A compilation of articles that appeared in the Yuma Sun documenting the community’s commitment to technology, growth and success
Yuma Pride and Progress

Greater Yuma is a dynamic region located at the epicenter of four states and two countries. Our unique location allows for international and southwest markets to be served in a single day truck haul. Growing companies needing a dedicated skilled workforce and easy access to their customers and supply source have found the Greater Yuma Region to be the answer to all of their wants and needs.

Consider all of us at Greater Yuma EDC an extension of your team. We are your arbitrator with all local and state public agencies. We are Grantee of Foreign Trade (FTZ) 219 and will partner with you to obtain FTZ status if applicable. We are prepared for every size project.

Let us serve you in your expansion and/or relocation needs. Greater Yuma EDC offers you a one-stop shop for corporate site selection data, economic/demographic research trends and quality of life information along with a fully interactive GIS Site Locator tool that will guide you in locating the ideal real estate option.

Many companies chose Yuma County as the place to grow their business. Their success is evidenced by their continued growth in this market. We invite you to visit Yuma and meet the managers of General Motors, Johnson Controls, Shaw Diversified, Associated Materials, Northwestern Industries, International Paper, Gowan Company and Datepac to glean first hand why they are thriving in Yuma County.

Thank you for your interest in the greater Yuma Region and I look forward to meeting you.

Julie Engel
President/CEO
Greater Yuma Economic Development Council

Message from the President and CEO of GYEDC

Education
Gowan Science academy earns kudos from Apple...........3
In code mode: STEDY now offering computer programming module.........................4
Dev Day Yuma gives students a taste of coding...........4
Gowan named an APS STEM School for the Future........5

Health
YRMC deemed ‘Most Wired’ hospital for third year........6
YRMC implants the world’s smallest pacemaker for first time in Yuma..........................7

Military
Microgrid at MCAS to ensure base needs.................8
NASA in town to evaluate Orion spacecraft...............9
Facebook’s solar drone tested at YPG again...............10
Astronauts in Yuma for Orion tests.........................11

Business
Officials: ‘Smart City’ plan may boost Yuma development, improved connectivity in the future........12
Area initiative wins award for economic development......13
Yuma’s infill project honored with state award..............14
Yuma lowers capacity fees for utility systems..............15
Business buddies: Yuma’s friendly policies are attracting companies.................................16
Fewer flights, bigger planes to serve Yuma Airport........17
Building boom: Recent activity seems to bode well for Yuma’s economy..........................18

Agriculture
Tech in agriculture: A look at farming innovations.........20
Agriculture center using drones to help farmers............21

Culture
Yuma’s Historic Downtown named best in Arizona..........22
Yuma has the most extra spending money in state........23
Bicycle friendly: Yuma nabs ‘bronze’ status...............23
Gowan Science Academy earns kudos from Apple

By Amy Crawford, Yuma Sun staff writer


Ask Principal Jamie Haines why Gowan Science Academy has earned kudos from Apple as a leader in using technology in the classroom, and those four words will pop up repeatedly in her answer.

“We’re able to have kids collaborate in ways they’ve never been able to collaborate before in a classroom,” Haines said of the use of technology at the 420-student school that was named an Apple Distinguished School last fall.

Much of that technology has come from Apple as Crane received a grant in late 2014 to supply the majority of the district’s schools with iPads as part of President Barack Obama’s ConnectED Initiative. Eight schools received iPads for students and MacBooks for teachers, training and professional development, technology support and more, though Gowan wasn’t one of them, Haines said.

Gowan’s Professional development coach, Alissa Guevara, said the technology was a bit awkward at first.

“I remember ... in the shift of when we first started, it was strange to get used to the idea of using a device,” she recalled.

But the shift in mentality is what has set them apart, Haines said.

“Really, what our teachers have done with that is absolutely incredible. They’re able to use those iPads as production tools, as opposed to just gaming devices,” she said. “They’re using them to create work ... kids are often on the Apple Suite, like Pages, Keynote, Numbers, etc.”

Students use both Apple and Google suite of programs to collaborate and share documents, presentations and projects, Haines and Guevara said.

Students are not just sharing with each other, they are reaching out across the nation and the globe, Haines said. The honor of being an Apple Distinguished School opens up more doors for Gowan to network with other such schools.

“There are Apple Distinguished Schools in 29 countries, I think it is,” Haines said, “and we’re able to learn from schools across the globe and figure out what innovation they’re doing and it really just puts us into an elite group of schools that (have)... innovation as their goal and focus.”

The connection kids are making are amazing, Haines said, and students can continue working on their devices even in the wireless connection goes down.

“Because the teachers have access to the world through their iPads, kids are working on meaningful, real-life projects, which makes school much more meaningful and relevant to them, which in turn makes them much more, much happier students, overall ... which is what I want to see,” she said. “I don’t know that we really have a good measurement of that ... kids’ enjoyment of school.”

The district recently held an Apple Summit, in which all its schools got together with other ConnectED schools in the region, including schools from San Luis, Ariz., and Calexico, Guevara said.

The networking just in the region was valuable, the two educators said.

“We just had a connection with two teachers that team teach, but don’t live in the same state, and so they use a program called Zoom, where they Zoom into each other’s classrooms,” Haines explained. “One teacher that may be living in Michigan can teach the lesson while the kids in Tennessee are watching that lecture in their devices.”

“Since the two teachers are collaborating, their lessons are identical,” Haines noted, “and they don’t have to be in the same building.”

While the district continues to find ways to sustain the technology, Haines said that everyone finds value in the technology and its uses.

“I think what we’re very fortunate for is that everybody -- students, parents, teachers -- find value in the iPads, so I know that we will make a way to sustain this technology,” she said. “It would be really weird for (our teachers) to go back to teaching without one-to-one devices.”

One of the pluses of being innovative with technology is that it pulls kids into the learning and creative process, Haines noted.

“Our kids are excited to come to school. I had a sixth-grader yesterday who had an appointment and Mom wanted to go to lunch and he was like, ‘No, I have to get back to school,’ and she was just shocked that this 12-year-old kid’s like, ‘Please, take me back to school.”
In code mode: STEDY now offering computer programming module

By Amy Crawford. Yuma Sun staff writer

“These students, they eat up everything he says. They just sit there wanting more and more,” she said of the 5:30 to 8 p.m. class held at the high school Mondays through Thursdays.

Some students even riding their bikes through the Class period like a business, Rodriguez, and students’ “want” list, but they didn’t expect the deviation so many put into the class, they said.

“A lot of them had given up some after-school sports that they were once in, some clubs that they were once in, because they wanted this so badly,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez, the curriculum, instruction and assessment specialist for the Southwest Technical Education District of Yuma, was helping the software development class instructor look for improvements. Except the students and the instructor, Jeff Breeden, weren’t interested in taking a break.

The moment was a bit of confirmation for Rodriguez, and STEDY Superintendent Kevin Imes, who knew that a desire for coding courses was on students’ “want” list, but they didn’t expect the deviation so many put into the class, they said.

“Help him with all the teaching aspects of it. He comes with the expertise. Together we are dangerous,” she said.

Imes said.

STEDY and the Yuma County Superintendent’s Office have been collaborating with other partners in the region to offer a software development pathway, Imes said.

With growing interest in Yuma’s coding event, Dev Day Yuma, and the awarding of an informatics grant at Arizona Western College’s San Luis campus, there are more pathways to earn a degree in computer science than ever before. In having Arizona’s three universities on the AWC campus, students can move from STEDY’s program into those, Imes said.

“We’re working together to create the pathway to that,” Rodriguez said. “It’s just a collaboration from high school all the way up to university.”

The coding class is a result of interest from students and economic development, Imes and Rodriguez said, and community and business leaders involved with coding and software development sit on the course’s advisory panel.

The desire for a coding class has lead STEDY to also consider offering an animation course as well, Imes said.

“When I say animation, it’s just not cartoons. I always have to put that little disclaimer in there, because architects, geologist, car manufacturers -- we have discovered that there’s a need for animators again,” he said.

Rodriguez is developing some curriculum for an animation course using standards from the Arizona Department of Education.

Community members and businesses interested in what the coding class is working on are invited to an open house on Oct. 19 at the Gila Ridge classroom.

Rodriguez said that the group is ready for the next challenge, whether it be animation or something else.

“It started to where... nobody left the room,” for the 10-minute break, Rodriguez said of the session she sat in on.

“They’re still working, asking questions, getting together, and it’s just so much fun. They’ve become like a family. They give each other rides and what they’re doing is just unbelievable. Jeff is ready to take them as far as they will go.”

Dev Day Yuma gives students a taste of coding

By Amy Crawford. Yuma Sun staff writer

Dev Day Yuma is all about bringing mentors and volunteers and students together to build an app or a game using a pre-programming tool called Scratch, said Yuma County Superintendent Tom Tyree, whose office is putting on the event.

About 100 high school students are registered for Yuma County’s first “coding event,” similar to one put on in Gilbert called the Spark App League and another called CodeDay in Maricopa County. Yuma’s event will be held in February.

Dev Day Yuma is all about bringing mentors and volunteers and students together to build an app or a game using an app called Scratch, said Yuma County Superintendent Tom Tyree.

About 100 high schoolers from area schools are expected, including those from eastern Yuma County, said Tyree and Brenda Warnock, Arizona Western College’s technology director.

Students are split into teams, and each has a mentor from the college’s IT department or other sponsor volunteer, Warnock said. Dev Day Yuma is designed to be a very “hands on” event.

AWC is providing a dedicated wireless hub for the event and laptops for the students to use, as well as the use of the Schoening Conference Center. The planning group did a mock-run through of events on Friday to see how the wireless would handle the bandwidth needed. There are more hot spots on reserve if needed, she said.

“For every plan, we have a backup plan and another backup plan,” Warnock said, “just in case.”

The event’s sponsors include the Helios Foundation, Trax International, the Yuma Union High School District, the Southwest Technical Education District of Yuma (STEDY), the Yuma campus of the University of Arizona, Arizona Western College, and the Yuma Chamber of Commerce.

Several sponsors are scheduled to speak to students during lunch, including Conrad Hernandez of Trax, to talk about coding as a career.

The Dev Day Yuma team consists of leaders from all of the aforementioned organizations: Julie Rodriguez, marketing consultant Bob Cuckler, UA lecturer Samuel Peffers, Tanya Hodges and Lori Honeycutt, the Yuma Union High School District’s director of career and technical education.

Videos for the event were made by funds from the Helios Foundation. The current Dev Day Yuma project was formed in the summer of 2016.

