PHX CONNECT
NEWSLETTER

GRATITUDE
FOR YOU

This is a special edition of the PHXConnect employee newsletter.
City leadership have joined to celebrate all City employees.
We hope you enjoy these notes of gratitude.

NOVEMBER 2026

Message from the City Manager

One of the great joys in my life is watching my 2 ½ year-old granddaughter as she grows up and becomes a "big kid." Part of that process is teaching her to say "please," "you're welcome" and "thank you."

These words are a reminder that we learn gratitude as a habit as well as an attitude. Studies of human health tell us that the habit and attitude of gratitude lead to healthier, happier lives.

At the City of Phoenix, I receive e-mails expressing gratitude for the work City employees do to serve our residents as we pick up trash, fix water leaks, help library patrons, answer 911 calls, issue licenses and much more. In turn, I want to express my appreciation and thanks to City employees who serve the community 24/7/365.

And as always at this time of year, a special thank you to those who work on the holiday.

Ed Zuercher
City Manager

Arts & Culture

Every great performance begins with people coming together, and my first few months with the City of Phoenix have shown me what an extraordinary ensemble we have. I'm grateful for the creativity, passion and dedication of our Arts and Culture team, whose work brings our city to life and connects creatives in every community.

It's a season that reminds us how art brings people together. Here's to a joyful holiday season and a new year filled with inspiration!

Phil Dunlap
Arts & Culture Director

Holiday tradition:
Music and time spent with loved ones

Aviation

I am thankful to work alongside an incredible team in the best city! Our three airports are complex, dynamic, and can be incredibly demanding. I am grateful to lead a special group of people at Phoenix Sky Harbor, Deer Valley, and Goodyear airports who are committed to professionalism, service delivery, and making our airports exceptional. Thank you to everyone in the Aviation Department and all City employees for your commitment and hard work. May your holiday season be filled with peace, love, and joy.

Chad Makovsky
Aviation Director

Holiday tradition:
Dressing my dogs up as "Max" from How the Grinch Stole Christmas

Budget & Research

B&R team – gratitude is definitely the right theme for this message, as I am consistently in awe of, and thankful for, the incredible work you do. The deadlines are tight, the asks are often unexpected and without precedent, and yet you consistently produce excellence. Not only that, you together make this department a great place to be, building each other up, helping each other grow, and collectively producing superlative budgets year after year. Thanks for making this place special, and I look forward to all the continued great work ahead.

Aaron Mertz
Budget & Research Director

Holiday tradition:
Always look forward to the days of leftovers after Thanksgiving!

City Auditor

I am so grateful for the great group we have at the City Auditor Department. We had one of our most productive and impactful years ever because of the professional and excellent work provided by our staff.

Thanks for all your hard work to help make the City better and improve our service to Phoenix residents. Happy Thanksgiving!

Aaron Cook
City Auditor

Holiday tradition:
Family holiday parties that bring everyone together

City Clerk

City Clerk Team! It's a genuine privilege to work with such an AMAZING team. The work you do makes a difference in so many ways, big and small every single day. Your commitment and dedication to excellence is incredible and leaves a lasting impression. And the way you show up and work together to get things done is truly inspiring. Thank you! I appreciate each of you and I am so proud to be part of our small but MIGHTY team!!!

Denise Archibald
City Clerk

Holiday tradition:
Gathering with people, sharing good food and celebrating together

Communications

C isn't just for Cookie. Or Communications. It's the creative, committed professionals who make the Communications Office a catalyst for change. A clever, caring crew, building coordinated campaigns that convey concern and commitment. Their copy keeps constituents connected, creating crisp graphics, compelling images and clear storytelling. A talented group of charismatic professionals, with a touch of chutzpah. To the Communications team I say: I "see" you. I celebrate you. I count on you.

Thank you for your contributions, your competence, and the camaraderie we share. Cheers to our cherished team!

Dan Wilson
Communications Director

Holiday tradition:
Chocolate Cheesecake

Community & Economic Development

As I celebrate my first holiday season with the City of Phoenix, I'm especially thankful to celebrate with my incredible colleagues on the Community and Economic Development team. Each of you have made me feel welcomed and valued, and I'm inspired by your commitment to our community. My favorite part of the holidays is spending time with loved ones and making memories that last long after the decorations come down. Cheers to a wonderful holiday season and an exciting year ahead!

