

OLYMPICS: Forging ahead is risky for host Tokyo **Page 48**

TV: Discovering the real Hemingway **Page 31**

GAMES: Bravely Default II not so rigid for a JRPG **Page 15**

EUROPE
& PACIFIC
WEEKEND
EDITION

MUSIC

Taylor Swift takes the first step toward reclaiming her catalog **Page 28**

STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

Volume 79 Edition 258 ©SS 2021

FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2021

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

Best Sniper competitors relish chance to improve

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

FORT BENNING, Ga. — It wasn't easy to leave Germany with its tightened coronavirus restrictions to travel to the United States, but the chance to earn the Army's Best Sniper title made navigating the red tape worthwhile.

For Army Sgts. Gerald Vistayan and John Visco, toting their sniper rifles to the U.S. added more difficulty, but the 2nd Cavalry Regiment infantrymen said they were determined to make it to Fort Benning this week for the 2021 Best Sniper competition. After completing the first three events of the four-day competition, Visco said he was certain the bureaucracy-induced headaches would prove worthwhile.

"It was a lot of work to get here," he said. "But it's incredible. The competition is no joke. It's tough. They're throwing some really tough stuff at us, but it's a lot of fun, and we can definitely learn a whole lot from it."

Win or lose, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment soldiers said the opportunity to rub shoulders and talk

SEE SNIPER ON PAGE 4



COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes
An Army sniper competes in the Best Sniper competition at Fort Benning in Georgia on Monday. The four-day competition tests U.S. military sniper teams from the Army, Marine Corps and Coast Guard on a variety of skills.

AFGHANISTAN



AP

Marine Lance Cpl. Brian Quinones is pictured after a gunbattle as part of an operation to clear the area of insurgents near Musa Qala, in northern Helmand province, Afghanistan, on July 23, 2010. President Joe Biden plans to remove all troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11.

Assessing their service

As US prepares to end the Afghan War, veterans agonize over sacrifices

BY DAN LAMOTHE AND ALEX HORTON
The Washington Post

As the U.S. military shut down scores of remote outposts and patrol bases across southern Afghanistan 10 years ago, the Taliban planted a white flag on a former U.S. position that had been bulldozed, claiming the turf as its own and taunting the withdrawing Americans.

Marine Lance Cpl. Ramon Kaipat removed the flag and was killed instantly when an im-

proved bomb hidden beneath it exploded, said Peter Lucier, another Marine in Kaipat's unit.

For Lucier, the incident, more than any other event in his seven-month tour, captured the bloody futility of the war. Kaipat, 22, died on April 11, 2012, standing on ground that U.S. commanders were no longer interested in

SEE SERVICE ON PAGE 7

RELATED

NATO forces also will leave country after Biden decision **Page 6**

Lawmakers pledge to seek ways to keep Taliban in check **Page 7**

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.124	\$3.534	\$3.785	\$3.404	Azores	..	..	\$3.685	..
Change in price	-0.8 cents	No change	-0.1 cents	-1.5 cents	Change in price	..	..	-0.1 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$3.967	\$4.264	\$3.940	Belgium	..	\$2.989	\$3.258	\$3.011
Change in price	..	+2.4 cents	+2.6cents	+2.4 cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$3.433	\$3.684	\$3.303	Turkey	..	..	\$3.570	\$4.026*
Change in price	..	No change	-0.1 cents	-1.5 cents	Change in price	..	..	-0.1 cents	+0.1 cents

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$3.579	..	\$3.199	South Korea	\$2.929	..	\$3.589	\$3.209
Change in price	..	No change	..	-1.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	No change	-1.0 cents
Okinawa	\$2.919	..	..	\$3.199	Guam	\$2.929	\$2.339	\$3.589	..
Change in price	No change	..	..	-1.0 cents	Change in price	No change	No change	No change	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
For the week of April 16-22

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		
Euro costs (April 16)	\$1.17	
Dollar buys (April 16)	0.8142	
British pound (April 16)	\$1.34	
Japanese yen (April 16)	106.00	
South Korean won (April 16)	1090.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.3785	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2515	
China(Yuan)	6.5256	
Denmark (Krone)	6.2103	
Egypt (Pound)	15.6795	
Euro	.8350	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7681	
Hungary (Forint)	299.85	
Israel (Shekel)	3.2809	
Japan (Yen)	108.73	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3015	
Norway (Krone)	8.3853	
Philippines (Peso)	48.44	
Poland (Zloty)	3.80	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7505	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3347	
South Korea (Won)	1116.69	
Switzerland (Franc)	.9219	
Thailand (Baht)	31.16	
Turkey (NewLira)	8.0965	

(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.)

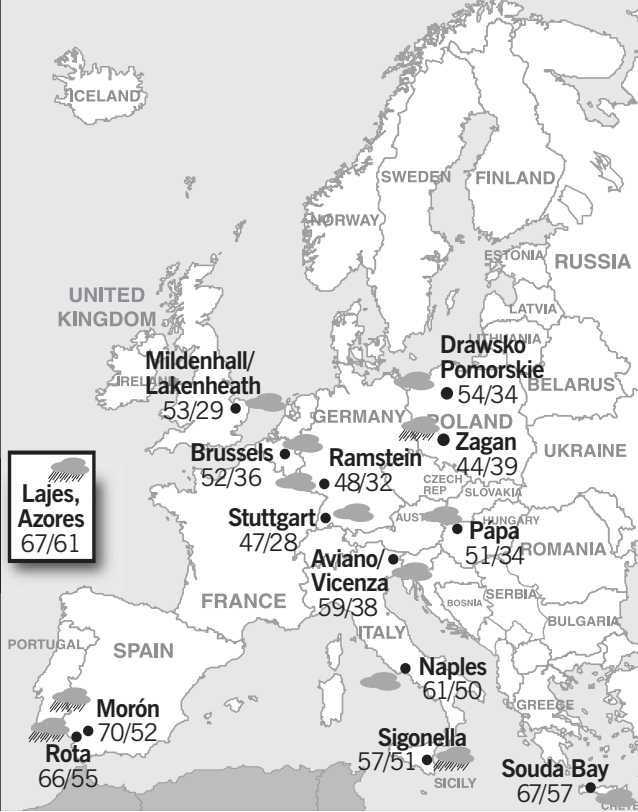
INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	3.25	
Interest Rates Discountrate	0.75	
Federal funds market rate	0.07	
3-month bill	0.02	
30-year bond	2.32	

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

Classified

Comics

Crossword

Faces

Opinion

Sports

36

12

38-39

38-39

35

40

41-48



However you read us,
wherever you need us.

Mobile • Online • Print

EUROPE

ADVERTISING

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

MIDDLE
EAST

ADVERTISING

CustomerService@stripes.com

+49 (0) 0631.3615.9111
DSN: 314.583.9111

PACIFIC

ICHIRO
KATAYANAGI

PacificAdvertising@stripes.com

CML +81 (42) 552.2511 ext. 77313
DSN: 227.7313

PCSing?

STARS AND STRIPES

RELOCATION GUIDE

Every Friday in the European and Pacific editions
of Stars and Stripes AND online daily at
www.stripes.com/relo

MILITARY



ALEX MILLAR, U.S. NAVY/AP

Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group Three, and Capt. G. S. Thoroman, commanding officer, amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard, salute the ensign for colors during a decommissioning ceremony at Naval Base San Diego on Wednesday.

Navy decommissions ship destroyed in dockyard fire

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The U.S. Navy on Wednesday decommissioned the USS Bonhomme Richard docked off San Diego nine months after flames engulfed it in one of the worst U.S. warship fires outside of combat in recent memory. The ceremony at Naval Base

San Diego was not open to the public, with the Navy citing concerns over the spread of the coronavirus.

The amphibious assault ship is expected to be towed to a shipyard in Texas for dismantling.

The ship that ignited July 12 burned for four days and was left

with extensive structural, electrical and mechanical damage. A Navy official said arson was believed to be the cause.

The Navy estimated that repairing the ship would run more than \$2.5 billion. Dismantling the ship is expected to cost about \$30 million.

Pacific Fleet's deputy commander tapped to lead 3rd Fleet based out of San Diego

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A naval aviator with experience in Iraq spanning from Operation Desert Storm in 1990-91 to the more recent Inherent Resolve has been nominated to command the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet, the Defense Department announced Wednesday.

If the Senate approves, Rear Adm. Stephen Koehler, currently the deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii, will be promoted to vice admiral as commander of 3rd Fleet, which is responsible for about 50 million square miles of the eastern and northern Pacific Ocean.

Its current commander, Vice Adm. Scott Conn, has held the position since September 2019.

Koehler, a San Diego native, was commissioned in March 1989 and holds a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College, according to the Navy's official biography. He is also a graduate of the Joint Staff College and the Navy Nuclear Power Program.

He has commanded the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and Carrier Strike Group Nine.

During operational tours, he supported the operations Desert Storm, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, Inherent Resolve and Freedom's Sentinel in support of contingency operations in the Middle East.

He has logged over 3,900 hours in the F-14 Tomcat and the F-18 E/F Super Hornet fighter jets, according to his bio.

He served ashore as an instructor pilot with Strike Fighter Squadron 101, known as the Grim Reapers, and later as the squadron's executive officer. He has also served as chief of staff to Joint Task Force Horn of Africa in Djibouti.



U.S. Navy

Rear Adm. Stephen Koehler, currently serving as deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii, has been chosen to lead 3rd Fleet.

He became deputy commander of Pacific Fleet in October.

olson.wyatt@stripes.com
Twitter: @WyattWolson

Top leaders push to address flux of migrants at border

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commanders of U.S. Northern and Southern Commands testified Wednesday that the United States must approach the influx of Central American migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as a national security issue and address the problem holistically.

"We have a national security imperative right now on our southern border that we need to deal with," said Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, who leads U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command.

VanHerck and Adm. Craig Faller, who leads U.S. Southern Command, told lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee that multiple factors have come together to create an environment that has driven more than 350,000 migrants to attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in the first three months of 2021.

Their comments came at a full committee hearing about national security challenges and military activity in North and South America. A rising number of migrants, including unaccompanied children, are arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, many to seek asylum.

"I believe it's a confluence of multiple things that are drawing folks to our border, from transnational criminal organizations to [coronavirus] to multiple natural disasters," Faller said.

The military officials urged lawmakers to look at migration as a "national security imperative," and the U.S. must come up with a whole of government approach to secure U.S. borders.

"The challenge is creating an environment where these folks can succeed, so they don't have to feel like they migrate. And that takes a whole of nation approach to get after transnational criminal organizations," VanHerck said in response to a question from Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., about the impact of President Joe Biden's immigration policies.

McClain, along with some other Republicans, pushed witnesses to comment on whether Biden's actions to reopen the southern border and "encourage migrants to illegally cross" into the U.S. makes the country less safe.

VanHerck did not directly comment on specific Biden policies, though he said "the admin-

istration is on a good track."

Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., pressed VanHerck to answer a question on whether strong enforcement of existing immigration laws would serve as a deterrent to illegal immigration.

"Our border security is national security and the laws that we have on the books would be part of contributing to overarching national security when enforced," the general responded.

One Democrat, Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, applauded Faller's description of the external forces — including the pandemic, natural disasters and political violence — driving large numbers of people from their homes in Central America and toward the U.S. southern border.

"Thank you for that testimony today because I frankly think coming from you, it's a really important message that people should really think about as we try to deal with the problems at the border," he said.

Robert Salesses, the Defense Department's acting secretary for homeland defense and global security, also said he recognizes the importance of a "whole of nation" approach.

"The Defense Department certainly can play a role in helping, but it also takes the diplomatic, the economic, the information, the law enforcement, all of that, and our partners in the South working together too to rethink this, and I think that approach can be very successful," Salesses said.

Throughout the hearing, officials voiced concern over the continuous threat that transnational criminal networks and illicit trafficking pose to the U.S.

"They traffic in arms, humans, drugs, and claim tens of thousands of lives here in the United States each year," Faller said in his opening statement.

The organizations drive illegal migration because people look to find safety elsewhere and it also allows bad actors to gain influence, such as China, he added.

Salesses said the Pentagon should apply some of the lessons that the Defense Department has learned through developing counterterrorism mechanisms to address the issue, because the focus on interdiction has not been successful.

cammarata.sarah@stripes.com
Twitter: @sarahjcam

MILITARY

Sniper: Competition challenges more than just shooting skills

FROM PAGE 1

shooting with some of the military's most accomplished snipers was worth the extra paperwork, the coronavirus tests and the trek to southwest Georgia, where the sun blazed down on competitors Monday afternoon as temperatures neared 90 degrees.

Fort Benning officials said they pressed Army leaders to OK the Best Sniper and Best Ranger events to be held there this week during its annual Infantry Week because they are important opportunities for elite-skilled people to share tactics and training practices. The events were canceled last year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

While some travel restrictions have remained in place for the military, the Army has continued to move large units of troops around the globe for training and other operations. The ability to safely move troops persuaded Army officials to move forward with a scaled-back version of Infantry Week, with competitors coming to Fort Benning from assignments around the world.

The Army gave the go-ahead in late January, said Lt. Col. Nate Williams, who commands Fort Benning's 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment. William's unit oversees the Army Sniper Course, which plans and holds the Best Sniper competition.

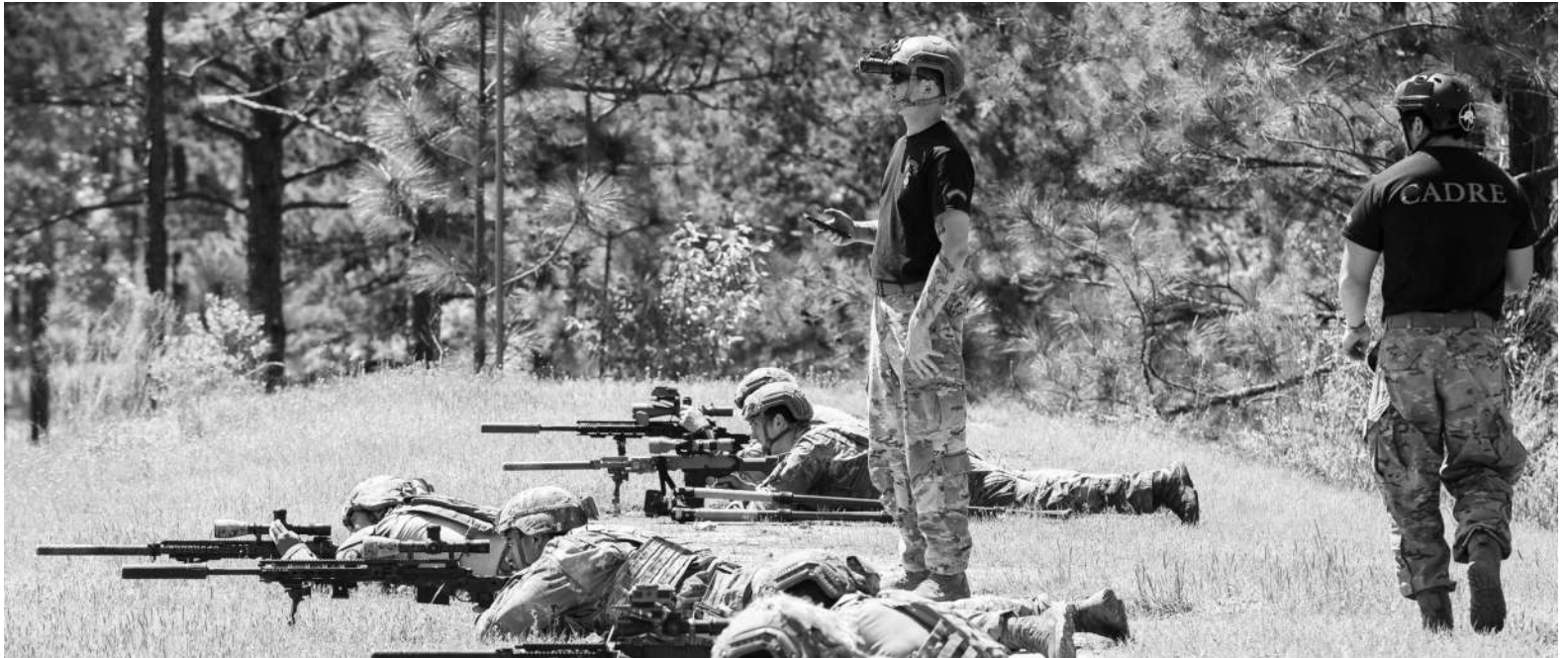
"We felt we needed to be able to show people that we can begin to open back up again as an Army," Williams said Monday.

Chance to learn

The competitions also give soldiers invaluable opportunities to advance their skills and learn from each other.

"It's demonstrating the expertise that we have within our ranks," Williams said. "Making a very competitive environment is healthy for the Army, and it's important considering the environment we think we're moving toward — large scale combat operations."

The competition this week includes 26 teams of sniper duos.



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Above: Army Sniper School cadre look on as snipers compete in the heartbreaker event during the Best Sniper competition at Fort Benning in Georgia on Monday. Below: Army snipers eye targets down range during the heartbreaker event.

One qualified team did not make the trip to Fort Benning after a positive test for the coronavirus, Williams said.

The Sniper Course cadre planned the 2021 event with the potential fight against a near-peer rival in mind. Taking cues from the Pentagon — which has shifted its primary focus from counterterrorism to full-scale operations to fight rival powers like China and Russia — instructors designed the 2021 contest to resemble an operation against an Army with similar capabilities to the U.S. military.

'Reality check'

The first surprise for sniper competitors came early in the competition, said Sgt. 1st Class Zachary Small, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the contest. Competitors in the very first stage, which kicked off at 4 a.m. Monday, had to maneuver a land navigation course as patrols of simulated enemies and small drones searched for them.

This competition challenges snipers' mental and physical abilities, Small said. It is not just a shooting competition; snipers



have to demonstrate other critical battlefield skills, including stealth, reconnaissance, fitness and the ability to adjust under pressure.

"We like to try and start off with a reality check," Small said. "So here we're taking an approach to this competition as what you could see in that next fight — that near-peer threat fight. That challenges the competitors to think outside the box and creates realism in the scenario in the best way that we could without having an actual enemy for searching for them."

Small said the competitors would have other surprises before a team was to be crowned Best Sniper on Friday.

After having the competition canceled last year, Small said he was pleased to see so many teams travel to Fort Benning this year. The Army sent teams from dozens of units, including National Guard and teams from elite special oper-

ations units including the 75th Ranger Regiment and Green Berets.

"You've got guys in this competition that are inexperienced, brand new right out of the Sniper course who are coming into this with the institutional knowledge of the latest information from the school, and guys who are very experienced operators, who've been out in a combat operational environment a ton over the last 10 years or more," Small said. "You get these guys together, and that's how you keep the [sniper] community growing; that's how you create and advance [tactics, techniques and procedures]. This is where a whole lot of knowledge is passed on and shared."

For Coast Guard snipers Petty Officer 2nd Class Randy Robinson and Nathan Wuerffel, the Army-led competition has offered them the opportunity to talk shop with snipers from the other ser-

vices, including more experienced snipers who have served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Coast Guardsmen assigned to the Maritime Security Response Team in Chesapeake, Va., said after only three competitions by Monday afternoon, they had picked up new ideas for training.

"For us, we're kind of limited a lot of times to the maritime environment, so here rubbing shoulders with guys that were in Syria and stuff, it's cool to get those experiences," Wuerffel said. "We want to come to these things knowing we're going to learn new things to train on when we go back."

Winning the competition would also be welcome, Robinson said.

"It would mean the world to win," he said. "We want to win this thing for sure."



Competitors use their partners as a base for shooting during the four-day contest that began Monday.

PACIFIC

American toilet paper taxes plumbing at Yokota

BY ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

Residents of at least one American military installation in Japan may have to purchase Japanese toilet paper to keep their plumbing working properly, according to the housing maintenance office.

American multi-ply toilet paper brands are to blame for frequently clogged pipes on Yokota Air Base, Amy Moses, operator of the tower maintenance department on Yokota, told Stars and Stripes in a phone call Monday. Yokota, in western Tokyo, is the headquarters for U.S. Forces Japan, 5th Air Force and the 374th Airlift Wing.

“We aren’t trying to take business away from the exchange or commissary,” she said. “But it saves a lot of work and frustration for everyone in the long run if you don’t use that toilet paper.”

Over time, thick toilet paper brands can back up in the septic system and lead to flooding and clogged drains that affect the bathtub and sink, Moses said. She said Japanese brands are designed to dissolve faster than American brands.

Residents should also avoid us-



ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes

American multi-ply toilet paper brands are to blame for clogged pipes on Yokota Air Base, Japan.

ing flushable wipes and putting toilet cleaning tabs in the tank, she said.

Moses said anyone unwilling to surrender their favorite brands of creature comfort should be stingy with the amount of tissue they employ and flush the toilet twice after using it. That will use more water, which is a good reason to reconsider your choice in toilet paper, she said.

Moses said she gets as many as eight calls per day about clogged plumbing, often repeat calls from the same residents.

“If people want to keep using the American brand they like, that’s fine, but eventually they’re going to have issues,” she said. “It gets really bad and even floods people’s master bedrooms.”

Yokota resident and post office

volunteer Tammy Jenkins said she has firsthand experience with a flooded toilet. After the third time her bathroom flooded since February 2020, tower maintenance told her American toilet paper was the problem.

“At first I thought they were joking,” she said. “But it’s worth going off base for Japanese brands if it means not having an overflowing

toilet.”

Jenkins, who said she got used to buying family-sized packages of American toilet paper after the coronavirus pandemic spurred a shortage last year, intends to give Japanese brands a try.

“It would have just been nice to know when I first got here,” she said. “I do a lot of shopping off base anyway, so I really don’t mind. I just wish I didn’t have to find out this way.”

Moses said the tower maintenance office is planning to address the toilet paper issue at newcomers’ orientations in the future.

At Kadena Air Base on Okinawa and Yokosuka Naval Base south of Tokyo, American-brand toilet paper is not an issue, sources there said.

“It is not a requirement here to use Japanese toilet paper,” Yokosuka spokesman Randall Baucom told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. “However, residents should stop using disposable wipes, or put them in the trash can rather than flushing them.”

earl.eric@stripes.com
Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl

ARMY
MARINE CORPS
NAVY
AIR FORCE
COAST GUARD
SPACE FORCE
You Can Join Navy Federal

Join a credit union that understands what it means to serve. On average, our members earn and save \$361* more per year by banking with us.

Visit navyfederal.org to join.

Insured by NCUA. *Dollar value shown represents the results of the 2019 Navy Federal's Member Giveback Study. The Member Giveback Study is an internal comparative market analysis of Navy Federal's loan and deposit account rates as compared to the national average for similar products. © 2020 Navy Federal NFCU 80932-E (9-20)

NAVY
FEDERAL
Credit Union

Our Members Are the Mission

ARMY
MARINE CORPS
NAVY
AIR FORCE
COAST GUARD
SPACE FORCE
VETERANS

WAR ON TERRORISM

Blinken in Afghanistan to sell US troop withdrawal

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war.

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 U.S. soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the U.S. invasion in 2001.

"I wanted to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the presidential palace in Kabul. "The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring."

"We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of U.S. troops.

Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that

we're writing together."

"We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdullah said.

Blinken arrived in the Afghan capital from Brussels, where he and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin briefed NATO officials on the U.S. decision and won quick approval from the allies to end their Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

Biden, Blinken and Austin have all tried to put a brave face on the pullout, maintaining that the U.S.- and NATO-led missions to Afghanistan had achieved their goal of decimating Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network that launched the 9/11 attacks and clearing the country



AP

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, talks with Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar outside the presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Thursday.

of terrorist elements that could use Afghan soil to plot similar strikes.

However, that argument has faced pushback from some U.S. lawmakers and human rights advocates, who say the withdrawal will result in the loss of freedoms that Afghans enjoyed after the Taliban was ousted from power in

late 2001.

"My views are very pessimistic," Naheed Farid, a member of parliament, told reporters when asked her thoughts about the future of her country. Farid was one of a half-dozen, mostly women, civic leaders who met with Blinken at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

NATO forces to leave Afghanistan after Biden's decision

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The NATO alliance, which rushed to join the United States in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, will depart the war-torn country alongside American forces in the months ahead, allies announced Wednesday.

"Standing shoulder to shoulder, we have paid a high price, both in blood and treasure," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said from NATO headquarters in Brussels, where he was flanked by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The NATO drawdown of its 10,000 troops will begin by May 1 and will be "orderly, coordinated, and deliberate." The drawdown also will be completed within a few months, Stoltenberg said.

"This is not an easy decision and it entails risks," the NATO chief said.

However, after two decades, he said it's become clear there is no

Western-led military solution to the challenges Afghanistan faces.

"We will leave Afghanistan together and bring our troops home," Blinken said. "After years of saying we will leave at some point, that time has come."

Blinken also said the original purpose of the war, eliminating the threat to the U.S. homeland posed by al-Qaida in Afghanistan, has been achieved.

The war, which killed and maimed thousands of U.S. troops, ultimately reduced the ability of militants to launch attacks on the United States, Austin concurred.

"Our troops have accomplished the mission they were sent to Afghanistan to accomplish," he said.

Allies will respond forcefully, Austin said, if the Taliban launches attacks on coalition forces as they draw down.

NATO's decision, reached during a high-level meeting at alliance headquarters, was almost inevitable following an announcement

Wednesday by President Joe Biden that the U.S. will pull all of its troops out of Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, which sparked the longest American war in history.

The Afghanistan War marked the first time in history that NATO allies invoked Article V, an alliance bedrock principle that an attack on one member is met with a response from all. For nearly 20 years, U.S. commanders and political leaders have said the end of the war in Afghanistan would be conditions based. But in announcing an end to U.S. military involvement, Biden said the time has come to pull out regardless of security conditions on the ground.

The withdrawal of roughly 2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan and thousands more NATO forces will be wrapped up before September.

The decision to depart is not without risk given the weakness of the Afghan government and doubts about the Afghan military's ability

to hold off the Taliban without international military backing. Blinken acknowledged even with U.S. military backing, Afghan forces remain locked in a stalemate.

Austin said the U.S. will continue to lend financial support to Afghanistan and its security forces.

The U.S. is expected to reposition counterterrorism forces in the region to be able to respond to threats should they emerge in Afghanistan. Austin declined to say what possible locations could be for such a force.

In 2014, NATO ended its formal combat role in Afghanistan as it shifted to training and advisory mission. But that didn't spell the end to the fighting, though most of the combat was left to U.S. forces in subsequent years.

During that time, Afghan forces were officially in the lead on the battlefield, but received massive logistics and advisory support from the U.S.-led coalition. The Afghan military has taken heavy casualties over the years at the hands of Tali-

ban insurgents, who often seized the initiative despite lacking the superior armaments and air power provided by Western forces.

The NATO-led combat force in Afghanistan peaked at 140,000 troops in about 2010, but by 2014 that number had dropped down to 13,000 troops as allies transitioned to its training effort. The numbers gradually declined with the passing years.

In all, more about 3,500 coalition troops — mostly American — were killed in the nearly 20-year campaign and more than 30,000 were injured. The U.S. also spent hundreds of billions of dollars on the war that started as a mission to eliminate al-Qaida fighters after the 9/11 attacks, but then morphed into a sprawling nation-building campaign that critics of the war said ultimately proved to be wasteful.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: @john_vandiver



DAN PELED/AP

Australian Defense Forces personnel take part in a parade in Brisbane, Australia, before deploying to Afghanistan in 2015.

Australia to withdraw from Afghanistan

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia would complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in September in line with the United States and other allies, the prime minister said Thursday.

Australia's contribution to the NATO-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain.

"In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in September," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

"The decision represents a significant milestone in Australia's military history," he added.

President Joe Biden plans to withdraw the last 2,500 U.S. troops from Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States that triggered the campaign.

More than 39,000 Australian military personnel have served in Afghanistan since 2001, and 41 have been killed there.

Morrison became emotional when reading the names of the Australian soldiers who had died

between 2002 and 2014. He said the Afghanistan campaign was worth the sacrifice.

"Freedom's always worth it. Australians have always believed that. That's why Australians who have serviced in our defense forces have always pulled on that uniform," Morrison said.

"Pulling on that uniform and serving under that flag, defending our values and standing up for them is what Australians do and those 41 brave men have exhibited that more than any other Australian can ever hope to," he added.

WAR ON TERRORISM

Lawmakers plan diplomatic moves on Taliban

By SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A group of Democratic House lawmakers said Thursday that they will attempt to limit the Taliban's ability to regain power in Afghanistan by continuing to have a robust diplomatic presence there and provide economic support on the heels of President Joe Biden's announcement to remove all remaining U.S. troops from the country.

"We're withdrawing combat troops, but we're not ending our relationship with Afghanistan. We'll continue to have a robust diplomatic and humanitarian

presence there, and we'll continue to invest in Afghanistan stability, infrastructure and national defense," Rep. Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey said during a call with reporters about Biden's planned withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

Sherrill, a member of the House Armed Services Committee who served in the Navy for nearly a decade, said the United States will continue to ensure al-Qaida is unable to rebuild its training bases and terrorist networks in Afghanistan.

"We've been there 20 years, and there are certain gains that I think will be entrenched in

certain regions of Afghanistan. And so, to the best of our ability, we'll be supporting the gains we've made, and ensuring that they continue," said Sherrill, a co-chairperson of the House Democratic Caucus task force on national security.

Other leaders of the group on the call included Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, the vice chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, Rep. Jason Crow of Colorado and Rep. Andy Kim of New Jersey, both co-chairpersons of the task force.

The comments came as some top Republicans, including Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, the top

Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, voiced concern that the Taliban could quickly regain a foothold in key locations in Afghanistan after the U.S. military leaves.

The country could return to "a breeding ground for international terrorists," Inhofe said Wednesday after Biden's speech about withdrawing the troops.

Aguilar acknowledged the U.S. is taking a risk that the Taliban could gain ground and take over more territories.

"We'll be keeping a close eye on what's happening, because most folks will recognize that

the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces are not yet capable of standing on their own," the congressman said.

Aguilar, who serves on the House Appropriations Committee subpanel on defense, said the U.S. must now assess the assistance package to the Afghanistan government and security forces, and examine what logistical support the U.S. can still provide without combat troops there.

The U.S. must also look at how to conduct the counterterrorism mission and assist the local government in the long term, he said.

Service: Vets reflect on Afghan tours

FROM PAGE 1
holding.

Lucier recalled Kaipat's death as he heard the news that President Joe Biden intends to remove all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of terrorist attacks that launched the United States into combat in that country. Lucier, now a law student in St. Louis, has long advocated for withdrawal, but the decision left him with no sense of satisfaction.

"I thought I'd be happy. It doesn't feel like a win," he said. "It's just really empty."

More than 800,000 people served in Afghanistan in the U.S. military, and many of them are reflecting anew on what the war achieved and the meaning of their individual parts in it.

About 2,300 U.S. service members died in the conflict, the longest in American history, and 20,000 more were wounded in action. Nearly 30,000 U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan at least five times, according to data released by the Pentagon. Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians also were killed, and the United States spent more than \$2 trillion prosecuting the war.

The planned departure has evoked a range of emotions among veterans of the conflict. Some felt withdrawal was inevitable, the frustrating result of repeated mistakes and missed opportunities. The rebuilding of Afghanistan and

the establishment of good governance seem as distant as ever. So does the end of violence.

"I think for the people who fought on D-Day, it was probably nice for those who survived to go on vacation in France 30 years later and see what they were looking at," said Loren Crowe, who deployed to Afghanistan twice as an Army infantry officer. "We're not going to get that, and that's fine. That doesn't make it a meaningless experience. But it also doesn't do very much to justify the cost that we paid."

Crowe, of Cambridge, Mass., earned a Silver Star for valor in 2008 in eastern Konar province and was shot there in 2012. He said he couldn't see how the U.S. military could stay but is concerned about what withdrawal means for Afghan civilians, especially if the Taliban returns to power and rules with the brutality it exhibited in the 1990s.

"There are 40 million people in that country," Crowe said. "They're going to bear all the costs of this decision."

Crowe said he began to have doubts about U.S. policy as he was serving in Afghanistan. Having less and less sense of what the United States was trying to achieve, he said, he began focusing his tour, to the extent that he could, on protecting the soldiers under his command.

Amber Chase, of El Paso, Texas,

served three deployments in Afghanistan as a mortuary affairs soldier. Her tasks included receiving the remains of the war dead, and she prepared hundreds of bodies for the last trip home.

Chase, who is pursuing a nursing degree, received Biden's announcement with some bitterness.

"It makes every life we lost over there pointless," Chase said.

Tyler Burdick was on a mountain in Utah training to compete in snowboarding in next year's Winter Paralympics when he heard about the Biden administration's plans. Burdick lost both legs below the knee after surviving an explosion in Marjah, Helmand province, in 2010. He was injured in the back of an armored vehicle just days before he was to return home.

Burdick, who provided medical treatment to Marines as a Navy hospital corpsman, said he approved amputation four years later, as the hardware implanted to stabilize his legs began to fail and his pain increased. He had planned to pursue a career as a Navy SEAL before he was injured.

Burdick, 40, said he thinks it is "long overdue" that the United States withdraw and that "we've overstayed our usefulness there — if we even had any to begin with."

But he remains proud of those with whom he served and stays in touch with them.

"It's frustrating that we weren't



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/AP

Marines Capt. J.R. Farris, left, and Cpl. M.A. Madding return Taliban fire from behind a primary school wall in Afghanistan in 2009.

able to accomplish as much as we set out to do," Burdick said, citing Marjah's return to Taliban control after the Marines withdrew. "It means a lot of guys got hurt and a lot of guys got killed, and it was all for nothing — and that's hard. That's something that I have to live with and deal with. We all do."

Ronald Moeller, who served as a civilian intelligence officer in Afghanistan on 12 tours, said he "really doesn't like" the Biden administration but agrees with the president's decision to withdraw. But he's also concerned that U.S. history in Afghanistan will quickly be forgotten and that necessary lessons from how the war was fought will not be learned.

Moeller, who lives in South Dakota, cited the confusion sur-

rounding operations he witnessed in eastern Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, where missions often were launched without any understanding of the people who were there and what previous American units had or had not done.

"It was sort of headlong rushing into, I don't want to say failure, but from one mistake to another," he said.

No U.S. service member has been killed in combat in Afghanistan since February 2020, but Moeller is concerned that that could come to an end. The Taliban has largely held fire since President Donald Trump signed an agreement last year to withdraw U.S. troops by this May, but it is not assured that the militants will continue to do so, Moeller said.

HAVE YOU BEEN INJURED?

Defense Base Act Legal Representation

Including Non-US Citizens

If you work for a company under contract with the United States Government outside the U.S. and fall ill or are injured at work, you may have the right to pursue a claim in the U.S. for benefits under the Defense Base Act. This law protects and applies to all injured employees, regardless of their citizenship or nationality. Under the law, you may be entitled to select a doctor and to payment of wages if restricted from working.

Hire Us Online Now!
www.barnettandlerner.com

For a **FREE** consultation
888.732.7425



**Barnett, Lerner, Karsen,
Frankel & Castro**
Professional Association
Attorneys and Counselors at Law

MILITARY

‘Magic mushroom’ could work better against depression

BY KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

The active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms may be more effective at treating depression than a leading antidepressant, a study has found, potentially opening up new avenues of treatment for troops who suffer from the debilitating condition.

The severity of depressive symptoms dropped by at least half in 70% of people who were given psilocybin in clinical trials conducted last year at Imperial College London, the study published Thursday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* said. Only 48% of a group that took the common antidepressant escitalopram saw a similar decrease.

Thirty of 59 patients were given two separate doses of 25 milligrams of psilocybin at three-week intervals, and took a daily placebo for six weeks. The others received two much smaller doses of psilocybin—1 mg—three weeks apart and took escitalopram, which is marketed under brand names like Cipralex and Lexapro, daily for six weeks.

All the patients had long-term, moderate to severe clinical depression and received psychological counseling throughout the study.

In addition to showing larger reductions in depressive symptoms, the psilocybin group reported greater improvements in their ability to cry or feel compassion, intense emotion and pleasure, the study said. They also said they felt less drowsy than those who took escitalopram.

“These findings provide further support for the growing evidence base that shows that in people with depression, psilocybin offers an alternative treatment to traditional antidepressants,” said professor David

Nutt, principal investigator on the study and the Edmond J. Safra Chair in Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London.

Earlier this month, Army veteran Jose Martinez urged California lawmakers to advance a bill that would decriminalize psychedelic drugs like magic mushrooms and LSD.

Martinez said he believes psilocybin mushrooms helped save his life when he felt depressed, after losing both legs and an arm to an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. Opponents of the bill said decriminalization could lead to more deaths by poisoning.

A study published in *Military Medicine* in 2012 estimated that 12% of deployed, 13% of previously deployed and just under 6% of never deployed military personnel have clinical depression.

In military personnel, clinical depression impedes readiness and often leads to poor health outcomes, a separate study published last year in *Military Medicine* said.

The Imperial College researchers are calling for a larger study to be conducted into the effects of psilocybin on mental health.

“We look forward to further trials, which if positive should lead to psilocybin becoming a licensed medicine,” Nutt said.

Until then, however, the researchers are advising against self-medication with magic mushrooms to treat depression.

Taking mushrooms found while foraging in the woods “might not have a positive outcome,” they said, stressing that the study was conducted under strict clinical guidelines.

zeitvogel.karin@stripes.com
Twitter: @StripesZeit



BRIAN FERGUSON/Stars and Stripes

People walk past open shops in the pedestrian zone of Kaiserslautern, Germany, last month.

Rheinland-Pfalz survey aims to help Americans navigate life in Germany

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
AND MARCUS KLOECKNER
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany—U.S. personnel and their families living in Rheinland-Pfalz can participate this month in a state-funded survey intended to help Americans adjust to life in Germany.

Americans on or off base may participate in the U.S. military-approved, anonymous online questionnaire through April 25, said John Constance, manager of “Welcome to Rheinland-Pfalz! Our neighbors from the USA.”

The welcome project was formed in 2014 to connect Americans and Germans.

The pandemic has “put a strain on everybody,” Constance said, and has made it difficult for Americans to feel like part of their communities. That’s especially true for recent arrivals who haven’t been to a festival or participated in typical German experiences.

“We’re looking to gather data on what American families strive to do during their time in Germany as well as their wishes and needs,” he said.

Respondents are asked to “tell us what they need in a ‘normal setting,’” Constance said, disregarding temporary lockdown restrictions, so the project can offer services once the pandemic is over.

The survey contains 21 questions and takes a few minutes to complete. One question asks what respondents are interested in doing in Germany, and includes multiple-choice answers such as improving German language skills, attending events, volunteering and interacting with locals.

Some questions seek a written response, such as one that asks what services or events would have made it easier to settle into local life.

Common challenges Americans face in Germany include the recy-

cling system, cultural differences and finding information, Constance said.

Respondents don’t have to provide their name or street address, but they can opt to list their city or village so participation can be gauged and specific issues can be identified, Constance said.

Rheinland-Pfalz has the largest U.S. presence of Germany’s 16 federal states, with tens of thousands of service members and their families at Ramstein Air Base, U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz, Spangdahlem Air Base and other installations.

There are 37 municipalities participating in the initiative. They list information in English on the program’s website, welcome-to-rlp.org/home, where a link to the survey is available.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com
kloeckner.marcus@stripes.com
Twitter: @stripesktown

Rota to gain 2 destroyers by middle of decade, EUCOM chief says

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany—Two more Navy destroyers are expected to be based out of Rota, Spain, within the next few years, a move that will help U.S. European Command keep closer tabs on Russian submarines, the top U.S. officer on the Continent said Thursday.

The destroyers, which have been sought by EUCOM for at least five years, could be in Spain by 2025 or 2026, Gen. Tod Wolters said during testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.

The ships would join four other destroyers based at Rota and will improve EUCOM’s ability to “see under sea,” Wolters said.

A larger naval presence and the Air

Force’s new F-35 fighter jets, scheduled to be based in the United Kingdom later this year, will add both firepower and intelligence reach to EUCOM’s capabilities, Wolters said.

U.S. military officials have repeatedly raised concerns about increased Russian submarine activity stretching from the North Atlantic to the Mediterranean. The Russians have been especially busy in a strategic waterway near Greenland over the past three years, Wolters said.

The additional destroyers are “absolutely, positively critical,” Wolters said.

The destroyers based at Rota have played a large role in countering Russia. Last year, they patrolled as far north as the Barents Sea, a first since the Cold War.

Sixth Fleet warships also have upped their presence in the Black Sea in 2021, not far from where Moscow maintains its Black Sea Fleet. The destroyers “are the workhorses of deterrence,” Wolters said.

When Moscow annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Russia gained a stronger foothold in the Black Sea region. Wolters said Russia has made a “concerted effort” to build up there.

The Black Sea “is an area of increased policy focus” for the Pentagon, said Laura K. Cooper, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia, who also testified Thursday.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: @john_vandiver



KRIS LINDSTROM/U.S. Navy

The destroyer USS Arleigh Burke gets underway from Norfolk, Va., en route to its new homeport in Rota, Spain, on March 26.

VIRUS OUTBREAK

Jobless claims in US lowest since outbreak

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits tumbled last week to 576,000, a post-COVID low and a hopeful sign that layoffs are easing as the economy recovers from the pandemic recession. The Labor Department said Thursday that applications plummeted by 193,000 from a revised 769,000 a week earlier. Jobless claims are now down sharply from a peak of 900,000 in early January.

For the week ending March 27, 16.9 million people were continuing to collect jobless benefits, down from 18.2 million in the previous week. Those figures make clear that even as the economy has strengthened in recent weeks, millions are facing a loss of a job or income and have been struggling to pay bills or rent.

The drop in claims comes after employers adding 916,000 jobs in March, the most since August, in a sign that a sustained recovery is taking hold as vaccinations accelerate, pandemic business restrictions are lifted in many states and Americans appear increasingly willing to travel, shop, eat out and otherwise spend again. The unemployment rate fell to 6%, from 6.2%, less than half the pandemic peak of nearly 15%.

The nation's unemployment rate has declined steadily, from a high of 14.8% a year ago to 6%. The last time the jobless rate was this low, weekly claims were around 350,000, still well below their current level.

Economists point to a range of potential explanations for the discrepancy. For one thing, many states are still struggling to clear backlogs of applications from previous weeks. As a result, jobless claims being reported now may stem from layoffs that occurred weeks ago. Some states are also facing what they suspect is a sizable number of fraudulent claims for unemployment aid.

Another possible factor is that under President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion rescue package, the federal government is now supplementing weekly jobless benefits by \$300 a week — on top of the average state unemployment payment of about \$340 — through September. That extra money may be encouraging more people to request unemployment aid.

“We feel like we’re at a place where the economy’s about to start growing much more quickly.”

Jerome Powell
Federal Reserve chairman

Still, not all unemployment applications are approved. The government reports each week on how many people have applied for aid — but not how many have actually received it. Claims are rejected if the applicants hadn't earned enough money to qualify or had been fired or quit their jobs. Unemployment aid is intended for people who have been laid off through no fault of their own.

Most analysts have grown bullish about the economy's prospects for the coming months. They include Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, who expressed his belief in an appearance last Sunday on “60 Minutes” that the economy is at “an inflection point” and appears poised for a boom.

“We feel like we’re at a place where the economy’s about to start growing much more quickly and job creation coming in much more quickly,” Powell said. “This growth that we’re expecting in the second half of this year is going to be very strong. And job creation, I would expect to be very strong.”

Many economists, in fact, are concerned more about a potential burst of inflation stemming from the unleashing of pent-up consumer demand. Prices for lumber, copper, oil and other raw materials have already risen as demand for gas, homes and electronic equipment has jumped.

Consumer prices rose 0.6% in March, the most since 2012, the government reported Tuesday, and are up 2.6% in the past year.

Powell has said that while inflation will likely pick up in the coming months, the price increases will probably ease as the pandemic-induced disruptions in many industries' supply chains are worked out.



CHRISTOPHE ENA/AP

A medical staffer works in the ICU unit at Charles Nicolle public hospital, Thursday, in Rouen, Normandy. The World Health Organization said Thursday that Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from COVID-19.

WHO: Europe passes 1M deaths

Associated Press

GENEVA — A top official from the World Health Organization says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from COVID-19 and the situation remains “serious,” with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

The comments by Dr. Hans Kluge on Thursday aimed to emphasize that Europe must keep up its guard with social distancing and speed up vaccinations as virus variants drive new infections to record levels in some nations.

Overall, a tally by Johns Hopkins University shows nearly 3 million deaths have been linked to COVID-19 worldwide — with the Americas hardest hit, followed by

Europe. The United States, Brazil and Mexico have reported the highest number of deaths, collectively at more than 1.1 million.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to “early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries” in WHO’s 53-country European region, which stretches into Central Asia — and cited “declining incidence” among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of COVID-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritized for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% — the lowest level in the pandemic.

Britain in particular has seen

new infections and COVID-19 deaths drop dramatically since January, due to a successful vaccination program and a prolonged national lockdown that is only being reversed in stages.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with COVID-19 than for people who receive AstraZeneca’s coronavirus vaccine.

“Let there be no doubt about it, the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective in reducing COVID-19 hospitalization and preventing deaths,” he said, adding that WHO recommends its use for all eligible adults.

USFK reports 3 service members, one dependent to COVID-19 count

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Forces Korea had four people come up positive for COVID-19, the coronavirus respiratory disease, after arriving in South Korea between March 31 and April 8, according to a news release Thursday.

No other U.S. installations in South Korea or Japan had reported new COVID-19 patients as of 5 p.m. Thursday.

Two of USFK’s new patients are service members who arrived at Osan Air Base during that period aboard the Patriot Express, a government-contracted passenger service, the release said. The others are a service member and a dependent who arrived between March 31 and April 5 at Incheon International

Airport aboard commercial flights.

Three of the new cases tested positive on their first mandatory test before entering quarantine, and one came up positive on the test required to exit quarantine, according to the release. All were quarantined at either Osan or farther to the south at the U.S. Army’s Camp Humphreys.

In Japan, Tokyo reported 729 people newly infected with the coronavirus, its highest one-day total since 734 cases on Feb. 4, according to public broadcaster NHK. Parts of the city are under an emergency order that requests bars and restaurants to close between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m.



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

People wearing masks to guard against the coronavirus stroll through Tokyo on Tuesday.

ditzler.joseph@stripes.com
Twitter: @JosephDitzler



U.S. Coast Guard

Crew members of the Coast Guard cutter Glenn Harris pull a person from the water Tuesday after the Seacor Power, a 175-foot commercial lift boat, capsized 8 miles south of Grand Isle, La.

12 missing, 1 dead, 6 rescued from capsized ship off La.

Associated Press

PORT FOURCHON, La. — Coast Guard boats and aircraft have covered an area larger than the state of Rhode Island to search for 12 people still missing Wednesday off the Louisiana coast after their offshore oilfield vessel capsized in hurricane-force winds.

One worker’s body was recovered Wednesday and six people were rescued Tuesday after the Seacor Power overturned Tuesday afternoon in the Gulf of Mexico, the Coast Guard said.

The search, interrupted by darkness and bad weather, has totaled nearly 40 hours and more than 1,440 square miles of Gulf waters by Wednesday afternoon, according to a news release. The hunt for the missing continued into the evening, said Petty Officer Carlos Galarza.

Coast Guard Capt. Will Watson said earlier that winds were 80 to 90

mph and waves rose 7 to 9 feet high when the lift boat overturned.

“That’s challenging under any circumstance,” Watson said. “We don’t know the degree to which that contributed to what happened, but we do know those are challenging conditions.”

The bulky vessel, also called a jackup rig because it has three long legs it can lower to the sea floor to lift the boat out of the water as an offshore platform, flipped over Tuesday afternoon south of Port Fourchon, a major base for the U.S. oil and gas industry.

One worker was found dead on the surface of the water, Watson said at a news conference Wednesday.

Divers were heading to the local area Wednesday afternoon, Coast Guard spokesman Petty Officer John Micheli said. Numerous other agencies helped with the search.

The relationship of those on board

to owner Seacor Marine was not immediately clear. The boat, capable of working in up to 195 feet of water, can carry a crew of 12, two “special personnel” and 36 passengers, according to the company website.

“We are deeply saddened by the news of the vessel capsizing and are working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard and local authorities to support all efforts to locate our valued team members and partners,” the Houston-based company said in a statement.

The vessel left Port Fourchon at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, bound for Main Pass off the southeast Louisiana coast, Watson said. The Coast Guard received a distress message from a good Samaritan at 4:30 p.m. and issued an urgent marine broadcast that prompted multiple private vessels to respond, saving four people, the agency said. Coast Guard crews rescued another two people.

US imposes new sanctions, expels Russian diplomats

By ERIC TUCKER
AND AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Thursday announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and sanctions against nearly three dozen people and companies as it moved to hold the Kremlin accountable for interference in last year’s presidential election and the hacking of federal agencies.

The actions, foreshadowed for weeks by the administration, represent the first retaliatory measures announced against the Kremlin for the hack, familiarly known as the SolarWinds breach. In that intrusion, Russian hackers are believed to have infected widely used software with malicious code, enabling them to access the networks of at least nine agencies in what U.S. officials believe was an intelligence-gathering operation aimed at mining government secrets.

Besides that hack, U.S. officials last month alleged that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to help Donald Trump in his unsuccessful bid for reelection as president, though there’s no evidence Russia or anyone else changed votes or manipulated the outcome.

The measures announced Thursday include sanctions on six Russian companies that support the country’s cyber activities, in addition to sanctions on 32 individuals and entities accused of attempting to interfere in last year’s presidential election, including by spreading disinformation.

The 10 diplomats being expelled include representatives of Russian

intelligence services, the White House said.

The White House also said Biden was using diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to respond to reports that Russia encouraged the Taliban to attack U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan based on the “best assessments” of the intelligence community. Reports of alleged “bounties” surfaced last year, with the Trump administration coming under fire for not raising the issue directly with Russia. The White House did not publicly confirm the reports. “The safety and well-being of U.S. military personnel, and that of our allies and partners, is an absolute priority of the United States,” the White House said Thursday.

The sanctions, presumably intended to send a clear retributive message to Russia and to deter similar acts in the future, are certain to exacerbate an already tense relationship between the U.S. and Russia.

In a television interview last month, President Joe Biden replied “I do” when asked if he thought Putin was a “killer.” He said the days of the U.S. “rolling over” to Putin were done. Putin later recalled his ambassador to the U.S. and pointed at the U.S. history of slavery and slaughtering Native Americans and the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II.

U.S. officials are still grappling with the aftereffects of the SolarWinds intrusion, which affected agencies including the Treasury, Justice, Energy and Homeland Security departments, and are still assessing what information may have been stolen.

Soldier charged after video of confrontation with Black man

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A white Army noncommissioned officer depicted in a viral video accosting and shoving a Black man in a South Carolina neighborhood has been charged with third-degree assault.

Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Pentland, 42, was charged Wednesday and listed as detained in the Richland County jail and issued a personal recognizance bond, according to online jail records, which did not show him as having an attorney.

The video, posted Monday by a woman on Facebook and shared thousands of times, shows a man, identified as Pentland, demanding



Pentland

that a Black man leave the neighborhood before threatening him with physical violence.

“You’re in the wrong neighborhood,” Pentland, standing on the sidewalk, can be heard saying to the other man before using an expletive. “I ain’t playing with you. ... I’m about to show you what I can do.”

According to Shirell Johnson, who posted the video, the incident happened in a subdivision of The Summit, which has a Columbia address but is technically outside the city’s limits. The video does not show what started the conflict. Johnson did not immediately respond to a message from The Associated Press seeking further details.

The recording begins with Pentland asking the Black man what he’s doing in the area. The Black man says he was simply walking and not bothering anyone.

Throughout the three-minute video, Pentland continuously demands that the other man leave the neighborhood, getting in his face and, at one point, pushing the man, who almost falls to the ground.

“Let’s go, walk away,” he said. “I’m about to do something to you.

You better start walking right now.”

At the end of the video, a woman who Pentland identifies as his wife can be heard telling the other man that he had picked a fight with “some random young lady” in the neighborhood, a claim the Black man then denies.

Johnson said authorities arrived at the scene and only gave Pentland a citation for malicious injury to property for slapping the man’s phone out of his hand and cracking it.

Officials at Fort Jackson, the U.S. Army’s largest basic training facility, said Wednesday they were looking into the incident. On one of

its Twitter accounts, base officials also said that U.S. Department of Justice authorities were investigating as well.

According to social media accounts connected to Pentland, he has been stationed at Fort Jackson since 2019 and has worked as a drill sergeant at the garrison.

During a news conference, Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott said the other man in the video was not a juvenile but declined to release his name. Lott said that man had been involved in other incidents in the neighborhood in the days leading up to the video but said that “none of them justified the assault that occurred.”

NATION

Defense rests case in Chauvin trial

Associated Press
MINNEAPOLIS — The defense at the murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd rested its case Thursday without putting Chauvin on the stand, presenting a total of two days of testimony to the prosecution’s two weeks.
Closing arguments are set to begin Monday morning, after which the jury will get the case.
Before the jury was brought into the courtroom, Chauvin, his COVID-19 mask removed in a rare courtroom moment, informed the judge that he would not testify, saying he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to take the stand.
It would have been the first time Chauvin publicly told his side of the story.

The prosecution briefly recalled a lung and critical care expert to knock down a defense witness’ theory that carbon monoxide poisoning from a squad car’s exhaust might have contributed to Floyd’s death.
Dr. Martin Tobin noted hospital tests that showed Floyd’s level was at most 2%, within the normal range.
And with that, both sides finished presenting their cases.
After closing arguments, the racially diverse jury will begin deliberating at the barbed-wire-ringed courthouse, with Minneapolis on edge against a repeat of the protests and violence that broke out last spring over Floyd’s death.
Judge Peter Cahill reminded the jurors they will be sequestered

starting Monday, and said: “If I were you, I would plan for long and hope for short.”
The question of whether Chauvin would testify was the subject of weeks of speculation.
The decision not to testify was announced a day after a forensic pathologist testifying for the defense said that Floyd died of a sudden heart rhythm disturbance as a result of his heart disease.
That contradicted prosecution experts who said Floyd succumbed to a lack of oxygen from the way he was pinned down.
The defense witness, Dr. David Fowler, said Wednesday that the fentanyl and methamphetamine in Floyd’s system, and possibly carbon monoxide poisoning, were contributing factors in the 46-year-old Black man’s death.

Fowler also testified that he would classify the manner of death “undetermined,” rather than homicide, as the county’s chief medical examiner ruled.
He said Floyd’s death had too many conflicting factors, some of which could be ruled homicide and some that could be considered accidental.
Prosecutor Jerry Blackwell launched an aggressive cross-examination, attacking Fowler’s findings down the line.
He got Fowler to acknowledge that even someone who dies from being deprived of oxygen ultimately dies of an arrhythmia.
Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd’s death after his arrest on suspicion of passing a counterfeit \$20 at a neighborhood market.



COURT TV/AP
Dr. David Fowler, a retired forensic pathologist and former chief medical examiner for the state of Maryland, testifies Wednesday in Minneapolis.

Wright family wants tougher charges against ex-cop

Associated Press
BROOKLYN CENTER, Minn. — Black community leaders and family members of Daunte Wright were calling for more serious charges against a white police officer in Wright’s death, comparing her case to the murder charge brought against a Black officer who killed a white woman in nearby Minneapolis.
Former Brooklyn Center police

Officer Kim Potter was charged with second-degree manslaughter in Sunday’s shooting of Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, during a traffic stop. The former police chief in Brooklyn Center, a majority non-white suburb, said Potter mistakenly fired her handgun when she meant to use her Taser. Both the chief and Potter resigned Tuesday. Potter was due for her initial court appearance Thursday.

However, protesters and Wright’s family members say there’s no excuse for the shooting and want prosecutors to file more serious charges.
“The family is glad she got charged but they do hope and pray for a day where they get equal justice,” Wright family attorney Ben Crump said Wednesday. “Why should we always get a fragment of justice?”

Advocates for Wright point to the 2017 case of Mohamed Noor. The Black former Minneapolis police officer fatally shot Justine Ruszczyk Damond, a white woman who was a dual citizen of the U.S. and Australia, in the alley behind her home after she called 911 to report what she thought was a woman being assaulted. Noor was convicted of third-degree murder in addition to second-degree manslaughter and sen-

tenced to 12½ years in prison. Potter’s charge carries a maximum 10-year prison sentence.
Noor testified that he fired to protect his partner’s life after hearing a loud bang on the squad car and seeing a woman at his partner’s window raising her arm. But prosecutors criticized Noor for shooting without seeing a weapon or Damond’s hands, and disputed whether either of them really heard a bang.

Panel advances bill on slavery reparations

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — A House panel advanced a decadeslong effort to pay reparations to the descendants of slaves by approving legislation Wednesday that would create a commission to study the issue.
It’s the first time the House Judiciary Committee has acted on the legislation. Still, prospects for final passage remain poor in such a closely divided Congress. The vote to advance the measure to the full House passed 25-17 after a lengthy and often passionate debate that stretched late into the night.
The legislation would establish a commission to examine slavery and discrimination in the United States from 1619 to the present. The commission would then recommend ways to educate Americans about its findings and appropriate remedies, including how the government would offer a formal apology and what form of compensation should be awarded.
The bill, commonly referred to as H.R. 40, was first introduced

by Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., in 1989. The 40 refers to the failed government effort to provide 40 acres of land to newly freed slaves as the Civil War drew to a close.
“This legislation is long overdue,” said Rep. Jerrold Nadler, the Democratic chairman of the committee. “H.R. 40 is intended to begin a national conversation about how to confront the brutal mistreatment of African Americans during chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and the enduring structural racism that remains endemic to our society today.”
The momentum supporters have been able to generate for the bill this Congress follows the biggest reckoning on racism in a generation in the wake of George Floyd’s death while in police custody.
Still, the House bill has no Republicans among its 176 co-sponsors and would need 60 votes in the evenly divided Senate, 50-50, to overcome a filibuster. Republicans on the Judiciary Committee were unanimous in voting against the measure.

MAX REFUND

in person or virtually.

You can get your taxes done by a tax pro in our office, or virtually via phone or e-mail. Just send a pic of your docs and an expert does the work. But no matter how you file with us, your maximum refund is always guaranteed.

**Virtually**

**Via drop off**

**In an office**

THANK YOU

for trusting us with your taxes.

KLEBER-KASERNE KAISERSLAUTERN
next to Food Court
BLDG 3231 - 0631/414 58444

EINSIEDLERHOF - KAISERSLAUTERN
0631-3554711
Kaiserstr. 55

SMITH-BARRACKS BAUMHOLDER
next to BurgerKing, Alterations, BarberShop
BLDG 8243 - 06783/98 1041 or 0160/545 6538

BAUMHOLDER
06783-981041
Kennedy Allee 28

PANZER-KASERNE BÖBLINGEN
BLDG 2903 - 07031/631 4800

STUTTGART-VAIHINGEN
Patch BKS
0711-1207624
KurmarkerStr. 30



PHONE: 0800 293 2584
elmer.stokes@hrblock.com
www.stokes-agencies.com

WORLD

Macron visits Notre Dame 2 years after devastating fire

Associated Press

PARIS — Two years after a fire tore through Paris’ most famous cathedral and shocked the world, French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday visited the building site that Notre Dame has become to show that French heritage has not been forgotten despite the pandemic.

Flanked by ministers, architects and the retired French army general who is overseeing the restoration of the 12th-century monument, Macron viewed the progress of the ambitious rebuilding

project. He offered the pandemic-weary French public hope that a completion date will arrive one day, if not in the near future.

“We’re seeing here how, in two years, a huge job has been accomplished,” Macron said, recalling the “emotion” throughout France at the images of flames devouring Notre Dame on April 15, 2019. “We also see what remains to be done.”

Macron has promised that the cathedral would be rebuilt by 2024, yet officials acknowledge the work won’t be fully completed by then. They cite factors such as

the COVID-19 pandemic for having slowed down the pace of reconstruction. The blaze also distributed vast amounts of toxic lead onto Notre Dame and the surrounding area, complicating the clean-up work that came before restoration efforts could even begin.

The French president offered a “huge thank you” and a message of determination to all the workers mobilized to rebuild Notre Dame.

“We will need to meet our goals” set for three years from now, Macron said.



French President Emmanuel Macron, center, talks to workers at the reconstruction site of the Notre Dame Cathedral on Thursday in Paris.

Sydney man finds snake in lettuce bought at supermarket

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Alex White thought he was watching a huge worm writhing in plastic-wrapped lettuce he’d just brought home from a Sydney supermarket — until a snake tongue flicked.

“I kind of completely freaked out when I saw this little tongue come out of its mouth and start flicking around and realized it was

a snake because worms don’t have tongues,” White said on Thursday. “I definitely kind of panicked a bit,” he added.

It was a venomous pale-headed snake that authorities say made an 540-mile journey to Sydney from a packing plant in the Australian city of Toowoomba wrapped in plastic with two heads of cos lettuce.

The refrigerated supermarket

supply chain likely lulled the cold-blooded juvenile into a stupor until White bought the lettuce at an inner-city ALDI supermarket on Monday evening and rode his bicycle home with salad and snake in his backpack.

White and his partner, Amelia Neate, spotted the snake moving as soon as the lettuce was unpacked onto the kitchen table.

They also noticed the plastic wrapping was torn and that the snake could escape, so they quickly stuffed the reptile with the lettuce into a plastic food storage container.

White phoned the WIRES rescue organization, and a snake handler took the snake away that night.

Before the handler arrived, White said WIRES had explained

to him: “If you get bitten, you’ve got to go to hospital really quickly.”

ALDI is investigating how a snake could have found its way into a supermarket.

“We’ve worked with the customer and the team at WIRES to identify the snake’s natural habitat, which is certainly not an ALDI store!” the German-based supermarket chain said in a statement.

Stripes

SERVICE DIRECTORY

The Daily Guide to Navigating the European Business Market

Transportation944

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)

For Further Information Please Contact

GERMANY

Phone: +49-(0)6134-2592730

Toll-free: 0800-CARSHIP (Germany only)

E-Mail: info@transglobal-logistics.de

WEB: www.transglobal-logistics.de

UNITED KINGDOM

+44-(0)1638-515714

enquiries@carshipuk.co.uk

www.carshipuk.co.uk

U.S.A

+1-972-602-1670 Ext. 1701

+1-800-264-8167 (US only)

info@tgall.us

www.tgall.us

For 2nd POV Shipments - Offices / Agencies near Military Installations

TransGlobal

LOGISTICS EUROPE GMBH

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

Transportation944

Ship Cars and Containers to and from the USA

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

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

WEEKEND

■ Bravely Default II shows JRPGs can still surprise

Video games, Page 15

reimagining her past

Taylor Swift begins reclaiming her back catalog by revisiting 'Fearless,' the album that put her on the path to superstardom

Music, Page 28

STARS AND STRIPES ILLUSTRATION/Universal Music Group photos

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY



PHOTOS BY JOSE A. IGLESIAS/TNS
A delivery robot runs along the road on March 30 in Section 9, located in the Brickell area of Miami, among restaurants operated by REEF. The robots will deliver from REEF's Miami-area restaurant partners.

Tips not required

Miami's REEF brings robot dinner delivery to downtown

BY BOB WILE
Miami Herald

The future is here — and it is rolling through the Brickell neighborhood delivering dinner.

Miami-based REEF has officially launched a robot delivery service, using Miami's urban core to test bringing food orders from its network of delivery-only kitchens, also called ghost kitchens. REEF is partnering with Mountain View, Calif.-based robot designers Cartken on the rollout. Anyone within a 3/4-mile radius of Brickell and downtown Miami could be on the receiving end of a robotic courier.

For now, customers can't choose whether they get a robot. But consumers who order from a REEF partner brand like Postmates, UberEats, DoorDash or GrubHub may find themselves prompted with the option for one.

For those who do get droid delivery, here's how it works: When the bot arrives at their house or apartment building, it waits outside and sends a text message alerting them that the delivery has arrived. While it makes its delivery, the robot's compartment is locked so that no one but the recipient can access the food. The robots' sensors and cameras help them navigate through busy sidewalks and street crosswalks as well as over steps and curbs.

The cost and time to receive the order is the same as if you were ordering from a plain old human worker — now in short supply due to the pandemic.

"Delivery continues to be the driving force behind supporting many of our beloved restaurants while staying safe during this pandemic," said Matt Lindenberger, Chief Technology Officer at REEF, in a statement. "However, the rising demand for delivery has created a bottleneck during peak dining hours that slows efficiency. We're looking at our robot delivery service as a long-term solution that can advance the delivery ecosystem by offering speed, quality and scale while reducing congestion and carbon emission."



A large SUV steers around a delivery robot running along the road March 30 in the Brickell area of Miami, among restaurants operated by REEF.

The bots will deliver orders from REEF'S Miami partner brands, including Della Bowls, Krispy Rice, Genuine Burger, Fuku, Mamma Parmigiana, BurgerFi, Michy B's, Van Leeuwen and Sam's Crispy Chicken.

REEF, founded in 2013 as ParkJockey by entrepreneurs Ari Ojalvo and Umut Tekin, became a billion-dollar "unicorn" in Dec. 2018 when it raised an undisclosed sum from a syndicate led by tech conglomerate SoftBank; that company's COO, Miami-based Marcelo Claure, recently talked up REEF as an example of Miami's potential as a tech hub. In November, REEF raised an additional investment round of \$1 billion from SoftBank, Emirates-based Mubadala Capital, and Oaktree Capital Management.

While other U.S. communities already enjoy robot catering, REEF could end up ushering in the first mass rollout of the technology. The company says it plans to deploy in other locations in the coming weeks; it currently lists more than 1,000 open job roles nationwide on its website.

"We're proud to be ground zero for this type of exciting and forward-thinking innovation that will help reduce congestion and carbon emissions — not just in Miami, but cities around the world," said City of Miami Mayor Francis Suarez in a statement.



Viofo/TNS
Viofo A139 3 Channel Dash Cam has front-facing, interior infrared and rear-facing cameras, so everything you need is recorded.

Dash cam captures video from front, back and inside

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

When you look at the specs for Viofo A139 triple channel dash cam, it's easy for non-tech heads to be intimidated and stay away from it. But don't. Dash cameras are a technology gadget you think you don't need until you do, which is often too late.

If you are ever in an accident, there's no better evidence than video.

Yes, the Viofo A139 does a lot, but once you see the high-quality image it produces and records (MP4 and JPG), it's easy to see why this is almost a must-have.

The triple cameras include a front-facing, interior infrared, and rear window camera, so everything is recorded without having to sacrifice a view. Along with the cameras, quick-release mounting equipment, easy installation cables, car charger adapter and instructions are all included. It does take a little time for installation, but it's nothing to shy away from doing on your own.

Each camera has a Sony sensor, which records in full HD. You'll really see the effect of the Sony sensors after recording night vision, which provides incredible detail. The front has a 140-degree wide-angle view; the inside and rear are 170 degrees. The front has a nearly 300-degree rotation to ensure the necessary angle.

All three cameras can record simultaneously. Content is stored

on a microSD memory card, class 10 up to 256GB.

The interior camera has a 6-element infrared LED lamp system, which translates to complete coverage of the interior for day or night.

Other features include parking mode, time-lapse, GPS with route data and vehicle speed, dual-band WiFi built-in with 2.4GHz and 5GHz for transferring content, and audio recording. An external microphone can be added to capture audio in specific locations.