For more information, check out http://www.devdayyuma.com. 
Yuma County's Gowan Science Academy has been selected as one of five APS STEM Schools for the Future for the upcoming school year, according to a news release from NAU.

Gowan Science Academy, or GSA, has been a STEM school since its inception in 2013 as a district charter school, said Principal Jamie Haines, who was hired as the school's first principal, and has been at the helm since its inception, according to previous articles in the Yuma Sun.

STEM schools focus on science, technology, engineering and math, Haines said. "This grant will push us to a new level in STEM education."

GSA teachers and administrators have already been to Flagstaff for training and will attend additional training sessions throughout the year both at GSA and NAU, Haines said.

"Going into Year 5 as a school, we are ready to push our students' learning to the next level and get them involved on a local issue in which they can develop solutions and create a lasting impact," Haines said in an email interview with the Yuma Sun, explaining one of the School for the Future's components.

"We know that if we can get students as young as 10 years old involved in their community and give them the experience of helping their community then they are likely to be contributing members of their community when they grow up," Haines said.

Haines said the GSA group has made connections with Yuma Community Food Bank President and CEO Shara Merten to start planning a food sustainability project in Yuma.

"One thing we have been working toward is developing community partners in order to have students make an impact in our Yuma Community," she said. "The professional learning we are receiving through this grant will allow us to do that this year."

The APS STEM School for the Future program, run by Northern Arizona University's Center for Science Teaching and Learning, is funded through a $250,000 grant from the APS Foundation, which was awarded in late 2016.

The APS STEM School for the Future is a K-8 professional development system designed for schools that are either beginning or already focused on their STEM learning journey, according to NAU's web page about the program. The purpose of the program is to "develop a more STEM literate workforce by building school capacity to design and implement effective STEM education for today's learners."

The is the second cohort of schools funded through the grant, according to the news release from NAU-Flagstaff. The first cohort, chosen in 2012, had 13 schools across Arizona. This year, the cohort has five schools: Cottonwood Middle School in Cottonwood; The STAR School in Flagstaff; Sierra Verde STEM Academy in Glendale; The STAR School in Flagstaff; and GSA.

"The learning we have already experienced through this grant is priceless. It's exactly what we needed to push Gowan Science Academy to a new level of STEM education," Haines said. "It is not only affecting our students but also this amazing community in which we live."
YRMC deemed ‘Most Wired’ hospital for third year

By Rachel Twoguns, Yuma Sun staff writer

With the world of technology ever changing, Yuma Regional Medical Center is aiming to keep up with advances and was recently named a Most Wired hospital for the third time.

“The Most Wired hospitals are using every available technology option to create more ways to reach their patients in order to provide access to care,” AHA president and CEO Rick Pollack said in a statement. “They are transforming care delivery, investing in new delivery models in order to improve quality, provide access and control costs.”

The results of the 19th Annual Health Care’s Most Wired survey, released by the American Hospital Association (AHA) Health Forum, recognized hospitals that are utilizing technology to improve accessibility for patients. The HealthCare’s Most Wired survey is conducted between Jan. 15 and March 15 every year.

Frederick Peet, chief information officer for YRMC, told the Yuma Sun in a July interview that the hospital was not on the list for the Most Wired hospitals for close to a decade.

“I’ve been here almost 11 years and we did not win this award for the first eight years,” Peet said. “We’ve spent a lot of time building that technology up to receive our first award in 2015.”

With the three-year streak of landing on the Most Wired hospitals list, Peet added that he feels YRMC is on track to adhere to patients’ needs in the future.

“It means that we are positioned now to the next five years from a technology standpoint to be able to provide what those patients—who may not need a lot of healthcare now but as they get older and as they raise children—they are going to need that and we know technology is going to be a central element in that care,” Peet explained.

The survey and benchmarking study includes 698 participants, representing an estimated 2,158 hospitals or more than 39 percent of all hospitals in the U.S. It examines how organizations are leveraging IT to improve performance for value-based health care in the areas of infrastructure, business, and administrative management; quality and safety and clinical integration, the AHA association showed.

“Annually around September or October we will get the links to the benchmarking reports,” Peet said. “We want to be careful but we look at hospitals of our size and typically we try to compare as much as we can to our patient population, our demographics of our patients and we look at them and we say ‘okay, how do we compare?’ because they give us a score in the benchmarking.”

The CIO of YRMC stated that the benchmarking score is used as a look into what may be working for other, comparable hospitals when it comes to their use of technology.

“We are not necessarily going to use it to make a definitive decision about technology but it’s another data point for us to look at — is there a technology solution that will help us and our patients?” Peet said. “It’s hard to be on the cutting edge sometimes of a lot of technology or what we call the ‘bleeding edge’ which is not really a proven technology. But, we need to stay up on technology and that’s what the Most Wired award sort of validates for us is that we have put in the operational dollars and energy to put ourselves in a place where technology plays a role in healthcare.”

Peet noted that as the hospital is “not on paper anymore” the organization has implemented an online way for patients to access information.

“We’ve implemented technology that allows for secure remote access when needed to patient information from physicians. We have a patient portal called MyCare so patients can access their information, download it, print it off and see their list of medications.”

According to the survey, YRMC is one of only five hospitals in Arizona to be honored this year. Other honorees are located in the Phoenix Metro area, Tucson and Prescott.

“There are a lot more than five hospitals in Arizona,” Peet said. “Either they are not taking the survey or they are just not quite there yet. For me, this (award) means that we are keeping up with technology in today’s world and thinking about Generation X or millennials and their use of technology. They want to use that technology to find a health care provider, deal with physicians etcetera and it’s good for us to not only understand that, but the back-end technology that makes that work, we have to be able to provide that and that is a lot of what we have in place today.”

Peet explained many of the technological strides YRMC has made are not necessarily ones patients often come in contact with or see in the hospital’s day-to-day operations, but they are occurring nonetheless, such as cyber security.

“Part of the IT infrastructure that we have has to deal with cyber security and implementing technology that helps us attain a secure environment,” Peet said. “We have a lot of technology in-house and it’s continuing to evolve and continuing to change and every year the Most Wired survey — they modify their questions and thus possible answers — so you can’t just acquire some technology and say ‘well we are good’ and be done with it. We are constantly evolving and changing the technology in the organization and trying to improve our ability to deliver healthcare, document on that healthcare, provide access to our patients and our staff and put in mobile solutions.”
Yuma Pride and Progress

By Rachel Twoguns. Yuma Sun staff writer

On a day that JoAnn Vanderwerken visited a local high school to attend to her granddaughter, she experienced a fainting spell that would lead to a life-changing procedure.

The 63-year-old Yuman said she often felt dizzy and had instances of falling. It was not until the beginning of this fall, however, that her blood pressure reached a dangerous low and she was diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation (A-Fib), a condition characterized by an irregular heart rhythm that commonly causes poor blood flow, according to Jonathon Man, cardiac electrophysiologist at Yuma Regional Medical Center Specialty Clinics.

Symptoms can include dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath or fainting spells, much like the one Vanderwerken experienced the day she attended to her granddaughter at school.

“That was actually the first time I had ever passed out,” Vanderwerken said. “I guess my blood pressure had become really, really low. I was more dead than alive.”

Her granddaughter, 17-year-old Sierra Friend, said she cares for Vanderwerken at home and noted that it was more common for her grandmother to have dizzy spells before the procedure. She added, however, that she was quite shaken the day her grandmother, whom she refers to as her own mother, fainted at her school.

She was driving home in her own car after meeting with Vanderwerken at the high school when she got a call that her mother had fainted. Friend said she immediately made her way back to the school.

“As I got to the school they had her on a stretcher coming out and she was out of it,” Friend recalled. “There was no life to her.”

Man said that approximately over two to five percent of people over the age of 70 have A-Fib and approximately over 10 percent of people over the age of 80 have the condition. Pacemakers are commonly used to treat A-Fib.

Husnu Evren Kaynak, an interventional cardiologist who is affiliated with YRMC and who performed the procedure on Vanderwerken along with Man, noted she was not only to get a pacemaker, but that she was an appropriate candidate for the world’s smallest pacemaker, the Mirca transcatheter pacing system (TPS).

“That is the latest technology,” Kaynak said. “It’s very small, it has no leads (wires) attached to it. This procedure has been done less than 10 times in Arizona so far. We decided that because of her age and her diagnosis, she would be an excellent candidate for this procedure.”

According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website, like other pacemakers, Mirca TPS generates electrical impulses that cause the heart to contract or beat. The Mirca TPS has an estimated 12-year battery life.

Additionally, the Mirca TPS was designed with a feature that enables it to be permanently turned off and remain in the body to eliminate the risk of electrical interaction when a new device is to be implanted when needed.

The Mirca TPS is about one-tenth the size of a traditional pacing device, is about one inch in length and is implanted directly into the right ventricle of the heart, most commonly through the femoral vein, or groin, rather than surgically implanted in the chest. Such was the case with Vanderwerken.

The procedure took place on Sept. 20 and took about one hour to complete. Both Man and Kaynak received specific training to perform the procedure.

“Typically the standard pacemaker has a generator which is put onto the chest and then a wire goes to the heart.” Man explained. “This one is very nice. It’s all self-contained and it goes directly into the heart so there are no extra wires.”

“It can only go in one chamber,” Man added. “Current pacemakers can pace two or three chambers so it’s not for everybody. Like Dr. Kaynak said, patient selection is very important. Although it’s the newest technology, we are not just doing it because it’s the newest. We are doing it because it’s appropriate for her as well.”

Since the Mirca TPS does not require the use of leads, or wires that connect traditional pacemakers to the heart, it makes it minimally invasive.

“It’s a great team approach with interventional cardiology and cardiac electrophysiology,” Kaynak said. “Now we can treat a wide range of patients with this device without outside scars and other possible complications. We have an elderly population in Yuma and a lot of patients can be candidates for this device. We are looking forward to treating them as a team.”

Once implanted, the Mirca TPS monitors the heart rate and adjusts therapy in response to the patient’s activity level. It is designed to allow patients to be followed by their physicians and send data remotely via the Medtronic CareLink Network.

Since the device has been implanted, Vanderwerken said she has felt that her quality of life has increased overall.