Ryan Touhill
Community & Economic Development Director

Holiday tradition:
Watching Home Alone (the original) & Christmas Vacation with my family

Equal Opportunity

I am amazed at the hard work and passion that the Equal Opportunity team shows for Phoenix. We have had a very busy year, and I am grateful to each employee in this department for their unwavering effort and contributions. The work that you do does not go unnoticed, and I hope you feel proud of what you have accomplished – I know I am proud of you all. I deeply value this team and am sincerely grateful for the professionalism and care this team brings, day in and day out. I wish a fulfilling and restful holiday season. Thank you!

Judy Boros
Equal Opportunity Director

Holiday tradition:
Making cookies with family

Finance

As we move into the holiday season and take time to reflect on what we're grateful for, I want to express my sincere appreciation for each of you. In the months I've spent getting to know our Finance team, I've been impressed by your expertise, dedication, and commitment to serving our community. Every day, you help ensure the City's resources are managed responsibly and transparently, supporting the services our residents rely on. Thank you for your patience, collaboration, and professionalism. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside each of you.

Kathryn Gregory
Chief Financial Officer

Holiday tradition:
Our family sprinkles magical sparkly oats on our yard for the reindeer!

Fire

I'm deeply grateful for all our Fire Department family and the professionalism and sacrifice you bring to this work 24/7, 365. Your commitment keeps our community safe every day. Growing up, making tamales with my mom was a cherished Mexican tradition. Now, we also celebrate my wife's Italian roots with the Feast of the Seven Fishes. It's moments like these that remind me how meaningful our service to the community and to one another truly is. During these holidays, I hope each of you can make your own special memories with family and friends.

Chief Mike Duran
Phoenix Fire Department

Holiday tradition:
Spending time with family (see above)

Housing

As I reflect on this year, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible Housing Department team. Your dedication, creativity, and compassion make a lasting difference in the lives of our residents every day. Whether through a call, case note, site visit, partnership, or project, your work advances our mission and strengthens our community. Thank you for your commitment to serving others, supporting one another, and making Phoenix a better place to call home. Your work is seen, valued, and deeply appreciated.

Titus Mathew
Housing Director

Holiday tradition:
Starting new traditions with our first grandchild and kids

Human Resources

As we wrap up 2026, I want to thank each of you for the work you've put in this year. We successfully streamlined processes, improving efficiency for employees and retirees, completed the 2026-2028 collective bargaining cycle, held our first all-staff retreat and continued to improve our investigative practices. Each of these milestones took time and dedication. I appreciate everything you do and the role you play in moving our team forward. I hope you take pride in everything we've accomplished together!

Jason Perkiser
Human Resources Director

Holiday tradition:
Watching Christmas Vacation & a Christmas Story with my daughter

Human Services

I would like to express my gratitude to HSD staff. We make the impact we do because each one of you shows up every day, ready to give your all to better the lives of those in our community. Whether you are working directly with clients or providing support behind the scenes, your contributions have significant influence on residents. As we celebrate this season, know that I am truly thankful for the privilege of working alongside such a talented and dedicated team. Together, we have achieved impressive milestones, tackled challenges with determination, & strengthened our culture of collaboration.

Jacqueline Edwards
Human Services Director

Holiday tradition:
Seeing Ballet Arizona perform the Nutcracker with my daughters & Mom

Information Technology Services

I want to take a moment to thank every member of the ITS team and IT professionals throughout the City. Much of your work happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt every day. Whether you're implementing new technology that improves City services or responding to issues at all hours to keep critical systems running, your commitment makes a real difference. We rely on your skill, dedication, and willingness to go the extra mile, and I am deeply grateful for all that you do. Thank you!

Steen Hambric
Chief Information Officer

Holiday tradition:
My family's traditional Danish Christmas Eve dinner

Law

As Thanksgiving approaches, I want to thank each of you across our Civil, Criminal, and Management Services divisions for your support over the last 4 years. You are a phenomenal team of dedicated professionals, and the entire executive team is grateful for the hard work and commitment you bring every day. We all wish you and your loved ones a happy, peaceful, and joyful Thanksgiving.

Julie Kriegh, Bill Solomon, & Gary Shupe
City Attorneys

Holiday tradition:
Spending time with family

Library

Thank you for your incredible work this year PPL! Our libraries are the heart of Phoenix communities, connecting people at every stage of life to resources that enrich their experiences. None of that would be possible without your dedication and hard work. Your commitment to ensuring that every person using our services is valued and heard makes you the living embodiment of public service. I am so grateful to work alongside and be inspired by you every day. You continually go above and beyond to make Phoenix a better place to live and work. Thank you for serving our communities the way you do.

