

Wrangler NEWS

Think Local. Read Local.

Dec. 3 - 16, 2016 • Volume 27, No.23



From upbeat Broadway classics to gospel and pop, the 142 members of Tempe Community Chorus have been singing their hearts out for 25 years. Page 15.



Paralympic cyclist Todd Key inspired students at Gilliland Middle School with a message about overcoming obstacles and helping others along the way. Page 6.



Students at Fuller Elementary got a lesson in baking bread—and sharing the handmade goodness with the needy and hungry in the community. Page 5.

What's Inside

Saddle Up

A law-enforcement rarity in an age where technology reigns



Tempe's mounted police unit visited Buena Vista Ranchos, where residents offered their community arena for training.

— Wrangler News photo by Alex J. Walker

Mounted patrols trot fearlessly where others dare not tread

Just as did many police officers during their early days on the force, modern-day cop Stephanie Braxton has a partner when she patrols Mill Avenue on weekend nights. But her backup in this case is a four-legged one, and his name isn't Fido.

Officer Braxton's steadfast, not-to-be-messed-with partner is a 2,000-pound gelding named Ranger, who she says is the perfect companion for what she calls her dream job.

"My whole life, ever since I was a little kid, I've been riding horses," Braxton said. One of two full-time mounted police officers for Tempe, Braxton said she's been in this—the "perfect" job—

since 2007.

If having equestrian blood flowing in one's veins seems a rarity, Braxton insists she's not the only one who has a love for horses.

Lt. Michael Pooley, who oversees Tempe's metro bureau, said he hopes to one day train for the mounted patrol. Tempe is one of few departments in the state to still have such a unit, he said, alongside Scottsdale and the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

"Basically, what we use them for is crowd control," Pooley said.

"One of the biggest reasons is the number of special events we have. Tempe has over 350 (of those) a year that draw thousands of people."

Mostly, the event-goers are

well-behaved, Pooley said, "but there are times when crowds get large and out of control. They do things they shouldn't be doing."

That's where the horses come into play.

The department has seven of the equestrian beauties, stabled at Kiwanis Park. A mounted officer holds the manpower and capabilities that could be considered equal to that of six non-horseback officers, Pooley said.

Braxton says Pooley knows whereof he speaks.

"When a fight breaks out, that's our time to shine," Braxton explained. "We blow our whistles, we yell, so they should hear us

— MOUNTED, Page 9

Refugees, fleeing war, find respite among Valley's welcoming families

By Joyce Coronel

The holidays are the time of the year when families gather to celebrate and hold each other close, sharing laughter, love and a home-cooked meal.

Not everyone is so fortunate.

For refugees arriving from war-shattered Syria, the season of joy may prove a lonely interlude in a foreign land.

Enter Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, president and dean of Valley Beit Midrash, a Jewish community organization. Together with Arizona Jews for Justice, Rabbi Yanklowitz, joined by Sarah Kader and her family, welcomed two Muslim families from Syria for the start of the holiday season, Thanksgiving.

Kader, her husband and their new baby, along with members of their extended families, hosted a Syrian family that included a mother and father with

— REFUGEES, Page 8

ASU prof helps kids engineer a path to careers of the future

By Mark Crudup

Students at Aprende Middle School are getting a head start in engineering, and the community service it provides, with the help of a program established by Arizona State University professor Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh and Jennifer Velez, of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering.

"We are systematically trying to make a difference in high schools, and now middle schools, as well," Ganesh said. "Kyrene has agreed to pilot the program this year at Aprende."

The project, called Engineering Projects in Community Service, or EPICS, provides middle school students the opportunity to understand what encompasses engineering and the stakeholders involved.

"Right now, we're trying to figure out how to get middle school students to understand the engineering

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Refugees

From Page 1

five young sons.

"We should not fear them, but embrace them and welcome them into our home and say, 'You're here and you're safe. This country is a land of promise and so we want you to feel welcome and be with us to celebrate this holiday with us.'"

Kader sees the outreach through the lens of family history. Her grandparents were Holocaust survivors and her father, born in Germany, was a refugee who arrived in the U.S. following WWII.

"They came to this country after experiencing hell on earth. Without America embracing them, who knows what would have happened? For my family, it's very significant to embrace the immigrant and refugee and not shun them," Kader said.

Rabbi Yanklowitz, who also welcomed a family of seven Syrian refugees for Thanksgiving, echoed those sentiments. "Our feeling is that America should be welcoming to refugees and those that have arrived should be embraced and integrated into American culture," he said.

"My sense is that their healthy integration into American society will depend more on us than on them."

Between the linguistic, cultural and culinary divide—in the days leading up to the intercultural feast—Wrangler News wondered how local Jewish families would bridge the gap with the Middle Eastern, Muslim refugees. Would they be able to communicate? What about the turkey? And who



The Kaders of Tempe welcomed a Syrian refugee family to their home to share a Thanksgiving feast.

— Wrangler News photo by Alex J. Walker

would say the blessing?

"We have a Syrian leader who is coming and who will translate at our home," Yanklowitz said days prior to the event. At the Kaders' place, one of the older refugee children speaks English and will translate, he added.

"It may sound cliché, but I think the language of love and hope and light is what we are hoping to communicate," Kader said. "We hope to welcome them with not just our words, but with our actions and with hugs and food and a warmth we hope they will feel regardless of whether they can actually understand us. I think it will be just fine."

As for the turkey discussion, well, there wouldn't be one. The family follows a very specific dietary regimen, which precludes the consumption of poultry, Kader said.

"But apart from that, we do a traditional Thanksgiving meal, (with) traditional sides of stuffing, gravy, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and all that."

Meanwhile, Yanklowitz is vegan. He's serving sushi and spaghetti to his guests.

And the blessing of the meal? "I will offer the blessing in our home as I always do as a traditional Jew, and I'll also welcome them to make whatever blessing would be most appropriate for them," he said.

Both Yanklowitz and Kader said their faith guides their vision of hospitality.

"As Jews, it's really a significant thing to do because the Jewish story is not just related to the Holocaust: Our whole history of thousands of years is a story of being a stranger in a strange land and wanting to feel like we have a home someplace," Kader said.

"The Bible is very clear that if you are a religious person, most fundamental is to be compassionate to those who are vulnerable, and in particular to the stranger," Yanklowitz said.

"We are trying make positive change here in Arizona," Kader said, adding that she hopes others will join Arizona Jews for Justice.

What about those who worry that refugees might harbor terrorist sympathies in this era of headline-grabbing, gut-wrenching terror attacks?

"America has a very thorough vetting process, both in terms of monitoring them and continuing to ensure their security around them.

"So I actually feel they are some of the most-safe people to interact with in the country," Yanklowitz said.

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One Voice

A 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Tempe Community Chorus

Friday, December 16, 7:30pm
Mesa Arts Center

Celebrate the holidays and our 25th with 140 voices singing "The First Noel," "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," "Let there be Peace on Earth," plus "Celebrate," and favorites "You've got a Friend," "Let Me be There" and more.

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Box Office: (480) 644-6500 \$15 ages 12+
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A 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION