gear between use, Ring continued.

The Year of the Frog was recognized because of widespread occurrence of chytrid fungus, which has affected more than 700 species in the past few decades and contributed to 90 possible extinctions, according to the University of Pennsylvania Medicine School of

Veterinary Medicine.

Amphibians are a key-stone and indicator species, Ring said. Amphibians are indicative of the health of an ecosystem. They’ve evolved over millions of years, so it’s important to make sure they are with us for centuries to come through education and advocacy.

Viewing any animals in Arizona, especially reptiles and amphibians, has a lot to do with the time of the year, the temperature and rain, according to Ring. The most important thing to remember is that in the state of Arizona people need to have a valid hunting and fishing license to interact with or collect any wild amphibian.

MacKenzie Brower can be reached at mbrower@iniusa.org. We’d like to invite our readers to submit their civil comments, pro or con, on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org.



ARIZONA'S FROGS

The Grand Canyon State has a host frogs native to the state and otherwise. They include:

- Arizona Treefrog
- Canyon Treefrog
- Baja California Treefrog
- Lowland Burrowing Treefrog
- Lowland Leopard Frog
- Plains Leopard Frog
- Northern Leopard Frog
- Relict Leopard Frog
- Chiricahua Leopard Frog
- Rio Grande Leopard Frog
- Rio Grande Chirping Frog
- Boreal Chorus Frog
- Tarahumara Frog
- American Bullfrog

Frogs and toads: Not the same animal

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

Frogs are the unofficial Leap Day mascot and reason National Frog Legs Day is Feb. 29, according to web-holidays.com.

The recognition is in part because some would prefer frogs remain cute animals and essential parts of ecosystems and the global environment.

While the opportunity to celebrate Leap Day only comes once every four trips around the sun, the chance to identify frogs — and distinguish them from toads — can happen anytime one is out in one of the amphibians' habitats.

Tom Weaver, curator of herpetology — the



Tom Weaver, the curator of herpetology (the study of amphibians and reptiles) at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, said Sonoran Desert toads like this one tend to prefer dry areas. (Courtesy of Tom Weaver)

study of amphibians and reptiles — at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, said toads

are warty-looking, covered in little lumps and bumps, while frogs are sleek and smooth.

“Toads also virtually always have dry skin, whereas frogs look wet even when they are out

of the water,” he said, citing one of the many differences. Weaver said while

Anurans are a class of animals in the Amphibia class that includes frogs and toads, which is different from salamanders and caecilians, “toad” is a common name for certain types of frogs. While the term “toad” gets used in reference to many types of frogs in everyday life, only members of the family Bufonidae are considered toads by taxonomy.

“They’re technically both from the same side of the animal kingdom, but they fulfill different niches in the environment,” Weaver said.

According to the Arizona Historical Society, as of April 2020, Arizona was home to 26 different species of frogs and toads, 23 of which

• See **Toads** on page 21

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Toads

• From page 20

are considered indigenous, or native to the state.

Weaver said diminishing numbers of both frogs and toads is a common topic among scientists and researchers today. Toads, Weaver said, are the “more hardy” of the two animals, able to endure harsh conditions, such as deserts.

Frogs, Weaver said, can adapt to seasons, but not necessarily a snowy winter. They seek water-centered environments, while toads seem to accept the driest of climates.

Also, frogs have more predators, so they tend to live in what Weaver calls the “understory” of bushes, shrubs and low-hanging tree

branches in an ecosystem. Toads tend to remain on or close to the ground.

Weaver said frogs can sometimes change colors as part of its camouflaging, while toads rely on staying in places that avoid the hawks, owls and snakes that are its predators. The idea one can “catch” warts from a toad is a myth — one that likely stems from the wart-like appearance of toads’ rough, dry, bumpy skin, Weaver said.

Both toads and frogs have skin that can cause irritation in humans if there’s direct skin-to-skin contact. Weaver said he learned this the hard way years ago.

“Don’t pick up a frog and then rub your eye afterward,” Weaver said. “It’s not a pleasant sensation.”



Tom Weaver, the curator of herpetology (the study of amphibians and reptiles) at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, says this Sonoran Green toad is an example of the colorful wildlife found in the Southwest. (Courtesy of Tom Weaver)

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The evolution of Leap Day

How Feb. 29 became a day of celebration

By **Cyrus Guccione**
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

What do Pope Paul III, Tony Robbins and Ja Rule have in common?