Erin MacFarlane
Phoenix Public Library Director

Holiday tradition:
My family's annual New Year's Day hike

Light Rail

I am deeply grateful for our outstanding Light Rail team and their dedication over the past year. Their support was instrumental as I transitioned into the role of Light Rail Administrator. I am proud to be part of such a strong and collaborative team. I am equally thankful for the community members we serve, whose reliance on public transit and continued inspiration give our work purpose each day.

Nick Valenzuela
Light Rail Administrator

Holiday tradition:
Time with family and plenty of football

Municipal Court

As the holiday season nears, I'm reflecting on the many things I'm grateful for, and you are among them. I value our conversations, teamwork, and shared commitment to Justice Through Excellence, Procedural Justice, and Seamless Service. Through a challenging transition, your positive, solutions-focused attitude and support have helped me greatly as I move from Judge to Chief Presiding Judge. I'm proud to serve beside you and grateful for all you do. I hope you enjoy time with family and friends this holiday season. If you ever need to talk, I'm here for you. Stay safe, healthy, and happy.

Wilbur Hudson
Chief Presiding Judge

Holiday tradition:
Spending time with family and friends

Neighborhood Services

One of the things I'm most thankful is the opportunity to work alongside a dedicated team with a genuine commitment to our city. I want to thank our Neighborhood Services Department team members for the incredible work each one of you do for our neighborhoods. Your efforts make a real difference to the people who call Phoenix home, and I'm grateful for your willingness to go above and beyond in your work. Thank you for your talents, and for choosing to bring them to NSD! I hope this holiday season brings you time to rest, recharge, and enjoy the company of those who matter most.

Spencer Self
Neighborhood Services Director

Holiday tradition:
Hot cocoa while looking at holiday lights

Office of Accountability & Transparency

I'm grateful every year for the opportunity to publicly acknowledge the outstanding OAT team & the work it does, but as always, it's a challenge to adequately express my gratitude in just a few words for the laughter, camaraderie, & commitment that you all bring to the team and our work. You have accepted and risen to challenges. You have skillfully navigated new projects and programs. You have grown, built, & blossomed. You have brought humor, support, & dedication to your teammates and the community. I'm so glad I have been witness to all of it. Here's to more in 2027 & thank you for 2026.

Shannon Johanni
Office of Accountability & Transparency Director

Holiday tradition:
A trip up to northern Arizona to celebrate the holidays with family

Office of Environmental Programs

You are here day after day. You care about so much and about everything. You do things that need doing; you do things that you are not asked to do and you make sure those things get done because you are part of the City of Phoenix. You are unique and irreplaceable. You might not see the day-to-day admiration of everyday people, but it is there. The world is a better and brighter place because of you. I feel immense appreciation for you and all you do. I also feel quite smug when I talk about you. You are special on your own and as a group. Thank you for being you and being part of my world.

Nancy Allen
Environmental Programs Administrator

Holiday tradition:
Las Noches de las Luminarias

Office of Government Relations

I want to take the opportunity to recognize the incredible work & contributions of this team. Your dedication, perseverance, and willingness to go above and beyond play an important role in supporting our office & advancing the broader priorities of the City. So much of what you do takes place behind the scenes, but the results of your efforts are felt throughout the organization. From navigating complex issues & building important relationships to advocating for the City's interests, your work makes a lasting difference. Thanks for your hard work and the care you put into serving the City.

Ilse Borquez
Government Relations Director

Holiday tradition:
I am looking forward to spending time with family and friends

Office of Heat Response & Mitigation

It has been another amazing year of growth and achievement for the Office of Heat Response and Mitigation! Thank you to the entire team for your vision, commitment, and creativity as we work to tackle big challenges and make a positive and lasting impact for the community. This year I am especially proud and thankful for everyone's collaborative spirit in welcoming new team members and the daily effort we all make to help each other succeed. Cheers to an outstanding 2026, and I look forward to continuing to build upon our momentum in 2027. It is a privilege to be on this journey with you!

David Hondula
Heat Office Director

Holiday tradition:
Hearing the kids give their ideas on how we should decorate the house!

