

Opinion

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County has made major election improvements



BY JACK SELLERS
Guest Writer

We are just a few weeks away from the start of the 2020 election cycle. The Board of Supervisors, the

Recorder's Office, and the Elections Department have been working in tandem for many months to make sure we provide voters with a great experience, whether they choose to vote by mail or in person, early or on election day.

In January, we launched a new elections website which provides a personalized dashboard for each voter.

BeBallotReady.Vote allows you to make changes to personal voter information, learn which upcoming elections you're eligible to vote in, find voting locations, sign up for text alerts and explore the new ballot style (you'll fill in ovals instead of arrows).

The Elections Department is also

incorporating new tabulation machines to make sure we provide residents with results quicker while still maintaining the security of our elections.

In recent years, counting all the ballots has taken weeks. The uncertainty that comes in the absence of a final tally can lead to confusion and concern, and sometimes outright suspicion and distrust.

We expect better technology will shorten the length of time it takes to count votes, lessening speculation and hopefully improving voter confidence in the integrity of our elections.

Last year, the Board of Supervisors and the Recorder's Office reached an historic agreement that aligns election responsibilities with what is written in state law, amending an outdated charter that delegated election-related responsibilities to the Recorder.

Under this new agreement, the Board oversees Election Day activities and emergency voting while the Recorder is

responsible for voter registration and early voting.

There are now two directors inside the Elections Department, one reporting to the Board and one reporting to the Recorder. They work together to plan and run great elections. You can see the first fruits of that labor in the dual, comprehensive plans created for the upcoming March 17 Democratic Presidential Preference Election.

On Feb. 19, nine polling sites countywide will open for early voting and we will mail out ballots to those on the Permanent Early Voting List.

We will open more than 220 polling places for residents who are eligible to vote in the Presidential Preference Election. This is more than triple the number we had four years ago, when long lines frustrated many voters.

Confusion about who was eligible to vote was a major problem four years ago, and this year we have a strong, information campaign aimed at making

sure voters understand who can vote.

Only registered Democrats are eligible to participate in this year's Presidential Preference Election. Since it is not a primary, registered independents are not eligible to participate. This is state law, not something in our control.

The Republican and Libertarian parties have chosen not to hold a preference election. If you're not sure about your party affiliation or if you're eligible, go to BeBallotReady.Vote. Both of those pieces of information are right there on the front page of your dashboard once you sign in.

You'll also find information about the Chandler all-mail city election March 10.

The big events happen later this year, with the primary election in August and the general election in November. We have our eyes on the prize and will do all we can to ensure a smooth voting experience and fast, accurate results.

Jack Sellers is a Chandler resident and a member of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

Woman's ordeal ends in hope for sex-trafficking victims

BY JENNIFER SCHWEGMAN
Guest Writer

A victim of familial sex trafficking, Julie Medeiros of Chandler was groomed into the business by her father at age 6.

Too young to understand anything different, Julie was trafficked out to strangers, members of her family's church community and her father's close friends from age 11 till 18.

Julie was in middle school when she began to understand that something wasn't right but didn't know how to articulate it – a common issue as many victims do not self-identify as victims.

Unfortunately, Julie's story is not uncommon in the sex trafficking world. A form of modern slavery that occurs in every state, many victims are trafficked by someone they know – not the result of kidnapping and drugs.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, there were 231 human trafficking cases reported in Arizona in

2018.

The state ranks 16th with 478 calls, making up 176 percent of all human trafficking calls nationwide. Some individuals are lucky and find a way to escape. Others do not.

Thankfully, Julie Medeiros' story has a happy ending. She gradually started to share her story, was adopted and now works tirelessly to help victims find their freedom and independence.

Currently a survivor mentor with Southwest Behavioral & Health Services, Julie works closely with victims and survivors of trafficking, in an effort to share information and resources.

Julie shares stories of her past hoping to inspire and give hope to others wanting a new life. She began to paint with other survivors and now sells her artwork via her Instagram: [Phoenix_Pour_Posse](https://www.instagram.com/Phoenix_Pour_Posse).

Human trafficking most often happens in plain sight so it's important to know what to look for so that community

members can make a difference in the lives of those who may be entrapped.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, if someone is a victim of human trafficking and modern slavery they may: show signs of physical abuse or injury; be accompanied everywhere by someone who speaks for them; appear to be fearful of or under the control of another person.

They may have health issues that have not been attended to; move or change jobs suddenly and often; travel with minimal or inappropriate luggage; be unable to freely contact friends and family; not be allowed to socialize or attend religious services; have restricted freedom of movement; avoid eye contact, social interaction, and authority figures/ law enforcement; seem to adhere to scripted or rehearsed responses in social interaction.

Today, Julie offers transportation and accompanies survivors to appointments,

court, and other outings that meet program requirements. She helps individuals focus on recovery with affirmation that each victim is unique and special, deserving a remarkable life.

The Integrated High Needs Case Management Program at Southwest Behavioral & Health Services supports children and families who have various high needs and at risk factors.

Individuals like Julie advocate for sex trafficking victims, engaging with community agencies/healthcare providers and others on his or her behalf.

"I'm there to support and be there in any way I can," said Julie. "Trust doesn't come easy but I share my story, offer whatever resources I can and try to inspire the victims to change their lives."

More information about the Integrated High Needs Case Management Program at Southwest Behavioral & Health Services is at sbhservices.org or 602-997-2233.

Share Your Thoughts: Send your letters on local issues to: pmaryniak@timespublications.com

SanTan Sun News

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