Online: viofo.com; \$269.99

Just in time for grilling season, Cave Tools has launched the Chicken and Turkey Roasting Rack to produce dinners cooked to perfection. After using it on a chicken, I'll confirm that it performed and produced as it's promoted, with a smokier, crispier and juicier result.

The patented self-basting and non-stick stainless steel frame makes it simple for cooking on a grill or in an oven. It holds up to 20 pounds of poultry at a unique 20-degree angle. The frame holds the poultry sitting with the legs facing down on the outside of the roasting rack, while keeping the wingtips tucked in.

This allows drippings to pool above the breast, keeping it moist. Keeping the poultry off the grilling surface also speeds cooking time by about 20 minutes.

Online: cavetools.com; \$19.99



CAVE TOOLS/TNS
Cave Tools Roast Rack holds up to 20 pounds of poultry at a 20-degree angle.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



NINTENDO/TNS

Bravely Default II's new cast — a nameable male character, as well as Gloria, Elvis and Adelle — is sent to gather stolen crystals.

Bravely Default II: Impressive flexibility within a rigid genre

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Innovation is hard to come by with Japanese role-playing games. It's a genre that remains stubbornly fixed with its turn-based battles and class systems. Developers have tried to add action elements to gameplay or introduced new progression systems with mixed success.

So when a studio comes across a wrinkle that nudges the genre forward, it becomes a feature to celebrate. With the Bravely Default series, the innovation was so important that it's in the title. The series came up with the Brave and Default systems, which is a gambit mechanic for turn-based combat. Players can be "brave" and use up future actions to frontload an attack or they can "default," which allows them to defend and bank a turn for later.

The concept was a hit and it did so well that Square Enix turned it into a series. Bravely Default II helmed by Claytechworks carries over the hallmark battle system but introduces a new cast and story. It mostly takes place on a continent with five kingdoms — Halcyonia, Savalon, Wiswald, Rimedhal and Holograd. A sixth kingdom called Musa was destroyed and its elemental crystals were stolen.

The story so far ...

The campaign focuses on Musa's Princess Gloria, who is trying to recover the lost treasures. She meets the male lead, whom players can name, and two others: Adelle and Elvis. Together the foursome embark on an adventure to gather the Wind, Water, Earth and Fire Crystals, which are at the heart of internal conflicts inside several kingdoms.

In traditional JRPG style, the squad travels to each kingdom and solves problems there while also uncovering the backstory behind each of the heroes. Despite its cutesy character design and bright colors, Bravely Default II is a dark tale. Players will come across piles of dead bodies, religious fanaticism and political murder. It's a strange contrast for a game that looks like it stars living Precious Moments figurines.

As far as structure goes, the first three chapters are linear and episodic, but Bravely Default II opens up in the later chapters as the Gloria's Heroes of Light crew have to hop around helping other kingdoms and fighting a bigger threat. Players also have extra content with side quests and party chats that offer more depth to the narrative and characters. The only issue is that many of the tasks are mundane fetch quests or jobs to eliminate certain monsters.

Although that part of the game can be disappointing, the combat and character progression are top-notch. Bravely Default II is JRPG that revels in the flexibility of its systems. The ability to use up to four actions or save them creates a fascinating dynamic where players can go all in to eliminate foes or save turns in order to rescue a party from being wiped out.

Layered on top of this is a job system built upon the concepts of artifacts called Asterisks. Over the course of the campaign, players will defeat foes and gain these relics that open up jobs. Players then have to level up these jobs to gain more powerful spells, abilities or attacks. Players can choose two jobs and up to five passive abilities from ones they have leveled up.

The beauty in the system lies in finding the best combinations of each. Bravely Default II gives players who love to theorycraft plenty to work with. The game creates engrossing opportunities to create parties that synergize the different abilities, and players can test them out against rare bosses or tougher foes.

With the characters being equal blank slates, it's up to the players to figure out the roles for each member of the party. With 20 jobs to choose from, players have plenty of combinations to experiment with and master. Bravely Default II will test players' mastery and knowledge of these vocations, because the final bosses are tough.

The only problem is that the game forces players to do a fair amount of grinding to reach these lofty goals. The party can sometimes enter a conflict underpowered, and players will have to level up and boost their jobs to take on the adversaries. Elsewhere, some job skills are key to fighting the difficult battles, and players will need to level them up to stand a chance.

Claytechworks tries to mitigate this with an online-compatible system where players use a ship to gather valuable items when they aren't playing. It's a slow process and it can be a slog, but Bravely Default 2 is rewarding for those who figure out its intricacies.

It's a 60-plus-hour JRPG that requires more strategy than its peers and one that manages to keep players engaged with its darker story. It also shows that the genre still has ways to surprise players when it offers systems of effortless depth and appealing complexity.

Platform: Nintendo Switch
Online: tinyurl.com/2uds897

Newest PVZ title a game-changer

By EBENEZER SAMUEL
New York Daily News

Plants vs. Zombies was never supposed to be a shooter. Nearly a decade ago, this was a tower defense game, and a wildly fun one at that. The premise was simple (if a bit weird): In a backfield battleground, a bunch of plants had to prevent a group of zombies from reaching a house. And never mind why or how: Arranging Pea Shooters and giant potatoes to block the oncoming hordes of rockstar zombies and zombies with random cones on their heads was fun.

Then it all changed. EA acquired Plants Vs. Zombies, and the franchise has gradually morphed into something else: a horde-mode-style multiplayer shooter. It's now hitting the Nintendo Switch in its latest form, Plants Vs. Zombies: Battle for Neighborville Complete Edition. And while this definitely isn't the PvZ I originally fell in love with, it is a game that offers solid fun.

Neighborville originally came out two years ago, but the Complete Edition that hits the Switch is the best version you can get. It's free of the microtransactions that have wrecked so many titles (including earlier versions of Neighborville), and thus you can focus on the shooting that much more.

And Neighborville's shooting is plenty competent. The strength of Plants vs. Zombies as a franchise is the wide scope of creature options; there are a host of different plants and too many zombies to count. You'll get to play as all of these (after unlocking them, of course), and you'll gradually upgrade them, too. That means everything from pirate zombies to Chomper plants, all with little endearing traits that make them feel distinct.

The gameplay itself works in all the classic shooter ways you expect. It doesn't quite compare with the likes of Overwatch as a multiplayer shooter, but on a Nintendo Switch that isn't exactly teeming with shooter options, it's still fun enough. You'll pick it all up swiftly, too, especially if you play through the single-player campaign. As is typical with EA, this campaign is essentially an extended tutorial for the multiplayer madness ahead.

You get several fun game modes. Turf Takeover is a 16-player mode with various objectives, and there's a Weekly Event mode too. My favorite mode is Garden and Graveyard Ops, a horde-mode-style title that has you and a team facing ever-tougher waves of enemies. This is the highlight of the game overall, and it's a blast if you get the right team together.

It's that "right team" part that might hold Neighborville back in the end. Right now, the audience for the game is thin.

It's all a far cry from the roots of Plants vs. Zombies as a tower defense title, and in some ways, yes, I do miss that. This was, to me, the ideal tower defense game, and I would have played many many sequels of it to great enjoyment. Neighborville does make the shooter transition solidly and competently, however, joining the sea of shooter games out there.

And that's not bad, even if you can't help wondering what might have been.

Platforms: PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch
Online: tinyurl.com/5f49y9bb

WEEKEND: MOVIES

standing in
FOR THE SAKE OF
the story

Actors used to be taboo in documentaries.
Now they're doing the heavy lifting as
directors seek new ways to narrate.

By ANN HORNADAY
The Washington Post

The new Netflix documentary “Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions Scandal” carries an unorthodox tagline for a nonfiction film: “Starring Matthew Modine.”

The award-winning actor, best known for his fictional roles in “Full Metal Jacket,” “Vision Quest” and “The Dark Knight Rises,” plays William “Rick” Singer, whose academic-coaching business was a front for an elaborate cheating and bribery scheme to get the children of wealthy parents into universities that included Harvard, Georgetown and Stanford. Although “Operation Varsity Blues” has plenty of talking-head interviews with real-life witnesses and participants in the scam, most of the players were not available for filming.

“Operation Varsity Blues” director Chris Smith, best known for the documentary “Fyre,” about the misbegotten music festival, wasn’t particularly interested in making a film about the Singer episode unless he could find a unique way into the story.

His screenwriter, Jon Karmen, made a bold proposal: Why not use the public record — hundreds of pages of affidavits and FBI wiretap transcripts — as fodder for a screenplay, and have actors play Singer and his clients?

(The team also reached out to interview key players in the scandal, most of whom were unavailable or unwilling to be filmed. Singer’s most high-profile clients included actresses Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin, both of whom received short jail sentences after they admitted participating in the scheme.)

“I’m not one of those filmmakers looking for an opportunity to do something in the narrative space,” Smith explains in a recent telephone conversation. “It was just a consequence of, how do you tell this story?”

We didn’t have access to the parents, and we didn’t have access to Rick Singer. The next best thing were the transcripts of these conversations between Rick and some of the people he was working with. For me, it was the closest thing we had to a window on that world.”

Blurring the lines between fact and fiction is nothing new for Smith: He made his filmmaking debut in 1996 with “American Job,” a fictional movie about a young man working a minimum-wage job that was so convincing, many viewers assumed it was a documentary. His sophomore effort, “American Movie” (1999), chronicled the real-life exploits of low-budget filmmaker Mark Borchardt; the documentary was so funny and full of you’ve-gotta-be-kidding-me moments that several audiences assumed it was fiction. Now, with “Operation Varsity Blues,” Smith says, “it finally made sense to put them together.”

SEE ACTORS ON PAGE 17



Skyler Gisondo plays Ben in “The Social Dilemma,” a documentary about the malignant effects of social media that relies heavily on dramatizations to make its point.

Netflix

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Actors: Just another storytelling tool

FROM PAGE 16

“Operation Varsity Blues” is part of a trend in documentary filmmaking, a discipline that has historically frowned upon devices like re-enactments, dramatizations and other conceits borrowed from narrative fiction. As far back as Robert Flaherty’s seminal 1922 film “Nanook of the North” — billed as a candid portrait of the life of an Inuit family in the Arctic Circle and revealed later to contain scenes that were scripted and staged — purity has been used as both an aspirational ideal and a cudgel. In 2005, controversy erupted when Robert Houston’s short documentary “Mighty Times: The Children’s March” won an Oscar, despite containing undisclosed re-enacted sequences. Years before, Errol Morris’ 1988 documentary “The Thin Blue Line” failed to receive an Oscar nomination, despite its groundbreaking use of narrative techniques such as re-enactments; stylized, slow-motion insert shots; a moody Philip Glass score; and a noir-esque, whodunit structure. In fact, it was just those flourishes — seen as revolutionary at the time — that reportedly turned off old-school members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ documentary branch.

Today, such tut-tutting seems as dated as the cheesy, ripped-from-the-headlines TV movies that gave the term “docudrama” a bad name.

Morris used the actor Peter Sarsgaard in his 2017 documentary series “Wormwood,” about the CIA’s history of secret experiments with LSD; in 2010, Alex Gibney enlisted the actress Wrenn Schmidt to portray a sex worker in “Client 9: The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer.” In “The Arbor” (2010) and “Notes on Blindness” (2016), actors lip-synced to tapes made of real-life subjects. The 2018 series “Watergate,” directed by Charles Ferguson, mixed straightforward interviews with scenes of actors performing taped conversations between President Richard Nixon and his advisers. In Netflix’s 2020 documentary “The Social Dilemma,” about the malign effects of social media, filmmaker Jeff Orlowski illustrated the observations of several executives, activists and academics by way of travails experienced by a fictional suburban family, played by an ensemble featuring Kara Hayward, best known from the Wes Anderson movie “Moonrise Kingdom.”

Lisa Nishimura, vice president of original documentary and independent films at Netflix, welcomes the innovations, emphasizing that they’re “not about blurring the lines between fiction and reality, but really about add-

ing to the fabric of the story when it makes sense and supports the filmmaker’s vision.” She adds that “every story is different. We have documentaries that use traditional techniques, like ‘Crip Camp’ and ‘My Octopus Teacher,’ where there are no re-enactments and the filmmakers had access to rich archives and a plethora of visual material. There are, however, instances where materials are limited and a story calls for bringing additional devices to already established and highly effective techniques — be it verite or archive.”

Used with ingenuity and transparency, such conceits are valid means to the end of good storytelling, insists Taghi Amirani, whose 2020 documentary “Coup 53,” about the plot conceived by British and U.S. intelligence to remove Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh from office, includes sequences starring Ralph Fiennes as real-life MI6 operative Norman Darbyshire.

Like Smith, Amirani and his editor and co-writer, Walter Murch, had access to Darbyshire’s words — in this case, the transcript of an interview conducted by the producers of the 1985 Granada Television series “End of Empire.” Initially, Amirani and Murch thought Fiennes could read portions of the transcript in a conventional voice-over, or they could film him reading in the sound studio with headphones on. Eventually, Amirani hit on the idea of shooting Fiennes as if he were being interviewed for “End of Empire,” in a chintz-covered chair at London’s Savoy Hotel, much like the series’ original participants.

That choice resulted in some of the most absorbing and memorable moments in “Coup 53,” in which Fiennes delivers a crafty, utterly mesmerizing performance (“That’s Norman,” Amirani recalls Darbyshire’s widow saying after she saw the film). It also resulted in vociferous pushback from the “End of Empire” team, who maintained that they never filmed Darbyshire and have criticized “Coup 53” for allegedly distorting the details of Darbyshire’s involvement in their film. (The “End of Empire” team does not dispute the authenticity of the Darbyshire transcript or the fact that they recorded his interview.)

Amirani regrets nothing. For one thing, he says, the way he staged Fiennes’ scenes — where the audience can see him preparing amid lights and cables, and talking over last-minute notes with Amirani — signals its speculative nature. In fact, it’s one of several instances where “Coup 53” breaks the fourth wall by

showing the filmmakers’ research and editing process.

“Are we telling you 100 percent Darbyshire was filmed? No,” Amirani says. “(But) there’s not a shadow of a doubt that he said these things.” What’s more, he adds, having Fiennes channel Darbyshire’s words gives them considerably more emotional weight and meaning than if they had merely been read as voice-over narration, à la Ken Burns in his 1990 documentary miniseries, “The Civil War.”

On a broader level, “there’s no such thing as complete objective truth in documentary,” Amirani says. “I actually cut my teeth in television doing observational documentaries, using a handheld camera and following everything.” That jittery verite style, he notes, has often been used to telegraph truth when even the most spontaneous, fly-on-the-wall film has been shaped by the person behind the camera. “What you choose for your subject, whether you shot in the morning or the afternoon, when you cut, when you say, ‘action,’ what lens you use, what questions you ask — you’re editorializing from the very beginning to the end, including ... the cutting room.”

In many ways, films like “Coup 53” and “Operation Varsity Blues” are simply continuing a dialogue that has always existed between fiction and nonfiction films, wherein directors like Paul Greengrass and Kathryn Bigelow inject authenticity into their movies with verite “shaky-cam” techniques and Chloe Zhao casts Frances McDormand and David Strathairn alongside nonprofessionals in her Oscar-nominated drama “Nomadland.”

Heidi Ewing, who makes nonfiction verite films with her frequent directing partner Rachel Grady, will release her first narrative feature in May: “I Carry You With Me” tells the true story of two Mexican American immigrants using many of the spontaneous and observational techniques Ewing developed over the course of her career, as well as more straightforward documentary elements.

What was a hard-and-fast line when she first started, Ewing says, “has become more porous. People have become freed up to give the story what it needs.” She connects that development to more visibility for documentaries, which are finding bigger audiences on cable and streaming outlets. “With popularity comes less adherence to the dusty or more stuffy rules of the medium that were in place for 50 years,” she says. “Also, the type of filmmaker making documentaries has changed. Now you have people who do music vid-



ADAM ROSE/Netflix

Matthew Modine stars in “Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions Scandal” as William “Rick” Singer, an integral figure.



Ali Amirani

Ralph Fiennes, left, played real-life MI6 operative Norman Darbyshire in the documentary “Coup 53,” directed by Taghi Amirani, right.

eos, commercials, narratives, Ron Howard is doing documentaries, Martin Scorsese. People are going in both directions and bring with them what they perceive as cinema.”

Murch, best known for his editing and sound design work with Francis Ford Coppola on “Apocalypse Now” and other films, sees the expanded boundaries between fact and fiction as a function of technology. When cinema verite was the gold standard in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, he says, independent filmmakers couldn’t afford the bells and whistles of narrative film.

“In those days, any kind of fancy stuff was aesthetically frowned upon, but also expensive,” he says. “And that’s all changed now.”

For Smith, the elastic nature of his film’s visual language was designed to meet the viewers’ own experience. In addition to the dramatized sections of “Op-

eration Varsity Blues,” Smith uses snippets of YouTube videos, television news reports, Google searches and social media posts. The aim, he says, was to acknowledge how “the way we consume media has evolved, (where) you’ll be watching a film and have your computer or phone on and you’ll be Googling things the whole time.”

The ultimate question, of course, concerns the filmmaker’s unspoken contract with the audience: When we see a documentary, we assume that it will tell us, if not the truth, then at least a version of the truth that the filmmaker has been honest about shaping.

For Amirani, the acid test is whether he can go home and say, “I have not misled anyone in this scene or this cut or this entire film, (and) I’ve used the entire cinematic toolbox to keep them interested and lead them through the story.”

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Nothing super about these heroes

McCarthy, Spencer are weak in ‘Thunder Force’

By Adam Graham
The Detroit News

It’s impossible to take “Thunder Force” seriously because “Thunder Force” doesn’t take itself seriously. Not that this superhero comedy is meant to be taken as a straightforward exercise in good vs. evil. It’s a comedy, and the joke is that two middle-aged women — played by Melissa McCarthy and Octavia Spencer — are the ones with the superpowers. OK, fine. The issue here is the inherent laziness of the storytelling, the humor and the entire enterprise. There’s never a feeling that anything is at stake, and it makes it impossible to invest any emotions into it. In short, there’s no rumble in this “Thunder.”

Blame writer-director Ben Falcone, in his fifth directorial teaming with McCarthy, his wife. Their partnerships have yielded McCarthy’s least rewarding film efforts to date, from 2014’s “Tammy” through to last year’s dreary “Superintelligence.” It’s clear they’re comfortable working together, and good for them, the world could use more workplace happiness. But that comfort is a crutch, and it isn’t pushing either party in positive creative directions. McCarthy plays Lydia, a blue-collar worker in Chicago who wears Slayer T-shirts more than she doesn’t. (McCarthy doesn’t make for a very convincing Slayer fan, but that’s another story.) Lydia’s estranged childhood best friend, Emily (Oscar-winner Spencer) went on to

become a top-level scientist who dedicated her life to avenging the death of her parents, who were killed by Miscreants, a race of supervillains created by a freak radioactive occurrence. Emily has come up with a secret formula to turn everyday humans into superheroes to combat the baddies. Welp, it isn’t long before the bumbling Lydia accidentally injects herself with Emily’s formula and is on her way to becoming a crime fighter with super strength. Emily reluctantly joins her, taking pills to gain the power of invisibility. And once fully trained, they set off to take on the Miscreants, led by a politician who calls himself the King (Bobby Cannavale) and a half-crab, half-man with a droll sense of humor (Jason Bateman). These plot elements are presented in extremely lackadaisical scenarios and within a structure where jokes are told, then repeated, then explained and told again, a detached form of humor deconstruction that begs the question, if something isn’t funny the first time, is it funny the fourth? In one scene, Lydia compares Emily’s daughter, Tracy (Taylor Mosby) to “Family Matters” Steve Urkel, and when Tracy doesn’t understand the reference, Emily goes on to impersonate Urkel and repeats the “did I do that?” line five times. And what doesn’t work once does not magically work on the fifth go-round. “Thunder Force” is full of these types of situations and joke breakdowns, as if Falcone isn’t confident enough to actually tell a joke, but would rather make fun of



Melissa McCarthy (Lydia) and Octavia Spencer (Emily) star as two middle-aged women who suddenly gain superpowers in the comedy “Thunder Force.”

the idea of telling a joke. It’s the same thing with “Thunder Force” as a whole: It’s like it doesn’t believe in telling a superhero story, it would rather make fun of the idea of telling a superhero story. Lydia and Emily don’t have a theme song, but they listen to Glenn Frey’s “Smuggler’s Blues” (and later, Frey’s “You Belong to the City”) and joke about how it doesn’t make a good theme song, until they wind up embracing it as their theme song exactly because it’s not a particularly effective theme song. It’s a lot of work to go through for not a lot of

laughs. Maybe just tell a joke and let it stand on its own? And so it goes. There’s a premise here that could work, but the execution is botched by Falcone’s inability to truly invest in what he’s doing. (It permeates everything, even down to Bateman’s costume, and you can clearly see the rubber that makes up his character’s claws.) “Thunder Force” isn’t here to save us, it’s the one that needs saving from itself.

“Thunder Force” is rated PG-13 for some action/violence, language and mild suggestive material. Running time: 107 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

Pandemic adds extra layer of threat to folk thriller ‘In the Earth’

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

There is a plague in England — the plague that we happen to be living through, as writer/director Ben Wheatley started writing the script for “In the Earth,” early in the 2020 lockdown. As such, it’s a quarantine film that actually captures the world we’re living in, of surgical masks and nasal swabs and social distancing. The extreme caution and danger that the plague dictates adds an extra layer of threat to “In the Earth,” a film that draws from a deep well of horror references, from “Frankenstein” to “The Wicker Man.” Wheatley has dabbled in folk horror before, notably in “Kill List” and “A Field in England,” but the sub-genre, which grapples with the clash of the ancient and the modern, is especially suited to a story like “In the Earth,” troubled by mysterious rhythms of the earth, and their affect on the human body and mind. Just when it seems like nature is out to get us, Ben Wheatley reminds us that,



Joel Fry, top, and Ellora Torchia in a scene from “In the Earth.”

indeed, it is. Unless it’s just us. Joel Fry stars as Martin, a nice, nerdy, socially awkward scientist who arrives at a deserted lodge that’s been converted to a forest management way station. He sets out on a long hike into the woods, guided by a sharp and intuitive ranger, Alma (Ellora Torchia). He intends to deliver some equipment to a former colleague, Dr. Olivia Wendle (Hayley Squires), who has been running experiments in the forest, but the journey is too arduous, and he’s too vague about their relationship for this to be a mere errand, and Alma knows it. Just before they depart, Martin spots an ominous piece of artwork at the lodge, depicting a dark figure overseeing a ritual. Alma informs him that this is Parnag Fegg, a witch of local folklore who has become a cautionary tale to warn children away from the forest. If only the

tale deterred adults too. As the doctor (Mark Monero) mentions to Martin, “people get a bit funny in the woods sometimes.” And how. Plunging ever deeper into the green, the pair are met with violence at the hands of a disturbed hermit, Zach (Reece Shearsmith). He purports to talk to nature itself, making offerings of his art with the unwilling participation of the few passersby. The arrival of Dr. Wendle seems a relief, until they realize that she, too, talks to the forest, through her own scientific, yet inherently pagan, system. The woods have become her own monstrous creation, an eerie hybrid of nature and technology that keens and croaks and seemingly traps whomever comes near. Wheatley’s film works on a purely elemental level; like nature itself, the film is a sensory event, the narrative often subsumed by the aural and visual experience. Clint Mansell’s brilliant score vibrates and reverberates through time, synths and

bells blending with the atmospheric, often punishing, sound design. Every cinematic element is designed to unnerve the viewer. Some choices, like Wheatley’s unique approach to film editing, making rapid little cuts when you least expect them, are more successful than others, such as the abstrusely hallucinatory montages. Wheatley crafts a plague film that isn’t necessarily about a plague, but that captures the anxiety and fear of invisible forces beyond our control impelling us, unknowingly, into danger. Fry is the perfect modern-day version of Sergeant Howie from “The Wicker Man,” a well-meaning volunteer who traipses into a peril he could never understand. But Wheatley doesn’t offer any explanations, pat or otherwise, instead letting us sit with the uneasiness that we might never fully comprehend the natural world and its energies, malevolent or benevolent.

“In the Earth” is rated R for strong violent content, grisly images, and language. Running time: 100 minutes.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Ticket to ride

Seniors eager to travel see the vaccine as their freedom pass; now they're planning accordingly

By HANNAH SAMPSON
The Washington Post

Liz and J.B. Wright have been busy during the past year in Virginia: puzzles, curbside pickup, painting rooms at home, video chatting with family, watching after one of their grandchildren. But all the action was close to home, and three of their four grandkids were growing up in other states. Then the couple got their first dose of the vaccine in January, and they could begin thinking about traveling again. “We started planning the day we got our first shot,” said Liz Wright, 68. “We were like, ‘Oh my God, we can go.’” All over the country, people 65 and older — those at highest risk of illness and death of COVID-19, and early in line for the vaccine — are starting to browse trips, actively plan and even hit the road. As of April 5, nearly 76% of Americans 65 and up had received at least one dose of the vaccine, and more than 56% were fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“The vaccine for them is a freedom pass — not to go crazy, but to do things,” said Rabia Shahenshah, a travel adviser with Tzell Travel Group. “It was definitely a game-changer.”

The Wrights have two journeys planned: a road trip to Massachusetts this month and a flight to California in May, both to see their children and their grandchildren. While Liz Wright hopes to get back to Europe and Turks and Caicos in the future, she has already told her friends that those trips will have to wait. “I was like, ‘Listen, we are completely off until at least 2022,’” she said. “Every trip I take is going to be to see my kids.”

Loretta Carson, a travel adviser at Protravel International, said most of her clients are going to see their children or grandchildren now. When she talks to them, the conversations inevitably turn to vaccines.

“It’s constant,” she said. “It’s the first thing we talk about.” Carson is fully vaccinated, too, but she has not done any travel of her own because she has had so much work. “I’m just happy to see the rebound and see the people dreaming and planning,” she said. “It’s like starting a new era almost.”

Travel companies say they see that hope reflected in their bookings. In a February call with investors, Royal Caribbean Group said it had seen a strong relationship to booking volumes and vaccines, including a proportional increase in the number of customers who were 65 and older. “Our belief is that as 65-plus are getting vaccinated, then they’re obviously becoming more comfortable with booking, and we’re seeing that very much in our bookings from about January forward,” Royal Caribbean CEO Richard Fain said on the call. Educational travel organization Road Scholar, which caters to “lifelong learners,” was seeing a huge jump in enrollments by mid-March. At that point, according to surveys of the company’s participants, 67% had been



iStock

As of April 5, nearly 76% of Americans 65 and over have had at least the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Viewed by some as a freedom pass, they are eager to resume planning trips that had to be put off in 2020.

“We started planning the day we got our first shot. We were like, ‘Oh my God, we can go.’”

Liz Wright, 68

vaccinated, and 99% planned to get the vaccine. “It’s no understatement to say the phone is ringing off the hook,” Road Scholar spokesman Chris Heppner said in an email. “We are seeing a huge shift in people’s eagerness to get something planned.” Some customers, he said, were celebrating their vaccinations by enrolling in a trip. The company planned to resume some programs in July. Squaremouth, a travel insurance comparison site, said it was seeing a “slow rebound” in older travelers booking trips, based on travel insurance sales through the site. Marketing manager Steven Benna said in

an email that as the vaccines have rolled out, the percentage of travelers in every age group over 60 has risen. Joe Corcoran, 84, and his wife, Loretta, 72, were recently in the process of planning their next big trip — a river cruise through Amsterdam and Budapest in June 2022. Joe, a retired chemical engineer who lives in Pennsylvania, said the couple thought about what they would do when they could travel again, but they could not start making solid plans until the vaccines were a certainty. They bounced ideas off Carson, their travel adviser, and settled on the cruise. “Part of the joy of travel is the anticipation of the travel itself,” Joe Corcoran said. “This is the start of our enjoyment of our trip in 2022, because now we have a place to go and plans to make, and this is part of the fun as well.” In early January, Ruth Berkowitz, 92, and other residents of her retirement community in Bridgeport, Conn., received their first vaccine dose, then the next one three weeks later. “You felt you could do anything,” Berkowitz said. “Not anything, but you could move a little.” She flew with her daughter to Florida, where she has a home in Boca Raton, in late February for two weeks of sunshine, boat-watching and visiting. It was a big change from the past year, when she kept “very, very close to home.” “I got down there and enjoyed it very much,” Berko-

witz said. She said she does not have more plans, but she would make the same trip again. “I feel safe,” she said. “I would go anywhere. I would be happy to go.” Angie Licea, president of Global Travel Collection, said her group is seeing faster growth with travelers 65 and older than other segments. In that age group, advisers are finding their clients interested in high-end resorts, private islands, future cruises and local, quick getaways. “Once people got vaccinated, they were like, ‘Wait a minute, it’s safe,’” she said. “I can go see my grandchildren. I can go to Florida and hang out. I can go to resorts.” But, unlike younger travelers, older clients are serious about how their destination is dealing with the threat of COVID-19, Licea said. “They’re traveling, but they want to ensure that the protocol is very solid and it’s safe and it’s regimented,” she said. Mickey Belosi, 73, and her husband, Jim Brady, 74, of Auburn, N.Y., epitomize that mind-set. Although they are preparing to get back out in the world again, they remain slightly wary. “We’ve been so used to being careful and staying away from people,” said Belosi, a retired nutrition educator. “Even if we’re safe, we may not emotionally be ready to get around a lot of people.” They missed out on three trips they had planned for spring 2020 and are planning to take one of them, a rescheduled European river cruise, in September. “Hopefully by September of this year it’ll be safe,” she said. Both got their second shot at the end of March. In the meantime, they have booked a boat to take along the Erie Canal, starting on Memorial Day, with their son, who will also be fully vaccinated by then. Brady, a retired social worker, said the couple would like to take their trip to Europe in the fall, travel for Thanksgiving and see family in San Francisco for Christmas. “I think we’re still hesitant about flying because so many people are not vaccinated and so many people are just careless, and there are some people who are non-believers and just won’t,” he said. “I think we’re still pretty cautious.”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Appreciating Milan, an underrated city

Here’s a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this crisis.

They say that for every church in Rome, there’s a bank in Milan. Indeed, the economic success of postwar Italy can be attributed, at least in part, to this second city of bankers, publicists and pasta power-lunchers. While overshadowed by Venice, Florence and Rome in the minds of travelers, Milan still has plenty to offer anyone who visits.

The importance of Milan is nothing new. Ancient Romans called this place Mediolanum, or “the central place.” By the fourth century AD, it was the capital of the western half of the Roman Empire. By the time the Renaissance hit, Leonardo had moved here and the city was called “the New Athens.”

Milan’s cathedral, the city’s centerpiece, is the third largest church in Europe. It’s massive: 480 feet long and 280 feet wide, forested with 52 huge pillars and populated by 2,000 statues. The place can seat 10,000 worshippers. Climbing the tight spiral stairs designed for the laborers who built the church, I emerge onto the rooftop in a forest of stony spires. Crowds pack the rooftop for great views of the

city, the square and, on clear days, the Italian Alps. But it’s the architectural details that grab my attention. Marveling at countless ornaments carved more than five centuries ago in marble — each



Rick Steves

The cathedral sits on Piazza del Duomo, Milan’s main square. It’s a classic European scene. Professionals scurry, fashionista kids loiter and young thieves peruse.

The grand glass-domed arcade on the square marks the late-19th-century mall, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. Built around 1870, during the heady days of Italian unification, it was the first building in town with electric lighting. Its art is joyful propaganda, celebrating the establishment of Italy as an independent country. Its stylish boutiques, restaurants and cafés reflect Milan’s status as Italy’s fashion capital.

In the evening, I see people in formal wear on their way to what is quite possibly the world’s most

flower, each gargoyle, each saint’s face different — I realize the public was never intended to see this art. An expensive labor of love, it was meant for God’s eyes only.



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

Milan’s main square and cathedral are a central hub where locals and tourists mingle.

prestigious opera house: La Scala. Like other great opera houses in Europe, La Scala makes sure that impoverished music lovers can get standing-room tickets or nosebleed seats that go on sale the day of the performance.

The next morning is the highlight of many Milan visits: Leonardo’s The Last Supper, painted right onto the refectory wall of the Church of Santa Maria delle

Grazie. Leonardo was hired to decorate the monks’ dining room, and this was an appropriate scene. Suffering from Leonardo’s experimental use of oil, the masterpiece began deteriorating within six years of its completion. The church was bombed in World War II, but the wall holding The Last Supper remained standing.

Today, to preserve it as much

as possible, the humidity in the room is carefully regulated — only 30 people are allowed in every 15 minutes.

When my 15 minutes of viewing are up, I emerge with renewed appreciation for Milan: Italy’s most underrated city.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

Theme parks dreaming up ways to delight future visitors

Although most theme parks across Europe remain shuttered at present, the hive of behind-the-scenes activity needed to keep such facilities fresh, unique and appealing to visitors continues. Thrill seekers and families in search of all-ages fun can whet their appetites for adventure with a peek at these coming attractions.

Belgium



Karen Bradbury

Walibi Belgium, Wavre: Kondaa is a name of a steel coaster that, when completed, will be the highest and fastest coaster in the Benelux. The mega-coaster will stand 164 feet tall, reach top speeds of 70 mph and offer 15 airtime experiences. It will also feature the world’s first non-inverting cobra roll element. The serpent-inspired ride is the showpiece of a new Africa-themed section of the park. Online: walibi.be/en

England

Alton Towers, Alton, Stoke-on-Trent: the children’s book Gangsta Granny inspired a comedy TV film of the same name; now, other scenarios and characters from the pen of the book’s author David Walliams serve as the inspiration for a new themed area of the Alton Towers Resort. The centerpiece is Gangsta Granny: The Ride!, a 360-degree special effects-laden ride simulating a mad dash through sewers in an attempt to break into a vault containing the crown jewels and get away before being caught by the Feds. The area’s other attractions include the Royal Carousel and Raj’s Bouncy Bottom Burp. Die-hard fans of the book can even book a Gangsta Granny-themed room at the Alton Towers Hotel. Online: tinyurl.com/36uyn3dw



Alton Towers Resort

A Gangsta Granny-inspired ride is coming soon to Alton Towers Resort in Stoke-on-Trent, England.