Office of Homeless Solutions

To our OHS team, thank you for the heart you bring to this work every day. I am continually inspired by your dedication and honored to be part of this team. You show up with compassion and a commitment to helping people navigate some of life's most difficult challenges. The work isn't easy, but your dedication to serving others, supporting each other, and finding creative solutions makes a huge difference in our city. Because of you, more people in need have hope. I'm proud to serve alongside you and deeply appreciative of everything you do.

Rachel Milne
Office of Homeless Solutions Director

Holiday tradition:
My annual Thanksgiving trip to see my extended family

Office of Innovation & Performance

Thank you to the Office of Innovation and Performance team for your dedication and passion in all you do. You put residents first when piloting new ideas; bring in resources – financial and technical support – to advance the City's top priorities; and work alongside departments to enhance performance and measure impact. True innovation does not happen without collaboration! Thank you to City departments for saying "yes" this year, even when the outcome is uncertain.

Michael Hammett
Chief Innovation Officer

Holiday tradition:
Watching "classic" holiday movies like A Christmas Story

Office of Public Health

To the Office of Public Health team, thank you for your commitment to show up every day to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone across Phoenix! Your work is meaningful and extends like a ripple into our community. I hope your holiday season is filled with love and joy. This year, each of you showed tremendous grace as we navigated changes. Thank you also to our HSD colleagues for being so welcoming to our team!

Yanitza Soto
Public Health Advisor

Holiday tradition:
Making tamales with my grandmother and family members

Office of Sustainability

Team Sustainability: thank you for another incredible year of advancing a more sustainable Phoenix. I'm grateful and proud to work alongside each of you. Though our team is small, our impact is significant. This year brought challenges, and you consistently put the success of the team first. Your dedication helped reduce energy burden, expand solar installations, and move climate action forward. Thank you for your professionalism, passion, kindness, and collaboration. Wishing you and your loved ones a wonderful holiday season, and I look forward to all we'll accomplish together next year.

Carla De La Chapa
Chief Sustainability Officer

Holiday tradition:
Slowing down with family, bake, watch movies, and take walks

Office of the City Engineer

You've saved the day more times than I can count, came through in a pinch, and continue to find ways to improve OCE. I'm very lucky and incredibly fortunate to work alongside each of you. It's staff like you that make it so easy to be thankful! Thanksgiving agenda: Eat too much, laugh a lot, hug your people, don't check work email! Happy Holidays!

Eric Froberg
City Engineer

Holiday tradition:
Building a gingerbread house (mainly so I can eat it)

Parks & Recreation

As I look back on this year, I'm reminded that great parks and recreation services don't happen by accident. They happen because of people who care deeply about their work and the community they serve. This Thanksgiving, I'm grateful for the energy, professionalism, and heart of our team. Whether you maintain our parks, lead programs, support operations, or work behind the scenes, your efforts make a difference every day. I wish you and your loved ones a wonderful Thanksgiving filled with rest, joy, and time with those who matter most.

Marty Whitfield
Parks & Recreation Director

Holiday tradition:
Putting on our navy blue jerseys and cheering for the Dallas Cowboys

Phoenix Convention Center & Venues

I am so proud to be able to work with such a talented team of professionals and experts. This past year had some big wins, like landing National Cattleman's Beef Association for 2032; a 'crowning' achievement in the design of the new logo for Symphony Hall; and an incredible approach to the guest experience as evidenced by our extraordinary customer satisfaction scores. I am inspired by you all daily and I wish you the best this Thanksgiving (even though I am protesting the winner of the department pie competition).

Jerry Harper
Phoenix Convention Center Director

Holiday tradition:
Watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade with our boys

Planning & Development

Every day, our team partners with out community to make phoenix the great city it is, and I never take for granted the dedication and expertise that each of you brings to the table. I want to express my sincere gratitude to each of you for the work you do to preserve, shape, and build a city we're proud to call home. None of this would be possible without you, and I'm proud of what we've accomplished together and grateful to serve with you all. Wishing you and your loved ones a joyful holiday season!

