



AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

See Proof on Next Page

**Billings Gazette
401 N Broadyway
Billings, Montana 59101
(406) 657-1200**

State of Florida, County of Orange, ss:

Edmar Corachia, being first duly sworn, deposes and says: That (s)he is a duly authorized signatory of Column Software, PBC, duly authorized agent of Billings Gazette, a newspaper of general circulation published that is a "legal newspaper" as that is published daily in the City of Billings, in the County of Yellowstone, State of Montana, and has charge of the Advertisements thereof.

If this certification is for the State of Montana, I hereby certify that I have read sec. 18-7-204 and 18-7-205 MCA, and subsequent revisions, and declare that the price or rate charged the State of Montana for the publication for which claim is made in printed copy in the amount of _____ is not in excess of the minimum rate charged any other advertiser for publication of advertisement, set in the same size type and published for the same number of insertions, further certify that this claim is correct and just in all respects, and that payment or credit has not been received.

PUBLICATION DATES: November. 7 2025

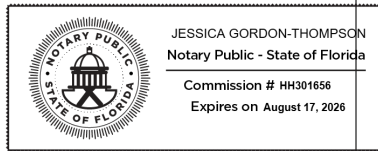
NOTICE ID: 6rjRgplzHYsutgcN4119

PUBLISHER ID: COL-MT-100831

NOTICE NAME: Equalis

Edmar Corachia

(Signed) _____



VERIFICATION

State of Florida
County of Orange

Subscribed in my presence and sworn to before me on this: **11/07/2025**

J. Thompson

Notary Public
Notarized remotely online using communication technology via Proof.

Request for Proposals

The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equals Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://ccog.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities> to download and complete the RFP package. Completed proposals are due before 3:00pm Eastern Time on 12/12/2025.

Gwinnett County Public Schools, on behalf of Equals Group members, has issued a request for competitive sealed proposals for Tires and Related Equipment, Supplies and Services. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://gwinnett.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities> to download and complete the solicitation package. Completed proposals are due before 10:00am Eastern Time on 12/9/2025.

Region 10 Education Service Center (ESC), on behalf of Equals Group members, is requesting responses for Audio-Visual and Related Technology Products and Services; Lawn Care, Landscape, and Grounds Maintenance Services; Paint and Paint Supplies; Cloud Solutions and Related Services; and Modular, Pre-Fabricated, and Pre-Engineered Buildings and Peripherals. Responses are due 12/12/2025 before 2:00 PM Central Time. To be considered respondents must submit a response to Region 10 ESC in accordance with solicitation documentation available at <https://www.region10.org/o/r10esc/page/request-for-proposals-rfps-bids>. The bid opening will take place at 2:00 P.M. Central Time via Teams as stated in the RFP.

November 7, 2025 COL-MT-100831 MMAXLP



Quote Only 2X (11/7 & 11/14)- RFP for Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, etc.; Gwinnett Co. Schools request for Tires, related services; Region 10 Education Service Center responses for Audio-Visual and related

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

THE STATE OF TEXAS §
COUNTY OF DALLAS §

I, **E. Nuel Cates**, being duly sworn upon oath, deposes and states that I am the **Publisher** of *The Daily Commercial Record*, a daily newspaper that qualifies as a newspaper of general circulation set out in Section 2051.044, Texas Government Code.

- 1) devotes not less than 25% of its total column lineage to general interest items;
- 2) is published at least once a week;
- 3) is entered as second-class (periodical) postal matter in Dallas County, Texas;
- 4) has been published regularly and continuously for at least 12 months prior to publishing

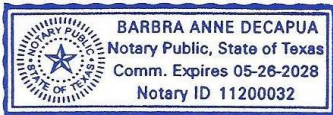
The attached notice was published in the *Daily Commercial Record* on the following date(s) and is a true and correct copy of said published notice.

Publication date(s)

11/7/2025, 11/14/2025

E. Nuel Cates, Publisher

Signed & sworn to me on this 14th day of November, 2025.



Barbra A. DeCapua

Notary Public, Dallas County, Texas

The Daily Commercial Record
706 Main Street, Dallas, Texas. 75202
(214) 741-6366
727242

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11/7,11/14



Ohio

PO Box 630599 Cincinnati, OH 45263-0599

GANNETT

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Brianna Louton
MCA Russell Johns
17110 Gunn HWY
Odessa FL 33556-1909

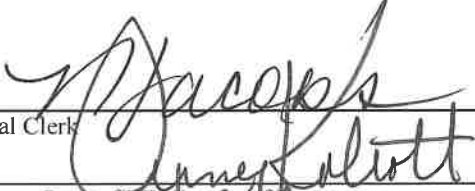
STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

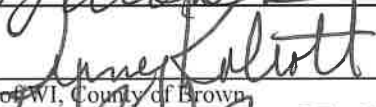
The Newark Advocate, printed and published in Ohio and personal knowledge of the facts herein state and that the notice hereto annexed was Published in said newspapers in the issues dated on:

NEW Newark Advocate 11/07/2025, 11/14/2025
NEW newarkadvocate.com 11/07/2025, 11/14/2025

and that the fees charged are legal.
Sworn to and subscribed before on 11/14/2025

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NADV, Nov. 7 & 14, 2025 #11797469



Legal Clerk


Notary, State of WI, County of Brown


My commission expires

Order No: 11797469 # of Copies: 1
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PO #:

THIS IS NOT AN INVOICE!
Please do not use this form for payment remittance.

AMY KOKOTT
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin



AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Kim Ridgeway.
Russell Johns
7853 Gunn HWY # 206
Tampa FL 33626-1611


STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

Before the undersigned authority personally appeared, who on oath says that he or she is the Legal Advertising Representative of the Pensacola News Journal, a newspaper published in Escambia County, Florida; with circulation in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties; that the attached copy of advertisement, being a Legal Ad in the matter of Bids & Proposals, was published on the publicly accessible website of Escambia County, Florida, or in a newspaper by print in the issues of, on:

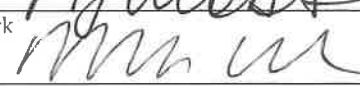
PNJ Pensacola News_Journal 11/07/2025
PNJ pnj.com 11/07/2025

Affiant further says that the website or newspaper complies with all legal requirements for publication in chapter 50, Florida Statutes.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, by the legal clerk, who is personally known to me, on 11/07/2025



Legal Clerk



Notary, State of WI, County of Brown

8.25.26

My commission expires

Order No: 11803163 # of Copies:
Customer No: 1388753 0
PO #: LSAR0399513

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Please do not use this form for payment remittance.

MARIAH VERHAGEN
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

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November 7 2025
LSAR0399513

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

CUSTOMER'S COPY

CUSTOMER NAME AND ADDRESS

MCA RUSSELL JOHNS ASSOCIATES
KIM RIDGEWAY
7853 GUNN HWY PMB 206
TAMPA, FL 33626
kridgeway@mcarrusselljohns.com

ACCOUNT NUMBER

9604

ACCOUNT NAME

MCA RUSSELL JOHNS ASSOCIATES

TELEPHONE

727-450-6172

ORDER #

SLT0035493

CUSTOMER REFERENCE NUMBER

CAPTION

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SLT0035493

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

AS THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, INC. LEGAL BOOKER, I CERTIFY THAT THE ATTACHED ADVERTISEMENT OF Request for Proposals The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equalis Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. FOR MCA RUSSELL JOHNS ASSOCIATES WAS PUBLISHED BY THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, INC., WEEKLY NEWSPAPER PRINTED IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITH GENERAL CIRCULATION IN UTAH, AND PUBLISHED IN SALT LAKE CITY, SALT LAKE COUNTY IN THE STATE OF UTAH. NOTICE IS ALSO POSTED ON UTAHLEGALS.COM ON THE SAME DAY AS THE FIRST NEWSPAPER PUBLICATION DATE AND REMAINS ON UTAHLEGALS.COM INDEFINITELY. COMPLIES WITH UTAH DIGITAL SIGNATURE ACT UTAH CODE 46-2-101; 46-3-104.

PUBLISHED ON 11/12/2025, 11/19/2025

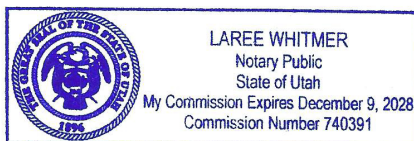
DATE 11/21/2025

SIGNATURE

STATE OF UTAH
COUNTY OF SALT LAKE

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME ON THIS 21st DAY OF NOVEMBER IN THE YEAR 2025

BY Doug Ryle



Laree Whitmer
NOTARY PUBLIC SIGNATURE

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Account #	Order Number	Identification	Order PO	Cols	Depth
54178	IPL0287142	Legal Ad - IPL0287142		3.0	69.0L