France

Disneyland Paris: Walt Disney Studios Park is presently fine tuning its “Cars”-themed attraction, The Cars Road Trip. Fans of Lightning McQueen and his friends can discover quirky roadside attractions, natural wonders and characters from the hit film. Online: tinyurl.com/zcpwnmwn

The Disney Junior Dream Factory will offer young visitors the chance to see their favorite characters sing and dance in an interactive, 20-minute musical show staged in a brand new theater. The production features both timeless classic characters including Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse and rising stars such as Fancy Nancy and Vampirina. Online: tinyurl.com/5sj86bzb

Overnight visitors can enjoy a stay at the resort’s “Hotel New York – The Art of Marvel,” the first hotel dedi-

cated entirely to Marvel art. The property will feature a lobby done up in massive black-and-white comic book-style art; the Manhattan Restaurant with a large ceiling sculpture evocative of the fictional realm of Asgard; and the Skyline Bar, with the Avengers Tower featuring in its panoramic views. Online: tinyurl.com/4uzedf39

Germany

Movie Park Studios, Bottrop: Movie Park Germany celebrates its 25th anniversary with the unveiling of a roller coaster based on a visit to a Hollywood movie set. The Multi Dimension Coaster, ready to ride in the spring of 2021, will be Europe’s first double-launch indoor roller coaster and its first to accelerate backwards. As visitors wait to board, a themed show immerses them in the glamorous world of Hollywood. The ride reaches speeds of 37 mph and passes through 12 scenes based on famous films. The attraction is geared to all ages and features a 360-degree rotating platform, multimedia elements and special effects. Online: tinyurl.com/2yssynum

Europa-Park, Rust: Europe’s second-most visited theme park after Disneyland Park continues to expand its Rulantica Water World offerings. Last autumn saw the opening of the Hyggedal sauna and relaxation zone, a vast, Nordic-themed oasis featuring saunas and an outdoor terrace. Other attractions in the works include the Snorri Snorkeling VR experience in which visitors equipped with VR diving goggles and a snorkel can explore underwater realms in the company of Rulantica’s cheery octopus mascot. In early summer, Svalgurok will become Germany’s largest outdoor water playground, with more than 100 different options for play and a gigantic slide tower featuring a wave slide and tipping bucket. Snorri Strand will offer splashy slides and water fun for the smallest visitors. Online: europapark.de/en/rulantica

WEEKEND: FOOD



Il Ceppo has been a go-to takeout spot for those with discerning tastes all through Italy’s pandemic lockdowns.

Il Ceppo
Address: Corso Andrea Palladio, 196, 36100 Vicenza VI
Hours: 8 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sundays, closed Mondays.
Prices: Moderate to expensive
Clientele: Mostly Italians; some Germans and Americans
Menu: English is available.
Phone: +39 (0)444 544414
Nancy Montgomery

Among Il Ceppo’s many offerings are cooked and cured hams, a variety of salami and other cured meats. The Vicenza store, already primed for the pandemic lockdowns with a thriving takeout business, has actually seen its business increase.



Il Ceppo has a wine cellar that also serves as its restaurant. It’s closed because of COVID restrictions, but the proprietors hope to reopen in the next few weeks.

Add some gourmet to your day

Il Ceppo deli in Vicenza makes lockdowns more bearable

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

O svaldo Boscolo started out in bacala, the Veneto region’s celebrated salt cod. Fifty years later, he still sells it by the ton. But he sells a lot of other ready-to-eat foods, too, in his family’s gourmet deli and restaurant.

There are lamb chops, lasagna, crepes, steamed vegetables, fried fish, broiled fish, shrimp salad, octopus salad, eggplant parmigiana, tripe and roast chicken.

Parma hams hang from the ceiling, just one kind of nine or 10 other hams waiting to be cut razor-thin for customers. Scores of cheeses from Italy, France and elsewhere are on offer. Ready-made sauces — duck ragu, meat or seafood in tomato sauce — sit next to fresh pastas to be cooked at home.

There are rows and rows of jams, canned vegetables and sauces, oils, vinegars, quail eggs and more. You can even pick up staples — a dozen regular eggs, milk, tortillas, caviar — from the refrigerator.

Il Ceppo deals in quality products and prices them accordingly. I’ve sometimes chided myself that I spent \$4 on something like potato puree, but such thoughts disappear at the first creamy bite.

Recently I got three little lamb chops for 11 euros (about \$13). Adding the potato puree, cooked peas, grilled vegetables and a piece of quiche for the next day’s breakfast, the bill came to 22.35 euros. I did have leftover peas and vegetables.

The wine cellar, where the elegant eat-in

AFTER HOURS ITALY

restaurant for which dishes are made to order is located, is closed as Italy endures its third or fourth COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

“We hope it can open in April or May,” said Maria Giovanna Boscolo, one of Osvaldo’s daughters.

That’s when they hope they can also restart their wine and food tastings. I attended one where the wines were way out of my league but delicious. My sommelier, Eva, later steered me to an 11-euro bottle of regional red that drinks like it costs far more.

The Il Ceppo staff are friendly like that. Most of them speak some English too.

Lockdowns have been good for Il Ceppo’s balance sheets. Maria Giovanna said business is up around 20%.

Already primed with a thriving takeout business, they never missed a day of business from morning to evening, six days a week. When everything was forced to close on Sundays last year, they opened up Mondays, the one day of the week they had been closed. They even added a delivery service.

montgomery.nancy@stripes.com
Twitter: @montgomerynancy



Il Ceppo stocks all sorts of cheeses, primarily from Italy and France, and will compose cheese and meat selections for customers, including a fruity mustard they make on site.



Il Ceppo offers a selection of fish, meat and poultry main dishes, along with pasta, potato and vegetable sides.



With vegetables, sauces, vinegars, oils and truffle salt, Il Ceppo in Vicenza, Italy, is a cornucopia of tasty delights.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



Fresh vegetables on sale March 3 at the Wiesbaden, Germany, farmers market. The market is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays.



One of the specialty food stands at the Wiesbaden farmers market on March 3 sells a wide selection of olives.



People adhere to coronavirus social distancing rules March 3 at a flower stand at Wiesbaden's farmers market.

Going to market

German farmers markets have a long tradition of offering fresh, homemade, local products

By DAVID EDGE,
IMMANUEL JOHNSON
AND KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

The bright colors of fruits, vegetables and fresh-cut flowers in German farmers markets are an elixir for eyes that are tired of looking at four walls during coronavirus lockdowns.

Most towns and cities have a market, where shoppers can buy everything from fresh local and imported produce, to baked goods, wine, spices and honey. At the three markets we visited, in Kaiserslautern, Weiden and Wiesbaden, we also found a stand with foods for the allergic, one that sells nothing but eggs, and a food truck that offers a culinary trip around the world.

Outdoor markets in Germany usually take place twice a week. They have been open throughout the pandemic and are enforcing strict coronavirus rules, including a requirement to wear a medical-grade mask and stand back from the next customer.

Wiesbaden

In early spring, Wiesbaden's farmers market had Italian grapes and plums, Spanish and Greek olives, Dutch tulips, French cheeses and wines, locally grown strawberries and other regional products. There were four butchers' trucks, a fish monger and, a rare find, the Noglla stall, which sells gluten- and lactose-free cakes, cookies and breads, as well as homemade spreads, prepared meals and sauces. There are many dining options nearby including the Lumen restaurant, which was offering vacuum-sealed, chef-made

meals with instructions, and wine at wholesale prices to take home and enjoy while coronavirus restrictions are in force. **Where and when:** By the Marktkirche and Rathaus, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 7 a.m. - 2 p.m.

More information: An online, interactive map of the market (tinyurl.com/vkx6ewmv) allows you to click on a stall by number and check out what it offers before you go. Parkhaus Markt is right on the square and costs 3 euros for the first hour.

Kaiserslautern

Farmers have been selling their wares in Kaiserslautern's Stiftsplatz since the 19th century. Today, more than half of the stalls at the market sell fruit and vegetables or specialty foods. Kirbas, a delicatessen that has been coming to the Stiftsplatz from Karlsruhe for 31 years, sells olives, peppers, sheep's milk cheeses, other Mediterranean specialties and seafood.

Other stalls sell flowers, local wine, cheese, meat, spices and condiments, and, on Saturdays only, honey and beeswax products. German and American fast food, like the ubiquitous bratwurst in a roll or a burger, is available from food trucks at the Saks Hotel end of the market. The stand that stood out on a quiet, snowy Tuesday in April was Borg's, on the same side of the square as the church. They sell eggs. Only eggs. They have brown and white eggs from free-range (freilandhaltung) and coop-raised (bodenhaltung) chickens, and from organically fed hens. The eye-catching multicolored eggs are hard-boiled and ready to eat, some of them organic, or



The egg stand in the outdoor market in Kaiserslautern, Germany, sells, from left to right, "bodenhaltung" eggs laid by chickens kept indoors, and "freilandhaltung" eggs from free-range chickens. "Bio," or organic eggs, are also available.

"bio," and some bodenhaltung. You can buy a single egg or a dozen. They had the longest line in the market. **Where and when:** Stiftsplatz, Tuesdays and Saturdays, 7 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. **More information:** Kaiserslautern has a smaller market on Thursdays on Koenigstrasse. The markets are about 20 minutes from Ramstein Air Base and an easy walk from most places in the city. Parking at the underground lot at the Stiftsplatz is 2 euros for the first hour. Street parking is also available.

Weiden

Weiden has hosted a market off and on since 1331, with interruptions for events like the plague and wars. Today, around 15 stalls sell vegetables and fruit, bread, eggs, cheese and meat products, as well as freshly made pasta, in the town's market, which is about 30 minutes away from Grafenwoehr and Vilseck. Locals are especially proud of the many potato varieties available and will explain which ones are better for mashing, baking in the skin or roasting. The sole food truck at the market in early April was run by Nina & Velja's Kitchen, which also has a restaurant in Weiden. They were offering what they call "wanderlust cooking," including brownies,



People wait in a socially distanced line to buy cheese from a stall April 7 in the outdoor market in Weiden, Germany.

quesadillas, and a pork belly and kimchi bowl served with rice, salad, onion jam, hummus and aioli — a global food trip during coronavirus times that takes in Germany, Korea, southern France, the Middle East, Mexico via Texas, and Mom's kitchen. **Where and when:** Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. **More information:** The Allee parking garage is a four-minute walk away at Buergermeister-Prechtel-Strasse 26. It charges around 1 euro for the first hour.

edge.david@stripes.com; Twitter: @DavidEdge96798393
johnson.immanuel@stripes.com; Twitter: @Manny_Stripes
zeitvogel.karin@stripes.com; Twitter: @StripesZeit

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Tiptoe through the tulips

Keukenhof garden opens its gates for visitors in Dutch virus test

By MIKE CORDER
Associated Press

Finally, after bleak winter months of a coronavirus lockdown, springtime shoots of hope emerged April 9 as restrictions were relaxed at a Dutch flower garden and other public venues.

Under a government-approved pilot scheme, the world-famous Keukenhof garden opened its gates to let a few thousand people tiptoe through the 7 million tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and myriad other flowers meticulously hand-planted throughout its manicured lawns by a small army of gardeners.

A maximum of 5,000 visitors were allowed into the garden, nestled amid the pancake-flat bulb fields between Amsterdam and The Hague, if they could show proof that they had just tested negative for COVID-19.

Minke Kleinen, who visited the central city of Arnhem with her friend Ilse van Egten, said it felt like their “first legal day out.” The friends took rapid tests before setting off and got their negative results by email as they drove.

“It feels strange that we can stand next to one another,” said Van Egten, giving Kleinen a quick hug. “It’s nice!”

Keukenhof lost an entire season last year to the pandemic as the first deadly wave of infections swept over the Netherlands. Its scheduled March 20 opening this year never happened because of the country’s strict virus lockdown.

The limited opening — six days spread over two weeks in April — is welcome to the 40 gardeners who spend months preparing for the annual spring season. In a normal year, the garden the size of 50 soccer fields can accommodate 10 times as many visitors each day.

Park director Bart Siemerink had mixed feelings.

“Of course, happy today. It’s the first day of Keukenhof 2021,” he said, but added that the park still felt different with such a relatively small number of visitors.

“So it’s a good feeling that we can open, but this is not Keukenhof as it’s supposed to be,” he said.

In pre-pandemic years, Keukenhof’s paths, park benches and cafes are crowded with visitors from around the world taking photos and selfies with one of the Netherlands’ most iconic products — the tulip.

On April 9, small groups of visitors were scattered around the lawns. You could get a plate of poffertjes — a Dutch treat of tiny pancakes covered in icing sugar — without having to wait in a long line.

The Dutch government announced last week that hundreds of public venues would be allowed to reopen under strict conditions to evaluate whether rapid testing can safely help the country ease coronavirus restrictions amid rising levels of vaccinations and warmer weather.

Under the scheme, visitors to Keukenhof — as well as museums, zoos and other venues — are allowed entry if they order a ticket online and get a negative virus test within 40 hours of their visit. All virus tests are free and a result is emailed within an hour to the tested person. That code, in turn, can be scanned at venues.

The tests come against a backdrop of stubbornly high infections that have begun edging lower in the past week after months of lockdown.

Health Minister Hugo de Jonge sees the limited openings as a way of easing back toward normal life as vaccinations reach more and more people.

Visiting Keukenhof felt like a privilege for those who got in.

“This is a gift,” said blogger Berry de Nijs. “It feels great today. It is beautiful weather anyway ... but to walk through the tulips is fantastic!”



PHOTOS BY PETER DEJONG/AP

Visitors wander the grounds of the world-famous Keukenhof garden April 9 in Lisse, Netherlands. To enter the garden, they must present proof of a negative COVID-19 test, and visitation is limited to 5,000 people per day.



The pathways through Keukenhof garden, normally crowded with people, are crowd free, allowing visitors clear views of the 7 million tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and other flowers planted by a team of 40 gardeners.



As the Netherlands test the waters to ease coronavirus restrictions, the world-famous Keukenhof garden in Lisse, opened its gates April 9 to a limited number of visitors who tested negative for COVID-19.



A couple take pictures as they enter the world-famous Keukenhof garden April 9 in Lisse, Netherlands.



Two women take advantage of the limited visitor numbers to pictures of the tulips April 9 at Keukenhof garden.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY THERON GODBOLD/Stars and Stripes

The chicken enchiladas from Posado del Sol, a Mexican eatery near Yokota Air Base, Japan, boast a delicious sauce with zing and the perfect amount of cheese.



Posado del Sol makes its creamy, slightly sweet guacamole fresh to order.



The tacos from Posado del Sol are simple but flavorful.

POSADA DEL SOL

Location: 2-30-23 Sakaecho, Higashimurayama, Tokyo 189-0013

Directions: A two-minute walk from Kumegawa Station on the Seibu Shinjuku Line. Google Plus code PFXC+82 Higashimurayama, Tokyo

Hours: Open 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. for lunch and 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. for dinner. Hours may differ due to coronavirus restrictions.

Prices: Between \$6 for appetizers and \$18 for meals

Dress: Casual

Information: 042-398-4710

Theron Godbold



Posado del Sol serves up satisfying Mexican fare just a short trip from Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo.

Quest for flavors of home

When searching for authentic Mexican fare in Tokyo, Posada del Sol comes close

BY THERON GODBOLD
Stars and Stripes

Rosas, Tres Amigos and Los Comales. These are restaurants that those who hail from Texas, like me, will recognize as places to get satisfying Mexican food.

But finding similar spots can be hard in Japan. Like a wrangler on the West Texas plains, you must always keep one eye open for authentic tacos, tortillas and enchiladas.

One day, while browsing through the Yokota Eats and Travels! group on Facebook, I stumbled across a post about Posada del Sol, a Mexican eatery about 45 minutes away from the western Tokyo air



**AFTER
HOURS
JAPAN**

base in Higashimurayama.

"My family and I tried Posada del Sol today by recommendation and ohhhhhh mannnnn! It did not disappoint!" Erica Hatch wrote on Sept. 5.

Her description of homemade tortillas and a friendly staff made me wonder if my search for good Mexican food in Japan was over.

After an easy drive, I found a pay park-

ing lot just a two-minute walk from the restaurant.

The dining area has room for 15 and is decorated with sombreros, pictures of caballeros and other Mexican memorabilia. Classic Norteño, the mix of Mexican and German music that sounds like polka, plays in the background.

I rate my Mexican restaurants on a scale of three: guacamole, enchilada and tacos. That's where I started at Posada del Sol.

The guacamole, which cost the equivalent of about \$6, was made fresh to order. It was creamy and a little sweet, but lacked salt and the tang of lime I am used to.

The beef tacos, about \$8 for two, tasted amazing but were smaller even than street tacos you'll find back in the States. However, the meat was flavorful, the salsa was mild and the tortillas fresh and fluffy.

The chicken enchiladas, about \$12, were near perfect. The sauce was great with a slight zing and just the right amount of cheese on top. Using the homemade tortillas to mop up the sauce makes for a fantastic finishing treat.

All in all, Posada del Sol made for a great stop, but I won't quit looking for that definitive throwback to memories of Texas.

godbold.theron@stripes.com
Twitter @GodboldTheron



**CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF SERVING
US MILITARY IN THE PACIFIC • 1945-2020**



75.stripes.com
STARS AND STRIPES

ENTER TO WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD!



ONE WINNER EVERY MONTH!



GO TO 75.STRIPES.COM TODAY!

WEEKEND: FOOD

Make it snappy

How to get perfectly crisp bacon

BY AARON HUTCHERSON
The Washington Post

I love bacon. While I agree that it shouldn't go on everything, I welcome the moments when I get to enjoy it in all of its crisp, smoky glory, such as in my colleague G. Daniela Galarza's winter BLT from her Eat Voraciously newsletter or on a breakfast plate alongside hash browns and a pair of picture-perfect sunny-side up eggs.

For me, the epitome of this cured pork product is audible crispiness. You might be a fan of some chew or tenderness, which is fine by me because that's your business, but I want there to be a snap and a crunch each time a strip passes my lips. For those of the same mindset, here are two methods to produce just that.

Stove top

Tried and true, this is the way I learned to cook bacon: Lay the strips in a cold skillet, place over medium-low to medium heat, flip and fry until you reach your desired doneness and then transfer to a plate lined with paper towels to drain. The key is to slowly render the fat to achieve bacon's character-defining crispness. Unless you walk away from the stove while cooking — which you should not do outside of a handful of situations anyway — this method produces superior results every time.

When it comes to skillet choice, nonstick or cast iron are my recommendations. I prefer a good nonstick skillet for more even heating and thus cooking, but some love the nostalgia of bacon frying in a cast-iron skillet, which is also a great way to season it from time to time. (And just a reminder about one of the myths of cast iron: While it is great at heat retention, it is a poor conductor, meaning that it will heat unevenly, leading to hot spots and varied textures in the bacon.)

You may have heard of the water method, and you may be wondering about its merits. For those not in the know, the editors at Cook's Illustrated recommend adding enough water to cover the bacon in the skillet at the start, which leads to a "crispy and tender bite." While it does produce a slightly less shatteringly crisp end result, I didn't notice enough of a difference to champion this method over cooking it naked.

The main downside to the stove-top method is the quantity of bacon that you can cook. Unless you have a large griddle that fits across multiple burners, a skillet can only hold enough strips to feed two, maybe three, bacon-loving humans. Plus, if you are prone to get distracted

easily and don't want to stand near the stove, there's risk of the pork belly going from beautiful to burned in no time at all. That's where the oven comes in.

Oven

Plain and simple, this is the best way to cook bacon for a crowd — or just any time you want to take a more hands-off approach. Lay the bacon on a rimmed baking sheet and place it in the oven until it's cooked to your specifications. There's isn't even any need to flip it.

I first encountered this method as a line cook, when we would make trays upon trays of bacon each brunch service. I have memories of placing a layer of parchment on each rimmed baking sheet, on top of which freshly cut strips of bacon were shingled just a bit (to fit more onto each pan) in the wee hours of the morning before the first diners arrived. The parchment paper is solely for easier cleanup, and I've used it when baking bacon ever since. (Daniela is a fan of foil for the same reason.) If there's sufficient overhang, either can leave a perfectly unsoiled pan underneath, but if you don't mind putting in some work and would rather not create more waste, cooking the bacon directly on the sheet pan is an option.

Considering a baking rack? I say don't. Cooking it on a rack leads to meaty instead of crispy bacon, which is not what we're after here. Plus, then you have the task of cleaning it, which I often find to be a real pain.

As for the oven temperature, it mostly comes down to how long you're willing to wait. The package currently sitting in my fridge instructs a 375 degree oven, which yielded my ideal of perfectly crisp, regular-cut bacon after about 25 minutes. I've gone as low as 350, but any lower than that and the wait becomes too long. J. Kenji López-Alt recom-



PHOTOS BY SCOTT SUCHMAN/The Washington Post

Cooking bacon slowly in a skillet can yield bacon with that perfect snap and crunch.

mends 425 degrees, which he says takes 20 minutes for crispy bacon, but he doesn't recommend going much higher than that. "Cooking at 475 left me with bacon that was threatening to burn in spots and still undercooked in others after just 15 minutes," López-Alt wrote. (Pro tip: There's no need to preheat the oven.)

Both methods lead to incredibly crisp bacon, and the choice of which to use mostly comes down to how much you want to make. If your ideal bacon is more limber or has a bit more chew, you may prefer a different meth-

od. There are several ways to go, and that's completely up to you. Regardless of the method you choose, the one rule that you must abide by is to always save the fat. That liquid gold is full of flavor and it's great for cooking vegetables, making vinaigrettes, frying chicken and even baking breads and desserts. Just pour the bacon grease into a metal or glass jar, pop it in the fridge (it should last for at least three months) or freezer (where it keeps indefinitely) and grab it whenever you want to add a boost of bacony flavor to whatever it is you're cooking.



Cooking bacon on a sheet pan in the oven is the best way to make enough to feed a crowd.

STARS AND STRIPES

Month of the Military Child

Let's Celebrate by Sharing Your Story!

Submit Today: militarychild.stripes.com

What's Your Story?

Stories will be...

- Featured on our website, militarychild.stripes.com.
- Printed in Stars and Stripes and Pacific community papers.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Plan more, juggle less

By NICOLE ANZIA

Special to The Washington Post

I am a planner — perhaps not surprisingly, given my occupation. So, when it became clear in early February that my family was going to take a safe, socially distanced road trip for spring break, I relished the idea of having something to plan and look forward to after not vacationing for a year. A relatively easy task, right? Not exactly.

As it turned out, my pandemic brain found planning and organizing the trip to be a challenge. Like a lot of people, I've been primarily focused on routine daily and short-term decisions for the past 12 months. Changing my thought process to plan for something more complex, and with different considerations than I've recently had to contend with, was difficult.

The experience taught me that our minds have changed after a year of mostly staying at home. Our lives are about to get busy again, and many of us are looking forward to that. But ramping back up will require some planning. Here are some ways to do that.

Set priorities

In some ways, it seems as if resuming our pre-pandemic lives should not be that problematic. But it's not as simple as just picking up where we left off. As places start to reopen and we return to doing "normal" activities, how we approach them will probably take some relearning, extra mental energy and potentially extra time. Making some intentional decisions now can help prevent things from spiraling out of control later.

Talk to your family about the activities they're looking forward to resuming and the ones that no longer interest them. Perhaps you started habits or practices during the pandemic that you would like to continue. Write those down. Do you want to keep baking, taking daily walks, eating together as a family or doing virtual exercise classes? Maybe you've enjoyed working from home and cherish the time you've gained without a commute. You might consider approaching your employer and negotiating a partial work-from-home schedule if that's an option.

Once you have your list of priorities, understand that there may need to be sacrifices in other parts of your schedule to make those happen.

Schedules and systems

After you've done some critical thinking about how you would like to structure your time, grab your calendar, whether it's on paper or an app. I've always used a

As pre-pandemic activities resume, here are some tips for keeping life from spiraling out of control



sending kids back to school, questionnaires before doctors' appointments. To keep track of tasks, I've been flagging emails that require action and setting daily — and sometimes hourly — reminders on my phone. Additionally, after not keeping a to-do list for the past year, because there wasn't much going on, I've started making detailed lists that I update daily.

It's also time to reinstate systems you used before the pandemic, such as making school lunches the night before, running the dishwasher every evening or preparing a shopping list each Sunday. Instituting routines and schedules will help keep everyone on track as the pace of our lives

picks up. And if you've gotten caught up on an ongoing project, such as organizing your digital photos or updating your files, include those tasks on your calendar, so you can maintain that progress.

Delegate and automate

Pandemic life helped us streamline some aspects of our lives. I started ordering groceries online and will continue doing that, because it saves so much time. If you felt more relaxed over the past year because you weren't driving your kids to daily activities, consider starting a carpool to school or practices. And if dinner has been less stressful because you started ordering fully prepared meals, maintain that practice. Automate as many deliveries as you can, including pet food, medications and household essentials. Or consider subscribing to a service or product that will help you take better care of yourself, enjoy a hobby or ease your workload. There are options for just about everything, including subscriptions for puzzles, spices, skin care and cleaning kits.

Give yourself a break

Everyone has experienced a higher level of stress than normal in the past year. Routine tasks such as keeping time and thoughts organized have taken a back seat as we focused on getting through each week — or even day. Some things may take much longer than they used to, or you might feel overwhelmed. That's okay; cut yourself some slack.

Give yourself plenty of time to complete your list, and celebrate small victories. The ongoing stress and anxiety is going to mean that mistakes will happen and tasks will be forgotten. It's more important to be flexible than to adhere to rigid standards.

Although we're all looking forward to moving past the pandemic, it's not going to happen

overnight. Don't expect that you're going to go right back to the way it was without sufficient sleep, time and self-care. As with all organizing tasks, the road leading back to our normal lives requires consistency, patience and work.

paper planner, but I didn't write everything down; a lot of things were on autopilot. But this past winter, as I struggled to focus and keep track of all the changes that were already happening (not to mention the ones for later this spring and summer), I found that writing everything on my calendar was essential.

There are new protocols that often require several preliminary steps: forms to be filled out before sending a child to baseball practice, daily checklists for

iStock

WEEKEND: BOOKS

American dreams with a dash of magic

Young man navigates cultural, societal expectations of being a second-generation Indian American in ‘Gold Diggers’

BY RON CHARLES
The Washington Post

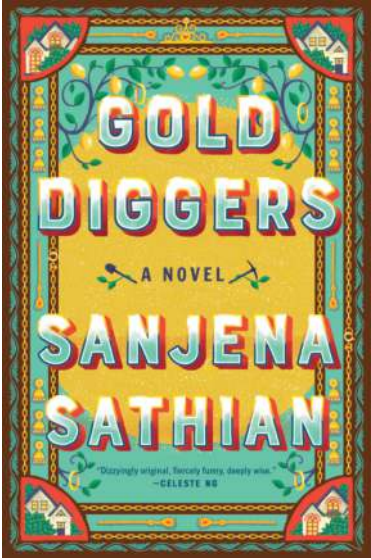
Sanjena Sathian’s “Gold Diggers” is a work of 24-karat genius. This remarkable debut novel — already chosen by Mindy Kaling for an upcoming TV series — melts down striving immigrant tales, Old West mythology and even madcap thrillers to produce an invaluable new alloy of American literature.

Charting the route that generations of Indian immigrants have taken to these shores, Sathian locates the precarious nexus of pride and anxiety where so many newcomers reside. She follows the children who straddle two cultures, forced again and again to answer the question, “What does it mean to be both Indian and American?” And in the process, she plumbs the universal challenge of satisfying the hunger for *more* — more money, more prestige, more time — an obsession that would make any of us strangers to ourselves.

The narrator of “Gold Diggers” is an endearing young man named Neil Narayan, an Indian American living in Atlanta.

“When I was younger,” Neil says, “I consisted of little but my parents’ ambitions for who I was to become.”

Despite the usual high school



temptations, he dutifully heeds his “mother’s warnings that engaging in *nonsense* could abort all you were supposed to become, could in fact abort the very American dream we were duty-bound to live out.”

But then there is Anita. Anita Dayal is literally the girl next door, but she’s also Neil’s Cleopatra and Daisy Buchanan. A friend since childhood, she’s infinitely cooler than Neil and bound to achieve the glittery success he won’t. And yet Anita and Neil remain yoked together by proximity and culture and eventually by disaster. Anita’s parents and his own — “the four

brown adults in a largely white subdivision” — “create a simulacrum of India in a reliably red Georgia county.”

Sathian creates that cul-de-sac with a wry and loving eye — a kind of South Asian version of “The Wonder Years,” with Neil’s awkward antics narrated by his older self. This is a world in which children act as a fulcrum for their parents’ ambition. Neil is admonished to study harder and longer, while Anita and his sister throw themselves into the Miss Teen India pageant. Every aced quiz, every spelling bee prize, every science fair trophy is confirmation that the decision to leave India was correct, while failure of any kind throws the family’s entire sacrifice into doubt.

“There was no room to imagine multiple sorts of futures,” Neil says, “We’d put all our brainpower toward conjuring up a single one: Harvard.”

It’s around this point that Sathian’s effervescent social satire breaks the bonds of ordinary reality and rises to another level. In a moment of crazed teenage despair, Neil discovers that right next door, Anita and her mother are practicing alchemy. Using an ancient recipe, they’re melting down stolen jewelry and creating a tart liquid that Anita drinks to

ingest the dreams and plans invested in that shiny bling.

As a metaphor of the thirst for success, this domestic sorcery is pure gold. But the real miracle here is the way Sathian melds that ancient magic to the contours of her otherwise natural story of contemporary life. She’s working in a liminal realm where the laws of science aren’t suspended so much as stretched.

“There are some mysteries a person needs to accept,” Neil says, which is good advice for anyone entering this novel.

In a dazzling demonstration of Sathian’s range, the book’s second half jumps a decade later, beyond the tragedy of Neil’s adolescence to the smoldering wreckage of his adulthood. It’s a jarring transition — and meant to be. Moving from Atlanta to the Bay Area, the novel also shifts from anxious teen drama to more astringent satire of second-generation Americans whose ambitions have pooled in Silicon Valley.

As a poor grad student in history, Neil finds himself out of sync with the moneyed internet culture around him.

“Sometimes,” he laments, “I can’t imagine ever feeling at home anywhere in the world, or with anyone at all.” Sathian, who inhabits Neil’s despair so sympa-

thetically, uses his alienated perspective to capture the plight of “conceptual orphans” launched into the United States by eager immigrant parents.

“In the space between us and the rest of adulthood lay a great expanse of the unknown,” Neil says. “We had not grown up imbibing stories that implicitly conveyed answers to the basic questions of being: What did it feel like to fall in love in America, to take oneself for granted in America? Starved as we were for clues about how to live, we would grip like mad on to anything that lent a possible way of being.”

As Sathian mines that vein of desperation, the term “gold digger” keeps turning, catching the light in strikingly different ways. It’s a slur hurled at women pursuing wealthy men; it’s a description of this country’s inexhaustible craving. And while everyone Neil knows rushes toward the future, he burrows through 19th-century California history looking for an Indian gold digger who may offer him “a legible American ancestor to provide guidance on how to make a life.”

With Neil’s struggle to find a usable past and a viable future, Sathian has created a funny, compassionate, tragic novel of astonishing cultural richness.

‘Speak, Okinawa’ author bonds with mother over shared heritage

BY AKEMI JOHNSON
Special to The Washington Post

When she was a young child, Elizabeth Miki Brina lived in her mother’s homeland of Okinawa, Japan’s southernmost prefecture. She rode on her grandmother’s back, played under the subtropical sun, heard the roar of military jets and spoke Japanese.

Then, her parents moved her to the United States, and she didn’t think about Okinawa for three decades. As she grew up, she spoke only English, knowing nothing of her mother’s history.

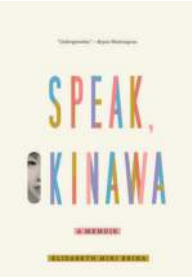
“Which is to say,” Brina writes, “that I grew up not knowing my mother or myself.”

Brina’s poignant memoir, “Speak, Okinawa,” is the story of her discovery of Okinawa as an adult — and discoveries about her mother and herself. Brina also explores Okinawa as an overlooked piece of the American story in need of hard scrutiny.

Brina’s mother was born three years after World War II. Like many Okinawans, her family survived the U.S. occupation by working for the U.S. military — building bases, serving cafeteria food, cleaning barracks. They lived in poverty, eating sweet potatoes for every meal, as military installations took over their island. Brina’s mother dropped out of school in the eighth grade to work in a factory and later became a waitress in a nightclub. By then the Vietnam War was raging, and the U.S. military

had turned Okinawa into a weapons depot and rest-and-relaxation destination, with tens of thousands of American troops stopping over on the island.

At the club, Brina’s mother met an American soldier from Manhattan, a college graduate from a wealthy white family. Brina



imagines their meeting: He is “Elvis handsome” and seems “like a way out.” “She is beautiful, exotic ... too vulnerable to resist.”

They married and eventually settled in the suburbs of Rochester, N.Y., where Brina grew up in a 99%-white community. In her eyes, her father was her hero, the one with all the answers, who navigated their world with confidence and power.

“He knew what to say, and he said it so well,” Brina writes. “His pronunciation was perfect.”

Meanwhile, her mother struggled to learn English and seemed “never entirely welcome” in their town, “never [able to] fully participate.” Her mother coped by drinking, sometimes once a month, sometimes once a week, until she passed out. Brina, internalizing the racism of her peers, idolized her father and was “cruel” to her mother. She

alternately ignored her and mocked her; she cut up her dresses and kimonos for scraps.