All three were born on Feb. 29, a day that only comes around every four years. Given its rarity and historical significance, Leap Day has become a noteworthy day for celebrations such as weddings, proposals and Leap Day birthday parties for people lucky enough to be born on Feb. 29.

Evolution into a special day

Leap Day's history dates back to ancient civilization's attempts to synchronize the calendar with movement of the Earth through the solar system.

Subtle changes in the heavens such as a star rising on different days every four years gave ancient civilizations a clue about the Earth's celestial synchronization.

Even the ancient Roman calendar had a system of occasional synchronization by adding the month of "Mercedonius" every so often to bring their calendars back into alignment with the solar year before a much simpler system of simply adding a day every four years was established in today's Gregorian calendar, which adjusts the calendar by three days every 400 years.

The extra calendar day every four years is due to Earth's irregular orbit around the sun,



Leap Day's history dates back to ancient civilization's attempts to synchronize the calendar with the solar system. (Metro Creative)

which takes slightly longer than 365 complete days (To be precise, a year is 365.2422 days long).

"If we continued to use a calendar with only 365 days, then over just a few decades, the calendar would drift out of sync with the seasons," says Ted Blank, a NASA solar system ambassador, astronomer and co-founder of the Foun-

tain Hills Astronomy Club.

Without an extra day added to the calendar every four years, some profound changes would occur, Blank said. Over time, farmers might begin planting crops in November instead of April. Over a few centuries, Easter would become a winter observance and Christmas would eventually become a summer

holiday.

"It keeps calendars from getting all screwed up over the long run and having a day added every fourth year keeps us on track," said photographer Bruce Boyce, who has spent a lifetime chasing uncommon occurrences in the solar system.

Boyce has photographed full and partial solar eclipses with

his camera and most recently the "Ring of Fire," an annular eclipse that occurs every few years. As a former aerospace engineer working on groundbreaking projects, including the creation of the Hubble Space Telescope, Boyce says Leap Day is critical in keeping civilization synchronized with the solar system.

But adding an extra

day in February every four years eventually overcorrects. The fact that a year is 365.2422 days long (rather than exactly 365.25) means that over four centuries of recognizing Leap Day without exceptions, the calendar would still drift out of sync.

That's why in years that are exact multiples of 100, Leap Day is skipped to keep the calendar even more precisely synchronized with the seasons.

"This is why the year 2000 was a Leap Year while 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not," said Ted Blank. "This set of rules and adjustments, instituted by Pope Gregory in the year 1582, is still not perfect but it will keep the calendar aligned with the seasons to within one day every 3000 years or so."

Uncommon celebrations

Despite the fact Leap Year babies — leaplings as they've become known — have received the short end of the calendar, the leap community has figured out a foolproof system to celebrate.

"In the leap community, we have a thing: 28 plus one equals 29, so we celebrate February 28 and March 1," said Bobbie Francis Hoehner of Hinesville, Georgia, a 56-year-old leapling who celebrates her 14th Leap Day birthday this Thursday. "We get two days because we're special," Hoehner said in a

• See **Calendar** on page 24

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Calendar

• From page 22

phone interview.

Every four years, Hoehner and her family find a fun way to celebrate her birthday by celebrating as if she were the age of her Leap Year.

"When I turned leap four, we had a clown party and when I turned leap nine, we had a superhero party," Hoehner said, who found out Superman's birthday was also Feb. 29.

Hoehner is a business owner who runs a health spa just outside of Savannah, Georgia, called The Healing Lounge at Get Tanked Float Center.

As a way of recognizing other local leaplings, she offers free Epsom salt floats on their birthday, joining a host of other businesses that offer business specials on Feb.

29.

"It was actually a ploy to meet other leapers in the area," Hoehner admits, who is part of a few Leap Year-related Facebook groups including "Leap Year Babies" and the "Honor Society of Leap Year Babies."

Bringing Leaplings together

Because of the growing leap community online, Hoehner joined 87 other leaplings in 2020 for a cruise to the Bahamas. On the cruise, she made friends with local leaplings and met five couples who were married on Leap Day.

"I just met a couple in Hinesville who are celebrating their first/fourth anniversary on Feb. 29," Hoehner said, adding many people target Leap Day for weddings given its rare occurrence that captures people's atten-



Bobbie Francis Hoehner, right, is a leapling who runs a health spa called The Healing Lounge @ Get Tanked Float Center in Hinesville, Georgia. Also pictured are Hannah Dickson, Steven Dickson and Kelsey Disher. (Photo courtesy of Bobbie Francis Hoehner)

tion and imagination.

