MUSIC: Beyoncé goes country on 'Cowboy Carter' **Page 28**

MOVIES: Patel's bold 'Monkey Man' **Page 16**

GAMES: Be your best self in Dragon's Dogma II **Page 15**

EUROPE & PACIFIC WEEKEND EDITION

NCAA TOURNAMENT
Iowa's Clark looking to cap magnificent career with title
Page 48

STARS AND STRIPES®
stripes.com

Volume 82 Edition 252 ©SS 2024 FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2024
平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊（土日除く）
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価￥100
$1.00

VIRGINIA MAYO/AP

Two military personnel stand underneath the flags of NATO alliance members during a wreath laying ceremony at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Thursday. NATO celebrated 75 years of collective defense across Europe and North America on Thursday.

War looms over NATO anniversary

As alliance marks 75 years, Ukraine's foreign minister fears for his nation

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Ukraine's foreign minister warned Thursday that without more support his country was at risk of destruction, putting a damper on an otherwise festive mood at NATO headquarters as members marked the alliance's 75th anniversary.

Dmytro Kuleba, in Brussels to meet with top allied officials, said Ukraine urgently needs more air defense systems, including American-made Patriot interceptors.

"I came here against the background of continued, unprecedented missile and drone attacks of Russia against Ukraine … which fits the Russian strategy to eliminate Ukraine from the map," Kuleba said.

The comments from Ukraine's top diplomat coincided with the anniversary of NATO's founding on April 4, 1949. At the alliance's headquarters Thursday, foreign ministers and NATO commanders gathered for a wreath-laying ceremony.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg marked the moment, saying allies were "more united than ever" and that Russia's attacks on Ukraine, both in 2014 and 2022, have galvanized the alliance.

"Since then, we have undertaken the biggest reinforcement of our collective defense in generations," he said.

Moments later, Kuleba, flanked by Stoltenberg, congratulated the alliance before turning to events in Ukraine and the need for Patriot missiles.

"I don't want to spoil the party," Kuleba said. "My main message today will be Patriots, because saving Ukrainian lives, saving Ukrainian economy, saving Ukrainian cities depends on the availability of Patriots and other air defense

SEE NATO ON PAGE 5

Innovative blood transfusion field kit honors fallen Osprey airman

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

A team of medical technicians at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, has created an improved blood transfusion kit that they say will save lives in future conflicts.

Project Lavoy, an effort by the 18th Medical Group, has been testing the kit, which enables medics to collect blood and perform transfusions as quickly as possible after casualties occur.

"We are hoping to eventually gain funding and support to make this an Air Force-wide toolset that all Airmen can utilize to enhance life-saving capabilities," Master Sgt. Jet Nesle, flight chief at the Regional Dental Laboratory, said in comments emailed Wednesday by the 18th Wing.

The project's name pays tribute to Tech. Sgt. Zachary Lavoy, who died Nov. 29 alongside seven others when their CV-22B Osprey crashed off southern Japan.

Blood loss accounted for 80% of deaths during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Master Sgt. John Reeves, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the medical

SEE AIRMAN ON PAGE 4

U.S. Air Force

A Project Lavoy medic tests new blood transfusion field kit during a casualty exercise at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Feb. 13.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.926	$4.450	$4.802	$4.405
Change in price	-0.6 cents	+0.8 cents	+1.2 cents	-3.8 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.973	$5.244	$5.178
Change in price	..	+12.4 cents	+12.5 cents	+5.5 cents
U.K.	..	$4.450	$4.802	$4.405
Change in price	..	+0.8 cents	+1.2 cents	-3.8 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.652	..
Change in price	..	..	+1.2 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.468	$4.755*
Change in price	..	..	+1.2 cents	-10.2 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective April 5. The change in price is from March 29.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.439	..	$4.049
Change in price	..	-1.0 cents	..	-4.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.569	..	..	$4.049
Change in price	No change	..	..	-4.0 cents
South Korea	$3.599	..	$4.479	$4.079
Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents	-4.0 cents
Guam	$3.629**	$4.149	$4.509	..
Change in price	-1.0 cents	No change	+2.0 cents	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
Pacific prices for the week of April 5-11

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (April 5)	$1.06
British pound (April 5)	$1.24
Japanese yen (April 5)	148.00
South Korean won (April 5)	1312.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Britain (Pound)	1.2672
Canada (Dollar)	1.3487
China (Yuan)	7.2346
Denmark (Krone)	6.8620
Egypt (Pound)	47.3810
Euro	0.9199
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8289
Hungary (Forint)	359.84
Israel (Shekel)	3.7151
Japan (Yen)	151.60
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3075
Norway (Krone)	10.6721
Philippines (Peso)	56.40
Poland (Zloty)	3.95
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7510
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3465
South Korea (Won)	1345.90
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9045
Thailand (Baht)	36.68
Turkey (NewLira)	31.8878

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.36
30-year bond	4.51

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

TODAY IN STRIPES

American Roundup 36
Classified 37
Comics 34,38-39
Crossword 34,38-39
Faces 35
Opinion 40
Sports 41-48

STARS AND STRIPES
However you read us, wherever you need us.
Mobile • Online • Print

	ADVERTISING	
EUROPE	CustomerService@stripes.com	+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111 DSN: 314.583.9111
MIDDLE EAST	CustomerService@stripes.com	+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111 DSN: 314.583.9111
PACIFIC	PacificAdvertising@stripes.com	+81 (42) 552.2511 DSN: 315.227.7310

Round-the-world news for America's military.

Stripes.com supplies constant updates, on news of interest — including reports from our overseas military bases in Europe, Pacific, Southwest Asia and the Mideast, and coverage of the Pentagon and Capitol Hill.
Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.

STARS AND STRIPES®
Mobile • Online • Print

MILITARY

West Point grad to be commandant of cadet corps

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

The Army has named a West Point alum who has flown Apache helicopters in combat as the next commandant of cadets at the U.S. Military Academy, the institution announced Wednesday.

Col. R.J. Garcia will become the school's 81st commandant of cadets later this year, West Point officials said. Garcia, a 1996 graduate of West Point, N.Y., will be promoted to brigadier general before taking charge of the corps of cadets.

Garcia

The commandant of cadets serves as West Point's No. 2 officer and is responsible for the day-to-day training and development of its cadets.

Garcia will replace Maj. Gen. Lori L. Robinson, another West Point alum, who has served as commandant since June 2023. She is expected to take command of the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command at Redstone Arsenal, Ala., according to the school. A date for their change of command has not yet been scheduled, a West Point official said.

In addition to attending West Point, Garcia was previously an instructor at the institution in its Behavioral Sciences & Leadership Department, according to the Army.

Garcia is a veteran of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As an AH-64 Apache attack helicopter pilot, he has served in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Infantry Divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division, the 1st Armored Division, on the Army staff at the Pentagon and at the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Novosel, Ala., according to his official service biography.

He is now serving as the deputy commander for support at the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, according to the service.

Garcia is from San Antonio, Texas, and is married with two children, according to his bio. He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from West Point, a master's degree in adult and occupational education from Kansas State University and a master's in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College, according to the Army.

US troops who 'made life better' recognized in South Korea

By David Choi
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A U.S. airman fed low-income South Koreans. A Marine created an English course for local children. A soldier organized sports for people with disabilities.

These "good neighbors" were among several U.S. troops recognized for their individual community service efforts during an annual awards ceremony hosted Thursday by U.S. Forces Korea.

USFK's Good Neighbor Award recognized those who make exceptional contributions to the U.S.-South Korea alliance. They're nominated by their commands and community members, and selections are made by a board of senior officials from USFK, U.N. Command and Combined Forces Command.

Other awards are handed out for group and unit-level efforts.

USFK commander Army Gen. Paul LaCamera described the public servants as "ambassadors" who "made life better for others."

"The human element of our alliance spans for over 70 years," he told roughly 150 people attending the ceremony inside USFK headquarters' Paik Auditorium. "That's what makes the relationship between our nations so special."

Luis Garcia/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Forces Korea commander Army Gen. Paul LaCamera, far left, poses with Good Neighbor Award winners at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, on Thursday.

Staff Sgt. Ellen Lim, of 7th Air Force, one of five individual award recipients, logged more than 180 community service hours, according to a readout of her award.

She provided meals for 480 low-income South Korean families, taught English to South Korean troops, painted the walls of a Pyeongtaek city police station and provided humanitarian aid for Sungnam city residents impacted by flooding last year, the readout said.

Sgt. Sean Nguyen, of Marine Corps Forces-Korea, helped create an English course for 17 children from low-income families in Pohang and organized clothing drives.

Army Staff Sgt. Shane Barnard, of U.N. Command, was awarded for organizing sports events for people with disabilities at Camp Humphreys.

Maj. Blake Benedict, of Eighth Army, was awarded for coordinating cultural and sports exchanges between U.S. and South Korean troops and their families.

Staff Sgt. Jonathan Hemme, of Marine Corps Forces-Korea, was awarded for collecting and distributing gift bags for orphans in Pohang city.

Speaking to Stars and Stripes at the ceremony, Lim said teaching hourlong English classes to South Korean troops was memorable because they had different reasons for learning.

Some wanted to better converse with their American counterparts and needed a tailored curriculum, she said. Others merely wanted to improve their English.

"I always wanted to give back to my community, so it was kind of natural for me," she said. "At Osan Air Base, I continued to find opportunities to serve."

Navy veteran lawmaker proposes renaming airport after Trump

By Svetlana Shkolnikova
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Navy veteran is leading an effort in the House to strip the name of former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles from the main international airport in the nation's capital and replace it with former President Donald Trump.

Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa., said he introduced legislation to rename Washington Dulles International Airport to Donald J. Trump International Airport because "our nation has never been greater than under the leadership" of Trump.

"As millions of domestic and international travelers fly through the airport, there is no better symbol of freedom, prosperity and strength than hearing 'Welcome to Trump International Airport' as they land on American soil," he said.

Reschenthaler

Reschenthaler was elected to the House in 2018 and previously served in the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General Corps, deploying to Iraq in 2009. He prosecuted nearly 100 terrorists in Iraq and helped successfully defend a Navy SEAL who was accused of covering up the mistreatment of an al-Qaida terrorist in U.S. custody, according to his congressional website.

Several other veterans in the House are backing Reschenthaler's bill, including Republican Mike Waltz of Florida, a former Green Beret; Republican Troy Nehls of Texas, an Army Reserve veteran; and Republican Barry Moore of Alabama, a veteran of the Alabama National Guard and Reserve.

Matthew Barakat/AP

The Metrorail station at Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Va., with the terminal in the background.

Lawmakers last proposed changing the name of Dulles airport in 1990, when former Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., suggested renaming it after former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who "helped save the world from tyranny" in World War II.

Eisenhower's aviation adviser chose to name the airport after John Foster Dulles, an influential figure during the early stages of the Cold War who advocated for an aggressive stance against communism. Dulles died three years before the airport opened in 1962.

The push to swap Dulles for Trump is unlikely to gain traction in the Democrat-controlled Senate and was met with ridicule by Democrats in the Republican-led House.

Rep. Jennifer Wexton, D-Va., described the bill as "another in a long list of instances where extreme House Republicans have shown how unserious [and] delusional they are."

"Let's get to work on the real issues the American people sent us here for — not renaming an airport after someone who sought to undermine our democracy," she wrote on X.

Rep. Gerry Connolly, D-Va., whose district partially includes Dulles, suggested Trump's name would be better suited elsewhere.

"Donald Trump is facing 91 felony charges," he wrote on X. "If Republicans want to name something after him, I'd suggest they find a federal prison."

MILITARY

Houthis may be running low on weapons as attacks ebb

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Houthi rebels in Yemen may be running through their supplies of drone swarms and anti-ship ballistic missiles as the pace of their attacks has slowed a bit, the top U.S. Air Force commander for the Middle East said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, who heads U.S. Air Forces Central, said that the persistent American retaliatory strikes on the Iran-backed militia group have "certainly affected their behavior. Their pace of operations is not what it was."

The Houthis have been conducting near daily attacks on commercial and military ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, launching drones and missiles from rebel-held areas of Yemen. The attacks — which are often unsuccessful but at times have struck the ships — have disrupted a crucial shipping route.

In response, the U.S. and allies have been forced to increase their military ship presence along the waterway, and on several occasions have launched wider retaliatory strikes on ammunition, weapons and other facilities.

Grynkewich said it's difficult to know exactly how much the Houthis' weapons supplies have been eroded by the U.S. strikes, because officials didn't have a detailed intelligence assessment of their capabilities before the attacks began.

"The challenge for us is understanding what the denominator was at the beginning. In other words, what did they have on hand to start with? We obviously know how much we have struck and we have assessments of how successful those strikes were." he said. " The other complicating factor is Iranian resupply."

He said the U.S. believes the Houthis had dozens of anti-ship ballistic missiles when they started, and they've launched dozens. So understanding how much Iran is able to restock the group is key.

The Houthis have defended their campaign as an effort to pressure Israel to end its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Speaking to reporters, Grynkewich said the Houthis are more independent and more difficult for Iran to control than other Tehran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria. Those groups have largely paused their attacks on U.S. forces at bases in Iraq and Syria since early February, when the U.S. launched a massive retaliatory assault against the groups and sites connected to Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

U.S. officials have said they believe pressure from Iran was part of the reason for the pause. But Grynkewich said the Houthis are "not quite as responsive" to Iranian direction.

He said that even if Iran tried to crack down on the Houthis or cut off weapons or other supplies, it would take time for that to have an effect.

Oberpfalz Police Station

A roughly 1,000-pound American World War II bomb is secured after being defused by specialists in Amberg, Germany, Thursday.

Disposal crews remove WWII bombs found near US bases in Germany

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE AND ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Specialists defused two American World War II-era bombs Thursday near a decommissioned train station outside the Bavarian city of Amberg.

The roughly 1,100- and 1,000-pound aerial bombs were discovered by a German construction company around 5:45 p.m. Wednesday next to the closed Amberg-Nuremberg railway line in Luitpoldhöhe, according to a statement Thursday from Bernhard Scheimer, first chief superintendent of the Upper Palatinate police.

The bombs pose no immediate danger to the neighboring U.S. Army installations at Grafenwoehr and Vilseck, said Dominik Lehmeier, a senior police commissioner in Amberg. The city is a popular destination for U.S. troops and their families who work on installations nearby.

After the bombs were uncovered, police set up a half-mile cordon and 500 people in the area were temporarily evacuated, the statement said. Operations were discontinued at an adjacent foundry.

The 1,100-pound bomb, measuring 3 feet in length and 20 inches in diameter, was defused Thursday at around 1 a.m., Lehmeier said. The three-man disposal crew was hampered in defusing the second bomb by flooding and shifting soil in the 13-foot-deep excavation pit. The all-clear came at 3:40 p.m. Thursday.

The second bomb "kept us busy for quite some time, but it has been safely defused," Lehmeier said.

Luitpoldhöhe is approximately 2 miles northwest of Amberg's city center. The foundry and its connecting rail line made the site a target for Allied bombers during World War II, Lehmeier said.

Technicians in Germany disarm close to 5,000 bombs annually, the national explosive ordnance disposal agency KSU said on its website. Approximately 100,000 tons of unexploded ordnance are still believed to lie hidden beneath urban areas and farmland.

Airman: Medical group plans more training to further develop concept

FROM PAGE 1

group's chemistry department, said in the email.

"Personnel who experience this need blood immediately, not hours down the road," he said. "By providing blood products at the point of injury, we can reduce the number of lives lost significantly."

Project Lavoy adds equipment to the joint first aid kit already carried by Air Force medics, allowing them to perform blood transfusions in the field.

Lavoy was a medical operations flight chief with Kadena's 1st Special Operations Squadron. His help propelled the transfusion project forward, Maj. Geoffroy Johnson, 18th Dental Squadron prosthodontist, said in the email.

Lavoy, 33, of Oviedo, Fla., was the first medic with extensive experience in field care and transfusions to respond when the project team, then called the Contingency Blood Program, sought expert support, Johnson said.

"TSgt Zachary Lavoy loved teaching, and was our lead cadre. … We decided to rename the project in his honor," he said.

The project began last year as part of a Spark Cell initiative by the 18th Medical Group, Reeves said. Spark Cells are a network of Air Force bases where airmen may develop locally generated innovative ideas and projects.

U.S. Air Force

Tech. Sgt. Zachary Lavoy died alongside seven other airmen when their CV-22B Osprey crashed off southern Japan on Nov. 29.

Johnson said Reeves conceived the idea after going through numerous exercises at Kadena.

Reeves, a medical laboratory technician by trade, said he saw gaps that could be filled to ensure lives are saved during contingency operations. However, getting the project off the ground was a collaborative effort, Johnson said.

Project Lavoy drew in Air Force Special Operations Command, 31st Rescue Squadron, medical professionals and innovation experts, Reeves said.

To show proof of concept of its new system, the medical group between Feb. 29 and March 1 trained four medics and five nurses who lacked previous field transfusion experience.

The medical group plans more training to further develop the concept and show the ease and value of the blood transfusion kit.

"Our medics need to be able to perform this time sensitive life-saving task within the 'golden hour,' and Project Lavoy makes it easier to meet that timeline," Johnson said.

Boxer finally heads for Indo-Pacific

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The USS Boxer, one of the Navy's key "mini-carriers," has left San Diego for the Indo-Pacific following a series of costly engineering problems a Navy probe says could have been avoided.

The 843-foot amphibious assault ship, which carries a mix of aircraft, deployed on Monday for the first time in five years. Such ships more commonly deploy every year or two, if they're not undergoing extended maintenance.

The Boxer had experienced three significant engineering failures that a Navy review obtained by KPBS found were caused, at least in part, by cost-cutting, underskilled workers, complacency and poor leadership.

The delays caused deep concern in the Navy because the Boxer was needed to help maintain an American presence in the Indo-Pacific, where China has threatened to invade Taiwan.

Now that the ship is underway, the Boxer will serve as the flagship of an Amphibious Ready Group that includes Camp Pendleton's 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Deadly Russian drone attack strikes Kharkiv

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces fired drones at two apartment buildings and a power plant in Ukraine's second-largest city, killing four people, local authorities said Thursday, as the Kremlin's forces apparently set in motion their strategy for the coming months of war by escalating the bombardment of civilian areas.

Shahed drones smashed into two apartment buildings in Kharkiv, near the Russian border, which has frequently been targeted during more than two years of war. Other drones targeted the power grid.

The Kremlin's forces in recent months have stepped up their aerial barrages of Ukraine, hitting urban areas. The approximately 620-mile front line is largely deadlocked, but Kyiv officials say Moscow's troops have recently been probing for Ukrainian weaknesses on the front line ahead of an expected large-scale Russian offensive in the summer.

An Associated Press video of the Kharkiv attack shows firefighters battling blazing houses in the dark when the roar of an approaching second drone grows louder. The drone explodes nearby, sending up an orange fireball, and rescue workers with flashlights dash to help their injured colleagues lying on the ground amid embers and debris.

"Where are ambulances?" shouts one first responder as they carry away the injured on fire blankets.

The Russian strikes hit a multistory building in Kharkiv twice in quick succession, killing three first responders, local authorities said. Six people were wounded at that location. Another 14-story building was hit by a drone, killing a 69-year-old woman.

Ukrainian officials have previously accused Russia of targeting rescue workers by hitting residential buildings with two consecutive missiles — the first one to draw crews to the scene and the second one to wound or kill them. The tactic is called a "double tap" in military jargon. Russians used the same method in Syria's civil war.

The Institute for the Study of War said the goal of Russia's escalated attacks on civilian areas and the country's power grid may be to compel Ukraine's army to deploy air defense systems away from the front line. That would allow Russia to provide more air cover for its ground operations on the battlefield, the think tank said late Wednesday.

Russian forces apparently have increased the scale of their mechanized ground assaults in parts of the front line in recent weeks, it added, apparently seeking gains while Ukrainian forces are kept waiting for the arrival of vital new military supplies from their Western partners.

With the support of China, Russia has built its forces back up close to full strength, according to a senior U.S. official.

"We have assessed over the course of the last couple of months that Russia has almost completely reconstituted militarily," U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the strikes that killed first responders in Kharkiv a "despicable and cynical attack" and renewed his plea for more air defense systems from the West.

"Strengthening Ukraine's air defense capabilities directly translates into saving lives," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Other first responders have also been victims of the fighting. The World Health Organization said Thursday that ambulance workers and other health transport staff face a high risk of injury or death.

"Many emergency teams come under fire either on the way to a call or at their bases," WHO said in a report.

"This is a horrifying pattern," Dr. Emanuele Bruni, WHO's incident manager in Ukraine, was quoted as saying in the report. "These attacks threaten their safety and further devastate communities that have been living under constant shelling for more than two years."

Ukrainian soldiers shot down 11 of the 20 drones Russia launched against Ukraine during the night, the General Staff said.

Russia also attacked energy infrastructure in the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions over the past day, wounding two people, the Ministry of Energy said Thursday.

Some 700,000 people in Kharkiv lost power last week after a massive missile attack hit the city's thermal power plant. Repairs are ongoing.

"Each manifestation of Russian terror once again proves that the country-terrorist deserves only one thing — a tribunal," Ukraine's human rights chief, Dmytro Lubinets, said on Telegram in response to the attack.

GEORGE IVANCHENKO/AP

A woman and her child look at a fire outside of her house, which was damaged after a Russian drone strike on a residential neighborhood in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on Thursday.

NATO: Alliance seeking improved system for arming Ukraine

FROM PAGE 1

systems."

In March, Ukraine was hit with 94 Russian ballistic missiles, he said. The Patriot is the only system able to intercept such weapons, he added. On top of that, Russia has deployed other missiles and carried out thousands of drone strikes in recent days, Kuleba said.

Kuleba's visit to NATO comes as the alliance is looking for a more reliable system for getting arms into Ukraine. On Wednesday, allies agreed to move forward with a proposal that calls for making NATO the planning hub for arming Ukraine.

If put into action, it likely would overtake the U.S.-led Ukraine Defense Contract Group, also known as the Ramstein Group because of its meetings at the U.S. Air Force hub in Germany.

It's not clear whether the U.S. is on board with the idea. White House spokesman John Kirby on Wednesday said the group, led by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, has been effective in bringing together more than 50 countries.

"We're going to continue to lead and convene it. And we know that our leadership of that contact group is valued, it's important," he said.

The alliance also is considering a new $100 billion fund over five years to better support Ukraine.

The ideas are part of an effort to add more predictability to an aid program that has run into political opposition in parts of the alliance, most notably in the United States. In Washington, partisan political disputes over how to support Ukraine stand in the way of a budget deal to deliver more arms.

The political impasse in the U.S. has led to a reduction in the flow of arms and has forced Ukraine to ration artillery.

Stoltenberg on Thursday said allies continue to work on "a more robust and predictable framework," to support Ukraine.

"This matters for Ukraine, but it matters also for the whole of NATO, for our security," Stoltenberg said.

VIRGINIA MAYO/AP

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, center left, stands with NATO's Chairman of the Military Committee Admiral Rob Bauer and NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana during a wreath laying ceremony at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Thursday.

Read STARS AND STRIPES online at
www.stripes.com

NATION

Colleges push aid as tuition soars higher

By Nick Perry
Associated Press

MEREDITH, N.H. — As more than 2 million graduating high school students from across the United States finalize their decisions on what college to attend this fall, many are facing jaw-dropping costs — in some cases, as much as $95,000.

A number of private colleges — some considered elite and others middle-of-the-pack — have exceeded the $90,000 threshold for the first time this year as they set their annual costs for tuition, board, meals and other expenses. That means a wealthy family with three children could expect to shell out more than $1 million by the time their youngest child completes a four-year degree.

But the sticker price tells only part of the story. Many colleges with large endowments have become more focused in recent years on making college affordable for students who aren't wealthy. Lower-income families may be required to pay just 10% of the advertised rate and, for some, attending a selective private college can turn out to be cheaper than a state institution.

"Ninety thousand dollars clearly is a lot of money, and it catches people's attention, for sure," said Phillip Levine, a professor of economics at Wellesley College near Boston. "But for most people, that is not how much they're going to pay. The existence of a very generous financial aid system lowers that cost substantially."

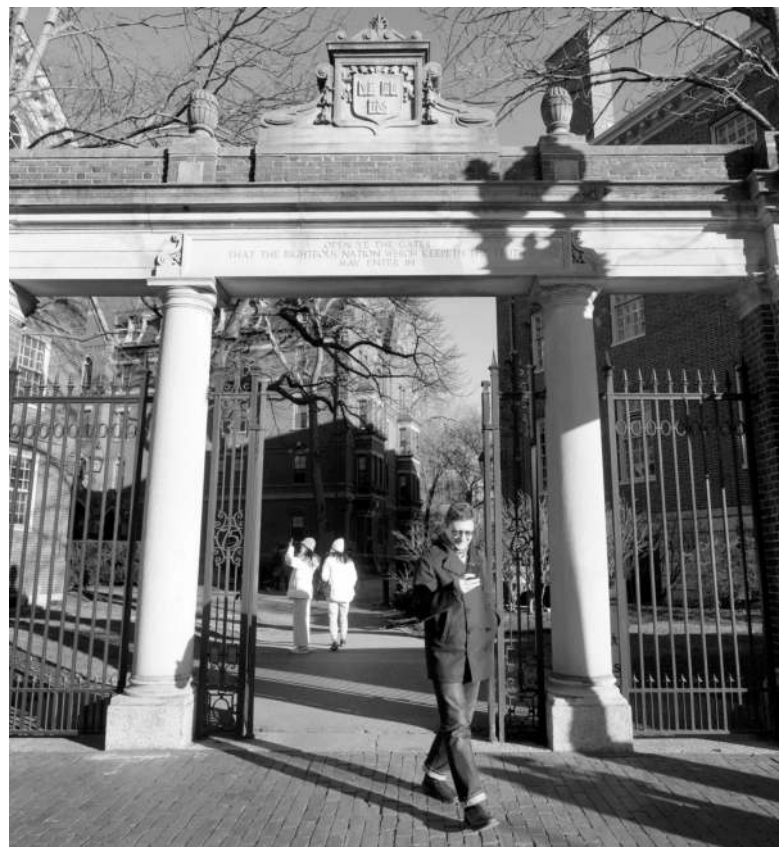
Wellesley is among the colleges where the costs for wealthy students will exceed $90,000 for the first time this fall, with an estimated price tag of $92,000. But the institution points out that nearly 60% of its students will receive financial aid, and the average amount of that aid is more than $62,000, reducing their costs by two-thirds.

But many prospective students this year are facing significant delays and anxiety in finding out how much aid they will be offered by colleges due to major problems with the rollout of a new U.S. Department of Education online form that was supposed to make applying for federal aid easier. Many colleges rely on information from the form for determining their own aid offers to students.

"The rollout has been pure chaos and an absolute disaster," said Mark Kantrowitz, a financial aid expert.

As well as repeated delays and glitches, he said, there have been other problems with the new system including more stringent requirements for proof of identity from parents, which is deterring thousands of eligible but undocumented parents from applying — even though their children are U.S. citizens and entitled to aid.

Kantrowitz said that if the significant drop in people applying for aid under the new system persists, it could result in lower enrollments and even force some institutions to close.



STEVEN SENNE/AP

A passer-by walks through a gate to the Harvard University campus earlier this year in Cambridge, Mass.

Levine said his research has shown that the amount lower-income students are paying at elite institutions has actually been declining over the past six years. But he worries that sticker shock will put off some students from even applying to institutions like Wellesley.

"People should be making educational decisions based on the actual cost they have to pay, not their perceived cost," Levine said. "The problem is that the sticker price is the easiest number to know. It gets the most attention."

Aside from Wellesley, some of the other colleges with sticker prices of more than $90,000 this year include the University of Southern California at $95,000, Harvey Mudd College in California at $93,000, the University of Pennsylvania at $92,000, Brown University in Rhode Island at $92,000, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire at $91,000, and Boston University at $90,000.

Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., puts its cost of attendance this fall at up to $91,000 but makes the point that the average parent contribution is just $13,000, and almost a quarter of families pay nothing at all. Harvard can afford a particularly generous student aid program because it has an endowment worth more than $50 billion, the largest of any university.

The sticker prices don't always provide apples-to-apples comparisons because some colleges include costs like health insurance and travel expenses, while others don't. And some colleges that last year had sticker prices of close to $90,000, including Columbia University in New York and the University of Chicago, have yet to reveal this year's expected costs.

Jobless aid claims rise to highest in two months

Associated Press

The number of Americans applying for jobless benefits rose to their highest level in two months last week, but layoffs remain at historically low levels as the labor market continues to chug along despite elevated interest rates.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that filings for unemployment claims for the week ending March 30 climbed by 9,000 to 221,000 from the previous week's 212,000.

The four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, rose modestly to 214,250, an increase of 2,750 from the previous week.

In total, 1.79 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits during the week that ended March 23, a decline of 19,000 from the previous week.

Weekly unemployment claims are considered a proxy for the number of U.S. layoffs in a given week and a sign of where the job market is headed. They have remained at historically low levels since the pandemic purge of millions of jobs in the spring of 2020.

The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark borrowing rate 11 times beginning in March of 2022 in an effort to bring down the four-decade high inflation that took hold after the economy roared back from the COVID-19 recession of 2020. Part of the Fed's goal was to loosen the labor market and cool wage growth, which it believes contributed to persistently high inflation.

Many economists thought the rapid rate hikes could potentially tip the country into recession, but jobs have remained plentiful and the economy has held up better than expected thanks to strong consumer spending.

In February, U.S. employers added a surprising 275,000 jobs, again showcasing the U.S. economy's resilience in the face of high interest rates.

At the same time, the unemployment rate ticked up two-tenths of a point in February to 3.9%. Though that was the highest rate in two years, it is still low by historic standards. And it marked the 25th straight month in which joblessness has remained below 4% — the longest such streak since the 1960s.

The March jobs report comes out on Friday.

Though layoffs remain at low levels, there has been an uptick in job cuts recently, mostly across technology and media. Google parent company Alphabet, eBay, TikTok, Snap, Amazon, Cisco Systems and the Los Angeles Times have all recently announced layoffs.

Outside of tech and media, UPS, Macy's and Levi Strauss also have recently cut jobs.

Delay denied for Trump hush-money trial in NYC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A judge on Wednesday rejected Donald Trump's bid to delay his April 15 hush money criminal trial until the Supreme Court rules on presidential immunity claims he raised in another of his criminal cases — spurning another of the former president's ploys to put off the historic trial. Several more are pending.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan declared the request untimely, ruling that Trump's lawyers had "myriad opportunities" to raise the immunity issue before they finally did so last month, well after a deadline for pretrial motions had already passed.

Trump

The timing of the defense's March 7 filing "raises real questions about the sincerity and actual purpose of the motion," Merchan wrote in a six-page decision.

Lawyers for Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, had asked Merchan to adjourn the New York trial indefinitely until Trump's immunity claim in his Washington, D.C., election interference case is resolved.

Trump contends he is immune from prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office. His lawyers have not raised that as a defense in the hush-money case, but they argued that some evidence — including Trump's social media posts about former lawyer Michael Cohen — is from his time as president and should be excluded from the trial because of his immunity protections.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments on April 25 — a week-and-a-half after the start of jury selection in the hush-money case.

Trump lawyer Todd Blanche declined to comment. The Manhattan district attorney's office also declined to comment.

Trump first raised the immunity issue in his Washington criminal case, which involves allegations that he worked to overturn the results of his 2020 election loss in the run-up to the violent riot by his supporters at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Merchan, in his ruling, drew a distinction between the Washington case — which he referred to as the Federal Insurrection Matter — and the hush-money case he's overseeing.

NATION

New job rule may counter Trump workforce promises

By Will Weissert
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government's chief human resources agency issued a new rule on Thursday making it harder to fire thousands of federal employees, hoping to head off former President Donald Trump's promises to radically remake the workforce along ideological lines if he wins back the White House in November.

The Office of Personnel Management regulations will bar career civil servants from being reclassified as political appointees or as other at-will workers, who are more easily dismissed from their jobs.

It comes in response to Schedule F, an executive order Trump issued in 2020 that sought to allow for reclassifying tens of thousands of the 2.2 million federal employees and thus reduce their job security protections.

President Joe Biden nullified Schedule F upon taking office. But if Trump, a Republican, were to revive it during a second administration, he could dramatically increase the around 4,000 federal employees who are considered political appointees and typically change with each new president.

In a statement issued Thursday, Biden, a Democrat, called the rule a "step toward combatting corruption and partisan interference to ensure civil servants are able to focus on the most important task at hand: delivering for the American people.'

The potential effects of the change are wide-reaching since how many federal employees might have been affected by Schedule F is unclear. The National Treasury Employee Union used freedom of information requests to obtain documents suggesting that workers like office managers and specialists in human resources and cybersecurity might have been among those subject to reclassification.

The new rule moves to counter a future Schedule F order by spelling out procedural requirements for reclassifying federal employees and clarifying that civil service protections accrued by employees can't be taken away, regardless of job type. It also makes clear that policymaking classifications apply to noncareer, political appointments.

"It will now be much harder for any president to arbitrarily remove the nonpartisan professionals who staff our federal agencies just to make room for hand-picked partisan loyalists," National Treasury Employees Union President Doreen Greenwald said in a statement.

> **"This is really foundational to how we can ensure that the government delivers for people."**
>
> **Skye Perryman**
> CEO of Democracy Forward

Good government groups and liberal think tanks and activists have cheered the rule. They viewed cementing federal worker protections as a top priority given that replacing existing government employees with new, more conservative alternatives is a key piece of the conservative Heritage Foundation's nearly 1,000-page playbook known as Project 2025.

That plan calls for vetting and potentially firing scores of federal workers and recruiting conservative replacements to wipe out what leading Republicans have long decried as the "deep state" governmental bureaucracy.

Skye Perryman, president and CEO of Democracy Forward, which has led a coalition of nearly 30 advocacy organizations supporting the rule, called it "extraordinarily strong" and said it can effectively counter the "highly resourced, anti-democratic groups" behind Project 2025.

"This is not a wonky issue, even though it may be billed that way at times," Perryman said. "This is really foundational to how we can ensure that the government delivers for people and, for us, that's what a democracy is about."

The final rule, which runs to 237 pages, is being published in the federal registry and set to formally take effect next month.

The Office of Personnel Management first proposed the changes last November, then reviewed and responded to 4,000-plus public comments on them. Officials at some top conservative organizations were among those opposing the new rule, but around two-thirds of the comments were supportive.

Jose Luis Magana/AP

Protesters demonstrate in support of Palestinians at Dupont Circle in Washington on March 30.

Trump events aren't drawing protests as election season nears

Associated Press

NEW YORK — When Donald Trump first ran for the White House eight years ago, protesters filled the streets.

His inflammatory rhetoric and often dehumanizing descriptions of immigrants spurred thousands to demonstrate outside his rallies. By this time in 2016, protesters regularly interrupted his speeches, sparking clashes and foreshadowing Trump's habit of encouraging violence against those he casts as his enemies.

"Knock the crap out of them, would you?" Trump once said as he egged on the crowd to go after protestors on their own — even promising to pay their legal bills.

No longer.

As he runs again with an agenda that is arguably more extreme than his two previous campaigns, mass protests at Trump rallies and appearances are a thing of the past. When Trump returned to New York last week for a hearing in one of his criminal cases, just a smattering of detractors turned up outside the courthouse. During a Midwestern swing Tuesday, Trump was interrupted briefly by a protest in Green Bay, but otherwise encountered minimal opposition.

In a twist, it's now President Joe Biden who is facing a sustained protest movement, largely by those furious over the administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas. During his first major rally of the year, Biden's 22-minute speech was interrupted no less than a dozen times by detractors calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Protesters repeatedly disrupted his fundraiser last week with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at New York's Radio City Music Hall, as hundreds more demonstrated outside.

Nearly a decade after Trump launched his first campaign, organizers and others who participated in past protests describe a change in tactics as they focus their efforts on other issues or turning out voters in November. Some described a "Trump fatigue" after nearly a decade of outrage. Others say it's Biden's policy toward Israel that has them the most agitated and have turned their attention to protesting him.

"All the people that would be protesting Trump, a lot of these people, a lot of that energy are now focused on protesting a genocide in Gaza," said Thomas Kennedy, an immigrant from Argentina who participated in more than a dozen anti-Trump protests and rallies in 2016.

Kennedy still describes the former president as a "horrible threat." But for "a lot of people like me who would have been out there protesting Trump, it's just demoralizing and dispiriting. It's not worth my effort and my energy."

That's a potential warning sign for Biden, whose campaign aims to energize its base by casting Trump as a threat and framing the election as a historic test of the nation's commitment to democracy.

Biden faces protest over Israel support

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has faced protests over the conflict in Gaza all over the country, but this week he confronted one inside the White House itself.

The occasion was a private meeting on Tuesday where Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and national security leaders could hear from Muslim Americans about their concerns involving the war between Israel and Hamas.

Shortly after the conversation began, a Palestinian American doctor from Chicago named Thaer Ahmad who has volunteered in Gaza announced that he was walking out.

Before leaving, Ahmad presented the president with a letter from an orphaned 8-year-old girl in Rafah, a city that Israel plans to target next. He included a photo. Ahmad said Biden's response to his protest was muted.

"He said, 'I understand,'" the doctor recalled.

This week's meeting was arranged by the White House instead of the more traditional celebratory dinner to mark the end of Ramadan. Several Muslim community leaders had refused invitations to break their fasts with the president, saying it would have been inappropriate at a time of famine in Gaza.

"We understand how this community is feeling in a deeply painful moment," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

NATION

Fed report rips Microsoft for shoddy security

By Frank Bajak
Associated Press

BOSTON — In a scathing indictment of Microsoft corporate security and transparency, a Biden administration-appointed review board issued a report Tuesday saying "a cascade of errors" by the tech giant let state-backed Chinese cyber operators break into email accounts of senior U.S. officials including Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The Cyber Safety Review Board, created in 2021 by executive order, describes shoddy cybersecurity practices, a lax corporate culture and a lack of sincerity about the company's knowledge of the targeted breach, which affected multiple U.S. agencies that deal with China.