“I love it,” Vanderwerken said. “I have more energy — no limitations. I can feel it at times at night if I am lying there — can feel myself jump only because it’s chugging my heart to pump. It’s an odd feeling but you get used to it, so now it doesn’t even bother me and I have more vitality. I want to live and I want to live life to the fullest.” YRMC is the fourth hospital in Arizona to implant the Mirca TPS following Mayo Clinic, Banner Health and HonorHealth. The Mirca TPS was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in April 2016 and has been granted Medicare reimbursement.
Microgrid at MCAS Yuma to ensure base needs

By Matt Harding, Yuma Sun staff writer

A new 25 megawatt microgrid unveiled Dec. 15, 2016, at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma will ensure the energy requirements of the base are met in the event of a system-wide grid outage.

The small-scale power grid also has the ability to generate power that can flow to the external grid for community consumption.

Project partners Arizona Public Service and the U.S. Department of the Navy, as well as local leaders, gathered at the site for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and discussed the microgrid’s importance to base operations and national security.

Mark Schiavoni, executive vice president and chief operating officer of APS — the utility that owns, operates and maintains the microgrid — said that the project came about as a result of the massive Sept. 8, 2011 power outage that affected nearly 7 million people in the region.

“The importance to (MCAS Yuma) is their ability to island themselves if anything were to happen to the power grid,” Schiavoni said. “They can be isolated and continue their mission 24/7/365, if necessary.”

The microgrid can provide power to the base within 30 seconds if a system-wide grid outage were to occur, ensuring continuous function.

Colonel Ricardo Martinez, the commanding officer of Marine Corps Air Station Yuma since June 2014, said that getting the system running at 100 percent so quickly “guarantees a seamless continuation of ongoing operations.”

Major General John Broadmeadow, commander of Marine Corps Installations Command, said that the Marines need to train and hone their skills on the base, “and that can’t be interrupted by natural disasters or attacks or anything that might cause the energy supply to this base to go down.”

He added: “This project is vital to our contribution to national security, and that’s not an overstatement.”

The microgrid system, with its 40 engine generators, has a control panel that can be monitored in APS’s main control room, and at APS control systems in Georgia and North Carolina.

“The whole system is autonomous,” said David Morton, who specializes in microgrids and energy storage engineering and construction at APS.

“It literally sees situations occurring on the grid and makes decisions on starting engines and isolating or distributing power on its own.”

PowerSecure, a subsidiary of Southern Company headquartered in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and APS both were involved in the design and engineering of the facility’s systems.

Ron Durfey, energy manager at MCAS Yuma for 30 years, said the Marine Corps had been looking for how it could make its bases “self-sufficient in a time of need,” such as after the 2011 blackout.

He said when that happened, there were issues with the backup generators and MCAS Yuma didn’t have enough energy capabilities.

“Now, not only can we take of our main facilities on the air station, we can take care of our family housing, we can take care of our mess halls (and) we can take care of the troops that are in the barracks,” Durfey said.

“To have that power available when you need it — in a time of crisis — is unbelievably necessary,” he added.

Ron Kruse, the public works director at MCAS Yuma who’s been working alongside Durfey for 20 years, noted that the 2011 blackout was at the start of MCAS Yuma’s Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course.

“We bring people in from all over the country,” he said. “An outage here has a lot of significant cost impacts.”

The microgrid is APS’s first.
NASA in town to evaluate Orion spacecraft

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

It’s the nature of mankind to explore, even beyond the planet. The United States intends to continue that exploration by going deeper into space with the Orion spacecraft, which will carry astronauts farther into the solar system than ever before, provide emergency abort capabilities, sustain the crew during the mission and provide safe re-entry through Earth’s atmosphere.

But NASA must first conduct tests to ensure that future crews return safely to Earth after those deep-space exploration missions. Orion’s parachutes are critical to the safe return of astronauts. They help Orion slow from about 300 to 20 mph in less than 10 minutes, enabling a safe splashdown in the ocean.

A NASA team based at Johnson Space Center in Houston planned to test the parachutes Dec. 13 at Yuma Proving Ground. The team has been working out of the Jacobs Hangar at the Yuma International Airport in preparation of this week’s testing.

The team loaded the model capsule onto a C-17 aircraft on Dec. 11 and transported it to YPG, where it will be dropped from an altitude of 35,000 feet. This test is the fifth in a series of eight to qualify the parachute system for crewed Orion missions.

Engineers will simulate a scenario in which one of the three main parachutes fails to open after the deployment of several other parachutes that help slow and stabilize the spacecraft.

“We want to demonstrate things like the opening loads, the rate of descent and the parachute sequence. In this particular test, we usually have three main parachutes at the end, but we’ll only put out two of the three so we’re demonstrating a failure mode,” Carol Evans, NASA test manager, said.

Testing is the only way to certify parachutes. “Some of them can be certified through analysis or simulations, but (you’ve) really got to put out the parachutes. The inflation and deployment cannot be modeled, so it has to be tested,” Evans said.

She noted that every detail is tested and retested because lives depend on it. Each test costs $1 million and includes the travel cost of the team, which can range from 20 to 60 people, the tests and use of the range.

Evans explained why NASA comes to Yuma for testing. “The Yuma Proving Grounds are the premier parachute test range in the United States, and they have all the facilities we need. They have cameras, airplanes, drop zone, safety, all the people we need.”

Because the actual spacecraft is worth several billion dollars, NASA uses replicas made of foam during testing. However, these models must be the same weight and dimensions as the real thing. The structure closely matches the spacecraft but can take a real beating.

This capsule is larger than the Apollo, which had room for three astronauts. The Orion has space for four astronauts.

“Everything is bigger, the parachutes are bigger,” Evans said.

She also believes the NASA space program is important because it inspires youth and a new generation of explorers and encourages interest in STEM: science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

“It lets us compete with the rest of the world and allows NASA and the U.S. to be a player in world exploration,” she added.

Evans also expressed appreciation for the local community. “Yuma is a great place to be. We always love coming here. It’s good for us.”

Gen Grosse, spokeswoman for the Yuma International Airport, is proud of the airport’s contribution to the aerospace industry.

“We can be a great contributing factor to economic development. Having NASA as one of the airport’s tenants really helps to solidify what Yuma has been promoting for a long time, that we are a great place to do business, we have a great facility, we have a great community, and we want you to do business here,” she said.
Facebook’s solar drone tested at YPG again

By Blake Herzog, Yuma Sun staff writer

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced in June that the social network ran a second test flight of its massive, solar-powered Aquila drone last month at Yuma Proving Ground, and the first that didn’t end in a crash landing.

Zuckerberg’s morning post shot quickly around local social circles, as they reveled in another after-the-fact reveal, which came a year and a day after the initial flight of the unmanned aircraft he hopes will deliver internet access to remote corners of the world.

Calling it “Aquila’s second successful flight,” Zuckerberg said, “In this test, it flew for 1 hour and 46 minutes over the desert and landed smoothly near Yuma, Arizona,” he said, using that location tag, although YPG is about 30 miles to the northwest.

He added, “We successfully gathered a lot of data to help us optimize Aquila’s efficiency. No one has ever built an unmanned airplane that will fly for months on a gravel surface, a 500-foot circle of level gravel which was the designated landing pad. Gomez said YPG staff quickly named the site “Aquila Beach.”

Gomez said his team was thrilled about the outcome, especially because “the improvements we implemented based on Aquila’s performance during its first test flight made a significant difference in this flight.”

The blog and video did not indicate whether Zuckerberg watched the flight in person, as he had during the inaugural flight last year.

That initial voyage was also not confirmed by Facebook for about a month after it happened, though the news leaked into the Yuma community just as it happened. At the time it was called a “successful flight” lasting 90 minutes, much longer than the half-hour expected. The crash landing didn’t become public until the National Transportation Safety Board released a report on the incident in December.

The May 22 flight was also done secretly within the vast holdings of YPG, an Army-operated military testing ground for both U.S. and foreign forces, and also by General Motors and some other corporate users.

“My kids had never been able to see internet before this,” said Chuck Wullenjohn, YPG spokesman.

Veronica Shorr, Yuma’s regional director for the Arizona Community Foundation, was excited enough about Zuckerberg’s post Wednesday to post one of the more than 3,500 comments it had gotten by 5:30 p.m. Thursday.

“Mark, I hope you fell in love with Yuma! Our community is ground zero for a lot of projects like this—giving us the perfect opportunity to promote STEM in our schools and community!” Shorr wrote, also encouraging the increasingly philanthropic founder to look into supporting the Yuma Community Fund’s technology-related programs.

She told the Yuma Sun she would have loved to see Zuckerberg speak to students at local schools. “Unfortunately he didn’t do that, but I think this is great, just him acknowledging Yuma in his post is a huge success, because now he’s putting Yuma on the map, worldwide.”

She noted other comments came in from India, Japan, South Africa and other nations, and a Facebook user from Kenya replied “Great” to her comment.

“So how cool to show this to our students. I can’t wait to go home and show my son, ‘look at this, this was tested in Yuma, and if this becomes a reality there’s going to be internet access for 4 billion people around the world, so what a great thing to say ‘Hey, it happened here’ or ‘It started here.’” she said, quoting figures Zuckerberg used in his post.

The Aquila aircraft, when fully developed, are intended to stay aloft for 90 days at a time and beam a broadband internet signal to a 60-mile wide area on the ground, from an altitude of up to 60,000 feet.
Astronauts in Yuma for Orion tests

By Mara Knaub. Yuma Sun staff writer

Many kids want to be astronauts when they grow up. Steve Bowen was one of those kids. He remembers being 5 years old and seeing the moon landing on a black and white TV. He wanted to be one of those space explorers, but he never thought it would happen.

Still, it was always in the back of his mind. So when the opportunity came to apply for the NASA space program, he did. Many astronauts applied time after time until they got accepted. NASA invited Bowen to join the program immediately.

“I was fortunate enough to be selected,” he said.

The Massachusetts native has now logged a total of 40 days, 10 hours, 4 minutes and 37 seconds in space, including 47 hours and 18 minutes in seven spacewalks, according to a NASA biography.

Bowen and fellow astronaut Barry “Butch” Wilmore were in town in December as NASA tests parachutes for the Orion program at Yuma Proving Ground. The spacecraft is designed for deep-space exploration, possibly a return to the moon as well as Mars and beyond.

A drop test scheduled for Dec. 13 was scrapped due to technical difficulties with the airplane carrying a replica of the capsule. During the test, the model would have been dropped from a C-17 flying at an altitude of 35,000 feet. Engineers wanted to evaluate a simulated scenario in which one of the three main parachutes fails to open.

However, the aircraft’s ramp malfunctioned, leading the NASA team to nix the test and reschedule it for Dec. 14.