ATTENTION: Kim Ridgeway
 17110 Gunn Hwy
 Odessa, FL 33556
 kridgeway@russelljohns.com

State of South Carolina

County of Richland

I, the undersigned, makes oath that the advertisement, was published in The State, a newspaper published in the City of Columbia, State and County aforesaid, in the issue(s) of

1.0 insertion(s) published on:
 11/07/25 Print

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IPL0287142
 Nov 7 2025

[Print Tearsheet Link](#)

[Marketplace Link](#)

Amanda Rodela



Amanda Rodela

Mary Castro



Sworn to and subscribed before me on

Nov 7, 2025, 9:39 AM EST



Online Notary Public. This notarial act involved the use of online audio/video communication technology. Notarization facilitated by SIGNiX®

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IFL0287142
Nov 7 2025

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IPL0287144
 Nov 12 2025

COUNTY OF BENTON)

SS

STATE OF WASHINGTON)

the undersigned, being duly sworn, deposes and says, I am the Legals Clerk of The Tri-City Herald, a daily newspaper. That said newspaper is a local newspaper and has been approved as a legal newspaper by order of the superior court in the county in which it is published and it is now and has been for more than six months prior to the date of the publications hereinafter referred to, published continually as a daily newspaper in Benton County, Washington. That the attached is a true copy as it was printed in the regular and entire issue of the Tri-City Herald and not in a supplement thereof, and that said newspaper was regularly distributed to its subscribers during all of this period.

1.0 insertion(s) published on:

11/12/25 Print

[Print Tearsheet Link](#)

[Marketplace Link](#)

Sherry Chasteen



Sherry Chasteen

Amanda Rodela



Sworn to and subscribed before me on

Nov 12, 2025, 10:10 AM ES'



Online Notary Public. This notarial act involved the use of online audio/video communication technology. Notarization facilitated by SIGNiX®

Sold To:
My Classified ads - CU80183354
17110 Gunn Hwy
Odessa, FL 33556

Bill To:
My Classified ads - CU80183354
17110 Gunn Hwy
Odessa, FL 33556

Affidavit of Publication

State of Illinois
County of Cook

Order Number: 7891576
Purchase Order:

This day, Jeremy Gates appeared before me and, after being duly sworn, made oath that:

- 1) He/she is affidavit clerk of Virginia Gazette, a newspaper published by Daily Press, LLC in the city of Williamsburg and the state of Virginia
- 2) That the advertisement hereto annexed has been published in said newspaper on the dates stated below
- 3) The advertisement has been produced on the websites classifieds.pilotonline.com and <https://www.publicnoticevirginia.com>

Published on: **Nov 12, 2025.**



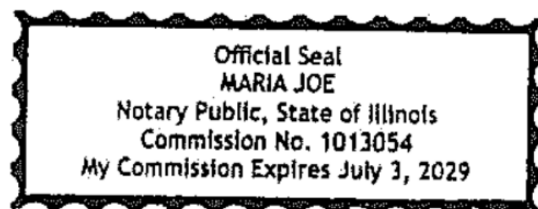
Jeremy Gates

Subscribed and sworn to before me in my city and state on the day and year aforesaid this 13 day of November, 2025

My commission expires July 3, 2029



Notary Signature



Notary Stamp

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AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Order Number : 11803497

STATE OF WISCONSIN
Brown County

Of the **Home News Tribune**, a newspaper printed in Freehold, New Jersey and published in East Brunswick, in State of New Jersey and Middlesex County, and of general circulation in Middlesex and Union Counties, who being duly sworn, depose and saith that the advertisement of which the annexed is a true copy, has been published in said newspaper in the issue:

11/07/2025

[Handwritten signature]

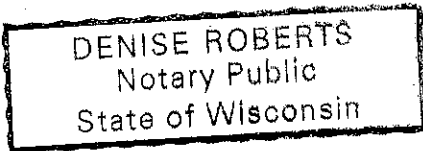
Legal Clerk

[Handwritten signature]

Notary Public State of Wisconsin County of Brown

[Handwritten date]

My commission expires



Request for Proposals

The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equalis Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://ccog.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities> to download and complete the RFP package. Completed proposals are due before 3:00pm Eastern Time on 12/12/2025.