It concluded that "Microsoft's security culture was inadequate and requires an overhaul" given the company's ubiquity and critical role in the global technology ecosystem.

Microsoft products "underpin essential services that support national security, the foundations of our economy, and public health and safety."

The panel said the intrusion, discovered in June by the State Department and dating to May "was preventable and should never have occurred," blaming its success on "a cascade of avoidable errors."

What's more, the board said, Microsoft still doesn't know how the hackers got in.

The panel made sweeping recommendations, including urging Microsoft to put on hold adding features to its cloud computing environment until "substantial security improvements have been made."

It said Microsoft's CEO and board should institute "rapid cultural change" including publicly sharing "a plan with specific timelines to make fundamental, security-focused reforms across the company and its full suite of products."

In a statement, Microsoft said it appreciated the board's investigation and would "continue to harden all our systems against attack and implement even more robust sensors and logs to help us detect and repel the cyber-armies of our adversaries."

In all, the state-backed Chinese hackers broke into the Microsoft Exchange Online email of 22 organizations and more than 500 individuals around the world including the U.S. ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns — accessing some cloud-based email boxes for at least six weeks and downloading some 60,000 emails from the State Department alone, the 34-page report said.

Three think tanks and foreign government entities, including a number of British organizations, were among those compromised, it said.

The board, convened by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas in August, accused Microsoft of making inaccurate public statements about the incident — including issuing a statement saying it believed it had determined the likely root cause of the intrusion "when, in fact, it still has not."

Microsoft did not update that misleading blog post, published in September, until mid-March after the board repeatedly asked if it planned to issue a correction, it said.

Photos from AP video

A house, dubbed the 'trash house,' covered in mounds of garbage bags and other items is finally getting cleaned up in Los Angeles.

Cleanup begins at LA 'trash house'

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass vowed that cleanup would begin Wednesday at a home where mounds of garbage and debris had piled up several feet high across the entire property's fenced-in yard and driveway.

The mayor said she only learned this week about the Spanish-style bungalow in the Fairfax district that residents have dubbed the "trash house." Neighbors say they have repeatedly complained about the stench coming from hundreds of white garbage bags that have accumulated along with broken down vehicles, piles of newspapers, cigarette cartons and other junk.

Standing in front of the house Wednesday morning, Bass said she would instruct officials to bypass red tape to make sure the place gets cleaned up immediately.

"I don't want to hear about any process or whatever, this to me is a public health emergency," Bass said Wednesday. "This is a fire hazard and I worry about the individual there, this place catching fire, him losing his life."

Hours later, sanitation workers wearing coveralls and masks arrived and began loading the trash into trucks.

After repeated complaint from neighbors, Los Angeles is taking on the challenge of cleaning up the 'trash house.'

Since last July, the Department of Building and Safety has fielded more than a dozen complaints related to trash and improper storage at the property, according to city records obtained by the Los Angeles Times. The complaints remain under investigation, but the city issued an order to comply in November.

With no compliance happening and piles of trash growing, the complaints ratcheted up this week, triggered in part by a post on the social media app Nextdoor and a report Monday from KTLA-TV.

"It's filthy," said Miriam Kosberg, whose family has owned the property directly behind the house for decades. "There's garbage all the way up to the back fence."

Kosberg told the Times she and her family hear the sounds of animals in the backyard and believe the swarm of mosquitoes in their yard is due to standing water and other detritus next door.

Another neighbor, Jonathan Fromen, said the problem has persisted for at least a decade. The yard was cleaned up a bit in 2018 and 2019, but since then the garbage began piling up again, Fromen told the Times.

Ford delays production of new electric pickup

Associated Press

DETROIT — With U.S. electric vehicle sales starting to slow, Ford Motor Co. says it will delay rolling out new electric pickup trucks and a new large electric SUV as it adds gas-electric hybrids to its model lineup.

The Dearborn, Mich., company said Thursday that a much ballyhooed new electric pickup to be built at a new factory in Tennessee will be delayed by a year until 2026.

The big electric SUV, with three rows of seats, will be delayed by two years until 2027 at the company's factory in Oakville, Ontario near Toronto.

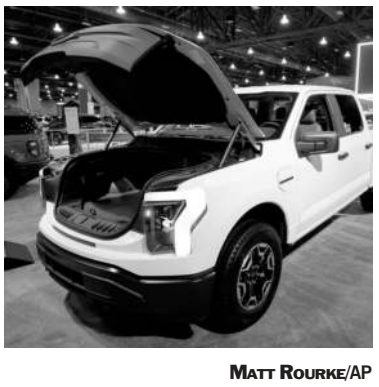
The retreat comes as U.S. electric vehicle sales growth slowed to 2.7% in the first quarter of the year, far below the 47% increase that fueled record sales and a 7.6% market share last year. Sales of new vehicles overall grew nearly 5%, and the EV market share declined to 7.1%.

Hybrid sales, however, grew 45% from January through March, while plug-in hybrids, which can go a short distance on battery power before a gas-electric system kicks in, grew 34% according to Motorintelligence.com.

Ford also said it "expects to offer" hybrid versions of all its gasoline passenger vehicles by the end of the decade in North America.

Industry analysts say most early technology adopters and people who want to cut emissions have already purchased EVs. Automakers now have to convince skeptical mainstream buyers to go electric, but those customers fear limited range and a lack of charging stations.

Ford expects pretax losses for its electric vehicle unit to widen from $4.7 billion last year to a range of $5 billion to $5.5 billion this year. But it foresees commercial vehicles making $8 billion to $9 billion, up from $7.2 billion last year.



Matt Rourke/AP

The Ford F-150 Lightning displayed at the Philadelphia Auto Show, Jan. 27, 2023, in Philadelphia.

NATION

Heavy, wet snow bears down on Northeast

By Dave Collins
Associated Press

A major spring storm brought heavy snow, rain and high winds to the Northeast late Wednesday and Thursday, causing more than 680,000 power outages across the region with the majority in Maine and New Hampshire. A woman was reported killed by a falling tree in a New York City suburb.

Two feet of snow is possible in parts of northern New England by Thursday evening, and wind gusts are predicted to hit 50 to 60 mph in coastal areas as well as inland, according to the National Weather Service.

Trees and power lines were reported down across the region. More southern areas were hit mostly with rain, causing flooding in some locations.

Chris Legro, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Maine, said it was the biggest April nor'easter to hit the region since 2020. He said he had to take some detours on the way into his office Thursday morning because of downed power lines.

"It's definitely going to be one that people remember for a little while," Legro said.

Late Wednesday afternoon, a tree fell on a vehicle in the Westchester County, N.Y., hamlet of Armonk, killing a woman who was the only person inside, police said.

Heavy snow made travel treacherous in northern parts of New England and New York. A crash shut down Interstate 95 northbound near Lewiston, Maine, on Thursday morning.

Dozens of flights at airports in the region were canceled or delayed. Many schools and government offices were closed in northern areas.

State government was shut down in Maine, where a special commission investigating the October mass shooting in Lewiston had to postpone a scheduled hearing.

"We recommend that you stay off the roads if you can, but if you must travel during the storm, be sure to give plow trucks, utility crews, and emergency first responders plenty of room as they work to keep us safe," said Maine Gov. Janet Mills.

> **"It's definitely going to be one that people remember for a little while."**
>
> **Chris Legro**
> National Weather Service meteorologist

Utilities in northern New England said they were prepared for the storm, but power restoration could still be lengthy.

"Weather conditions are going to be hazardous on Thursday, and we ask everyone to use caution on the roads," said Jon Breed, spokesperson for Central Maine Power.

Whipping winds and driving rain battered Boston. Staff at the New England Aquarium there did a sweep of the roof to make sure nothing could blow into the sea lion habitat, which is partially exposed to the outdoors. The storm caught some visitors off guard.

"I just saw the wind and the rain and I just bought this little poncho to protect myself," said Claire Saussol, who was visiting Boston from France on Wednesday. "I wasn't prepared with the warm clothes. It's worse than the north of France! Very worse, but it's ok. It's a pretty city."

Meanwhile, cleanup work continued in several states wracked by tornadoes and other severe weather blamed for at least three deaths.

Forecasters said heavy, wet snow would persist across Wisconsin and Upper Michigan into Thursday, with 6 to 10 inches overall possible in far-northern Wisconsin, 2 to 4 inches in Madison but just a trace in Milwaukee.

Severe weather earlier in the week knocked out power to thousands of homes and businesses in several other states. Tornadoes touched down in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia.

Storms in northeastern Oklahoma on Tuesday unleashed three suspected tornadoes and dumped heavy rain that was blamed for the death of a 46-year-old homeless woman in Tulsa who was sheltering inside a drainage pipe.

In Pennsylvania, a woman in her 80s was killed in the Philadelphia suburb of Collegeville on Wednesday when a tree fell on her car, officials said.

Lucy Schaly, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette/AP

Beaver Falls, Pa., firefighter Jason Tyger, right, gets some help carrying a woman from a boat after she was rescued from her flooded home on McKim Way in Franklin Township, Pa., on Wednesday.

Rick Barbero, The Register-Herald/AP

A tree sits uprooted and the roof is ripped off a home belonging to Johnny Carte on Lookout Road in Hico, W.Va., on Wednesday, after a storm hit the area the day before.

Stretch of California Highway 1 that collapsed closed again as storms near

Associated Press

BIG SUR, Calif. — As more storms approach California, officials have closed a scenic stretch of iconic Highway 1 where a giant section collapsed into the ocean following heavy weekend rains.

The Monterey County Sheriff's Office had warned residents of parts of the coastal community of Big Sur to evacuate Wednesday before the road closed later that day. The road was expected to be closed for several days until the weather event passes, the office said. The Carmel Unified School District said the evacuation warning led to the closure of an elementary school and preschool on Thursday and Friday, news outlets reported.

Convoy passage for vehicles through the area being repaired, planned for Thursday and Friday, has been canceled because of the forecasted rain, but was set to resume Saturday, the California Department of Transportation posted on social media. Crews will remain to check for any changes in conditions, officials said.

The collapse occurred Saturday near Rocky Creek Bridge, about 17 miles south of Monterey, temporarily stranding as many as 1,600 people in Big Sur. Most of the people trapped there were able to leave when a single lane was reopened Sunday, Caltrans spokesperson Kevin Drabinski said earlier this week.

The famous route has seen frequent closures because of collapses, mudflows and rockslides during severe weather.

Powerball jackpot jumps to $1.23B with no big winner

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Powerball jackpot has increased to an estimated $1.23 billion after another drawing without a big winner Wednesday night.

The numbers selected were: 11, 38, 41, 62, 65 and the Powerball 15.

The jackpot, which now ranks as the eighth-largest in U.S. lottery history, has been growing for more than three months, reflecting the long odds of 1 in 292.2 million of winning the top prize. Since the last player won the jackpot Jan. 1, there have been 40 consecutive drawings without anyone matching all six numbers.

Lottery officials note that thousands of people have won smaller prizes, which range from $2 to $2 million.

The $1.23 billion prize is for a sole winner who chooses to be paid through an annuity with 30 annual payments. Winners almost always prefer the cash option, which for the next drawing Saturday night would be an estimated $595.1 million.

VETERANS

Disabled veterans target federal contracts

$38B allocated for small businesses certified as owned, operated by service-disabled veterans

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Dawn Halfaker was leading a military police platoon as an Army second lieutenant in 2004 when she was critically wounded in a Humvee while on patrol in Iraq.

"I was on the wrong end of a rocket-propelled grenade, which took my right arm and caused a lot of other injuries," said Halfaker, who underwent 10 surgeries at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland.

At 26, she was medically discharged yet undaunted in her ambition to continue working in the military — but now as a civilian. After a stint as a technology researcher for a defense agency, Halfaker gambled on starting her own business.

She used her disability checks and savings to launch a one-person company in 2006 offering technology services to the Defense Department, which was in the middle of integrating digital services in most operations.

"Succeeding at government contracting is about how you define your company and its focus," said Halfaker, who in 2021 sold Halfaker and Associates to Science Applications International Corp. for $250 million.

In 2024, government contracts are big business to private companies offering goods and services. Contracts are valued at more than $760 billion — a $70 billion increase from just two years ago, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The federal government plans to award $38 billion exclusively in contracts to small businesses certified as owned and operated by service-disabled veterans.

The companies qualify for contracts set aside specifically designated for them. The value reached 5% of all government contracts in 2024, up from 3% in 2023.

"This increase represents tens of billions of additional federal contract dollars available to service-disabled-veteran-owned companies," said Scott Jensen, executive director of the National Veteran Small Business Coalition.

Jensen, who advocated for the increase before Congress, described the measure as a priority for his organization, which represents 40,000 veterans who are small business owners.

"This milestone victory comes at a time when veterans in government contracting are providing tremendous value to our nation and to the government, serving again, this time as business owners," he said.

Dawn Halfaker

Dawn Halfaker suffered a life-threatening injury that ended her Army service. She is shown here in 2004 during deployment in Iraq. As a civilian, she launched a firm providing technology to government agencies. She sold the business in 2021 for $250 million.

Erica Dobbs

Erica Dobbs, a retired Navy commander, founded Dobbs Defense Solutions in 2019 providing technology services and business intelligence to government agencies.

Halfaker company's growth trajectory is something of a Cinderella story among service-disabled-veteran-owned small businesses, which number about 300,000.

The small businesses must be majority-owned and operated by one or more service-disabled veterans. Qualifying veterans self-certify through the Small Business Administration.

"I had a lot of naivete at first," said Halfaker, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., where she studied computer science. "I had a Kevlar [vest] but had no idea how I got one — or about acquisitions and the government procurement process."

"But I came across a unique opportunity to start doing some consulting work on my own at DARPA," Halfaker said, referring to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

She first had to form a company as a sole proprietor to work as a government contractor.

Halfaker said she strategically focused her mission on providing technology services, which were in high demand in areas that she had training and experience.

Erica Dobbs is another small business entrepreneur whose company provides contracting services to the federal government and is experiencing rapid growth.

Dobbs retired as a Navy commander in 2018 after 36 years of military duty, including in California, Hawaii and Maryland. She formed Dobbs Defense Solutions a year later with four employees and a $10,000 payroll.

Her company provides information technology, cybersecurity and business intelligence, which involves data mining and analysis to help organizations make evidence-based decisions.

Dobbs, who has a service-related disability from multiple injuries, used her benefits and pension to fund her startup business.

"I had to bootstrap my business and use whatever savings I had," she said. "I had my disability and my retirement checks. One I used to pay for my business and with the other I paid for living expenses."

Dobbs said she sought to work within the defense industry, where she had expertise and a network of military associates.

Dobbs said she was fortunate to land a Defense Department contract "right out of the gate" with the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, now the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office.

Topping the list of services government agencies are purchasing in 2024 are engineering and technical support.

Dobbs said she tries to pace expansion without taking on more business than her company can handle. Her clients include the Navy, the Defense Department and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Norris Middleton, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and disabled veteran, sees the biggest challenges of running a government contracting business as developing and sustaining access to capital and clients.

"Potential customers will not award [a contract] to someone that they do not know, like and trust," he said. "This is difficult especially for firms trying to penetrate the contracting business."

Middleton is president, chief executive officer and co-owner of MSTI, which has provided records and information management to federal agencies for 35 years.

Middleton

MSTI's services include program management, project management and records inventory, maintenance and disposal. The company also helps agencies optimize information and meet compliance standards.

A prostate cancer survivor after exposure to Agent Orange, Middleton served in the Army from 1965-1985 with tours in Vietnam, Panama and Korea.

With military training in computer science, he served as an academic computer center instructor at West Point.

Middleton said he applied his IT skills to roles in the private sector after retirement, including at General Electric Co. and Contel Corp. He joined MSTI in 1998, where he rose to president/CEO and then became part owner in 2013.

MSTI's customers include the Department of Veterans Affairs, Federal Trade Commission, Federal Aviation Administration and the National Ground Intelligence Center.

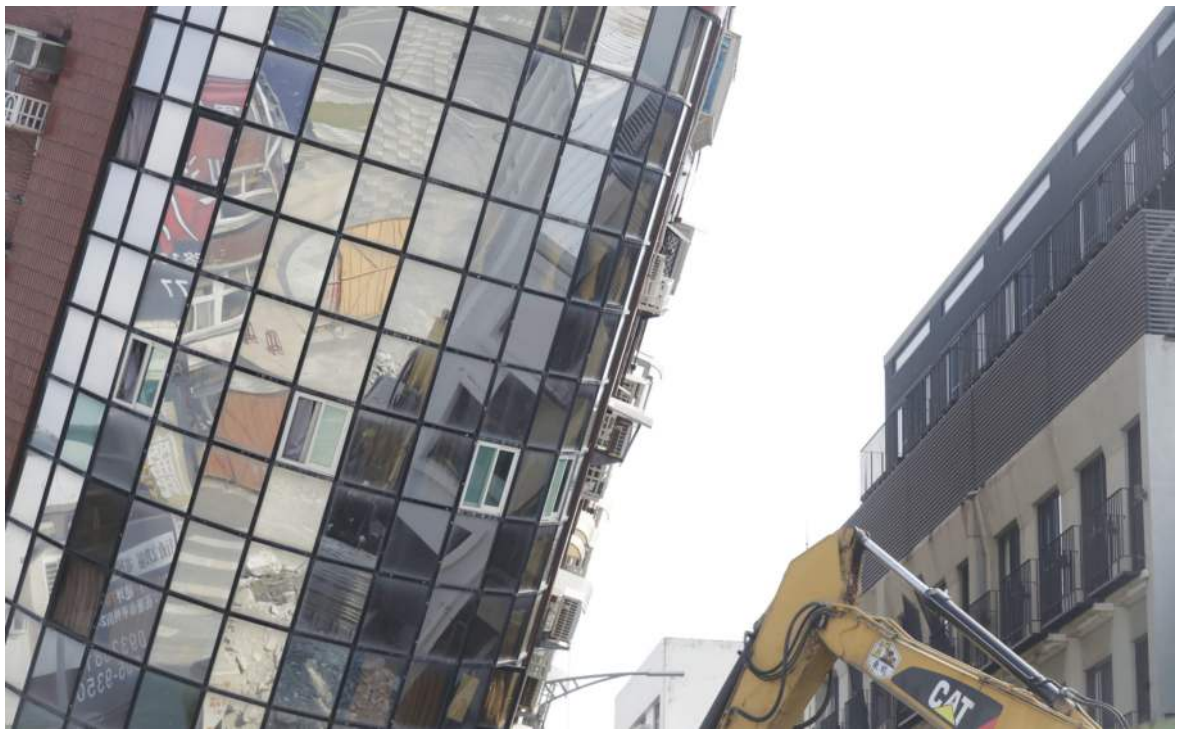
Halfaker also grew her business to serve other large government agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare.

But even through expansion, Halfaker said she stayed vigilant about keeping costs down as she hired more staff and moved to larger office space.

"I was advised early on not to give up equity in my company and to keep expenses as low as possible," Halfaker said. "I ran it lean and mean. The focus was about the end state and the least cost to get there."

hershey.linda@stripes.com

WORLD



CHIANG YING-YING/AP

A building is seen partially collapsed on Thursday, a day after a powerful earthquake struck Hualien City in eastern Taiwan.

Rescuers in Taiwan seek those missing or stranded after quake

Associated Press

HUALIEN, Taiwan — Rescuers searched Thursday for missing people and worked to reach hundreds stranded when Taiwan's strongest earthquake in 25 years sent boulders and mud tumbling down mountainsides, blocking roads. Ten people died and more than 1,000 were injured.

The powerful quake struck during the morning rush hour a day earlier, sending schoolchildren rushing outdoors and families fleeing their apartments through the windows. The ground floors of some buildings collapsed, leaving them leaning at precarious angles. Though the island is regularly rattled by earthquakes and generally well prepared, authorities did not send out the usual alerts because they were expecting a smaller temblor.

Some 200 residents of Hualien County near the epicenter were staying in temporary shelters, and the main road linking the county to the capital, Taipei, was still closed Thursday afternoon, but much of Taiwan's day-to-day life returned to normal. Some local rail service to Hualien resumed, and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., one of the world's most important manufacturers of computer chips, restarted most operations, the Central News Agency reported.

Nearly 1,100 people were injured in the quake. Of the 10 dead, at least four were killed inside Taroko National Park, a tourist attraction famous for canyons and cliffs in mountainous Hualien about 90 miles from Taipei. One person was found dead in a damaged building and another was found in the Ho Ren Quarry. Rescuers also carried out the body of a man, who had severe wounds on his head, from a hiking trail.

Hundreds of people were stranded when rocks and mud blocked the roads leading to their hotel, campground or work site — though most were safe while they awaited rescue. It wasn't clear Thursday if any people were still trapped in buildings.

About 60 workers who had been unable to leave a quarry because of damaged roads were freed, authorities said. Six workers from another quarry were airlifted out.

Some 700 people remain cut off, the vast majority of them employees and guests at a hotel in the national park. Authorities said they were safe and had food and water, and that work to repair the roads to the hotel was nearly finished.

US treasury chief arrives in China for five-day talks

Associated Press

GUANGZHOU, China — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen arrived in China on Thursday for five days of meetings in a nation determined to avoid open conflict with the United States, yet the world's two largest economies still appear to be hashing out the rules on how to compete against each other.

There are tensions over Chinese government support for the manufacturing of electric vehicles and solar panels, just as the U.S. government ramps up its own aid for those tech sectors. There are differences in trade, ownership of TikTok, access to computer chips and national security — all of them a risk to what has become a carefully managed relationship.

The 77-year-old Yellen, a renowned economist and former Federal Reserve chair, laid out to reporters the issues that she intends to raise with her Chinese counterparts during her five-day visit. Yellen begins her trip in Guangzhou and later moves to Beijing for meetings with finance leaders and state officials. Her engagements will include Vice Premier He Lifeng, Chinese Central Bank Governor Pan Gongsheng, former Vice Premier Liu He, leaders of American businesses operating in China, university students and local leaders.

Yellen, speaking to reporters Wednesday during a refueling stop in Alaska en route to Asia, said her visit would be a "continuation of the dialogue that we have been engaged and deepening" ever since U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in 2022 in Indonesia. She noted that it would be her third meeting with China's vice premier.

Yellen recently accused China of flooding global markets with heavily subsidized green energy products, possibly undercutting the subsidies the U.S. has provided to its own renewable energy and EV sector with funds provided by the Democrats' Inflation Reduction Act. She said she intends to repeat her concerns to Chinese officials that they're flooding the global market with cheap solar panels and EVs that thwart the ability of other countries to develop those sectors.

"We need to have a level playing field," Yellen told reporters. "We're concerned about a massive investment in China in a set of industries that's resulting in overcapacity."

Yellen didn't rule out taking additional steps to counter Chinese subsidies in the green energy sectors, adding, "It's not just the United States but quite a few countries, including Mexico, Europe, Japan, that are feeling the pressure from massive investment, in these industries in China."

The Treasury secretary's travels come after Biden and Xi held their first call in five months on Tuesday, meant to demonstrate a return to regular leader-to-leader dialogue between the two powers. The leaders discussed Taiwan, artificial intelligence and security issues.

Holocaust survivors join initiative to fight increasing antisemitism

Associated Press

BERLIN — More than 250 Holocaust survivors have joined an international initiative to share their stories of loss and survival with students around the world during a time of rising antisemitism following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel that triggered the war in the Gaza Strip.

The Survivor Speakers Bureau was launched Thursday by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also referred to as the Claims Conference.

"A Holocaust survivor speakers bureau of this scale and reach is unprecedented," said Gideon Taylor, the president of the Claims Conference. "At a moment of dramatically rising antisemitism, this program tells the history and educates for the future."

Six million European Jews and people from other minorities were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust.

The speakers bureau connects Holocaust survivors with students both virtually and in person.

In the United States and Germany, educational institutions can invite survivors to personally speak in classrooms and university lecture halls. Educators in other countries can request video conferences to ensure firsthand testimony is accessible.

The Claims Conference hopes to soon add more countries where young people can meet survivors in person.

"Holocaust education is crucial, especially given the current events happening around the world," said Holocaust survivor Eva Szepesi, who lives in Germany.

"My goal in sharing my own story of survival is and has always been to show the human impact, not just of the Holocaust, but of all the racist and hateful actions being taken in the world," the 91-year-old survivor of the Auschwitz death camp added.

"If hearing my testimony helps one person understand that they, too, have a role in the events happening in their community, and they can stand up for what is right, then I feel it is worth it for me to go remember and share those terrible stories."

Antisemitism in Germany, many other European countries, the United States and elsewhere has been described as reaching levels not seen in many decades. The Claims Conference hopes that first-person accounts of the cruelties endured during the Holocaust will help counter disinformation, denial and prejudice.

"Firsthand accounts are essential to maintaining Holocaust memory and go much further to ensure people understand the impact of bigotry, antisemitism and unchecked hatred," said Greg Schneider, the vice president of the Claims Conference.

The group handles claims on behalf of Jews who suffered under the Nazis and negotiates compensation with Germany's finance ministry every year. Since 1952, the German government has paid more than $90 billion to individuals for suffering and losses resulting from persecution by the Nazis.

C400 T 4-MATIC AMG-LINE 333 HP, 2017
NP: 79k€ incl. Extras. Save 50k€ over NP.
Like new, 114.600 KM, brilliant blue metallic,
full leather, light gray, fully equipped.

ASKING PRICE: 29,150 € | Near Wiesbaden
06124-7240999 or 017 17 71 99 99

WORLD

Harsher era possible after attack on Moscow concert

ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO/AP

Mukhammadsobir Faizov, a suspect in the Crocus City Hall shootings, sits in a defendants' cage in court in Moscow, Russia, on March 24.

Associated Press

Video and photos of suspects in a mass shooting show them apparently being brutalized by Russian security forces — without any rebuke from authorities. A top Kremlin official urges that hit squads be sent to assassinate Ukrainian officials. Senior lawmakers call for restoring capital punishment, abolished decades ago.

The aftermath of the Moscow concert hall attack that killed 145 people in the bloodiest assault in Russia in two decades seems to be setting the stage for even harsher rule by President Vladimir Putin following his highly orchestrated electoral landslide last month.

Putin vowed to hunt down the masterminds of the March 22 attack that he linked to Ukraine despite Kyiv's vehement denials and a claim of responsibility by an offshoot of the Islamic State. He warned ominously that terrorism is a "double-edged weapon."

Putin lieutenant Dmitry Medvedev declared that if Ukrainian involvement is proven, Moscow should respond by deploying hit men to kill the country's leaders "in Kyiv or any other convenient place."

The attack dealt a heavy blow to Putin less than a week after the vote that extended his rule for another six years. It marked a major failure by his security agencies that were given an advance warning by the U.S. that extremists were planning an imminent attack.

Critics of the Kremlin argue that security forces are so focused on conducting the harshest crackdown on dissent since Soviet times that they are distracted from tackling real threats.

In an apparent attempt to divert attention from the security lapse and rally support for the war in Ukraine, Putin and his lieutenants alleged — without evidence — that the arrest of the four suspects near Ukraine indicated Kyiv's likely involvement.

The four, all citizens of Tajikistan, were detained by security forces in a forest about 86 miles from the Ukrainian border.

Video confessions of their involvement in the attack were released by Russian news outlets, but the veracity of those statements has been called into question because the men seemed to have been severely beaten and bore other signs of brutality when they appeared in court.

One had a heavily bandaged ear — reportedly cut off during interrogation. Another had pieces of a plastic bag on his neck, a possible sign of attempts at suffocation. A third was in a wheelchair, barely conscious, accompanied by medical personnel.

Russian police and other security agencies have long been accused of torture, but many incidents also brought official condemnation, dismissals of those involved and criminal prosecutions.

In stark contrast, authorities refused to comment on the grisly video that emerged or the signs of maltreatment seen in court.

One video showed a man in combat fatigues cutting off part of a suspects' ear and forcing it into his mouth while threatening to do the same with his genitals.

Another suspect was seen with his trousers pulled down and wires attached to his genitals.

The Associated Press was unable to verify the authenticity of the images, but Human Rights Watch said it determined the men in the photos and videos were the same as those in court for their pretrial hearings.

"The rapid and widespread sharing of these videos appears to be no accident but rather some kind of appalling boast by the Putin government of its brazen disregard for basic rights, fundamental humanity, and the rule of law," said Tanya Lokshina, HRW's associate director for Europe and Central Asia.

Kremlin propagandists sought to cast their treatment as a proper response to the massacre.

Margarita Simonyan, head of state-funded broadcaster RT, dismissed criticism and said the law enforcement personnel involved shouldn't face any punishment.

"Imagine yourself in place of our guys who were chasing those ghouls who just mowed down many, many of our fellow citizens," Simonyan said. "What were they supposed to do? Serve them some warm porridge and yogurt?"

Many observers saw the tacit endorsement of such brutality as an ominous sign of more to come.

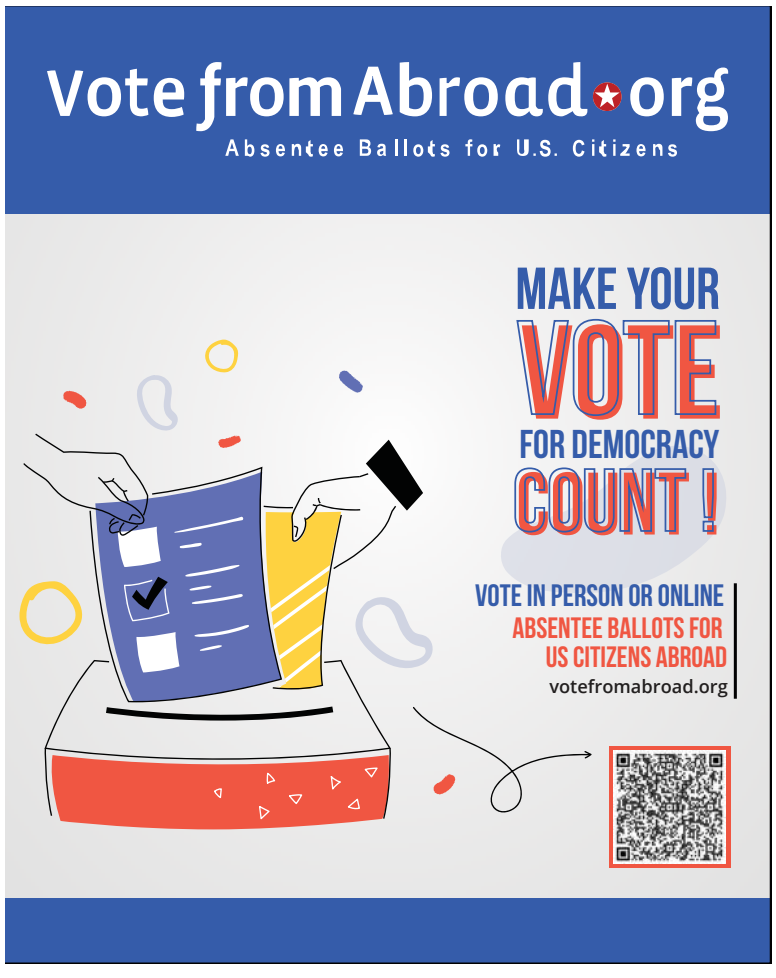
"All that serves a double function — a show of terror as a mechanism of intimidation and rallying hatred," political analyst Kirill Rogov said in a commentary. "It normalizes hatred as a response, including to those who have questions and disagreements."

The concert hall attack also brought demands from hawks and some senior lawmakers to reinstate the death penalty, which has been suspended since 1996 when Russia joined the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights organization.

Some Kremlin-connected lawmakers and others oppose the move, in an apparent sign of Putin's hesitation.

Lidiya Mikheyeva, the secretary of the Public Chamber, a Kremlin-controlled advisory board, spoke against reinstatement and reverting "to the times of savagery and barbarity."

"The abolition of the death penalty is one of our country's major historic achievements," she added.



WEEKEND

Dragon's Dogma II a tailor-made blast

Video games, Page 15

Sure as shootin'

Beyoncé shows she belongs in the country conversation with much-anticipated new release 'Act II: Cowboy Carter'

Music, Pages 28-30

Blair Caldwell

Movies — 16-17 Travel & Food — 18-25 Television — 31 Health — 32 Crossword — 34

An appetite for cheesy pranks

This year's April Fools' Day marketing hoaxes included several gross food-based items and 1 bizarre real option

BY EMILY HEIL
The Washington Post

In an era of stunt products and crazy collabs (yes, Thin Mint cookie-scented deodorant and mustard Skittles actually exist), it's getting harder to spot the kind of April Fools' Day pranks food companies like to pull every spring.

This year, it seems that the marketing departments that come up with these kinds of things were in a particularly deranged mood, "inventing" a slew of products that range from the slightly clever to downright revolting. And now our email inboxes and social media feeds are overflowing with a fresh round of bizarre food-based offerings — many of which we are really, really glad aren't real.

Velveeta

Velveeta Gold hair dye sounds like an April Fools' prank, but appears to be an actual product. The other products here, however, aren't real — at least, we don't think so.

Old Bay body scrub

Move over, Irish Spring — how about lathering up with a scent that immediately makes people think of crabs? The iconic seasoning brand has gone on a spree of collaborations and spinoffs in the past few years, from Goldfish crackers to hot sauce to vodka, which might make this one seem slightly plausible. But the signs that this was an (orange-stained) tongue-in-cheek debut were there, starting with the packaging, which boasts that it's "great for your legs" — next to a picture of a chicken leg. And while we don't expect to see this on shelves, one fan spoke for the spice's legendarily cultish fan base: "I know this is April Fools but I would 10000% grease myself up like a chicken with this," they commented.

Sriracha mayo toothpaste

Personal-care items crossed with food was a strong theme in this year's batch of April Fools' jokes, and this one — by Lee Kum Kee, the maker of a sriracha-kicked-up mayonnaise — was particularly stomach-churning. "Freshen up and keep those cavities away with a bold, spicy flavor built for top tier oral hygiene," the company posted on Instagram. "Who's up for a flavorful surprise?" We are pretty sure we have the answer: No one. Literally no one.

Dole's canned pineapple and ham

The U.K. arm of the famed fruit company seemed to be poking Hawaiian pizza haters by combining the divisive toppings in a single can. While we love a good pineapple-studded baked ham — and think that people should top their pies with whatever makes them happy — the idea of slippery canned meat drowning in sweet juice might be enough to make a person join in on the hate.

Ranch-flavored Smarties

Here's where things in the Golden Age of Weird and Unnecessary Collabs get *reallll* murky. Is the mashup between Hidden Valley Ranch and Smarties candy genuine? It seems not, given that its announcement was hashtagged #AprilFoolsDay. But when you're dealing with a salad dressing brand that has lent its signature flavor to ice cream and lip balm, it's hard to know for sure.

Sour cream and onion soda

At least the good people of chips-in-tubes-maker Pringles and Olipop soda had the decency to definitively label their "collaboration" — a bubbly drink imbued with the savory chip flavors — as a hoax. "April Fools" reads the last photo in the slideshow showing cute young people enjoying the improbable combination a little too enthusiastically.

Velveeta hair dye

Wait, this one is — real. The maker of the famously vibrant-orange "cheese product" apparently thinks people want their tresses to match their nacho sauce, and have debuted a semi-permanent dye that it promises "isn't just a change in hair color, but a declaration of a bold and confident attitude." The date of its introduction might make people think twice, but it seems the product is actually available for purchase. It's not the brand's first foray into the beauty world, either: In 2022, it offered a limited-edition nail polish that smelled of its signature product.

Scotch from Scotch tape

Okay, here is a fake product that we will allow. For one, this Scotch whisky from the makers of Scotch tape does not sound disgusting! It's a play on words, see, and it does not rely on a gag-inducing flavor profile for laughs. And what can we say, we like the idea of our desk-supply drawer getting friendly with our liquor cabinet. Kudos, too, for clear labeling: After posting the initial faux product news, the company followed up with a second post making clear that it was just having a little seasonal fun. "As you may know ... all scotch is whisky but not all whisky is scotch," the post read, "just like all Scotch® Brand Tape is tape, but not all tape is Scotch™ Brand."

Vehicle seat massager, portable chair help travelers go on outings in comfort

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Laxon lets you drive in incredible comfort with its 3D air massager for your back and thighs.

The Air Massage Vehicle Seat offers a refreshing in-car experience. It features air cushion support for the back area, three drive massage modes and two dynamic modes for idle times.

Its controller is user-friendly; the seat offers hourly auto-start automation, ideal for long or short trips.

The seat measures 20 by 53 inches and weighs 7.7 pounds. It is constructed with a premium surface material and has anti-slip silicone dot grids to keep the driver in place.

Laxon states it is compatible with all vehicle models and has four stylish color options.

Online: laxon.us; $399, in black, brown, choco and ivory

If you want a portable chair that you can sit in after a five-second setup, Danish designer Sitpack's Campster 2 is the answer. The camping chair completed a successful Kickstarter campaign last year and is now available.

For portability, it folds to the size of a 1.5-liter bottle and stores in the included shoulder strap carrying case; a S-carabiner is also included. With just a 3.23-pound weight, it's ideal for sporting events, festivals and travel. It has a sturdy aluminum frame, ripstop nylon and an airflow backrest.

The Campster 2 is designed with a unique one-piece grab-n-pull system for instant opening and closing. The quad-supported legs are listed to support up to 300 pounds in ergonomic comfort.

It has a 12-inch seating height and remains solid on grass, sand or gravel.

A pair of big side pockets are handy, and accessories available to add on include an insulated bottle holder ($9.95) and a ground sheet ($25). A seat warmer ($49) is available in soft fleece or quilted.

