

Espire Sports to expand with 12-unit casitas complex next door

By PARKER JONES
The Daily Courier

Espire Sports is set to build a new 12-unit complex of casita short-term rental homes next door to the pickleball and athletic facility.

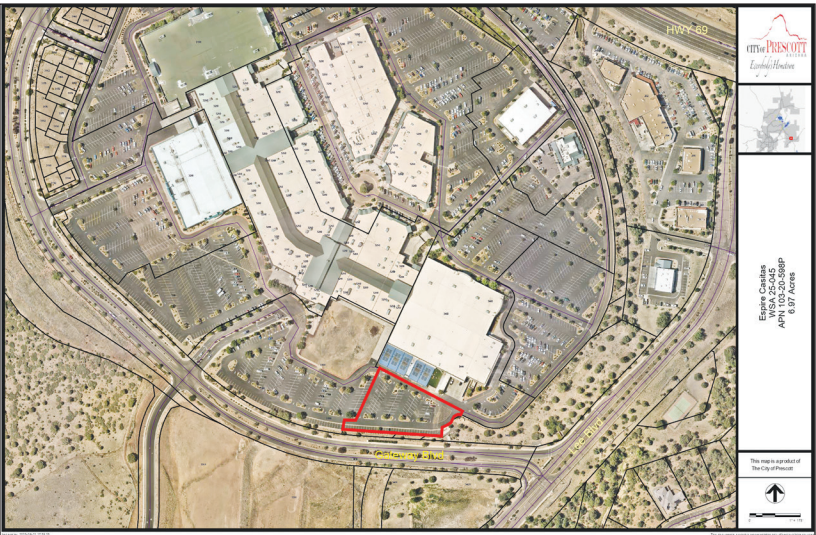
The Tempe-based Dalke Design Group recently submitted a Water Service Application for the development on behalf of Espire Owner Jim Thomas. The Subcommittee on Water Issues is set to discuss a recommendation on the application at their meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 2.

According to the site plan attached in the meeting agenda, the complex will be located just south of Espire Sports at 3400 Gateway Blvd., at Pine Ridge Marketplace. Once approved, it will be the first of its kind on the grounds of the mall.

The complex will feature eight one-bedroom casitas, at about 828 square-feet each; and four two-bedroom units, at about 1,032 square-feet each. They will all be one story tall and each have their own patio.

Thomas said the casitas will operate similar to AirBnBs or other short-term rental options for people staying less than 30 days in town. However, he noted that they will be fully furnished and have all the amenities of any hotel or apartment.

"They're full on one or two bedrooms with a full kitchen, living room, and a gorgeous outdoor covered patio. So it's nicer to stay in than



A map showing the location of a future 12-unit apartment complex next to Espire Sports at the Pine Ridge Marketplace in Prescott. (Courtesy)

a hotel," Thomas said.

He said the target audience for the casitas will likely be pickleball enthusiasts or competitors traveling from afar, with access to the Espire facility included with nightly rent.

"We'll hold events at Espire where 20 people could come from Japan and they're coming just to play pickleball, they're coming to see beautiful Prescott, maybe visit the Grand Canyon," Thomas said. "20 of their closest friends can all hang out together."

There will also be a new turf area constructed among 31 parking spaces dedicated to the apartments in addition

to the neighboring mall parking. The entire parcel comprises 6.97 acres of space, and was previously owned by Thomas but only used as parking.

The water service application itself states that the entire complex will likely use about 2.04 acre-feet of water per year, with 1.44 acre-feet used for the buildings and .60 acre-feet used for landscaping.

Thomas said the casitas will ultimately be a unique new feature for Espire, and he expects them to be

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Education

Professions program offers opportunity for high schoolers

By ABIGAIL CELAYA
The Daily Courier

The Education Professions program is looking for its first cohort from Prescott. It is a program designed for high school students who want to pursue a degree in education and want to get a head start. It aims to provide them with employment or postsecondary opportunities in the education field and gives them interactive experiences with students at different age levels.

Run by Mountain Institute CTED, the program offers high schoolers the opportunity to complete an associate of arts in elementary education either in high school or at Yavapai College after high school. They may take dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment classes to achieve this. The associate degrees are then transferable to UA, ASU and NAU.

After a four-year degree, students then have the option to enter into a program for Teacher Certification that would allow for loan forgiveness with a commitment to five years of teaching in Arizona.

Classes can be taken online or at Mountain Institute CTED. As part of the promise program, high schools will pay for students to take core classes. If they want to take electives, they can be reimbursed down the line.

Tara O'Neill is an education professor at Yavapai College and works with the Education Professions program. "We want to recruit hometown teachers," O'Neill said.

The program is looking to get its first cohort of face-to-face students from Prescott. Students will have the opportunity to participate in teaching observation hours and complete work at a college level. Yavapai College has a laboratory teaching school where students can see high-quality teaching in the birth to pre-kindergarten realm.