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November 7 2025
LNYS0399533

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

STATE OF NEVADA)
COUNTY OF CLARK) SS:

MCA RUSSELL JOHNS
17110 GUNN HIGHWAY
ODESSA FL 33556

Account #
Order ID

105557
344482

Leslie McCormick, being 1st duty sworn, deposes and says: That she is the Legal Clerk for the Las Vegas Review-Journal/Las Vegas Sun, daily newspaper regularly issued, published and circulated in the Clark County, Las Vegas, Nevada and that the advertisement, a true copy attached for, was continuously published in said Las Vegas Review-Journal/Las Vegas Sun, in 1 edition(s) of said newspaper issued from 11/07/2025 to 11/07/2025, on the following day(s):

11/07/2025

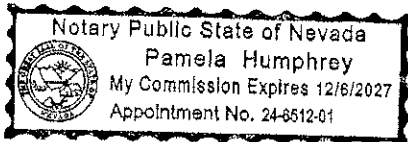
Leslie McCormick

LEGAL ADVERTISEMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Subscribed and sworn to before me on this November 7, 2025

Notary

Pamela Humphrey



Request For Proposals (RFPs)

The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equalis Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://ccog.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities> to download and complete the RFP package. Completed proposals are due before 3:00pm Eastern Time on 12/12/2025.

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PUB: Nov. 7, 2025
LV Review Journal

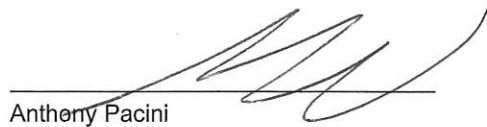
November 14, 2025

Affidavit of Publication

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a duly authorized representative of MCA Russell Johns Associates LLC, the company handling the advertising matters for USA Today a daily newspaper distributed within the United States.

A public notice ad was placed by Equalis Group (Janitorial/Tires/HVAC) and was published in said newspaper within the marketplace section of the National USA Today Marketplace on November 7, 2025 and November 14, 2025.

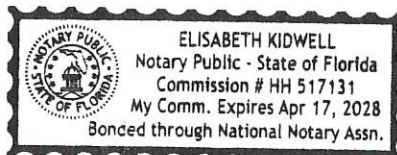


Anthony Pacini

On this 14th day of November, I attest that the attached document is a true, exact, complete, and unaltered tearsheet.



Notary



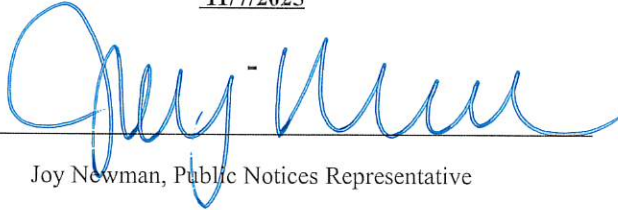
CAPITAL CITY PRESS

**Publisher of
THE ADVOCATE**

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

The hereto attached notice was published in THE
ADVOCATE, a daily newspaper of general circulation
published in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the Official
Journal of the State of Louisiana, City of Baton Rouge,
and Parish of East Baton Rouge or published daily in
THE TIMES-PICAYUNE/THE NEW ORLEANS
ADVOCATE, in New Orleans Louisiana or published
daily in THE ACADIANA ADVOCATE in the following
issues:

11/7/2025



Joy Newman, Public Notices Representative

Sworn and subscribed before me, by the person whose signature
appears above

12 Nov 2025

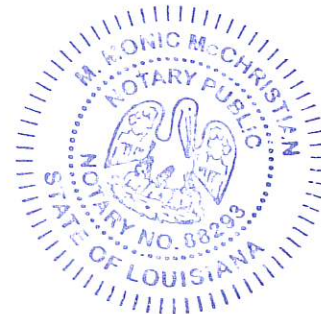


M. Monic McChristian,

Notary Public ID#88293

State of Louisiana

My Commission Expires: Indefinite



Ad No: 165347

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equals Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://ccog.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openopp> opportunities to download and complete the RFP package. Completed proposals are due before 3:00pm Eastern Time on 12/12/2025.