Bowen and Wilmore were both at the drop zone for the opportunity to see the test and get a better understanding of how the spacecraft would land. Of course, the Orion would be landing in water, not the desert. But tests allow engineers to figure out which angles are best for splashing into the ocean because, as Bowen jokes, just about everybody knows how painful a “belly flop” can be.

While waiting for the morning drop test, both Bowen and Wilmore shared their thoughts, experiences and advice to kids who dream of becoming astronauts.

Bowen, 53, has been a part of the NASA program for 17 years. He earned a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1986 and a master’s in ocean engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Joint Program in 1993.

His advice to kids who want to explore space? “Study hard, do well in school, and when you get these opportunities, even if you have setbacks, continue to work hard, and you will get choices that excite you and you will excel at them. If you get an opportunity to apply (for the NASA space program), go for it and even if you’re never chosen, you will still have a tremendous career and do something you really love.”

Bowen pointed out that “99 percent” of being an astronaut does not involve flying. But for him, just being part of the NASA space exploration program is satisfying.

“You feel like you are contributing to a better future, to a better understanding of mankind, science, medicine and biology,” Bowen said.

He also noted while space travel is fascinating, humankind should not lose sight of the beauty and uniqueness of Earth, something he can personally attest to after admiring our home planet from space.

Wilmore, a Tennessee native, has logged 178 days in space and has 25 hours and 36 minutes of time in four spacewalks in his decade and a half serving with NASA. He decided to apply to the space program and become an astronaut because “you can’t fly higher and faster than a space shuttle.”

Asked to describe his dream mission, Wilmore noted that “whatever the country is doing, whatever the focus is, I’m on board. Flying in space, there is no ‘I’d rather do this or that.’ Flying in space is marvelous, anything you can get is fantastic.”

He describes flying in space as the best experience he’s had in the NASA program. “You can’t beat space flight as far as the job position. An astronaut’s job is not to fly in space, it’s to support human space flight and occasionally you get to fly in space. So you can’t top that,” he said.

“The weightlessness, you feel like Superman because you can fly. You can’t top that. And whatever you’re doing, whatever the task is, there’s no better place to be for periods of time than being in orbit.”

Wilmore also encouraged kids to study math and science. “If you want to be an astronaut you need to have a good foundation in many disciplines and math and science gives you that.”

He noted others can also support the human space flight program. “It takes us to far destinations and we have benefits on earth from the things we are learning as we go forward. This support is much appreciated.”

Wilmore believes the testing at YPG is vital to the program. “I’ve come back to earth under parachute so there’s not a much better feeling than when the parachute opens successfully, I’m telling you, when you’re riding the capsule. Eventually we’ll be flying humans on Orion to far destinations beyond lower orbit yet to be determined and you want to come home. And we can’t get home obviously without parachutes when you’re flying a capsule. These tests are vital to the program and getting folks back safely to their families,” he said.

Chuck Wullenjohn, YPG public affairs officer, pointed out the economic impact of having 50 NASA team members in Yuma this week, all staying in local hotels, some renting cars and fueling up, eating at restaurants and shopping in the community.

Col. Ross Poppenberger, commander of YPG, also noted how NASA’s use of the range facilities for testing shows how YPG continues to be a valuable resource for the nation and how that technical expertise supports the NASA mission.

“At the end of the day, as these other agencies are looking to come to Yuma, we do well to maintain that technical expertise,” he said.
Officials: ‘Smart City’ plan may boost Yuma development, improved connectivity in future

By Joyce Lobeck, Special to the Yuma Sun

Great things are happening in Yuma — new stores and restaurants have been opening their doors and companies are choosing to locate their businesses here, providing a welcome boost to the community.

But that activity is expected to be just the beginning of what the future will hold in ways that aren’t even fathomable today.

The attraction, city officials believe, is Yuma’s transformation in the coming months into a “smart city,” the first in the world.

“There are very exciting prospects,” said Yuma Mayor Doug Nicholls. “I really anticipate the smart city initiative will spur more interest in development.”

After all, he added, “every company is driven by technology.”

Just off the top of his head, he thought of Amazon drone deliveries and autonomous cars. “It will be the next generation of business development.”

Added City Administrator Greg Wilkinson, “it’s almost unlimited the things we’ll be able to do … things we haven’t even imagined yet, technology is advancing at such a rapid rate.”

So what is a smart city and how did Yuma end up being selected to be a pilot market for the brand new technology? Furthermore, what will it mean for the community?

Through an agreement approved by the Yuma City Council in August, small units called nodes will be installed in the next several months on top of every streetlight in the city that will blanket the community in high-speed broadband connectivity.

“Once this happens, anything or everything is possible … applications no one has dreamed up yet,” said Rob Praske, founder and CEO of anyCOMM.

He recalled that as “just a kid,” he developed medical alerts for shut-ins. Several of his previous companies were leading developers of hardware and software for the home electronics and healthcare industries. anyCOMM has focused its attention to connecting people throughout cities.

“There will be wifi anywhere you go in the city,” he said, noting that the technology isn’t meant to replace existing Internet service but to add to and enhance it — no more dropped phone calls and no more spotty service in some areas. “That will be possible because of the brand new wifi network.”

Praske said anyCOMM has been piloting the technology for six years in portions of various cities. Now it is at the point of high-volume mass production and Yuma will be the first full-city deployment of the anyCOMM technology in the world.

“The recipe for Yuma to lead 17 other cities we have in play was timing and strong leaders,” he said. “Yuma has technology people and forward thinkers. They understand what this will bring to the community and are willing to work with advanced technology companies.”

For example, Wilkinson has an IT background and Ricky Rinehart, former deputy administrator, came from a career in cable television.

In addition, said Praske, the community is a good size for the project. He noted that anyCOMM is footing the bill for the nodes at a cost of $1,000 each and the city has approximately 10,000 streetlights for a total initial investment of $10 million. The company also will maintain and upgrade the nodes at no cost to the city.

Praske emphasized that “anyCOMM is taking the initial risk. There’s no risk to the city.”

The nodes are to be installed by Siemens Industry, Inc., Building Technologies Division, using a cooperative purchase agreement with the state of Arizona. At the same time, Siemens will install LED lights and new ballasts, increasing the energy efficiency of the city’s streetlights and save the city more than $3.85 million over the next 10 years in energy and operational costs, according to Wilkinson.

Another big factor in Yuma’s favor is its location on the major fiber optics line that runs along the railroad, connecting Los Angeles and Denver, Praske said. That not only made the city attractive as the company’s first complete smart city, it also has anyCOMM looking to Yuma as the potential location for one of four infrastructure operations centers it intends to build in the United States, he said. “We’re talking about a 50,000-square-foot facility with 250 employees working around the clock — high tech jobs requiring specific skills. That’s what (being a smart city) means to economic development just for our company. It would spur other companies to do the same thing. We’re launching Yuma into something no other cities have.”

As part of the public-private agreement with the city, anyCOMM will share 20 percent of revenue the company anticipates generating from selling wifi connectivity to customers at “super, super reasonable” fees as well as payment by cellular carriers for connections to the new network to improve their service.

In addition, anyCOMM is deploying a separate private network for first responders, emergencies and other city use. The nodes have an array of sensors built in:

- Audio sensors to record such sounds as gunshots, breaking glass and car crashes.
Area initiative wins award for economic development

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

A binational initiative to increase commerce and tourism in the Yuma County area and the neighboring region in Mexico has been honored for excellence in economic development.

The American Planning Association’s Economic Development Division awarded the 4FrontED Initiative with its Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Planning Award. The award was presented May 9 at the American Planning Association National Planning Conference in New York City.

The binational 4FrontED campaign promotes Yuma County, San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, and surrounding areas as a single economic region to attract industry.

The association noted the public-private partnership “is adding economic value to a multi-jurisdictional region where it may not have otherwise occurred.”

The name “4FrontED” is a nod to the region’s location at the convergence of four states in two nations. The collaboration involves the Arizona cities of Yuma, Somerton, Wellton and San Luis; Yuma County; San Luis Rio Colorado in Mexico; and the Arizona Department of Transportation. The Cocopah Indian Tribe is a recent member of the initiative.

Yuma Mayor Douglas J. Nicholls said 4FrontED’s successes have only just begun as participants unite behind its shared vision.

“We are doing so, in unison, with short-term and long-term goals, to put the region on the global map,” Nicholls said.

The effort was branded as 4FrontED by the Greater Yuma Economic Development Corporation and its Sonora counterpart COPRESAN.

Mayor Douglas Nicholls welcomes another business to Yuma, flanked by a sign promoting 4FrontED, a binational campaign that promotes Yuma County, San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, and surrounding areas as a single economic region to attract industry.

In 2013, several agencies, including ADOT, Arizona-Mexico Commission, Arizona Commerce Authority and Arizona Office of Tourism, worked with the border communities of Douglas, Nogales and San Luis/Yuma County to create the Arizona Border Communities Roadmap identifying assets and strategies to generate economic development.

“ADOT recognizes that border communities, because of their binational nature, have unique needs but also present a number of valuable opportunities for growth and development,”

ADOT Director John Halikowski said, “The collaborative approach through the Border Communities Roadmap ensures that we maximize the efforts to promote the region and foster new investment and job creation.”

The 4FrontED Initiative stems from a binational work program, the Border Business Case, that is the first step of the Border Communities Roadmap.

Through the 4FrontED Initiative, communities and businesses in the Yuma County region and Mexico formed alliances to increase international commerce and tourism and develop strategies to connect investors with opportunities.

This story originally appeared in Yuma Biz, a publication of the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce.
Yuma’s recently adopted Infill Overlay District and Plan has been recognized with a “State of Planning” award, one of seven handed out by the American Planning Association, Arizona Chapter.

Laurie Lineberry, director of the city’s Department of Community Development, and Alyssa Linville, principal planner, hold an award from the American Planning Association, Arizona Chapter that the department won in the 2017 Best Open Category for its Overlay District and Plan. The award was presented to the Yuma City Council during the Nov. 15 meeting.

Photo by Mara Knaub/Yuma Sun

Laurie Lineberry, director of Yuma’s Community Development Department, and Alyssa Linville, principal planner, hold an award from the American Planning Association, Arizona Chapter that the department won in the 2017 Best Open Category for its Overlay District and Plan. The award was presented to the Yuma City Council during the Nov. 15 meeting.

By Mara Knaub. Yuma Sun staff writer

Yuma’s infill project honored with state award

Yuma’s infill project honored with state award

Yuma’s recently adopted Infill Overlay District and Plan has been recognized with a “State of Planning” award, one of seven handed out by the American Planning Association, Arizona Chapter.