As an adult, Brina contended with her own challenges with drinking and relationships, and began to empathize with her mother’s pain. Visiting her parents one weekend at age 26, she engaged in her “typical rant-exchange” over politics with her father during dinner, the two of them shouting different views and ignoring her mother, who drank two bottles of wine and then crawled under the table. When her mother started screaming and kicking, knocking over glasses, Brina joined her on the floor, curling their bodies together. In earlier days, Brina might have run away, but in that instant she saw that “her trauma is my trauma, that our pain comes from the same source.”

Brina’s curiosity grew, and at age 34, she traveled to Okinawa and began to delve into its history of war, colonialism and survival. In her mother, she began to see strength instead of weakness, the weight of history instead of personal failing. She detected traces of Okinawa’s subjugation in both her own life and her mother’s, in the way they were “fighting to be acknowledged and understood. Fighting to matter.”

This battle was most evident in their relationships with men. Brina’s father treated her mother “more like a daughter than a wife.” As a teenager, Brina began believing

she must say yes to anything boys and men asked of her. When they found her attractive, she didn’t know “how to channel this attraction toward respect, toward care, toward love.” The memoir becomes a testament to the importance of their lives as Asian women, as mother and daughter, and an apology for all the years Brina thought otherwise.

“Speak, Okinawa” is strongest when Brina is recounting, with piercing candor and clarity, the almost claustrophobic world of an only child and her parents — their shifting allegiances, the wounds they inflict on each other and their rocky path toward acceptance, apology and forgiveness. The memoir is also a portrait of the devastating effects of imperialism and racism on a person’s identity, self-worth and relationships and offers a perspective on how a person can combat these legacies.

In the book’s early pages, Brina observes that she is “too American.” By the end, she writes that her story is both American and Okinawan. She claims her Okinawan identity in part by taking a stand against the injustices inflicted on Okinawa over the years. She points to the many crimes committed by U.S. servicemen since World War II, including sexual assault, murder and robbery, and opposes a new American base being built on the main island today. “Free Okinawa!” Brina writes.

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Wish you could go back
And tell yourself what you know now

REVIEW

Swift takes a principled stand, and it's a bonanza for her fans

Rerecorded 'Fearless' includes 14 of singer's 'vault' tracks

BY MIKAEL WOOD
Los Angeles Times

On Jan. 31, 2010, Taylor Swift stood on-stage at the Grammy Awards and promised that the story of that night — the night “in 2010 that we got to win album of the year at the Grammys,” as she put it — would be the one she’d tell her grandkids over and over again when she was 80.

Well, maybe.

In the decade and change since her sophomore LP, “Fearless,” took the Grammys’ most prestigious award, Swift has won album of the year two additional times — including just last month, when the singer’s victory with the platinum-certified “folk-

SEE SWIFT ON PAGE 29

Taylor Swift has returned to her 2008 album “Fearless” as the first installment in her much-discussed plan to rerecord her six earliest studio LPs following the 2019 purchase of her former label, Big Machine, by Scooter Braun, above left.

STARS AND STRIPES ILLUSTRATION/Universal Music Group, AP, iStock photos



Taylor Swift

Fearless: Taylor's Version (Republic)

WEEKEND: MUSIC

APPRECIATION

DMX rapped, and lived, with unmatched ferocity

BY AUGUST BROWN
Los Angeles Times

In a November interview with Talib Kweli, rapper DMX was searingly candid about his drug use and the trauma that drove it. “I learned that I had to deal with the things that hurt me,” he said. “I didn’t really have anybody to talk to ... talking about your problems is viewed as a sign of weakness when actually it’s one of the bravest things you can do. One of the bravest things you can do is put it on the table, chop it up, and just let it out.”

He recounted how, as a 14-year-old, he’d unwittingly smoked a crack-infused blunt, which introduced him to drugs and began a stormy, lifelong relationship with self-medication to heal his pain. “Drugs were never a problem, drugs were a symptom of a bigger problem,” he said. “There were things I went through in my childhood where I just blocked it out. You never know when the things you stored away are going to come out and just fall all over the place.”

The interview seemed an encouraging sign that the rapper, born Earl Simmons, was finally rounding a bend on his difficulties with substance abuse, after canceling a tour and checking into rehab in 2019. But the 50-year-old rapper succumbed to that longtime struggle. DMX died on April 8 after suffering a heart attack on April 2, following an overdose at his home in White Plains, N.Y.

A statement from his family read, in part: “We are deeply saddened to announce today that our loved one, DMX, birth name of Earl Simmons, passed away at 50 years old at White Plains Hos-



DMX

pital with his family by his side after being placed on life support for the past few days. Earl was a warrior who fought till the very end. He loved his family with all of his heart and

we cherish the times we spent with him. Earl’s music inspired countless fans across the world and his iconic legacy will live on forever.”

DMX’s life and career were contradictions from the start. He was devoutly religious yet accrued a lengthy list of arrests and incarcerations — most recently, in 2018, he went to prison for tax fraud. He possessed one of rap’s most distinctive, combative vocal tones, with gut-spilling lyrics churning through his difficult youth in 1980s New York, yet he was also a staggeringly popular artist, topping the Billboard 200 with each of his first five albums, starting with 1998’s landmark “It’s Dark and Hell Is Hot” on Ruff Ryders/Def Jam. All told, he had 15 Hot 100 singles. He also was a charismatic film star in critical and commercial successes like “Belly” and “Romeo Must Die.”

From the opening salvo of his first major-label single, “Get at Me Dog,” to “Stop Being Greedy” and “Ruff Ryders Anthem,” the ultimate get-ready-to-rumble rap track that helped made producer Swizz Beats’ career, DMX possessed a voice like no other. His delivery was deep, frantic and hoarse, yet with a coiled intensity that made his songs feel like hits even as he rapped: ‘N— wonder why N—

wanna die / All I know is pain, all I feel is rain / How can I maintain with that s— on my brain?”

DMX prowled the stage with tendons rippling, eyes aflame, a physical manifestation of the storms in his head. But he hit more ruminative and tender notes as well, as on “How It’s Goin’ Down” with R&B singer Faith Evans. “It’s Dark and Hell Is Hot” was an instant classic, and it made him an immediate but troubled superstar.

With his follow-up later in 1998, “Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood,” DMX was already wrestling with the demons of drug abuse. “Slippin” used a Grover Washington Jr. sample to moving effect, while DMX laid out how a childhood laced with uncaring institutions, absent family and drug use bent his sense of self.

His third album, 1999’s “... And Then There Was X,” was a juggernaut on the charts, going six times platinum on the strength of “Party Up (Up in Here),” which retooled his tense paranoia into a monster hit that would echo at clubs and sports arenas for years to come. “What’s My Name” and “What These Bitches Want” took a darker, tenser flip on that template, but now, DMX wasn’t just a growling, compellingly paranoid entry to the New York canon — he was a superstar.

He also defined a transitional era in hip-hop, as it moved from the bicoastal wars and gang conflicts of the late Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur into a new, dominant form of popular music. After Biggie, Jay-Z may have become the King of New York, and Wu-Tang Clan made the city a mythic realm. But DMX was

New York rap at its most distilled: brash deliveries, a hard-bitten worldview and productions rooted in soulful, confident horn samples. His sprawling Ruff Ryders crew (alongside future stars Eve, Ja Rule and in-house producer Swizz Beatz) kept hits coming from all directions.

The next albums of his Billboard 200 streak lost a little of that momentum, even with occasional standout singles like 2001’s “Who We Be” that drew lines among the societal failures of prison, drugs and isolation that broke Black communities (its video, with black-and-white protest footage from the ’60s, felt like an antecedent to Lil Baby’s “The Bigger Picture” clip).

2003’s “X Gon’ Give It to Ya,” a bigger-than-life anthem from the soundtrack of the action movie “Cradle 2 the Grave,” became his final signature hit, eventually serving as mixed martial arts walk-out music, the backdrop for a killing spree in the 2016 film “Deadpool” and as the musical bed for a “Rick and Morty” montage that became an ever-present reaction meme. In 2016, Bernie Sanders even used DMX’s “Where the Hood At?” as walk-on music to a rally, sending rap fans and leftists alike into unlikely glee.

While DMX had devoted much of his late career to preaching in his Christian faith, he’d reportedly re-signed with Def Jam. In an era with so much nostalgia for the era of rap and pop he helped epitomize, this could have been the beginning of a much-deserved comeback. So many young rappers have fallen victim to drugs and violence of late; it’s only compounding to watch older ones struggle so deeply with the same things.

Swift: Redo of breakout album makes creative, business sense

FROM PAGE 28

lore” made her the first woman to threepeat in Grammys history.

But if her treasured memories have gotten more crowded than she might’ve anticipated, “Fearless” still looms large in the Taylor Swift mythology. Released in 2008, when she was 18, the record captures her arrival at true superstardom; it sold more than 10 million copies and spun off her first Top 10 pop hit in the Romeo and Juliet-themed “Love Story.”

Now Swift, 31 and on her fourth full-length in less than two years, has returned to the album as the first installment in her much-discussed plan to rerecord her six earliest studio LPs following Scooter Braun’s 2019 purchase of her former label, Big Machine. (The music exec, known among other things for his onetime work with Swift’s nemesis Kanye West, last year sold Big Machine — and with it the singer’s master recordings — to an investment fund for more than \$300 million.)

Swift has been open about her motive for making “Fearless (Taylor’s Version),” as she’s calling the new set released April 8: She’s looking to devalue those masters by essentially replacing them in the mar-

ketplace with a product she owns. In the future, when a filmmaker or ad agency wants to use one of her songs in a movie or TV commercial, or when a fan streams it on Spotify, she’s betting they’ll turn to these renditions instead of those in which Braun reportedly retains a financial interest.

Yet the rerecording project makes unique creative sense for an artist sufficiently obsessed with time and aging and nostalgia that she spent her big Grammys speech as a teenager imagining herself in senior citizen-hood. For most acts, this whole enterprise would seem crassly commercial; for Swift, it presents a chance to live out a key lyric from one of “Fearless” emotional highlights: the strummy, impossibly yearning “Fifteen,” about wishing “you could go back and tell yourself what you know now.”

Which isn’t to say she’s not seizing an opportunity to ring up more business. Beyond the 13 songs on the original “Fearless” — its other hits include “You Belong With Me” and “White Horse” — “Taylor’s Version” features 14 bonus tracks, a half-dozen of which have never been heard before; they’re newly recorded productions of tunes written during the “Fear-

less” era from what Swift calls her vault, complete with interest-piquing contributions from Maren Morris and Keith Urban.

One of the vault selections, “Mr. Perfectly Fine,” caused a hubbub online when fans deduced that Swift had written the sharply witty song in the aftermath of being dumped by Joe Jonas. (Among her better epithets in a tune full of them: “Mr. never told me why / Mr. never had to see me cry / Mr. insincere apology so he doesn’t look like the bad guy.”)

So how does the “Fearless” redo compare to the old album? It would take a deeply devoted Swiftologist — of which there are millions, each eagerly armed with a fine-toothed comb — to suss out the minute differences, so thoroughly has the singer re-created her original arrangements. Accompanying her are many of the folks who played on “Fearless” and on tour with Swift around the same time, with the conspicuous exception of her former co-producer Nathan Chapman, who, judging by his recent work with other Big Machine acts, perhaps elected not to rock a professional boat.

The most significant change is in Swift’s singing voice, a once-brittle instrument

that of course has gotten deeper, huskier and more flexible since the late ’00s. But she only really takes advantage of that shift a couple of times — in “Fifteen,” which now carries some of the disappointment her fresh-faced narrator had yet to face, and “The Best Day,” an earnest tribute to her parents that skirted corniness a decade ago but now feels lined with an adult understanding of childhood. (That Swift’s mother has since battled cancer repeatedly makes the song only more poignant.)

As for the lightweight bonus material, which she cut in the studio with her “folklore” and “Evermore” collaborators Aaron Dessner and Jack Antonoff, none of it argues that it deserved a place on “Fearless,” though “Mr. Perfectly Fine” comes close. Lots of mid-tempo acoustic strumming; lots of lyrics missing the trademark specificity that defines Swift’s A-game.

Still, for an artist who would appear to have earned a hiatus — “Lover,” though it seems an eternity ago, came out in the pre-pandemic summer of 2019 — Swift has put a remarkable amount of energy into this would-be practical exercise.

Only she could make bare-knuckled capitalism feel like a moral act.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

A trip down memory lane

Movie buff's basement-turned replica rental store goes viral on social media with more than 500K likes, 55K shares

By TOMMY BIRCH

Des Moines Register

As Brian Hogan walks to a back area of his basement, he passes by a collection of DVDs that are carefully lined up on old rental store shelves. The movies are categorized by different themes like action, comedy, horror, drama and sci-fi. Hogan, who has John Carpenter's "Lost Themes III: Alive After Death" vinyl playing, looks around the room as he turns down the volume.

"It's ludicrous," Hogan says of his room.

It's actually a trip down memory lane. To a time when you had to go to a local rental store to grab your favorite movies. It was a time before Netflix and online streaming. It's a time that Hogan, a 38-year-old barber, wants to feel a part of whenever he comes down to the basement of his Urbandale, Iowa home after a day of work to relax and reflect.

"It just feels nice being here," Hogan said. "I don't think you'll see video stores opening up anymore. I don't think they're sustainable, unfortunately."

So Hogan has done the next best thing. He's transformed part of his basement into a replica rental store that houses more than 6,000 DVDs and at least another 1,000 videos. Each video is lined up in alphabetical order. It's just like a rental store of yesteryear, with movie posters hanging on the walls and collectibles displayed throughout. Hogan even has a cash register.

"It is a man cave that looks like a video rental store," his wife Erin said.

That's always been the goal. Brian, a longtime lover of movies, needed a place to store all of his DVDs and tapes. So when his daughter moved away for college, he converted her room into his own makeshift rental store. The spot is so well done, so perfectly crafted and already so popular that it has made Hogan a social media star. Now he and his rental store — er, basement — are catching the attention of celebrities like Jimmy Kimmel and Ellen DeGeneres.

Hogan's passion for flicks

Hogan's love of movies came from his father Jeff Hogan. Jeff took Brian to movies at an early age, including a showing of "Good-



BRIAN POWERS/Des Moines Register

Seven thousand movies and accompanying promo materials line the walls and ceiling of Brian and Erin Hogan's basement March 11 in Urbandale, Iowa. Brian transformed the space into a replica rental store.

fellas" when he was 8 years old. Their family would head to the local movie rental store after school on Friday and pick out movies for the weekend.

"He never censored me," Brian said. "He would just say, 'Pick out whatever you want.' So I was probably watching stuff I shouldn't have. But he didn't seem to care."

Brian's love of movies grew. His first job was working behind the counter at a local Hy-Vee's movie rental center when he was 14. The biggest perk of the job: The promotional movie posters he was able to collect. Even after the job, Hogan kept collecting replica props, DVDs and tapes. Hogan, like his dad, took his kids to the video store to celebrate the start of the weekend.

He bought DVDs and cassettes wherever he could. He'd rummage through boxes at garage and estate sales. He'd purchase cheap movies at Goodwill or the Salvation Army, getting what he thought were steals on used cassettes or DVDs. One tape he picked up had three movies recorded on it: "Rocky," "Grease" and "Steel Magnolias." The owner had printed the synopsis from the television guide and taped it on the video. Hogan ended up with five copies of "The Rundown," starring The Rock and Seann William Scott, because he kept purchasing the movie over and over when it would get lost in his collection.

"I'd always be like, 'Oh, I want to watch that movie, it's terrible' and I couldn't find it but I always knew I could get a copy at Goodwill for like two dollars," Hogan said.

The movies range from "Speed" to "Shallow Hal" and "In the Line of Fire" to "Old School." And the collection got so big that there would be stacks of them everywhere in the house. Hogan would pile up movies on the kitchen table, the counter, the bedroom and even the bathroom. Finding a specific movie was chaotic.

As rental stores across Des Moines started shutting down and his daughter moved away for college, Hogan got an idea about how to organize his movies and collectibles.

Basement transformed

The idea of transforming his basement really began to take shape when a pair of local rental stores announced they were closing. The two, Family Video and Video Warehouse, were places Hogan frequently visited. When the two started getting rid of movies and materials, Hogan grabbed some of the shelving.

He brought them down to a couple of rooms in his basement and used them as his own displays in two rooms, creating aisles to walk through and scan through movies. He hung up posters and put up faux brick paneling on the

outside of the main room with a window he got from the Habitat for Humanity Restore. Hogan purchased a red "Open" sign at Sam's Club and a door off Facebook Marketplace for \$20.

The door leads into the main room, which splits into a back room full of cassettes, two chairs and multiple television sets to watch movies on. Hogan picked up a clip rack that holds bags of Doritos on the end of one of the shelves as if they're ready for purchase. A replica E.T. doll sits in the corner. On a window ledge is a replica Wilson volleyball from the movie "Cast Away." Hogan has a replica Slimmer (from "Ghostbusters") sitting on some movies. He's filled out the rest of the area with other trinkets, a mini fridge and an old movie rental sleeve that's displayed on one of the walls.

"I was coming home one weekend from college and I was going downstairs and I opened up my bedroom door and I just saw that there was a bunch of shelves in my room and there were a bunch of DVDs," said his daughter Bickley Riley. "I was shocked but I wasn't too entirely shocked. I knew he was going to do something ridiculous with it."

Hogan started on the project in September of 2020. Finding a place to store things wasn't his only ambition. Hogan, who owns Franklin Barber Shop in Beaverville,

was feeling down as his business took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. To lift his spirits, he went to work on the project, getting help from some friends and family members.

"He's always been like, 'I always wanted to work in a video store' and as you see video stores closing and really no future for those to re-open, this was another way for him to kind of live that out vicariously," Erin said.

Kimmel, DeGeneres notice

Erin wasn't sure what to expect when she grabbed her phone and started giving a tour of the replica store, which takes up about a third of the couple's 1,669-square-foot basement.

She then uploaded it to TikTok and watched it go viral, with more than 500,000 likes and 55,000 shares. Erin, who used the name @thevideobunker, was overwhelmed by the attention it got.

"I think for a lot of people, it's nostalgia and connecting to nostalgia," Erin said. "We got a lot of comments like, 'Does it smell like a Blockbuster?' People equate that with different times, happier times. And it does for us, too."

The video has even caught the attention of Jimmy Kimmel and Ellen DeGeneres, whose producers have reached out to the Hogans about possibly including them on their show. The New York Post did a story on the videos, too.

The basement rental store may look like a finished product, but Brian said it's far from done. He's fixing a popcorn machine and adding a bell to the door. The hope is to eventually turn the remainder of the basement into a movie theater with a marquee. Brian is still grabbing what he can from Video Warehouse while it's still open and hopes to be the business's final customer. Jon Fridley, the store's general manager, said he's happy to see some of his things keeping the movie store experience alive.

"It's kind of cool to be able to provide him with some of the supplies and fixtures," Fridley said.

In the meantime, Brian plans to keep tinkering with the project. Now that he's got his replica video store, he said he hasn't given up on his dream of eventually owning a real one.

"Fingers crossed," he said with a smile.

"I think for a lot of people, it's nostalgia and connecting to nostalgia.

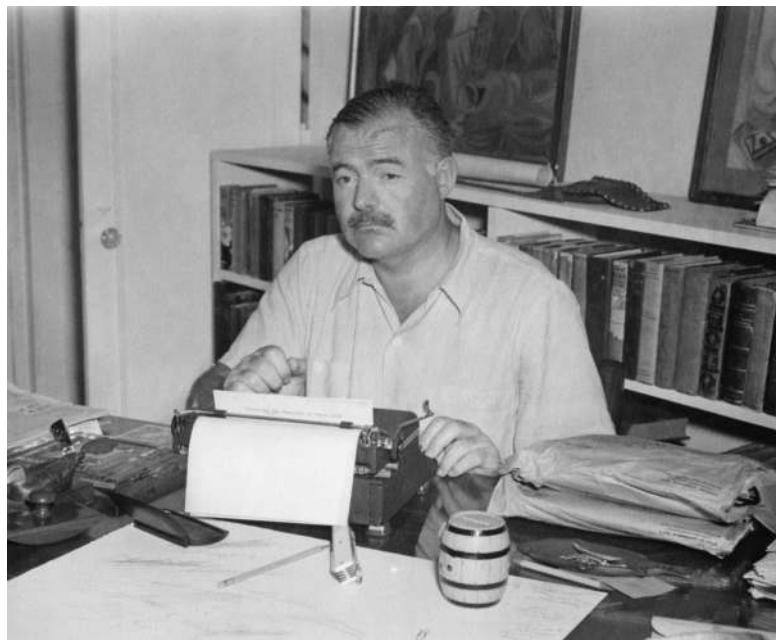
We got a lot of comments like, 'Does it smell like a Blockbuster?'

People equate that with different times, happier times. And it does for us, too."

Erin Hogan

Brian Hogan's wife

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



PBS photos

Ernest Hemingway sits at his typewriter at his home in Cuba.

Uncovering the real Hemingway

Ken Burns psychologically separates the man from the myths in a new documentary

BY CHUCK BARNEY

The Mercury News

The image many of us have of Ernest Hemingway is pretty simplistic: An iconic writer who

avored stripped-down prose, and, in public, epitomized hyper-masculinity to an almost cartoonish degree.

The image filmmaker Ken Burns uncovered while working on his latest PBS documentary epic is, thankfully, much more complex.

"We were drawn to trying to get at a real Hemingway," Burns said. "I think the persona of the wild man, the drunk, the bar guy, the big-game hunter, the big-sea fisherman is sort of what we inherit — the baggage we carry. But we lost everything the second we began this project. All of our baggage is somewhere else."

In its place is "Hemingway," a three-part, six hour film that divides its time between dissecting the influential work of a literary giant and delivering a psychological examination of a man whose tumultuous life ended at the age of 61 when he put a shotgun to his head.

With actor Jeff Daniels voicing the title subject, Burns and co-director Lynn Novick level a critical eye at Hemingway, who had four wives and occasionally could be violently abusive toward them. He also hated his mother and became estranged from two of his sons. Some of his writing and letters revealed racist leanings.

So riddled with foibles was Hemingway that Novick went into the project with a discernible dislike for the author known for classic books like "The Old Man and the Sea," "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "The Sun Also Rises."

"I wasn't sure how I would feel spending six hours with him as a viewer," she recalls. "He was really unkind and hurtful to people, and self-centered... And he had a talent for becoming alienated from people who cared about him."

But as she, Burns and writer Geoffrey C. Ward further pondered the burden of Hemingway's "struggles and demons," Novick developed more compassion for him.

"For me, it was like a full circle, actually, to appreciate his humanity," she says.

The film rigorously explores the different sides of the man called "Papa" — and the contradictions.

For example, though Hemingway clearly relished his rugged man's-man persona, he experimented with gender fluidity in both his writing and marriages. His wives were asked to cut their hair short to look like boys, while he grew his long and took on the name of "Katherine" as they reversed roles in their sex life.

"What we need is a more nuanced sense of his sexuality — his very complicated and evolving sexuality," Burns says. "... Maybe it was born when (Hemingway's) mother twinned him, putting him in dresses and his



Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn en route to China, 1941.

sister in pants so they could be alike. Maybe it is born of some other thing. But he has a curiosity about role changes."

And whether the dynamics of that role-playing had anything to do with it or not, it is clear that Hemingway exhibited an acute ability to see things from a female perspective in his writing. Irish author Edna O'Brien, one of many literary experts interviewed in the film, points to Hemingway's fabled World War I novel "A Farewell to Arms" as evidence.

Parts of that book, she says, "could have been written by a woman (and) I regard that as a compliment." She adds that Hemingway nailed all "the boy's stuff, the man's stuff, the horror of war. But when people put the book down, what will they re-

member? They'll remember a woman dying in childbirth."

Burns says he and his team weren't interested in chasing headlines. After all, many of the film's talking points have surfaced to varying degrees in the numerous biographies and critical studies devoted to Hemingway. But among its startling revelations are details about the multiple concussions and traumatic brain injuries the writer suffered, and the cumulative effect they might have had on his mental state.

"This is a man whose life ends very tragically by his own hand," Burns says. "And people have expounded on all sorts of different rays: the genetics, the madness that existed in his family, his own father's suicide, the ideation that produced in him ... We are

not going to be bold enough to say that this is the one thing that did it — that pulled the trigger, literally and figuratively — but that it is a whole complex set of things."

While "Hemingway" apparently leaves no flaw unexposed as it delves deeply into the man's personal life, it keeps coming back to the books and short stories, which, for the most part, continue to be held in high esteem by the authors, fans and experts who appear in the series.

"The writing only increased in its power and glory and majesty," Burns says. "As I confronted all of this negative stuff, it became important that the art transcended it and basically didn't excuse it."

The first episode of "Hemingway" premieres Sunday on AFN-Prime.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Skin deep

Dermatologists urge caution when following the exfoliation advice of ‘skinfluencers’ and say the step isn’t necessary for healthy skin

BY JANNA MANDELL
Special to The Washington Post

If you follow the advice of magazines such as Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar, social media “skinfluencers,” or your favorite skin-care brands, you may have read that exfoliating — the process of detaching dead skin cells — is a vital step in achieving healthy skin. According to these sources, exfoliation can amplify the results of topical products such as serums, masks and moisturizers, boosting the skin’s “glow” and “radiance,” as well as cutting down on acne and signs of sun damage.

But if you ask dermatologists, they’ll tell you that not only is exfoliation usually an unnecessary step, many people overdo it. “Our skin cells naturally exfoliate on their own,” said Chicago-based dermatologist Caroline Robinson. The skin cells migrate from the deepest layers to most superficial layers, and slough off roughly every 28 days, she added, although the process can take longer as we get older. “Products and tools that help us exfoliate are designed to encourage a healthy behavior our skin does naturally.”

Exfoliants are either chemical or manual (or physical), or a combination of both. Chemical exfoliants usually use hydroxy acids to dissolve the bond between skin cells, loosening dead skin for removal.

There are also enzyme exfoliants, which come from fruits such as papaya, pineapple and pumpkin. These tend to be to be gentler than hydroxy acids and may have anti-inflammatory properties.

Manual exfoliation uses a product such as a face scrub or a tool such as a mechanical face brush to “scrub” and loosen the dead skin cells. Microdermabrasion and dermaplaning are manual exfoliation treatments performed in-office.

Terms like hydroxy acids and microdermabrasion aside, ex-

foliation is nothing new. Queen Cleopatra bathed in sour milk to reap the benefits of naturally occurring lactic acid, an alpha hydroxy acid, and the Romans and Greeks were known to use corrosive agents such as limestone as a manual exfoliant.

But now, the shelves of beauty retailers and drugstores are stocked full of exfoliating options: exfoliating facial cleansers and toners, exfoliating facial scrubs made with ingredients such as rice-based enzyme powder, and body scrubs that contain salt or sugar granules. (Body exfoliants also come in chemical, manual and/or a combination of both kinds of exfoliants.)

There are more than 1 million #exfoliate posts on Instagram, while #exfoliate videos have been viewed nearly 220 million times on TikTok.

In 2020, facial exfoliant sales were up 9% year-over-year, Larissa Jensen, vice president of beauty at the NPD Group, a market research firm, said in an email.

“In fact, it [facial exfoliants] was the only segment to gain among the larger facial skincare category, which includes cleansers, face creams, and face serums,” she said.

“We are living in a society of over-exfoliators,” said Joshua Zeichner, a New York-based dermatologist and director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital. Consumers have unrealistic expectations, according to Zeichner: “People try and achieve the ‘radiance and glow’ from exfoliation that they see in images and videos on social media, and unfortunately we do not have an objective way of measuring these terms.”

Atlanta-based dermatologist Tiffany Clay said she has seen an increase in facial over-exfoliation in her patients over the past year.

Patients who follow these “skinfluencers” come into my office with compromised skin barriers due to exfoliating too often and



iStock

Some dermatologists say they prefer patients come to their offices for exfoliation treatments because it is easy to over-exfoliate at home, leading to tightness, shininess, stinging, redness and increased sensitivity.

with something too abrasive,” she said.

Clay added that she prefers chemical exfoliants over manual exfoliants for the face, because chemical options give more control: “When it comes to manual exfoliation, it’s all about pressure.” If you’re grinding a manual or physical exfoliant into your skin, you can create microtears in the skin and disrupt its barrier, she said.

Just because a product label tells you to exfoliate twice a day doesn’t mean you should, said Ranella Hirsch, a dermatologist based in Cambridge, Mass.

“If you blindly exfoliate, you risk tearing apart your barrier, which is made up of functional skin cells that tightly regulate what comes into the body,” she said.

One of the most problematic exfoliating myths, according to Hirsch, is that you should exfoliate dry, flaky skin.

She likes to use the analogy of bricks and mortar to explain why that’s not the case. Flaking skin usually happens because the mortar holding the layers of skin cells together (made up of lipids and fats) is low, and the bricks (keratinocytes) are falling off.

“When we exfoliate, we use hydroxy acids and enzymes to break the bonds that hold the cells together, which is what we don’t want,” she said. “When you have flaky, dry skin you need to moisturize, not exfoliate.”

Damage from over-exfoliation can present in many ways, including tightness, shininess, stinging, redness and increased sensitivity, Hirsch said.

“We tend to grossly overestimate what our skin can handle,” she said.

That’s why she recommends

that people new to facial exfoliation “start low” with a low-percent-age exfoliant, “start gentle” with less irritating ingredients, and “go slow” by beginning with one night a week and then gradually adding more only if your skin tolerates it.

One of Hirsch’s favorite at-home exfoliants is Josh Rosebrook Daily Acid Toner, which she said is gentle enough for sensitive skin — even if you use retinoids. For acneic skin, Hirsch likes Paula’s Choice Skin Perfecting 2% BHA Liquid Exfoliant.

While, again, exfoliating your body isn’t necessary, Hirsh said that hands, feet and sometimes arms and legs can benefit from regular exfoliation. You don’t have to show the same caution with those body parts as you do with your face, neck and chest, she said.

Clay recommends being careful with certain foot treatments: “Some people with very thick layers of skin on their feet may need a jump-start with a pedicure or at-home chemical foot peel. These should be done in moderation because although the soles of the feet may seem very thick, too much exfoliation may cause the skin to become too thin, leading to tears, cuts and infections.”

After exfoliating your face or body, it’s important to always follow up with a moisturizer, said Zeichner, who usually pairs exfoliating products with moisturizers that have skin-repairing ingredients such as niacinamide, ceramides and/or oatmeal. He recommended moisturizers from CeraVe, La Roche-Posay and Aveeno.

And, the experts said you should always apply sun protection when using exfoliants.

Because it’s easy to over-exfoliate at home, some dermatol-

ogists prefer in-office treatments, seeing the latter as a controlled burn compared with a wildfire.

New York-based dermatologist Macrene Alexiades said in an email that she recommends exfoliation as an option for people with oily skin, large pores and, in some cases, wrinkles.

“Specifically, with respect to sun damage and wrinkles, I use exfoliation [in-office] as an artist tool to resurface the skin and induce new collagen,” she said.

She and Robinson both recommend in-office chemical peels — which use one or more exfoliating chemicals to create an injury of a specific skin depth with the goal of stimulating new skin growth and improving surface texture and appearance.

“When I administer a medical peel in-office, I get a full thickness resurfacing of the skin, and then we allow the skin to rejuvenate itself over a 28-day cycle,” Alexiades said.

“Chemical peels are one of my favorite in-office procedures because they are so simple to integrate and I can use them on all skin types,” Robinson said. They also can speed up your product results, she added. “Sometimes if our skin cells are not turning over as quickly as they would naturally — then our skin-care products are not penetrating where they need to.”

Finally, Zeichner emphasized patience when it comes to seeing the benefits of exfoliation.

“To see an improvement in texture, tone, hyperpigmentation or lines could take several weeks to months of regular use,” he said.

He concluded, however, that there is only one way to achieve perfect skin: using a good social media filter.

“If you blindly exfoliate, you risk tearing apart your barrier, which is made up of functional skin cells that tightly regulate what comes into the body.”

Ranella Hirsch
dermatologist based in Cambridge, Mass.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



Rebecca Roberts

Noah and Rosalie, seen above in March at almost 6 months old, are twins, but Rosalie was conceived later than her brother in a rare case of superfetation.

‘It just doesn’t happen’

British twins conceived at different times in rare case of superfetation

By SYDNEY PAGE

Special to The Washington Post

Rebecca Roberts and her partner struggled with infertility for more than a year, so when they got a positive result with an at-home pregnancy test, they were overjoyed.

But the news did not feel real until the first ultrasound appointment, when the couple saw their baby on a sonogram screen and listened to the calming cadence of a steady heartbeat.

On Roberts’ medical chart, her obstetrician wrote: singleton.

“I remember walking away from the very first scan so happy,” said Roberts, 39, who lives in Wiltshire, England.

But her excitement abruptly shifted to shock five weeks later at the 12-week ultrasound appointment, when the sonographer spotted something astonishing: It appeared as though Roberts was suddenly carrying two babies — one of which was considerably less-developed than the other. The room fell silent.

“I thought something awful had happened,” Roberts said. “The sonographer looked at me and was like, ‘Do you know you’re expecting twins?’”

But this was not a typical set of twins, Roberts learned. Her pregnancy was diagnosed as superfetation, a rare condition in which a woman who is already pregnant conceives another baby.

Roberts’s pregnancy is one of few superfetation cases recorded in medical literature, said her obstetrician, David Walker.

Superfetation is so uncommon that Walker struggled to diagnose it. In his 25 years as an obstetrician, it was something he had never seen before.

“It just doesn’t happen,” Walker said, adding that it took several scans before he could confidently diagnose the condition. “We were concerned because the second twin was much smaller. It was only by regularly scanning and seeing that the rate of growth was consistently three weeks behind that we realized it was superfetation.”

