

NFL: Panthers receiver ready to be top option again **Page 48**

MUSIC: King Gizzard gets nostalgic **Page 28**

GAMES: Ubisoft could lure Star Wars fans back **Page 19**

EUROPE
& PACIFIC
WEEKEND
EDITION

MOVIES

‘Alien: Romulus’ on a schedule that has a film for every type of horror fan

Page 15
Review, Page 16

STARS AND STRIPES®

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Navy's shuffle brings second aircraft carrier to Northwest

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

NAVAL BASE KITSAP, Wash. — Eugene Gardner had come all the way from Parker Heights, Texas, to see the USS Ronald Reagan transit the Puget Sound to the base outside Seattle and welcome home his son.

“Here comes our son’s bedroom,” Gardner said Tuesday into his cellphone to his wife as the aircraft carrier swung into view on the end of ropes tied to two tugboats.

The crew of the carrier lined the ship’s rail in their dress white Navy uniforms. Somewhere in the 2,800 sailors or so was Gardner’s son, Lafayette, an airman. The elder Gardner came prepared to match his son and wore his dress Army 1st Cavalry Division uniform from his 35 years as a soldier.

“I told him that at least once in

SEE CARRIER ON PAGE 6



LOUIS THOMPSON STAATS/U.S. Navy

Sailors muster before manning the rails aboard the flight deck of the USS Ronald Reagan in Bremerton, Wash., Tuesday.



LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Army M1A2 Abrams tanks operated by the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, part of the 1st Armored Division from Fort Bliss, Texas, stand by for a drill at the Rodriguez Live Fire Complex in Pocheon, South Korea, on Wednesday.

No luxury of time

Army brigade rehearses sudden deployment to South Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

POCHEON, South Korea — Anti-tank rounds flew from a column of M1A2 Abrams tanks Wednesday at the Rodriguez Live Fire Complex, a short drive from the border with North Korea.

The 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, part of the 1st Armored Division from Fort Bliss, Texas, was taking part in Operation Pacific Fortitude, a test of the Army’s ability to quickly deploy and defend South Korea in case of war.

Two weeks earlier, the brigade unexpectedly received orders to deploy roughly 800 soldiers to South Korea within 10 days.

Only a handful of soldiers from U.S. Army Forces Command in North Carolina and Eighth Army at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, knew of Pacific Fortitude, and they were only privy to certain details, according to Eighth Army’s director of future planning Col. Denise Little and operations planner Capt. Coby Ruether.

The Forces Command, responsible for combat readiness across the Army, released details of the exercise to planners six months ahead; but the unit involved and the exercise dates were withheld until the final stages “so the unit wouldn’t catch wind,” Little said at Eighth Army headquarters Monday.

Secrecy simulates a real “no-notice alert,”

she added.

Spc. Zachary Baker, an M1 armor crewman in the brigade, said he was “pretty excited” to get the surprise notice two weeks ago.

“A lot of us and a few senior members of the unit had actually worked in South Korea so we kind of know the lay of the land,” he said at the range Wednesday. “Even though it was a surprise deployment for us, we were all ready for anything.”

Most of the brigade arrived Aug. 1 throughout South Korea on commercial and military aircraft with their rifles and body armor.

The brigade’s Abrams tanks and M109 Pal-

SEE TIME ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.823	\$4.335	\$4.683	\$4.113	Azores	..	..	\$4.533	..
Change in price	-3.4 cents	-2.9 cents	-2.8 cents	-5.1 cents	Change in price	..	..	-2.8 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.742	\$5.017	\$4.846	Turkey	..	..	\$4.349	\$4.611*
Change in price	..	+3.1 cents	-3.3 cents	-3.2 cents	Change in price	..	..	-2.8 cents	No change
U.K.	..	\$4.335	\$4.683	\$4.113	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 16. The change in price is from Aug. 9.				
Change in price	..	-2.9 cents	-2.8 cents	-5.1 cents					

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$4.329	..	\$3.759	South Korea	\$3.499	..	\$4.359	\$3.789
Change in price	..	-2.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	-3.0 cents	-5.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.469	..	..	\$3.759	Guam	\$3.529**	\$4.039	\$4.389	..
Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-3.0 cents	-3.0 cents	-2.0 cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade									
Pacific prices for the week of Aug. 16-22									