Laurie Lineberry, director of the city’s Department of Community Development, and Alyssa Linville, principal planner, presented the award to the city during the Nov. 15 council meeting. Former senior planner Naomi Leeman also worked on the project; she is now living on the East Coast.

Yuma competed with every city and county in the state, as well as a private developer who does this kind of work.

The “Best Open” category requires a project “that demonstrates significant and relevant planning related to change in the community and it had to be tied closely to community results, quick implementation and create economic competitiveness,” Lineberry explained.

She recalled that when Deputy Mayor Gary Knight said he wanted to move forward with an infill overlay plan, “I was thrilled.” She pulled out her notes from an old file she started from when she first began working on the project.

“I spent a little time on it and handed it over to Alyssa and Naomi and they took off with it,” Lineberry said. “They put the whole package together and it has been very successful because we’ve seen a lot of activity in the area that we’ve identified for infill overlay.”

The city will be submitting the project for a national award next year, she added.

“We just wanted to thank you for your support, thank you for believing in us and letting us move ahead and get creative,” Lineberry told the council.

Mayor Doug Nicholls congratulated those who worked on the project and expressed appreciation “for all the hard work.”

The project goal was to encourage development of vacant lots and old buildings that have fallen into disrepair in the historical parts of town. The Infill Overlay District identifies properties within the city that qualify for development or redevelopment incentives. An inventory identified 448 vacant properties in the district.

According to staff, the key to suc-
This story originally appeared in Yuma Biz, the monthly publication by the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce.
Business buddies: Yuma’s friendly policies are attracting companies

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

Yuma is gaining a reputation for being business friendly. At least three major companies have moved or announced plans to move to the city, thanks to the city’s “nurturing environment,” according to Julie Engel, president and CEO of the Greater Yuma Economic Development Corp.

The agency, which is tasked with locating and attracting industry to this region, worked with these three companies -- Almark Foods, Martech Medical Devices and MPW Industrial Services -- in tandem with the city.

In a letter to Mayor Doug Nicholls and the City Council, Engel pointed out the reasons she believes the companies chose Yuma. “For a company to choose a community, they have to believe they are welcome and will be treated fairly. GYEDC has witnessed firsthand this is common practice for the City of Yuma leadership. I truly believe the experience these companies have had with the city during negotiations played a critical role in their decision to locate and subsequently expand in Yuma.”

Reducing fees, deferring payments

She also credited the council’s efforts to lower the cost of capital investment with reductions in capacity fees and impact fees. The result is that “companies are recognizing Yuma as a business partner in lieu of a regulatory agency with oversight.”

Specifically, the city reduced development fees 40 to 60 percent in all categories to make it less costly for a new business to locate here and less costly for new construction. The city also reduced the water and sewer capacity fees for new hookups and businesses.

“Our water and sewer costs are now highly competitive if not lower than most of our rival areas for new manufacturing,” City Administrator Greg Wilkinson said.

The city also implemented a “one-stop shop” predevelopment meeting, where representatives from all areas of the city sit at the table in one meeting with a person or business thinking about building in the city.

“This allows most questions to be answered immediately, since staff is present to make suggestions that save them time and money and provides staff with a heads-up so our plan reviews take place much faster than other places,” Wilkinson explained.

The city has also invested in an economic development administrator who works hand-in-hand with GYEDC and is also a facilitator for new businesses and local business expansion. Jeff Burt, the city’s new economic development administrator, also works with new retail companies that GYEDC does not handle.

Recently the city took the predevelopment meeting process to another level. “Our frontline PDMs proved to help businesses and developers, but many times a new manufacturing company or other business brings in unique discharges to sewer or to our air, or they may have special issues to address,” Wilkinson explained.

For these situations the city put in place the Executive PDM, which is basically the city administrator and respective department directors sitting at the table at the first meeting with a new company.

“This group can make more complicated decisions on the spot rather than telling a new company ‘we will have to get back to you,’” Wilkinson said. “When you establish this great working relationship from the beginning, companies understand that they have found an organization that listens to them, that respects their unique situation and who will be there to help if they get to a critical spot.”

He pointed out that many times a community can lose a company because the initial startup costs are too large. To help with this, the city instituted a policy of allowing companies to pay capacity and development fees over a period of several years rather than upfront. For companies that use a lot of water, these costs can be significant.

“This still maintains the idea that ‘growth pays for growth,’ which keeps it off the back of existing taxpayers, but allows them to come in without the larger startup costs to pay it over time when their facility is making money,” Wilkinson said.

The city also implemented a similar process for residential developers where it defers payment of capacity fees until a house is sold or it closes escrow. A developer does not have to come up with cash upfront when building a home and can pay it when the developer has cash flow from the sale of the home.

Offering incentives, developing workforce

To compete head-to-head with other cities in attracting manufacturing companies, Yuma also offers incentives. The city initiated an incentive policy that allows manufacturers to recapture some of the investment dollars they put into the community in the way of new jobs and new buildings. Rebates are provided, which again lower a company’s investment costs to set up business in Yuma.

However, Wilkinson said, the city only provides incentives for manufacturing companies as it would be unfair to provide incentives to retail companies which compete against other retail companies that are already in Yuma.

Another component in Yuma’s approach is the partnerships it has in the job-training area. “Being business-friendly is not just confined to city staff. It is a community-wide commitment. We are routinely able to demonstrate to a new company that the community can provide the workforce that they need,” Wilkinson said, noting that YPIC and Goodwill have done an “excellent job in the community to help us with workforce training.”

Having community education partners such as Arizona Western College, University of Arizona, Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University has also assisted in the business-friendly atmosphere. “All are very open to work with companies to modify curriculum to what is required for their graduates to qualify for employment,” Wilkinson said.

Yuma-area voters helped with the approval of the joint technological educational district which assisted in the recent attraction of Almark Foods. The Yuma JTED, called the Southwest Technical Education District of Yuma, is the only one in the state with a food manufacturing program.

“We were able to show them how we could provide a trained workforce for food manufacturing via the JTED. The JTED is set to work with Almark in the actual development of curriculum so graduates can be prepared to walk straight into their manufacturing workforce. This may also be a key factor in attracting another food manufacturing company to Yuma,” Wilkinson said.
Strong leadership

In addition, Mayor Doug Nicholls launched a regional initiative to attract businesses in partnership with Mexico, called 4FrontED. Regional partners GYEDC, Yuma County, Wellton, Somerton and San Luis work together to establish a strong working relationship with Mexican companies and agencies like PIMSA and Copresan (similar to GYEDC) which has enabled Yuma to attract companies like MarTec.

A business-friendly environment also entails solid, stable leadership, Engel said, recognized the “outstanding” leadership efforts of Wilkinson, Utilities Director Jay Simonton and Community Development Director Laurie Lineberry.

Wilkinson said the city has worked hard “to provide that solid, stable, visionary and tech-savvy leadership” within city staff and departments.

The mayor and council have focused on job creation and economic development, Wilkinson said. “It is incredibly important that the city has a solid mayor and council like it does who are actively engaged and have set up a stable and inviting environment for businesses to want to come to Yuma.”

He added, “We have found that the extra personal touch in having the mayor and city administrator sit in on initial meetings with a new prospective company goes a long way in demonstrating and showing them that our community is the place to locate.”

Being business friendly grows the economy and creates jobs and ultimately leads to a better quality of life. “We live in an amazingly friendly and patriotic community. Yumans deserve nice things, facilities and places for our kids to play, and a great quality of life,” Wilkinson said.

“If we can create more jobs and better paying jobs, we can lift some of our residents away from being unemployed or underemployed. We have a great quality of life here, and we need to work hard to maintain and grow that.”

Still more to do

Although Yuma has made great strides in attracting business, Wilkinson said there’s more than city can do. The city lost a couple of manufacturing companies because they didn’t feel it could provide the high-tech workforce they needed.

“Every company that looks at Yuma talks about our business-friendly approach, their assessment of the great dedicated workforce we have here, but the lack of a full four-year university presence to provide a highly educated workforce was an issue for a few,” he said. “Hence the University of Yuma concept that we are working on.”

The idea is that the local college, three universities and the Arizona Commerce Authority will work together to expand their presence onto a full campus to offer more degrees. It would be funded by private sector dollars.

While Yuma has the reputation as being one of the top business-friendly cities in the state, “it is not something you can sit on,” Wilkinson said. “You have to continually work on it all the time.”

To attract more businesses, Engel believes communities should invest in water and sewer infrastructure and road improvements.

“When the company is required to pay for these two fundamental services, we lose the opportunity. Companies are making massive investments in the community by building or buying buildings and equipment that is usually worth millions of dollars,” she said.

“Now add the employee wages and most companies typically lose money for the first 12 to 18 months depending on how quickly they are ready for production. If the municipality is requiring the company to build the roads and extend water and sewer lines for miles as part of their upfront capital costs, the community is quickly eliminated as a viable option.”

Building out the infrastructure should be a top priority, she said. “The cities and towns in Arizona who have adopted this philosophy continue to outperform all other communities.”

Fewer flights, bigger planes to serve Yuma Airport

By Matt Harding, Yuma Sun staff writer

Larger commercial airplanes will soon be flying between Yuma International Airport and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, resulting in fewer scheduled flights but with the addition of first-class seating options.

American Airlines — Yuma’s sole commercial service provider — will replace the majority of its 50-seat CRJ200 aircraft servicing Yuma with the 70-seat CRJ700 Nov. 30, according to a Yuma Airport press release.

The airline had five daily roundtrip flights between Yuma and Phoenix. The change will reduce it to four daily roundtrip flights.

“Although there will be one less arriving/departing flight per day, the new, spacious CRJ700 aircraft serving Yuma will accommodate the same amount of passengers as before,” wrote Airport Director Gladys Wiggins.

The CRJ700 includes six first-class seats and 64 seats in the main cabin.

“Keeping the number of local commuters using the local regional airport for air travel is essential as the airport staff continues to seek additional routes and air carriers,” Wiggins continued. “The airport needs Yuma to use their local airport and not begin their travels in Phoenix, Mesa or San Diego.”

At an airport stakeholder meeting in late June, Jeffrey Hartz, a senior air service consultant with Mead & Hunt who has worked with Yuma Airport for nearly three years, said that many airlines were increasing plane sizes.

Slightly larger planes like the CRJ700 don’t cost too much more to build or purchase, and they give the airlines a bigger profit, he said.