Online: sitpack.com; $110

LAXON/TNS

The Laxon Air Massage Vehicle Seat includes multiple drive massage and dynamic modes.

SITPACK/TNS

The Sitpack Campster 2 folds to the size of a 1.5-liter bottle and weighs just 3.23 pounds.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Prepare your Arisen for new adventure

Popular character creation system back in Dragon's Dogma II with addition of a richer story, enhanced game mechanics

BY BRIAN BOWERS
Stars and Stripes

As I plunge my flaming sword into the belly of an immense ogre, my three companions send lightning crackling through the air, fire an exploding arrow and seem to materialize from nowhere to dispense pain.

Now, this is exhilarating! This is Dragon's Dogma II.

The fantasy role-playing game is the long-awaited sequel to the 2012 favorite from Capcom. As in the original, you play as the Arisen, a hero whose destiny is linked to a powerful dragon. This time around, the Arisen must navigate through conspiracies in two different nations, engage in myriad minor quests and battle countless goblins, harpies, bandits, minotaurs, ogres, griffins, drakes and more.

Your first job when the game begins — or even before the game begins — is to create your Arisen. Capcom knew its incredibly detailed character creation system was popular, so they released it well before the game's launch. By the time the game was actually available, I had spent hours creating characters — including an Arisen who looks a lot like me with a few more inches in height and fewer inches around the waist.

In creating your character, you can choose between human and Beastren — a catlike humanoid race that rules the second major nation you'll visit. You also select a vocation: fighter, mage, archer or thief. Each vocation has its own specialized sets of weapons, armor and abilities. As you advance in levels in your selected vocation, your abilities become more diverse and powerful — and spectacular when unleashed in battle.

If you decide that you're tired of swinging a sword and would like to wield a bow or magic staff, you can stop by your friendly neighborhood guild and change your vocation without fee or penalty. In fact, the game encourages you to switch vocations to suit your current circumstance. And as you progress through your adventure, more specialized vocations become available.

Soon after escaping imprisonment at the beginning of the game, you'll also need to create a main pawn.

Pawns are the most distinctive feature of Dragon's Dogma. A pawn is a sort of interdimensional traveler who becomes your ever-present companion, fighting beside you, healing you and gathering your loot.

When creating a pawn, you have all of the same options as when creating your Arisen. It's best to give your pawn a vocation that complements yours. Since I started as a fighter, I chose to create a mage. (She looks like a certain cleric from Baldur's Gate 3 — a task made easy thanks to a previous builder who posted specific stats online.)

And whenever you decide to change your vocation, you can change your pawn's so you can remain a formidable team.

Capcom

In Dragon's Dogma II, players select a vocation for their character, the Arisen. Each vocation — fighter, mage, archer, thief and even more that become available later in the game — have their own specialized sets of weapons, armor and abilities.

BRIAN BOWERS/Stars and Stripes

Dragon's Dogma II offers an incredibly detailed character creation system, so it's possible to put yourself — or an even better-looking version — into the game. You'll also create an ever-present companion known as a main pawn — this player's main pawn is a mage that resembles Shadowheart from Baldur's Gate 3.

You can also set your pawn's personality: straightforward, calm, kindhearted or simple. Your choice manifests itself in their dialogue and actions. You can also choose a specialty that enables them to locate materials for crafting or speak Elvish, among other things. My favorite specialty is "Chirurgeon," which prompts them to heal my Arisen or other pawns when necessary.

During your adventures, you can — and should — hire two additional pawns to accompany you. To do this, you approach one of the many Rift Stones scattered across the land and enter the interdimensional Rift that's populated by pawns created by other gamers. You can hire them for a mission or for the long term — or at least until they fall off a cliff and into a river.

One interesting aspect of hired pawns — and your own pawn, if he or she is hired by another gamer — is that they acquire information on the locations of quest items and treasure as they travel. Pawns are always eager to share information gained from "other worlds," as well as other observations, which means there's a constant stream of chatter during your travels.

Because of all this, pawns are much more interesting, lively and enjoyable in Dragon's Dogma II.

Overall, game mechanics are basically the same as in the original, though some have been fine-tuned to make fights more exciting and other actions less tedious. For example, if you get tired of hoofing it through the forest, you can hop onto one of the new oxcarts that regularly travel between major locations.

However, one addition has been the subject of some online grumbling: Dragonsplague. This is an affliction that pawns can pick up when fighting dragons or traveling with other pawns who are infected — usually in another gamer's world. This disease gives pawns red eyes and headaches, causes them to ignore commands and eventually spurs them to slaughter villagers.

If a pawn exhibits early symptoms, it's easy to fire a hireling, but curing a main pawn requires a drastic measure — death. Well, it's not actually that drastic, since pawns spring back to life and still love you. The easiest ways to "kill" pawns is to hurl them into deep water or unequip their weapons and let them die in battle.

Dragon's Dogma II offers a richer story than the original. The main quests take you through a medieval kingdom beset by intrigue as well as hordes of evil creatures. You then head into a desert land ruled by a Beastren empress where the monsters are even bigger and badder. And the side quests add interesting characters and color to the tapestry.

While the story is nowhere near as deep — or long — as Baldur's Gate 3, Dragon's Dogma II's tale is definitely more satisfying than most.

And like the original Dragon's Dogma, the adventure doesn't need to end after you've vanquished the ultimate dragon and secured your rightful place on the throne. After the final battle, you can play the game again with New Game+, which allows you to start over but with all of the experience, gold and gear you accumulated during your first playthrough.

Of the countless hours I spent playing the original game, most were in New Game+, and I'm sure I'll do the same this time around.

Platforms: PC, Xbox Series X/S, PlayStation 5

Online: dragonsdogma.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Dev Patel wrote, directed and starred in "Monkey Man." He grew up inspired by action heroes like Bruce Lee and fell in love with action films.

Patel's passion project

'Monkey Man' actor/writer/director says Hindu mythology inspired his revenge film

BY LESLIE AMBRIZ AND SIAN WATSON
Associated Press

Dev Patel first pitched "Monkey Man" as "a revenge film about faith."

"Faith can be such a beautiful, powerful thing. It can bring us together. At its best, it should make us fight for each other instead of fighting against each other," says Patel, who is making his feature directorial and screenwriting debut with the action thriller.

"Monkey Man" was inspired by the legend of Hanuman — a Hindu deity revered for his strength, loyalty and courage. Patel says that he saw a lot of parallels between Hindu mythology and the iconography of the superheroes that we know of today, like Superman.

The film centers on a character named Kid — played by Patel — who makes a living working in an underground fight club and who later seeks to avenge his mother's horrific death by infiltrating the elite class of a Mumbai-like city.

"Every day I've prayed for a way to protect the weak," Kid says in a scene from the film's trailer. Throughout the film, we learn that his mission extends beyond his family. Patel's character becomes a symbol of freedom, seeking justice for those who have been oppressed and displaced in the name of power, money and religion.

"We're talking about religion and how religion can weaponize a large mass of people. And it can be used to a horrible extent to inflict violence. At the same time, it can be such a beautiful teacher," Patel says. "The iconographies, the stories, the morals of right and wrong and courage, there's this duality to it. ... You look at these old temple carvings in India and it was so much more free, open and radical in a way."

The Oscar-nominated British actor grew up inspired by action heroes like Bruce Lee and fell in love with action films at a young age.

"I was like, 'I can use a genre that I love so dearly to talk about the caste system,'" he says. "It came from a place of rage too, against what was happening in India. And it happens everywhere, really."

For Patel, the film, which features many Indian actors, speaks to issues of violence against women, the caste system and police brutality — all issues he says that, while taking place in India in the film, are also universal.

He describes the action film's commentary as a way to reach individuals who might be on the wrong side of history.

"How do I get them to watch this and feed them vegetables through a sort of entertaining Trojan horse so it doesn't feel like a lesson in politics or morals or whatever?" Patel asks.

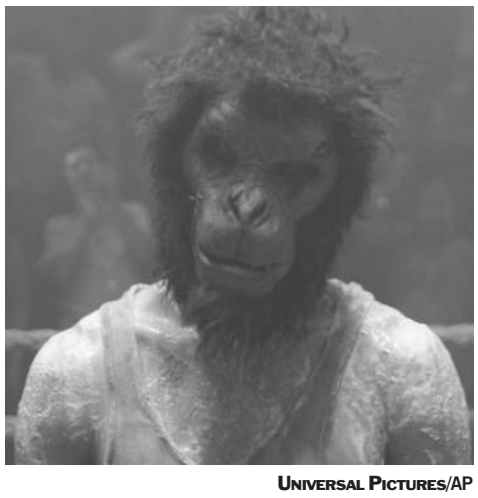
In addition to the fraught topic, the directorial debut was beset with challenges during production, including the coronavirus pandemic-driven shutdown, limited crew members and a series of physical injuries.

"I broke my hand, I broke my foot, I tore my shoulder. Everything that could have possibly gone wrong in the making of this film did go wrong," he said. "And it's really been a humbling experience."

After surviving the grueling production process, the film was dropped by Netflix. Netflix did not respond to multiple requests for comment from the AP.

"The studio that first acquired it, they didn't really know what they'd bargained for," Patel says. "The actual film itself is a lot denser and it's saying a lot. Let's say that it's not your usual action scene on page one, and then you continue fighting nonstop. It's trying to do a bit more."

It was "just sitting there gathering dust," Patel says. He was ready to let it go when Oscar-winning writer and director Jordan Peele — and Founder of Monkeypaw Productions — swooped in to save the day, purchasing the film through his production partnership with Universal Pictures.



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

The central character in "Monkey Man" initially makes a living working in an underground fight club and later seeks to avenge his mother's horrific death.

"He saw me as a filmmaker. He saw the pain I'd been through," recalls Patel. "He said, 'I hope you don't mind. I've shared it with Universal and we're going to buy it.' I literally — I fell off my seat."

For Peele, "Monkey Man" reminded him of the '80s and '90s, when "movies were good."

"It was iconic. I felt passionately that it was demanding to be on the big screen," Peele says. "I could immediately see that this was a director who had gone through lengths and pushed and pushed and pushed because it really makes it to the screen. I mean, you have a film that is just absolutely huge, and the story of it is really intoxicating."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Patel pulls no punches

‘Monkey Man’ a promising directorial debut, bold statement from Oscar-nominated actor

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Dev Patel’s got something to say, but he’s going to let his fists do the talking. With his directorial debut, the wild action revenge flick “Monkey Man,” the Oscar-nominated actor makes a bold statement with this one-two punch of a film that asserts himself as both an action star and promising genre director.

Having achieved his fame in more serious dramas like “Slumdog Millionaire” and “Lion,” Patel’s passion project “Monkey Man” is a big swing, and a big swerve for the actor. Luckily, it connects, landing with a satisfyingly bone-crunching intensity. And if the movie is intended as Patel’s calling card, he leaves the whole damn deck on the table.

“Monkey Man” is a love letter to East Asian martial arts movies, and to Indian folklore and culture. The monkey in question is both Hanuman, the Hindu god of wisdom, strength, courage, devotion and self-discipline, and it is also the face of the dingy rubber mask that the Kid (Patel) dons for his underground boxing matches, which are announced by a delightfully slimy Sharlto Copley.

This is a revenge picture, and so the Kid, who sometimes goes by the alias “Bobby,” must get revenge, driven by his fiery blood-soaked memories, and the sound of his mother whispering Hanuman’s legend in his ear. He wheedles his way into the kitchen of “Kings,” an upscale restaurant, and then, alongside the in-house drug dealer, Alphonso (Pitobash), upstairs into the VIP club, where corrupt cops and powerful politicians party with a harem of international escorts.

The Kid wants to get close to Chief Rana (Sikandar Kher), a cruel police officer, whose bloodied knuckles haunt his nightmares. But Rana is only part of the food chain of money and power in this city — there are far bigger predators to fight if he does manage to send murderous greetings from his dead mother.

This Kid’s got potential but he’s not quite finished yet, and Patel turns “Monkey Man” into his coming-of-age story, mapping the fight scenes alongside his growth as a warrior. That’s part of what makes Patel’s direction of the film so fascinating — the action sequences at the end of the movie are so much slicker than the hectic, chaotic brawls in the first half, because the Kid is so much more skilled and confident. The style of the film evolves in tandem with our hero.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

The action-packed film “Monkey Man” stars Dev Patel as a vengeful boxer coming into his own.

Working with cinematographer Sharone Meir (who most recently worked with the legendary John Woo on “Silent Night”), Patel favors long takes where the camera follows bodies in motion closely, looking up to catch a hit, and then down to see the result. These long takes with concealed cuts get smoother as the film progresses, and the climactic showdown in the VIP bar is a gorgeously fluid set piece, soundtracked to the churning guitars of Indian folk metal band Bloodywood. Rhythm and musicality is a huge part of Patel’s action style, and he utilizes it for effect.

Patel also frequently intersperses blink-and-you’ll-miss-them POV shots, further aligning us with the Kid’s experience. Every frame is wild and colorful, with lots of needle drops and a hectic, chaotic energy that is sometimes unwieldy. He dispenses with any restraint in “Monkey Man,” a film stuffed and saturated with color, texture, music, spirituality and violence.

The screenplay, by Patel, Paul Angunawela and John Collee (story by Patel), is a bit formulaic and even hackneyed at times. The story is political but also politically muddled, imparting a vague warning about the hazards of worshipping false idols. The story relies on sexual violence against women as a good/evil cheat sheet while also using the very same sexual exploitation as a cheeky visual backdrop — a trope that can often be a trap. Patel is far more successful at exploring sexuality in the genre via a group of transgender women who teach the Kid how to harness his pain into power, led by an incredibly compelling Vipin Sharma as the wise Alpha.

But formula also serves Patel, allowing him to experiment aesthetically and present himself in a new way to audiences. We’ll never look at him in the same light again — and that’s a good thing.

“Monkey Man” is rated R for strong bloody violence throughout, rape, language throughout, sexual content/nudity and drug use. Running time: 122 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

Teens start a mock government in documentary ‘Girls State’

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

What would an all-female government look like in the U.S.? Or even a majority female government? It’s something that remains a fantasy. But for the ambitious high school students in the Girls State program, given the spotlight in a new documentary on Apple TV+, it’s something they can play at for at least a week.

Six years ago, documentary filmmakers Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss brought their cameras to the Boys State camp in Texas in the aftermath of a historic and, according to that 2018 class, embarrassing stunt in which their predecessors voted to secede from the United States. By the time the filmmakers were finishing that effort, they were already thinking about a follow up focused on the girls’ program.

In “Girls State,” they move away from Texas and to Missouri, and give voice to several Midwestern teens during a heightened week in which a draft of the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion nationwide, had leaked to the press. This is hardly a consensus issue among the young women at the camp: Even at a single lunch table, many sides of the debate are represented. One girl is firmly pro-choice, but even those opposed also have differing viewpoints of what the government’s purview should be.

During another moment, two girls talk about the right to bear arms. One preaches the importance of protecting a constitutional right, the possibility of arming teachers and the comfort she would get from having access to a bedside automatic rifle should an armed intruder enter her house at night. The other wonders if that’s more of a danger to the household than anything else. And they eventually agree to disagree. Minds are not necessarily being changed through these talks, but all seem excited for the opportunity to be heard (and, sometimes, to hear what others have to say).

APPLE TV+/AP

Brooke Taylor and Nisha Murali are two of the Missouri teens who hash out timely issues in “Girls State.”

McBaine and Moss take pains to find a group of main characters with different backgrounds and viewpoints. There’s the city girl from St. Louis who thinks she’s probably the most liberal of the bunch. There’s the reformed conservative who once followed her family but in recent years has started disagreeing. There’s a moderate conservative who truly believes in bipartisanship. And there is one Black girl who wonders if she’s the first Black person that some of the others have seen. She ends up being elected attorney general, while the others run for the highest office: governor.

Perhaps the most compelling turn of events is how a bit of camp gossip about Boys State, being held on the same campus for the first time ever, evolves into a movement. The girls are dispirited by rumors of more funding and less fluff for the boys. They also all cringe when time is taken to scold them for wearing shorts and tops that are too revealing and wonder if the boys are getting similar lectures. After the election, one girl takes it upon herself to do some investigative journalism about the rumored inequities.

Like “Boys State,” this film presents a fascinating microcosm of American teenagers. Granted, it’s a rather narrow, self-selecting group of kids who choose to spend a week of their summer vacation creating a mock government. You wonder whether four or eight years from now, when they are voting and entering the workforce, they’ll have a similar interest in politics and policy and the ambition to do something about it. For the sake of democracy, let’s hope so — these kids are really something.

“Girls State” is unrated. Running time: 98 minutes. Now streaming on Apple TV+.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Vienna's unique cuisine a reason to linger

If any European capital knows how to enjoy the good life, it's Vienna. Compared to most modern urban centers, the pace of life here is slow. Locals linger over pastry and coffee at cafés. Concerts and classical music abound. And chatting with friends at a wine garden is not a special event but a way of life.

For many Viennese, the living room is down the street at the neighborhood coffeehouse, which offers light lunches, fresh pastries, a wide selection of newspapers and "take all the time you want" charm (with famously grumpy waiters). Each coffeehouse has its own individual character. Café Sperl dates from 1880, and is still furnished identically to the day it opened — from the coat tree to the chairs. Café Hawelka has a dark, "brooding Trotsky" atmosphere, paintings by struggling artists who couldn't pay for coffee, smoky velvet couches and a phone that rings for regulars.

Make it a point to stop by Demel, the ultimate Viennese chocolate shop, filled with Art Nouveau boxes of choco-dreams come true: Kandierte Veilchen (candied violet petals), Katzenzungen (cats' tongues) and much more. An impressive cancan of cakes is displayed to tempt you into springing for the cake-and-coffee deal (point to the cake you want). You're sure to see Sacher torte, the local specialty. Apart from its apricot filling, the recipe seems pretty simple ... chocolate on chocolate. You can sit inside the shop, with a view of the cake-making, or outside, with the street action. Fancy shops like this boast on their sign: "K.u.K." (meaning good enough for the König und Kaiser — king and emperor).

For another royally good experience, head to the Heurigen (wine gardens). Clustered around the edge of town, at the start of the legendary Vienna Woods, wine-garden restaurants feature cold-cut buffets paired with fine Austrian wines in an old-village atmosphere with strolling musicians. If you visit in fall, try Sturm, the semi-fermented new wine made from the season's first grape harvest and only available in autumn. Many locals claim that it takes several years of practice to distinguish between Sturm and vinegar. The red version is so hearty and fruity that locals say "Eat up!" when toasting with it.

Rick Steves

Of the many wine-garden suburbs, Grinzing is the most famous and lively. To avoid tour groups, try Nussdorf, popular with Viennese. Music lovers head to Heiligenstadt to visit the Beethovenhaus wine garden, where the composer lived and began work on his Ninth Symphony.

Vienna claims to be the only city with a cuisine of its own. Vienna soups come with fillings, such as semolina dumpling or pancake slices. Wiener schnitzel is a breaded and fried veal (or pork) cutlet. For hardcore Viennese cuisine, drop by a Würstelstand. The local hot-dog stand is a fixture on city squares throughout the old center, serving a variety of hot dogs and pickled side dishes with a warm corner-meeting-place atmosphere. Or eat at Buffet Trzesniewski, famous for finger sandwiches with toppings like chicken liver or herring.

CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

The Viennese enjoy taking their time when out with friends at peaceful wine gardens.

From July through August, a thriving people scene erupts each evening in the park on Rathausplatz, the welcoming park in front of Vienna's City Hall, where free concerts are broadcast on a giant screen. Scores of food stands and picnic tables are set up. There are no plastic cups, just real plates and glasses — Vienna wants the quality of dining experience to be as good as the music that's about to begin. About 2,000 spots on comfy benches face a 60-foot-wide screen up against the building's Neo-Gothic facade.

The program differs every night, with filmed performances ranging from opera and classical concerts to more contemporary fare.

This article is used with the permission of Rick Steves' Europe (www.ricksteves.com). Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio and organizes European tours

Warm up to these coastal party spots on the Continent

While a nearly-deserted island or coastline beloved by birdwatchers might sound like fine vacation destinations to the mature traveler, older teenagers or young adults are apt to find active, social pursuits infinitely more interesting. Here are three coastal resort areas bound to appeal to parents and their older kids.

The Riviera Romagnola, Italy: The Riviera Romagnola refers to a 55-mile stretch of seacoast along the Adriatic Sea in the regions of Emilia-Romagna and Marche. This area beginning from the mouth of the Reno River in the north to Gabicce Monte in the south attracts by day with sandy beaches with shallow waters, theme parks, water sports facilities and countless bars and restaurants. When it comes to choosing a "bagno," a beach resort charging a fee for entry, lounge chair, beach umbrella and services, visitors are spoiled for choice. Self-catering beaches offering more privacy can also be found.

Karen Bradbury

The unofficial capital of the area is the sprawling resort town of Rimini. Behind its beachside strip of bars and restaurants offering excellent nightlife are monuments dating back to Roman times, including the Arch of Augustus, Italy's oldest intact Roman arch. Just north of the city is found Italia in Miniatura, a miniature park depicting the whole of Italy along with other European landmarks and geographical features.

Along the Riviera Romagnola's southern tip is found the town of Gabbice Mare, home to the nightclub known as Baia Imperiale. The massive club with its four dance floors and distinctive columns has served as a filming location, and from 2014-2018, it was ranked the No. 1 Italian nightclub on the International Nightlife Association's list of Top 100 Best Clubs in the World. In Riccione, party people have been getting down for decades at the club known as Cocoricò. The notorious locale was the subject of an award-winning documentary film in 2023.

iStock

Malta offers plenty of beaches, clubs and public events to please those looking for a good time in the sun.

A peak time to visit Rimini and its surroundings is during the annual event known as Pink Night, a weekend full of concerts, art installations and fabulous displays of fireworks; this is scheduled for July 5-7 in 2024.

Costa Brava, Spain: This term meaning rugged coast refers to a coastal region of Catalonia in northeast Spain stretching from the town of Blanes to the French border. Some of its best-known resort towns include Blanes, Lloret de Mar and Tossa de Mar.

Lloret de Mar has a well-earned reputation as party central and offers a pulsating nightlife scene, from small pubs where the action spills out into the streets to massive clubs such as the ColossOs Disco, capable of accommodating 2,500 guests at once. Outside city limits is found Millennium Party, which guests are brought to by shuttle bus. From its roof terrace, the huge venue offers spectacular views of the city below.

Just north of Lloret is found Tossa de Mar, which enchants with its perfectly formed bay overlooked by the ancient fortress of Vila Vella. Along the town's steep and winding cobbled streets, bars, restaurants, boutiques and art galleries all beckon. The coastal path leading northward offers stunning ocean vistas and the chance for dips in hidden coves. Blanes, popular with Spanish visitors, offers its visitors experiences typical to an old Catalan coastal village such as visiting a fish or a farmer's market.

History lovers would enjoy a daylong excursion to the inland city of Girona, where the influences of the Romans, Arab and Jewish communities can still be felt within the medieval walls that flank the city. A prime time to visit is during Temps des Flors, an event in which florists compete to stage the most innovative and eye-catching floral arrangements among the Old Town's natural assets. The 2024 edition of the flower festival is May 11-19.

Malta: The tiny island nation of Malta offers an intriguing juxtaposition of rich history and nightlife. Beautiful beaches and budget-friendly prices add to its appeal. Most of the island's major coastal resorts are scattered along the northern coast. Reliable public transportation makes getting around cheap and easy. Golden Bay, Paradise Bay and Mellieha Bay are considered some of the island's best places for a sun-soaked day in the sand.

The area known as Paceville, in the town of St. Julian's, attracts a young crowd at night. Places to see and be seen include Havana and Sky Club. Gianpula Village is the place to see popular performers and the best-known DJs. Bedtimes also come late at night in Sliema, where bars, restaurants and snack stalls line the waterfront.

Malta's capital is Valletta, a UNESCO World Heritage city. Sights include a citadel built in the 16th century by the Knights of St John, the Grandmaster Palace and the Upper Barrakka Gardens overlooking the busy harbor. A highlight of any tour is St John's Co-Cathedral, with two Caravaggio paintings gracing its baroque interior.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Menton farmers feeling squeeze

On French Riviera hillsides, lemon growers are struggling with developers, climate, competition

BY BARBARA SURK AND DANIEL COLE
Associated Press

When the French Riviera town of Menton prepares to host its lemon festival each year, it assembles more than 140 tons of citrus to build the ornate floats and showy park displays that attract thousands to the Fete du Citron. But none of it is the actual Menton lemon, a prized variety whose fans included King Louis XIV, who enjoyed drinking its juice and bathing in its essential oils.

They're too precious and there aren't enough of them, either.

"Honestly, we prefer that people taste our lemons rather than look at them on display," said Marine Krenc, an events manager for Menton's tourism office.

Menton was once a leading lemon-growing region in Europe, with a global reputation and exports to as far as the United States and Russia in the 18th century. But that was before the French Revolution led to cancellation of laws that protected Menton from competition from other lemon-growing regions, and before the Riviera's rise as a playground for tourists and the wealthy led to hotels and villas steadily displacing orchards and farmland.

These days, only 56 small producers still grow the high-end lemons, and some worry that a warming climate will add to their challenges in coming years.

When Pierre Ciabaud, a sixth-generation lemon-grower, was looking for a job that would support a family in the 1960s, he had to break with family tradition. He set up a hardware and appliance store to make ends meet. Now retired, he tends the family's grove on one of the last remaining lemon hills overlooking the city of Menton and its built-up Mediterranean coast dotted with private swimming pools.

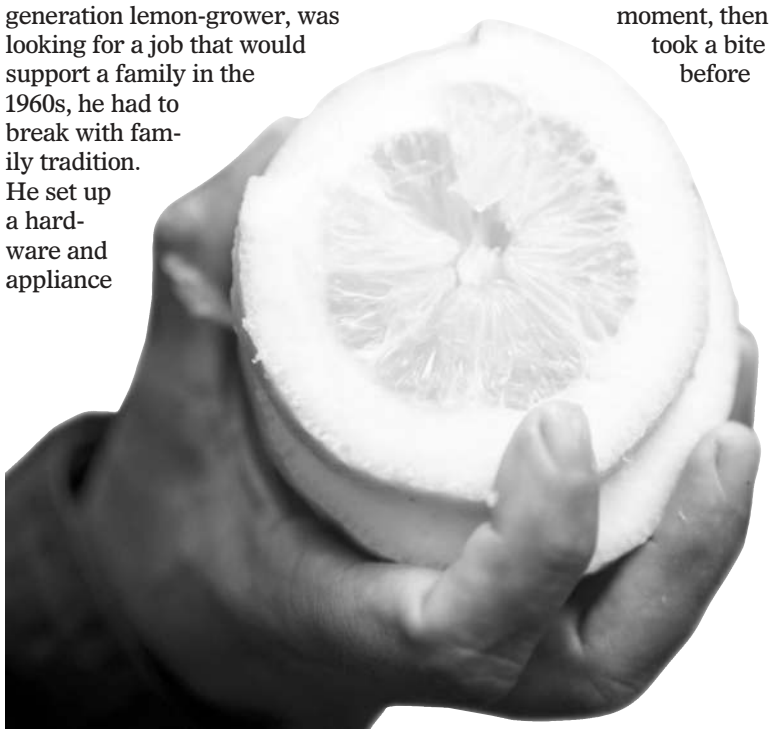
"The valleys of Menton used to be covered with lemon groves; there were trees everywhere," Ciabaud said. Now, he said, "The land is sold to developers and all you see are buildings."

He recalls his father collecting a ton and a half of lemons every 20 days. The region's annual production now is about 200 tons.

"A young person today would not be able to live from lemon farming," Ciabaud said.

The region nestles between the French southern Alps and the Mediterranean Sea, covering about 247 acres and stretching beyond Menton's municipal boundaries into Roquebrune, Sainte-Agnès and Castellar. The mild climate — from a protective mountain range, proximity to the sea and steady sunshine with moderate rain during winter months — and sandstone-rich soil give the Menton lemon its distinct flavor: acidic, but neither bitter nor sweet, and with a lemongrass scent in its zest. They're bigger than most lemons, with a thicker skin.

During the lemon festival, visitors to La Casetta, a city-owned orchard, were treated to a taste of the Menton lemon by a caretaker who handed out slices. One woman took hers, inhaled its scent for a long moment, then took a bite before handing it to a companion.



PHOTOS BY DANIEL COLE/AP

A visitor picks lemons March 2 during a guided tour at the Maison du Citron lemon farm in Menton. Only 56 small producers still grow the high-end lemons. Bottom left, a sliced Menton lemon.

Krenc calls it "our caviar." Mauro Colagreco, a celebrity chef who operates a three-Michelin-star restaurant, Le Mirazur, in Menton, has praised it and features it in fish dishes and desserts.

The Menton lemon got a boost in 2015 when the European Union granted it the protection of a geographical indicator, which aids in marketing the lemons and is intended to guard against lesser varieties misusing the name. It's the only lemon in France to carry such an indicator.

Laurent Gannac has been growing lemons for 30 years, since he first moved to the region as a landscaper. He started from scratch on an uncultivated plot of about 6 acres, and spent years clearing and terracing the land, planting 400 trees and setting up an irrigation system.

He said he has benefited from the geographical indicator, but both he and Ciabaud worry about climate change. This part of France has endured three years of drought, and seen rising temperatures and scrambling of seasons, though it hasn't yet hurt the lemon crop. Snowmelt from the mountains has helped so far.

But farmers will have to adapt to rising temperatures if they want to continue producing the lemons, he said.

"Our goal for the Menton lemons is that they land on a plate, in a restaurant, or in a gourmet jam for select customers," Gannac said.

Tourists pose for pictures March 1 in front of a sculpture made of lemons during the 90th edition of the Lemon Festival in Menton. None of the lemons used in the floats and showy park displays are of the Menton variety.

Sixth-generation lemon farmer Pierre Ciabaud's lemon farm sits near the highway in Menton. "The valleys of Menton used to be covered with lemon groves; there were trees everywhere," Ciabaud said.

"Honestly, we prefer that people taste our lemons rather than look at them on display."

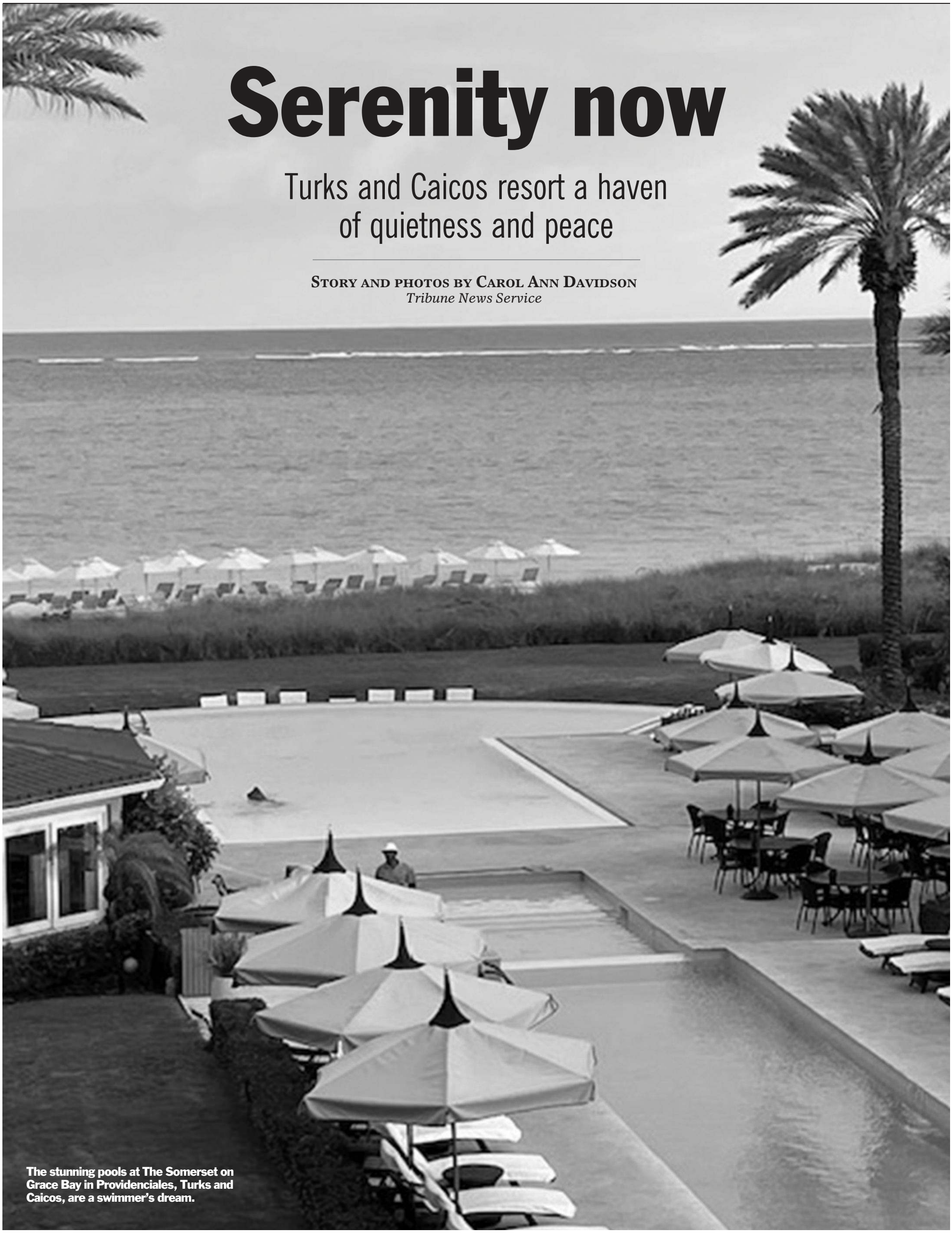
Marine Krenc
events manager for Menton's tourism office

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Serenity now

Turks and Caicos resort a haven of quietness and peace

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CAROL ANN DAVIDSON
Tribune News Service



The stunning pools at The Somerset on Grace Bay in Providenciales, Turks and Caicos, are a swimmer's dream.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Noise is my nemesis. I often seek quiet places, but rarely achieve the relaxation I'm hoping for.

So when deciding where to go for a much-needed vacation at the beginning of March, I decided to spend it at a luxury resort, specifically The Somerset on Grace Bay in Providenciales, Turks and Caicos. I crossed my fingers that I would find a modicum of peace and serenity.

I had viewed online photos and videos of the property. It certainly looked beautiful, but would it achieve my high standards for low decibels?

This was my third trip to Turks and Caicos, but my first to The Somerset.

It's not the newest kid on the block (it was built in 2006). Shinier sites have arrived on the scene — a few of which I have visited — but there is something more genteel, relaxed and intimate about this property. It immediately felt like home. The Somerset oozed charm, without the noisy bells and whistles that many resorts display, substituting intense activity and helicoptering attention for thoughtful but unobtrusive service.

Part of the charm resided in the configuration of the Spanish Mediterranean style of architecture of yellow stucco capped by the red clay roof. The four-story residences, housing one- to five-bedroom suites, formed a horseshoe shape, allowing each unit to have an unobstructed view of Grace Bay Beach. With its miles-long shoreline of silky white sand, Grace Bay is listed among Tripadvisor's "Best of the Best" beaches for 2024.

I arrived at night after a 90-minute flight from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., so I didn't see the crowning centerpiece of the property until early the next morning. I opened the floor-to-ceiling drapes in my one-bedroom suite, stood out on the terrace and gaped in amazement at the stunning lap and infinity pools that seemed to flow straight into the ocean. An employee was carefully cleaning the pools while another was setting up the chaise longues with pristine white covers and rolled towels.

So, what can a gal do but don her swimsuit and jump right in? I had the pools all to myself, and after an hour swim in the 104-foot-long lap pool, I headed for breakfast. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served at the Barbetta, an independently owned restaurant on The Somerset's property. The open-air breakfast room overlooked the landscaped park area bordered by smaller Somerset accommodations. I must admit that breakfast choices were plentiful, but the quality of the food could be improved. However, Ingrid, the delightful server, was a pleasure.

Key to a great resort vacation is the staff. It turns out that many of the employees have been there since The Somerset opened — a good sign. They understand understated hospitality but deliver it with ease and a kind of natural friendliness, as if you've known them all your life.

There's a gym on-site, which I didn't use because I wanted as much sun and sand and water as I could possibly squeeze into my short stay. But I did avail myself of a sublime massage on my suite terrace. Yuli, a therapist all the way from Bali, knew exactly how to knead stressed muscles into submission. While working her wonders, the sound of birds and the ever-present warm island breeze kept us company.

Each of the 53 accommodations is uniquely decorated. My 1,500-square-foot suite was airy, modern and immaculate. The kitchen offered every imaginable culinary gadget, Viking and Bosch appliances and a separate glass wine refrigerator. The king-size bed was mercifully comfy in a massive bedroom bracketed on one side by a Juliet balcony and on the other by the en suite bathroom and separate closet room.

I may have been the solo traveler there but had the pleasure of meeting a host of couples young and old, many with their children or grandchildren. The resort is known for its Caicos Kids Club designed for children ages 3 to 12. While parents grab a bit of free time, an array of supervised activities such as arts and crafts, treasure hunts and beach games occupy the little ones.

For bigger kids like myself, the sea offers endless adventures. Although I was almost enticed into parasailing, I opted for less height and more splash on one of the Hobie Cats that the resort provides. I even let out a few hoots when I first straddled what felt like a trampoline on wings with a sail attached. It was a particularly windy day, and the youthful navigator steered the craft out into the wild blue yonder. It was thrilling, and a bit scary, when a huge wave danced all over me. But I survived to tell the tale.

A main entrance to The Somerset on Grace Bay in Providenciales, Turks and Caicos. The resort was built in 2006, so it's not the newest in the area, but has a more genteel, relaxed and intimate feel than some of the newer properties.