EXCHANGE RATES													
Military rates													
Euro costs (Aug. 16)	\$1.07	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8721										
British pound (Aug. 16)	\$1.25	Thailand (Baht)	35.22										
Japanese yen (Aug. 16)	144.00	Turkey (NewLira)	33.6197										
South Korean won (Aug. 16)	1327.00	(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.)											
Commercial rates													
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	INTEREST RATES <table><tr><td>Prime rate</td><td>8.50</td></tr><tr><td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td><td>6.00</td></tr><tr><td>Federal funds market rate</td><td>5.33</td></tr><tr><td>3-month bill</td><td>5.21</td></tr><tr><td>30-year bond</td><td>4.13</td></tr></table>		Prime rate	8.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00	Federal funds market rate	5.33	3-month bill	5.21	30-year bond	4.13
Prime rate	8.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00												
Federal funds market rate	5.33												
3-month bill	5.21												
30-year bond	4.13												
Britain (Pound)	1.2837												
Canada (Dollar)	1.3712												
China (Yuan)	7.1501												
Denmark (Krone)	6.8030												
Egypt (Pound)	48.9249												
Euro	0.9116												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7969												
Hungary (Forint)	359.78												
Israel (Shekel)	3.7047												
Japan (Yen)	149.10												
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3061												
Norway (Krone)	10.7093												
Philippines (Peso)	57.25												
Poland (Zloty)	3.90												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7527												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3213												
South Korea (Won)	1366.12												

WEATHER OUTLOOK



TODAY
IN STRIPES

Classified 46
Comics 34,38-39
Crossword 34,38-39
Opinion 40
Sports 41-48
Weekend 13-34

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MILITARY



JACOB NUNNENKAMP/U.S. Navy

Task Force Pegasus Troopers stand alongside Polish allies during a ceremony celebrating Polish Armed Forces Day on Forward Operating Site Powidz, Poland, on Wednesday.

Poland showcases growing army during Red Army defeat holiday

BY VANESSA GERA
Associated Press
WARSAW, Poland — NATO member Poland on Thursday is paying tribute to its historic victory over the Red Army by honoring fallen Poles and showing off modern tanks and other equipment that it hopes will deter the threat it sees in modern-day Russia.

A parade featuring Polish troops joined by some U.S. and other allied soldiers will pass through the center of Warsaw in the early afternoon on the Armed Forces holiday, with tanks rolling through a major riverside thoroughfare and fighter jets flying overhead.

Some of Poland's new weapons replace Soviet- and Russian-made equipment sent to neighboring Ukraine after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of its democratic neighbor in 2022. Since Poland broke free of Moscow's control 35 years ago and then joined NATO, it has worked to modernize its army.

Those efforts moved into higher gear after Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2014, and then again in 2022, with fears heightened all along the strategic stretch of NATO's eastern flank — from the Baltic nations to Poland to Romania.

The holiday falls on the anniversary of the 1920 Battle of Warsaw, in which Polish troops defeated Russian Bolshevik forces advancing on Europe, halting their western march.

The war in Ukraine has reminded Poland of the enduring threat it has long faced on the flat plains of central Europe wedged between larger, more powerful — and often aggressive — neighbors.

Even membership in NATO has not eased the sense of threat after Russia's attack on Ukraine and a migration crisis that erupted in 2021 along Poland's border with Belarus.

Warsaw saw a sudden surge that year in large-scale migration from the Middle East and Africa as a form of hybrid warfare orga-

nized by Moscow and Minsk.

Polish Defense Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz wrote a letter to soldiers saying the holiday is a reminder of "the most glorious episodes of the Polish army, of the price of independence and freedom."

"On this day, we pay tribute to all the heroes who fought for the homeland from the dawn of our country," he added.

Russia's war against neighboring Ukraine and the Poland-Belarus border crisis have led many Poles to fear what the Kremlin might do next should it succeed in Ukraine.

Poland signed a \$10 billion deal earlier this week with the U.S. government for 96 Apache attack helicopters.

