

serving
Northern Pinal County
ARIZONA
Superstition Mountain Country

**Festivals Abound
In October**

see page B-2



**Elks Soccer
Shoot-Out!**

see Sports, page C-1

**APACHE JUNCTION
Gold Canyon**

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NEWS

50¢

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New Optimists



see page A-6

G.A.I.N.



see page A-3

**Medalist
Honors**



see Sports, page C-1

Saddle Up

see page B-4

Public Meetings

**Apache Junction
Parks and Recreation
Commission
regular meeting**
6 p.m. Wednesday,
Oct. 1, 2008
300 E. Superstition Blvd.

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Residents See Big Jump In Fire Tax Bill

Fire Board cut tax rate by 28 cents but tax bills rise anyway, some by more than 100%

Part 3 of a 3-part series

By Meghan McCoy
The News

APACHE JUNCTION — Many local residents are feeling the effects of paying more money for their Pinal County Real Property tax bills, especially with the Apache Junction Fire District (AJFD) this year, even though the AJFD tax rate decreased by 28 cents from 2007.

Not only are homeowners experiencing a higher rate in the fire service taxes they owe, but business owners with commercial property are feeling the burden of paying more also. For example, a piece of commercial property in Apache Junction that is valued at \$122,000 showed an increase in their AJFD tax rate from \$279.58 last year to \$560.18 this year, a hike of



**Board Chairman
Jim Cowles.**



**Board Member
Steve Stockton.**



**Board Member
Chet Haines.**



**Board Member
Mike Cooney.**



**Board Member
Todd House.**

more than 100 percent. The AJFD determines the fire district's tax rate by numbers the county assessors office provides for the net assessed valuation, which provides them with information on the value of each parcel in Pinal County 18 months prior. In other words, the assessed valuations tax payers are seeing on their bill is a reflection of

what their property was valued at 18 months ago. Fire Marshal David Montgomery said this year there was an average of a 35-percent increase across the board, even though the tax rate was lowered 28 cents from last year. He explained that even though there was an increase of 35 percent, it does not mean the AJFD received

a 35-percent increase in its baseline budget. The AJFD baseline maintenance and operation budget was \$13.2 million for 2007-2008 and \$14.4 million for 2008-2009, which Montgomery pointed out does not show a 35-percent increase. He said the secondary valuations went down 28 cents from the previous year for

the AJFD, which provided the district with the ability to apply a \$2 tax rate for every \$100 of assessed valuation. With the decrease in the tax rate, the amount of money the district is collecting went down, Montgomery explained. Board member Todd House

see **Fire Taxes, A-3**

Sheriff Candidate Disputes Photo Speeding Ticket

Babeu claims he doesn't know who was driving his car



This photo radar picture documents the speeding allegation. The car belongs to Sheriff's candidate Paul Babeu, but he denies knowing the woman driving.

By Christina Fuoco-Karasinski
The News

FLORENCE- A car owned by Republican Sheriff candidate Paul Babeu was cited for speeding by photo radar on November 2, 2007, however, Babeu has not accepted responsibility and wrote on the ticket that the identity of the driver is "unkown" (sic), according to public documents obtained by *The News*.

The car appears to be driven by a woman with two children in the backseat.

The ticket was issued at 1:09 p.m. November 2, 2007, for driving 51 miles per hour in a 40 mile-per-hour zone in the 4100 block of East Hunt Highway West near Queen Creek. On the ticket, Babeu wrote the driver was "unkown" (sic) and dated it December 23, 2007. Based on

the grainy photograph, he said, he could not identify the driver. He did, however, acknowledge it is his car.

"The driver was unknown and I was not the driver of that vehicle," said Babeu last week, a Chandler police officer who is on leave to run his campaign for Pinal County Sheriff.

"In fact, once I announced I was running for sheriff, the sheriff and his deputies sent a two-page letter to my police chief in Chandler."

"There's much more involved here. It's clear I'm not the driver and they're making such a significant effort. It's all about politics."

Babeu said the letter asked his chief, Sherry Kiyler, to force him to identify the driver of the vehicle. In the letter, which Babeu faxed to *The News*, then-Pinal County



**Chandler Police Officer
Paul Babeu, candidate for
Pinal County Sheriff.**

Deputy Chief Clinton Lee wrote to Kiyler, "I find it almost incomprehensible that a police officer would have absolutely no idea who was in possession of and operating his/her vehicle on any

see **Ticket, page A-3**

AJ Schools Suffer Student Loss '08

District may face another \$1 million cut from budget

By Meghan McCoy
The News

APACHE JUNCTION — Superintendent Dr. Greg Wyman said the school district is experiencing a loss of approximately 250 students compared to this time last year. His announcement came during the Apache Junction Unified School District (AJUSD) monthly governing board meeting on Tuesday, September 9, 2008. The loss in student population will ultimately affect the budget for the 2009-2010 school year.

Wyman said the loss of 250 students roughly translates to \$1 million being cut for next year's budget. This portion of the district's budget is configured through an Average Daily Membership (ADM), which is calculated over the first 100 days of school.

Although the current budget shows a loss of approximately 184 students (a financial loss of approximately \$600,000), the final impact of the ADM and budget loss will not be determined until mid to late March, after the 100th day of school occurs in late January. The impact of the number of students the district lost during the first 100 days of school will not affect the budget until the 2009-2010 school year.

The 250 students the district lost represents a 50-student

loss at Apache Junction High School, 100-student loss at the middle schools and a 100-student loss at the elementary schools.

Of those missing students, 17 percent are attending schools out of state, 6 percent are attending a school outside of the Valley, 11 percent are attending East Valley schools, 34 percent are attending other Valley schools, 16 percent are attending charter schools, .5 percent are being home schooled, and 1.5 percent are learning online. The district does not have information for the final 13 percent.

A memo sent out by Wyman stated, "please note that the total district activity indicates that 550 students left the district, so the district gained a total of 300 new students."

Wyman explained that a loss of 250 students translates to approximately a \$1 million loss to the budget next year in addition to the \$950,000 loss the district implemented this year due to the Maintenance and Operations Budget Override three year phase out period. An estimated reduction for the 2009-2010 budget will be approximately \$1.5 to \$2 million.

"We will come up with solutions," Wyman said about tackling the budget decrease

see **Student Loss, A-3**

PCSO Arrests QC Teen For School Bomb Threat

Pinal County Sheriff's Office detectives apprehended a 14-year-old J.O. Combs Middle School student and bomb threat suspect within less than 12 hours of the suspect making the threat.

At about 9:30 a.m. September 11, PCSO deputies were dispatched to J.O. Combs Middle School, 37611 N. Pecan Creek Drive, in reference to a bomb threat. The school principal reported the front office of the school received a telephone call from an un-

known external line with a young male caller stating "a ninth grader has a bomb" and then the caller hung up.

J.O. Combs Middle School was evacuated and visually inspected by PCSO officers. The Chandler Police Department assisted the search by bringing in a bomb detection handler and canine, which yielded negative results after two searches of the building. It was determined that the school was safe for children to return and the case was

transferred over to PCSO detectives.

After interviewing students and the principal of J.O. Combs Middle School, PCSO detectives identified a 14-year-old student as a viable suspect. Detectives went to the student's residence and after speaking with the student and his father, the student was detained and booked into the Pinal County Adult Detention Center on charges of interference or disruption of an educational facility.

The News Kidcast

Mostly sunny skies with highs in the upper 90's and lows around 70 degrees.

This week's
**Weather
"Artoonist"
Madelynn
Shirley
Age 5**
Peralta Trail
Elementary
School