As she prepares to turn leap 14, Hoehner says she isn't quite sure how she will celebrate. She turned 14 in 1982 when teenagers were riding a new wave of pop

culture and MTV, so it's safe to say her birthday will have some 1980s influence. And while she won't be on board for this year's leapling cruise, she says the leap community is hoping to

break the record of gathering as many leapers in one place.

"With a birthday as weird as ours, it's nice to meet other people," Hoehner said.

"It's a very eclectic

group."

We invite our readers to submit their civil comments on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org. Cyrus Guccione can be reached at cguccione@iniusa.org.

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Business groups promote 'Leap of Kindness' day

Queen Creek chamber in Valley taking part

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

It's Leap Year, and of course that means February has an extra day in 2024.

If you're wondering what to do with your extra day, the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce is encouraging you to give back to your community by volunteering.

The Queen Creek chamber is the only chamber of commerce in the Valley — and one of only three in the state — to be taking part in #LeapOfKindnessDay, a national movement that began in 2016 in Saratoga Springs, New York, under the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce's banner.

The idea behind Leap of Kindness Day is to pair area employers with nonprofit organizations and other individuals and groups that could use an extra helping hand on this extra day. Since its founding, #LeapOfKindnessDay has spread to more than 200 communities, mostly in the Eastern U.S., according to the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce's website.

The initiative is just starting to make its way out West. In Arizona, Queen Creek is joined by Maricopa and Vail in leading the #LeapOfKindnessDay charge in the state.

"Queen Creek has a very strong sense of community and the people out here, for the most part, tend to be friendly and service-oriented," Queen Creek Chamber

#LeapOfKindnessDay was started in 2016 by the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce in New York. The Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce is just one of three chambers across the state taking part in the initiative this year. (Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce)

of Commerce President and CEO Chris Clark said. "You can see hundreds of volunteers at any of the community events and it's just a wonderful sight. This was just one more opportunity to confirm that's still the case and that people will come together and help our nonprofits, help the community."

Clark and his team connected with nonprofits in Queen Creek and throughout the East Valley to create a list of organizations and their needs, along with con-



Chris Clark

tact information. Businesses and members of the public are encouraged to go to the chamber's ExploreQueenCreek.com website to find an organization they would like to help and use their extra day to volunteer their time and services or donate needed items.

Groups taking part in #LeapOfKindnessDay include United Food Bank, House of Refuge, the Mary Gloria Foun-

dation and Chosen Warrior Cancer Support.

"We've had a lot of positive feedback. People like the idea of it and really, it's just a chance to motivate the businesses or community because a lot of times donations to local nonprofits are down this time of year," Clark said. "We see declines in donations of clothing and food and money after the holiday season, so this is just a good chance to refill your favorite organization's supplies or give them hours of volunteer time."

Bryan McClure promotes giving back to the community in his capacities as a business owner, chamber member and Queen Creek council member. He sees #LeapOfKindnessDay as another great opportunity to help.

"I have a team and I'm always encouraging them to get involved in the community and to serve their neighborhoods," McClure said. "When I heard about this movement I thought, wow, how perfect is that for our town to embrace and identify needs? And

we as the business community can support that and step up and lift one another up."

Like Clark, McClure said he believes there's



Bryan McClure

something special about the people of Queen Creek for emphasizing service

to community in their personal lives. He also praises town leaders and the chamber for guiding community-based projects that function year-round.

"We're on the cutting edge in finding positive solutions to better our community," McClure said.

"We're always striving to improve and grow, so anytime we can adopt good policies and events and lead the way, we're going to do that. The chamber is a great example of that. I'm really proud to be a member of the chamber since 2009. Having served as an ambassador and on the board, I know the good work that they do. We are leaders and we make things happen. We don't just wait for things to happen."

For information on how you can take part in #LeapOfKindnessDay, visit ExploreQueenCreek.com.

We'd like to invite our readers to submit their civil comments, pro or con, on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org. Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org.