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AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

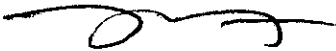
Kim Ridgeway,
Russell Johns
7853 Gunn HWY # 206
Tampa FL 33626-1611

STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

The Arizona Business Gazette, a newspaper published in the city of Phoenix and general circulation in the counties of Maricopa, Coconino and Pinal, State of Arizona, and personal knowledge of the facts herein state and that the notice hereto annexed was Published in said newspapers in the issue:

PNI azcentral.com 11/13/2025
PNI Business Gazette 11/13/2025, 11/20/2025

and that the fees charged are legal.
Sworn to and subscribed before on 11/20/2025



Legal Clerk



Notary, State of WI, County of Brown



My commission expires

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VICKY FELTY
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

Request for Proposals

The Cooperative Council of Governments (CCOG), on behalf of Equalis Group members, has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the following categories: Janitorial Supplies, Equipment, Services and Related Solutions; Energy Management and Procurement Services; Fleet Related Technology and Software Solutions; Maintenance, Repair, and Operational (MRO) Supplies, Services, and Solutions; Waste & Recycling Containers with Related Solutions. Organizations who wish to participate in the RFP process must register with Bonfire strategic sourcing platform through this link <https://ccog.bonfirehub.com/portal/?tab=openOpportunities> to download and complete the RFP package. Completed proposals are due before 3:00pm Eastern Time on 12/12/2025.

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November 13, 20 2025
LAZS0399495

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

State of Wisconsin
County of Brown

Linda Tuttle being duly sworn, deposes and says she is the Principal Clerk of **The Journal News**, Division of Gannett Newspaper Subsidiary, publishers of following newspaper published in Westchester and Rockland Counties, State of New York, of which annexed is a printed copy, out from said newspaper has been published in said newspaper editions dated:

11/07/2025

Linda Tuttle

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 07 day of November, 2025

Nicole Jacobs
exp: 8-21-26

Notary Public
State of Wisconsin, County of Brown

NICOLE JACOBS
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

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November 7 2025
LNYS0399541

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

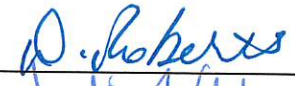
Kim Ridgeway.
Russell Johns
7853 Gunn HWY # 206
Tampa FL 33626-1611

STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

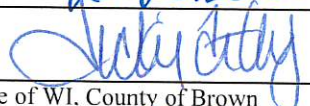
The Record Searchlight, a newspaper published in the city of Redding, Shasta County, State of California, and personal knowledge of the facts herein state and that the notice hereto annexed was Published in said newspapers in the issue:

RRS Redding Record Srchlght 11/07/2025
RRS redding.com 11/07/2025

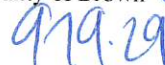
and that the fees charged are legal.
Sworn to and subscribed before on 11/07/2025



Legal Clerk



Notary, State of WI, County of Brown



My commission expires

Request for Proposals
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November 7 2025
LYRK0399504

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VICKY FELTY
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

Request for Proposals

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November 7 2025
LYRK0399504

LOCALiQ

The Register-Guard

PO Box 631824 Cincinnati, OH 45263-1824

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Brianna Louton
My Classified Ads
7853 Gunn HWY # 206
Tampa FL 33626-1611

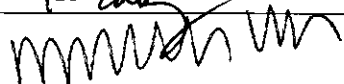
STATE OF WISCONSIN, COUNTY OF BROWN

The Register-Guard, a newspaper of general circulation as defined in ORS 193.010 and 193.020; published at Eugene in the State of Oregon, County of Lane; that the printed copy of which is hereto annexed, is publishing in the entire issue of said newspaper in the issues dated:

11/07/2025

Sworn to and subscribed before on 11/07/2025

Legal Clerk

K. Young


Notary, State of WI, County of Brown

8 25 26

My commission expires

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MARIAH VERHAGEN
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

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LOCALiQ

South Bend Tribune | The Herald Times | PO Box 630485 Cincinnati, OH 45263-0485
The Times-Mail | Evening World
The Reporter Times

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

Kim Ridgeway.
Russell Johns
7853 Gunn HWY # 206
Tampa FL 33626-1611

STATE OF INDIANA, COUNTY OF ST JOSEPH

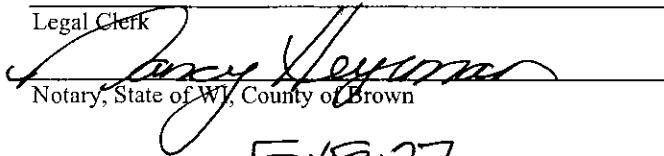
The South Bend Tribune, a newspaper printed and published in the county of St Joseph, in the State of Indiana, and personal knowledge of the facts herein state and that the notice hereto annexed was Published in said newspaper in the issue dated:

11/07/2025, 11/14/2025

and that the fees charged are legal.
Sworn to and subscribed before on 11/14/2025



Legal Clerk



Notary, State of WI, County of Brown

5.19.27

My commission expires

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NANCY HEYRMAN
Notary Public
State of Wisconsin

Request for Proposals

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HSPAXLP

November 7, 14 2025

LSBN0399519

'A powerful slap to the Taliban's face'

Afghan women's team returns to FIFA play

Ciaran O'Mahony and Bianca Roberts

Special to USA TODAY

Afghan goaltender Fatima Yousufi stepped on the field at Berrechid Municipal Stadium in Morocco on Oct. 26 for a historic comeback more than four years in the making.