The industry switch was clearly evident, and the use of larger planes would come as no surprise since statistics show just that.

Hartz had noted that the use of regional jets with between 30 and 50 seats has decreased by 38 percent since July 2011, while the 51 to 70 seat jets have increased by 8 percent. The use of larger planes with 71 to 100 seats has increased by 83 percent in that same timeframe.

American Airlines also recently announced that passengers who fly in and out of Yuma will be able to use an electronic boarding pass on their mobile devices.

Passengers will be able to either download their boarding pass to their phone, or use the American Airlines app. They will be able to choose “Email with Mobile Option” as they check in on www.aa.com or through the app.

The airline decided to go forward with the mobile boarding system in Yuma after a successful pilot program completion. There is no charge for the service or the app.

The American Airlines ticket counter at Yuma Airport will continue to remain open two hours before departure, and close 30 minutes before departure.

Flight information is available at www.yumaairport.com.
Building boom: Recent activity seems to bode well for Yuma’s economy

By Joyce Lobeck, Yuma Biz

The local economy is humming along -- if building activity throughout Yuma County is any indication.

“It was a busy year … very busy for inspections and plan reviews,” Randy Crist, city of Yuma building official, said of 2016. He noted that more than 3,400 plans were reviewed -- a some-20 percent increase over 2015.

“It was an awesome year.” That goes for both residential and commercial building activity.

And all indications point to an equally busy year in 2017 for developers and builders in the city of Yuma and countywide. That activity crosses the spectrum to include residential development, health care facilities, schools and commercial and industrial activity, not to mention the Pacific Avenue Athletic Complex now under construction near Yuma Palms Regional Center.

The recreational complex, a $13 million project, is on a fast track as it needs to be completed by Labor Day for a big softball tournament that is scheduled to take place there that holiday weekend, Crist said.

“It’s a big project,” he said, with six regulation-size softball fields, state-of-the-art LED lighting, an elaborate drainage system and computer-controlled irrigation system due to the heavy soil of the area. DPE Construction Inc. of Yuma is the general contractor.

Arguably the largest upcoming ticket item countywide is building activity generated by voter approval in November 2015 of a sale by Yuma Union High School District of $79.5 million in bonds. The bonds will fund a number of projects to repair, renovate and maintain schools, improve school grounds and build school buildings.

Since its passage a little over a year ago, many projects are already underway throughout YUHSD schools. In addition, plans are in review for new classroom buildings at Cibola High School that will replace modular classrooms on that campus, while modular classrooms are under construction on the San Luis High School campus. At the same time, the designing, planning and estimating of future projects continues, among them construction of a new Somerton High School, a new building for Vista and the replacement of the YUHSD administrative offices.

Elsewhere, a new office building for Gadsden School District was recently constructed in San Luis, Ariz., and kitchen and classroom renovation projects for two Crane School District schools -- Rancho Viejo and HL Suverkrup -- have been completed.

The biggest news for 2016 was the completion of the long-awaited new Emergency Department at Yuma Regional Medical Center, just in time to give the community an early Christmas present when it started serving patients in the early hours of Dec. 15.

The new Emergency Department was the culmination of a three-year, $115 million expansion and campus renovation effort, according to an announcement by contractor McCarthy Building Companies. Begun in 2013, it involved a number of “make-way” projects that included construction of a patient and visitor parking garage, administrative building and completion of the patient tower before the ED project was undertaken. The new 71,000-square-foot ED boosts bed capacity from 37 to 72 to meet the community’s needs for years to come. It also includes lower-level parking for medical staff, an underground shell floor for a future dietary kitchen department and two additional upper level shell floors totaling 100,000 square feet to accommodate future hospital needs.

“They’re not done yet,” Crist said of YRMC. “There’s a lot of shell space, and I anticipate work on the new food service department before long. There’s no plans submitted yet, but I know it’s out there.”

Other health care facilities are more immediately on the horizon.

YRMC has leased the second floor of a 35,000-square-foot empty building at 2500 S. 8th Ave. YRMC intends to relocate its clinical offices to the site once tenant improvements are completed this summer.

Meanwhile, construction is well underway in Somerton for two new buildings for the Regional Center for Border Health at 950 Main St., said Kirk Perkins, construction manager for Yuma Valley Contractors. The $5.5 million project includes two two-story buildings. A 22,500-square-foot building will house the organization’s College of Health Careers in one location. The second building, with 15,000 square feet, will allow for expansion of the center’s clinical health care services in a state-of-the-art facility, to include a pharmacy. Both buildings are scheduled for completion by early August.

Perkins noted that the health-care provider has outgrown its downtown clinic. Plans are to keep that clinic open as well to better serve the Somerton area.

Crist noted that two other large health care projects are in the planning stages within the city of Yuma. Bio Medical and Surgical Plaza, an outpatient surgical center, will be going in at 3049 S. Avenue B. And the 88-bed River Valley Estates Assisted Living is to be developed in Plaza Del Este on the east side of Yuma.

Various other health care projects also are underway, such as an expansion to Up-2-Par Medical Clinic at 2775 S. 8th Ave. that is now under construction, a new dental clinic for Dr. Alex Freeman at 1207 W. 16th St. and new medical office for Dr.
Scott Forrer at 2500 S. 8th Ave.

They follow a variety of health-related projects that were completed in 2016, among them remodeling of a hotel into the Veterans Assisted Living, an addition and alterations to Achieve Human Services at 3220 E. 40th St., interior alterations to the Ambulatory Surgery Center at 2261 S. Avenue B, new offices at 2201 S. Avenue A for dentist Dr. Craig Barrows and orthodontist Dr. Allison Milliner, renovations to Haven Health at 2470 S. Arizona Ave., factory built building for Yuma Health Clinic at 675 S. Avenue B and a new parking deck at ProMed, 2270 S. Ridgeview Drive, in anticipation of future development of that medical complex.

New eateries in Yuma that opened in 2016 include Freddy's Custard and Steakburgers in Gomez Plaza at 1785 E. 16th St., Native Grill and Wings also in Gomez Plaza at 1717 E. 16th St., and Hooters in the former Logan's Steakhouse site at 1519 S. Yuma Palms Parkway.

Meanwhile, a Denny's is coming to San Luis, Ariz., near Walmart, and Black Bear Diner plans to open in the fall in the former Mimi's Café site at Yuma Palms Regional Center.

Two major retail projects are well underway in Yuma: Sprouts Farmers Market has a targeted opening in early summer at 4th Avenue and 16th Street; and Sportsman Warehouse is well under construction next to Hobby Lobby with an anticipated opening by summer. Also under construction is a new auto service shop for Alexander Ford at 801 E. 32nd St., completion of Mission Valley Plaza Building 2 and various other smaller projects.

A major retail project completed in 2016 was the Walmart Neighborhood Market at 2675 W. 8th St. Other completed retail project include construction of the Valentine Guzman Insurance Agency and Real Estate Offices on 4th Avenue, remodeling Regency Main Street Cinemas to add recliner seating, a remodel of Sprague's Sports, alterations to Albertson's at 252 W. 32nd St., construction of Big Tire Suspension at 4101 E. 32nd St., and tenant improvements for Farley's Market at 1110 S. Castle Dome Ave. that opened and closed the same year.

A variety of industrial projects also have been completed, are under development or are in the planning stages.

Coming is an egg processing plant for Almark Foods, a 120,000-square-foot facility to be built at East 36th Street and Avenue 4 1/2E at an estimated cost of $27.5 million for land acquisition, construction and equipment. Almark supplies hard-boiled and peeled eggs to such national grocery chains as Kroger and Safeway, as well as a variety of convenience stores. Construction is expected to begin this spring for completion by the spring of 2018. It would provide 100 jobs.

In San Luis, there's some activity for industrial parks being developed near San Luis Port II.

Infrastructure has been completed for 80 acres in the Southwest Arizona Industrial Park and lots are now being marketed, reported Elizabeth Carpenter, Realtor for the park being developed by Eddie Loo. “There is some interest,” she said, but negotiations are in the early stages.

RL Jones expects to break ground by early March on 20 acres the company is developing within the Magrino Industrial Park to accommodate the brokerage house's operations and that of its clients, confirmed Russ Jones. He added that other projects in the industrial park are in the planning stages.

And Eckard Commercial Construction has been busy with various projects at Citrus Business Park, located on Avenue 4E between 41st and 43rd streets, reported Troy Eckard. A manufacturing plant for S&A Industries was completed in 2016 and the builder is getting ready to build a new 23,000-square foot plant for Insultech. He is working on several other projects, but they're too early in negotiations to disclose who they are.

He said the 72-acre business park currently is an estimated 30 to 40 percent built out. “The park is getting full. There's a lot of good stuff … a lot of interest. It's been a dynamic 1½ years.”

He credits Greater Yuma Economic Development Corporation for its assistance and “just getting companies to commit to coming to Yuma.”

As for residential, that sector, too, has been busy.

In the city of Yuma, 448 building permits were issued in 2016 for single-family detached homes and townhomes, reported Crist. That compares to 383 permits issued in 2015 — and that was a 25 percent increase over the previous year.

“Residential continues to surpass previous years,” Crist said. And he expects the number to further improve this year despite talk by the Feds of raising the interest rate.

Residential activity in Yuma includes a new subdivision being developed by Halls Brothers Construction off 12th Street between Avenues C and B. Elsewhere, building activity continues at such subdivisions as Park West, Livingston Ranch, Saguaro, Sierra Montana and Araby Crossing, Crist reported.

In addition, construction is underway on the second phase of El Dorado Condominiums at 3701 W. 22nd Lane.

Residential activity is also brisk in San Luis, reported Rosales, with three new subdivisions either under construction or in the planning stages. The two primary home builders there are Nieves Riedel and Bienestar.

Jacobson Companies has been busy building new homes at Martinez Lake, reported Bruce Jacobson, vice president of the company. “It's exciting to see what is going on. A lot of homes are being built … nice homes.”

The same is starting to happen at Fisher's Landing, he said, with people from California wanting to build nice weekend homes along the water.

The company also is moving forward with two more units at Cielo Verde off 32nd Street and Avenue 8 1/2E. He said infrastructure is going in for Unit 5, where he expects to start building houses by summer. He also expects to start home construction within the next few months in Unit 3.

Crist concluded: “I'm a very cautious person but I'm optimistic. I think we'll continue to see increases in our growth here. We're back to a solid strong pace.”

This story originally appeared in Yuma Biz, the monthly publication by the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce.
Tech in agriculture: A look at farming innovations

By Mara Knaub. Yuma Sun staff writer

Farming has come a long way from the days when mule teams and manual labor got the job done. And remember, there was no air conditioning at the time.