O'Neill said the courses are flexible, all materials are provided, and it's nice for students to be able to make connections in the community and have real people with real experience they can talk to about teaching.

"The program lets them get an idea if teaching is for them right away and gives them hands-on teaching experience," O' Neill said.

Originally, O'Neill was nervous that the high schoolers wouldn't be mature enough to be able to complete the college-level coursework. She said she didn't want to make accommodations or hold their hands. The kids have blown her away.

"Because these students have grown up in K-12 systems, they see things others don't," O'Neill said. "They are watching teachers, learning about teaching."

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Chino Valley's Territorials Days



Chino Valley Parks and Recreation employees showed off their leadership skills in the annual Territorial Days parade Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025. For more photos, visit dCourier.com for a gallery. (Stan Bindell/For the Courier)

Arizona to consider one-year graduate law school program

By HOWARD FISCHER
For the Courier

PHOENIX — Arizona could soon become the only state in the nation where the person representing you in court on a criminal charge, from traffic infractions right up to homicide, might have just one year of law school.

A proposal being advanced by the top administrator of the Arizona Supreme Court would take what now are programs offered at the state's two law schools to simply provide advanced legal knowledge to graduate students and enhance and convert them to a one-year course that, in the end, would lead to the ability to actually take on clients.

It wouldn't be quite that simple, said Dave Byers, director of the administrative office of the courts.

Students would need to take a prescribed list of courses specifically related to criminal law, graduate with a B or better average and pass appropriate license exams. They would be granted a degree in Master of Legal Studies.

And they would first have to work under the supervision of an actual licensed attorney for some period



Byers

— the proposal now suggests nine months — before they could practice on their own.

Byers told Capitol Media Services that, despite what appears to be a glut of lawyers based on billboards and TV commercials for those injured in accidents and accused of drunk driving, the fact is that Arizona is a "legal desert," with the state having fewer lawyers per capita than almost anywhere else in the country.

What this training is geared to he said, is training people who can work in understaffed offices of county attorneys and public defenders, particularly in rural areas, where those who have an actual law degree — a juris doctor — are less likely to practice, whether it has to do with the pay or simply wanting to live somewhere more urban.

Byers acknowledged, though, that once that period of supervision is over, the holders of the special MLS designation would be free to take on clients in criminal cases anywhere they want. And they'd be able to handle everything short of a crime where the death penalty could be imposed.

That possibility has alarmed Dean Brault, director of public defense services for Pima County.

"Creating a system where any criminal practitioner, be it a prosecutor or public defender, can graduate from undergrad and be practicing in two semesters is reducing that bar, and is literally lowering the bar to say that when a person's life or liberty is at stake, up to and including the rest of their lives, that suddenly we only require one year worth of schooling," he said. "That is absurd."

That sentiment is shared on the prosecution side of the equation. Pima County Attorney Laura Conover said what's being proposed makes the criminal justice system "some kind of lesser cousin to the rest of the law."

Consider, she said, if her grandmother needs legal help writing up a will.

"She'd better sit down with a fully trained, three-year State Bar attorney because money is on the line," Conover said.

"But if my cousin is facing 25 (years) to natural life, then a quite young, lesser trained, lesser educated, under-examined attorney will do just fine," she said. "And that double standard is not something that the criminal justice system should be subjected to."

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Northern Arizona VA 4th annual suicide poker run next Saturday

By HAVA HERZOG
The Daily Courier

Coming back for its fourth year, Northern Arizona Veterans Affairs Health Care System will host its annual Suicide Poker Run Saturday, Sept. 6.

The free event is intended to raise awareness of veteran suicide while riding motorcycles to northern Arizona legion posts. Participants will learn how to help someone struggling with suicidal ideations — veterans and non-veterans alike.

Riders will pull a playing card at each location, trying to make the best poker hand by the end of the event. No four-wheeled vehicles or side-by-sides are allowed; however, trikes and three-wheeled vehicles are OK. Check-in, an opening ceremony and coffee and breakfast snacks are at 8 a.m. at the Bob

Stump Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center at 500 N. Highway 89, Prescott. The opening ceremony will include color guard, national anthem and opening remarks. Below is the order of stops for the poker run which begins around 9 a.m.

9:20 a.m. — American Legion Post #40 at 650 East Road 3 South in Chino Valley.

10:30 a.m. — American Legion Post #25 at 480 South Calvary Way in Cottonwood.

11:20 a.m. — Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #6739 at 277 West State Route 260 in Campe Verde.

12:10 p.m. — Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #10227 at 2375 N. 5th-St., Prescott Valley. At the final stop, the last poker cards will be drawn, and lunch will be served.

According to the Veter-

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Motorcycles and their riders at the Northern Arizona VA Medical Center in Prescott the morning of the Suicide Prevention Poker Run in 2023. (Kirk Wright/Northern Arizona VA Health Care System, file)