This wasn't just a game. Not after enduring years of exile after fleeing Afghanistan amid the Taliban's takeover. Not after an eleventh-hour relocation of this tournament – the 2025 FIFA Unites Women's Series was originally scheduled to be played in Dubai – because UAE visas for the Afghan team were not approved. Not after finally finding a voice with FIFA as a refugee team.

Yousufi said she and her teammates – known as Afghan Women United – felt more pressure than ever in an international tournament. It was a major step in their collective fight to be recognized as a national team. But Mursal Sadat, who plays centerback, said it was also about showcasing the strength of Afghan women and what they can achieve even under the most devastating circumstances.

"Everyone was telling me, 'We won't get it,'" Sadat told USA TODAY Sports about their fight for an Afghan team. "But I said, 'We will still fight this fight, because it's not about us, it's about all the women in our country. It's about being a voice for them.'

"It's a matter of gender equality ... for every woman and girl around the world."

Friendly matches for most national teams are an informal, preparatory part of the sporting calendar. But for the newly established Afghan Women United team, the FIFA Unites Tournament Oct. 26-Nov. 1 in Morocco marked a moment of great geopolitical – and personal – significance. The four-team tournament allowed the Afghan players to contest their first games against international opposition since they fled their country in 2021, evading oppression from the Taliban, which banned women's sports after returning to power after the withdrawal of American forces.

"It has a very big meaning for us," Yousufi said. "It's going to be a big message ... a powerful slap to the Taliban's face, that we're unstoppable."

The round-robin tournament tested the mettle of the fledgling Afghan refugee team, which lost to Chad 6-1 and Tunisia 4-0 before posting an emphatic 7-0 victory in their final match against Libya.

But an overarching victory was secured before the first whistle, according



Afghan goalie Fatima Yousufi runs toward her teammates to celebrate after scoring their first goal during the FIFA Unites Women's Series 2025.

ABEDEL MAJID BZIOUAT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

to Yousufi, earned by virtue of the team's mere existence.

"There were a lot of sacrifices to just make it this far," Yousufi said. "I'm just so glad right now that (after) all our hard work ... we have this result."

Reflecting on Afghan Women United's historic debut, captain Fatima Haidari said there was "a real mix of emotions" among her teammates.

"I cried because we are back after many years, after all the moments that we suffered out of Afghanistan, far from our families ... but we are still here," said Haidari, who lives in Italy. "We are fighting, and we had that spirit to be together and to strongly go ahead and just play the match."

Four-year journey back to the pitch

The Afghan players have been in exile since August 2021. More than half of the team resettled in Australia, while others found safety in European countries.

High-profile female athletes were a major target of the Islamic fundamentalist movement as it swiftly set about introducing over 70 decrees across the country that restricted women's rights to sport, education, employment and freedom of movement in public.

"When the Taliban arrived, everything just vanished," Yousufi said. "The (football) dream ... everything changed to survival mode."

"Every day, we were seeing the news that an athlete was killed by the Taliban, a politician was killed by the Taliban, a reporter was killed by the Taliban."

Prominent sportswomen across the country were encouraged to destroy all evidence of their sporting identities.

"I was supposed to burn my jersey and my medals ... I couldn't do it," Yousufi said. "I started to dig a hole in the backyard, and I just ... buried my memories, my sacrifices, my hard work and just trying to be a nobody."

She thought at the time: "I'm just deleting myself. I did that to be safe, to just save my family, my teammates – everyone."

Yousufi will never forget the four perilous days spent at Kabul Airport, waiting to escape via emergency visas arranged by FIFPRO and the Australian government.

"I myself got beaten by the Taliban during that time," she said. "I just escaped them, and I made my way to the gates. And my family got beaten by the Taliban. It was so bad."

Evacuation enabled the safety of the players, but the ongoing threat of reprisal remained for family members left behind.

"There was a day that my mom called me in a hurry, and she told me that the Taliban was here," Yousufi said. "They searched our house. They made such a big mess around. They even dug up the yards."

"My parents at that time; they were so scared."

FIFA pathway restores Afghan team

Participation in international soccer tournaments is a politically charged area of bureaucracy.