The kitchen and dining room in one of the one-bedroom suites at The Somerset on Grace Bay. Each of the 53 accommodations on the property, ranging from one- to five-bedroom suites, is uniquely decorated.

Then as my reward for being so brave, I plunked myself down on a beach chaise longue strategically placed near the water's edge and munched on a grilled shrimp salad washed down by an intoxicating coconut rum punch served by a waiter from The Somerset's poolside restaurant. Watching the swimmers, kayakers, parasailers, sailboats and sunbathers was entertainment enough.

Once the headiness of the drink wore off, the sunny beach beckoned me for a long, leisurely stroll.

Grace Bay itself stretches about 3 miles, but it connects seamlessly with two other beaches so one could conceivably walk for about 12 miles. I didn't count my steps, but I viewed various properties along the way — some very modern, others a bit worse for the wear — and I liked that the area was not overcrowded and the resorts were spread out so a sense of privacy prevailed. But for me, my Somerset "home" was where I wanted to cocoon. So back I went for my last evening meal at Barbetta: grilled mahi-mahi with asparagus, saffron infused potatoes followed by crackling creme brûlée.

While checking out the last morning of my stay, a couple was just arriving. The woman asked me, "Is it quiet here?"

The residences at The Somerset on Grace Bay are designed in the Spanish Mediterranean style of yellow stucco with red clay roofs. The residences form a horseshoe shape, allowing each unit to have an unobstructed view of Grace Bay Beach.

"Yes," I said truthfully, "and peaceful."

She turned to her husband with a big smile and said, "That's exactly what we need."

A fitting end to my pursuit and a positive introduction to theirs. Maybe on my next trip I'll try parasailing. Fingers crossed.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Rainbow Street in Amman, Jordan, is a colorful neighborhood in the center of the city and a hot spot for visitors and city residents alike.

Rainbow Street is known for its cafes, restaurants and nightlife. Most of the cafes and shops are family-owned.

The walls on buildings near Rainbow Street in Amman often have colorful graffiti and street art.

Lighting up Amman

Aptly named Rainbow Street puts Jordanian capital on vivid display with its colorful buildings, bustling energy, American-friendly vibe

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Picture if you will an urban scene of vibrant colors splashed across buildings, the lively chatter of local folks and tourists mingling and the aroma of strong coffee and tasty Middle Eastern cuisine wafting through the air.

That's Rainbow Street, nestled right in the heart of downtown Amman, the capital of Jordan. I'd heard a lot about this "must-see" thoroughfare before setting eyes on it during a recent trip.

Lined with cafes, restaurants and shops for the young and fashionable, Rainbow Street lives up to its name with colorful decorations adorning the buildings and quirky graffiti featuring things like Pokémon and pizza.

The U.S. has a significant military presence in Jordan, and service members deployed there had given me recommendations on what and where to eat.

But nothing could quite prepare me for the bustling energy that greeted me. Also, Amman is filled with hills, and Rainbow Street straddles a hilltop that offers stunning panoramas of the surrounding scenery.

Cafes and shops, mostly family-owned, line the street. Well-fed cats sauntered past the shops, and the beefy felines allowed me to pet them.

I found myself drawn to a cozy little spot called 1212 the Mid Coffeehouse. I spent hours there since the owners let me use their Wi-Fi and plug in my laptop.

I listened to their eclectic collection of local music and 1990s rock as I soaked in the literary vibes. Other customers came by and I could overhear their passionate arguments about geopolitics.

After nightfall, I ordered a delicious dinner spread that included hummus, halvah, pita and date molasses. The cafe owner, possessing trademark Jordanian hospitality, kept giving me more and more food.

I then went to Mijana, another spot on Rainbow Street that was recommended to me as a great place to eat Jordan's trademark dish, known as mansaf. The meal consisted of a hearty portion of lamb, bread, rice and yogurt sauce.

I washed it down with a cup of Turkish coffee and listened to the conversations around me while looking out from the window of the restaurant's rooftop terrace at the city below.

Mijana, like the places I had visited, had English-speaking servers who seemed very familiar with Americans. Getting to and from Rainbow Street was a breeze. Uber is available and every taxi driver knows of the street's reputation.

Rainbow Street is also close to other landmarks in Amman, such as the historic downtown of al-Balad and the remains of a Roman theater.

Despite being more expensive and touristy than other places in Amman, the area manages to retain its charm.

It's a fine place for a two-hour jaunt to pose for Instagram photos, but it's also great just as a hangout for soaking in the atmosphere, which Rainbow Street has in spades.

lawrence.jp@stripes.com
@jplawrence3

On the QT

Location: Rainbow Street is in Jebel district, close to downtown, running east from First Circle to Mango Street.
Hours: All day. Nighttime is when a lot of the street comes alive, especially during Ramadan.
Cost: Free. Cafes and restaurants are more expensive than elsewhere in Amman.

J.P. Lawrence

A dinner spread at 1212 the Mid Coffeehouse on Rainbow Street in Amman included hummus, halvah, pita and date molasses.

The restaurants on Rainbow Street in Amman often have rooftop areas affording fine views of the capital.

Guten Tag, Selen

New Kaiserslautern cafe continues traditions of its former owner, right down to the menu

By Phillip Walter Wellman
Stars and Stripes

Some customers at Kaiserslautern's Cafe Selen probably don't realize they're at a new restaurant.

It's in the same spot as the once-popular Cafe Susann, which closed in January. But much remains the same, including the vintage-looking coffee machine at the bar and the giant Swiss cheese plant in the front window. Even the menu is unchanged.

I stopped by one recent afternoon to see whether the quality of the food is the same, too.

Cafe Susann, which opened downtown seven years ago, quickly became a hot spot for lovers of vegetarian brunch options, coffees and cakes.

It was announced at the start of the year that Elif Selen would take over the restaurant with her mother and aunt, continuing the vegetarian brunch theme.

The trio introduced a lunch special, which changes during the week and is not on the normal menu. Former options include a breakfast burrito and plates of pasta. Otherwise, the menu consists of four dishes established under Cafe Susann.

The vegan-friendly French toast uses banana and coconut milk as a substitute for eggs. Three slices of whole-grain bread peek out from under a dollop of homemade lemon cream.

Although the dish resembles a dessert, it's much less sweet than traditional French toast covered in maple syrup.

The bread has a mild sweetness and tastes like an elephant ear. It blends well with the slight zest of the cream and the tangier, runny blueberry sauce. The light texture and subtle flavors are offset by a sprinkling of caramelized walnuts.

This is a tasty and fun dish that didn't disappoint. However, it may not be a filling meal for some, especially those used to larger, American-size portions.

The breakfast burger is a popular dish, and it's also my favorite. It consists of a warm scrambled egg patty, leafy greens, pink pickled onions and a spicy vegan mayo, all inside a brioche bun.

The bun is extremely soft and almost dissolves in the mouth, complementing the light, fresh filling. It comes with a small salad. The vegan mayo — made with vegetable oil, soy milk, paprika and cayenne pepper — is the dominant flavor of the burger although the spice level is mild.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Cafe Selen

Address: Osterstrasse 7, Kaiserslautern, Germany
Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; closed Mondays
Prices: French toast, 9.50 euros; breakfast burger, 11.30 euros; Ayurvedic millet porridge, 8.70 euros; the Classico, 12 euros
Information: 0631 37330162

Phillip Walter Wellman

It's satisfying and a little messy. My napkin was stained orange from the mayo, which I kept wiping from my fingers. Next time I order the breakfast burger, I might use a fork and knife.

Cafe Selen's Ayurvedic millet porridge is made with coconut milk, cinnamon and cardamom and is suitable for vegans and those intolerant to gluten.

The dish is topped with compote and seasonal fruit; my bowl had slices of apple and pear. Oranges and grapes were also included, which mixed well with the gooey millet. The modest serving was packed with flavor and relatively filling for its size.

Although I can't fault the preparation or the taste of this dish, I could probably whip up something similar at home with relative ease.

The fourth daily offering, the Classico, was included in a recent Stars and Stripes review of standout healthy dishes in Kaiserslautern.

It consists of homemade baked beans and bread, a boiled egg, red beet salad, pickled onions and whipped ricotta cream with olive oil. The ricotta can be substituted for hummus.

The dish is full of subtle flavors, the standout one being the rustic tomato taste of the beans.

All the dishes are available from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or until the restaurant runs out, with vegan and gluten-free substitutions possible. For patrons who want just a snack, assorted homemade cakes and coffees are available.

Luckily for regulars, Cafe Selen provides the quality and laid-back ambiance that Cafe Susann became known for. Continuity can make the differences, such as the new name painted on the front window, so subtle that they escape notice.

wellman.phillip@stripes.com
@pwwellman

PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

A full house for lunch at Cafe Selen in Kaiserslautern on March 26. The restaurant is located in the same spot as Cafe Susann used to be, before it closed in January.

Cafe Selen's breakfast burger includes a warm scrambled egg patty, leafy greens, pickled onions and a spicy vegan mayo inside a brioche bun.

Cafe Selen's Ayurvedic millet porridge is made with coconut milk, cinnamon and cardamom and is suitable for vegans and those intolerant to gluten.

YEAR ROUND TAX SERVICE
In Office • Drop Off • From Home

Getting your refund is more important than ever.

Wherever you are, we can help prepare your taxes.

Send your documents to our office.

A tax pro will contact you with any questions and to let you know when your return is ready for approval.

Review and approve your return online.

H&R BLOCK
MILITARY TAX EXPERTS
OPEN YEAR ROUND • ITIN ACCEPTANCE AGENT • EXPAT TAX SERVICE

Military tax expertise to get you every deduction you deserve.

Questions? Call us:

GRAFENWÖHR
+49 (0)173-573-6112
office62911@hrblock.com
jorellano@hrblock.com

VILSECK
Ambergerstr. 1
92249 Vilseck
+49 (0)9662-701339
office62911@hrblock.com
jorellano@hrblock.com

hrblock.com

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Gundam gets final goodbye

Giant moving robot takes last bow in Japan

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

A 60-foot-tall moving robot inspired by a popular Japanese anime series said its last goodbyes Sunday after a four-year, twice-extended display.

The RX-78F00 Gundam — or General Purpose Utility Non-Discontinuity Augmentation Maneuvering Weapon System — stood on Yamashita Pier with the Yokohama skyline as its backdrop.

It was erected in December 2020 to mark the 40th anniversary of "Mobile Suit Gundam," which premiered in 1979. Most Gundams are large, bipedal, humanoid vehicles controlled from a cockpit by a human pilot. The one in Yokohama could move its head and arms and take steps backwards and forwards and kneel. More than 1.5 million people visited the manned robot in its Gundam Dock Tower.

The exhibit was scheduled to close in 2022 and again last year but the Gundam Factory, which operates the exhibit, had extended the robot's appearance through the end of March.

Tickets for the final weeks went fast, but I was among the lucky few. Approaching the Gundam Factory from Motomachi-Chukagai Station, the towering robot was visible from afar.

Hundreds of people were already present, but there was a clear view for photos of the Gundam once I was inside the Gundam Factory's gate.

The 25-ton robot stood inside an intricately built dock tower. With its back attached to the dock, the massive structure was raised, lowered and moved forward and backward using the Gundam-Carrier, an assembly of large gears and pulleys.

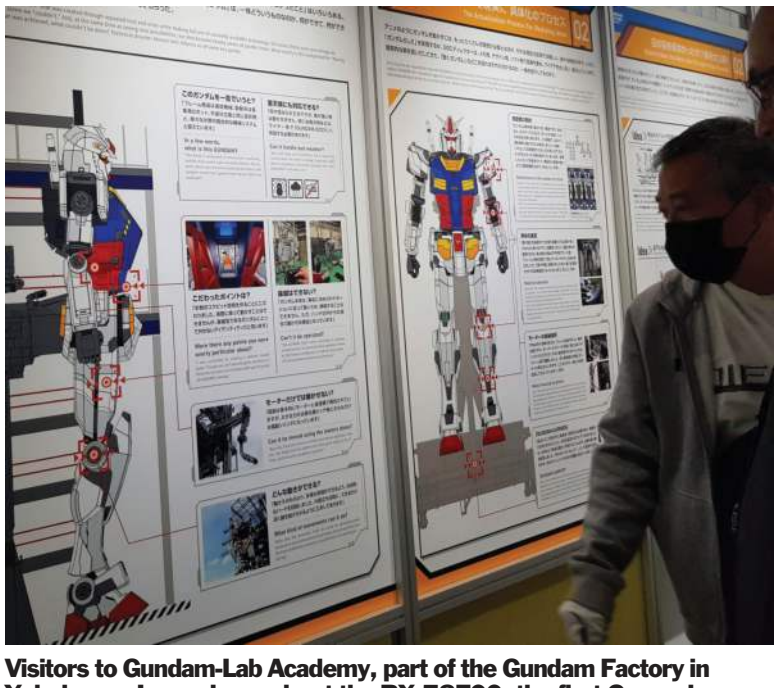
From standby mode in a standing position, the Gundam undertook a series of scheduled movements.

The free movement of its hands, arms, legs and feet allowed it to simulate walking forward. Light-emitting diodes, including red and green ones in its eyes, made for a brilliant night show. Altogether, the performance was called the Artificial Intelligence Awakening.

Before leaving, I looked back at the giant Gundam one last time. Sentimental music playing over the public address system lent an aura of sadness to one of its final performances.

Anyone who may have missed the final RX-78F00 exhibit can find an even taller Gundam display for free at Odaiba, a waterfront area of Tokyo. The Gundam statue at DiverCity Tokyo Plaza, the RX-0 Unicorn Gundam, depicts a newer version of robot that stands 64 feet.

king.juan@stripes.com
@juanking_17



Visitors to Gundam-Lab Academy, part of the Gundam Factory in Yokohama, Japan, learn about the RX-78F00, the first General Purpose Utility Non-Discontinuity Augmentation Maneuvering Weapon System, or Gundam.

PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

The nearly 60-foot RX-78F00 takes a step at the Gundam Factory in Yokohama, Japan. The robot's exhibit, built in December 2020, was scheduled to close in 2022 but was extended through last month.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Ricotta works in pasta, sweets and much more

BY GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Ricotta is probably most famous as the mild-tasting white Italian cheese unceremoniously stuffed into ravioli, manicotti and pasta shells, or the soft white curds that the picky eater in the family shuns in lasagna.

Yet you can do so much more with ricotta, which can be made with milk from cows, goats or sheep (or in Italy, water buffaloes). It's easy to find in your grocery store's dairy section, usually next to the cottage cheese and sour cream.

And if you're able to lay your hands on a container of fresh ricotta, even better.

Fresh ricotta has so many uses. In addition to pasta dishes, it can be baked with garlic and a little lemon zest into a cheesy spread for crostini or crackers. It can add tang to pancakes, pitch-hit for cooked potatoes in your favorite gnocchi recipe and can add pizazz to cakes and cookies, such as these delicate Holy Cannoli cookies.

Holy Cannoli Cookies

Ingredients

1 cup softened unsalted butter
1 cup granulated sugar
2 eggs, slightly beaten
½ cup fresh ricotta cheese
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups all-purpose flour
10 ounces mini chocolate chips (about 1½ cups)
1 cup shelled pistachios, optional

Directions

In a mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar together until fluffy. Add beaten eggs and ricotta cheese and mix until well combined.

Add vanilla extract, cinnamon and fresh orange zest.

Sprinkle in baking powder, baking soda and salt and mix until well combined. Mix in flour.

Stir in 1 cup of chocolate chips and nuts, if using. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line the baking sheet with parchment paper or lightly grease.

Drop 1½ tablespoons of cookie dough 2 inches apart on prepared sheet. Bake for 8-10 minutes, or until lightly brown on bottom and around the edges. Remove to cooling rack to cool.

Microwave remaining chocolate chips in 20-second intervals, stirring in between until smooth. Drizzle over cookies.

Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

PHOTOS BY LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

A short walk from Camp Humphreys' walk-in gate, Que Rico has various art styles displayed on its walls and even on the floor.

A tasty fiesta of food and art

Que Rico serves delicious Mexican dishes amid colorful surroundings close to Camp Humphreys

BY LUIS GARCIA
Stars and Stripes

Authentic Mexican cuisine is a rare find outside North America, but Que Rico comes as close as you'll find in Pyeongtaek, South Korea.

Just a 5-minute walk from Camp Humphreys' walk-in gate, this colorful eatery adds flair with examples of various art styles displayed on its walls and even on the floor.

The menu is limited when compared to typical Mexican restaurants in America but features handmade breads and tortillas.

The enchiladas suizas (16,000 won, or about $12) arrives as three flour tortillas with grilled chicken, a spicy red sauce, melted cheese and onions. Warning: the sauce comes with a tremendous kick.

On a later visit, my party ordered two gringas and two carnitas tacos (15,000 won and 11,000 won, respectively).

The gringas are prepared al pastor over flour tortillas and topped with pineapple, melted cheese, onion, cilantro, salsa and lemon juice. The carnitas consist of pork stew meat over corn tortillas topped with onion, cilantro, salsa and lemon juice.

AFTER HOURS
S. KOREA

Que Rico

Location: 151-11 Gaeksa-ri, Paengseong-eup, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea
Hours: Open 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sundays. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays.
Prices: Tacos start at around $9; more elaborate dishes top out at around $16.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A 5-minute walk from Camp Humphreys' walk-in gate.
Information: Online: facebook.com/urquerico

Luis Garcia

After that, I placed a to-go order for a torta Cubana, a sandwich filled with pork, sliced cheese, sausage, a sunny-side up egg, sliced bacon, melted cheese, onions, tomato and jalapeño. It cost 17,000 won.

Que Rico offers Jarritos, a classic Mexican soda, in several flavors. Various Mexican and Korean beers are also available.

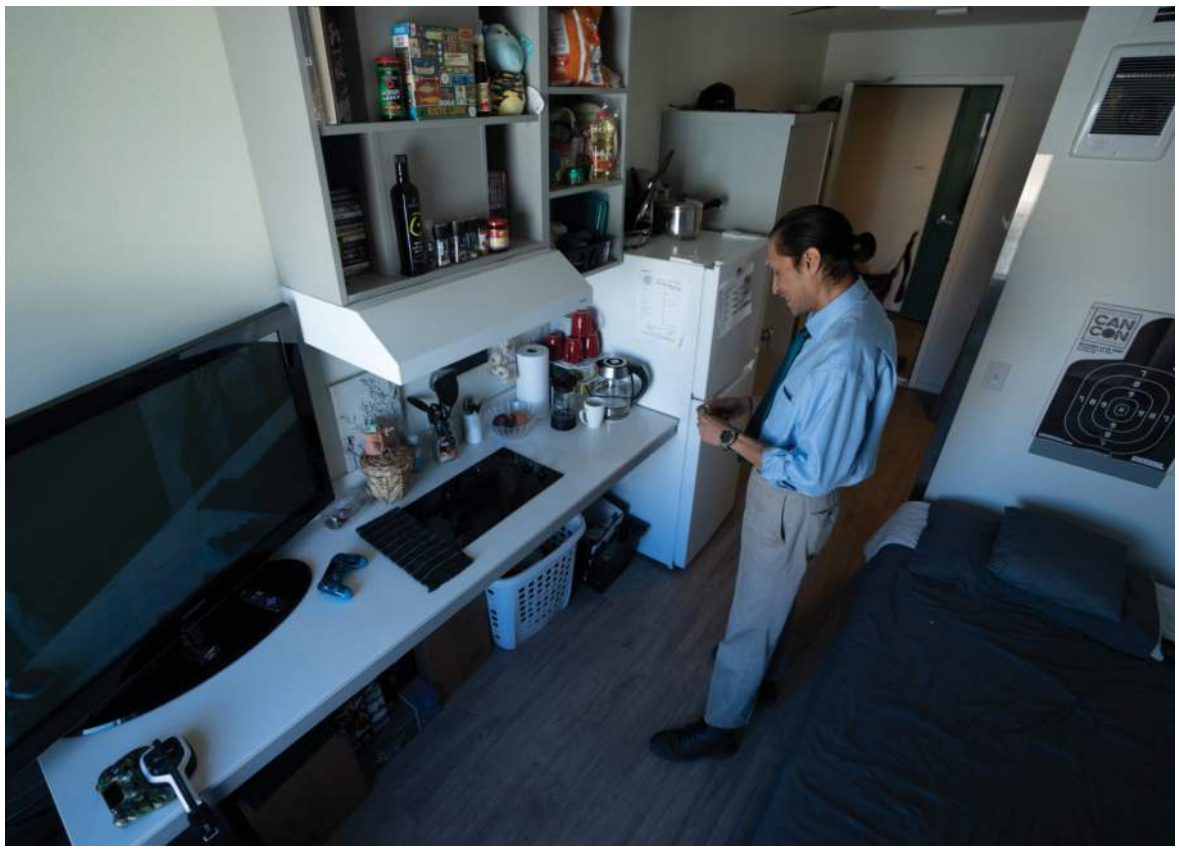
garcia.luis@stripes.com
@LGarcia_Stripes

Que Rico restaurant comes as close to authentic Mexican cuisine as you're likely to find in Pyeongtaek, South Korea.

Carnitas and gringas tacos come with delicious, fresh toppings on either flour or corn tortillas.

The torta Cubana from Que Rico is filled with pork, sliced cheese, sausage, a sunny-side-up egg, sliced bacon, melted cheese, onions, tomato and jalapeño.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



JENNY KANE/AP

Cheyenne Welbourne stands in his micro-apartment at The Starlight affordable housing building that is run by Central City Concern, a Portland-based homeless services nonprofit, on March 15 in Portland, Ore.

JENNY KANE/AP

Welbourne's Portland, Ore., micro-apartment has a curtained-off toilet and sink and is just big enough to fit a single bed, a chair and a TV. It also has a kitchenette with induction cooktop.

JENNY KANE/AP

The Starlight has shared showers for Welbourne and other residents.

Homes for the homeless

Micro-apartments are back, after nearly a century, as need for affordable housing soars in states like Washington and Oregon

BY HALLIE GOLDEN AND CLAIRE RUSH
Associated Press

Every part of Barbara Peraza-Garcia and her family's single-room apartment in Seattle has a double or even triple purpose.

The 180-square-foot room is filled with an air mattress where she, her partner and their children, ages 2 and 4, sleep. It's also where they play or watch TV. At mealtimes, it becomes their dining room.

It's a tight squeeze for the family of asylum seekers from Venezuela. But at $900 a month — more than $550 less than the average studio in Seattle — the micro-apartment with a barebones bathroom and shared kitchen was just within its budget and gave the family a quick exit from its previous arrangement sleeping on the floor of a church.

"It's warm. We can cook ourselves. We have a private bathroom. It's quiet," said Peraza-Garcia, whose family came to the U.S. to escape crime in Venezuela and so she could access vital medication to combat cysts on her kidney. "We can be here as a family now."

Boarding houses that rented single rooms to low-income, blue-collar or temporary workers were prevalent across the U.S. in the early 1900s. Known as single room occupancy units, or SROs, they started to disappear in the postwar years amid urban renewal efforts and a focus on suburban single-family housing.

Now the concept is reappearing — with the trendy name of "micro-apartment" and aimed at a much broader array of residents — as cities buffeted by surging homelessness struggle to make housing more affordable.

"If you're a single person and you want a low-cost place to live, that's as cheap as you're going to get without trying to find a subsidized apartment," said Dan Bertolet, senior director of housing and urbanism for the nonprofit research center Sightline Institute.

The Pacific Northwest is a leader in the resurgence of this form of affordable housing. Oregon last year passed a bill opening the door for micro-apartments and Washington state lawmakers this year did the same, starting to clear red tape that for years has limited construction of the tiny units, which are about a third the size of an average studio apartment.

The Washington bill, which was signed last month by Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee after receiving nearly unanimous support in the Legislature, would require most cities to allow micro-apartments in residential buildings with at least six units, according to the Department of Commerce. It takes effect in late 2025.

The legislation is an effort to counteract skyrocketing housing prices and, in the Seattle area, one of the nation's highest rates of homelessness, as well as a critical housing shortage.

Extremely low-income renters — those below federal poverty guidelines or earning 30% of the area median income — face a shortage of 7.3 million affordable rental homes, according to a National Low Income Housing Coalition report published last month. Such households account for 11 million — or nearly one-quarter — of renters nationwide, the report said.

MANUEL VALDES/AP

Four-year-old Fraiber Peraza looks at a phone while Franklin Peraza sits on an inflatable bed March 11 in their micro apartment in Seattle.

Rep. Mia Gregerson, who sponsored Washington's bill, said she predicts the measure will lead to thousands of units being built in her state, providing unsubsidized affordable housing to everyone from young people getting their first apartment and elderly people downsizing to those coming out of physical or mental health treatment.

"Government can't close that gap all by itself; it has to have for-profit, market-rate housing built all at the same time," said Gregerson, a Democrat.

The U.S. lost hundreds of thousands of SROs in the last half of the 20th century as associations with poverty and substandard

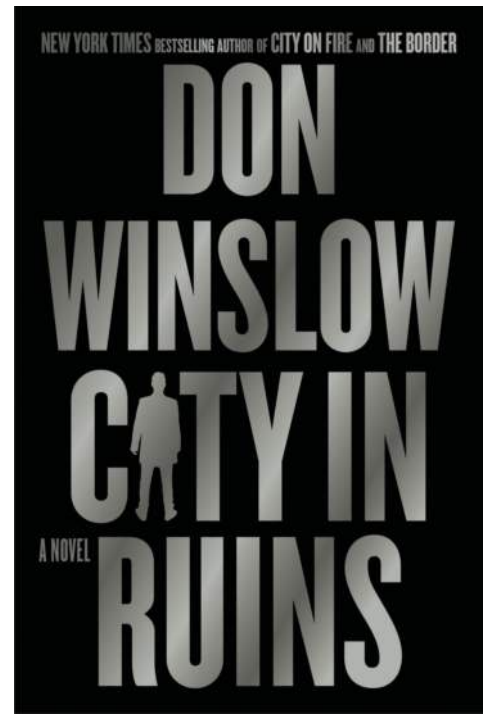
SEE APARTMENTS ON PAGE 27

"All I had was just me and my backpack, and that's it. ... I just want a home, you know? A nice home, a decent home."

Cheyenne Welbourne
moved into a micro-apartment in Portland, Ore., last March after years of living on the streets

Farewell to fiction writing

Don Winslow exits genre in high style with trilogy-concluding novel 'City in Ruins'



By Alma Katsu
Special to The Washington Post

And so, we come to the end. The end of an exemplary crime fiction trilogy and the self-chosen end of a popular author's writing career. But I've gotten ahead of myself.

With "City on Fire" (2022), "City of Dreams" (2023) and now "City in Ruins," Don Winslow has written a near-perfect saga: He's created great characters who grow and develop while remaining true to their essence, and a sweeping story that morphs and expands over time, with the stakes escalating until they reach nosebleed heights at the end. Winslow says he has given up writing novels to devote his time to political activism: "I wanted in the fight. I didn't want to be writing a fiction obituary of America losing democracy," he told the Los Angeles Times. With "City in Ruins," he says farewell in high style.

Winslow modeled this trilogy on Virgil's Roman tragedy "The Aeneid," an intention made obvious by the epigrams in all three novels. However, you needn't be a Roman or Greek scholar to enjoy these books (and though it is best to read them in order, it's not vital). These novels wear their inspiration lightly. The epic poems do not bleed into Winslow's story but linger like ghosts in the background.

At the center of the three "City" books is Danny Ryan, a Rhode Island version of "a Springsteen kind of guy," a onetime Providence waterfront worker from a scrappy Irish American family. Over the course of the series, he has gotten mixed up with the mob, fought epic (yet doomed) battles and resurrected himself in Hollywood. After marrying into the family of the king of the Irish mob in Providence, he ends up their reluctant leader in a fatalistic war with the Italians, runs to the West Coast with his family and crew to lie low when it all blows up, manages to claw back his life, gets involved with a movie that's being made about the Rhode Island mob and falls in love with a celebrity superstar.

In the final moments of "City of Dreams," Ryan is in a bad place: in the desert, facing off against a Mexican gang lord who wants to end him. The woman he loves is dead, and he blames himself. Ryan's life has turned around in the opening of "City in Ruins." He now owns a casino on the Las Vegas Strip; he's being a good dad to his son, Ian, with whom he escaped from Rhode Island six years earlier; and he has a psychotherapist girlfriend who's very different from his previous love interests — in other words, good for him.

But then Ryan decides to indulge his ambition by building a billion-dollar resort casino complex — Il Sogno, which sounds like Las Vegas' latest wonder, the Sphere, expanded into a full-blown resort. Winslow shows us step by step what it takes to do something this grandiose in Vegas, where everything is supersize, especially the egos.

The project puts Ryan on a crash course with one of his hitherto friendly rivals. Vegas being Vegas, everyone has some connection to the mob, even if it's distant, and before long, Ryan — who thought he had successfully left his gangster past behind — finds himself up to his eyebrows in trouble as old vendettas are resurrected.

Peter Moretti Jr., son of one of Ryan's former rivals, returns to the States after serving a tour in Iraq only to find out that his mother and her lover are responsible for his father's death. In a scene involving the clan godfather, Winslow shows how an innocent like Peter Jr. is manipulated into carrying the water for his late father's crime gang. The rest of this thread is devoted to the courtroom battle between the good district attorney who wants to see Peter Jr. pay for his crimes and the sharpshooting defense attorney who uses every trick he's got to get the young man freed.

There's also Chris Palumbo, the late Peter Sr.'s second-in-command, who took to the wind after a partnership with a crooked FBI agent went south. We see him holed up in Nebraska with a hippie-ish woman (a la Odysseus and Circe in "The Odyssey") until he comes to realize that he must return to his wife and children back East. He knows he must face the music for his misdeeds and confront the Providence crime gang that wants him dead.

Winslow immerses readers in the hidden world of organized crime, highlighting its inner workings. Whether it's jousting between lawyers, etiquette among wiseguys or the history of the mob in Las Vegas, Winslow knows how to make the reader feel like one of the cognoscenti. For instance, he shows how he toed the line through the first two books so that Ryan can be in the casino business in Book 3: "Danny's lawyers argued his cause. 'There isn't a single fact linking Mr. Ryan to organized crime,' the lead attorney said. 'Not an arrest, not an indictment, never mind a conviction. All you have are rumors and a few articles in the tabloids.' … The appeal was an effort to keep Danny out of the [Nevada Gaming Control Board's] dreaded Black Book, which would have prevented him from even entering a casino."

"City in Ruins" can be read as a meditation on honor, revenge and justice, but it also challenges readers to examine beliefs about morality. In "City in Ruins," whether you're in the world of gangsters or law enforcement or the casino industry, Winslow shows us that morality rides a sliding scale. Ryan is the closest thing the novel has to a hero, trying to inflict the least amount of pain and suffering while saving his family and friends, and willing to sacrifice his dreams as payment for his past sins. In absolutist terms, however, he's no hero — yet the reader continues to root for him. Even the villains in "City in Ruins" question whether the gods are protecting Danny Ryan or if he will ever get his comeuppance. For the answer, you're going to have to read the book.

Apartments: Alternatives are shelters, overcrowding, living on street

FROM PAGE 26

accommodation sparked restrictive zoning laws. Some cities outlawed their construction altogether — a loss some housing experts say helped contribute to the homelessness crisis.

Facing that crisis and a critical housing shortage, cities and states across the nation are now shifting their stance.

In December, as her state grappled with a massive influx of migrants, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced a $50 million program aimed at repairing and renovating 500 SROs across the state.

But there is concern that this type of affordable housing is not an ideal fit for an especially vulnerable group — families.

There are more than 3,800 unhoused families with children in the Seattle area, among the highest in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Cities need to focus on building affordable housing that also includes larger units, such as studios and one-bedroom apartments, said Marisa Zapata, a land-use planning professor at Portland State University.

"My biggest concern is that we will see them as the solution and not do right by our community members by building the housing that people want," she said of micro-apartments.

The bill passed by Oregon lawmakers last year requires local governments to allow SROs in areas zoned for residential use. The provision took effect Jan. 1.

Central City Concern, a Portland-based homeless services nonprofit, leases more than 1,000 SRO units — both subsidized and not — to people who are considered extremely low income. It helps people struggling to access housing due to eviction histories and poor credit scores.

The units have a median rent of $550 a month, making them vital for people exiting homelessness or living on fixed incomes, such as those with disabilities, said Sarah Holland, senior director of supportive housing and employment. More than 80% of tenants were formerly homeless, she said, and some have been living in their units for 30 years.

Manuel Valdes/AP

Barbara Peraza-Garcia holds her 2-year-old daughter while her partner Franklin Peraza sits on their bed, in their micro apartment in Seattle on March 11. The family of four live in a 180-square-foot unit.

Cheyenne Welbourne moved into one of the nonprofit's micro-apartments in downtown Portland last March after years of living on the streets. The room, which has a curtained-off toilet and sink, is just big enough to fit a single bed, a chair and a TV. But to him, it's a treasured home that he's decorated with colorful lights, potted plants and action figures. He uses the small kitchenette, which features an induction cooktop, for making the tea he loves to drink.

"All I had was just me and my backpack, and that's it," he said. "I was just happy to be in here and that I didn't have to spend another winter out there.

"I just want a home, you know? A nice home, a decent home."

Some experts hope the Pacific Northwest will inspire more states to take similar steps.

"The alternatives are … people being in shelters, people being on the street, people being doubled, tripled, quadrupled up," said Vicki Been, faculty director at New York University's Furman Center and a law professor.

For Peraza-Garcia's family in Seattle, the tight squeeze is worth it to be in the same complex as cousins and walking distance of grocery stores, a park and preschools. They plan to spend the next year in the micro-apartment and then move to a bigger place … if family members can get good-paying jobs.

Country without borders

Beyoncé's new album reinforces dedication to Black reclamation

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

First, Beyoncé arrived at the 2024 Grammy Awards in full cowboy regalia — making a statement without saying a word. Then, during the Super Bowl, she dropped two hybrid country songs: "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages." All of that heralded her latest album, "Act ll: Cowboy Carter," released March 29.

As a Black woman reclaiming country music, she stands in opposition to stereotypical associations of the genre with whiteness. "Cowboy Carter" was five years in the making, a direct result of what Beyoncé has called "an experience that I had years ago where I did not feel welcomed … and it was very clear that I wasn't," most likely a reference to a 2016 CMAs performance that resulted in racist backlash.

Fast forward eight years, and last month, she became the first Black woman to top Billboard's country music chart. "Cowboy Carter" doesn't shy away from country: A prerelease track list teased potential collaborations with Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson and included a mention of the "Chitlin' Circuit," a Jim Crow-era network of Black entertainment venues. One song is titled "The Linda Martell Show," after the performer who became the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry.

Nevertheless, she declared on social media, "This ain't a Country album. This is a 'Beyoncé' album" — in 10 words separating herself from the industry while still identifying herself as someone working in and with the genre.

Texas and daddy lessons

Beyoncé hails from Houston, a city with a rich musical interplay of "blues and country and hip-hop," says Francesca T. Royster, a DePaul University professor and author of "Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions."

Houston is also home to the rodeo, the country's oldest Black trail ride and Black cowboy culture — in 1800s Texas, one in four cowhands were Black. Royster says Beyoncé has inherited this history by exploring country sounds, as evidenced on the country-zydeco-R&B barnburner "Daddy Lessons" from 2016's groundbreaking "Lemonade."

At the time, though, the Recording Academy rejected its inclusion in the Grammys' country categories. "Daddy Lessons" was also kept off country radio, says Alice Randall, author of "My Black Country" and the first Black woman to write a coun-

SEE BORDERS ON PAGE 29

Beyonce's latest album, "Cowboy Carter," is her ode to country music and was five years in the making.

Blair Caldwell

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEW

‘Act II: Cowboy Carter’ defies categorization

By Maria Sherman
Associated Press

“Nothin’ really ends / For things to stay the same they have to change again,” Beyoncé sings on “Act ll: Cowboy Carter,” the opening lines of the opening track, “Ameriican Requiem.”

“Them big ideas, yeah, are buried here / Amen.”

In some ways, it is a mission statement for the epic 78-minute, 27-track release — or at the very least, functions like a film’s title card to introduce yet another blockbuster album.

In the days leading up to “Cowboy Carter,” the pop superstar said this “ain’t a Country album” but “a ‘Beyoncé’ album” — positioning herself in opposition to country music’s rigid power structures and emphasizing her ability to work with the style with her latest genre-defying opus.

A capital-C country album, it is not — and of course it isn’t. Beyoncé is an eclecticist, known for her elastic vocal performances: in a moment, choosing to belt close to godliness and in another, moving with ease into a fractured run, inheriting histories through the vowels she stresses, the handclaps she introduces and the genres she utilizes. (That’s evident in the instruments as well, which range from washboard, pedal steel, banjo, mandolin, Vibraslap, bass ukulele and mandolin, to name a few.)

If the album, five years in the making, was inspired by the racist backlash she faced after performing at the 2016 CMAs with the Chicks, as many fans have theorized, she’s eclipsed it and then some. Tell Beyoncé she isn’t welcomed in your space; she’ll carve out a bigger one.

Beyoncé
Act II: Cowboy Carter
(Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia)

“Ameriican Requiem” bleeds into a reimagination of a Beatles classic, “Blackbiird.” It was originally written by Paul McCartney about desegregation in American schools with particular emphasis on the Little Rock Nine, the first group of Black students to desegregate a white public school in 1957. In Beyoncé’s rendition, harmonies are stacked. She’s joined by Tanner Adell, Brittney Spencer, Reyna Roberts and Tiera Kennedy — some of the most exciting voices in contemporary country — who are also Black women.