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Welcome to this Lock and Leave two year old 1735 sq ft Saguaro Model in the Four Seasons subdivision of Sun City West. Two bedrooms and a Den or three bedrooms. Three baths with ensuites in each of the bedrooms and a separate two piece. Private inside Laundry. Great Gourmet kitchen with gas Range. Upgrades include quartz counters in the Kitchen and both baths, Woodgrain tile throughout and carpet in both bedrooms. Open floor plan with plenty of room for relaxing or entertaining. 2 Bedrooms are split. Private back yard with covered patio. Front Courtyard with pavers to enjoy the morning sunshine. Two car garage with Epoxy, fridge and storage. Enjoy using all amenities in SCW including shopping, doctors, restaurants, seven golf courses, all the pools and crafts within minutes of the home. MLS 6590900 \$460,000



16254 W Escondido Ct, Surprise

Welcome to this Outstanding Stonecrest offering the Buyer a home already to move into and enjoy. New pool heated with gas, travertine decking. Private back yard landscaped- Gardeners/Retreat. Entertaining at the best, four areas to sit and enjoy in Privacy. Fruit trees and Bar area. The Home has been re done with every item. Kitchen and Quartz. Bedrooms are all modern with the best lights and touches to showcase the Home. Guest bedroom offers - Patio door to Pool. Master bedroom is just beautiful Tub and Shower all New. Closet and touches that are outstanding. Plantation Shutters and all new windows. New Roof and solar bought and paid for. New A/C New H2O Storage in garage. Two car with 3rd Golf Car garage. Rock and outstanding landscaping. List of all upgrades attached. MLS 6641875 \$785,000



14950 W Mountain View Blvd #1111, Surprise

This unit is located on the ground floor and a corner unit. New furnace and A/C. Fully Furnished and two bedrooms split with two separate Bathrooms. Kitchen has been upgraded with all new stainless steel appliance's plantation shutters. White cabinets and white blinds make this a bright area and unit that offers an easy lock and leave and little to no maintenance Close to all the amenities and walk directly to your parking spot. Moments away. This unit boasts two suites with separate baths and showers. Front room and formal dining outside the kitchen nook. Patio offers a lounge area. Access to all of the facilities and Golf in Grand unit. Private Bedrooms and bathrooms. You have all the amenities in this Building as well. Swimming Pool and games rooms, a small theater and library. This lifestyle is pretty wonderful. MLS 6594994 \$297,900



15326 W Pasadena Dr, Surprise

Welcome to this spacious Jasmine located on the golf course with amazing sunset views of Granite Falls North #4. This property will wow you with all that it has to offer. The large spacious kitchen with plenty of room for a family or entertaining. Features stainless steel appliances, corian countertops lots of cabinets. Adjoining to a relaxing family room and plenty of windows to enjoy the never ending views. Formal dining room and second flex room. Large tile throughout leading to the carpeted two bedrooms with adjoining closets and baths. Desirable den. Custom slat window covers. Oversized covered with custom stained concrete back patio with pony wall to enjoy the beautiful evenings of Arizona. Two car garage complete with free standing custom cabinets and bump out for golf cart. MLS 6638805 \$649,900



16124 W Desert Cove Way, Surprise

Enjoy all the upgrades this Former Sun City Grand Show Home has to offer. One owner 2100 sq ft Verano with triple car garage. 2 bedrooms & 2 baths. Tile and carpet throughout with neutral colors. Large family room off Kitchen which has granite countertops, s/s appliances, lots of cupboards and counterspace. Built in cabinets in both living room and den. Formal dining area. Large master bedroom with walk-in closet and spacious ensuite. Welcoming front courtyard. Lush backyard with water feature. Private covered and epoxied rear patio. Extended garage with golf cart access door and attached storage cabinets. Immediate Walking distance to the majority of the amenities Sun City Grand has to offer. Immediate possession. Easy to Show. MLS 6658187 \$689,900



17346 W Alder Ln, Surprise

Sierra w/Casita w/full bath close to Cimarron Center in The Grand with 2 bedrooms, 2 baths and a den. Over 2000 sq ft of well-maintained living space with many upgrades. Welcoming private Front courtyard leading to Front entry. Kitchen features gas countertop cooking with upgraded appliances, Corian countertops with an island and upgraded cabinets and is open to a large family room with media wall and fireplace. Large master bedroom with walk in closet, ensuite and access to patio. Tile throughout living area with carpets in bedrooms. The Casita is also tiled, with a large ensuite. Extended garage has cabinets & windows. Large partially covered patio surrounded by a stylish knee wall with a built-in outdoor kitchen with natural gas BBQ. All concrete is epoxy coated. This is a Beauty! MLS 6659746 \$596,900

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