The true number of superfetation cases is not known, but according to a report published in 2008 in the European Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Reproductive Biology, fewer than 10 instances of the phenomenon had been recorded at the time.

Ordinarily, hormonal and physical changes during pregnancy prevent another conception from occurring.

That was not the case for Roberts.

“Instead of stopping ovulation, she released another egg about three or four weeks after the first one, and the egg somehow miraculously managed to fertilize and implant in her uterus,” Walker said.

Although Roberts was taking a fertility drug to stimulate ovulation, Walker said he’s “not convinced” that the medication — which can increase the chances of having multiples — is what caused the superfetation.

“She didn’t release two eggs at the same time, which is what the medication normally does,” Walker said. “But we have no way of proving it one way or another.”

Given the rarity of the condition, coupled with Roberts’ age and the common risks associated with carrying twins, the pregnancy brought some challenges, particularly during the third trimester. The couple were told that the younger baby might not survive.

“Anything that can go wrong with a pregnancy is more common with twin pregnancies,” Walker said. “But with a three-week difference, you don’t want to compromise the smaller twin by delivering too early. You have to keep a really close eye. The delivery was crucial in this case.”

Roberts knew preterm labor was probable, so ensuring that the smaller baby was far along enough before birth “was a really massive worry for us,” she said.

At just over 33 weeks into the pregnancy, the smaller fetus’ umbilical cord was not functioning normally, which started to affect the baby’s growth. Doctors decided it was time to deliver.

Although Roberts’ children had different due dates, she had a Caesarean section and gave birth to both babies on Sept. 17. Noah came first, weighing 4 pounds, 10 ounces. Two minutes later, his younger sister, Rosalie, arrived, weighing 2 pounds, 7 ounces.

“We got to see both of them as soon as they were born,” Roberts said. “It was absolutely beautiful.”

The family’s initial bonding time was short-lived, as both babies were whisked away to the neonatal intensive care unit. Noah remained in the hospital for just over three weeks, while Rosalie stayed for 95 days.

The couple drove to the hospital every day to visit their children until just before Christmas, when they were given the go-ahead to bring Rosalie home.

“We could finally get on and start our lives. It felt like we were on hold having them in the hospital,” said Roberts, who designs children’s clothing.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Old, useless recipes and why I keep them

Fueled by a rare rush of spring cleaning adrenaline, I fetched the bloated behemoth from my crowded shelf of cookbooks, careful to catch the loose clippings stuffed haphazardly between her cracked covers. The 30-year-old binder full of collected recipes needed thinning.

She was full of so many yellowing newspaper scraps, hand-written index cards, jagged-edged items clandestinely ripped from magazines in dentists’ waiting rooms, photocopied pages of cookbooks and hole-punched computer printouts, she was literally bursting at the seams.

Her bulging faux leather cover had split along its binding. The pages hanging precariously on the rings were a messy combination of baseball card collector sheets containing small clippings, ancient magnetic photo pages plastered with cutouts and hole-punched sheets of paper.

Something had to be done.

Gripping a pair of scissors and a trash bag, I plunked down on our couch with the slovenly old gal, envisioning her slimmer version sitting neatly on my shelf within the hour.

With her weight in my lap, I lifted the top cover, mindful of the splitting spine, and allowed loose recipes from recent years to fall out. I’d deal with them later. I was more interested in tossing the old recipes I never used anymore.

The metal rings of the dog-eared Betty Crocker Cook Book I’d received as a bridal shower gift creaked open like the doors of a pharaoh’s tomb.

“Ah,” I breathed, and prepared myself to purge. But soon, memories crept into my consciousness.

“Turkey Divan” on lined notebook paper brought me back to the early years of our marriage, when I was trying so hard. I’d stopped making this dish a long time ago, but the warm feeling of nostalgia prompted me to turn the page.

“A classic!” I thought, spying “Karen’s Chicken Stew.” Stationed together in the ’90s, Karen was my first close Navy wife friend. She had married a few years before me, so she was my role model in those early years. She’d made her stew recipe for me when my newborn son was hospitalized with meningitis. It required only condensed soups and basic ingredients thrown into a Crock-Pot, but to me it epitomized comfort. For many tours of duty, I made Karen’s recipe for military spouses or friends in need. Hell would freeze over before I’d throw out Karen’s Chicken Stew Recipe.

I got lost in succeeding pages, unable to part with the recollections they inspired. Pepperoni Cheese Bread from my Virginia Beach neighbor conjured afternoons when the kids played in our cul-de-sac. Summer Squash Tart — the fun night I hosted Bunco. Oriental Snack Mix — that hilarious military wives’ Polish pottery-shopping road trip. Pumpkin Soup with Maultaschen — my military spouse writers’ group in Stuttgart. Hot Crab Dip — a staple when my best friend since ninth grade and I get together. Kalua Pig — my son’s Webelos Troop crossover ceremony.

Those recipes were definitely worth revisiting, but others would never be referenced again. “Erin’s Beef Dish” produced a bland glop of tough meat and mushy vegetables swimming in grayish gravy. But it was given to me by a Marine wife who was one of the funniest people I’d ever known. “Spinach Rolls” were too labor-intensive to ever attempt again, but the dish reminded me of an ego boost that came at a much-needed moment in my life. I’d never made “Sue’s Brownie Recipe” but, strangely, it was written on the back of a copy of my deceased father-in-law’s will.

Bent over the heavy book in my lap, I turned the pages, one after the other. I realized that these scraps and scribbles were moments frozen in time, blended with my psyche, baked into my subconsciousness. This was no recipe book — it was a treasured scrapbook.

And it’s a keeper.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com, and in Lisa’s book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*. Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

BY ANGELA OLSON HALSTED AND DOUG PETERSON / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

110 Land between Togo
and Nigeria

111 Insider's vocabulary

112 Catch with a throw

113 Alternative to Chuck

115 Wistful sound

118 Man's name that's
123-Down reversed

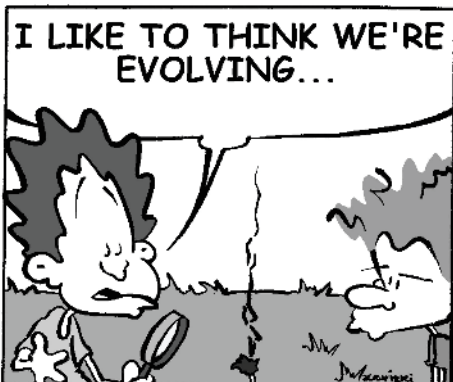
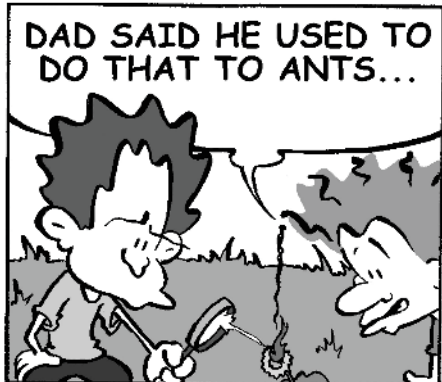
119 Stanza contraction

121 Home of the world's
largest carnival

122 Word with red or
army

123 Man's name that's
118-Down reversed

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
20						21							22								
23					24								25								
26				27					28			29					30				
31			32				33	34							35	36					
			37			38					39										
40	41	42							43	44	45		46					47	48	49	
50						51								52			53				
54				55	56			57				58	59			60					
61			62		63		64		65					66	67						
			68	69				70			71										
72	73	74							75	76	77		78				79	80	81	82	
83							84					85		86		87		88			
89					90	91			92			93				94	95				
96				97			98		99						100						
			101					102			103										
	104	105							106	107	108					109			110	111	112
113							114							115					116		
117					118	119						120		121	122			123			
124										125							126				
127										128							129				

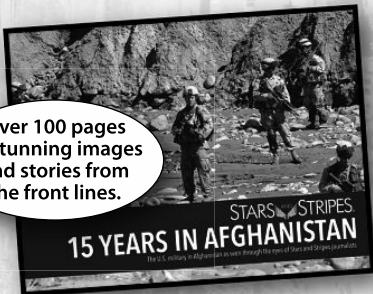


RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

[illegible]

Only **\$14.99** with Free Shipping

ORDER NOW at www.stripesstore.com



FACES

Digging into the mystery

Notorious B.I.G.'s murder gets the human touch in 'City of Lies'

BY DAN DeLUCA

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Who killed the Notorious B.I.G.? Brad Furman has a strong suspicion, and he's ready with a three-word response to people's questions about the 1997 murder of rapper Christopher Wallace, who was shot to death in Los Angeles just six months after Tupac Shakur met the same fate in Las Vegas.

"Watch the movie," says the Philadelphia-born movie director, speaking of "City of Lies," his new crime procedural — based on a true story, but with fictional elements — that stars Johnny Depp and Forest Whitaker.

Depp's character is based on the late LAPD detective Russell Poole and his efforts to get to the bottom of the case. Whitaker's character is a made-up journalist loosely based on a real author.

"City of Lies" concerns the decadeslong investigation of the death of Wallace, also known as Biggie Smalls, the New York rapper beloved for such enduring hits as "Juicy" and "Hypnotize." The movie, based on the 2003 nonfiction book "Labyrinth" by Randall

Sullivan, depicts a corrupt Los Angeles Police Department that, after nearly a quarter century, has never officially solved the mystery.

"A murder like that only goes unsolved," Depp says as the Poole character, "if the police don't want to solve it."

Furman made the movie with full cooperation of Voletta Wallace, the mother of the rapper, who plays herself in the film, now out on video-on-demand after a three-year delay from its original 2018 release date.

"City of Lies" is Furman's follow-up to "The Infiltrator," his 2016 film starring Bryan Cranston. That drug-world thriller featured a screenplay by Furman's mother, Ellen Brown Furman, a lawyer who hammered out the script at the family beach house.

The director had his biggest commercial success with "The Lincoln Lawyer," starring Matthew McConaughey, in 2011.

His Biggie and Tupac passion goes back to seeing Wallace in a club in New York while he was a film student at New York University. He remembers pulling his car over to the side of the road



SUZANNE TENNER/TNS

Forest Whitaker, left, and Johnny Depp in a scene from Brad Furman's "City of Lies," a police procedural about the investigation into the death of Christopher Wallace, aka the Notorious B.I.G.

when he heard the news of Shakur's death on the radio.

Wallace and Shakur's stories have been thoroughly explored in popular culture, from Nick Broomfield's 2002 "Biggie and Tupac" to the USA Network's 2018 dramatic series "Unsolved" to the 2019 National Public Radio podcast "Slow Burn."

"City of Lies" comes at things via Sullivan's "Labyrinth" book, with its mouthful of a subtitle: "A Detective Investigates the Murders of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G., the Implication of Death Row Records' Suge Knight, and the Origins of the Los Angeles Police Scandal."

The director developed a close relationship with Voletta Wallace,

who permitted use of her son's a cappella vocals, which are featured to haunting effect. In the movie, no actor actually "plays" the rapper: Except in a few shots in silhouette or profile, the images of B.I.G. and Shakur shown are of the late rappers themselves.

When Furman first suggested Wallace play herself, "she laughed me off the phone and told me to go call Angela Bassett," he says.

"But we built a beautiful and trusting relationship. ... Miss Wallace is an incredibly inspiring woman. Having her in the movie was crucial for me. I didn't want to make a movie that exploited the murder of Christopher Wallace. I wanted to make a movie that hon-

ored him and Tupac."

The movie, he says, "is about a failure of institutions. We invest in the police to protect and serve and think that these individuals are going to do their job honorably, and when they don't, there's a lot of dirty secrets that have to be hidden."

But he's also thrilled to finally tell the story of the rapper from a human perspective.

"With the iconography of stardom, we forget these people are human," Furman says.

"This was a young man, a young Black man who lost his life, who was murdered. ... This is a real life we're dealing with, and there's a responsibility I felt I had to honor."

Rhimes responds to uproar over Page's departure from 'Bridgerton'

BY CHRISTIE D'ZURILLA

Los Angeles Times

"Like, we didn't kill him. He's still alive!"

That's what Shonda Rhimes told Vanity Fair recently, reacting to the uproar over news that fan favorite Rege-Jean Page would not return as Simon Basset, Duke of Hastings, in the second season of Netflix's hit series "Bridgerton."

Rhimes, an executive producer on the series set in Regency-era England, said she was "really shocked, because usually that happens when I've killed off somebody that's been around for a while" — like the McDreamy (Patrick Dempsey) and McSteamy (Eric Dane) characters on "Grey's Anatomy."

In the case of "Bridgerton," Page's disappearance is mostly to do with the structure of the source material, eight books by Julia Quinn that detail each of the eight Bridgerton siblings' love lives. Daphne (Phoebe Dynevor), the rakish duke's eventual one-and-only, had her story told in book one ("The Duke and I") and in season one. And now that's done.

Page, Rhimes said, "is a powerful, amazing actor and that meant we did our job — every season, our job is finding the right people and putting together this incredible, world-shifting romance. I don't know that I expected this much of an explosion, given that every book [in the Bridgerton series] is a different romance."

"What would be the ever-after of this combo? I mean, really: What would Rege-Jean do, you know what I mean?," she told Vanity Fair. "We gave them their happily ever af-



NETFLIX/TNS

Phoebe Dynevor as Daphne Bridgerton and Rege-Jean Page as Simon Basset in a scene from "Bridgerton."

ter! And now we have this next couple coming. And so yeah, I was like, whoa!"

Since making a splash (and nabbing a SAG Award nomination) as the dashing duke in Netflix's popular series, Page

has hosted "Saturday Night Live," been mentioned as a leading candidate to play the next James Bond and nabbed a leading role in the Hasbro-Paramount adaptation of "Dungeons & Dragons," along with Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez and Justice Smith.

Plus he has a pre-"Bridgerton" résumé that includes roles in the 2016 remake of "Roots," the 2018 movie "Mortal Engines" and two seasons on ABC's "For the People."

"Pleasure and a privilege!," the London-born actor tweeted in response to Netflix's April 2 announcement that he would not be back. "An honour to be a member of the family — on and off screen, cast, crew and incredible fans — the love is real and will just keep growing."

Season two, based on "The Viscount Who Loved Me," will focus on the romantic adventures of Anthony Bridgerton (Jonathan Bailey), the fictional family's eldest son, and Kate Sharma ("Sex Education" star Simone Ashley).

'Bridgerton' gets third and fourth seasons

The wildly popular period drama has been renewed for third and fourth seasons, Netflix announced Tuesday.

A second season following Lord Anthony Bridgerton's "quest for love" is currently in production, Netflix said.

Rhimes is excited to continue working on "Bridgerton" after the third and fourth seasons were picked up.

"This two-season pickup is a strong vote of confidence in our work and I feel incredibly grateful to have partners as collaborative and creative as Netflix."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man fleeing police crashes Maserati SUV

CA OAKLAND — A man fleeing the California Highway Patrol totaled his girlfriend’s Maserati SUV after he careened up an embankment and slammed into the underside of an overpass, wedging the vehicle under a freeway in Oakland, authorities said.

“The driver is lucky to be alive. The owner of the Maserati ... not so lucky,” the CHP said in a social media post that included photos of the mangled luxury vehicle.

Police said the 32-year-old man was speeding on a highway when a CHP officer tried to stop him. He accelerated to over 100 mph and then exited the freeway, veering over a curve, up the embankment and ending up just beneath the freeway, said Officer David Arias, a spokesman for the CHP in Oakland.

Cannabis-themed license plates to be auctioned

CO DENVER — Cannabis-themed license plates in Colorado are being auctioned off to the highest bidder in a fundraiser for the Colorado Disability Funding Committee.

The state is selling the rights to 14 plates with cannabis-themed phrases, including “BONG,” “GANJA,” “TEGRIDY” and “HASH,” KUSA-TV reported.

A license plate with “ISIT420,” a reference to slang for smoking pot, has so far garnered bids of more than \$6,500, making it the highest in demand. Bids are being collected until 4:20 p.m. on April 20, a day considered the unofficial “pot holiday.”

Winning bidders will be able to use the configuration of letters and numbers they chose on a novelty plate of their choosing but must pay registration fees, personalized plate protection fees and the costs for potential designer backgrounds.

Postcard from Titanic’s radio operator to be sold

MA BOSTON — A postcard written by the Titanic’s senior radio operator just weeks before the ocean liner sank in the North Atlantic in 1912 was put up for auction.

The card was written by Jack Phillips to his sister, Elsie Phillips, in March 1912 while awaiting the ship’s first sea trials, according to RR Auction in Boston.

“Very busy working late. Hope to leave on Monday & arrive Soton Wednesday afternoon. Hope you quite OK. Heard from Ethel yesterday,” he wrote. It’s signed “Love Jack.”

It is postmarked Belfast, where the Titanic was built, and has a canceled halfpenny stamp.

The postcard is being sold by the estate of Vera and John Gillespie, longtime members of the Massachusetts-based Titanic His-



BIANCA MOORMAN, THE MERIDIAN (MISS.) STAR/AP

Promoting awareness

Key Field Air National Guard Chaplain Maj. Shane Moore signs a banner to honor victims of sexual assault and child abuse at the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience in Meridian, Miss. Key Field and Wesley House partnered to promote awareness about child abuse and sexual assault during April.

torical Society, said Bobby Livingston, executive vice president at RR Auction.

Truck, stolen trailer crash into vehicles

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Several people were injured after the driver of a truck with a stolen trailer crashed into a number of vehicles in downtown Indianapolis.

Police tried to stop the truck but called off the pursuit when the driver fled east in the westbound lanes of Interstate 70, police said.

At least two other vehicles were sideswiped by the truck before it exited the freeway, ran a red light and struck other vehicles.

The driver of the truck and a passenger ran from the crash site but were arrested nearby, police said.

Inmate found breaking hole in window at jail

KS WICHITA — A detention deputy doing his regular early morning rounds discovered an inmate trying to break a hole to an outer cell window at the county jail in Wichita, authorities said.

The Sedgwick County Sheriff’s

THE CENSUS

30K The approximate number of Florida Keys customers who lost power when a sailboat got stuck in transmission lines, officials said earlier this week. Keys Energy Services said in a Facebook post that crews were working to restore power. A similar incident involving a sailboat hitting transmission lines next to the Seven Mile Bridge happened in October 2018, the Miami Herald reported. That incident also knocked out power to about 30,000 homes.

Office said in a news release that the deputy noticed paper covering part of the window and instructed the inmate to remove it so he could examine the window. He found damage to the window about six inches in diameter.

The inmate had broken the first several layers of glass, but had not yet broken through to the outside of the building.

A hole of this size would have provided an access point to introduce contraband into the facility, the sheriff’s office said.

Spring arrives: Block falls through ice in contest

VT DANVILLE — Spring has arrived in a northeastern Vermont community where a cinder block fell through the ice at Joe’s Pond in West Danville.

Each year people buy tickets to guess when that will happen in the

annual Joe’s Pond Ice Out Contest.

This year, the block went through the ice disconnecting a clock at 4:57 p.m. on April 10.

Over 10,000 tickets were sold but the winner has not yet been announced.

According to the Joe’s Pond Association, the contest was started in the 1980s due to cabin fever.

Life-sized elephant statue installed at stadium

AL TUSCALOOSA — A life-sized statue of an elephant was moved to a street corner outside the University of Alabama’s football stadium after 20 years at a country club.

The 7-ton bronze statue now stands on a tall pedestal outside Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, news outlets reported. Although the university’s sports nickname is the Crimson Tide, its mascot is an elephant.

The statue dubbed Tuska, by English artist Terry Matthews, is 19 feet, 1 inch from the base to the tip of its trunk.

A gift from former athletic director Bill Battle and his wife, Mary, helped the school move Tuska, The Montgomery Advertiser reported.

Statehouse break-in, vandalism investigated

OH COLUMBUS — A man broke into the Ohio Statehouse, used a fire extinguisher to spray chemicals on the historic building’s Rotunda floor, and then called 911 seeking medical help, according to the State Highway Patrol.

Columbus police responding to the call found the man outside on the west lawn of the downtown building near the monument to former Ohio governor and president William McKinley.

The man appeared to be under the influence of drugs, said Lt. Craig Cvetan, a patrol spokesman.

The man broke a window to get inside, broke a second window once inside the building, and broke a third to escape, Cvetan said.

GET YOUR ROAD MAP TO THIS WEEK'S GREAT SAVINGS!



SHOPMYEXCHANGE.COM/SAVINGS-CENTER/WEEKLY-ADS



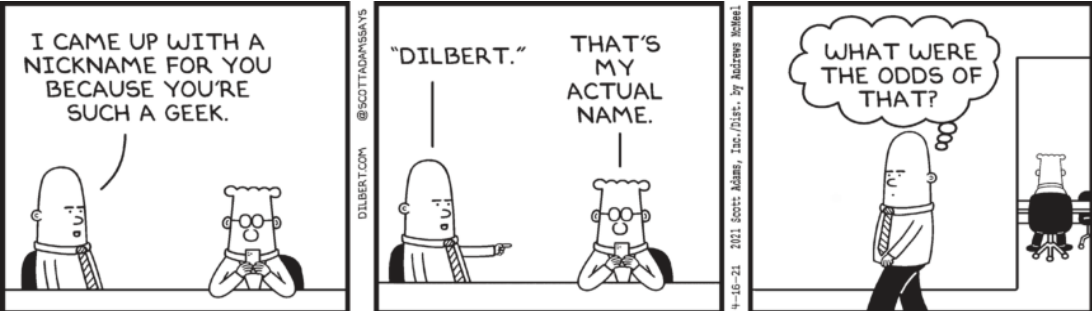
shopmyexchange.com



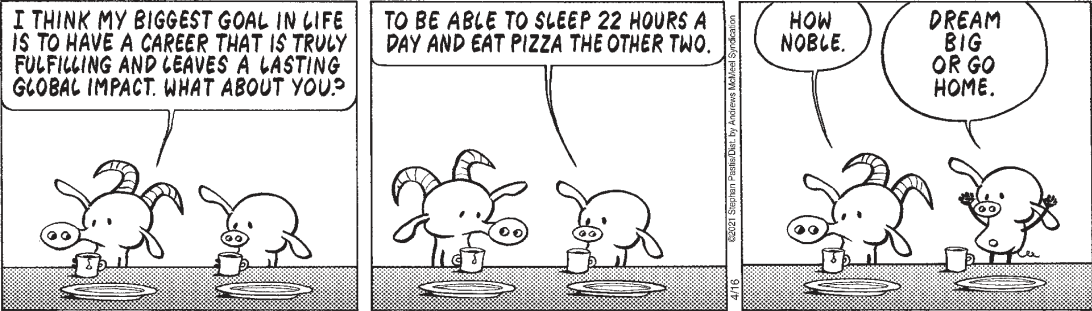
Frazz



Dilbert



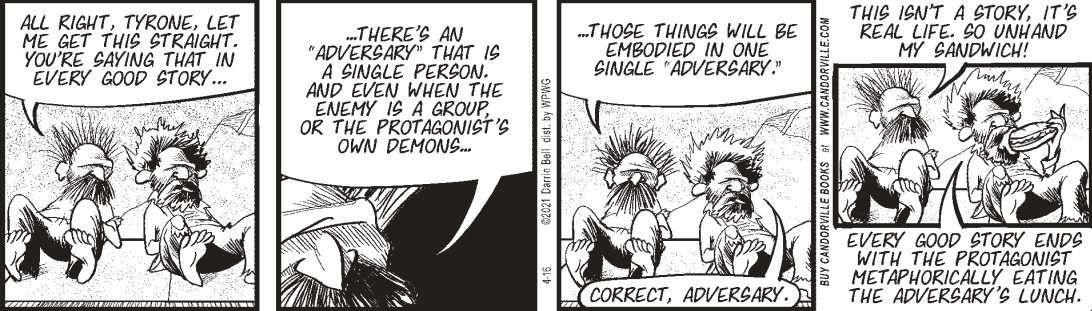
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



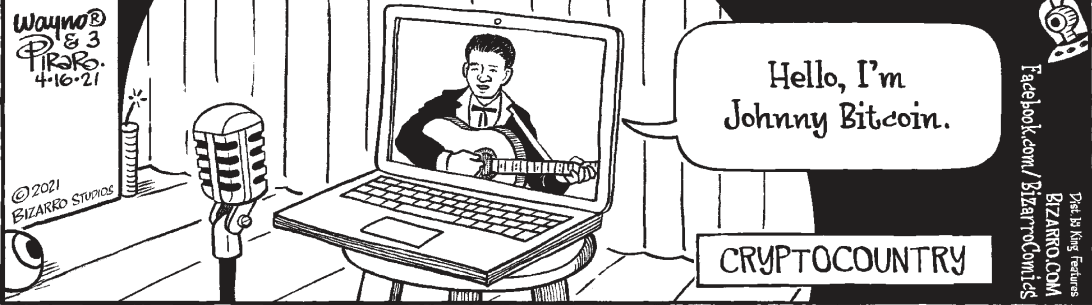
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
18							19	20				
				21			22			23	24	25
26	27	28				29				30		
31					32				33			
34				35				36				
37			38				39					
			40				41			42	43	44
45	46	47				48	49					
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

- ACROSS
- 54 Scratched (out)
- 55 Klutz
- DOWN
- 1 "Pygmalion" monogram
- 4 Hot tubs
- 8 Short cuts
- 12 100%
- 13 Highly-rated
- 14 Spoken
- 15 "Just be patient"
- 17 — Martin (cognac)
- 18 Exit
- 19 Links org.
- 21 Scot's denial
- 22 Flower part
- 26 Partner of aches
- 29 Baton Rouge sch.
- 30 Salt Lake athlete
- 31 Bohemian
- 32 Obtained
- 33 Early automaker
- 34 Actor Billy — Williams
- 35 Superman foe Luthor
- 36 BLT bread
- 37 Biblical strong fellow
- 39 Shriver of tennis
- 40 Coloration
- 41 — de corps
- 45 Scottish slope
- 48 Furious
- 50 Swiss river
- 51 "Legally Blonde" role
- 52 201, in old Rome
- 53 Cinch
- 25 Take it easy
- 26 Cushions
- 27 Geometric calculation
- 28 Detail
- 29 Bagel topper
- 32 River to Lake Ontario
- 33 Pizzazz
- 35 Singer Rawls
- 36 Took a bite
- 38 Bo Peep's charges
- 39 "Us" director Jordan
- 42 Puerto —
- 43 Bygone Peruvian
- 44 Pre-weekend yell
- 45 Some coll. degrees
- 46 Scooted
- 47 Palindromic constellation
- 49 Caribou kin

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	A	B	A		L	A	C	K		M	A	E
U	S	E	R		I	R	O	N		I	S	A
C	H	A	M	O	M	I	L	E		L	A	S
S	E	N	O	R	A				A	D	E	P
				R	E		F	E	D	U	P	
A	R	M	Y		S	R	O			B	O	N
L	E	I			W	O	N			S	U	E
L	O	L	A		A	S	S		E	T	N	A
				E	R	U	P	T		O	N	
M	A	H	E	R				C	R	A	V	A
A	M	I			B	O	N	U	S	M	I	L
N	O	G			A	R	I	E		E	T	T
I	S	H			N	O	B	S		L	O	O

4-16 CRYPTOQUIP

VMW LGS'B SABNBBNC LEIG

BIMCWEPV RKJPIB IGJI VYSL

EP CNPBN QJBBNB SP ASVWW

VYSMP C: RNIN QSBB.

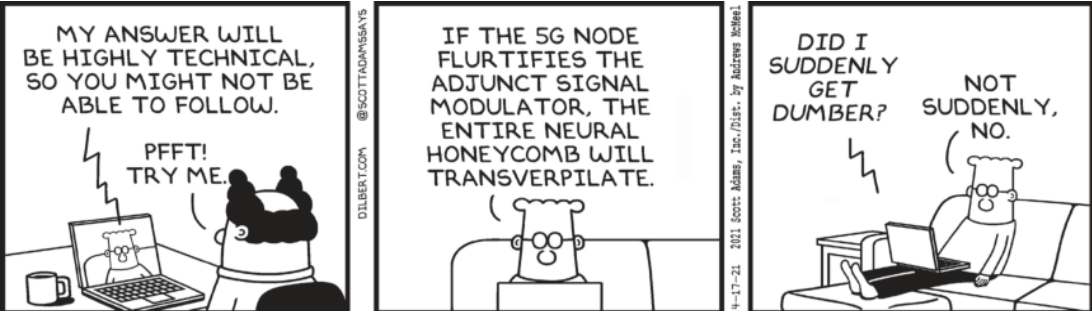
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT YOU CALL MEDICATIONS THAT ARE REMEDIES WHEN YOU GET TOO WILDLY HAPPY? MANIC CURES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals Y

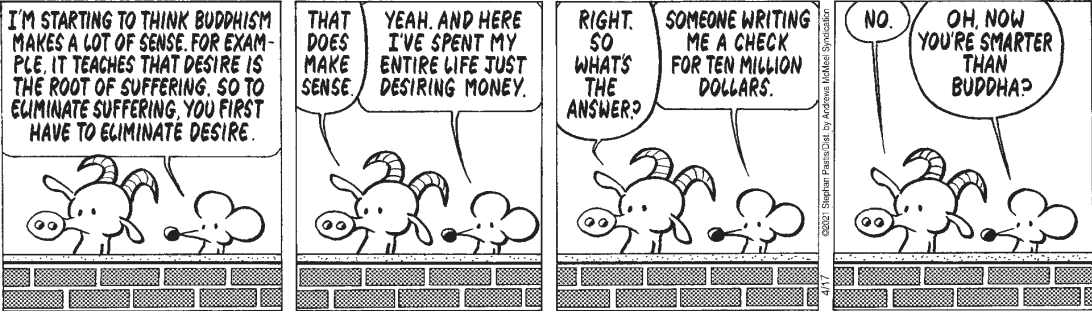
Frazz



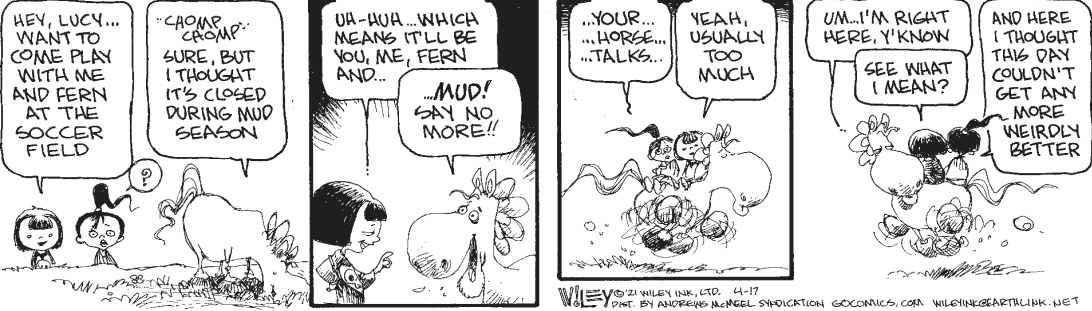
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



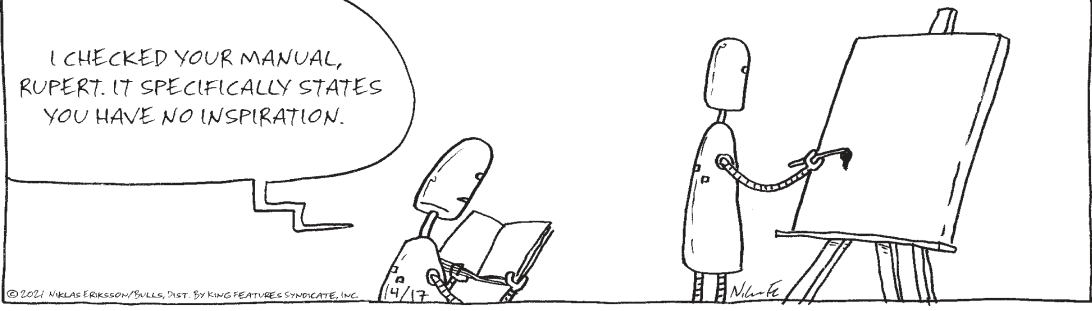
Non Sequitur



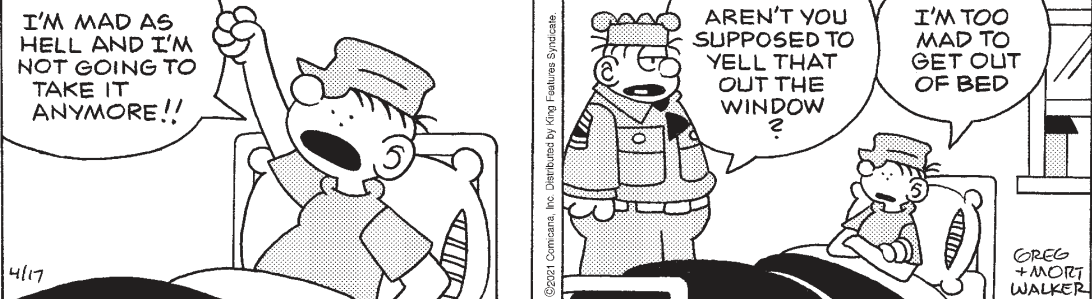
Candorville



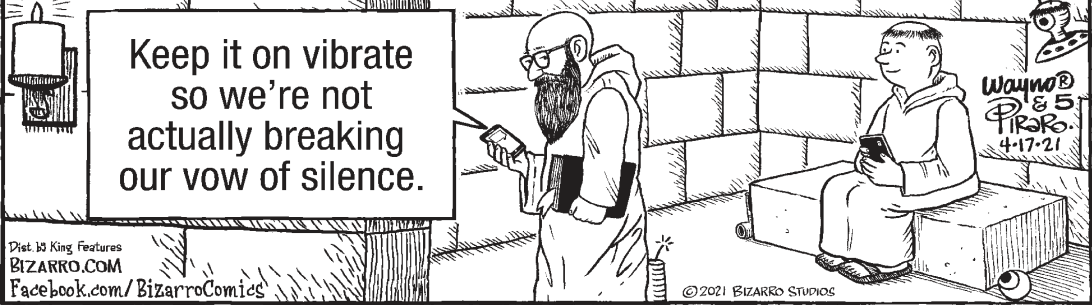
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11
12							13					
14							15					
16					17	18				19		
			20	21			22	23				
24	25	26		27			28		29		30	31
32			33				34					
35					36					37		
		38		39		40			41			
42	43			44	45				46	47	48	49
50			51				52	53				
54							55					
56							57					

- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 25 Churchill gesture
- 26 Forever
- 28 Belgrade residents
- 30 Actress Hagen
- 31 Tiara sparkler
- 33 Reggae relative
- 34 Dietician's stat
- 39 A-bomb trial
- 41 Plaintive poem
- 42 Weight
- 43 Margarine
- 45 Fed. workplace monitor
- 47 Comic strip possum
- 48 Hidden valley
- 49 Annex
- 51 God, in Roma
- 53 Mountain pass
- 1 Use elbow grease on
- 6 Parking pros
- 12 Pass by
- 13 "That's cool"
- 14 Grow bored with
- 15 Serenaded
- 16 Mast
- 17 Online auction site
- 19 Soak (up)
- 20 Start of a spell
- 22 "Chandelier" singer
- 24 "Hail!"
- 27 Web addresses
- 29 Punch
- 32 "This calls for champagne!"
- 35 Quick look
- 36 Campus digs
- 37 River blocker
- 38 Scooted
- 40 Theater award
- 42 Sweetie
- 44 "Sula" author Morrison
- 46 Women's links org.
- 50 Skips over
- 52 Ancient
- 54 Fixation
- 55 Kvetched
- 56 Corolla or Camry
- 57 Secretly watch
- 1 Faux pas
- 2 "Growing Pains" singer Alessia
- 3 Verdi work
- 4 GI entertainers
- 5 Alluded (to)
- 6 Travel permit
- 7 All in — work
- 8 — -Manuel Miranda
- 9 Sandwich filler
- 10 Bandleader Puente
- 11 Halt
- 12 Roswell visitors
- 18 Inflated party prop
- 21 Tampa Bay NFLer
- 23 Leb. neighbor
- 24 Jungfrau, e.g.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

G	B	S		S	P	A	S		B	O	B	S
A	L	L		A	O	N	E		O	R	A	L
Y	O	U	L	L	S	E	E		R	E	M	Y
E	G	R	E	S	S		P	G	A			
			N	A	E		A	N	T	H	E	R
P	A	I	N	S		L	S	U		U	T	E
A	R	T	Y		G	O	T		O	L	D	S
D	E	E		L	E	X		T	O	A	S	T
S	A	M	S	O	N		P	A	M			
			H	U	E		E	S	P	R	I	T
B	R	A	E		S	E	E	T	H	I	N	G
A	A	R	E		E	L	L	E		C	C	I
S	N	A	P		E	K	E	D		O	A	F

4-17 CRYPTOQUIP

UFBY M LMJVHSXRMJ WBQBJV

LRMYV VMQVBQ QHSEBYHYDRA

KMW, H DXBQQ VFMV UZXRW

KB M AXSEA AXSSM.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: GUY WHO'S OBSESSED WITH STUDYING PLANTS THAT GROW IN DENSE MASSES ON BOGGY GROUND: PETE MOSS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals D



Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Europe commander
 Lt. Col. Richard McClintic, Pacific commander

EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editor
 leonard.terry@stripes.com
 Robert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor
 reid.robert@stripes.com
 Tina Croley, Managing Editor for Content
 croley.tina@stripes.com
 Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
 moores.sean@stripes.com
 Joe Gromelski, Managing Editor for Digital
 gromelski.joe@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
 Robert Reismann, Mideast Circulation Manager
 robert.w.reismann.naf@mail.mil
 xsscirculation@stripes.com
 DSN (314)583-9111
Europe
 Karen Lewis, Community Engagement Manager
 lewis.karen@stripes.com
 memberservices@stripes.com
 +49(0)631.3615.9090; DSN (314)583.9090
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 116, Washington, DC 20001-3050
Reader letters
 letters@stripes.com
Additional contacts
 stripes.com/contactus

OMBUDSMAN

Ernie Gates

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 week-days (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.