They aren’t the only next generation highlighted on “Cowboy Carter”: Willie Jones’ rich Louisiana tone turns “Just for Fun” into trail-riding gospel country. Shaboozey’s country-rap marks a pivot in the album’s trajectory on “Spaghettii,” setting the listener up for the singular listening experience of the Patsy Cline-channeling “Sweet Honey Buckiin’,” with its Jersey club beats.

Country veterans, too, appear: Willie Nelson is a rough-around-the-edges radio DJ on the fictional station KNTRY — the effect is an alternative America where terrestrial country radio does not overwhelmingly prefer playing white performers; snippets of Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s “Down by the River Side,” Chuck Berry’s “Maybellene” and Roy Hamilton’s 1957 “Don’t Let Go” bled into Nelson’s smoky voice.

“Jolene” is a reimagined take on the 1973 Dolly Parton original; it’s preceded by “Dolly P,” a spoken word interlude from Parton. “Remember that hussy with the good hair you sang about?” she says, referencing “Becky with the good hair” from her single “Sorry” off of 2016’s “Lemonade.” “Reminded me of someone I knew back when, except she has flaming locks of auburn hair. Bless her heart! Just a hair of a different color, but it hurts just the same.” Beyoncé’s version, of course, is very Beyoncé — there’s no shrinking and begging for this woman to step off; it’s a warning.

Perhaps Beyoncé’s clearest predecessor on this album is Linda Martell, the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry. Martell’s 1970 landmark record “Color Me Country” should be considered country canon; she offered Black women rare visibility in a genre stereotypically associated with whiteness. She also appears twice on “Cowboy Carter,” first providing clarity on the complicated origins of country in “Spaghettii.”

“Genres are a funny little concept, aren’t they?” she says, laughing. “In theory, they have a simple definition that’s easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined.”

Shared histories and families are abundant: “Protector” begins with Beyoncé’s daughter Rumi Carter asking for “the lullaby, please,” leading into a tearjerker of an acoustic ballad centering motherhood.

If listeners position “Act ll: Cowboy Carter” next to “Act l: Renaissance,” they might view the record as a continued dialogue in the Beyoncé mythos: “Lemonade” established Beyoncé’s dedication to Black empowerment. “Renaissance” reclaimed House music for its Black progenitors, a sprawling release that placed techno, Chicago and Detroit house, New Orleans bounce, Afrobeats, queer dance culture and beyond on the same dance floor — and highlighted the frequent invisibility of that Black performance in the music history books. “Cowboy Carter” does something similar with country music — and, in true Beyoncé fashion, extends well beyond it, as vessel, captain and crew on this journey.

“Bodyguard” borders on soft rock; “YA YA” interpolates Nancy Sinatra’s “These Boots Were Made for Walkin” and The Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations”; “Riiverdance” and “II Hands II Heaven” bring back the electronica of “Renaissance.” “ll MOST WANTED” features raspy-rich Miley Cyrus, and interpolates Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide.” “Levii’s Jeans” modernizes the timeless combination of R&B and country ballads, amplified by a surprising collaborator in a crooning Post Malone — lest we forget he also hails from Texas.

Effortlessly, “Cowboy Carter” weaves canonized classics into the same breath as Beyoncé’s country music evolutions and Black music history preservations. If the Beatles and the Beach Boys are unimpeachable, so is Martell, so is Beyoncé, and Adell, and so on.

The magic here, of course, is Beyoncé’s mastery of art and message.

At the center of everything is her larger-than-life performance — serious and jubilant, like when she plays her nails as percussion, an ode to Parton doing the same on “9 to 5.” (That’s on “Riiverdance,” a club song that recalls country’s Celtic folk origins.)

On “Cowboy Carter,” historical course-correcting — and evolution — goes down with honey. Lessons are learned on the dance floor, on the radio, at the imagined honky-tonk, in headphones.

It’s an album that will require close examination for full enjoyment — but Beyoncé fans have long learned to be great students.

Borders: Beyoncé intertwines genres, makes the music her own

FROM PAGE 28

try No. 1 hit in Trisha Yearwood’s “XXX’s and OOO’s (An American Girl).”

The hybridized approach of “Daddy Lessons” came two years before Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” raised similar questions of what kinds of artists are embraced by the country music industry when they experiment with different styles.

The 2016 CMAs

If there is a lightning rod country music moment in Beyoncé’s career to date, it’s her performance of “Daddy Lessons” at the 2016 Country Music Awards with The Chicks, six days before Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election.

“The CMAs are an important place to stage and test the ways that the genre is willing to collaborate and connect,” says Royster.

The award show regularly welcomes pop musicians to perform alongside country acts in an attempt to reach new audiences — Justin Timberlake and Chris Stapleton performed together the year prior.

Critics celebrated the powerful performance, but online, Beyoncé was met with racist backlash and some viewers labeled her “anti-American.”

In 2003, just before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, The Chicks’ Natalie Maines said they were ashamed to be from the same state as then-President George W. Bush. There was immense backlash that “reflected the kind of preferences that country music ended up moving towards in that post-9/11 moment, where country radio shunned The Chicks, stopped playing their music, and instead, played these jingoistic anthems and helped popularize them,” says Amanda Martinez, author of the upcoming “Gone Country: How Nashville Transformed a Music Genre into a Lifestyle Brand.”

When they joined Beyoncé, it was their first time back at the CMAs.

Beyoncé had aligned herself with the Black Lives Matter movement and performed at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show surrounded by Black dancers in black leather and black berets, reminiscent of the Black Panthers. Some football fans vowed to #BoycottBeyonce.

For Beyoncé and the Chicks — symbols of progressive politics in a traditionally conservative arena — “it was just too much,” says Martinez, who adds that the CMAs were very excited to get Beyoncé, and then quickly changed course, scrubbing any mention of her appearance from social media.

Redefining country music

If “Lemonade” established Beyoncé’s dedication to Black empowerment, and her last album, “Act l: Renaissance” is viewed as an exercise in reclaiming House music, on this album, “she is reclaiming the Black roots of country music,” says Martinez.

That reclamation is evidenced in the inclusion of banjoist Rhiannon Giddens, whose music and scholarship highlights the contributions of Black Americans in folk and country.

Martinez sees Beyoncé’s direct predecessors in Martell, The Pointer Sisters and Tina Turner’s 1974 country album — and a present one in up-and-comer Tanner Adell, who sings, “looking like Beyoncé with a lasso,” on her 2023 single “Buckle Bunny.”

In Randall’s view, the impossible-to-define origins of country music center on three forms: Celtic ballad storytelling, African influences and evangelical Christianity.

“Country music can’t be country music without Black influences,” she says, pointing out that Hank Williams’ mentor was a Black musician from Alabama named Rufus “Tee Tot” Payne and that the American folk group The Carter Family learned from Lesley Riddle.

“Country music has a rigid, centralized power structure that has wielded a lot of power over ‘what country music is,’” says Martinez.

Beyoncé is not beholden to those forces.

“Beyoncé is Black, so she can be seen as an outsider,” she says. “But she says, ‘This ain’t a country album.’ I think that this speaks to the distinction between country music as an art form without boundaries, and the industry of country music.”

Randall agrees: “The songs that have been released preserve the best of country and take country to places it has never been. Evolving and preserving is a facet of the genius of Beyoncé.”

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Christian McBride and Edgar Meyer

But Who's Gonna Play the Melody? (Mack Avenue Records)

Get ready to rumble. This album will work out your sound system.

Virtuosos Christian McBride and Edgar Meyer play double bass duets on their first joint album, "But Who's Gonna Play the Melody?"

The answer? Both.

McBride and Meyer swap the lead on their instrumental recordings, which include original tracks and cover songs. Despite the limitations that come with being a two-man bass band, they explore all manners of music while defying genre divides.

The duo has the bona fides to make lemonade out of lemons. McBride is a jazz superstar fluent in R&B. Meyer's remarkably diverse résumé ranges from bluegrass to classical. He's also an adjunct associate professor of bass at Vanderbilt University, where the album was recorded.

They draw on a multitude of genres, plucking, bowing and showing how expressive their 20-pound instruments can be.

Listening to Meyer and McBride is a physical experience, especially with good speakers, and the sound waves they generate could dislodge a nightclub from its foundation.

The album isn't just about booming. Meyer and McBride make music that's engaging even when the notes are too low to hum. The basses growl, snort, buzz and crack wise. They share the same rhythm, engage in conversation and explore divergent syncopation, while solos sing, swing and careen.

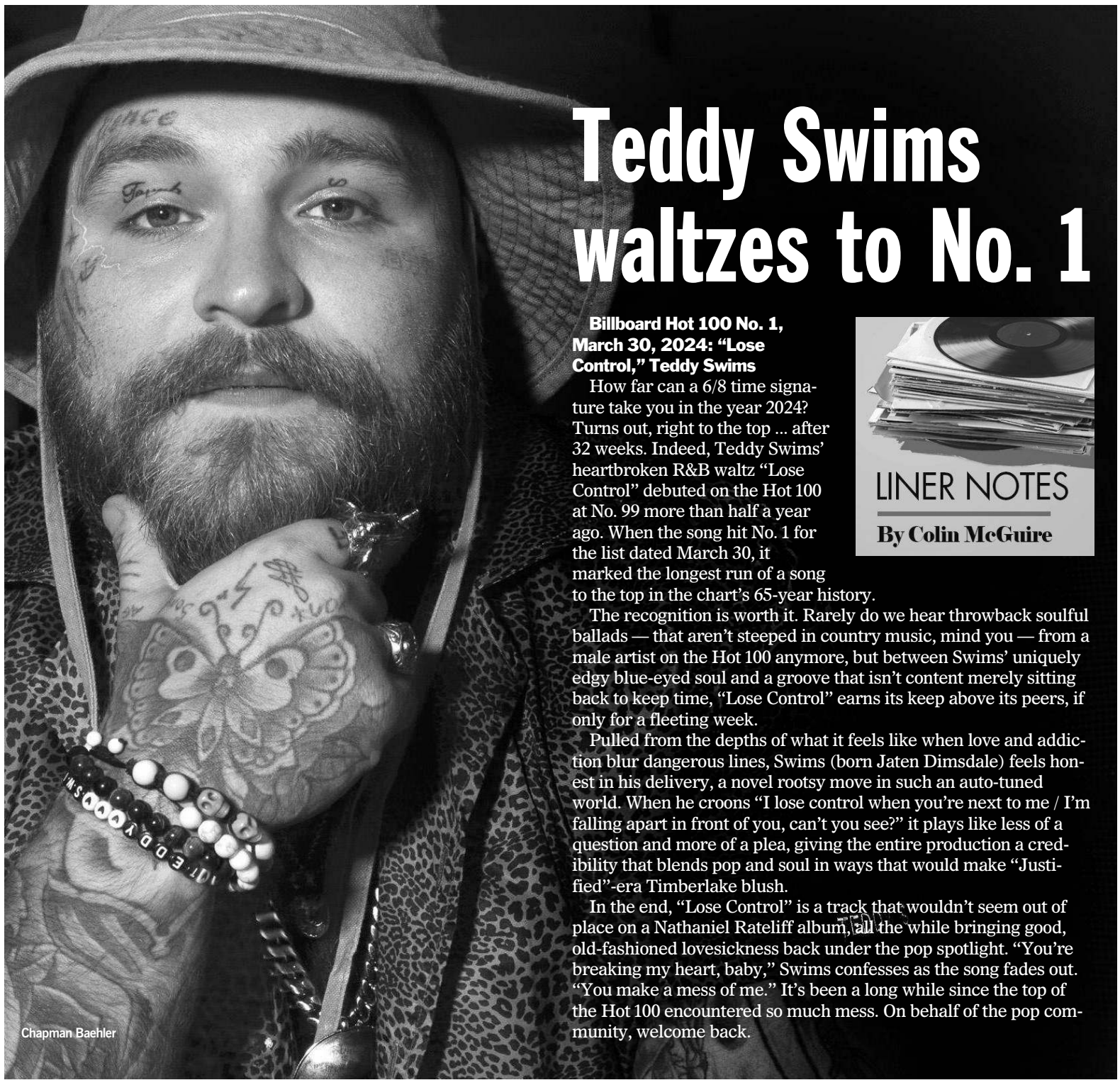
The mood is generally jolly, and even the typically melancholy "Days of Wine and Roses" moves at an oddly jaunty tempo. The duo's approach works better on the other tunes.

"Bebop, of Course" gets jazzy, while "Canon" mixes the 17th century with the 21st. "Philly Slop" is an invitation to dance, and the stop-start "FRB 2DB" would tickle James Brown.

McBride and Meyer take turns at the keyboard for lyrical piano-bass duets, including a beguiling cover of "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," with the melody an octave lower than usual.

Best of all is Bill Monroe's "Tennessee Blues." Meyer and McBride make it a fiddle tune, sawing with a zeal that could topple timber. In short, they get down.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press


Chapman Baehler

Teddy Swims waltzes to No. 1

LINER NOTES

By Colin McGuire

Billboard Hot 100 No. 1, March 30, 2024: "Lose Control," Teddy Swims

How far can a 6/8 time signature take you in the year 2024? Turns out, right to the top ... after 32 weeks. Indeed, Teddy Swims' heartbroken R&B waltz "Lose Control" debuted on the Hot 100 at No. 99 more than half a year ago. When the song hit No. 1 for the list dated March 30, it marked the longest run of a song to the top in the chart's 65-year history.

The recognition is worth it. Rarely do we hear throwback soulful ballads — that aren't steeped in country music, mind you — from a male artist on the Hot 100 anymore, but between Swims' uniquely edgy blue-eyed soul and a groove that isn't content merely sitting back to keep time, "Lose Control" earns its keep above its peers, if only for a fleeting week.

Pulled from the depths of what it feels like when love and addiction blur dangerous lines, Swims (born Jaten Dimsdale) feels honest in his delivery, a novel rootsy move in such an auto-tuned world. When he croons "I lose control when you're next to me / I'm falling apart in front of you, can't you see?" it plays like less of a question and more of a plea, giving the entire production a credibility that blends pop and soul in ways that would make "Justified"-era Timberlake blush.

In the end, "Lose Control" is a track that wouldn't seem out of place on a Nathaniel Rateliff album, all the while bringing good, old-fashioned lovesickness back under the pop spotlight. "You're breaking my heart, baby," Swims confesses as the song fades out. "You make a mess of me." It's been a long while since the top of the Hot 100 encountered so much mess. On behalf of the pop community, welcome back.

NCT Dream

DREAM()SCAPE (SM Entertainment)

When is a good dream not a great dream? When you don't remember it in the morning.

When is a good album not a great album? When it's bold, but not bold enough, and commercial, but not commercial enough.

NCT Dream's fifth EP, "DREAM( )SCAPE" (pronounced "dream escape"), explores the beats of a cool, imaginary urban landscape. But it comes in and out of focus through a combination of tempo changes, innovative sounds (smoothie slurp, anyone?) and catchy yet somehow forgettable hooks.

It's a mysterious quandary: one second you get into it with both feet, but the minute a song is over, it's gone into musical ether.

Overall, the dynamic six-track record "DREAM( )SCAPE" offers a variety of styles. "UNKNOWN" is a middling, smooth electronic pop tune. It wisely moves on to the kinetic "BOX," a catchy, swagger-heavy beast with an unusual scratchy industrial sound.

"Carat Cake" is a fun pun on the run from a specific genre — it's angling for a bit of a trap cred wrapped in a fast-paced electro sound with the silly yet endearing chorus "Wow, wow wow wow / That's a Carat Cake." Try dislodging that from the subconscious.

Opener "icantfeelanything" is the epic-sounding song of the EP with its deep bass interludes. But then "Smoothie" comes along with its chirpy tempo-changing lanes and fun production, while "Breathing" is a fast-paced yet relaxing ballad.

With plenty of certified bops under their belt, the South Korean septet make the best of the material, vocally. But only fans will stick around for this pleasant-enough offering.

— Cristina Jaleru
Associated Press

Judas Priest

Invincible Shield (Columbia)

If you think Judas Priest is a bunch of past-their-prime old geezers, you've got another thing coming.

The heavy metal quintet that formed in 1969 and released its first album in 1974 may be a bit long in the tooth, but their latest album "Invincible Shield" shows them rocking faster and harder than ever before, which is saying quite a bit.

Judas Priest has helped define the sound and look of heavy metal, particularly with a string of hits in the 1980s like "Living After Midnight," "Electric Eye" and "Breaking The Law."

Most of the band members are well into their 70s, yet they play fast and hard enough to put 20-something rivals to shame.

The disc kicks off with "Panic Attack," which lifts the foundational riff of Rush's "Tom Sawyer" and grafts it onto what sounds very much like Priest's own "Painkiller" in a case of theft so brazen that they should send three-quarters of what they earn on this song to Geddy Lee. But the track is blazingly fast, as are the two that follow: "The Serpent and the King" and the title track.

"As God Is My Witness" is even faster, if that's possible, and no proper heavy metal album would be complete without a biker anthem; "Sons of Thunder" fits the bill nicely.

The guitar duo of Richie Faulkner and Glenn Tipton, who is still able to play in the studio despite Parkinson's disease, make increasing use of twin harmonic solos on several tracks.

And at age 72, after more than 50 years of torturing his vocal cords, singer Rob "The Metal God" Halford is still delivering the goods.

— Wayne Parry
Associated Press

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Netflix

Prince Andrew (Rufus Sewell) gets questioned by BBC "Newsnight" journalist Emily Maitlis (Gillian Anderson) about allegations of sexual misconductct in the drama "Scoop."

A 'Scoop' that held royalty accountable

Gillian Anderson, Rufus Sewell re-create a 2019 media disaster for House of Windsor in Prince Andrew drama on Netflix

By Jill Lawless
Associated Press

As the past few weeks have shown, British royalty and the media can be an explosive mix.

The absence of the Princess of Wales after abdominal surgery in January sparked uncontrolled online speculation that was first heightened by the release of a manipulated photo, then eased by a video statement from Kate disclosing that she is being treated for cancer.

It's a reminder that when palace privacy meets public curiosity and the public interest, things can get messy.

For more evidence, watch "Scoop," a behind-the-scenes Netflix drama about a disastrous interview Prince Andrew gave in 2019 in response to allegations of sexual misconduct. Now streaming, it stars Rufus Sewell as Andrew and Gillian Anderson as journalist Emily Maitlis, who grilled the prince for the BBC's "Newsnight" program.

The feature-length drama is a return to royal themes for "The X-Files" and "Sex Education" star Anderson, who played a leading role in Season 4 of "The Crown," albeit as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, not as a member of the House of Windsor. Anderson says the "complex" relationship between royalty and media needs reassessment.

"Whether that's (Prince) Harry and his cases against the tabloids and all of the truths around that that have come to the fore, or other aspects that are becoming more public knowledge, it probably needs a proper rethink," Anderson told The Associated Press.

Prince Andrew agreed to be interviewed to address reports about his friendship with financier Jeffrey Epstein — found dead in a New York prison in August 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges — and allegations by a woman that she'd had sex with Andrew when she was 17 and was trafficked by Epstein.

"Scoop" is based on a book by Sam McAlister, the tenacious producer who secured the interview. As played by Billie Piper, she promises the palace: "An hour of television can change everything."

That proved grimly true for Andrew.

Under Maitlis' gentle but determined probing, the prince denied all allegations, failed to show empathy for the exploited young women and said Epstein had "conducted himself in a manner unbecoming," which struck many viewers as an understatement.

He claimed he couldn't have been at a nightclub with his accuser on an alleged date because he was at a suburban Pizza Express restaurant with his daughter Princess Beatrice. He couldn't have been sweating on the dance floor because an "overdose of adrenaline" during his time as a helicopter pilot in the 1982 Falklands War had left him unable to perspire.

McAlister recalled the "extraordinary" experience of being in the room as the interview was recorded inside Buckingham Palace.

"As a journalist, and an ex-lawyer, I knew profoundly that he was doing something that would change the course of his life and the course of life of everyone in the royal family," she said at the show's London premiere.

Andrew initially thought the interview had been a great success, even giving Maitlis a tour of Buckingham Palace after it was recorded.

But he "stepped back" from public duties days after it was broadcast, and has not returned. In 2022, he reached an out-of-court settlement with his accuser, Virginia Giuffre, paying her an unspecified sum without admitting guilt.

Sewell, who spent up to four hours a day being transformed into the prince with makeup and prosthetics, said he tried to find "all of the contradictions" in Andrew. He saw a man whose self-image was forged through a lifetime of deference from those around him, and who played up to his tabloid image as a "naughty scamp" — "Randy Andy" in his bachelor youth, "Air Miles Andy" in his role as a British trade emissary.

Sewell said he felt Andrew's self-image was "dependent on the other party acquiescing to the idea that he is the prince."

"In order to maintain the idea of himself, he needs someone to play along," said the British actor, recently seen as a mischief-making ambassadorial spouse in "The Diplomat" on Netflix. "And the interview is the process by which this fish finds himself out of his bowl, gulping for air — because Emily Maitlis does not even need to be rude or aggressive, she just needs to not agree to her side of that contract. And suddenly he is a creature that cannot get the oxygen."

The show's re-creation of the infamous interview is remarkably tense, even for viewers who have seen the real thing.

"We prepared completely separately, and there was no rehearsal," Anderson said. "So when we came together to shoot the interview, it was on our first day of work together and we started the day sitting across from each other in those chairs and the cameras rolled. And so there was tension in and of itself."

"Scoop" is the first of two TV dramas based on the interview. Amazon's rival miniseries "A Very Royal Scandal" is due later this year, with Michael Sheen as Andrew and Ruth Wilson as Maitlis.

Anderson is proud that "Scoop" is a story with "four strong female leads in the ensemble." The cast also includes Keeley Hawes as Andrew's private secretary Amanda Thirsk and Romola Garai as "Newsnight" boss Esme Wren.

As for what the palace can learn from it, she said: "If this tells us anything, it would be that the royal family should never do an interview at all."

"But actually," she added, "I think what is amazing and what stands out is the importance of independent journalism, to hold authority to account and to at least attempt to get some semblance of the truth."

A problem underfoot with your soles

Companies developing footwear with plant-based bottoms that won't leave toxic contaminants behind when they degrade

BY DALIAH SINGER
The Washington Post

Thomas Bogle was logging dozens of miles on the spruce- and pine-lined backcountry trails that weaved around his home in Steamboat Springs, Colo., as he trained for an ultramarathon. His mind wasn't focused on his target pace, though. Instead, he couldn't stop thinking about the micro bits of plastic and rubber the soles of his shoes were shedding on the forest floor.

With every step we take, our shoes leave behind an invisible trail of toxic contaminants that can potentially harm soil, water and animal health.

Nearly 24 billion pairs of shoes were produced in 2022. Each contains myriad plastics and synthetic, petroleum-based rubber. Of the 500,000 tons of microplastics that seep into the world's oceans each year, up to 35% come from synthetic textiles, including footwear, according to one estimate, from the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Footwear alone accounts for 1.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, not that far below the airline industry, which is responsible for around 2%.

Though shoe brands have taken strides toward sustainability, from offsetting carbon emissions to swapping out materials in the upper sections of shoes, they have largely overlooked soles. Now a slew of companies are starting to focus underfoot by developing new plant-based soles that won't leave plastics behind when they degrade.

Bogle, who spent eight years working in product development at a footwear company, is now working on an outsole from plant byproducts, while Keel Labs, a sustainable materials company started by two fashion design students, is making soles out of seaweed-based fiber. Native Shoes has a line of slip-ons made from an algae-based material, and Unless, a plant-based streetwear company in Portland, Ore., rolled out a shoe made entirely of biodegradable materials in conjunction with NFW.

Shoes are designed "to last 1,000 years, and we use [them] for 100 days," said Yuly Fuentes-Medel, program director of climate and textiles at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Your sneakers' waste problem

Americans alone toss out 300 million pairs of shoes every year. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, only about 13% of clothing and footwear is recycled in the United States.

That's partly because of the complexity of the shoemaking process. The average sneaker is composed of more than 130 individual pieces, according to Fuentes-Medel, who recently helped create the Footwear Manifesto, a report on how to make the industry more sustainable. Manufacturing a pair requires at least 100 steps on average, including stitching and gluing, she said. That makes it nearly impossible to recycle them or take them apart to reuse their materials.

The plastics in shoes also pose problems while consumers are wearing them. A 2022 study in the Journal of Hazardous Materials suggests abraded plastic from shoe soles reduces soil's capacity to hold water and impedes photosynthesis. Another study, published in Science of the Total Environment, attributed mass Coho salmon die-offs to 6PPD, a chemical added during tire manufacturing that is also found in footwear.

Plant-based soles address some of these issues. They won't shed plastic into the environment, and making them generates fewer carbon emissions and takes fewer toxic chemicals. But shoes made with natural materials face some of the same challenges as their plastic counterparts once they're discarded. Taking the shoes apart is still hard, and recycling them will require setting up new infrastructure.

The more consumers ask for these products, Fuentes-Medel said, the more likely that infrastructure will come online, eventually leading to a more sustainable shoe industry.

"You don't want to consider your shoe something you're going to throw away, and that's a long-term change," she said. "It's a mental model that needs to change for us to keep building all the products of the future."

PHOTOS BY TONY BYNUM/For The Washington Post

Thomas Bogle, the chief executive of Solum, examines a single straw fiber, as Andrew Bishop, farmer and owner of Ag Processing Solutions of Great Falls, Mont., and Gene Kelly, professor of pedology at Colorado State University, discuss growing the raw product they plan to use to make outsoles.

That raw fiber gets ground into a fine powder, turned into pellets and later pressed into the sole.

A fertilizing sole

After spending more than a decade working in the industry, Bogle had an idea to create an entirely plastic-free shoe outsole —the component that was the first to wear out on his shoes during his long runs in the Colorado wilderness. He enlisted Gene Kelly, a professor of pedology (or soil science) at Colorado State University and a fellow runner, who helped develop a shoe sole made of beeswax, vegetable oils and plant byproducts such as leaves and husks from corn, hemp and other crops.

Bogle's company, Solum, partners with farmers and producers across the country to grow and harvest the materials, before converting them into bio-pellets and blending them with natural rubber to craft the sole.

Instead of shedding toxic chemicals, Bogle explained, Solum's soles deposit biologically derived nutrients back into the soil as they naturally wear down over time. A consumer survey by the company found that the average lifetime of a shoe outsole is around three years. Solum's break down about 11% faster by design.

Ponto, a San Diego-based footwear brand, is planning to launch a product with a Solum outsole later this year.

"Products should really be made the same way plants grow: Build it so it's regenerative, it's circular, otherwise our landfills are going to be filling up," said Lanna Lottman, the company's chief product officer. "We don't want you to buy a shoe from us every year."

British brand Rock Fall is releasing a number of styles that include Solum's sole this month. The company, which focuses on safety and technical footwear, is also using algae in the upper parts of its shoes and castor oils instead of petroleum.

These days, Bogle runs and hikes, and even golfs, in shoes with his company's plant-based soles.

"Footwear is a very hard product to fix," he said. "It really requires completely shifting how we think about footwear and how we make footwear and the materials we use."

"Products should really be made the same way plants grow: Build it so it's regenerative, it's circular, otherwise our landfills are going to be filling up. We don't want you to buy a shoe from us every year."

Lanna Lottman

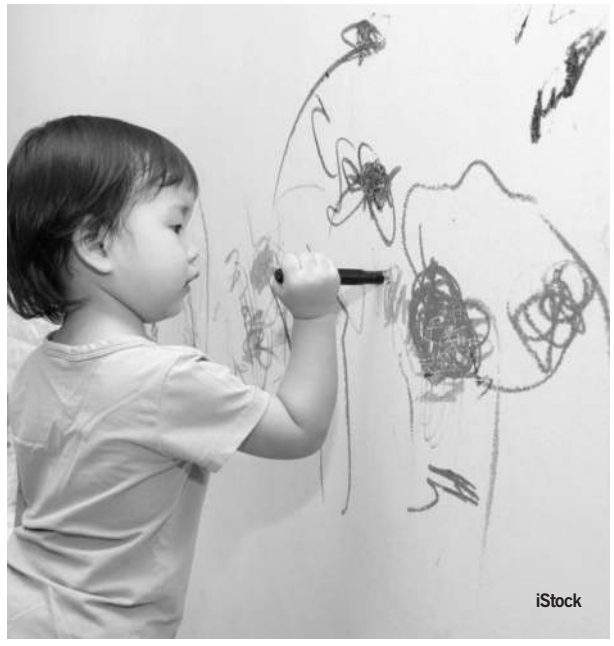
the chief product officer of Ponto, a San Diego-based footwear brand, planning to launch a product with a Solum outsole later this year

WEEKEND: FAMILY

When stuff, kids collide

Parents wonder whether to own fine furnishings when children are young

BY CAITLIN GIBSON
The Washington Post


iStock

I was standing in the kitchen, unloading the dishwasher, when I heard the cheerful voice of my 22-month-old from the living room.

"Dark blue," he sang, "Dark, dark blue!"

So cute, I thought, stacking plates. I wonder what he's singing about. Then, with sudden certainty, I knew. The rug. Oh God, the rug.

Here I must back up and explain that the rug — thick, cream-colored wool, neither cheap nor machine washable, but so lovely — was doomed from the start. We had acquired it as excited first-time homeowners four years earlier, when we had an infant daughter and an old dog, both of whom spent much of their waking hours regurgitating fluids. In the years since, as we added another child to the mix, we'd grown ever more adept at dabbing and spot-cleaning and vacuuming and cringing. The rug took a beating, but it was hanging in there.

Until that evening in July 2022, when I bolted from the kitchen to the living room and found my toddler artiste, a marker in his fist as he rolled joyfully atop a rug that was now emphatically marked with bold (dark blue) lines, and I knew then that the rug wasn't coming back from this one.

I wondered if this was a lesson, a reminder that kids and nice things don't really mix, that the joy of a pleasing aesthetic can't trump the unbridled chaos and mess of small children. What's the right call? Do you create a home you love knowing that a baby might gnaw on your wood furniture like a tiny beaver, or leave colored pencil scratches on the dining room table, or add Crayola stripes to the area rug? Do you put off owning something you'd enjoy, keep a beloved heirloom locked away until some later, safer date? I decided to ask a couple of interior designers who are also parents and spend much of their time designing spaces for families.

"Parents are wondering this all the time," Saudah Saleem, an interior designer and mother of five in Maryland, told me. "So many are like, 'I love this aesthetic, but is it realistic to move forward with this?' "

These might be parents who are looking to transform their home, or maybe they just want to live comfortably, or perhaps they have their eye on a single room or piece of nice furniture.

"But they also have children, who are not going anywhere for 18 years at least. And no, you don't wait 18 years to be comfortable at home!" Saleem says. "I truly don't believe it's a sacrifice you have to make."

OK! So maybe the rug wasn't such a ridiculous choice after all?

"Well..." says Lina Galvão, co-founder of the design studio Curated Nest and a mom of two in Connecticut, and I can tell she's trying to think of the gentlest way to say this. "Rugs and accessories — those are the things you're going to invest the least in, at least if you have kids or pets ... I don't usually recommend an expensive rug." She pauses, then adds, very kindly: "Or, maybe a darker color?"

But with other key items (couches, tables, cabinets, shelving), Galvão does suggest investing in something that will last, if possible.

"Your entire home is going to age and wear more beautifully if you make good selections to start with," she says. "Wear and tear is inevitable, and we try to pick furnishings and materials that are going to resist that as much as possible, but nothing is 100% bulletproof. And you never know what your kids are going to bring to the table."

(I confess that my son once literally brought his brand-new baby teeth to the corner of our solid cherry coffee table, but Galvão is unfazed: "Oh, that's patina," she says, laughing. "That's fine!")

Whatever our goal or budget, whatever our personal style, both Galvão and Saleem emphasize that the decisions we make about our home matter more than we might realize.

Before she became an interior designer, Galvão worked in health care, she says; she spent a lot of time in hospitals, where she noticed how profoundly the physical environment affected the emotional state of the patients who were there to receive care.

That connection is especially true in our own homes, too, she says.

"I think a lot of people will kind of dumb down or minimize the impact of having a well-designed space, and what that does for your well-being and mental health," she says. "Our homes are one of the few spaces in our lives where we have full creative control. It is a blessing to have a home that feels like you."

Saleem agrees that aesthetics play a role in how we feel — the colors that we use, the mood it evokes.

"And that trickles down," she says. "How does our mood impact our kids' moods?"

Here, then, is where we have to know a little something about our moods, and what evokes them. If a lighter-colored couch makes you happy, that matters; if a child spilling juice all over it will send you into the stratosphere, that matters, too. (Fortunately, the designers note, there are far more stain-resistant materials out there these days, which make a wider range of colors feasible.) We should consider how we feel about delaying something that makes us happy, the right balance between embracing the present while planning for the future.

This question also arises often around furniture that has been passed down in families, over which we might feel especially protective. I tell Galvão about the dining room furniture in my house, a solid walnut table and cabinet of Scandinavian design that belonged to my grandparents throughout my own childhood. Before the table stood in our house, it was waiting for us in a storage unit — and we could have left it there longer, where it wouldn't be scarred by pencils and Hot Wheels.

"But why shouldn't you be surrounded by beautiful things every day that mean a lot to you?" Galvão says. "It's beautiful, it's meaningful, it's free. Use your heirlooms!" But: "Know thyself," she adds, repeating the phrase for emphasis. If your jaw is clenched every time a child is in proximity to your cherished hand-me-down, perhaps employ a protective barrier, or place it somewhere less trafficked.

Saleem is also in favor of including our most beloved pieces — "heart pieces," she calls them — in our spaces. And if we're going to be living around them, then life is going to happen to them.

"But if it's locked away in a storage unit until your kids are 25, you're missing all those moments, that part of the story," she says.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Best friendships don't need a fantasy setting

I tooted the horn before pulling out onto our street. My husband waved, with the dog standing nearby. I wouldn't see them again until Sunday afternoon.

When our military family was active duty, I was content taking a couple of trips a year. But now, as a "retired" military spouse that doesn't move anymore, I depend on weekend getaways to break up the monotony of civilian life.

I had planned this trip with my high school girlfriends months ago, and my excitement was building. In four hours, I'd arrive in the Catskills and meet up with Patrice, my best friend since ninth grade, and three other girlfriends whom I hadn't seen much since we graduated from high school in 1984 — Andrea, Peggy and Ann.

As my GPS rattled on, I thought of the tote bag in the trunk containing a mother lode of high school memorabilia: my old yearbooks, photographs, journals and dog-eared notes passed in study hall. My hoarding tendencies had paid off.

While making my way to upstate New York, I envisioned our rental house. The Airbnb photos depicted a spacious, Swiss-style chalet, seemingly plucked straight out of the Alps, in a gorgeous sylvan setting, with a charming warming hut and an outdoor hot tub.

"We're going to have a blast," I thought, imagining us as unrealistically stylish 30-somethings, flipping locks of shiny hair, flashing brilliant white teeth, wearing slouchy cotton sweaters and well-worn Levis, drinking fine wines around an open fire in front of a spectacular mountain backdrop.

It was a bad habit of mine — imagining things to be far better than reality — that set me up for disappointment.

That cold, drizzly afternoon, I drove my car through dreary, mud-splattered towns, past abandoned motor lodges and rinky-dink diners. Over a bridge and up a hill, I turned onto an unpaved dead-end road, and finally, onto our rental property as directed by my GPS. "You have arrived."

"Wait, what?" I said. "This is it?" The small, wood-sided house looked nothing like the photographs online.

"It'll be fine," my best friend said, laughing. Patrice had driven up from Pittsburgh with Peggy. Soon, Andrea arrived, followed by Ann, wearing her old cheerleading sweater.

I was prepared to impose a strict activity schedule to combat awkward silences. However, the chatter never stopped. Conversation and laughter flowed for hours on end as if we'd never left high school. Food and drink appeared in a haphazard, chaotic dribble throughout the night, until the table was piled high with burnt pizza burgers, wine glasses, pierogies, peanut butter confection bars, buffalo chicken dip, cheese and crackers, chips, yearbooks and photographs.

"Oh, my God, listen to this!" each of us yelled before reading lines from an old note or yearbook autograph. Our adolescent scribblings expressed the immature sentiments of our teen years: "The dance is in two days and no one has asked me yet!" "I hate Chemistry!" "Did you tell him I like him?" "Gag me with a fork!" "I'll never get a boyfriend!" "She's so FAKE!"

Although we'd made plans to explore the Catskills on Saturday, we barely made it out of our pajamas. Pots of coffee led to Bloody Marys and mimosas. That afternoon, while snow fell over the Catskills, we sat around a roaring fire in the warming hut, singing along to The B-52s, The Go-Go's, The Squeeze, U2, Prince, Tears for Fears, Depeche Mode, The Police and more.

That night, although we were all reluctant to stuff our imperfect 57-year-old bodies into bathing suits, we got in the hot tub. Bobbing in the bubbles, it was as if we were 15 again, cracking juvenile jokes and busting each other's chops.