While sovereignty of state-level decision-makers – such as the Taliban-controlled Afghan Football Federation – is technically mandated, mounting criticism from the international community

and targeted advocacy by the Sport and Rights Alliance and Human Rights Watch propelled FIFA to take unprecedented action in recognizing Afghan Women United.

This is the first time football's world governing body has established a team in defiance of a national football association.

"It was so important for us to keep this title and to have the team back again ... to just not let the Taliban win this," Yousufi said.

Speaking after the 4-0 loss to Tunisia, Sadat said, "It's more than football for us."

"We didn't care about the result. We just cared about lifting up each other. We've got to be true leaders and show the girls in Afghanistan that despite the result, despite the winning or losing, you're going to be a champion," said Sadat, who along with many of her teammates lives in Australia and plays professionally for Melbourne Victory FC AWT. The last three letters standing for Afghan Women's Team, which has a partnership with the Australian club Melbourne Victory.

"The AWT competes in Football Victoria's competitive leagues where they have recently secured back-to-back promotions and will next season be in the Women's State League 2," Melbourne Victory's website reads. "In addition to supporting their sporting life, Melbourne Victory is committed to supporting players' social and cultural lives. This involves investment in support structures providing health and well-being, education and employment."

FIFA President Gianni Infantino, who was in attendance, congratulated Afghan Women United's debut on the international stage as, "The beginning of a beautiful, beautiful story that you are writing for yourselves, for your families, for so many girls and women all over the world."

Yousufi hopes the organization will continue to support the team's ambitions. But for her, the most important thing is inspiring Afghan women who feel hopeless.

"I know it's so hard to tell them, 'Do not give up' ... (But) those girls in Afghanistan should dream, because those dreams (are) going to scare the Taliban," Yousufi said. "They should not give up on their dreams, because that's what the Taliban wants."

Ciaran O'Mahony is a freelance reporter based in the United Arab Emirates. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Age*, *The New Arab* and *The Diplomat*. Bianca Roberts is a freelance reporter based in the United Arab Emirates. Her work has appeared in *ABC News (Australia)*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Diplomat* and *The New Arab*.

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NCAA-bound Washington inspired by goalie

Cydney Henderson
USA TODAY

As Washington goalkeeper Tanner Ijams prepared for a shootout against Michigan State in the 2025 Big Ten women's soccer championship game on Nov. 9, the sophomore asked herself a simple question: What would Mia Hamant do?

Hamant was the Huskies goalkeeper last season, but her budding soccer career was tragically cut short by a rare and aggressive form of Stage 4 kidney cancer. Hamant, 21, died Nov. 6, three days before the Big Ten championship match.

Ijams took over as starting keeper this season after Hamant's diagnosis. As Michigan State players lined up to take their penalty kicks, Ijams was confident the Huskies would win.

"(Hamant) has a really, really good way of reading which way the striker is going, and it definitely helped me a lot in those moments," Ijams told USA TODAY Sports on Wednesday Nov. 12. "She was always so supportive of me and teaching me little techniques and little tricks that she does to just be a better keeper. So she definitely shared so much of her knowledge with me, and she's such an amazing keeper."

The moment the Huskies punched their NCAA Tournament ticket felt eerily similar to last season, when Hamant earned Big Ten All-Tournament honors after making three saves in a quarterfinal penalty shootout victory over Iowa to advance.

"It was only fitting that we finished that game with penalties," said coach Nicole Van Dyke, whose No. 4 seeded Huskies will play Montana on Friday (10 p.m. ET, ESPN+). "I felt like we had won it before we even started the penalties. I could see Mia (Hamant) giving a few fist pumps in that and screaming from the sidelines because for a goalkeeper to be at the heart of that moment is something pretty special for this team."

Hamant 'continued to show up'

Hamant was coming off a career-best junior season at Washington, where she ranked third in the nation in save percentage (0.882), before she received the diagnosis in April. Hamant had Stage 4 SMARCB1-deficient kidney cancer. A GoFundMe organized by teammate Lucy Newlin's mom, Kim Newlin, said the form of cancer Hamant was diagnosed with was so rare that "many medical facilities may only see a single case per year."

Hamant sat out her senior season to have treatment but was never far from her teammates or the game she loved. She was there the first day of practice,

when the Huskies laid out their season goals, Van Dyke said. She was at every home game. She was only a FaceTime call away when the team was on the road. The team celebrated Hamant's 21st birthday together in July with games of Tic, Tac, Toss, Perfection and Tapple.