OPINION

Biden made the tough, correct call on Afghanistan

BY HENRY OLSEN
Special to The Washington Post

President Joe Biden's announcement that the United States will unconditionally withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan by Sept. 11 reflects a regrettable reality, but it is the right decision.

The United States invaded Afghanistan on Oct. 7, 2001, because the Taliban government had allowed its territory to be used by the Islamist terrorist group al-Qaida to launch the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington. That response was right: The United States had to bring the war home to the attackers. Along with our NATO allies, we were able to cripple al-Qaida and show other nations that if they connived with terrorists, the United States would not tolerate their covert encouragement of our open enemies.

Twenty years later, the Taliban no longer control the government, but the United States is still at war with the Taliban. We have tried a variety of strategies, including a surge of military forces in 2009 that was supposed to stop Taliban fighters operating from bases in neighboring Pakistan. None have worked. The Taliban remain a persistent power, drawing succor from their core support group, ethnic Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, they have consistently held the strategic initiative because the U.S. forces cannot—or will not—cross the Pakistani border to eliminate the bases the insurgents retreat to. They thus control the war's flow, ramping up attacks or lowering them according to their designs. The United States cannot win under those conditions; it can only create a stalemate preventing the Taliban from toppling the weak Afghan central gov-

ernment we have supported in Kabul.

This situation creates a clear strategic quandary for Washington. Is it worth spending billions of dollars a year, and committing thousands of troops and their equipment, indefinitely to keep the Taliban out of power? Viewed as an isolated question, the answer is clearly yes. It is in U.S. interest to prevent a potentially hostile power from again controlling a hard-to-attack nation from which anti-U.S. terrorism groups can freely operate. But viewed against the broader strategic challenges the United States faces, the answer is clearly no.

Today's global environment is far different from what it was 20 years ago. In 2001, China and Russia were much weaker entities. Their economies were vastly smaller than they are today, and their military forces were incapable of posing even a regional threat to U.S. allies in Asia or Europe. We could afford to concentrate our considerable power on fighting terrorism.

Today, those two countries pose very serious threats to NATO allies in Europe and the free nations in Asia. U.S. interests would be much more threatened by the loss of Taiwan to Chinese invasion or the subversion of Estonia by Russian-backed forces than they would be by a terrorist resurgence. Compared with those threats, it makes more sense for the United States to withdraw its assets from Afghanistan and concentrate them in the regions more important to our national security.

If Biden chose to stay in Afghanistan, on the other hand, the situation could be dire. Russia, China and Iran have an informal anti-Western alliance with increasingly close military cooperation. This raises the specter of simultaneous, coordinated assaults on the

U.S.-led global order that would severely tax U.S. power. Signs of that are already appearing. Russia is currently building forces on the Ukrainian border at the same time Iran is ramping up its uranium enrichment activities, and China is increasing its military presence in the South China Sea and close to Taiwan. U.S. forces would already find it difficult to support our allies in all three regions at the same time. Imagine if we also had to maintain or increase our presence to support the Afghan government in the face of a ferocious Taliban offensive — and do so to protect the lives of thousands of American soldiers and citizens now in harm's way. The political pressure to make the wrong decision — to support our troops in the peripheral Afghan theater at the expense of other, more important, engagements — would be immense.

It is regrettable that our withdrawal could easily lead to a Taliban victory. We should continue to support the elected Afghan government with arms and nonlethal aid. We should declare that we reserve the right to launch missiles and airstrikes against any terrorist bases that reemerge in Taliban-controlled territory. We should also liberally apply economic sanctions against a Taliban government should it resume support for anti-U.S. groups. But we should not reconsider our decision to strategically withdraw from an untenable position.

The hard fact is that losing Afghanistan does not pose an essential threat to U.S. security, but losing a conflict against one of our three main enemies would. Kudos to President Biden for making the tough, correct call.

Henry Olsen is a Washington Post columnist and a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Biden offers false hope to sell his plan of surrender

BY ELI LAKE
Bloomberg Opinion

President Joe Biden has chosen to finish what his predecessor started in Afghanistan and surrender to the Taliban. Unlike former President Donald Trump, however, Biden may not even have the so-called peace process in Afghanistan to point to as an excuse for abandoning an elected Afghan government made possible by American blood and treasure.

A day before word of Biden's decision to withdraw by Sept. 11 leaked to the press, the Taliban announced they will not participate in peace talks in Turkey. That means the U.S. will be leaving Afghanistan's government to fend for itself in the midst of a civil war.

This is an ideal opportunity for a hobbled al-Qaida to rebuild. The Biden administration doesn't see it that way. Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, a senior administration official said the U.S. will still fight al-Qaida even after its forces have left Afghanistan. "We believe that we retain substantial military and intelligence capabilities to disrupt the broader capacity of al-Qaida to successfully reconstitute the sustained homeland threat to the United States," the official said.

In practice, that means the Biden administration expects to base an arsenal of drones, sensors and counterterrorism personnel in Pakistan, from where it can launch strikes on al-Qaida in Afghanistan. This plan depends on a Pakistani govern-

ment that has spent most of the Afghanistan War harboring and funding the Taliban. This is the same government that imprisoned the brave doctor who assisted the CIA in locating Osama bin Laden in 2011.

Another problem with this strategy is that the U.S. will lose the human assets necessary to track al-Qaida and other jihadis in Afghanistan. What chances are there that Afghans who oppose al-Qaida will risk their own lives to aid a superpower that has left the country to fend for itself against the Taliban? Fred Kagan, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, who has conducted numerous in-depth military studies of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan since the 2000s, told me: "The U.S. cannot conduct meaningful counterterrorism operations from hundreds of miles away over the sovereign territory of Pakistan against al-Qaida groups."

The happy talk about being able to counter al-Qaida once the U.S. leaves is not the only reality-challenged promise Biden will make to sell his Afghanistan surrender. There is also the fate of Afghan women. A recent virtual conference on women in Afghanistan featured some of the activists included in the Kabul government's negotiation team. They warned that a withdrawal now would risk two decades of gains for Afghan women.

It's easy to see why. If the Taliban take over the rest of the country, they will turn back the clock to the time before the U.S. invasion. Women will not be allowed to par-

ticipate in most aspects of public life. Girls will not be allowed to attend schools. Violators of these dictates will risk prison or worse. The Biden administration knows this. The senior official who briefed reporters said that in the last 20 years, the number of children in school has gone from fewer than 900,000 in 2001, almost all of them boys, to 9.2 million today, 3.7 million of them girls.

Unfortunately the Biden administration's plan to protect those gains relies on sanctions and censure. For example, the U.S. will withhold diplomatic recognition of the Taliban government if it chooses to rule Afghanistan the way it runs its shadow state. It will continue to apply sanctions on Taliban officials that abuse human rights. That might work against an adversary that cared about international recognition or economic growth. But the Taliban is a violent cult that cares only about imposing Islamic rule at any cost.

For more than a decade, the U.S. has faced a terrible choice in Afghanistan: continue to fight the Taliban to a stalemate, or leave and watch the collapse of the elected government in Kabul. Trump tried to end the Afghanistan War but never did. The only question for Biden is whether he understands that his decision amounts to surrender.

Bloomberg Opinion columnist Eli Lake covers national security and foreign policy. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Saturday's schedule

EAST

Delaware (4-0) at Villanova (2-1)
Holy Cross (2-0) at Bucknell (2-1)
SC State (2-1) at Delaware St. (2-2)

SOUTH

Gardner-Webb (2-1) at Charleston Southern (1-2)
Stetson (0-4) at Davidson (4-2)
Mercer (5-5) at Samford (3-3)
The Citadel (2-9) at VMI (5-1)
Richmond (3-0) at James Madison (4-0)
Southern U. (3-1) vs. Grambling St. (0-3) at Shreveport, La.
Butler (0-5) at Morehead St. (3-3)
Alabama A&M (2-0) vs. Alabama St. (2-2) at Birmingham, Ala.

MIDWEST

North Dakota (4-1) at Youngstown St. (1-6)
SE Louisiana (4-2) at S. Illinois (4-3)
San Diego (4-1) at Valparaiso (3-2)
Presbyterian (3-3) at Drake (2-2)
S. Dakota St. (4-1) at N. Dakota St. (6-1)

SOUTHWEST

Sam Houston St. (5-0) at Incarnate Word (3-2)
MVSU (0-3) at Texas Southern (0-2)
Prairie View (2-0) at Ark.-Pine Bluff (3-0)

FAR WEST

Portland St. at Montana (1-0)
Idaho (2-3) at N. Arizona (2-2)

AP SPORTLIGHT

April 16

1940 — Bob Feller of Cleveland defeats the White Sox 1-0 in the only opening day no-hitter in major-league history, at Chicago.

1949 — The Toronto Maple Leafs, with a 3-1 victory, sweep the Detroit Red Wings for the second straight year in the Stanley Cup finals.

1954 — The Detroit Red Wings edge the Montreal Canadiens 2-1 in the seventh game to win the Stanley Cup.

1957 — The Montreal Canadiens beat the Boston Bruins 5-1 to take the Stanley Cup in five games.

1961 — The Chicago Black Hawks win the Stanley Cup in six games with a 5-1 triumph over the Detroit Red Wings.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Optioned RHP Travis Lakins Sr. to the alternate training site. Recalled RHP Travis Lakins Sr. from the alternate training site. Placed RHP Mac Sceroler on the 10-day IL, retroactive to April 13.

BOSTON RED SOX — Recalled RHP Eduard Bazarido from the alternate training site.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Placed RHP Dylan Chase on 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Zack Burdi from the alternate training site.

HOUSTON ASTROS — Placed DH Jordan Alvarez, 2B Jose Altuve, 3B/SS Alex Bregman, INF Robel Garcia and C Martin Maldonado on the 10-day IL. Recalled INF Taylor Jones, C Garrett Stubbs and INF Abraham Toro from the alternate training site. Selected INF Alex De Goti and OF Ronnie Dawson from the alternate training site.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Activated RHP Josh Staumont from the 10-day IL. Designated CF Nick Heath for assignment. Optioned RHP Carlos Hernandez to the alternate training site.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Placed SS Andrelton Simmons on the COVID-19 IL. Selected the contract of INF J.T. Riddle from the alternate training site. Recalled RF Alex Kiriilloff from the alternate training site. Reinstated 3B Josh Donaldson from 10-day IL and optioned LHP Brandon Waddell to the alternate training site.

NEW YORK YANKEES — Optioned RHP Albert Abreu to the alternate training site.

SEATTLE MARINERS — Reassigned INF Donovan Walton to the taxi squad.

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Recalled LHP Josh Fleming from the alternate training site. Optioned 3B Kevin Padlo to the alternate training site.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Placed RHP Julian Merryweather on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Anthony Castro.

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Recalled OF Guillermo Heredia and LHP Tucker Davidson from the alternate training site. Placed OF Christian Pache and LHP Max Fried on the 10-day IL.

CHICAGO CUBS — Activated C Austin Romine from the 10-day IL. and RHP Jason Adam from the reserve/COVID-19 list. Selected RHP Shelby Miller from the alternate training site. Designated C Tony Wolters for assignment. Optioned RHP Albert Alsolay and LHP Brad Wieck to the alternate training site.

CINCINNATI REDS — Claimed LHP Phillip Diehl off waivers from Colorado and optioned to the alternate training site. Transferred RHP Michael Lorenzen from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Placed CF Lorenzo Cain on the 10-day IL. Recalled CF Tyrone Taylor from the alternate training site.

NEW YORK METS — Optioned LHP Stephen Tarpole to the alternate training site.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Placed CF Adam Haseley on the restricted list. Recalled CF Mickey Moniak from the alternate training site. Optioned RHP Spencer Howard to the alternate training site.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Placed Of La-Monte Wade Jr. on the 10-day IL. Recalled

TENNIS

Monte-Carlo Rolex Masters

Thursday

At Monte Carlo Country Club
Monte Carlo, Monaco
Purse: Euro 2,082,960
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Stefanos Tsitsipas (4), Greece, def. Cristian Garin (16), Chile, 6-3, 6-4.
Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Spain, def. Lucas Pouille, France, 6-2, 7-6 (2).

Men's Doubles
Round of 16

Robert Farah and Juan Sebastian Cabal (1), Colombia, def. Hubert Hurkacz, Poland, and Felix Auger-Aliassime, Canada, 6-0, 6-2.

MUSC Health Women's Open

Wednesday

At Family Circle Tennis Center
Charleston, S.C.
Purse: \$235,238
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Danka Kovinic, Montenegro, def. Lauren Davis, United States, 6-1, 1-6, 6-3.
Shelby Rogers, United States, def. Claire Liu, United States, 6-2, 6-2.
Clara Tauson, Denmark, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, 6-1, 6-4.
Nao Hibino, Japan, def. Francesca Di Lorenzo, United States, 6-4, 6-3.

Women's Doubles
Round of 16

Jamie Loeb, United States, and Erin Routliffe, New Zealand, def. Arina Rodionova, Australia, and Rosalie van Der Hoek (4), Netherlands, 6-1, 4-0, ret.
Naomi Broady, Britain, and Astra Sharma, Australia, def. Tereza Martincova and Linda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, walk-over.
Julia Wachaczyk, Germany, and Renata Zarazua, Mexico, def. Tara Moore, Britain, and Emina Bektas, United States, 6-4, 6-1.
Elixane Lechemia, France, and Ingrid Neel, United States, def. Maria Sanchez and Quinn Gleason, United States, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 10-8.
Caty McNally and Hailey Baptiste, United States, def. Sophie Chang and Emma Navarro, United States, 6-2, 6-4.

OF Steven Duggar from the alternate training site.

SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned RHP Nabil Crismatt to the alternate training site. Reinstated RHPs Pierce Johnson and Dan Altivilla from 10-day IL. Placed RHP Taylor Williams on the 10-day IL.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES — Signed G Tim Frazier to a 10-day contract.

WASHINGTON WIZARDS — Signed C Jordan Bell to a 10-day contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed DE Frank Herron, FB Mikey and DL P.J. Johnson.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed DE Jadevon Clowney. Re-signed DT Sheldon Day and TE Stephen Carlson.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Signed LB Keanu Neal.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed TE Antony Auclair.

MIAMI DOLPHINS — Re-signed LB Calvin Munson and DB Jamal Perry to one-year exclusive rights contracts for 2021 season.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Promoted Andre Patterson to assistant head coach and named Robert Steeples assistant special teams' coach and Marquis Johnson assistant strength and conditioning coach.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Waived CB Ryan Lewis.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed LB Eric Wilson.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Re-signed QB Josh Hobbs and LB Vince Williams.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Waived TE Chase Howell. Re-signed ERFA OL Daniel Brunskill.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed Chuck Arnold to a contract extension to remain president of Seattle Seahawks First and Goal through 2027.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Signed RB Giovani Bernard. Re-signed DT Steve McLendon.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Recalled D Conor Timmins, G Jonas Johansson and D Dan Renouff from the minor league taxi squad.

DALLAS STARS — Signed D Joel Hanley to a two-year contract extension.

DETROIT RED WINGS — Reassigned LW Taro Hirose and G Kaden Fulchere to Grand Rapids (AHL) from their taxi squad.

MINNESOTA WILD — Recalled LW Nico Sturm from the minor league taxi squad.

MONTREAL CANADIENS — Recalled G Cayden Primeau from minor the league taxi squad.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Reinstated C Michael McCarron from suspension.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Agreed to terms with F Collin Adams on a two-year, two-way contract.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Placed C Jackson Cates on IR COVID-19 protocol.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Re-signed F Connor Sheary to a two-year contract.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

D.C. UNITED — Promoted Dave Kasper to president of soccer operations and sporting director. Named Lucy Rushton general manager and head of technical recruitment and analysis.



MARK HUMPHREY / AP

Southeast Missouri State defenders Lawrence Johnson, left, and Shabari Davis, right, break up a pass intended for Tennessee State wide receiver Zaire Thornton during Sunday's game in Nashville, Tenn.

Pandemic-driven spring football fuels creativity

By TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — William and Felicia Mosley found the perfect way for them to make the most of the four-hour drive from their Montgomery, Ala., home to cheer on their son at Tennessee State.

They turned on Zoom and attended church services.

Juggling church and football is a typical Sunday for NFL fans. Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, it became the norm for college fans like the Mosleys as most Football Championship Subdivision leagues moved their schedules to the spring. Schools still faced some of the same issues that colleges dealt with during the fall and winter — canceled games, limited practices, sidelined players.

But Sundays were more of a spring thing.

The Ohio Valley Conference and Northeast Conference decided to play on Sundays to help schools staff all the sports in this chaotic spring.

The Mosleys worshipped virtually through their own church service, then joined her brother's service in St. Louis, Mo., before arriving in Nashville in time to cheer their son Kaleb, Tennessee State's punter and kicker.

"It's worked out great for us because usually we're traveling ... so we get to listen in the car while we're driving," William Mosley explained.

"It's been a glorified spring ball, especially with COVID and injuries and stuff like that. You really haven't been able to put your best team on the field all year long."

Rod Reid

Tennessee State coach, whose contract wasn't renewed after a 2-5 season

Said TSU fan Doris Thomas said: "You get up cheering for the Lord, and you come in here and cheer for the team."

With kickoffs ranging from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., TSU athletic director Mikki Allen said it made perfect timing for going from one church to another, and he hears from fans who enjoyed a great church service first.

"In the Southeast, football is a religion as well," Allen said. "There's a lot of avid football fans, obviously, in Middle Tennessee, in the Nashville area. So they're coming right after church service, whether they're having church service by Zoom or in person, and they get an opportunity to come to the legendary William Jasper Hale Stadium."

The OVC was one of the last conferences to decide to postpone the season to spring. Commissioner Beth DeBauche said playing on Sunday was an easy decision with member schools needing flexibility to staff all the sports being

played.

"Sunday was the window that we thought we could balance out all the staffing responsibilities and again, still give that requisite space, a standalone space for football that fans and families could also come and attend and be a part of it ...," DeBauche said. "It really has turned out to be a good decision for the league."

Some FCS teams played a few games last fall. Jacksonville State played four last fall and then won the OVC regular-season title this spring. The Gamecocks will be part of the FCS playoff bracket of 16 teams, down from the usual 24, announced Sunday.

But there was no escaping the impact of COVID-19.

"It's been a glorified spring ball, especially with COVID and injuries and stuff like that," said TSU coach Rod Reed, whose contract was not renewed Monday after a 2-5 season. "You really haven't been able to put your best team on the field all year long."

NBA/NFL

Aldridge retires due to heart condition

BY BRIAN MAHONEY
Associated Press
NEW YORK — LaMarcus Aldridge retired from the NBA on Thursday after saying he experienced an irregular heartbeat during his final game with the Brooklyn Nets.

Aldridge, 35, posted a statement on social media saying the heart concerns he had during and after Brooklyn’s loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Saturday was one of the “scariest things” he’s experienced.

Aldridge, who was diagnosed with Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome — an abnormality that can cause a rapid heartbeat — as a rookie in 2007, said he feels better now after getting it checked out but decided to end his 15-year career.

“For 15 years I’ve put basketball first, and now, it is time to put my health and my family first,” Aldridge wrote.

The seven-time All-Star signed with the Nets on March 28 and he had become their starting center. He missed the last two games with what the team had called a non-COVID-19 illness.

Nets general manager Sean Marks said the team fully supported Aldridge’s decision.

“We know this was not an easy decision for him, but after careful consideration and consultation with numerous medical experts, he made the best decision for him, his family and for his life after basketball,” Marks said.

Aldridge joined the Nets after reaching a buyout agreement with the San Antonio Spurs and provided his new team with an inside post presence that was one of the few things it was missing. The 6-foot-11 Aldridge had the best of his five games with the Nets in the one before his heart trouble, scoring 22 points in a victory over New Orleans on April 7.

The No. 2 pick in the 2006 draft was long one of the best at his position, averaging 19.4 points in a career that began with nine seasons in Portland.

He went on to play 5 ½ with the Spurs and was a five-time All-NBA selection.

Aldridge thanked all three organizations in his post, saying Portland gave him some “unforgettable years” after drafting a “skinny, Texas kid.”

He praised the Nets for allowing him to play his type of game.

“You wanted me for me,” Aldridge said. “In a game that’s changing so much you asked me to come and just do what I do which was good to hear.”

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	38	17	.691	—
Brooklyn	37	18	.673	1
Boston	29	26	.527	9
New York	29	27	.518	9½
Toronto	22	34	.393	16½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	30	25	.545	—
Miami	28	27	.509	2
Charlotte	27	27	.500	2½
Washington	21	33	.389	8½
Orlando	18	37	.327	12
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	34	20	.630	—
Indiana	26	28	.481	8
Chicago	22	32	.407	12
Cleveland	20	34	.370	14
Detroit	16	39	.291	18½

Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Dallas	30	24	.556	—
Memphis	27	26	.509	2½
San Antonio	26	27	.491	3½
New Orleans	25	30	.455	5½
Houston	14	41	.255	16½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Utah	41	14	.745	—
Denver	35	20	.636	6
Portland	31	23	.574	9½
Oklahoma City	20	35	.364	21
Minnesota	14	42	.250	27½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	39	15	.722	—
L.A. Clippers	39	18	.684	1½
L.A. Lakers	34	21	.618	5½
Golden State	27	28	.491	12½
Sacramento	22	33	.400	17½

Wednesday’s games
Milwaukee 130, Minnesota 105
Cleveland 103, Charlotte 90
Philadelphia 123, Brooklyn 117
Toronto 117, San Antonio 112
New York 116, New Orleans 106
Orlando 115, Chicago 106
L.A. Clippers 100, Detroit 98
Golden State 147, Oklahoma City 109
Indiana 132, Houston 124
Dallas 114, Memphis 113
Denver 123, Miami 106
Washington 123, Sacramento 111

Thursday’s games
Milwaukee at Atlanta
Golden State at Cleveland
Boston at L.A. Lakers
Sacramento at Phoenix

Friday’s games
Indiana at Utah
L.A. Clippers at Philadelphia
New Orleans at Washington
Oklahoma City at Detroit
Charlotte at Brooklyn
Orlando at Toronto
Denver at Houston
Memphis at Chicago
Miami at Minnesota
Portland at San Antonio
New York at Dallas

Saturday’s games
Utah at L.A. Lakers
Cleveland at Chicago
Detroit at Washington
Golden State at Boston
Memphis at Milwaukee
San Antonio at Phoenix

Sunday’s games
Indiana at Atlanta
New Orleans at New York
Brooklyn at Miami
Houston at Orlando
Oklahoma City at Toronto
Portland at Charlotte
Sacramento at Dallas
Minnesota at L.A. Clippers

Calendar
May 16 — End of regular season
May 18-21 — Play-In Tournament
May 22 — July 22: 2021 NBA Playoffs
May 30 — Deadline for an early entry player to apply for this year’s Draft (11:59 p.m. ET)
June 21-27 — NBA Draft Combine
June 22 — NBA Draft Lottery
July 19 — Deadline for an early entry player to withdraw from the NBA Draft (5 p.m. ET)
July 29 — 2021 NBA Draft



Offensive lineman Quinn Meinerz runs at Wisconsin Whitewater’s pro day on March 9. It was one of only four pro days hosted by non FBS teams and was held only because Meinerz was a Senior Bowl standout.

Pandemic limits chances to spot diamonds in the rough

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press
Those diamonds in the rough selected in the late rounds of NFL drafts or signed as undrafted free agents are more like hidden gems this year.

Fewer schools outside the Football Bowl Subdivision hosted pro days this year, meaning college players from smaller schools with NFL hopes didn’t get the same exposure they would have otherwise from campus workouts in front of scouts.

Only three Football Championship Subdivision schools and one in Division III had pro days scheduled compared with 48 in the FCS and nine in Division II in 2019, the last year with a draft leadup unaffected by COVID-19.

“Every year we’ve had a guy shock us in the 40, a guy shock us in the 225 bench press, shock us in the broad jump. You won’t get to see that this year,” said Scorpio Horn, the Missouri Western defensive coordinator who’s the liaison to the NFL for the Division II school in St. Joseph, Missouri.

“The only guys from small schools that will get that opportunity are the dominant guys that are first-day or next-day guys. Everybody knows who they are. Those guys get an opportunity and the scouts see them, but it’s that one diamond in the rough that we’ll allow to come.”

There were 112 pro days this year, according to NFL.com. That compares with 171 in 2019, 196 in 2018 and 230 in 2017.

For the second straight year, NFL teams cut back on travel for scouts and personnel people as a precaution against COVID-19. With the February scouting combine in Indianapolis canceled, the importance of pro days was height-

ened, and smaller school players with established profiles were directed to the nearest big school pro days.

Another pandemic-related reason for fewer pro days was that many non-FBS schools that typically host them did not this year because their teams are playing this spring after having their fall seasons postponed.

The only FCS pro days this year were at Central Arkansas, North Dakota State and South Dakota State, according to NFL.com. Only two players worked out at Central Arkansas and SDSU and three at NDSU, down from normal years at all three schools. SDSU and NDSU are playing this spring.

“Is this maybe a year some of those later rounds there are less diamond-in-the rough picks? Potentially,” said Wisconsin-Whitewater tight ends coach and director of operations Tim Shields, a former player agent.

“If you’re choosing between someone at Missouri Western who you were only able to see once versus three of your scouts at Northwestern seeing someone work out, maybe this is the time you take the Northwestern kid because you have a more complete evaluation on the Northwestern kid.”

Division III Wisconsin-Whitewater held a pro day that drew representatives of all 32 teams but only because its Senior Bowl revelation, offensive lineman Quinn Meinerz, warranted a closer look after Whitewater did not play in the fall.

About 230 players lost opportunities for exposure with the cancellation of two all-star games, the East-West Shrine Bowl and NFLPA Collegiate Bowl. The NFLPA and Shrine games attract a bountiful number of third-day

draft prospects or undrafted free agents.

Kansas City Chiefs defensive end Tershawn Wharton out of Division II Missouri-Rolla was one of those undrafted free agents who was discovered in the 2020 Shrine game.

“These guys pop off the screen and they make you go back and look at their tape and you’re kind of anxious for their pro day to come and see what they run and jump,” Chiefs general manager Brett Veach said. “That will be the challenge.”

Wharton would have been at Missouri Western’s pro day last year if it had not been canceled, so his invitation to an all-star game proved especially valuable.

Horn said Missouri Western’s pro day traditionally draws 25-30 players from Missouri’s FCS and Division II teams, and almost every year three or four are invited to a rookie minicamp.

“I hope we get it back next year,” Horn said, “and kids can get the opportunity to play at the next level.”

New York Giants general manager Dave Gettleman said even though the pandemic caused many pro days to be canceled last year, as it did this year, the task of evaluating 2021 prospects is more difficult.

“Last year, despite the fact the world essentially closed down mid-March, we had already had Indy, we had the all-star games and obviously had a full college season with full normal access,” Gettleman said.

At pro days this year, teams were limited to having three people attend, scouts often had to watch from the stands instead of on the field and face-to-face conversations with players usually weren’t allowed.

AUTO RACING



MICHAEL CONROY / AP

NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson, left, and Indycar driver Scott Dixon, right, talk during practice for the Indianapolis 500 on May 16, 2019. The IndyCar season begins with three new drivers, including seven-time NASCAR champion Johnson.

Johnson ditching plain label

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Jimmie Johnson, with wisps of gray in his beard, is a 45-year-old rookie in the IndyCar Series ready to reintroduce himself.

He's a windbag, a craft-o-maniac, a guy who goes, is really into eggs and keeps things fresh.

Those are just some of the labels Carvana has tagged Johnson with in a series of seven spots highlighting the online car dealer's first partnership with a professional athlete. The seven-time NASCAR champion begins his official transition to IndyCar this weekend with Sunday's season opening race at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama with three ads debuting during the NBC broadcast.

This won't be the vanilla version of Johnson fans became accustomed to during 19 Cup Series seasons driving for buttoned-up Hendrick Motorsports. Those who know Johnson away from his day job have always decried his image, insisting he's actually a hard-partying daredevil who never shies away from a bad idea.

Carvana, which is new to motorsports with its Johnson sponsorship and has a light sports marketing portfolio, decided to use Johnson's true personality in making its ad campaign for the IndyCar season. It hired The Malloy Brothers for the spots and Johnson already knew both Brendan Malloy and Emmett Malloy through other connections.

He was comfortable when the Malloys came to him about using a laxative to demonstrate how quickly Carvana can complete a car sale, or eating seven hard-boiled eggs for the seven-day test it out policy. Johnson even bedazzled a pair of jeans to demonstrate personalized financing options.

So who is this loose and easy-going Johnson? Same guy he always was.

"You know, this is just what I've figured in my own head and I've got nothing to back it up, but I've given people a reason to hate me for so many years, right?" Johnson said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"I was Jeff Gordon's hand-picked guy and there was a crowd I was never going to win over. Then in my final year, people were like 'OK, it's his last year, he's been here a long time, we're not going to cheer him but we'll give him some credit.' Now that I am not there, I wonder if there's a fan base that has finally decided, 'Alright, he's cool. He's served his time. I respect him for doing something different.' I don't know, but there's some kind of shift going on and people are finally starting to lighten up about me."

The road ahead won't be easy for Johnson as he unlearns two decades of driving a heavy stock car and adapts to a nimble, open-wheel machine against drivers half his age. Johnson is slated to drive just the 13 road and street course events on the IndyCar schedule for Chip Ganassi Racing with Tony Kanaan picking up the four oval races in the No. 48.

His barometers have so far only been in testing with his first true action this weekend at Barber.