On my Sunday drive home, it occurred to me that the weekend hadn't disappointed me after all. In fact, reality was even better than I'd imagined.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

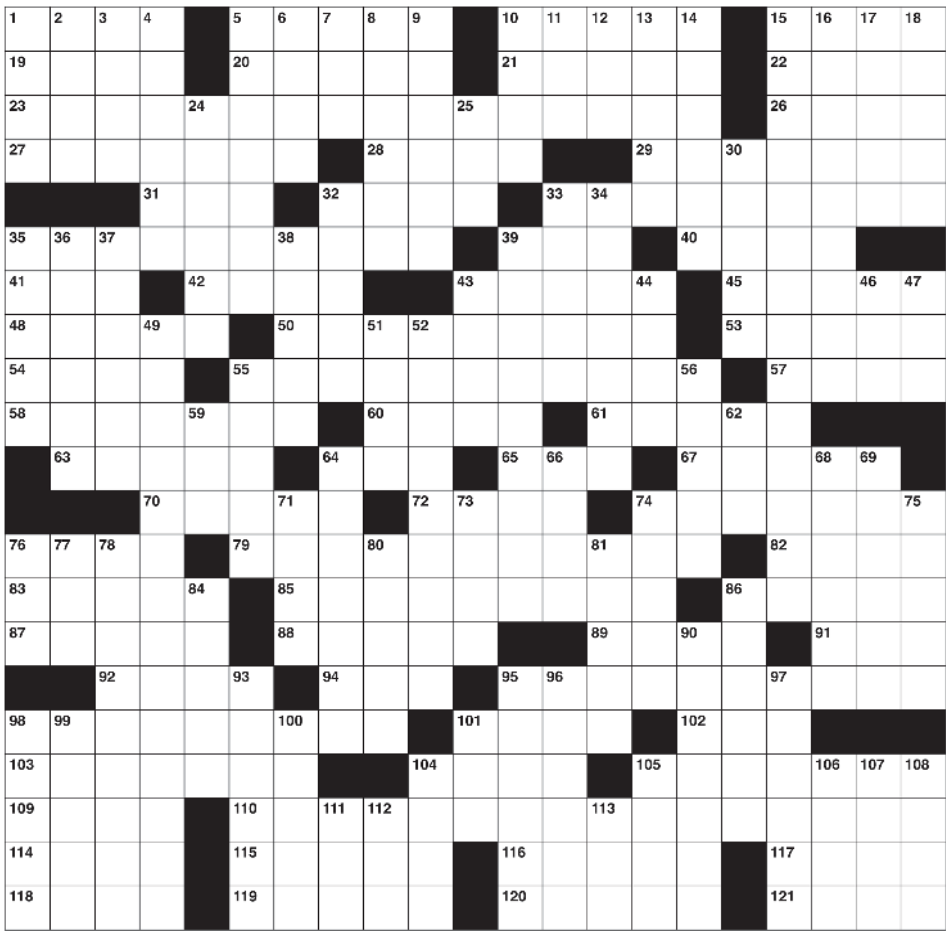
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

FEELING POSSESSIVE

BY JOHN KUGELMAN / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

John Kugelman, of Gainesville, Va., is a software engineer and musician. This is his third crossword for The Times — all Sundays. Crossword construction and music "tickle all the same brain cells," he says, as each is "half-creative and half-technical." He adds: "Sundays are like the progressive rock of crosswords. I love 20-minute songs and I love 21x21 grids."



ACROSS

1 "No ____, Bob"
5 Commuting options
10 Thunderstruck
15 Lead-in to cure or cab
19 Peace symbol
20 Absolutely necessary
21 Snack brand with a hyphen in its name
22 Simoleons
23 Oil futures?
26 The Australia-shaped "Pride of Australia," for one
27 Pool side
28 Crest
29 Sack
31 Parent's exhortation
32 Real bind
33 People who might answer "What's up?" with "The sky"
35 Castle moat?
39 ____ Scott-Heron, writer of "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"
40 Entitled guys?
41 Kind of rating system in chess
42 Audio option
43 Slangy greeting
45 Sales prospects
48 Smoky tendrils
50 Shoves, to a poker player
53 Ed of "Up"
54 Daredevil Knievel
55 Sugar and cocoa content?
57 ____ the Orange (Syracuse mascot)
58 Scoop, so to speak
60 Braces might fix them
61 Auto company headquartered in Yokohama
63 Veg-O-Matic maker
64 Over there
65 Humble home
67 Wavy dos
70 International date line?
72 Bordeaux besties
74 They prevent accidental scribbles
76 ____ room
79 "Lights! Camera! Action!"?
82 Biblical twin
83 Midas's downfall
85 Reprimand to a rubbernecker
86 Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible
87 Pale purple
88 N.B.A. analyst Burke
89 Police alerts, for short
91 What goes around the head at Diamond Head
92 Preposterous
94 The "en" in "enby"
95 "And . . . cut!"?
98 Personal theory that isn't in the source material
101 Fed. statute that took down the Gambino crime family
102 Mama's boy
103 Not working, say
104 He literally jumped the shark on "Happy Days"
105 85 to 115, typically
109 Skier Lindsey
110 Stock prices?
114 Monthly utility bill: Abbr.
115 Rapper with seven posthumous albums
116 Persona
117 Quantum ____
118 Utility figure
119 "Killers of the Flower Moon" tribe
120 Wears on
121 River swirl

DOWN

1 Some email attachments
2 Beat handily
3 "I'm done talking"
4 Called into question
5 Binary
6 Homebodies?
7 Go after
8 Actual title of "The Piña Colada Song"
9 Drunken state
10 Comet alternative
11 Come down with
12 See 30-Down
13 Pours poorly
14 Pays (up)
15 Noodles and floaties?
16 Chess move with a French name
17 Render more youthful, as with C.G.I.
18 Sweden has more than 200,000 of them (of which only 1,000 are inhabited)
24 Sudden contractions
25 God's first word on the first day
30 With 12-Down, world champion boxer who retired an undefeated 24-0
32 Put up with
33 Novelist Cather
34 Not authorized
35 Cut
36 Late-night host John
37 Finish behind
38 Breed of cattle
39 Swinger's attire
43 Hinged fastener
44 "The Empire of the ____" (H.G. Wells short story)
46 Lions or Tigers, on a scoreboard
47 Theater sign
49 Leaf fossils?
51 Brand whose sales spiked after an appearance on "Stranger Things"
52 Portrayer of Bob Newby on "Stranger Things"
55 Parade sight
56 Carriers of master keys, informally
59 ____ blue
62 Garden variety?
64 At 78, she became the oldest artist to have a No. 1 dance hit
66 Inits. on a "Choice" label
68 Indian spice mixture
69 Necessities for retiring?
71 Org. with the tagline "No More Victims"
73 Something furry on a fir
74 Practices mise en place
75 "____ Q" (rockabilly classic)
76 James Bond studio
77 Memorable time
78 Machine learning model that mimics the human brain
80 Company whose misconduct helped spawn the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (2002)
81 Muse with a lyre
84 Record label that famously turned down the Beatles
86 Supercell, e.g., for short
90 Europeans who speak a non-Indo-European language
93 Can't not
95 Encouragement at karaoke night
96 Skin condition
97 Turn on
98 What drones and anxious parents do
99 ____ Gay
100 Hub
101 Bacardi, por ejemplo
104 Part of a clock
105 Playwright William
106 Call for
107 Mortarboard tosser
108 Catch a glimpse of
111 Many an I.R.S. employee
112 Witch
113 Coltrane's instrument

GUNSTON STREET

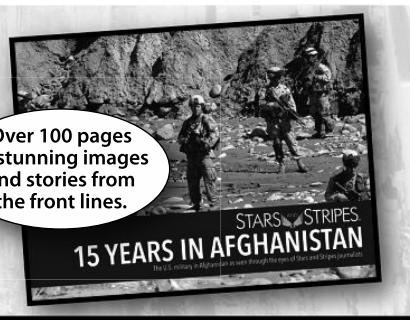
"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

STARS AND STRIPES 15 YEARS IN AFGHANISTAN

The story of the U.S. military's role in Afghanistan, as seen through the eyes of Stars and Stripes journalists covering America's longest war.

Only $14.99 with Free Shipping



ORDER NOW at www.stripesstore.com

FACES

No need to kiss rockers goodbye

Swedish company pays $300M for catalog, says biopic, Kiss avatar show in the works

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

It's never really the end of the road for Kiss. The hard rock quartet have sold their catalog, brand name and IP to Swedish company Pophouse Entertainment Group in a deal estimated to be over $300 million, it was announced Thursday.

This isn't the first time Kiss has partnered with Pophouse, which was co-founded by ABBA's Björn Ulvaeus. When the band's current lineup — founders Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons as well as guitarist Tommy Thayer and drummer Eric Singer — took the stage at the final night of their farewell tour in December at New York City's famed Madison Square Garden, they ended by revealing digitized avatars of themselves.

The cutting-edge technology was created by George Lucas' special-effects company, Industrial Light & Magic, in partnership with Pophouse. The two companies recently teamed up for the "ABBA Voyage" show in London, in which fans could attend a full concert by the Swedish band in their heyday, as performed by their own digital avatars.

The ways in which Kiss' avatars will be utilized has yet to be announced, but Pophouse CEO Per Sundin says fans can expect a biopic, a documentary and a Kiss experience on the horizon.

An avatar show is scheduled to launch in the second half of 2027 — but don't expect it to look anything like "ABBA Voyage," Sundin told the AP. And fans can expect it to kick off in North America.

Sundin says the goal of the purchase is to expose Kiss to new generations — which he believes sets Pophouse apart from other acquisitions of music catalogs.

"The record companies, the three big ones that are left, they're doing a fantastic job, but they have so many catalogs and they can't focus on everything," he says. "We work together with Universal (Music Group) and Kiss, even though we will own the artists' rights, and we're doing it in conjunction with Kiss. But yes, we bought all rights, and that's not something I've seen that clear before."

"I don't like the word acquisition," Gene Simmons tells the AP over Zoom, assuring the band would never sell their catalog to a company they didn't appreciate.

EVAN AGOSTINI, INVISION/AP

From left: Gene Simmons, from left, Tommy Thayer, and Paul Stanley of Kiss perform during the final night of the "Kiss Farewell Tour" at Madison Square Garden in New York on Dec. 2.

"Collaboration is exactly what it's about. It would be remiss in our inferred fiduciary duty — see what I just did there? — to the thing that we created to abandon it," he continued.

"People might think, 'OK, now Pophouse is doing that stuff and we're just in Beverly Hills twiddling our thumbs.' No, that's not true. We're in the trenches with them. We talk all the time. We share ideas. It's a collaboration. Paul (Stanley) and I especially, with the band, we'll stay committed to this. It's our baby."

And within that: no more live touring, for real. "We're not going to tour again as Kiss, period," he says. "We're not going to go put the makeup on and go out there."

Kiss are Pophouse's second investment outside of Sweden: In February, Cyndi Lauper entered a partnership with the company that included the sale of the majority share of her music and a new immersive performance project she's calling an "immersive theater piece" that transports audiences to the New York she grew up in.

The aim is to develop new ways to bring Lauper's music to fans and younger audiences through new performances and live experiences.

"Most suits, when you tell them an idea, their eyes glaze over; they just want your greatest hits," Lauper said at the Pophouse headquarters in Stockholm in February. "But these guys are a multimedia company. They're not looking to just buy my catalog; they want to make something new."

Beyoncé: Stevie Wonder the harmonica player on her rendition of 'Jolene'

Los Angeles Times

Beyoncé just revealed that Stevie Wonder is the person who played the harmonica on her rendition of Dolly Parton's "Jolene." Featured on her newest album "Cowboy Carter," her version completely re-imagines Parton's original narrative — with Beyoncé forewarning Jolene instead of Parton's previous pleading.

As Wonder presented her with the Innovator Award at Monday's iHeartRadio Music Awards in L.A., she expressed gratitude and love for him, for his music and for "making a way for all of us."

"Whenever anyone asks me if there's anyone I can listen to for the rest of my life, it's always you. So thank you, God bless you," Beyoncé said.

Wonder responded, "I want to thank you for motivating the world to be a better place."

In that moment, Beyoncé gave all her watchers and listeners a look into "Cowboy Carter's" most talked-about track, "Jolene." With Beyoncé credited as the performer and producer, she has listed Parton as the sole writer of the song — despite Beyoncé reconstructing the 1973 classic. Now Wonder is thrown into the notable mix as a contributing musician.

"And thank you for playing the harmonica on 'Jolene,'" Beyoncé said.

Wonder joins Parton, Willie Nelson, Miley Cyrus and Post Malone as some of the collaborators, contributors and features on "Cowboy Carter." Released last week, the singer's country-influenced venture already is Spotify's most streamed album in a day in 2024 and it has the most first-day streams by a female country artist on Amazon Music.

AMY SUSSMAN/TNS

Beyoncé, left, shown with Stevie Wonder on Monday at the iHeartRadio Music Awards in Los Angeles, revealed Monday that Wonder lent his harmonica skills to her rendition of "Jolene."

SiriusXM gives channel 13 to Swift for 1 month

It's Taylor Swift's world and the rest of us are just shaking it off to the sounds of it, as the superstar gets her own SiriusXM station in the run-up to the release of her new album.

"Channel 13 (Taylor's Version)" will churn out Swift fan favorites across North America 24/7 from April 7 through May 6, SiriusXM announced in a press release Tuesday.

"The 13th day of the channel, Friday, April 19, coincides with the release of Taylor Swift's new album, 'The Tortured Poets Department,' " the broadcaster said, noting the new album will be played from front to back "continuously throughout the weekend."

In addition to Swift's nearly two-decades' worth of music, "including Eras Tour favorites, all (Taylor's Versions), From the Vault tracks, live tracks, [and] bonus tracks," the channel will feature Swifties' sharing "their own personal and meaningful experiences with Taylor and her music."

New York Daily News

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Archaeological site found on Air Force base land

NM HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE — An archaeological site that might shed more light on New Mexico's ancient history has been discovered recently within the boundaries of Holloman Air Force Base.

Base officials said geomorphologists and members of the 49th Civil Engineer Squadron environmental flight uncovered a campsite that's about 8,200 years old and belonged to some of the state's first settlers.

Matthew Cuba, the squadron's cultural resource manager, said the formation of the white sand dunes buried the site with windblown silt protecting the archaeological remains.

He said digs at the site have turned up about 70 items ranging from flake stones to a rare example of an early ground stone.

2 catfish farms settle suit alleging unequal pay

MS JACKSON — Two Mississippi catfish farms have settled a lawsuit alleging that they brought workers from Mexico to the U.S. and paid them significantly more than they previously paid local Black farmworkers for the same type of labor, plaintiffs' attorneys said Tuesday.

Southern Migrant Legal Services and Mississippi Center for Justice sued Jerry Nobile, his son Will Nobile and their farms in August on behalf of 14 Black farmworkers. The federal lawsuit said the Black workers were "systematically underpaid and denied job opportunities for years in favor of non-Black foreign workers" at Nobile Fish Farms, which also raise corn and soybeans.

The plaintiffs' attorneys said the lawsuit concluded on "mutually agreeable terms" under a confidential settlement.

Court records show the lawsuit against Nobile Fish Farms was settled in February.

ELIZABETH ROBERTSON, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/AP

Creating a bouquet

Ramsy F. of Philadelphia helps his daughter Sofia F., 4, pick tulips at the 2024 Dalton Farms Festival of Tulips! in Swedesboro, N.J., on Easter Sunday. The farm has 400,000 daffodils, 150 varieties of tulips and planted one million bulbs. The festival ends on April 14.

Voters reject stadium tax for Royals and Chiefs

MO KANSAS CITY — The future of the Royals and Chiefs in Kansas City was thrown into question Tuesday when residents of Jackson County resoundingly voted down a sales tax measure that would have helped to fund a new downtown ballpark along with major renovations to Arrowhead Stadium.

Royals owner John Sherman and Chiefs president Mark Donovan acknowledged long before the final tally that the initiative would fail. More than 58% of voters ultimately rejected the plan, which would have replaced an existing three-eighths of a cent sales tax that has been paying for the upkeep of Truman Sports Complex — the home for more than 50 years to Kauffman and Arrowhead stadiums — with a similar tax that would have been in place for the next 40 years.

The Royals, who had pledged at least $1 billion from ownership for their project, wanted to use their share of the tax revenue to help fund a $2 billion-plus ballpark district. The Super Bowl champion Chiefs, who had committed $300 million in private money, would have used their share as part of an $800 million overhaul of Arrowhead Stadium.

Tax and fee package could flip US Senate seat

MD ANNAPOLIS — A push in Maryland's legislature for hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes and fees has some Democrats concerned that the package may bolster Republican former Gov. Larry Hogan's campaign for U.S. Senate and cost the party its already-narrow majority.

It's a worry that is being amplified by the need for federal support to rebuild Baltimore's collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge.

While a Republican hasn't won a Senate race in Maryland since 1980, Hogan is widely believed to be the GOP's best chance in decades. Hogan's political ascendency resulted in large part from his criticism of tax increases that resonated with a tax-weary electorate in his upset victory in 2014.

"If you go back to 2014 and 2018, I think it's not brain science to see what happened and how the former governor was successful in the state of Maryland, and so that context is very real, and we have to be honest about it," Maryland Senate President Bill Ferguson, a Baltimore Democrat, said.

Democrats hold a tenuous 51-49 majority in the U.S. Senate. And Hogan, who was originally elected governor by railing against tax increases endorsed by the Maryland General Assembly, has already made the Maryland race unusually competitive in the heavily Democratic state.

Former officer sentenced for scheme to help mayor

NY NEW YORK — A former police officer who prosecutors say was the ringleader of a campaign donations scheme to help New York City Mayor Eric Adams during his winning 2021 run was sentenced Tuesday, authorities said.

Dwyane Montgomery was ordered to perform 200 hours of community service and was prohibited from hosting political fundraisers or soliciting contributions on behalf of any campaign for a year, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office confirmed.

The 64-year-old former NYPD deputy inspector agreed to the sentence when he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor conspiracy charge in February. Montgomery was among six people charged with conspiracy, attempted grand larceny and making false statements in relation to the campaign donations plot.

The indictment did not implicate Adams.

Man admits stealing, trying to sell luxury items

CA LOS ANGELES — A Southern California man on Tuesday admitted stealing nearly $2 million worth of jewelry, clothing and accessories from guests at a Beverly Hills hotel, then traveling to Florida to sell the stolen goods, federal prosecutors said.

Jobson Marangoni De Castro, 38, pleaded guilty to one count of interstate transportation of stolen property, a felony that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison, the U.S. Attorney's Office said in a statement.

De Castro tricked a hotel employee into giving him a key to the victims' room and stole all their suitcases while they were at dinner, prosecutors said.

Investigators said De Castro then traveled to Miami, where he messaged a potential buyer on social media, saying he wanted to sell a diamond necklace and luxury watch but he did not have papers for them because he had found them in a box belonging to his late mother. The next day, the buyer wired $50,000 for the jewelry, which De Castro brought to the buyer's Miami store, investigators said.

The jewelry matched the description of the items stolen from the victims in Beverly Hills, and De Castro was arrested, according to court documents.

Tropicana Las Vegas closes after 67 years

NV LAS VEGAS — In the 1971 film "Diamonds are Forever," James Bond stays in a swanky suite at the Tropicana Las Vegas.

"I hear that the Hotel Tropicana is quite comfortable," Agent 007 says.

It was the Tropicana's heyday, a frequent haunt of the legendary Rat Pack, while its past under the mob cemented its place in Vegas lore.

But after welcoming guests for 67 years, the Las Vegas Strip's third-oldest casino shut its doors for good on Tuesday. Employees crowded the main entrance, cheering and crying, while tourists and locals watched the historic moment from behind a yellow gate. A tissue box made its way through the crowd.

Demolition is slated for October to make room for a $1.5 billion Major League Baseball stadium — part of the city's latest rebrand as a hub for sports entertainment.

From The Associated Press

Transportation 944

VEHICLE SHIPPING SERVICES

- International Shipping
- Import & Export
- Inland trucking *(U.S. & Europe)*
- Door to door pick-up/delivery service
- Customs clearance
- All Risk Marine Insurance
- Auto Insurance *(Germany only)*

Trans Global
LOGISTICS EUROPE GMBH

For Further Information Please Contact

	GERMANY	UNITED KINGDOM	U.S.A
Phone:	+49-(0)6134-2592730	+44-(0)1638-515714	+1-972-602-1670 Ext. 1701
Toll-free:	0800-CARSHIP (Germany only)		+1-800-264-8167 (US only)
E-Mail:	info@transglobal-logistics.de	enquiries@carshipuk.co.uk	info@tgal.us
WEB:	www.transglobal-logistics.de	www.carshipuk.co.uk	www.tgal.us

For 2nd POV Shipments - Offices / Agencies near Military Installations

Are you in the picture?

Reading **Stars and Stripes** gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.

No one covers the bases the way we do.

STARS AND STRIPES

Transportation 944

Ship Cars and Containers to and from the USA

WSA
WORLDWIDE SHIPPING AGENCY

OPENING HOURS: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon - Fri
0800-522-6274 or 800-WSA-SHIP (972-7447)
For a free rate request, please email: info@worldwide-ship.de
Visit our Website: www.worldwide-ship.de

Off Duty? Amuse Yourself!

Concert, events, TV, movies, music, video games, celebrity antics...

Get entertained with...

STARS AND STRIPES

STARS AND STRIPES

CLASSIFIED

	EUROPE	MIDDLE EAST	PACIFIC
Advertising	**Doug Dougherty** dougherty.doug@stripes.com +49(0) 631-3615-9000 DSN: 314-583-9000	**Doug Dougherty** dougherty.doug@stripes.com +49(0) 631-3615-9000 DSN: 314-583-9000	**Ichiro Katayanagi** PacificAdvertising@stripes.com DSN: 227-7313, CML +81 (42) 552-2511 ext.77313
Circulation	**Carlo Aquino** Aquino.Carlo@stripes.com +49 631-3615-9136 DSN: 314-583-9136	**David Schultz** Schultz.David@stripes.com +49 631-3615-9136 DSN: 314-583-9136	**Mari Mori** CustomerHelp@stripes.com +81(3) 6385.7333 DSN: 315-227-7333
Reader Letters	letters@stripes.com	letters@stripes.com	letters@stripes.com

ClassifiedsEUROPE

For information on Commercial Rates: **CIV: 0631-3615-9012 or DSN: 583-9012**

Announcements 040

SCAM FADS

Classifieds scams can target both sellers and buyers with classifieds advertisements.

Be aware of the common red flags.

Some of the latest Scam fads are:

- Vehicle buyers wanting to buy sight unseen and have the vehicle shipped through an agent using paypal.
- People saying Free Dog (different breeds) for adoption.

Automotive 140

SELLER BEWARE

Individuals placing classified advertising should use discretion in concluding the sale of their property. Not all potential buyers are reputable or honest. Stars and Stripes suggests that you take precautions to ensure that potential buyers are reputable and will be able to fulfill the terms of the sale. Stars and Stripes is not liable for the contractual relationship between sellers and buyers of merchandise advertised in the newspaper or on the web site.

Are you in the picture?

Reading **Stars and Stripes** gives you a better handle on issues that affect you most.

No one covers the bases the way we do.

STARS AND STRIPES

However you read us, wherever you need us.

Sell Your Stuff!

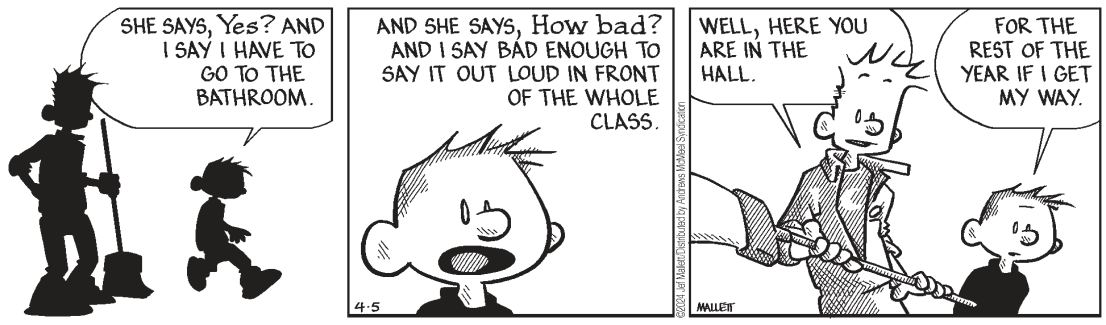
Take the fuss out of packing up for your next **PCS**—sell everything with Stripes ***free classifieds!***

STARS AND STRIPES

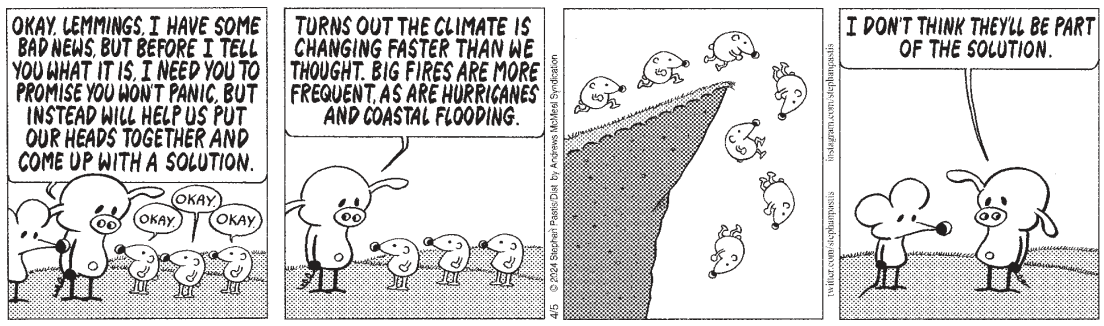
Bizarro

Loose Parts

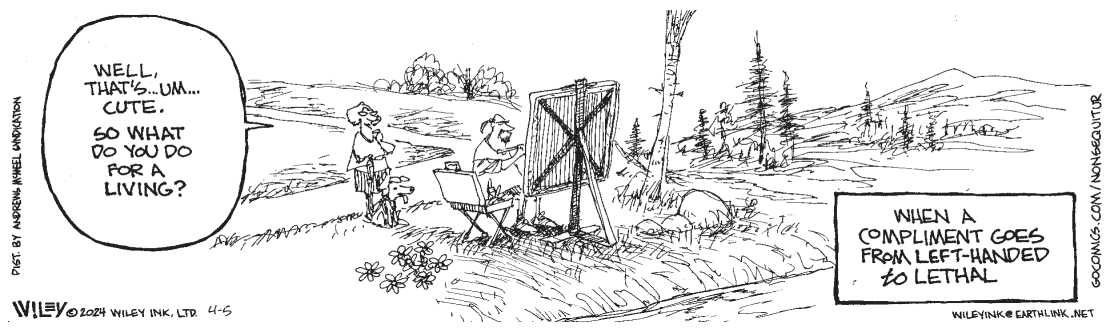
Frazz



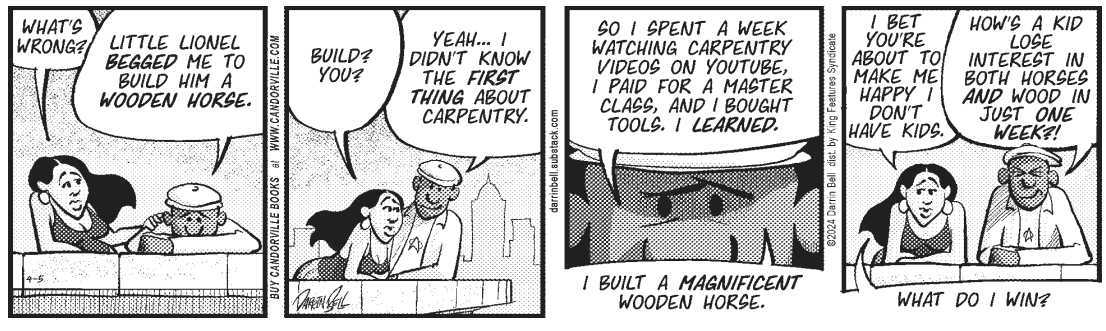
Pearls Before Swine



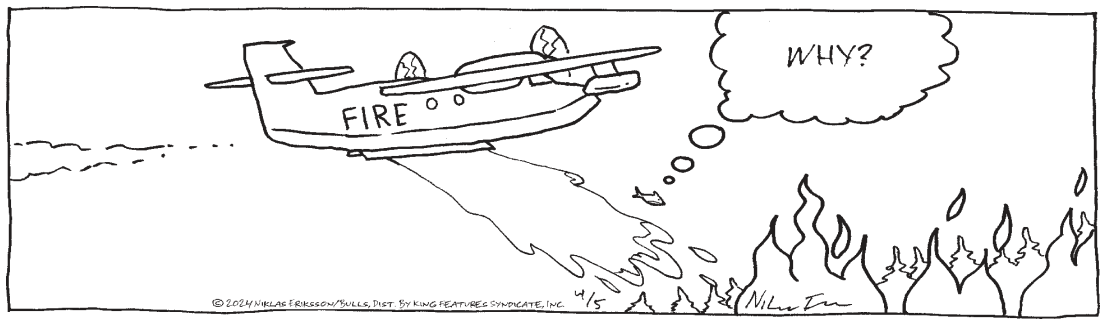
Non Sequitur



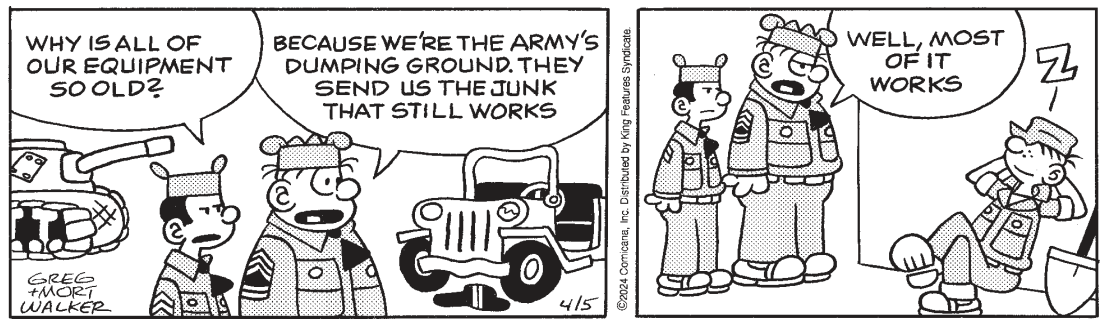
Candorville



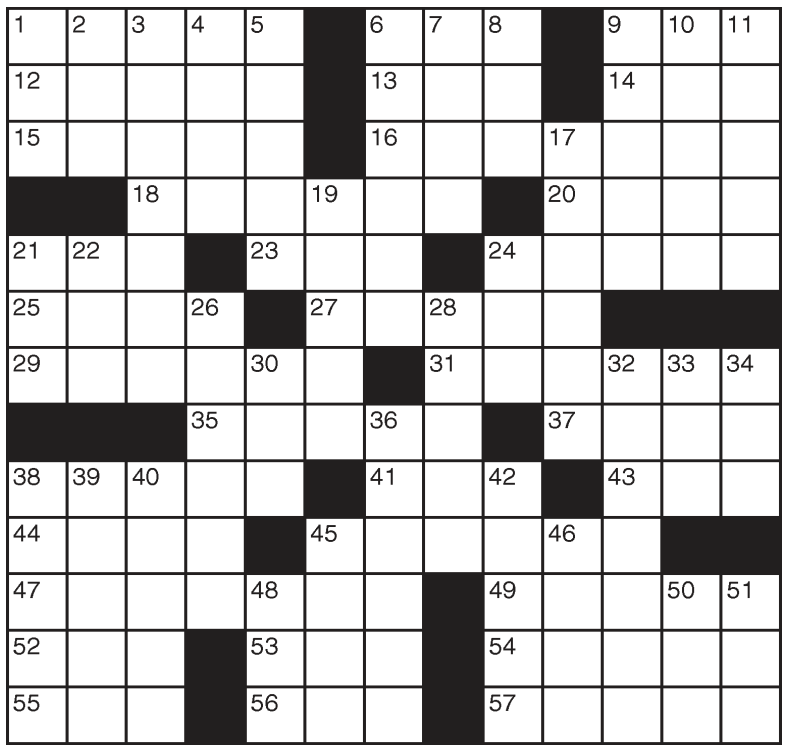
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 "Strange as it seems ..."
6 "Big Blue"
9 Homer's cry
12 "Old MacDonald" letters
13 Soccer's Hamm
14 — Cruz Kayne of "Barbie"
15 Tooth problem
16 Strength
18 Wears away
20 Poker type
21 Sandy shade
23 Lawn material
24 Dutch painter Jan
25 Starting lineup?
27 Serenity
29 Pooh's mopey pal
31 Sutherland of "24"
35 Activist Chavez
37 Roman 1052
38 Vegas area
41 Scepter
43 Half of dos
44 Dr. McGraw
45 Set afire
47 Pressing need
49 Popular payment app
52 Classic car
53 MSN alternative
54 Rainbow-shaped
55 Sun. talk
56 SSW opposite
57 Tell

DOWN

1 British ref. work
2 Conk out
3 Propriety
4 Tale teller
5 Toys on strings
6 Block
7 Resumes
8 Yoga pad
9 "Inferno" author
10 Perfectly timed
11 "Papa" of classical music
17 Honor
19 Ninnies
21 — kwon do
22 Rushmore face
24 Biol. or chem.
26 Pliant
28 "Rubber Capital"
30 Agent
32 Ease of speaking, as a language
33 Aachen article
34 Brazilian city
36 Sock pattern
38 Eggs on
39 Chekhov's "— Sisters"
40 Strictness
42 Prima donnas
45 PC picture
46 Prefix with byte
48 A Bobbsey twin
50 Convened
51 Prefix with meter

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	D	O	S		H	U	G		P	H	E	W
T	I	D	Y		A	M	O		L	A	T	E
O	N	E	L		L	A	T		U	L	N	A
M	A	R	V	E	L		H	A	R	L	A	N
			I	M	P			B	A	M		
B	O	C	A		A	M	B	U	L	A	T	E
A	N	I			S	S	E			R	A	N
H	O	T	I	S	S	U	E		S	K	I	T
		Y	R	S			R	B	I			
I	C	H	I	N	G		H	E	L	P	M	E
S	E	A	S		R	D	A		K	O	N	A
E	L	L	E		U	R	L		E	G	O	S
E	L	L	S		B	E	L		N	O	P	E

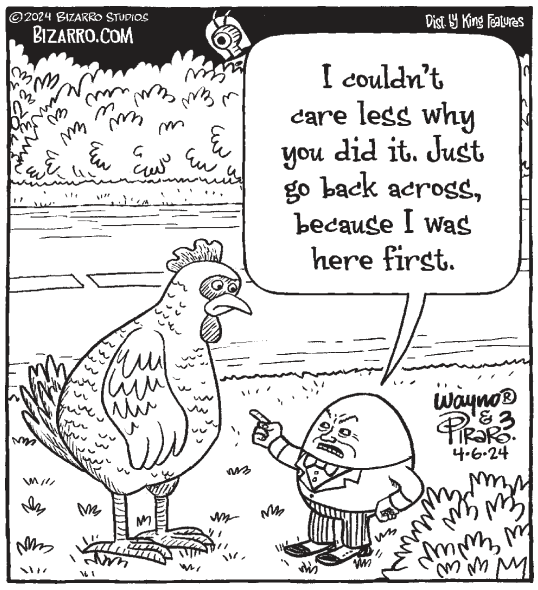
4-5 CRYPTOQUIP

V B A L M A L O N S O Q S A VJXBKSQVJLD Q MNLXSNFASOJQW XAWAFJOJNL QK, J'K OQI XBAI'SA TRWWJLD XBA TWRD.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SINCE THOSE CELEBRITIES WERE STANDING ABREAST IN A LONG, STRAIGHT ROW, THE STARS HAD ALIGNED.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals G