Josh Bednarek
Planning & Development Director

Holiday tradition:
Zoo Lights, Luminarias at the DBG, and the APS Electric Light Parade

Police

As we approach the end of the year, I want to thank each of you for your dedication, professionalism, and commitment to serving our Phoenix community. Every role in our department contributes to our mission of leading with PRIDE, and serving with integrity, compassion, and excellence. I am continually inspired by your resilience, the sacrifices made by your families, and the trust you build within our community every day. As we look ahead to 2027, I am excited to strengthen those connections and continue moving our department forward together. Thank you and have a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

Chief Matt Giordano
Phoenix Police Department

Holiday tradition:
Visiting and thanking those employees who will have to work on holidays

Public Defender's Office

As my time with the City of Phoenix draws to a close, please know that it has been my greatest honor to work with the incredible staff of the Public Defender's Office. The dedication that all of you exhibit every day in support of the neediest and most marginalized members of society has inspired me and has challenged me to be the best leader, lawyer and man that I can be. I will always remember my time here with the greatest fondness and pride. Thank you all for everything you do.

David Ward
Public Defender's Office Director

Holiday tradition:
The lights, festive decorations and pageantry the season brings

Public Transit

Team Transit! I want to take this moment to tell you how much your hard work, positive attitude, professionalism, and dependability mean to me and to the City of Phoenix. The holidays are a time to rest and recharge - and you have definitely earned it considering all we've accomplished this year. Wishing you and your family a warm, joyful holiday season filled with everything that makes this time of year special.

Jesús Sapien
Public Transit Director

Holiday tradition:
Having dinner on the patio while others across the country shovel snow. :D

Public Works

Thank you to every Public Works team member, on the front lines and behind the scenes, who keeps our solid waste, fleet, and facilities services running for our community and sister departments. Your dedication doesn't stop, even during the holidays, and it doesn't go unnoticed. My favorite part of this season is quality time with my family, friends, and my golden doodle, Guinness. I hope each of you gets that same time with the people (and pets) you love. Happy holidays, and thank you for all you do!

Felipe Moreno
Public Works Director

Holiday tradition:
Quality time with family, friends, and my dog!

Retirement Office

As I continue settling into this role, I'm deeply grateful for your patience, support, and willingness to embrace change. I'm proud to be part of a team so committed to helping people. The thank-you notes we receive from employees are a meaningful reminder that your dedication makes a lasting difference. Thank you for all that you do!

Mayra Baquera
Retirement Program Administrator

Holiday tradition:
Cheesy holiday movies and tamales

Street Transportation

Thanksgiving provides an opportunity to thank those whose efforts strengthen our community. I'm proud of the work accomplished by Street Transportation Department employees, with special recognition for our field staff, who are on the front lines rain or shine, delivering critical services and responding to community needs while helping keep Phoenix moving safely. Thank you to all employees for your dedication and commitment to public service. May this Thanksgiving bring you and your loved ones together to celebrate the season.

Briiana Velez
Street Transportation Director

Holiday tradition:
Spending quality time with family and creating lasting memories

Volunteer

Jasmine, I hope you are enjoying this season of thanks with your baby! I am truly thankful for the time, effort, and positive energy you bring each day. Your commitment helps strengthen our team and enables us to achieve great things together. It is a privilege to work alongside someone who consistently demonstrates such professionalism, kindness, and reliability to not only our internal customer but our external customers as well. Thanks again for all you do!

Yvonne Pastor
Chief Service Officer

Holiday tradition:
Connecting with family and enjoying a slower pace

Water Services

Every day, I see the skill, dedication, and heart that Water Services staff bring to serving our community. I'm truly grateful for each of you and for the way you solve problems, support one another, and work tirelessly on behalf of Phoenix residents. Your commitment makes a real difference, and I'm proud to be part of this team. During this holiday season, I hope you're able to slow down, enjoy the traditions that are meaningful to you, and spend time with the people who matter most. Thank you for all you do, and warmest wishes to you and your loved ones.

Brandy Kelso. P.E.
Water Services Director

Holiday tradition:
Spending time with family & friends, baking cookies, and relaxing

Youth & Education

The holiday season is fast approaching, and I want to express my sincere gratitude for the hard work each member of the Youth and Education Office team puts in every day. While the work we do to support youth and families is incredibly important, it is equally critical to take time to recharge and create lasting memories with our loved ones. I look forward to spending time with my family and grandson, Miles, whose curiosity, energy, and joy are a reminder of what this season is all about. I wish you and your families a holiday season filled with peace, gratitude, and laughter. Happy Holidays!

Tim Valencia
Youth and Education Director

Holiday tradition:
Spending quality time with my 2-year-old grandson, Miles

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