What’s in the near future? Driverless equipment that will thin and weed fields and robotic machines armed with sharp knives that will harvest crops without risk to humans.

Third-generation farmer Cory Mellon of Mellon Farms shared information on the use of “Technology and Agriculture’s Future” during a Dec. 8 presentation at the University of Arizona Yuma Ag Center as part of the Yuma Area Agricultural Council’s Agriculture Grows Yuma Tour.

“It still amazes me what our forefathers did with teams of animals. Just the logistics to feed the mules,” he said.

Farmers used to deliver water to fields from below the surface, called subirrigation. For it to work, a field had to be perfect. Too much water, a seed would drown; not enough, it wouldn’t germinate.

Today farmers use sprinklers to germinate seeds, which lessens water conservation concerns.

“It’s so much better, so much more efficient with today’s technology,” Mellon said.

Technology today

“Ag has historically been far behind,” Mellon noted.

But in Yuma, many farms already use the latest technology available in farming. Laser leveling was a “game-changer” in the industry. Before this technology, farmers “eyeballed” fields while leveling them. Laser leveling was developed in the early ‘70s, which makes it old technology now but farmers still use it everyday.

“It’s a tried-and-tested system. The only drawback, you had to have a fairly educated driver,” Mellon noted.

But now with the use of GPS — although not as accurate as lasers — there’s no need for an “educated” driver although there still needs to be a “warm body” in the tractor. Drivers had to map every bit of a field; now computers do the mapping.

This method is “good enough,” Mellon said, because there’s no need for perfection with sprinkler systems.

When GPS auto-steer arrived in Yuma in 2000, it was “huge” for local farmers. “It made all our beds straight. We have perfect rows. We can operate at night. It makes us look good,” Mellon said.

The straight and uniform rows made possible by GPS has allowed farmers to increase crop yield and introduce even more technology, such as chemical auto thinning.

Farmers typically overplant because of the risks facing vulnerable seeds: wind, dry spots, birds, etc. Farmers might plant four seeds with the intention of keeping only one. This makes thinning necessary.

In the last 200 years, thinning was done by hand. It was a very labor intensive. Now cameras and infrared lights tell equipment when to turn on and off the chemical. The spray is very precise and won’t damage a plant while killing its neighbor.

It also does the work of 30 people. Several farmers in Yuma now use this technology. Although it has replaced a bus crew, the equipment still very expensive and requires “super-high maintenance.”

“It’s truly amazing to watch,” Mellon said. “Crews work 10 hours and go home. This machine will work 24/7 and it never shows up hungover,” Mellon said.

Another technology used by the local industry is RFID’s, or radio-frequency identification bar-coding, which automatically identifies and tracks tags on boxes. In case of a recall, a product’s history can be traced back, down to every chemical that was applied to it. It tells who did what and where.

Even the plastic bag of a salad has an incredible amount of technology behind it with millions of dollars poured into research to make its shelf life as long as possible.

All foremen now have cell phones, when in the past they used two-way radios. They have easy access to all sorts of information. If a tool breaks down, they can look up an instant fix.

“It’s made us smarter. It’s made us more efficient,” Mellon said.

What’s next?

What’s coming next in technology? Driverless tractors and auto-weeding. But the U.S. is “way behind as far as mechanization,” Mellon noted.

Because of a lack of workers, European farmers have pushed the development of the camera-based system that make driverless equipment possible, which will likely replace quite a number of human workers.

Sensor-based weeders can grab weeds surrounding a plant without touching it. This technology already exists, but it’s still too expensive. However, Mellon added, he foresees many arriving in Yuma in the next few years.

The next push is for harvest automation, which would eliminate cutters, who do the hardest job, bent all day, for 10-hour shifts.

However, today’s harvesters are much improved from past versions, needing only 15 workers instead of 30, with crews working inside, protected from bad weather, with radios or TVs on.

Massive amounts are being spent on developing automated harvesters. “It’s all about the sensors,” Mellon said. “Whoever wins the sensor war, their company will be worth so much money, it’s not even funny.”

Although drones are already being used to some extent in the industry, improvements in sensors will go a long way. Sensors will be able to spot wet or dry soil areas without someone having to walk the entire field. They could detect mildew and bugs, picking up their pheromones from miles in the air.

These are not available to the public yet, but they’re coming to the ag sector sooner than later, Mellon said.

Mellon also believes “big data” — the gathering of massive amounts of information and feeding it to a supercomputer with software that can predict, for example, where disease will hit and or where mildew is likely to start — will change the industry.

Farmers would only have to treat that one spot. “We nip it there,” Mellon said.

“Big data,” he added, “is the new oil.”
Agriculture center using drones to help farmers

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

Traditionally the cultivation of dates has been very labor intensive. For example, workers have had to climb and pollinate each female tree by hand.

But drones are changing the way things have been done for thousands of years. Instead of climbing trees to hand-pollinate each individual tree, workers can now attach nylon stockings filled with pollen and fly it over the trees. The flying motion releases the pollen powder.

Drones are making this and other jobs much easier. And it’s one of the jobs of the Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture to find out how drones can make agriculture tasks easier and more efficient.

“I’m excited about that,” said Rosa Bevin-ington, a media specialist for the center.

Bevington has been a drone operator for the ag center for three years. She’s certified by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The center first used drones in pollinating date trees in 2016 by using nylon stockings. This year the center worked with the University of Arizona Systems Engineering Program, which developed a more sophisticated release mechanism as a senior design project.

The center first began using drones under the leadership of Kurt Nolte, then executive director of the Yuma County Cooperative, who originally focused on using drones to make high-quality educational outreach videos with footage shot from the skies.

Then they saw more potential for research and started using drones for plant counting and health analysis.

Paul Brierley, executive director of the Yuma Center of Excellence for Desert Agriculture, supports the use of drones for a variety of applications in agriculture. The center is researching ways drones can scout fields to spot bug infestations, diseases, irrigation problems and soil health problems.

“It’s good for detecting health issues that might not be seen by walking along the edge of a field. With drones, you can see the middle sections from above,” Brierley said. “If a plant is stressed, you can see it visually.”

Bevington stiches images shot by drones to create a composite of a field shot from above. “It’s a collage of sorts, but pretty seamless,” she explained.

The lower to the ground it is, the higher the resolution and sharper the image, which means that the image can be better enlarged, making it easier to spot problems.

Drones images can collect a lot of data, such as yield and stand counts (the number of plants growing), with software doing the counting.

“If someone is going to market dates, it’d be nice to see how many they have to sell,” Brierley said.

If there’s a flood, drones can be used to assess damage to fields when someone can’t physically get in. This helps farmers know what kind and how much damage has been caused, which in turn helps them decide whether plants are still viable or if fields need to be replanted.

There’s also been talk of using drones to scare birds away from fields, but this comes with a hazard as some birds will attack drones. This happened to Bevington a couple of times. Once a hawk kept circling her drone until it decided it was neither a threat nor a treat.

Bevington had to learn the FAA rules for flying drones before becoming certified. For example, drones can fly only up to 400 feet.

“They don’t like drones crashing into aircraft,” Brierley quipped.

He doesn’t believe that this will be an issue in the future. “Technology will solve that,” he said, noting that the same avoidance technology that allows cars to drive by themselves without crashing will be applied to drones.

In the meantime, a drone pilot needs to have it in view at all times and there can only be one operator per drone while it is in flight.

If a field is located under unregulated airspace, a drone can be flown without permission, but it the field is near an airport, the drone operator needs to give a 90-day notice to fly. Most of these rules apply to commercial drones, not those flown by hobbyists.

The first phase in the use of drones is getting visual imagery that helps farmers manage their fields and make decisions.

But soon drones might help even more, thanks to the development of infrared cameras equipped with optical sensors that “see” things — such as disease on a plant — before they can be seen with the naked eye.

The sooner the farmer knows of disease or dry areas, the sooner the farmer can address it. This gives the farmer more options, for example, he can spot treat the disease with a mild chemical when it’s just starting before it spreads to the entire field.

“There will be less chemicals used and less damage to the plant. Just better treatment options, it’s better for the environment, and they’ll be savings money,” Brierley said.

Bevington was also working with the U.S. Arid Lands Agricultural Research Center on a collaborative project with NASA early next year. The “ground truthing” project will help the agency verify the images taken by satellites. The center’s drones will take photos and compare them to those taken by NASA to check the accuracy of the satellite images.

Other developments in the near future include using drone 3D images that can determine things such as how tall plants are. There is a lot of work being on sensors that drones can carry that might ultimately automate lots of tasks.

But just collecting data is not enough, Brierley noted. They need to find out what to do with the data and how it can help farmers. The center is ready to do its part by helping to develop drone applications specific to the agriculture industry, addressing their needs and wants.

“Rosa is our step No. 1,” Brierley said, noting that Bevington is currently learning software programs that could help farmers.

The center is also ready to let drone companies test their abilities to detect disease and infections on its research farm.

“It can be valuable to the company and industry,” Brierley said. “They can say it’s been tested, that the ag center screened it. There are a lot of claims of ‘we can do this,’ but can they?”

Bevington was also working with other researchers on projects, agriculture or otherwise. Brierley pointed out that drones nowadays are being used in many ways, for example, Yuma County uses drones in mosquito counts. Insurance companies use them to assess damage after natural disasters. Public agencies are using them to assess damage as well and to help with recovery efforts. Real estate and security companies are also using them.

“There’s so much potential,” Brierley said.
Yuma’s Historic Downtown named best in Arizona

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

Word is getting out! Yuma is a great place to visit.

That’s according to two separate travel-related organizations that singled out the city as a destination.

First, the televised travel show “Official Best of Arizona 2017” featured Historic Downtown Yuma during a half-hour show in May. It named Downtown Yuma as Official Best Historic Main Street Community in Arizona for 2017.

“This is well-deserved recognition for the businesses of Downtown Yuma, and it’s an acknowledgement all Yumans can be proud of,” Linda Morgan, executive director of the Yuma Visitors Bureau, said in a press release. “There are many great communities like ours throughout Arizona, many which could have just as easily been recognized. For Yuma to get the nod is an honor.”

On March 2, the Visitors Bureau sponsored a visit by an “Official Best Of” videographer who shot footage of the Main Street scene, depicting its “eclectic, traveler-friendly atmosphere.”