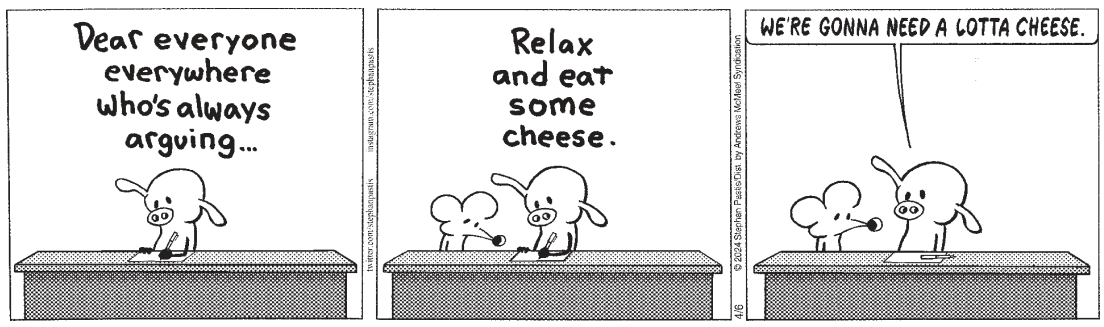
Bizarro



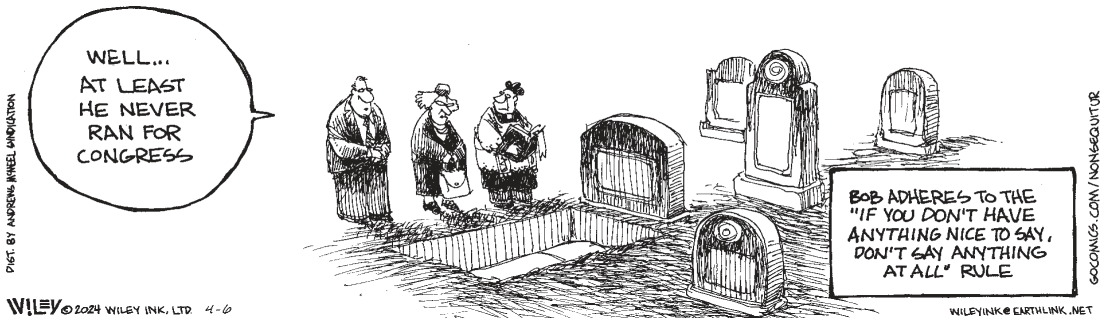
Loose Parts

Frazz

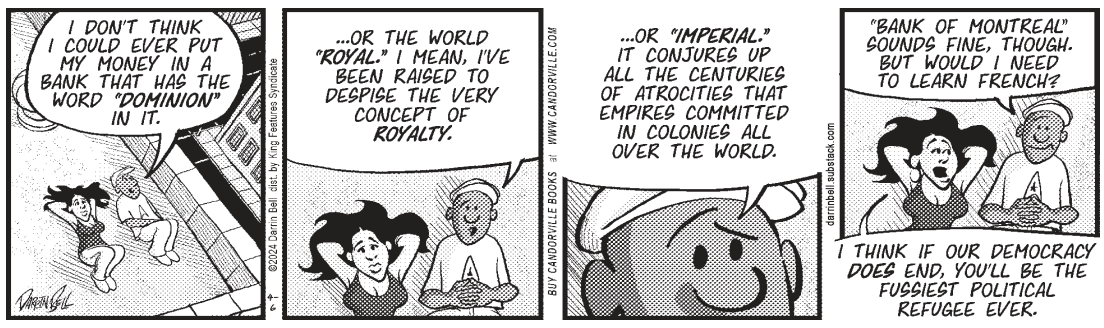
Pearls Before Swine



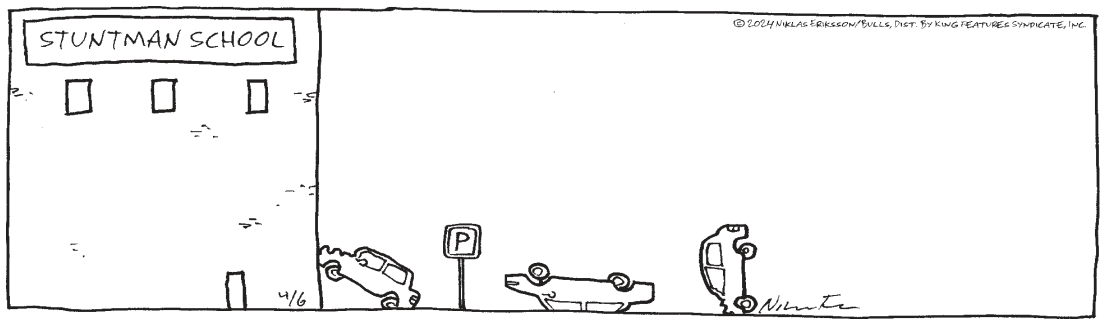
Non Sequitur



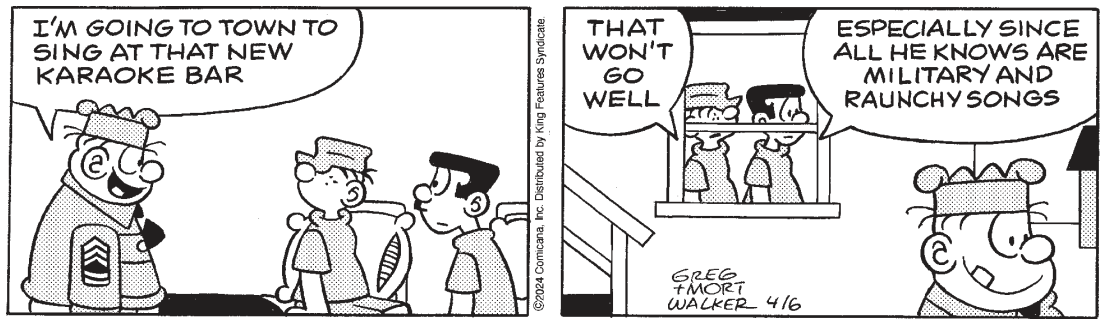
Candorville



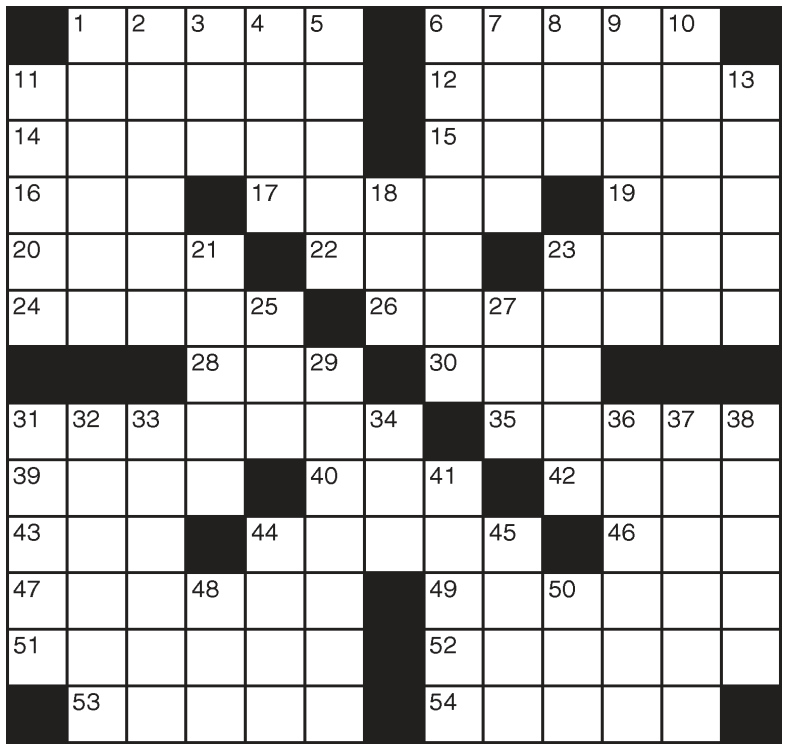
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Mexican snacks
6 Mamas' mates
11 Recital piece
12 Bureau
14 Chef Lagasse
15 Marley's music
16 $ dispenser
17 Pricey violin
19 Run after K
20 Clark's love
22 Slump
23 Univ. division
24 Community gym sites
26 Daughter of Lear
28 Showbiz job
30 Pester
31 Ten-sided figure
35 Fleet-related
39 Historic times
40 Paris appellation
42 Locus
43 "— Poetica"
44 PC drive insert
46 Greek P
47 "— shabby"
49 Breathing need
51 "Misty" composer Garner
52 Broadway's Stritch
53 In a way, slangily
54 Harry and William's mom

DOWN

1 Hand-beaten drum
2 Lacking vigor
3 Lot vehicle
4 Elevator name
5 De-ices, in a way
6 Ideal
7 Mellowed
8 Identify
9 One who's gone fishing
10 Shrimp recipe
11 Serta rival
13 Streisand title role
18 Cleaning cloth
21 Heroic tales
23 French painter Edgar
25 Autograph, for short
27 A Bobbsey twin
29 Canal boat
31 Diplomat Silas
32 Goofs
33 Cuba's Fidel
34 Neither mate
36 — Mary
37 Goddess of wisdom
38 Sierra —
41 Made a cattle call
44 Stallion-to-be
45 1041, in old Rome
48 Rocky peak
50 "Homegoing" author — Gyasi

Answer to Previous Puzzle

O	D	D	L	Y	■	I	B	M	■	D	O	H
E	I	E	I	O	■	M	I	A	■	A	N	A
D	E	C	A	Y	■	P	O	T	E	N	C	Y
■	■	E	R	O	D	E	S	■	S	T	U	D
T	A	N	■	S	O	D	■	S	T	E	E	N
A	B	C	D	■	P	E	A	C	E	■	■	■
E	E	Y	O	R	E	■	K	I	E	F	E	R
■	■	■	C	E	S	A	R	■	M	L	I	I
S	T	R	I	P	■	R	O	D	■	U	N	O
P	H	I	L	■	I	G	N	I	T	E	■	■
U	R	G	E	N	C	Y	■	V	E	N	M	O
R	E	O	■	A	O	L	■	A	R	C	E	D
S	E	R	■	N	N	E	■	S	A	Y	T	O

4-6 CRYPTOQUIP

S G M Q W P M V M G A C D M L C W M K S F B S ' D F K D S M W Y P J C L M M V S G M O M Z P O R D A R Z B G G B Y Y C S D: "Y R Q Q C M D K J D S M M Z."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN CENSORS ARE WITHDRAWING A CONTROVERSIAL TELEVISION AD, I'D SAY THEY'RE PULLING THE PLUG.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals B

STARS AND STRIPES

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander
Michael Ryan, Pacific chief of staff

EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief
reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast
Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific
Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington
Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast
David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe
Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific
Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

Washington
tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters
letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts
stripes.com/contactus

OMBUDSMAN

Jacqueline Smith

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper's independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at 202.886.0003.

Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published weekdays (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for $1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA, Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DOD personnel are located.

The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

© Stars and Stripes 2024
stripes.com

OPINION

'We are trying to find some way not to retreat'

By David Ignatius
The Washington Post

KYIV, Ukraine

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy delivered a stark message to Congress in an interview last week as Russian missiles were pounding southern Ukraine: Give us the weapons to stop the Russian attacks, or Ukraine will escalate its counterattacks on Russia's airfields, energy facilities and other strategic targets.

Zelenskyy spoke in a sandbagged, heavily guarded presidential compound that seemed nearly empty of its old civilian workforce after more than two years of war. The security was so tight, I had to surrender my plastic felt-tip pens. But Zelenskyy appeared as animated and pugnacious as when he made his defiant stand in the courtyard when the war began.

Zelenskyy, the actor who became a wartime president, now totally inhabits this role. He wore his habitual dress of a Ukrainian military sweatshirt and combat pants. He looked less haggard here on his home ground than he had about a month ago at a security conference in Munich. He seems to relish being the symbol of a nation at war.

The congressional delay in approving a $60 billion military aid package has been costly for Ukraine, Zelenskyy said. The military has been unable to plan future operations while legislators squabbled for nearly six months. He warned that hard-pressed Ukrainian forces might have to retreat to secure their front lines and conserve ammunition.

"If there is no U.S. support, it means that we have no air defense, no Patriot missiles, no jammers for electronic warfare, no 155-millimeter artillery rounds," he said. "It means we will go back, retreat, step by step, in small steps."

To describe the military situation, Zelenskyy took a sheet of paper and drew a simple diagram of the combat zone. "If you need 8,000 rounds a day to defend the front line, but you only have, for example, 2,000 rounds, you have to do less," he explained. "How? Of course, to go back. Make the front line shorter. If it breaks, the Russians could go to the big cities."

"We are trying to find some way not to retreat," Zelenskyy continued. After the Russian capture of Avdiivka in February, he said, "we have stabilized the situation because of smart steps by our military." If the front remains stable, he said, Ukraine can arm and train new brigades in the rear to conduct a new counteroffensive later this year.

As Russian drones, missiles and precision bombs break through Ukrainian defenses to attack energy facilities and other essential infrastructure, Zelenskyy feels he has no choice but to punch back across the border — in the hope of establishing deterrence. An example is Ukraine's drone strikes against Russian refineries over the past month. I asked Zelenskyy if U.S. officials had warned against such attacks on energy facilities inside Russia, as has been rumored in Washington.

"The reaction of the U.S. was not positive on this," he confirmed, but Washington couldn't limit Ukraine's deployment of its own homebuilt weapons. "We used our drones. Nobody can say to us you can't."

Zelenskyy argued that he could check Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy grid only by making Russia pay a similar price. "If there is no air defense to protect our energy system, and Russians attack it, my question is: Why can't we answer them? Their society has to learn to live without petrol, without diesel, without electricity. … It's fair."

"When Russia will stop these steps, we will stop," he said.

What Zelenskyy wants urgently are long-range ATACM-300 missiles, which he said could strike targets in Russian-occupied Crimea, especially the airfields from which Russia launches planes with precision-guided missiles that are doing heavy damage. These missiles recently hit Odesa and several other targets.

"When Russia has missiles and we don't, they attack by missiles: Everything — gas, energy, schools, factories, civilian buildings," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy recalled that in Munich in February, he took out a map of the targets the ATACMS could hit. "I showed them military platforms like airports, air-defense systems and other sites," he said. When I asked whether the ATACMS are on the way, as is rumored in Washington, he laughed and said: "I can't share with you this information. Sorry." He said that the missiles "are not in Ukraine" now.

Zelenskyy touted his program for a domestically produced "army of drones, including some that can reach 1,000 kilometers or more into Russia." But he cautioned that "drones are not enough for winning the war. … We could use naval drones to push their fleet out of our territorial waters and the entire western part of the Black Sea, yes. But it's not enough to win. These are drones, not missiles."

Zelenskyy offered a chilling characterization of his adversary, Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Putin is cunning, but he's not smart," he said. "When you fight with a smart person, it's a fight with rules. But when you fight with a cunning person, it's always dangerous."

Zelenskyy has been the X-factor in this war, mobilizing his country and much of the world to resist Russian aggression. I wish members of Congress who balk at aiding Ukraine could have listened to the Ukrainian leader talk about the price that Ukraine has paid for its defiance — and the risks ahead for the United States if it doesn't stand with its friends.

How judge in classified docs case just got called out

By Harry Litman
Los Angeles Times

Jack Smith has had enough.

Late Monday, the special counsel responded to U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon's bizarre recent order in the classified records case against Donald Trump, which asked the parties to propose jury instructions based on flagrantly wrong legal premises. Smith's answer, in effect, was "I'm not playing."

Rather than take on Cannon's cockamamie assignment, Smith laid out accurate jury instructions based on the actual charges and law.

Cannon had ordered the parties to "engage with" the Trump team's recurrent misinterpretation of the Presidential Records Act, which has no legal bearing on the case. Her order also depended on an account of the facts — namely, that Trump may have magically converted all the classified government records at issue into his personal property as he left the White House — that has always been beyond incredible.

In effect, Cannon was ordering the Justice Department to assume that the world is flat and then map a route from Atlantis to Arcadia.

But the order wasn't just daffy; it was pernicious. As I explained when the judge entered the order, her "Alice in Wonderland" antics seemed designed to avoid issuing a ruling that prosecutors could appeal while also setting the stage for her to adopt Trump's ridiculous claims after a jury has been impaneled.

That could be a fatal blow to Smith's case. Once a jury is selected, even a ridiculous order can bring a prosecution to a hard stop because the Constitution's double jeopardy clause precludes retrial. It would be the judicial equivalent of a perfect crime.

Cannon's conduct has raised the question of when and how Smith could ask the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals to remove her from the case. That would be a heavy lift, and yet Cannon's earlier bungling of a search warrant in the case was so extreme that another grievous error could justify such an unusual remedy. But Cannon has seemed to play a cat-and-mouse game with the prosecution, favoring Trump with delays while avoiding definitive rulings that Smith's team could readily appeal.

The special counsel's latest filing suggests the end of the game may be near. The government's 24-page answer states flatly that the judge's "legal premise is wrong, and a jury instruction … that reflects that premise would distort the trial." Under the usual rules of discourse between judge and litigants (and especially federal prosecutors), that's pretty cheeky.

But it was just the beginning of Smith's pushback. The special counsel proceeded to instruct the judge — again contrary to normal etiquette — that it is "vitally important" that the court make a decision about Trump's Presidential Records Act arguments. In other words, Cannon's precious thought experiment was not only wrongheaded; it was a dereliction of the court's basic responsibility to rule on the parties' motions. The Justice Department is turning the tables on Cannon by telling her to just decide the matter already.

The prosecution further called out Cannon's threat to issue a consequential ruling after a jury is impaneled, writing, "The Government must have the opportunity to consider appellate review well before jeopardy attaches."

The Smith team then made its most important and aggressive move by noting that when judges have issued clearly erroneous jury instructions that doom prosecutions, "courts have permitted the government to obtain writs of mandamus."

Smith has laid down the gauntlet, telling Cannon in no uncertain terms that if she doesn't move to resolve Trump's frivolous arguments well ahead of trial, he will bring a writ of mandamus to the 11th Circuit along with a motion to recuse her from the case. Providing this road map of his intentions puts Smith on firm footing to challenge the judge if she continues to dither.

For that reason, this brief is the special counsel's most important in the case since the indictment. Under the circumstances, it's the strongest possible move to speed the prosecution to a trial before the election.

Harry Litman is the host of the "Talking Feds" podcast and the Talking San Diego speaker series.

SCOREBOARD/WOMEN'S HOCKEY

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Men's NIT

Semifinals
Tuesday, April 2
At Indianapolis

Indiana State 100, Utah 90
Seton Hall 84, Georgia 67

Championship
Thursday, April 4

Seton Hall vs. Indiana State

Women's NIT

Semifinals
At Troy, Ala.
Wednesday, April 3

Minnesota 74, Troy 69
Saint Louis 57, Vermont 54

Championship
Saturday, April 6

Saint Louis vs. Minnesota

TENNIS

Charleston Open

Wednesday
At Family Circle Tennis Center
Charleston, S.C.
Purse: $922,573
Surface: Green clay
Women's Singles
Round of 32

Victoria Azarenka (12), Belarus, def. Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Italy, 6-1, 6-2.
Anhelina Kalinina (15), Ukraine, def. Caroline Wozniacki, Denmark, 6-2, 6-3.
Astra Sharma, Australia, def. Lesia Tsurenko (16), Ukraine, 6-4, 6-0.
Emma Navarro (10), United States, def. Katie Volynets, United States, 6-1, 6-1.
Daria Kasatkina (4), Russia, def. Ashlyn Krueger, United States, 6-3, 0-6, 6-1.
Veronika Kudermetova (9), Russia, def. Shelby Rogers, United States, 7-6 (5), 6-4.
Taylor Townsend, United States, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova (6), Russia, 7-5, 6-2.
Beatriz Haddad Maia (5), Brazil, def. Caroline Dolehide, United States, 6-2, 7-5.

US Men's Clay Court Championship

Wednesday
At River Oaks Country Club
Houston
Purse: $661,585
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Luciano Darderi, Italy, def. Francisco Cerundolo (2), Argentina, 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (4).
Brandon Nakashima, United States, def. Rinky Hijikata, Australia, 6-1, 6-4.
Ben Shelton (1), United States, def. Zizou Bergs, Belgium, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.
Marcos Giron (7), United States, def. Jeffrey John Wolf, United States, 6-4, 6-3.

Copa Colsanitas

Wednesday
At Centro de Alto Rendimiento
Bogota, Colombia
Purse: $267,082
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Sara Errani, Italy, def. Sara Sorribes Tormo (3), Spain, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4.
Kamilla Rakhimova (8), Russia, def. Renata Zarazua, Mexico, 7-6 (4), 6-7 (5), 6-3.
Irina Maria Bara, Romania, def. Laura Pigossi, Brazil, 3-6, 7-6 (3), 6-4.
Cristina Bucsa (4), Spain, def. Jule Niemeier, Germany, 6-4, 6-1.

Grand Prix Hassan II

Wednesday
At Royal Tennis Club de Marrakech
Marrakech, Morocco
Purse: Euro 579,320
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Lorenzo Sonego (4), Italy, def. Sumit Nagal, India, 1-6, 6-3, 6-4.
Pavel Kotov, Russia, def. Flavio Cobolli (8), Italy, 6-1, 7-6 (5).
Matteo Berrettini, Italy, def. Jaume Munar, Spain, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.
Fabio Fognini, Italy, def. Laslo Djere (1), Serbia, 7-6 (1), 2-6, 6-4.

Estoril Open

Wednesday
At Clube de Tenis do Estoril
Estoril, Portugal
Purse: Euro 579,320
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Round of 32

Marton Fucsovics, Hungary, def. Pedro Cachin, Argentina, 7-5, 6-2.
Pedro Martinez, Spain, def. Daniel Altmaier, Germany, 6-4, 6-2.
Jan Choinski, Britain, def. Joao Fonseca, Brazil, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-4.
David Jorda Sanchis, Spain, def. Jaime Faria, Portugal, 7-6 (4), 6-1.
Arthur Fils (5), France, def. Joao Sousa, Portugal, 7-5, 6-4.
Gael Monfils (7), France, def. Henrique Rocha, Portugal, 7-5, 7-5.

PRO HOCKEY

PWHL

	GP	W	L	OW	OL	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	19	10	6	3	0	36	50	41
Minnesota	19	8	4	4	3	35	47	35
Montreal	18	7	5	3	4	31	44	45
Ottawa	19	7	6	0	6	27	50	50
Boston	19	4	9	4	2	22	38	48
New York	19	3	9	4	3	20	39	49

Teams awarded three (3) points for a regulation win, two (2) points for an overtime or shootout win, one (1) point for an overtime or shootout loss, and zero (0) points for a regulation time loss.

Sunday, March 24

Minnesota 3, Montreal 2, SO

Monday, March 25

New York 3, Boston 2

Thursday, April 18

Toronto at Boston

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Sent RHPs Ben Lively and Xzavion Curry to Columbus (IL) on a rehab assignment.
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with C Brian O'Keefe on a minor league contract.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Sent LHP Tanner Tully outright to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (IL).
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Sent RHP Adrian Martinez outright to Las Vegas (PCL).

National League

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Placed OF Jason Heyward on the IL. Activated OF Taylor Trammell.
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Placed RHP Trevor Megill on the 7-day IL, retroactive to March 31. Recalled RHP J.B. Bukauskas from Nashville (IL).
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Activated C Joey Bart. Placed C Jason Delay on the 10-day IL, retroactive to April 1.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

DETROIT PISTONS — Signed G Jaylen Nowell to a 10-day contract.
TORONTO RAPTORS — Signed C Malik Williams to a 10-day contract.
WASHINGTON WIZARDS — Recalled G Patrick Baldwin, Jr. from the Capital City Go-Go of the G League.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed WR Greg Dortch to a one-year, exclusive-rights tender.
ATLANTA FALCONS — Re-signed DT Eddie Goldman.
BUFFALO BILLS — Traded WR Stefon Diggs, a 2024 sixth-round draft pick and a 2025 fifth-round pick to Houston in exchange for a 2025 second-round pick.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Re-signed OL Chuma Edoga.
DETROIT LIONS — Re-signed CB Kindle Vildor. Matched 49ers' offer sheet on TE Brock Wright.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Promoted Bryan Engel to vice president of player health and performance and Nate Weir to director of sports medicine/head athletic trainer.
LOS ANGELES RAMS — Signed WR Tyler Johnson.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Re-signed T Kendall Lamm to a contract.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed RB Patrick Taylor.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed WR Laviska Shenault.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Signed DE Randy Gregory.
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Signed DL Haggai Chisom Ndubuisi.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

ANAHEIM DUCKS — Signed RWs Coulson Pitre and Yegor Sidorov to three-year, entry -level contracts.
BUFFALO SABRES — Reassigned G Devon Levi on loan to Rochester (AHL).
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Signed F Nick Lardis to an entry-level contract.
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Re-signed F Chris Wagner to a one-year contract.
FLORIDA PANTHERS — Recalled D Uvis Balinskis from Charlotte (AHL)
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Recalled F Brian Halonen from Utica (AHL).
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Reassigned G Joel Blomqvist to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).
SEATTLE KRAKEN — Signed G Victor Ostman to a two-year, entry-level contract.
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Reassigned G Vyacheslav Peksa to Newfoundland (ECHL) from Toronto (AHL).
WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Reassigned Matthew Phillips to Hershey (AHL).

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

NEW YORK RED BULLS — Signed M Cameron Harper to a three-year contract.

COLLEGE

DETROIT — Named Mark Montgomery men's head basketball coach.

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup points leaders

Through April 1

1.	Martin Truex Jr	270
2.	Kyle Larson	256
3.	Denny Hamlin	252
4.	Ty Gibbs	236
5.	Ryan Blaney	229
6.	Christopher Bell	219
7.	William Byron	215
8.	Chase Elliott	209
9.	Ross Chastain	207

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	3	0	3	12	6	3
Inter Miami CF	3	2	2	11	14	10
Columbus	3	1	2	11	9	6
New York	3	1	2	11	9	6
Toronto FC	3	2	1	10	6	5
Atlanta	3	2	0	9	9	4
Philadelphia	2	0	3	9	10	6
D.C. United	2	1	3	9	9	8
Charlotte FC	2	2	2	8	6	5
CF Montréal	2	2	1	7	8	8
Nashville	1	1	4	7	7	11
Chicago	1	3	2	5	9	13
Orlando City	1	3	2	5	5	11
NYCFC	1	4	1	4	4	8
New England	0	4	1	1	4	11

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
LA Galaxy	3	0	3	12	13	9
Vancouver	3	1	1	10	10	6
Real Salt Lake	3	2	1	10	10	7
Minnesota	3	1	1	10	8	6
Houston	3	1	1	10	6	4
Sporting KC	2	1	3	9	9	7
Colorado	2	2	2	8	8	10
Portland	2	3	1	7	11	11
LAFC	2	3	1	7	9	9
St Louis City	1	1	4	7	11	11
Austin FC	1	2	3	6	7	9
FC Dallas	1	4	0	3	6	10
San Jose	1	5	0	3	7	13
Seattle	0	3	2	2	4	7

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday's games

Toronto FC at Vancouver
New York at Cincinnati
D.C. United at Columbus
LA Galaxy at Los Angeles FC
Colorado at Miami
Atlanta at New York City FC
Charlotte FC at New England
San Jose at Austin FC
Houston at Chicago
Real Salt Lake at Minnesota
Philadelphia at Nashville
FC Dallas at St Louis City
CF Montréal at Seattle

Sunday's game

Portland at Sporting Kansas City

Saturday, April 13

Los Angeles FC at Portland
LA Galaxy at Vancouver
Toronto FC at Charlotte FC
Orlando City at D.C. United
Cincinnati at CF Montréal
New England at New York City FC
Chicago at New York
Seattle at FC Dallas
Miami at Sporting Kansas City
Houston at Minnesota
Columbus at Real Salt Lake
Colorado at San Jose

Sunday, April 14

Philadelphia at Atlanta
Austin FC at St Louis City

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	3	0	0	9	11	7
Chicago	2	0	1	7	5	2
North Carolina	2	1	0	6	7	3
Washington	2	1	0	6	4	3
Houston	1	1	1	4	4	7
San Diego	1	1	0	3	2	2
Gotham FC	1	1	0	3	1	1
Orlando	0	0	3	3	4	4
Louisville	0	0	3	3	4	4
Bay FC	1	2	0	3	4	5
Seattle	1	2	0	3	2	3
Utah Royals FC	1	2	0	3	3	5
Portland	0	2	1	1	6	8
Angel City	0	2	1	1	3	6

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday, March 29

Chicago 1, Orlando 1, tie
San Diego 1, Seattle 0

Saturday, March 30

Kansas City 4, Angel City 2
North Carolina 1, Gotham FC 0
Louisville 2, Portland 2, tie
Houston 3, Bay FC 2

Sunday, March 31

Washington 2, Utah Royals FC 1

Friday, April 12

Washington at Houston
Orlando at Utah Royals FC

Saturday, April 13

Portland at North Carolina
San Diego at Louisville
Angel City at Chicago

Sunday, April 14

Kansas City at Gotham FC
Seattle at Bay FC

NATHAN DENETTE/AP

United States forward Hilary Knight holds the trophy as she and her teammates celebrate after beating Canada in the gold medal game at the women's world hockey championship last year.

World closing gap on 2 powerhouses

BY JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

Fond as Hilary Knight is of the fierce women's hockey rivalry between the United States and Canada, the veteran player has watched her sport's international growth enough to realize the decadeslong era of North American dominance might finally be coming to a close.

Whether that happens at this year's 10-nation world championship, which began Wednesday in Utica, N.Y., or at the 2026 Winter Olympics, the U.S. captain said she can envision a time when the Americans and Canadians aren't a lock to meet with a gold medal on the line.

"It just speaks to there's more eyes on the sport, there's more investment. More countries are able to show up and play, and I think it's awesome," said Knight, 34, a nine-time world champion who is preparing to compete in her 14th tournament. "And that's why you really have to take this tournament one game at a time because nothing's guaranteed."

There's a similar expectation — don't call it a concern — growing in Canada, where two-time Olympic defenseman Renata Fast welcomes the challenge of nations bridging the competitive gap.

"As a high-performance athlete, you want to play the best, you want other teams to make it tough," Fast said. "All of our goals is to grow the game. And the more challenges, the better."

In Wednesday's opening games, the U.S. beat Switzerland 4-0, Sweden topped Denmark 3-1 and the Czech Republic downed Finland 4-0,

Make no mistake, the defending champion Americans and Canadians are favored to play for gold on April 14 for what would be the 22nd time in 23 tournaments.

The only exception came in 2019, when host Finland upset Canada in the semifinals before losing a shootout to the U.S.

While Finland remains a contender, fast-rising Czech Republic — winners of the past two bronze medals — and a young Swedish team are showing signs of being ready to mount a challenge.

"We're not resting on our laurels by any means," Czech coach and former Canadian Olympian Carla MacLeod said of her team that as recently as 2015 was playing in the International Ice Hockey Federation's second division.

"The mission is clear. Everyone is doing their darndest to try to give their teams the best opportunity to win a gold medal, and we're no different," she added. "Is the time now, is the time later? We'll never know. ... But I think that gap is going to close."

The Swedes, who haven't medaled since 2007, are brimming with confidence.

They're buoyed by a roster that might be young — 14 players are 22 or younger — but features nine who have won silver on under-18 teams in 2018 and 2023. And Sweden returns a majority of a team that nearly toppled Canada in a 3-2 overtime loss in the world quarterfinals last year.

"We don't respect them like maybe we did a few years ago," 18-year-old Mira Jungaker said, referring to the U.S. and Canada. "Like, we still respect them, of course, but not on the ice (and we are) going on the confidence that we can actually beat them."

The competitive landscape of women's hockey is shifting with more European nations having their players develop at U.S. colleges.

NHL

Stars streaking toward playoffs

By Stephen Hawkins
Associated Press

DALLAS — Dallas Stars coach Pete DeBoer went into this season a little worried about the potential hangover effect on his team after the long postseason run that ended with a loss last May in the sixth game of the Western Conference finals.

With six games left before the playoffs begin again, DeBoer is feeling pretty good about his team.

The Stars have won a franchise-record eight games in a row, Jake Oettinger has posted shutouts in the past two, and they are on top of the Western Conference standings with 105 points, one behind the New York Rangers for the most in the NHL. They are playing their best hockey of the season.

"This is the right time," DeBoer said after the Stars beat Edmonton 5-0 on Wednesday night. "Forget the wins and the winning streak, I like the detail in our game. I like how we're playing for the most part, so that's a good thing. Everyone wants to be doing that this time of year, and the wins are a by-product of that."

Dallas already has seven 20-goal scorers, and captain Jamie Benn is one shy of making it a franchise-record eight after scoring his 19th against the Oilers.

Wyatt Johnston, the 20-year-old in his second full season, became the first Stars player to reach 30 this season when he scored coming out of the penalty box as part of their four goals in a span of less than seven minutes in the second period.

"The team's at a really good place," Johnston said.

"We're just trying to focus like on the little habits, the little details, trying to focus for the playoffs," forward Radek Faksa said. "We have lots to play for. We already clinched a spot. We want to win the conference ... so we have a great spot for the playoffs."

Tony Gutierrez/AP

Stars center Radek Faksa slips the puck past Edmonton Oilers goalie Calvin Pickard on Wednesday night in Dallas. Faksa had a goal and two assists in the Stars' 5-0 victory.

Faksa, part of their fourth line, put the Stars ahead of Edmonton with his goal only 2:08 into the game. He also had two assists, on Johnston's goal and when Sam Steele closed out the scoring. There were 10 Dallas players who tallied points.

"I think our depth has carried us," DeBoer said. "It was 12 months ago, and everyone was describing us as a one-line team."

The Stars last week clinched a third consecutive postseason berth, their longest streak since five in a row through the 2008 playoffs, when they also lost in in the conference finals. That was also the end of being in the playoffs 12 of their first 14 seasons after moving from Minnesota to Dallas in the summer of 1993, and included their Stanley Cup title in 1999.

Dallas last year lost Game 6 of the Western Conference finals at home to Vegas, which went on to win the Stanley Cup. That was after the Stars opened the playoffs with a six-game series against Minnesota and then survived a seven-game series against Seattle.

As for their eight-game winning streak now, there had been six other times in franchise history when the Stars had won seven games without extending that.

They were back home against Edmonton after each of their previous four games had been on the road. Overall, they have won their past seven road games, and play their last regular-season games away from home against Chicago and Colorado this weekend before finishing with a four-game homestand.

Oettinger hasn't allowed a goal in 7½ periods, about 152 minutes. He stopped 35 shots against an Edmonton team filled with top scorers that went 0-for-4 on the power play.

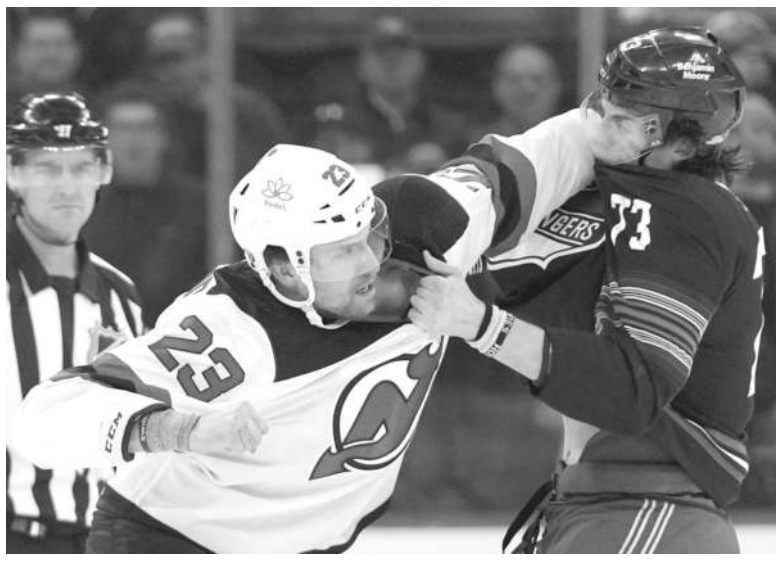
"It's awesome. He gives us a lot of confidence, and he's been so good all year," Johnston said about the goalie. "It feels pretty good when you have him back there. And, I mean, it's pretty hard to lose games when he's not letting up any goals."

Devils, Rangers start game with brawl

By Allan Kreda
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils started Wednesday night's game with a brawl involving all 10 players on the ice off the opening faceoff.

The main event was Rangers center Matt Rempe taking on New Jersey's Kurtis MacDermid, with the two having history from the previous time the Devils visited Madison Square Garden on March 11. That night, Rempe refused MacDermid's offer to fight early in the game. Later in the contest, Rempe knocked Devils defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler out of the game with a high elbow and was subsequently suspended for four games.



Mary Altaffer/AP

New Jersey Devils defenseman Kurtis MacDermid (23) fights Rangers center Matt Rempe on Wednesday night in New York.

Rempe and MacDermid fought the longest on Wednesday as their tussle continued at center ice after the other four fights had ended. Four players from each team received game misconducts 2 seconds into the game.

Along with Rempe, New York defensemen Jacob Trouba and K'Andre Miller and forward Barclay Goodrow were ejected from the game.

New Jersey defensemen Kevin Bahl, John Marino and MacDermid, and forward Chris Tierney also received early exits.

The Rangers went on to win 4-3 on a late power-play goal by Chris Kreider.

"I had no idea that was going to happen. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing," MacDermid said.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-N.Y. Rangers	76	51	21	4	106	263	214
x-Boston	76	44	17	15	103	252	208
x-Carolina	75	47	21	7	101	255	199
x-Florida	76	47	24	5	99	246	193
a-Toronto	75	43	23	9	95	276	235
Tampa Bay	75	42	26	7	91	263	242
m-Philadelphia	76	36	29	11	83	222	239
Washington	74	36	28	10	82	203	238
Detroit	75	37	30	8	82	251	249
N.Y. Islanders	75	33	27	15	81	222	249
Pittsburgh	75	34	30	11	79	226	225
Buffalo	76	36	35	5	77	229	229
New Jersey	76	36	36	4	76	249	262
Ottawa	74	33	37	4	70	238	256
Montreal	74	29	33	12	70	205	252
Columbus	75	25	38	12	62	217	273

Western Conference

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-Dallas	76	48	19	9	105	281	220
x-Vancouver	76	47	21	8	102	260	204
x-Colorado	75	47	22	6	100	280	225
c-Winnipeg	75	45	24	6	96	228	187
p-Edmonton	74	45	24	5	95	264	214
p-Vegas	75	42	25	8	92	244	219
Nashville	75	43	28	4	90	244	228
Los Angeles	75	39	25	11	89	234	199
St. Louis	75	40	31	4	84	216	226
Minnesota	74	36	29	9	81	227	235
Seattle	75	31	31	13	75	199	218
Calgary	74	34	35	5	73	227	243
Arizona	75	31	39	5	67	227	250
Anaheim	76	25	47	4	54	187	275
Chicago	75	22	48	5	49	166	262
San Jose	74	17	49	8	42	165	298

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.
x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division
z-clinched conference
(a, c, m, p)-top three in their division

Wednesday's games

Tampa Bay 4, Toronto 1
N.Y. Rangers 4, New Jersey 3
Los Angeles 5, Seattle 2
Dallas 5, Edmonton 0
Vancouver 2, Arizona 1

Thursday's games

Boston at Carolina
Florida at Ottawa
N.Y. Islanders at Columbus
Pittsburgh at Washington
Tampa Bay at Montreal
Calgary at Winnipeg
Colorado at Minnesota
St. Louis at Nashville
Los Angeles at San Jose

Friday's games

N.Y. Rangers at Detroit
Philadelphia at Buffalo
Washington at Carolina
Colorado at Edmonton
Seattle at Anaheim
Vegas at Arizona

Saturday's games

Tampa Bay at Pittsburgh
Florida at Boston
Winnipeg at Minnesota
Dallas at Chicago
St. Louis at San Jose
New Jersey at Ottawa
Philadelphia at Columbus
Toronto at Montreal
Nashville at N.Y. Islanders
Edmonton at Calgary
Vancouver at Los Angeles

Sunday's games

Buffalo at Detroit
Minnesota at Chicago
Columbus at Carolina
Arizona at San Jose
Ottawa at Washington
Montreal at N.Y. Rangers
Nashville at New Jersey
St. Louis at Anaheim
Dallas at Colorado

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nikita Kucherov, TB	74	42	88	130
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	75	47	80	127
Connor McDavid, EDM	72	29	97	126
Artemi Panarin, NYR	76	45	65	110
David Pastrnak, BOS	76	46	58	104
Mikko Rantanen, COL	75	39	61	100
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	74	39	60	99
Auston Matthews, TOR	74	63	36	99
J.T. Miller, VAN	76	35	61	96
William Nylander, TOR	75	40	55	95
Sam Reinhart, FLA	76	52	35	87
Quinn Hughes, VAN	76	16	70	86

GOLF/AUTO RACING

More players agree division isn't ideal

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. — Rory McIlroy and Bryson DeChambeau will be the in the same place next week, when they head to Augusta National for the Masters.

