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HEATING UP THE SKIES

Tim Kelley, Flagstaff Flyers Club treasurer, left, helps junior pilot James Miller, 13, with his radio-controlled airplane last week at Hebestreit Field during the Flagstaff Flyers Beat the Heat Fun Fly. The three-day fundraising event welcomed more than 30 pilots of all ages to fly their model aircrafts and participate in fun competitions.

Junior pilot Jace Chavez, 14, right, talks to Todd Howe, Flagstaff Flyers Club president, about testing his radio-controlled airplane after a crash last week at Hebestreit Field during the Flagstaff Flyers Beat the Heat Fun Fly.

For more photos of the event, see page A8

New mural adds warmth to CCHHS waiting area

BY MARIAH TEMPRENDOLA
Navajo-Hopi Observer

FLAGSTAFF — Warm shades of red, orange and gold stretch across the lobby, where hummingbirds hover beneath blue skies, butterflies drift through

the warm air, and deer stand among the desert colors. The mural, inspired by beautiful artwork representing the Navajo and Hopi cultures, welcomes visitors to the Coconino County Health and Human Services (CCHHS) building.

Two mural artists, Duane Koyawena and Chelsie Begood, collaborated on the project to create a welcoming environment for everyone that enters the building.

See MURAL, Page A9

NAU discusses its enrollment decline

BY ABIGAIL KESSLER
Sun Staff Reporter

The projected decline in enrollment at Northern Arizona University for the coming school year is the result of a combination of factors that are affecting colleges across the United States, according to the university’s vice president of enrollment management.

NAU is expecting to start the school year next month with an enrollment that is 2,854 students lower than it had the previous fall (the university’s budget for fiscal year 2027 estimated it would have 24,331 full-time equivalent students in fall 2026). Data in the university’s annual Fact Book shows it has not had an enrollment change of this size so far in the 21st century.

Anika Olsen, NAU’s vice president of enrollment management, said a combination of factors “that converged into a perfect storm” led to the projected decrease for fall 2026. Items she listed as contributing factors included larger graduating classes and smaller incoming ones in recent years, an ongoing demographic cliff that means other universities are doing more to enroll students in their state, changes to federal policy around student visas, shifts in student perceptions of the value of higher education and a wider variety of education options for them to choose from.

Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) executive director Chad Sampson cited similar reasons,

See ENROLLMENT, Page A10

Former NAU employees speak out on reductions

BY ABIGAIL KESSLER
Sun Staff Reporter

Employees of Northern Arizona University have described feelings of uncertainty around the recent staff reductions happening on campus.

NAU said it will be starting the school year with around 250 fewer employees than the prior year due to a combination of natural attrition measures and reductions in force intended to help balance the university budget. This is in response to expected declines in enrollment and state funding for the upcoming school year.

Both a current and former NAU employee said the staff reductions are the result of the university asking departments

to find ways to reduce their budgets over the past two years and have come without warning to the affected employees. Each requested anonymity, as did a student worker whose on-campus job was cut shortly after the end of the most recent school year.

“The fact that it’s the largest employer in northern Arizona and it let go a lot of employees and a lot of the workforce, that’s something people should know about,” said a current NAU employee who has worked in their department for multiple years. “I know the university’s trying to keep it quiet, but it’s something that affects the people of Flagstaff as well as

See EMPLOYEES, Page A11

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