

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Groovin’ in the Aspens returns in September

BY STEVIE SANCHEZ
Special to the Daily Sun

While summer is winding down, trail runners are continuing to gear up for one of northern Arizona’s favorite fall traditions. Groovin’ in the Aspens returns Sept. 13, inviting runners from across the Southwest to experience Flagstaff’s world-class trails as the season begins to change. Hosted by Bear Jaw Events, the race welcomes runners of all experience levels to the Fort Valley trailhead, where participants will wind through miles of scenic singletrack surrounded by towering ponderosa

pinos and, with a little help from Mother Nature, the first hints of Flagstaff’s famous golden aspens. Formerly known as Gaspin’ in the Aspens, the event has been refreshed with a new name while maintaining the community atmosphere and challenging courses that participants have come to expect. “This race is about celebrating everything that makes Flagstaff special,” organizers said. “The trails, the cooler temperatures, the changing colors and the incredible outdoor community all come together for an unforgettable weekend.”

Participants can choose from five distances — 6K, 10K, 20K, 30K and 50K — making the event accessible to everyone from first-time trail runners to seasoned ultramarathon competitors. Each course showcases a different side of the Fort Valley trail system, offering flowing forest trails, rolling climbs, technical sections and sweeping mountain scenery. The event has earned a reputation for combining competitive racing with a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere. Volunteers and spectators line portions of the course to cheer runners

on, while the finish area offers music, food, race awards and opportunities for participants to connect after crossing the finish line. In addition to highlighting Flagstaff’s extensive trail network, Groovin’ in the Aspens helps showcase the region as a destination for outdoor recreation. Every year, the race attracts runners from throughout Arizona and neighboring states, many of whom extend their stay to enjoy Flagstaff’s restaurants, breweries, shops and surrounding public lands. Race organizers encourage participants to register early, as several

distances are expected to fill before race week-end. Volunteers are also welcome and play a key role in supporting runners throughout the day. Whether tackling a first trail race or chasing a new personal best, Groovin’ in the Aspens offers runners an opportunity to experience northern Arizona at one of its most beautiful times of year. For race details, course information, volunteer opportunities or registration, visit [GroovinInTheAspens.com](#).

STEVIE SANCHEZ IS THE FOUNDER AND RACE DIRECTOR OF BEAR JAW EVENTS, WHICH HE

LAUNCHED IN FLAGSTAFF IN EARLY 2014 WITH THE INAUGURAL BEAR JAW GROOVE. A RACER FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES, SANCHEZ PARTNERED WITH NICK MENNINGER IN 2018 TO EXPAND THE ORGANIZATION’S TRAIL RUNNING AND OUTDOOR EVENT LINEUP, INCLUDING GROOVIN’ IN THE ASPENS AND THE 2026 RESURRECTION OF COSMIC SOLSTICE, THE CELEBRATED 1990S-ERA “AROUND THE PEAKS” RACE. RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM TO TWO WONDERFUL GIRLS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER, AND FEELS LUCKY TO CALL FLAGSTAFF “HOME.” SHE IS ALSO THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN AND WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT BY SENDING YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY TO HER AT [RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM](#).

EAGLES

FROM PAGE B1

its first drive. Marcos de Niza turned the ball over on downs the following drive. The 48 points scored by Marcos de Niza marked the most Flagstaff has allowed in a season opener since 5A Camelback scored 53 in the Skydome in 2022. But the Eagles’ defense did make some big plays early. Senior linebacker Micah Worley picked off Mattison late in the first quarter at midfield. Flagstaff failed to capitalize on the takeaway, turning the ball over on downs before the end of the first quarter. Garcia’s scoring barrage began less than a minute into the second quarter with a 6-yard scamper into the end zone. Custer connected with one of his biggest targets, sophomore wide receiver



Flagstaff football head coach Andres Delgadillo looks on during a game against Marcos De Niza on Thursday in the Walkup Skydome.

Evan Washington, on a 31-yard touchdown pass on the following drive. The connection between Custer and Washington will be crucial as the season continues. “They’ve established quite the relationship, especially recently with Evan being a freshman last year, stepping up as a sophomore and with Broden paving his path also. It’s definitely nice to

see them grow together,” Delgadillo said. Washington was called for a penalty after spinning the ball on the ground after the play. The flag moved the extra point try farther back, which ended up being blocked. Delgadillo said Washington let his emotions get the best of him, but he took accountability for it. “He owned up to his mistake, but obvious-



Flagstaff’s AJ Valdez (2) runs with the ball during a game against Marcos De Niza on Thursday in the Walkup Skydome.

ly it hurts the team to have to kick so far back,” Delgadillo said. “He’s young. He’ll learn. He’ll grow.” Another 6-yard score by Garcia on a run-play option kept the Padres up two possessions in the later stages of the second quarter.

Marcos de Niza looked to break away with a stunning 86-yard run from Garcia on the first play following a Flagstaff turnover on downs to go up 28-6 with three minutes until halftime. Flagstaff salvaged the half with a methodical

drive that ended with Custer finding senior wide receiver AJ Valdez for a touchdown with 46 seconds until halftime to cut the lead to 28-12. Another methodical drive put Flagstaff

See EAGLES, Page B1



Piano Recital

Presented by
Juan Velasco

Featuring the music of:
*Bach, Beethoven,
Stölzel, Albinoni,
Giazotto, Chopin,
and Debussy*

Sunday August 30, 2026 at 3:30 PM

San Francisco de Asis Catholic Church,
1600 E Rte. 66
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

General Admission: \$25 per person or \$75 per family

Tickets sold at the door or at (928) 225-5034

THINK ON THESE THINGS

In Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul tells us things to think on. The first thing he mentions is things that are true. While truth is important in all areas of life, it is especially important when it comes to our life with God. There are many who believe and say that they have the truth, but they cannot all be right. The only source that any of us can trust is God. He is the source of all spiritual truth. Followers of Christ are set apart (sanctified) by truth, and truth comes from God’s word – the Bible. See John 17:17. God’s inspired word is what you should test all ideas and teachings against to see if they are true. See II Timothy 3:16-17.

Look for this brief article every week as we offer things to think on from God’s Word.

For more resources and information, visit our website at [HigherGroundChurchofChrist.com](#) Or call: 928-224-9444

We are currently meeting on
Sundays at 3:00 pm at the LaQuinta Inn 2015 S Beulah, Flagstaff, AZ.



MUSEUM of NORTHERN ARIZONA

EASTON COLLECTION CENTER OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, August 22nd, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

FREE for everyone!

Join us for a behind-the-scenes look at the Museum of Northern Arizona collections at our annual Collection Center Open House.

The Open House will highlight items related to MNA’s *Artist Hopid Unvield* exhibit currently on display in the main museum building.

The Center is located across Rte. 180 from the main building.



3101 N FORT VALLEY ROAD | FLAGSTAFF AZ | [MUSNAZ.ORG](#)