New faces in IndyCar

Series set to open with three rookies chasing Dixon

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

Jimmie Johnson, Scott McLaughlin and Romain Grosjean, oh my! That's quite the rookie class for IndyCar, which opens the season Sunday at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama stacked with storylines throughout the grid.

Johnson brings seven NASCAR championships to Chip Ganassi Racing for a career reset at 45 years old. Although he always wanted to be an IndyCar driver, his opportunities came in stock cars until Johnson was able to call his own shots.

The transition will be incredibly difficult. The opening practice Saturday on the road course will be the first for Johnson, who will be doing nearly everything for the first time this weekend.

"If there's a rocky day, am I going to be surprised? Probably not," team owner Ganassi said Wednesday. "He's a damn hard worker. He sets the bar at a new level for the amount of work a driver puts in. He's always in the simulator, on the computer, on the phone, making calls, asking questions, working out, talking to sponsors, talking to the team."

"I mean, the guy doesn't slow down. I had no idea what I was up against when racing against him in NASCAR, and now I've got a little feel for it."



ERIC GAY / AP

Rookie IndyCar driver Scott McLaughlin, right, jokes with his crew and visitors during IndyCar Series testing in Austin, Texas on Feb. 11, 2020.

Grosjean comes to IndyCar from Formula One, where he'd grown frustrated at team disparity that prevented him from winning in nine seasons. His F1 career came to an abrupt halt after a fiery November crash in Bahrain; and instead of taking a ride with another team not capable of winning, the Frenchman signed with Dale Coyne Racing.

Like Johnson, Grosjean does not plan to race the four ovals on IndyCar's 17-race schedule.

McLaughlin is the three-time defending Australian V8 SuperCars champion who moved to the United States to drive the full season for Team Penske and will resurrect the iconic "Yellow Submarine" paint scheme in the Indianapolis 500 driven by Penske winners Helio Castroneves, Rick

Mears and Johnny Rutherford.

"I didn't think I'd be racing Jimmie Johnson and Romain Grosjean. It's crazy. Very exciting," McLaughlin said. "It just shows what IndyCar is all about right now. I hope the fans relish it."

McLaughlin should easily take top rookie honors because he's running the full schedule, but he's got his sights set on winning races and even competing for the championship. But the competition is fierce, starting at the top with six-time champion Scott Dixon and within Team Penske.

Dixon will be trying to tie A.J. Foyt's record seven championships while leading an expanded Ganassi organization. The team will field four cars this season with only Marcus Ericsson returning for a second year. Dixon will be acclimating to new teammates Johnson and second-year IndyCar driver Alex Palou.

Dixon in 20 seasons has never won back-to-back titles but his current streak of two in the last three years is the best of his career. He turns 41 this July but noted Tom Brady recently won a sixth Super Bowl at 43.

"I don't think you can ever really put a time scale on it or an age or anything like that," Dixon said. "I think we've seen the longevity, not just in our sport but across sports in general, there's so many different ways, whether it's the mental game or training or anything like that."

Penske has three IndyCar champions on its roster: Josef Newgarden has two titles, while Simon Pagenaud and Will Power each have one.



Grosjean

MLB/COLLEGE ATHLETICS

2020 rookies debut again, with fans in stands

BY JAKE SEINER

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Trevor Rogers' major league debut was only about half what he expected.

"A lot of jitters," the Miami Marlins left-hander recalled. "And a lot of cardboard cutouts."

Rogers, like the other 211 players who made their big league debuts in 2020, got an unusual introduction to baseball's top level — a pandemic-shortened season when fans were almost entirely banned from the ballpark. Now, many of those players are back in the majors, and all those cutouts have been replaced by limited-capacity crowds that are still some of the biggest those rookies have seen.

"It has been amazing," said fellow Marlins youngster Jazz Chisholm Jr. "I feel like every day is a new opening day for me because I've never had the chance to play with fans in the big leagues."

Chisholm and Rogers both broke in with Miami last season, part of an up-and-coming club that overcame a season-stalling coronavirus outbreak to end a 16-year play-off drought.

Rogers admits the fans momentarily threw him off his game. The 23-year-old made his first start this season against St. Louis on April 5 and trailed 3-0 after his first inning on the mound. Mechanical issues were part of the problem, but he also acknowledged having those debut jitters all over again with 4,605 fans at Marlins Park.

"I was overeager, for sure," he said. "Hearing the noise of the crowd, the talking, the chit-chatting, the cheering and booing and all that good stuff, it was something I had to get used to again. It definitely got the heart rate going a little faster."

A first-round draft pick in 2017, Rogers adjusted just fine in his next turn — a Sunday matchup against two-time Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom in New York. He outpitched the Mets' ace in a 3-0 victory, aided by a stunning homer from Chisholm off deGrom's 100 mph fastball at the letters.

With his bright blue hair and extravagant jewelry, Chisholm's eagerness to perform for an audience isn't much of a surprise.

"I love having fans out there," the infielder said. "I love hearing them talk their trash, I love the compliments, I love everything the fans bring to the game, the energy. It does it all for me. It gives me goose bumps getting ready to go out there and play a game."

Business isn't quite as usual in the big leagues. After filling stadiums with card-



AP photos

Above: A limited number of fans stand for the National Anthem before a game last week between the Pirates and the Chicago Cubs at PNC Park in Pittsburgh. Left: Miami Marlins starting pitcher Trevor Rogers throws during the first inning of a game against the New York Mets on Saturday in New York.



board likenesses of fans last year, teams have begun allowing limited fan access, with an average crowd of roughly 10,000 per game. For players coming from the minors, those crowds are already about as big as they've seen — Triple-A parks generally average 5,000-9,000 patrons per game.

For some, the return has been well-timed.

Yermin Mercedes has been a breakout star with the Chicago White Sox, becoming the first player since at least 1900 to open a season with eight straight hits — over his

first four major league starts, no less.

The 28-year-old has seemingly cemented himself as a fan favorite in less than two weeks. He's been greeted by huge cheers when he comes to bat, and he posed for photos near Chicago's dugout last week with a fan wearing a custom No. 73 jersey with "Yerminator" stitched on the back.

"They love me right now," Mercedes said, adding: "I'm feeling comfortable, I'm feeling great, because I know I have people behind me."

Those crowds are easy motivation for players trying to work their way back to the bigs, too, like Colorado Rockies right-hander Ryan Castellani. The 25-year-old was called up off the taxi squad for his first major league start last Aug. 8 and delivered four no-hit innings against Seattle.

"From a selfish perspective, it was awesome," he told The Associated Press. "I mean, I love getting called up pitching, it was a great game. But from a family perspective and all that, I would say it was a little bit of a disappointment."

Castellani ended up pitching in 10 games,

all a little bittersweet because his family couldn't come see him in person. He's been with his wife since high school, meaning she's been with him through his entire career. But she — like the rest of his family — had to watch from afar.

He made sure to collect mementos, including at least a half-dozen balls from his debut and more from his first victory a couple of weeks later. He distributed those to family, friends and influential others, including Rockies assistant director of player development Chris Forbes, who scouted and drafted him.

Castellani is working out at Colorado's alternate training site, waiting for his next big league chance. He's grateful to have had something of a soft open last year — "it was just baseball, there wasn't any distractions," he said — but he expects it to feel different the next time he toes a major league mound.

"That first game in front of, like a huge crowd, huge ballpark, having family in the stands, that'll be, I feel like, just as good, maybe even better, than my debut," he said.

NCAA votes to make major change to transfer rule

Associated Press

Starting next season, major college football and basketball players will be permitted to transfer one time before graduating without being required to sit out a year of competition.

The NCAA Division I Council voted Wednesday to changed the long-standing rule that has often deterred players in high-profile sports from switching schools, two people with knowl-

edge of the council's decision told The Associated Press.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the two-day meeting was still in session and the council's decisions would not become official until it ended Thursday. The Athletic first reported the council's vote.

The so-called one-time exception has been available to athletes in other NCAA sports for years, allowing them to transfer

and play immediately. Athletes in football, men's and women's basketball, men's ice hockey and baseball have not had that available to them without asking the NCAA for a special waiver and claiming a hardship caused the need for a transfer.

Athletes who have graduated have also been permitted to transfer without sitting out, but not undergraduates.

Starting this fall semester, all

athletes will be operating under the same rules: Transfers will be allowed to play right away.

Those in fall and winter sports must notify their schools they intend to transfer by May 1; in spring sports, the notification date will be July 1. The notification dates begin in 2022.

For this year, athletes in all sports will be required to notify their schools about their intent to transfer by July 1.

The council also voted to let the current dead period in recruiting in all sports expire June 1. A ban on in-person recruiting has been in place for more than a year because of the pandemic. Coaches will again be permitted to visit recruits off campus, hold camps on campus and welcome prospective student-athletes on official recruiting visits.

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	9	3	.750	—
Toronto	6	6	.500	3
Baltimore	5	6	.455	3½
New York	5	7	.417	4
Tampa Bay	5	7	.417	4
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Kansas City	6	4	.600	—
Cleveland	6	5	.545	½
Chicago	6	6	.500	1
Detroit	6	6	.500	1
Minnesota	5	7	.417	2
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	7	5	.583	—
Seattle	6	5	.545	½
Houston	6	6	.500	1
Oakland	5	7	.417	2
Texas	5	7	.417	2
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	5	3	.625	—
Philadelphia	6	6	.500	1
Miami	5	6	.455	1½
Washington	3	6	.333	2½
Atlanta	4	8	.333	3
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cincinnati	7	5	.583	—
Milwaukee	7	5	.583	—
St. Louis	6	6	.500	1
Chicago	5	7	.417	2
Pittsburgh	5	7	.417	2
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	10	2	.833	—
San Francisco	8	4	.667	2
San Diego	8	5	.615	2½
Arizona	4	8	.333	6
Colorado	3	9	.250	7
Wednesday's games				
Toronto 5, N.Y. Yankees 4				
Boston 3, Minnesota 2, 7 innings, 1st game				
Kansas City 6, L.A. Angels 1				
Boston 7, Minnesota 1, 7 innings, 2nd game				
Texas 5, Tampa Bay 1				
Chicago White Sox 8, Cleveland 0				
Detroit 6, Houston 4				
Seattle at Baltimore, ppd.				
Washington 6, St. Louis 0				
Milwaukee 7, Chicago Cubs 0				
San Francisco 3, Cincinnati 0				
N.Y. Mets 5, Philadelphia 1				
Pittsburgh 5, San Diego 1				
Miami 6, Atlanta 5, 10 innings				
L.A. Dodgers 4, Colorado 2				
Thursday's games				
Seattle at Baltimore				
Boston at Minnesota				
Cleveland at Chicago White Sox				
Seattle at Baltimore				
Texas at Tampa Bay				
Toronto at Kansas City				
Detroit at Oakland				
Philadelphia at N.Y. Mets				
Miami at Atlanta				
San Diego at Pittsburgh				
Arizona at Washington				
Colorado at L.A. Dodgers				
Friday's games				
Tampa Bay (Wacha 0-1) at N.Y. Yankees (TBD)				
Chicago White Sox (Cease 0-0) at Boston (Pivetta 2-0)				
Cleveland (Allen 1-1) at Cincinnati (Hoffman 1-1)				
Baltimore (López 0-2) at Texas (Foltynewicz 0-2)				
Toronto (Matz 2-0) at Kansas City (Minor 1-0)				
Minnesota (Shoemaker 1-0) at L.A. Angels (Heaney 1-1)				
Detroit (Ureña 0-2) at Oakland (Montas 1-1)				
Houston (Urquidy 0-1) at Seattle (Kikuchi 0-0)				
Atlanta (Smyly 0-0) at Chicago Cubs (Davies 1-1)				
Arizona (Widener 1-0) at Washington (Scherzer 0-1)				
St. Louis (Martínez 0-2) at Philadelphia (Moore 0-0)				
San Francisco (DeSclafani 1-0) at Miami (TBD)				
Pittsburgh (Brubaker 1-0) at Milwaukee (Houser 1-1)				
N.Y. Mets (Lucchesi 0-0) at Colorado (González 1-0)				
L.A. Dodgers (Buehler 1-0) at San Diego (TBD)				



DAVID BANKS / AP

Chicago White Sox starting pitcher Carlos Rodón, center, celebrates his no-hitter against the Cleveland Indians after his team's 8-0 win Wednesday in Chicago.

Nearly perfect: HBP means Rodón settles for no-hitter

White Sox pitcher throws MLB's 2nd no-no of season

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Carlos Rodón jumped around near the mound, surrounded by exuberant teammates. All the injuries, all the uncertainty, it seemed like a lifetime ago.

From no roster spot to no-hitter — Rodón had arrived at his moment.

The left-hander threw the second no-hitter of the young baseball season Wednesday night, losing his bid for a perfect game on a hit batter with one out in the ninth inning, and the Chicago White Sox cruised to an 8-0 victory over the Cleveland Indians.

“It just feels good to finally sit here and tell you I dominated today, and it felt good,” Rodón said. “I’ve never really done that. I’ve never done that on this level at least, and it feels good to say I did it.”

The 28-year-old pitcher got some help from AL MVP José Abreu, who picked up Josh Naylor’s slow bouncer leading off the ninth and got his toe on first base in the nick of time. The pandemic-limited crowd of 7,148, bundled up on a cool, crisp night, had to endure a quick replay review when the Indians challenged, but the call was upheld.

Rodón then plunked Roberto Pérez on the back foot with an 0-2 slider — the only runner he allowed. An incredulous Rodón looked on almost in bewilderment

as Pérez made his way to first, asking the veteran catcher if the ball actually hit him.

Rodón regained his composure in time to strike out Yu Chang looking and retire Jordan Luplow on a sharp grounder to third baseman Yoán Moncada, starting a joyous celebration. Rodón held out his arms as Moncada jumped toward him and backup catcher Zack Collins joined the impromptu party.

“That was the most incredible thing that I’ve ever been a part of behind the plate,” the 26-year-old Collins said.

Sideline by a string of injuries throughout his career, Rodón was out of a job for a while last winter. Back in December, the White Sox declined to offer him a 2021 contract. The No. 3 pick in the 2014 amateur draft re-signed with the team as a free agent, agreeing to a one-year deal for \$3 million on Feb. 1.

Looks like a pretty good call at the moment. Rodón (2-0) won a spot in the rotation in spring training and pitched five scoreless innings in his first start of the season. He was supposed to pitch Monday against Cleveland, but was scratched because of an upset stomach.

It was the first no-hitter for the White Sox since Lucas Giolito pitched one Aug. 25 last year against Pittsburgh and No. 20 in franchise history, second-most among major league teams behind



DAVID BANKS / AP

Rodón reacts after striking out Cleveland Indians batter Arned Rosario to end the eighth inning.

the Dodgers (23).

Pérez made two hard outs earlier in the game and said when he came up in the ninth, he was unaware Rodón had not permitted a baserunner.

“To be honest, I didn’t really think he had a perfect game until I got hit,” Pérez said. “I thought he had a no-hitter going on but I really didn’t think he had a perfect game. It’s hard, man. I’m not going to stand there and get hit, especially on a night like tonight when it was cold. But that’s just part of the game.”

Rodón’s gem came only five days after Joe Musgrove threw a no-hitter for his hometown Padres at Texas.

Mound experiment will begin in minors

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball wants to see if moving back the pitcher’s mound will increase offense.

MLB will experiment with a 12-inch greater distance between the mound and home plate during a portion of the Atlantic League season in an effort to decrease strikeouts and increase offense.

The pitching rubber will be moved back to 61 feet, 6 inches starting Aug. 3 during the second half of the independent minor league’s season.

“It’s a direct response to the escalating strikeout rate, where you’re giving the hitter approximately one one-hundredth of a second of additional time to decide whether to swing at a pitch, which has the effect just in terms of reaction time of reducing the effective velocity of a pitch by roughly 1.5 mph,” said Morgan Sword, MLB’s executive vice president of baseball operations. “The purpose of the test and hope is giving hitters even that tiny additional piece of time will allow them to make more contact and reduce the strikeout rate.”

In 2019, the last full season, strikeouts set a record for the 12th consecutive year at 42,823, up 33% from 32,189 in 2007. Strikeouts exceeded hits the last three seasons after never occurring before in major league history.

MLB calculated the average fastball velocity last year at 93.3 mph and estimated the increased distance would decrease the equivalent to 91.6 mph.

The mound has been at its current distance since 1893, when the National League moved the rubber back 5 feet. Strikeouts declined from 8.5% in 1892 to 5.2% in 1893 and the batting average increased from .245 in 1892 to .280.

Chicago Cubs president of baseball operations Jed Hoyer compared these changes to the lowering of the pitcher’s mound from 15 inches to 10 for the 1969 season.

“We’ve got to do something to get more offense in the game, whether you want to talk about the mound being moved back a foot, whether you want to talk about different ways of getting rid of the shift, whether you want to talk about substances on the ball,” Hoyer said. “We need to make adjustments. The DH originally came of these adjustments. The mound being lowered came from these adjustments. And I personally am of the mind of — obviously, I love baseball, but I don’t believe the rules are written on stone tablets.”

NHL

Sakic, Avalanche in win-now mode

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

DENVER — Deep down, this is precisely the sort of depth Colorado Avalanche general manager Joe Sakic always pictured.

Two goaltenders to back up one of the best in the league. Three balanced lines to complement a top one that's anchored by Nathan MacKinnon. A blue line filled with the perfect mix of young and veteran defensemen.



Sakic Only one thing may stop the Avalanche going forward: the salary cap.

Not this season, of course, but next. That's why Sakic chose to make a strong push at the trade deadline with several deals to bolster his NHL-leading team.

"This is as deep of team as we're going to have here," Sakic said. "We're going to have to get cheaper starting next year at some of those positions."

That's due to looming contract decisions with three big pieces of the team: goaltender Philipp Grubauer and captain Gabriel Landeskog, who are both free agents after this season, along with defenseman Cale Makar, a restricted free agent.

At the moment, Sakic is locked in on the playoffs, not contract talks. The last Avalanche team to hoist the Cup was the 2000-01 version that included a forward named Sakic.

"Everybody is focused on trying to win a Stanley Cup here," Sakic said. "We'll get to all those guys when we get to them. I don't really have any information on that. I think we're just focused on hockey right now."

In order to boost his team, Sakic surrendered some draft picks and young players in trade swaps. Because as they've learned through past experiences with injuries, there's no such thing as too much depth.

To acquire veteran defenseman Patrik Nemeth from Detroit, Sakic sent a 2022 fourth-round pick to the Red Wings.

To pick up backup goaltender Devan Dubnyk from San Jose, Sakic included a 2021 fifth-round pick in addition to defenseman Greg Pateryn.

And to get veteran forward Carl Soderberg from Chicago, Sakic packaged a pair of young forwards in Ryder Rolston and Josh Dickinson.

"We've got a lot of prospects we feel," Sakic said. "We feel this is the right time to do that."

One thing Sakic didn't want to do was disrupt team chemistry. So

Scoreboard

East Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	43	28	11	4	60	152	127
N.Y. Islanders	42	27	11	4	58	125	98
Pittsburgh	42	27	13	2	56	146	118
Boston	40	22	12	6	50	112	106
N.Y. Rangers	42	20	16	6	46	136	112
Philadelphia	42	19	17	6	44	123	154
New Jersey	41	14	21	6	34	103	135
Buffalo	42	10	25	7	27	100	147

Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	41	27	10	4	58	133	102
Tampa Bay	42	28	12	2	58	143	108
Florida	43	27	12	4	58	136	117
Nashville	44	24	19	1	49	119	123
Chicago	43	20	18	5	45	122	135
Dallas	41	15	14	12	42	113	107
Columbus	44	15	20	9	39	112	145
Detroit	44	15	23	6	36	99	140

West Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	43	30	9	4	64	154	101
Vegas	42	29	11	2	60	138	96
Minnesota	41	25	13	3	53	124	111
St. Louis	42	19	17	6	44	122	132
Arizona	44	19	20	5	43	118	139
San Jose	42	18	20	4	40	114	141
Los Angeles	42	16	20	6	38	114	127
Anaheim	44	14	23	7	35	101	138

North Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	43	28	11	4	60	143	112
Winnipeg	43	26	14	3	55	139	115
Edmonton	42	25	15	2	52	134	120
Montreal	40	18	13	9	45	123	114
Calgary	43	19	21	3	41	115	127
Vancouver	37	16	18	3	35	100	120
Ottawa	44	14	26	4	32	118	164

Wednesday's games
Minnesota 5, Arizona 2
Winnipeg 3, Ottawa 2
Calgary 4, Montreal 1
Colorado 4, St. Louis 3
Vegas 6, Los Angeles 2
Anaheim 4, San Jose 1

Thursday's games
Buffalo at Washington
Florida at Tampa Bay
N.Y. Islanders at Boston
Nashville at Carolina
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers
Philadelphia at Pittsburgh
Winnipeg at Toronto
Chicago at Detroit
Columbus at Dallas

Friday's games
Calgary at Montreal
N.Y. Islanders at Boston
San Jose at Minnesota
Edmonton at Vancouver
Los Angeles at Colorado
Vegas at Anaheim

Saturday's games
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers
Washington at Philadelphia
Pittsburgh at Buffalo
Ottawa at Montreal
St. Louis at Arizona
Chicago at Detroit
Florida at Tampa Bay
Nashville at Carolina
Toronto at Vancouver
Columbus at Dallas
San Jose at Minnesota
Edmonton at Winnipeg

he picked up Nemeth and Soderberg, who both have been around the organization.

Nemeth was actually one of Makar's first defensive partners. The 29-year-old Nemeth spent two seasons in Colorado from 2017-19. Nemeth is also an insurance policy for Erik Johnson, who won't return for the regular season due to an undisclosed injury but could possibly be available if the Avs make a deep playoff run.



TED S. WARREN / AP

Seattle Kraken general manager Ron Francis kept an eye on the deals that were made at the trade deadline, with an eye on which players might be available in July for the NHL Expansion Draft.

AROUND THE LEAGUE

Deal the Kraken?

Francis can't make official trades — yet

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Just because the NHL can't release the Kraken until October doesn't mean Seattle wasn't in the mix at the trade deadline.

General manager Ron Francis can't finalize any transactions until ownership makes its final expansion payment to the league, but there is precedent for making a handshake deal or two. That's what George McPhee did at the deadline four years ago with Pittsburgh, setting the table for goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury to be the face of the Vegas Golden Knights franchise.

If Francis made an arrangement with another team, he's not saying, though Seattle kept close tabs on all the moves — and the rest of the league certainly had the Kraken in mind with the expansion draft coming up in July.

"You always have the capability of having those discussions and reaching those agreements if both sides agree to it," Francis said Tuesday, a day after the deadline. "We're like everybody else on that trade deadline day: We're watching it, we're analyzing things. When trades happen, we're updating our list and seeing how that affects (how) we were thinking on certain teams."

Francis said nothing at the deadline surprised him, and little directly affected Seattle because so few players signed beyond this season were traded. Maybe scratch off the available list defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler (traded from Washington to New Jer-

sey) and forward Scott Laughton (re-signed with Philadelphia), but there was nothing earthshattering.

Maybe that's because executives learned some lessons from the 2017 expansion draft for Vegas. St. Louis general manager Doug Armstrong said teams are less likely to let Francis be the "puppet master" manipulating the league like McPhee did.

"I think everyone was a little more conscious of what was coming up at the expansion draft," Armstrong said. "When you're looking as if you're going to protect three defensemen, seven forwards, OK, if I acquire this player, what's the acquisition price, and then am I going to be able to protect him and what's it costing me on the other side?"

The Flyers were willing to risk that with Laughton, so perhaps big forward James van Riemsdyk and his sizable contract are on the board for Seattle. Vegas took on very few high-dollar, long-term contracts in 2017, but Francis won't share his philosophy.

He knows his colleagues have a longer runway to this expansion draft than they did last time, more time to figure out how to minimize the talent available. The wrinkle is the salary cap, which remains flat at \$81.5 million for multiple seasons because of pandemic-related revenue losses. The Kraken could seize any opportunities.

Small bubble

With roughly a month left in the regular season, 12 of the 16 playoff spots are all but wrapped up, with a

handful of teams vying for the rest. That helped separate the buyers and sellers at the deadline, though many in the race stood pat.

Armstrong's Blues were quiet, thanks in large part to a three-game winning streak that put them in a playoff position in the West Division. Had they lost those three games, Armstrong could've been a seller.

"When we were thinking about being a seller, we had a vision of, if we're going to do something, what we wanted in return," he said.

Instead, St. Louis is jockeying with Arizona for a playoff berth. With the top four pretty much set in the East and North, the only other drama is between Nashville, Chicago and Dallas in the Central.

Season over

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel (neck) and Dallas Stars winger Alexander Radulov (core muscle injury) were ruled out for the rest of the season. The Stars said Radulov will have surgery and also confirmed goaltender Ben Bishop, who hasn't played since the 2020 playoff bubble, won't return until training camp.

Leaders

Goals: Auston Matthews (Toronto), 32; Assists: Connor McDavid (Edmonton), 46; Points: McDavid: 69; Ice time: Drew Doughty (Los Angeles), 26:57; Wins: Andrei Vasilevski (Tampa Bay) and Philipp Grubauer (Colorado), 25 each; Goals-against average: Petr Mrazek (Carolina), 1.47; Save percentage: Filip Gustavsson (Ottawa), .946.

OLYMPICS



EUGENE HOSHIKO / AP

A woman wearing a protective mask walks in front of the Olympic Rings on Tuesday in Tokyo. As cases surge, various polls suggest up to 80% of Japanese want the Olympics canceled or postponed.

Price: Tokyo's 'safe hands' often shaky

FROM PAGE 48

views Japan," Dr. Gill Steel, who teaches political science at Doshisha University in Kyoto, wrote in an email. "Canceling the Olympics would have been seen, at some level, as a public failure on the international stage."

The price will be steep when the Olympics open on July 23.

The official cost is \$15.4 billion. Olympic spending is tough to track, but several government audits suggest it might be twice that much, and all but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The Switzerland-based IOC generates 91% of its income from selling broadcast rights and sponsorship. This amounts to at least \$5 billion in a four-year cycle, but the revenue flow from networks like American-based NBC has been stalled by the postponement.

What does Tokyo get out of the 17-day sports circus?

Fans from abroad are banned, tourism is out, and there'll be no room for neighborhood partying. Athletes are being told to arrive late, leave early and maneuver around a moving maze of rules.

There are also reputational costs for Japan and the International Olympic Committee: a bribery scandal, botched planning, and repeated misogyny in the Tokyo Olympic leadership.

The IOC is betting Tokyo will be a distraction — "the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel" —

but various polls suggest up to 80% of Japanese want the Olympics canceled or postponed. And many scientists are opposed.

"It is best to not hold the Olympics given the considerable risks," Dr. Norio Sugaya, an infectious diseases expert at Keiyu Hospital in Yokohama, told The Associated Press.

\$15.4B

Official price tag of the 2020 Olympic Summer Games in Tokyo, though several government audits have indicated the true costs could be twice that amount. All but \$6.7 billion is coming from public funds.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Japan's vaccine rollout has been almost nonexistent, few will get shots before the Olympics open, and Tokyo has raised its "alert level" with another wave predicted about the time of the opening ceremony. About 9,500 deaths in Japan have been attributed to COVID-19, good by global measures but poor by standards in Asia.

And what's the impact of 15,400 Olympic and Paralympic athletes from more than 200 countries and territories entering Japan, joined by tens of thousands of officials, judges, media, and broadcasters?

"The risks are high in Japan. Japan is dangerous, not a safe place at all," Sugaya said.

The IOC and Japanese politicians decided a year ago to postpone but not cancel the Olympics, driven by inertia and the clout of Japanese ad giant Dentsu Inc., which has lined up a record of \$3.5 billion in local sponsorship — probably three times more than any previous Olympics.

"I think the government knows full well the Japanese public doesn't want the Olympics as of now," Dr. Aki Tonami, who teaches political science at the University of Tsukuba, wrote in an email to AP. "But no one wants to be the one to pull the plug."

The Olympics may also determine the fate of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who replaced

Shinzo Abe seven months ago.

Despite being billed as the "Recovery Olympics," the northeastern area of Japan is still hurting a decade later. Many blame the Olympics for the slow recovery and siphoning off resources.

"Suga's fate is sealed," Tonami said. "I think he knows his tenure as a PM will not be a long one, so even though it would be nice for him personally to pull it off, it probably doesn't change the political conditions around him."

Steel was more optimistic.

"His government has a higher chance of surviving, even thriving, if they can pull off a successful Olympics — risky strategy, obviously, if it is a disaster."

But the "safe pair of hands" have often been shaky.

Tokyo's initial logo was scrapped after claims it was plagiarized, the original stadium concept was dropped when costs soared past \$2 billion, and organizing committee president Yoshiro Mori — a former prime minister — stepped down two months ago after making derogatory comments about women. Artistic director Hiroshi Sasaki left a few weeks later, essentially for the same reason.

On top of it all, French prosecutors believe Tokyo landed the Olympics by channeling bribes to IOC voters. Rio de Janeiro apparently landed the 2016 Olympics the same way, prosecutors allege.

"It's so easy to make money off the system," said Dr. Lisa Kihl, who studies sports governance at the University of Minnesota. "Nobody is going to rock the boat because everybody is benefitting from it. ...Until sports internationally are governed like financial institutions, it's not going to change."

Officials: Olympic cancellation, no fans still options

Associated Press

TOKYO — Two officials in Japan's ruling LDP party on Thursday said changes could be coming to the Tokyo Olympics. One suggested they still could be canceled, and the other said even if they proceed, it might be without any fans.

Toshihiro Nikai, the No. 2 and secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, mentioned the cancellation only a day after Tokyo reached the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday.

He made his comments in a show recorded by Japan's TBS TV.

"If it seems impossible to go on with the games, they must be definitely canceled," Nikai said. "If there is a surge in infections because of the Olympics, there will be no meaning to having the Olympics."

Asked if a cancellation was still an option, Nikai said: "Of course."

But he also added: "It is important for Japan to have a successful Olympics. It is a big opportunity. I want to make it a success. We will have many issues to resolve and prepare, and it is important to take care of them one by one."

Prime Minister Toshihide Suga said in a statement there was "no change to the government position to do everything to achieve safe and secure Olympics."

Tokyo organizers said they, the IOC and the International Paralympic Committee "are fully focused on hosting the games this summer." They said Suga "has repeatedly expressed the government's commitment" to holding the Olympics.

COVID-19 cases have been rising across Japan. On Thursday, Japan's second-largest metropolitan area of Osaka recorded 1,208 new cases. It was the third straight day that new cases surpassed 1,000. Tokyo hit 729, its highest total in more than two months. Japan has attributed 9,500 deaths to COVID-19, good by world standards but poor by results in Asia.

Tokyo and Osaka have been under an alert status since earlier this month, but officials are concerned there is little sense of urgency. Experts on a Tokyo metropolitan government taskforce warned that the new variant could replace the conventional virus and trigger explosive infections by early May. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike urged residents to take maximum protection and asked non-Tokyo residents not to



KOJI SASAHARA / AP

Japanese Vaccine Minister Taro Kono said on Thursday that even if the Olympics do go on, it's probable events will have to be held in empty venues, particularly as cases surge across the country.

visit the area.

Taro Kono, the government minister in charge of Japan's vaccine rollout, said even if the Olympics go on, there may be no fans of any kind in the venues. He said it's likely that the Olympics will have to be held in empty venues, particularly as cases surge across the country.

That means only television cameras and still cameras will be around to record the action, joined by some reporters, judges and match officials.

The delayed Tokyo Olympics are to open in just over three months on July 23, and the Paralympics follow on Aug. 24. Fans from abroad have already been banned. Now even Japanese spectators could be kept away.

"I think the question is how to do the Olympics in a way that is possible in this situation," Kono said Thursday on a television talk show. "That may mean there will probably be no spectators."

Kono did not suggest the Olympics would not go ahead, but he said they could be held under only "certain conditions."

"The way these Olympics will be held will be very different from past ones," he said.

Tokyo organizers have said they expect to announce a decision this month on the number of fans allowed into each venue.

Organizers had expected to receive about \$800 million from ticket sales, their third-largest source of income. Any shortfall will have to be made up by Japanese government entities, which are already footing most of the bills.

SPORTS



Flirting with perfection

White Sox's Rodón settles for no-no after HBP in ninth inning » **Page 45**

2020 SUMMER OLYMPICS

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY
TOKYO 2020



Tokyo pitched itself as "a safe pair of hands" when it was awarded the Olympics 7 ½ years ago. Now, nothing is certain as Tokyo's postponed Olympics hit the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday.

KIM KYUNG-HOON/AP



Willing to pay the price

Olympic organizers, IOC push on with Tokyo Games despite public opposition, surging cases

BY STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

Tokyo pitched itself as "a safe pair of hands" when it was awarded the Olympics 7 ½ years ago.

"The certainty was a crucial factor," Craig Reedie, an IOC vice president at the time, said after the 2013 vote in Buenos Aires.

Now, nothing is certain as Tokyo's postponed Olympics hit the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday. Despite surging cases of COVID-19, myriad scandals and overwhelming public opposition in Japan to holding the Games, organizers

and the IOC are pushing on.

Tokyo's 1964 Olympics celebrated Japan's rapid recovery from defeat in World War II. These Olympics will be marked by footnotes and asterisks. The athletes will aim high, of course, but the goals elsewhere will be modest: get through it, avoid becoming a super-spreader event, and stoke some national pride knowing few other countries could have pulled this off.

"The government is very conscious of how 'the world'

SEE PRICE ON PAGE 47

"The government is very conscious of how 'the world' views Japan. Canceling the Olympics would have been seen, at some level, as a public failure on the international stage."

Dr. Gill Steel

Political science teacher at Doshisha University in Kyoto

Nets' Aldridge retires due to heart issue » NBA, Page 42