They're saying the same things this week, albeit a golf world apart.

Sounding an alarm going into the year's first major, McIlroy and DeChambeau were among players from both the PGA Tour and LIV Golf League on Wednesday speaking out — perhaps a bit more forcefully than before — on a need for the game to somehow reunite or risk further eroding its fan base.

"If you look at the TV ratings of the PGA Tour this year, they're down 20% across the board. That's a fifth. That's big," McIlroy said. "I would say the numbers on LIV aren't great either in terms of the people tuning in. I just think with the fighting and everything that's went on over the past couple years, people are just getting really fatigued of it and it's turning people off men's professional golf. And that's not a good thing for anyone."

DeChambeau was a bit more succinct: "It's up to the guys up top to figure it out and figure it out quickly, because we can't keep going this direction. It's not sustainable, for sure."

Chris Trotman, LIV Golf/AP

Captain Bryson DeChambeau of Crushers GC hits his shot on the driving range during the practice round before the start of LIV Golf Miami at the Trump National Doral on Tuesday in Miami.

Between the Valero Open in San Antonio and the LIV Golf League's stop this weekend near Miami, there are 43 golfers — 30 from the PGA Tour, 13 from LIV — playing one last time before heading to the season's first major. And the majors are one of the few places where players from the PGA Tour and LIV still play head-to-head, because of the divide that has fractured golf for the last couple years.

That means at the majors, and events like the Ryder Cup, the big names are all in one place. Otherwise, they're not, and they haven't been since LIV started luring players away — reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm, Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson, Brooks Koepka, Sergio Garcia, Bubba Watson, DeChambeau and many more among them.

There have been talks about patching together the game again for months, going back at least to the agreement that the PGA Tour struck last June with the Public Investment Fund — Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund — in a deal that was supposed to be completed by the end of last year. It still isn't done, the tour has since come out with an equity program for players, and the divide continues.

"I think there's room for both. It's as simple as that," Rahm said. "I think we have the opportunity to end up with an even better product for the spectators and the fans of the game, a little bit more variety doesn't really hurt anybody. So, I think, properly done, we can end up with a much better product that can take golf to the next level worldwide, and I'm hoping that's what ends up happening."

LIV's ratings have been dismal, at best. According to Nielsen TV data from February, LIV Golf Mayakoba pulled in 432,000 viewers on the CW Network, its most ever. On the same day, a rerun of a PGA Tour round from Pebble Beach had 1.21 million viewers on CBS.

McIlroy said viewership numbers from the three majors besides the Masters — Augusta National, he said, is in an entirely different category from everything else, and he's not wrong about that — will show the impacts of the game's divide.

"If the numbers are better and you've got all the best players in the world playing, then there's an argument to say, 'OK, we need to get this thing back together,'" McIlroy said. "But on the flip side, if the numbers aren't as good, it's an argument to still say we need to put everyone back together because people are losing interest in the game if they don't want to tune in to the four major championships."

Russell 'waiting for a disaster' after crashing at Australian GP

By Stephen Wade
Associated Press

SUZUKA, Japan — George Russell spoke for the first time about his dramatic crash with Fernando Alonso in the Australian Grand Prix last month and said Thursday that race officials need to respond quicker to such incidents to avoid a catastrophe.

The Mercedes driver described his fear of sitting in a crashed car unprotected on the track, where drivers reach speeds of 155 mph.

"It was an incredible position to be in," Russell said of the crash at Turn No. 6. "You're on a blind bend, 250 kilometers per hour (155 mph), right on the racing line with the car half upside down. You're waiting for a disaster to happen.

"Fortunately, I had a 10-second gap behind me. And I think it was 10 or 12 seconds before the safety car came out. But in the space of 10 seconds you can have five, six, seven cars — if that was on lap one of the race — and probably been hit numerous times even with the yellow flag."

Russell

Russell called for a quicker response time and the use of technology to help get the safety car out faster.

"We need to find a way that if a car is in a danger zone, it's automated straight away, within half a second or so, because those seconds count and lives are at risk. It's time with the technology that we have now to make steps in this area."

Alonso was given a 20-second penalty for what stewards called his "unusual maneuver" with Russell behind him. That description of his move could entail braking and driving slowly, which could impede other drivers.

Russell, speaking before Sunday's Japanese GP, said he saw Alonso in a coffee shop days after the Australian race.

"We both move forward from this," Russell said.

Asked if he had talked to Alonso about the incident in the coffee shop, he replied. "No, we didn't. He didn't get my coffee, though."

Russell said drivers have a right to brake, downshift or speed up to get the right "racing line." But he suggested limits.

"When we start braking in the middle of the straight, downshifting, accelerating, upshifting again, then braking again, I think that goes beyond the realm of adjusting your line," Russell said, calling it "one step too far."

"I don't think what Fernando did was extraordinarily dangerous, but it will open up a can of worms if it wasn't penalized."

Job seeker

Carlos Sainz won the Australian GP just over a week ago. Curiously, the Ferrari driver will be out of work next season with Lewis Hamilton arriving from Mercedes.

So the Spaniard is job hunting.

"I mean, talking to a few (teams) because that's what my management team and myself should do when I don't have a job for next year yet," Sainz said.

Asanka Brendon Ratnayake/AP

Mercedes driver George Russell of Britain steers his car during the third practice session of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park in Melbourne, Australia, on March 23.

He has no move to announce, but he wants to have one soon.

"The only thing I would say is that, yeah, it's time now to speed up a bit everything and hopefully we can get it sorted sooner rather than later."

Four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel, who stepped away from Formula One after the 2022 season, is reportedly interested in returning. Perhaps to Mercedes to take Hamilton's place — though that's probably a long shot.

Russell was open to it.

"Sebastian's a great person and he's a four-time world champion and, for sure, his personality is missed on the grid," he said. "It's important that we have the best 20 drivers in the world all competing for race wins and championships.

"I'm really happy and open to have anybody as my teammate, you know, whether it's a world champion, whether it's a rookie. It doesn't change how I go about my business. And, yeah, as I said, we'll welcome anybody."

MLB

Yanks relish hot start after down year

By David Brandt
Associated Press

PHOENIX — One year after a rare mediocre season tested patience in the Bronx, the New York Yankees are relishing a fast start.

The scariest part for opponents? A slugger-filled lineup that includes Juan Soto, Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton, Anthony Rizzo and Alex Verdugo isn't even that hot.

New York wrapped up an impressive season-opening road trip with a 6-5 win over the Arizona Diamondbacks, bolting to a 6-1 start. Even more encouraging for the Yankees, those wins came against the Houston Astros and Diamondbacks, clubs expected to be playoff contenders.

"The guys are fired up and rightfully so," manager Aaron Boone said. "I'm sure the Bronx will be popping on Friday."

New York has an off day before its home opener against the Toronto Blue Jays on Friday.

Judge hit his first homer of the season in Wednesday's win, giving the Yankees a 2-1 lead with a two-run, opposite-field shot that landed in the Chase Field pool beyond the right-center wall. In the 11th, his double into the right-center gap put the Yankees ahead 6-4.

"You just got to keep swinging," Judge said. "It's early in the season, got to get your at-bats. Keep swinging at good pitches and if you don't get good pitches, take your walk and let the guys behind you do their job."

The five-time All-Star entered 3 for 24 with one RBI, his fewest hits ever through six games. He hasn't been alone with his middling start — Stanton is batting .150 with 11 strikeouts in 20 at-bats, Rizzo is hitting .222 and Verdugo .160.

Rick Scuteri/AP

The New York Yankees' Aaron Judge, right, celebrates with Anthony Volpe after hitting a two-run home run against the Arizona Diamondbacks during the first inning Wednesday in Phoenix. The Yankees won 6-5.

Soto's been the best of the bunch with a .345 average but has just two extra-base hits, low by his standards.

Now that Judge appears to be heating up, the rest may follow.

"I told him I wanted him to go visit the pool at some point in this road trip," Boone said. "Glad he checked that box. Had a really good at-bat in the 11th to give us that insurance run. He's getting there.

"With Aaron, it's a matter of time."

Verdugo — acquired in a trade from the Red Sox during the offseason — hit his first Yankees homer Wednesday. The 27-year-old jumped all over an elevated fastball from Kevin Ginkel, launching a no-doubt, two-run shot deep into the right-field seats.

As Verdugo rounded the bases, his teammates were barking at him like a dog, which is the one of the team's current celebrations. The outfielder said he loved it.

"Everyone in here knows we're talented, knows what we can do," Verdugo said. "You've just got to go out there every day and have that dog mentality. It's not always going to come easy. You've got to sometimes fight. We've been doing a really good job of that during this run."

The Yankees have also been good on the mound, despite missing ace Gerrit Cole. Led by Carlos Rodon, Nestor Cortes, Clarke Schmidt, Luis Gil and Marcus Stroman, the pitching staff came into Wednesday's game with a 2.72 ERA, which ranks fourth in the big leagues.

New York went 82-80 last season, missing the playoffs and nearly finishing below .500 for the first time since 1992. This season's first week might be a signal that 2023 was an aberration.

"It's pretty nice," Soto said. "I won't say it makes it easier, but we have the record on our side. With a huge start, it's great for confidence as we go up to New York."

Chourio maintains composure as rookie

By Steve Megargee
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Jackson Chourio is showing poise beyond his years while showcasing why the Milwaukee Brewers invested so much in him before he reached the major leagues.

His latest example occurred Tuesday during the 20-year-old's first at-bat in front of the home crowd at American Family Field. Chourio stepped to the plate in the third inning of a scoreless game with the bases loaded and one out.

It was the type of situation that might have tempted a typical rookie to do too much. Chourio singled to right to put the Brewers ahead for good in a 3-2 victory over the Minnesota Twins.

"The mentality is it's just another game," Chourio said through an interpreter. "You've got to take one game at a time and continue to give the best version of myself."

Chourio has done just that. He's batting .375 (6 for 16) through four games and has showcased the attributes that enabled him to soar up the minor league system as a teenager.

That's why the Brewers signed him to an $82 million, eight-year contract when he had played only six games above Double-A.

Chourio

"He's a big-time performer," Milwaukee manager Pat Murphy said.

That big contract has brought attention to Chourio even as he plays in baseball's smallest market. He showed his ability to thrive in the spotlight when the Brewers headed to New York and opened the season with a three-game sweep of the Mets.

Chourio at 20 years, 18 days became the fifth-youngest player to hit leadoff in his MLB debut, trailing only a quartet of 19-year-olds: Bobby Doerr in 1937, Billy Consolo in 1954, and Bob Kennedy and Sibby Sisti in 1940.

"Honestly, I felt comfortable from my first day, being in New York," Chourio said. "It was kind of good to get that one out of the way. I felt comfortable, confident. Now it's just time to go out there, play fun, play hard and just have a good time."

Chourio went 1 for 3 with a walk and an RBI in his debut. He had two hits in each of his next two games. Then he went 1 for 4 with the RBI single against the Twins.

He's done all this while adapting to playing right field after working at center for most of his minor league career.

"I think it's been like what I thought it was going to be — a dream," Chourio said. "We've really got to enjoy it the most I can."

Chourio's teammates are impressed with the way he has responded to the scrutiny.

"He's come up with a lot of hype and a lot of expectations," outfielder Christian Yelich said. "That's not always easy to deal with as a young player. But I thought he did great in New York. It's huge to just get those first couple of games out of the way and get them under your belt and just settle back in.

"After today, you kind of get back in a regular-season routine and you don't have the introductions and all of the pageantry that comes around with opening day and home openers. For him, it's going to be probably nice to just settle in and play baseball."

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	6	1	.857	—
Boston	5	2	.714	1
Baltimore	4	2	.667	1½
Tampa Bay	3	4	.429	3
Toronto	3	4	.429	3

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	4	0	1.000	—
Cleveland	5	2	.714	½
Minnesota	3	2	.600	1½
Kansas City	2	4	.333	3
Chicago	1	4	.200	3½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	4	2	.667	—
Texas	4	2	.667	—
Seattle	3	4	.429	1½
Houston	2	5	.286	2½
Oakland	1	6	.143	3½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	3	2	.600	—
Washington	2	3	.400	1
Philadelphia	2	4	.333	1½
New York	0	4	.000	2½
Miami	0	7	.000	4

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Pittsburgh	5	1	.833	—
Milwaukee	4	1	.800	½
Chicago	4	2	.667	1
Cincinnati	4	2	.667	1
St. Louis	3	4	.429	2½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	7	2	.778	—
Arizona	4	3	.571	2
San Diego	4	5	.444	3
San Francisco	2	5	.286	4
Colorado	1	6	.143	5

Wednesday's games

Texas 4, Tampa Bay 1
Baltimore 4, Kansas City 3
L.A. Angels 10, Miami 2
Minnesota 7, Milwaukee 3
Boston 1, Oakland 0
Cleveland 8, Seattle 0
N.Y. Yankees 6, Arizona 5, 11 innings
Houston 8, Toronto 0
Cincinnati 4, Philadelphia 1
San Diego 3, St. Louis 2
Washington 5, Pittsburgh 3
Chicago Cubs 9, Colorado 8
L.A. Dodgers 5, San Francisco 4
Detroit at N.Y. Mets, ppd.
Atlanta at Chicago White Sox, ppd.

Thursday's games

Detroit at N.Y. Mets, 2
Pittsburgh at Washington
Cleveland at Minnesota
Miami at St. Louis
Chicago White Sox at Kansas City

Friday's games

Toronto (Kikuchi 0-1) at N.Y. Yankees (Stroman 1-0)
Oakland (Sears 0-1) at Detroit (TBD)
L.A. Dodgers (Miller 1-0) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 0-1)
Tampa Bay (Littell 1-0) at Colorado (Gomber 0-0)
Baltimore (Rodriguez 1-0) at Pittsburgh (Jones 1-0)
San Diego (Cease 0-1) at San Francisco (Hicks 1-0)
N.Y. Mets (Quintana 0-1) at Cincinnati (Greene 0-0)
Philadelphia (Nola 0-1) at Washington (TBD)
Arizona (Henry 0-1) at Atlanta (Strider 0-0)
Chicago White Sox (Fedde 0-0) at Kansas City (Singer 1-0)
Houston (Brown 0-0) at Texas (Bradford 1-0)
Seattle (Gilbert 0-0) at Milwaukee (Peralta 1-0)
Boston (Crawford 0-0) at L.A. Angels (Canning 0-1)

This date in baseball

April 5

1972 — MLB for the first time fails to open because of a player strike, which started April 1 and would be settled April 13.

1989 — Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Orel Hershiser's consecutive scoreless streak of 59 innings ends.

1993 — The Florida Marlins and Colorado Rockies make their MLB debuts as expansion teams.

2005 — The Washington Nationals lose their inaugural season opener, 8-4 to the Philadelphia Phillies. Formerly the Montreal Expos, they are the first team to represent the nation's capital since the Washington Senators left after the 1971 season.

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
z-Boston	60	16	.789	—
Milwaukee	47	29	.618	13
Cleveland	46	31	.597	14½
Orlando	45	31	.592	15
New York	44	31	.587	15½
Miami	42	33	.560	17½
Indiana	43	34	.558	17½
Philadelphia	41	35	.539	19
Chicago	36	40	.474	24
Atlanta	36	40	.474	24
Brooklyn	30	47	.390	30½
Toronto	23	53	.303	37
Charlotte	18	58	.237	42
Washington	15	62	.195	45½
Detroit	13	63	.171	47

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Minnesota	53	23	.697	—
x-Denver	53	23	.697	—
x-Oklahoma City	52	24	.684	1
L.A. Clippers	47	28	.627	5½
Dallas	45	30	.600	7½
Phoenix	45	31	.592	8
New Orleans	45	31	.592	8
Sacramento	44	31	.587	8½
L.A. Lakers	44	33	.571	9½
Golden State	41	34	.547	11½
Houston	38	37	.507	14½
Utah	29	47	.382	24
Memphis	26	50	.342	27
Portland	20	56	.263	33
San Antonio	18	58	.237	35

x-clinched playoff spot
z-clinched conference

Tuesday's games

L.A. Lakers 128, Toronto 111
Washington 117, Milwaukee 113
Miami 109, New York 99
Philadelphia 109, Oklahoma City 105
Minnesota 113, Houston 106
Cleveland 129, Utah 113
Denver 110, San Antonio 105
Sacramento 109, L.A. Clippers 95
Golden State 104, Dallas 100

Wednesday's games

Portland 89, Charlotte 86
L.A. Lakers 125, Washington 120
Atlanta 121, Detroit 113
Boston 135, Oklahoma City 100
Brooklyn 115, Indiana 111
Minnesota 133, Toronto 85
Memphis 111, Milwaukee 101
Orlando 117, New Orleans 108
Phoenix 122, Cleveland 101

Thursday's games

Atlanta at Dallas
Philadelphia at Miami
Sacramento at New York
Golden State at Houston
Denver at L.A. Clippers

Friday's games

Oklahoma City at Indiana
Orlando at Charlotte
Portland at Washington
Sacramento at Boston
Detroit at Memphis
Miami at Houston
New York at Chicago
San Antonio at New Orleans
Toronto at Milwaukee
Golden State at Dallas
Minnesota at Phoenix
Utah at L.A. Clippers

Saturday's games

Cleveland at L.A. Lakers
Detroit at Brooklyn
Philadelphia at Memphis
Atlanta at Denver

Sunday's games

Houston at Dallas
Cleveland at L.A. Clippers
Miami at Indiana
Portland at Boston
Oklahoma City at Charlotte
Chicago at Orlando
Washington at Toronto
New Orleans at Phoenix
New York at Milwaukee

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Doncic, DAL	66	762	454	2240	33.9
Antetokoun., MIL	71	820	505	2179	30.7
Gil.-Alex., OKC	71	763	532	2150	30.3
Brunson, NY	70	697	362	1945	27.8
Booker, PHO	62	603	363	1710	27.6
Durant, PHO	69	699	345	1899	27.5
Tatum, BOS	71	653	401	1930	27.2
Jokic, DEN	73	758	335	1924	26.4
Curry, GS	69	605	279	1821	26.4
Fox, SAC	67	643	295	1764	26.3

AROUND THE NBA

Health will be vital for Knicks, 76ers

Both teams looking for East finals return

By Noah Trister
Associated Press

Even in defeat, Jalen Brunson and the New York Knicks put on an entertaining show these last few days.

The question now is whether the banged-up team can really be a factor in the postseason title chase — because it's been a while.

New York has not made the conference finals since 2000, one of the longest droughts in the NBA. The Knicks did win their first-round playoff series last year, but they'll need to take another step before Madison Square Garden can host the kinds of massive postseason scenes that were common there a quarter-century ago.

Sunday night was a preview of what that could look like as New York fought Oklahoma City to the wire. Brunson's layup put the Knicks up with 4.1 seconds left, only for Shai Gilgeous-Alexander to answer from the corner, giving the Thunder a 113-112 victory.

A performance like that makes the Knicks look like contenders, but their health is a major concern. Julius Randle (dislocated right shoulder) hasn't played since late January. OG Anunoby (right elbow injury) hasn't played in more than two weeks — New York is 15-2 in games he's appeared in since the Knicks acquired him from Toronto.

Peter K. Afriyie/AP

Philadelphia 76ers guard Buddy Hield drives to the basket against Knicks guard Jalen Brunson in the first half in New York on March 10. Neither team has been to the Eastern Conference finals since the early 2000s.

Mitchell Robinson returned from a 3½-month absence for the game against Toronto last week, but he did not play against Oklahoma City because of a sprained left ankle.

"We always feel that if we defend and we rebound and we keep our turnovers down, no matter where we are, no matter who we have, if we do those three things it'll put us in position to win," coach Tom Thibodeau said.

Only a couple of current teams have gone longer without reaching the conference finals than the Knicks. Washington hasn't been since 1979, and Charlotte has never made it. New Orleans hasn't advanced that far, either, although that team's entire existence in Louisiana is actually younger than the Knicks' drought.

Another team in the East has fallen short for almost as long as New York: The Philadelphia 76ers haven't made it to the conference finals since Allen Iverson took them to the NBA Finals in 2001.

Joel Embiid has won an MVP with Philadelphia, and the 76ers have been seeded in the top three in the East playoffs four times in the past six years, but they haven't made it past Round 2.

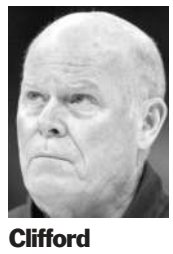
Embiid is working his way back from knee surgery, and Philadelphia would be in the play-in tournament if the season ended now. So the 76ers face a daunting path if they're finally going to return to the NBA's final four.

Clifford stepping down as Hornets head coach

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Steve Clifford said the grind of an 82-game season became too much — and the losing didn't help, either.

So Clifford informed the Charlotte Hornets on Wednesday that he is stepping down as head coach after the season. He plans to stay on in an advisory role. Clifford said he wasn't forced out, and it was his decision to leave.



Clifford

"You need a certain energy level to get through 82 games," he told The Associated Press. "This year was really tough to get through."

It doesn't help that the Hornets are 18-57 this year and 45-112 the past two seasons under Clifford.

"Probably the losing over the last couple of years has been part of it," he said. "I don't know how you gauge that, but it wears on you. This can be an incredibly rewarding league. But it's also difficult with all of the travel. I got to the point this year where it was all too much for me. I need time away from coaching."

Clifford declined to say if his health factored into his decision. In 2017, during his first stint with the Hornets, Clifford stepped away from the team because of a health issue.

Clifford believes the Hornets are in good hands and have a solid core in Brandon Miller and LaMelo Ball.

"The foundation is there," Clifford said. "Two days ago I am sitting here and watching our game earlier this season against the Celtics (from November) and LaMelo has 36 points and (eight) assists and Mark (Williams) has 18 points and 16 rebounds and Miles (Bridges) hits a game-winning 3. My point is there is a talented foundation there."

WOMEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

Each Final Four team has compelling story

Clark's Iowa team, NC State's impressive run overshadow heavyweights UConn, S. Carolina

BY DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Caitlin Clark and Iowa are back in the Final Four again. So are Dawn Staley and undefeated South Carolina.

The women's basketball world will descend on Cleveland for the national semifinals on Friday and the championship game two days later.

Clark willed her team to its second consecutive trip to the Final Four, scoring 41 points to beat defending champion LSU 94-87 on Monday night. The Tigers knocked out the Hawkeyes last year in the title game. Now the Hawkeyes are two wins away from their first national championship.

"That's obviously our goal. That's where we want to be," Clark said. "But you've got to win one at a time. There's still two more there to get. That's what makes the Final Four so fun. Anybody can take it. Anybody can win it."

Next up for Iowa is UConn, the team that knocked them out of the tournament in Clark's freshman season. The Huskies beat Southern California 80-73 in the other regional final on Monday night.

Staley's team will face North Carolina State, which is making its first appearance in the Final Four since 1998.

A lot of attention will be on Clark, which Staley doesn't mind, because it means her unbeaten team is flying a bit under the radar. It's the second consecutive year that South Carolina has reached the Final Four undefeated and the fourth in a row the team has advanced at least this far.

South Carolina (36-0) vs. North Carolina State (31-6)
AFN-Sports
1 a.m. Saturday CET
8 a.m. Saturday JKT

Most of the talk this season has focused on star players across the country like Clark, USC's JuJu Watkins, UConn's Paige Bueckers and Notre Dame's Hannah Hidalgo.

The Gamecocks, who have an entire new starting five this year, aren't built around just one player. They have taken a back seat as far as attention goes.

"I like it. I really do. Like go ahead, take the spotlight, put it somewhere else," Staley said. "Let this team continue to thrive in the space that they're given. Hopefully at the end of the day, next week this time, I'm hoping that we give a lot of people a lot to talk about."

Like South Carolina, there wasn't much expectation for the Wolfpack to make the Final Four. They were unranked coming into the start of the season, making N.C. State the first unranked team in the preseason poll to reach the Final Four since Washington did it in 2016. Wins over UConn and Colorado before December gave notice that the Wolfpack really were a good team.

N.C. State was one win away from reaching the national semifinals two years ago before losing to UConn in double overtime in the Elite Eight.

"I think of Kay Yow — 34 years at N.C. State and took this program to a Final Four in '98," Wolfpack coach Wes Moore said.

"I think of the players two years ago that were a double-overtime game away from being in this exact spot. So I think of them. And then I think of these players, again, overcoming all the doubts and questions and just — Final Four, y'all."

Moore knows his team has a tall task ahead against the Gamecocks.

"They're a great, great team. Obviously, the best team in the country. But you're not playing a four-out-of-seven series. You're playing one game, OK?" he said. "So we've just got to find a way to win one game against them, and it's going to be a big challenge."

UConn is back in the Final Four after seeing its 14-year run end last season in a loss to Ohio State. Now the Huskies will have to figure out a way to slow down Clark, who has been nearly unstoppable the last two years.

MARY ALTAFFER/AP

South Carolina celebrates with the regional championship trophy after beating Oregon State in the Elite Eight. With the spotlight on Caitlin Clark, the unbeaten Gamecocks are flying a little under the radar.

Last: Given another shot at LSU, Clark delivered for Hawkeyes

FROM PAGE 48

Make no mistake, this is Clark's party.

She has been the dominant story this season, a generational talent who has lived up to expectations and even pushed beyond them. So maybe it's fitting that Clark will take her last collegiate shots on the same floor where LeBron James rose from hyped high school phenom to NBA superstardom.

The game's best outside shooter, Clark has hardly missed.

With the stakes as high as possible on Monday night in Albany, N.Y., Clark came through.

A year after losing in the NCAA title game to the Tigers and star Angel Reese, who famously taunted her in the closing seconds, Clark got even in the rematch with a few flicks of her right wrist.

She dropped nine 3-pointers while passing UConn great Diana Taurasi's tourney record for 3s, and Clark moved past Oklahoma's Taylor Robertson for the most 3s in a career for Division I players.

Iowa (33-4) vs. UConn (33-5)
AFN-Sports
3:30 a.m. Saturday CET
10:30 a.m. Saturday JKT

At one point in the second half, LSU guard Hailey Van Lith, who was given the impossible assignment of guarding Clark, reacted with a shrug and a "what am I supposed to do?" expression after watching another 3 fall.

For Bluder, it was nothing new. But the setting made this more special.

"Her distant 3s were spectacular," Iowa's coach said. "We asked her to try to get to the rim in the first quarter. I thought she did. She did a great job of that. We wanted her to get some high-percentage easy ones to begin with, and she did.

"In the third quarter, when she took that distant 3 and she nailed it to get us going, I knew then we were in good shape. I never want to talk about her without talking about her passing. Absolutely unbelievable."

In some ways, so is UConn's presence in this year's Final Four, despite its blue-blooded pedigree.

The Huskies have been ravaged by injuries, forcing Auriemma to play four freshmen and leaving him with little depth. Fortunately, he's still got the marvelous Paige Bueckers, who has returned to her All-America form after missing last season with a knee injury.

Auriemma has had more-talented teams, led by stars Breanna Stewart, Diana Taurasi, Sue Bird and Maya Moore, but this one is unique.

"There's something about this group that the intangibles are what's carrying us right now, that grit, that toughness," said the 70-year-old Auriemma, an 11-time national champion. "Will it hold up in the Final Four? I don't know. The Final Four, talent takes over in the Final Four. We'll see what happens, but that's been the story of this group for the last three years."

While 12.3 million viewers across America watched Iowa-LSU Part II on a celebratory night for women's hoops, Moore wasn't one of them. He had a legitimate excuse: game planning for the talented Gamecocks.

Moore spent the day in his office dissecting film of coach Dawn Staley and her Southeastern Conference champions, who have shown moments of vulnerability during March Madness but head into the weekend favored to cut down the nets in Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse on Sunday.

Moore said when he walked into the house his wife was watching Iowa and he caught Clark putting the finishing touches on LSU.

"I saw the last minute," he said. "But I've seen the highlights. I saw her up close and personal last year. We were fortunate. We went to Iowa a year ago and won. We held Caitlin Clark to 45. I can't believe I didn't have coaches calling me last year for my scouting report in the NCAA Tournament.

"She is amazing."

Some might say the same about the Gamecocks, led by 6-foot-7 All-American center Kamilla Cardoso. They've been dominant, but something's shaky, and Staley wasn't always convinced this group would be one of the last four standing.

"I'm shocked," she said. "I'm shocked that we're undefeated. I'm shocked that we're here at the Final Four competing for a national championship. Our coaching staff put in a lot of work, and sometimes when you put the work in, it's returned in this fashion.

"It's caught us off guard, but I'm super happy for our players because they started from the bottom and then they're here."

MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

MICHAEL DWYER/AP

UConn head coach Dan Hurley celebrates with center Donovan Clingan, left, after defeating Illinois in an Elite Eight game in the NCAA Tournament on March 30 in Boston. UConn will play Alabama in the Final Four.

Beating reigning champion UConn won't be easy task

BY JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

The 2024 version of March Madness has apexed with a trio of streak busters in the desert.

N.C. State is in the Final Four for the first time since Jim Valvano ran around trying to find someone to hug after the 1983 national championship. Purdue and big man Zach Edey will make their first Final Four appearance since Joe Barry Carroll dominated the paint in 1980.

Alabama? Never been.

An angry pack of Huskies awaits in the Valley of the Sun.

Dominating on its way to a fifth national championship a year ago, UConn has looked even more unbeatable so far in its run to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07.

"Our defense is elite. Our offense is elite. We rebound the ball," coach Dan Hurley said. "These guys play every possession like it's the end of the world."

With 7-foot-2 Donovan Clingan in the middle and talent across the roster, UConn won its first four NCAA Tournament games by an average of 27.7 points. The Huskies made Illinois look like a JV team in the Elite Eight, reeling off 30 straight points in a 77-52 victory to become the first reigning champion to reach the Final Four since Florida's consecutive titles.

Knocking off UConn will be a monumental task in Glendale, Ariz., starting with Alabama in the semifinals Saturday.

"His (Hurley's) formula is working out pretty well," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "I'm going to have to figure out that formula myself here soon."

No. 4 Alabama vs. No. 1 UConn
AFN-Sports
2:30 a.m. Sunday CET
9:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

No. 11 NC State vs. No. 1 Purdue
AFN-Sports
12 a.m. Sunday CET
7 a.m. Sunday JKT

Playing fast and letting 3s fly from all over, Alabama led the nation in scoring during the regular season and has kept up the pace in March. Led by heady, gritty point guard Mark Sears, the Crimson Tide scored at least 89 points in three of four NCAA Tournament games, including 109 in the opener against Charleston.

Alabama reached its first Final Four by making 16 3s in an 89-82 win over Clemson.

"Guys bought in — we can make this run, other teams have done it," Oats said. "We have the capability to do it."

On the other side, Purdue has college basketball's most unstoppable force in Edey.

Edey has been nearly unguardable, becoming the first player since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then known as Lew Alcindor) in 1968 to have at least 50 points and 35 rebounds while shooting 65% from the field the first two games of an NCAA Tournament.

Edey topped that with a career-high 40 points and 16 rebounds in a 72-66 win over Tennessee that sent the Boilermakers to the Final Four a year after making history by losing to a No. 16 seed.

"Zach's got a competitive fight to him. He doesn't back down," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "When you have that elite physical size and you have that competitive spirit with it, with some skill, it's pretty dangerous. He's pretty hard to handle."

So is N.C. State's DJ Burns Jr.

The 6-9, 275-pounder has a big-sized game and a personality to go with it. He's the focal point of the Wolfpack offense, and opponents have yet to find a way to stop him.

Burns has great footwork, a soft touch and vision to find the open man nearly every time. Combined with the team's other DJ, Arizona State transfer DJ Horne, N.C. State won five games in five days just to get into the NCAA Tournament and kept rolling into the Final Four as a No. 11 seed.

"DJ Burns has been around for a long time, but his personality, his play has really opened eyes of a lot of folks around the country," N.C. State coach Kevin Keatts said.

Advanced stats show each Final Four team has unique strengths

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

It feels like UConn vs. the field in the men's Final Four, and the advanced stats show the defending champions have no glaring weaknesses.

Still, the other three teams made it this far for a reason. Here's a look at what each Final Four participant does well and what it doesn't, with some help from Ken Pomeroy's numbers:

UConn (35-3)

Pomeroy Rank: 1

Strengths: Where do you begin? In 2-point field goal percentage, the Huskies are No. 4 in the country on offense and No. 2 on defense. If you think you can make up for that by making a lot of 3s, UConn is pretty good at limiting attempts from beyond the arc. They also don't turn the ball over that much, and they're No. 13 in Division I in offensive rebounding percentage. So you're probably not going to make up ground in those areas if you're behind in shooting percentage.

Weaknesses: The Huskies are only 315th in adjusted tempo. So you can play a low-possession game against them and try to pull off the upset that way.

In This Tournament: The best example of UConn's dominance came in the Elite Eight, when the Huskies shot 3 of 17 from 3-point range and still beat Illinois by 25. UConn shot 28 of 43 from 2-point range while the Illini went 11 of 44.

Purdue (33-4)

Pomeroy Rank: 3

Strengths: Led by 7-foot-4 Zach Edey, the Boilermakers are dominant on the boards, ranking sixth in the country in offensive rebound percentage. They're also ninth in free throw rate and second in 3-point shooting percentage.

Weaknesses: Purdue is the most turnover-prone team at the Final Four, and the Boilermakers don't force many themselves. They could be vulnerable to a hot-shooting opponent.

In This Tournament: Purdue had an uncharacteristically poor outside shooting day in the regional final against Tennessee, getting outscored 33-9 beyond the arc. The Boilermakers made up for that by attempting 33 free throws to 11 for the Volunteers, and they had 13 offensive rebounds to Tennessee's six.

Alabama (25-11)

Pomeroy Rank: 12

Strengths: It'll be a contrast in style against UConn, with the Crimson Tide ranking ninth in adjusted tempo. They shoot a lot of 3s, and they hit the offensive boards well. Alabama doesn't get to the line as well as, say, Purdue, but the Crimson Tide shoot a better percentage from there than any other team remaining.

Weaknesses: Defense, defense and defense. Alabama is 104th in adjusted defensive efficiency. Pomeroy's stats go back to 1997, and the worst defensive team to win a title in that span was Baylor in 2021, which finished at No. 22.

In This Tournament: The Crimson Tide's 109-96 win over Charleston in the first round was a good reflection of what this team is. The second round against Grand Canyon was a helter-skelter game in which scoring was down, but then Alabama reverted to form, beating North Carolina and Clemson while allowing over 80 points but scoring enough to win.

NC State (26-14)

Pomeroy Rank: 43

Strengths: The Wolfpack take care of the ball, ranking ninth in the country in turnover percentage. That means even if the team is going through a rough stretch offensively, they don't compound their problems, and they've been able to avoid falling too far behind.

Weaknesses: Even after this run through the ACC Tournament and its NCAA regional, N.C. State is pretty average in many statistical categories. The Wolfpack don't rely much on the 3, so if an opponent can defend big man DJ Burns one on one, they may be in trouble.

In This Tournament: Burns is shooting 67% from the field through four games. Thanks to that, N.C. State has shot over 50% from 2-point range in each game. They've gotten some good fortune too, with Marquette and Duke combining to go 9 of 51 from 3-point range.

LM OTERO/AP

North Carolina State's DJ Burns Jr. goes up for a basket against Duke's Kyle Filipowski during the second half of an Elite Eight game in the NCAA Tournament in Dallas on March 31. N.C. State won 76-64.

SPORTS

Streaking Stars

Playoff-bound Dallas stretches winning streak to eight ›› NHL, Page 42

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Last shot

Clark nears end of college career with crown in sight

By Tom Withers
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The final shows for Caitlin Clark's tour are booked in an arena just a short drive from the Rock & Roll Hall Fame.

Hello, Cleveland.

College basketball's biggest act — men's or women's — will close out her magnificent Iowa career this weekend in the Final Four after Clark delivered a 41-point, 12-assist performance in a win over defending champion LSU.

It was vintage Clark, and typical Clark.

"When the stage is the brightest, when the spotlight is the brightest, she's at her very best," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said Monday on a Zoom call. "She loves this. Some people wither in the moment. She just gets stronger in the moment.

"When it's her time, she's going to just shine."

> **"When it's her time, she's going to just shine."**
> Lisa Bluder
> Iowa coach

Clark, who has spent this season rewriting record books, signing autographs for adoring fans everywhere she goes and excelling despite enormous pressure, will lead the Hawkeyes (33-4) in Friday night's second semifinal against UConn (33-5), one of the game's preeminent programs back for a 23rd time under Hall of Fame coach Geno Auriemma.

In the other semifinal, undefeated South Carolina (36-0) puts perfection on the line against North Carolina State (32-6), a No. 3 seed that already has pulled off two upsets in the NCAA Tournament and has sights on a third.

"Hey, we're coming to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, you got to crash the party, right?" Wolfpack coach Wes Moore said with a smile.

SEE LAST ON PAGE 46

Iowa guard Caitlin Clark will put the finishing touches on her college career this weekend in Cleveland when the Hawkeyes compete in the women's Final Four.
HANS PENNINK/AP

After last season, Yanks relishing hot start ›› MLB, Page 44

027664 520705