"Mia continued to show up," Van Dyke said. "I think her connection and the connection she has with her teammates never left from the second she was diagnosed. If she could be here, she was here."

Following a seven-month battle with cancer, which she documented on her Instagram account @miakickscancer, Hamant lost her fight. The devastating news came shortly after the Huskies' 2-1 Big Ten Tournament semifinal win over No. 15 Wisconsin on Nov. 6 in St. Louis at Energizer Park.

Van Dyke had the impossible task of telling her team, gathering players and families that traveled for the tournament. The coach said she "couldn't be more grateful" for the families, staff and university's "team effort of wrapping their arms around our team."

"Everyone was going through the exact same thing, all together as a team," Ijams said, "and we were able to really look at each other and say, 'Hey, we can feel everything that we need to feel. We can let everything out.' And that's exactly what we did that night that we found out. We cried together, we sobbed together, we reminisced on moments with her together and really just contributed to the team spirit."

The Huskies prioritized connectedness the next day, leaving space for players to process and grieve the loss of their teammate and friend. "We did things that every high-caliber soccer team wants to do. We went to Target. We went and had Chick-fil-A," Van Dyke said. The Big Ten championship game was days away, but that didn't matter in the moment. "One thing that we could control was just spending more time together."

Van Dyke pulled seniors Lucy Newlin, Kelsey Branson and Kolo Suliafu aside to ask a question she knew may sound ridiculous to the competitive group: Do you want to play in the championship on Sunday?

"Before all the words are even coming out of her mouth, our heads are nodding up and down," Newlin said. "We're looking at each other with incredulous looks on our faces. But everyone on this team wanted to play and wanted to win for the person next to them, for Mia, for the support staff, for the coaches, for everyone who's gotten us to this point because we've had an incredible season so far. So why wouldn't we just go on and win the whole thing?"

They wanted to finish what they



Washington goalie Tanner Ijams, holding the trophy, and her teammates celebrate winning the Big Ten title Nov. 6. UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

started when they set their goals, with Hamant, on the first day of practice.

"They knew that that's what (Hamant) would want," Van Dyke added. "And that's what she will continue to want for this team, is for the team to be successful and the team to pursue their goals because they're not just their goals, they are Mia's goals, and they're always her goals."

Huskies rally through grief

Hamant's presence was alive at the Big Ten championship game, and her team "felt her in a thousand ways," Newlin said. The Huskies listened to a playlist curated by Hamant in the locker room before the game. Her No. 00 jersey was draped on the bench during the match, and the team was greeted by a beautiful orange sunset (Mia "was a big fan of sunsets") that matched the color of the bows in their hair. (Orange is the official color of kidney cancer awareness.)

"Songs would come up that I haven't heard since I listened to them with (Hamant) for the first time, and she's there ... back with us," Newlin recalled. "We step on the field and the sun comes out from behind the clouds and shines directly on us where we're standing as we're doing the captain's meeting. And she's there in every moment, conscious or not, we know she's there with us."

Despite being "physically, emotionally, mentally tired," the Huskies were fueled by Hamant.

Van Dyke's final message before her team took the pitch: "There's no result, win, lose, or draw that reflects how

much we loved Mia."

Senior forward Kalea Eichenberger got the Huskies on the board less than four minutes into the match and pointed to an orange wristband she was wearing in honor of Hamant. Michigan State's Kayla Briggs converted a penalty kick in the 11th minute to tie the match at 1. After two scoreless overtime periods, it was fitting the match came down to penalty kicks, a scenario Hamant loved.

"I definitely felt Mia's presence in that moment," Ijams said. "(Hamant) is someone that I share that love of PKs with. She's been super passionate about it. ... We've both talked about the fact that a lot of people think we're a little insane for it, but we love penalty kicks. So the second that final whistle blew, I knew I needed to use momentum to our advantage."

The sophomore keeper turned up the energy and made two PK saves, adding to her career-high six saves.

When the match was over, all the emotions and grief the team had pushed aside flooded back. Tears were shed, a Big Ten championship trophy was hoisted and their trip the NCAA Tournament was booked.

"You can see just how far (Ijams') confidence has come, how much belief she has in herself, and how much trust she has in her teammates and how much trust they have in her," Van Dyke said. "I think that's the turning point for a goalkeeper is when the team trusts you to the utmost."

"We wanted to make sure that (Ijams) understood that she doesn't need to fill anybody's shoes. You don't need to be Mia, you just need to be yourself."

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