“We’re really excited about it,” Dustin Mylius, the bureau’s marketing manager, told the Yuma Sun. “The recognition is very much due to the businesses that have had a hand in making Yuma more than a place to get gas and snacks.”

Mylius noted that the show focuses on attractions already well known by many Yumans but which might be “lessor known gems” for visitors and even some residents.

Some of the attractions spotlighted in the segment include Lutes Casino, which has been a community staple for 75 years in business; Yuma Art Center, which Mylius describes as a “pretty important piece in Yuma’s downtown scene”; the Historic Yuma Theatre, which dates to 1912; and Prison Hill Brewing Company.

The segment also made special mention of some of the specialty shops on Main Street as well as the “special goodies” found on the side streets. The Colorado River and the people of this “big little city” also received special nods.

The “Official Best Of” team puts lists together every year showcasing the best places in every state. The Visitors Bureau played a significant role in making the Yuma segment happen.

It began with the “Official Best Of” production team requesting nominations on its website. Researchers then “scoured” print and online travel resources and contacted other experts in the field to determine which nominees or researched attractions would be named as a “best of” in the state.

The team reached out to the Visitors Bureau, which shared information highlighting some of the most interesting places downtown as well as how Yuma came to be the original crossing point of the Colorado River.

They had already done some research on the Yuma Historic Main Street, Mylius noted.

The production team then informed the Visitors Bureau of the city’s title and made arrangements to film the downtown area. The bureau put the team in contact with business owners in the district.

The final product aired on KOLD Tucson and KPHO Phoenix. Those who missed the broadcast can find the May 15 naming on OfficialBestOf.com and on the Yuma Visitors Bureau’s Facebook and Twitter pages.

As for the second honor, Trivago posted an article on May 15 naming Yuma one of the Top 10 “emerging travel destinations” in the United States. The online travel search engine ranked Yuma in eight place and noted a 22 percent increase in searches for the city.

“It’s not some obscure list. It’s actually based on people doing searches,” Mylius noted.

Of course, none of this surprises the Visitors Bureau, which doesn’t shy from recognizing that for most travelers, Yuma is “often not an ultimate destination,” but more often a stop on the way somewhere else, like San Diego or Phoenix. But if travelers do stop for a few hours, they’ll find “a great deal to do, adventures and authentic experiences and uniqueness,” Mylius said.

Trivago posted the article to its travel inspiration page “room5” (http://room5.trivago.com/emerging-travel-destinations-2017/).

Morgan called it “exciting news” and “an indication that local businesses and our various attractions are getting people’s attention. It is also an indicator that the Visitors Bureau is having great success with its marketing strategies.”

While the Trivago findings were unexpected, the bureau has been reporting a spike in traffic to VisitYuma.com for more than a year.

“Trivago’s ranking of Yuma is highly assuring and goes a long way to validate the data we’ve been presenting locally,” Mylius said in a press release.

In 2016, VisitYuma.com experienced an increase of 64 percent in user sessions and an increase of 57 percent in unique users generating more than half a million page views, compared to 2015. So far in 2017, site traffic is up 7 percent compared to the same four-and-a-half-month period in 2016.

The bureau pointed out that Trivago and VisitYuma.com are not the only sources reporting the uptick in interest in Yuma as a travel destination.

Statewide lodging performance figure, released by Smith Travel Research and the Arizona Office of Tourism earlier this month, show Yuma County first-quarter occupancy rates up more than 10 percent and revenue per available room up nearly 18 percent over first quarter 2016.

Even better, Gov. Doug Ducey’s office released information in January indicating that all of Arizona — including metropolitan and rural areas — had “outperformed the national average in every major year-over-year (lodging) performance indicator in 2016.”

“The impact this is having on the Yuma economy is measurable,” the Visitors Bureau noted.

In the first quarter of 2017, Yuma’s special sales tax collection totaled $1.4 million — up 1.95 percent from the first quarter of 2016, according to data provided by the City of Yuma.

“In case there was doubt for the real, positive impacts tourism is having on our community, I hope the data dispels any disbelief,” Morgan said. “At the Visitors Bureau, we will continue to show tourism’s value and, with the support of city leadership, we will strive to ensure the economic vitality of our community for years to come.”

**TOP 10 EMERGING DESTINATIONS IN THE U.S.**

1. Glendale, Arizona
2. Indio, California
3. Williams, Arizona
4. Boise, Idaho
5. Kingman, Arizona
6. Plymouth, Massachusetts
7. Laredo, Texas
8. Yuma, Arizona
9. Winter Haven, Florida
10. Baytown, Texas

Source: Trivago
Study: Yuma has the most extra spending money in state

By Mara Knaub, Yuma Sun staff writer

Yuma is No. 1 in the state and No. 10 in the region when it comes to the amount of spending money residents have left over after paying taxes and basic expenses, according to a study.

The Trove Technologies study noted Yumans might earn lower salaries but they pay less in housing and other expenses, leaving them with more discretionary income than residents of other Arizona cities.

According to Trove, the average salary for Yuma is $40,049, estimated taxes are $8,525 and basic expenses are $27,061, leaving a discretionary income of $4,462.

The first Trove Discretionary Income Study shows Yuma has discretionary income 5.7 percent above the state average. Although salaries in Yuma are 4.3 percent below the state average, housing expenses and non-housing expenses came in 28.1 percent and 10.5 percent below the state average, respectively.

“Salaries are a little bit below the state average. That being said, the cost of living, specifically on the housing side, it was the best in the state,” said Michael Pao, CEO and co-founder of Trove Technologies, which works with clients who are wanting to move within a city or between cities.

Yuma is the only city that placed above the national average in the state in the study. Arizona as a whole ranks poorly (No. 38) among all states and in the bottom five states in the West.

“Very low expenses and taxes make Yuma an attractive city for workers, despite lower salaries,” Pao said. “Our research shows that the average worker has 5.7 percent more discretionary income in Yuma than elsewhere in the state.”

The study defined discretionary income as the amount left over after subtracting estimated taxes and basic expenses, including groceries, housing, utilities, transportation, health care and other goods and services. This is based on survey data from more than 300 independent researchers, Trove said.


According to the company, this study is the first of its kind to incorporate data that reflect regional differences in salaries, cost of living and taxes to most accurately reveal the take-home pay of American workers across 778 occupations.

While there are many cost-of-living calculators that highlight general income differences across cities, there are no others that take into account the effect of taxes on the cost of living or identify the significant differences by occupation, the company said.

“We analyzed occupation-specific salary figures, tax data and costs of living across cities and states to create the first annual Trove Discretionary Income Study. We’ve gone way beyond your typical ‘cost-of-living’ calculator by ranking cities and states for discretionary income,” Pao explained.

The Yuma metropolitan area scored 75 out of 100, garnering a designation of “very good” in an analysis of all occupations. A higher score indicates the job earns higher discretionary income in that city or state compared to other places.

“Yuma is actually No. 3 overall in the country, the country being 399 other cities, for health care practitioners and technical occupations,” Pao noted.

The Trove study listed the five top jobs in Yuma, when it comes to having leftover money, as tellers, surveying and mapping technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical records technicians and light truck/delivery services drivers.

It listed the bottom five jobs as financial services sales agents, chefs and head cooks, health educators, sales managers and architectural/engineering managers.

These rankings were calculated by sorting the occupations in this city based on how each occupation ranks against the same occupation in other cities.

Editor’s note: Reporter Blake Herzog contributed to this story.

Bicycle friendly: Yuma nabs ‘bronze’ status

From Staff Reports

Yuma’s efforts to improve conditions for bicyclists are gaining increased recognition. The city received “bronze” status as a Bicycle Friendly Community this year by the League of American Bicyclists, a bicycle advocacy, information and promotion group.

This upgrades the city from last year’s honorable mention.

Yuma was one of 65 new and renewing BFCs announced in November. There are now more than 400 BFCs in all 50 states.

“This designation highlights the city of Yuma’s continuing commitment to provide for all modes of transportation in the Yuma community,” noted Jennifer Albers, a principal planner for the city. “Over the past year the city has completed the 16th Street and 4th Avenue intersection with the inclusion of bike lanes in all directions, the 32nd Street bicycle crossing and pedestrian island at the East Main Canal and the 40th Street pathway connecting the East Main Canal Linear Park to Avenue A.”

“We applaud these communities for making bicycling a safe and convenient option for transportation and recreation,” said Bill Nesper, executive director at the League of American Bicyclists. “We are encouraged by the growing number of leaders who see bicycling as a way to build more vibrant, healthy, sustainable and connected communities and be a part of the solution to many complex challenges faced at both the community and national levels. We look forward to continuing to work with these communities as we move closer to our mission of creating a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone.”

The BFC program is “revolutionizing the way communities evaluate their quality of life, sustainability and transportation networks, while allowing them to benchmark their progress toward improving their bicycle-friendliness,” according to a city press release.

The bronze BFC award recognizes Yuma’s commitment to improving conditions for bicycling through investment in bicycling promotion, education programs, infrastructure and pro-bicycling policies.

“One of the most amazing things about the Bicycle Friendly Community program is how diverse participating communities are” said Ken McLeod, policy director of the League of American Bicyclists. “This round is a great example of that, with towns as small as 588 people and counties of over 2 million. There are places with no bike lanes, but emerging bike cultures, as well as leading platinum cities. That all of these communities find value in the program speaks to the breadth of the program and its commitment to being a part of creating a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone.”

The BFC program provides a benchmark for communities to evaluate bike-friendly conditions and policies, while highlighting areas for improvement. The national scope of the program also promotes competition and comparison between communities.

The program provides a roadmap to building a Bicycle Friendly Community, and the application itself has become a rigorous and an educational tool in itself. Since its inception, more than 800 distinct communities have applied and the five levels of the award — diamond, platinum, gold, silver and bronze — provide a clear incentive for communities to continuously improve.

To apply or learn more about the BFC program, visit bikeleague.org/community.
After 16 Years we’re still...

• Local
• Trustworthy
• Growing Strong

We’ve grown from 15 original employees and 1 branch to 65 employees and 4 branches!

We’re Yuma’s only locally owned and operated bank

2017 Bauer Financial “Top 100” Western Region Award
* Highest asset growth • Growth in number of employees • Largest net interest margin • Highest percentage growth in commercial real estate

Rated 5 ★ by BAUERFINANCIAL, INC.

1st BANK YUMA
“Hometown Banking - 1st in Service”
928.783.3334

4th Ave & 28th St • 4th Ave & 18th St • Fortuna Rd & 38th St • 654 N 1st Ave, San Luis

www.1stBankYuma.com