Kosiniak-Kamysz said the Apaches, with their modern technology, mark a milestone for Poland's efforts to modernize its military, and would allow Abrams tanks and F-35 aircraft to be used to their full capacities.

Report: Sexual assaults surpass DOD estimates

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes
The official Pentagon tally of sexual assaults in the military during the past 20-plus years likely undercounts the actual number by at least two to four times, researchers say in a new study.

The Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute compared Defense Department data with figures compiled by independent sources between 2001 and 2023 to calculate its findings.

Last year alone, there were nearly 74,000 such assaults in the armed forces, compared with the Defense Department's official tally of around 29,000, according to the study, released Wednesday.

The range of two to four times higher was described as "conservative" and "likely accurate" by the report's authors, who added that high-end estimates suggested a prevalence 10 times higher than DOD figures.

The findings come after more than a decade of efforts to address the prevalence of sexual assault in the military, including several dozen initiatives by defense secretaries and hundreds of recommendations by government panels and task forces.

Despite these efforts, military officials put an overarching emphasis on training and deploying troops to Iraq and Afghanistan at the expense of confronting "a clear institutional problem of sexual assault," according to the report.

"During the post-9/11 wars, the prioritization of force readiness above all else allowed the problem of sexual assault to fester, papering over internal violence and gender inequalities within mili-

tary institutions, and thus we must consider this problem to be a cost of war," the report said.

The authors argued that a slight decrease in the number of cases in 2023 as compared with that of 2021, the final year of the war in Afghanistan, "is further evidence that the previous 20 years of institutional focus on training and deploying troops to Afghanistan ... contributed to a permissive environment for sexual assault."

The report estimates there were over 75,500 cases in 2021, with DOD putting the figure for that year at about 36,000, roughly the same level as when the war began in 2001.

Over the course of the war, on average, nearly one-quarter of all active-duty women and almost 2% of all active-duty men experienced sexual assault, according to the report's calculations.

Black women and LGBTQ+ service members were more likely to experience sexual harassment and assault than others, the report said.

The Costs of War study follows a 2021 Congressional Research Service report that said there was some evidence that most sexual offenses in the military were not being reported.

DOD officials in past years have conceded that the true number was likely higher because of those who didn't file a report.

Also in 2021, lawmakers approved a bill that took away the decision on whether to prosecute cases of rape or sexual assault from military commanders.

It was named the I am Vanessa Guillen Act, after a 20-year-old Army specialist who was murdered at Fort Hood, Texas, after reporting sexual harassment.

Germany suspects Russian hand in sabotage at military bases

Bloomberg
Germany is investigating possible Russian sabotage at two military bases where attempts were apparently made to contaminate drinking water, according to a senior lawmaker in Berlin.

The two facilities allegedly targeted are a Bundeswehr base at Cologne-Wahn and a NATO airfield in nearby Geilenkirchen. Ulrich Fonrobert, a spokesman for the German military, said a hole had been cut in the fence around the Cologne base overnight

though the person or people responsible had not been located.

A warning system had indicated "abnormal values" in water quality, suggesting the water system was being targeted, Fonrobert told reporters Wednesday at a news conference.

Donny Demmers, NATO spokesperson at Geilenkirchen, said a suspect tried to get access to the facility on Tuesday evening, but security guards thwarted the attempt.

"Because we know what hap-

pened in Cologne, we checked our water facilities. They weren't accessed by any intruders," he added.

Marcus Faber, the chairman of the defense committee in the lower house of parliament in Berlin, told Bloomberg that "the suspicion of sabotage is firming up" at the Cologne site, which is a hub for the aircraft used by Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his cabinet.

"Further investigations will show whether my initial suspicions are confirmed that Russia is be-

hind this," Faber said, adding that committee members are being continually updated on the probe.

A spokesman for the Russian government didn't immediately reply to a request for comment.

Konstantin von Notz, the chairman of the parliamentary committee that oversees Germany's intelligence services, reiterated a warning about an intensified hybrid war being waged by Russia following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Germany is the second-biggest

military and financial backer of the government in Kyiv after the United States.

"There are cyber attacks almost on a daily basis," von Notz was quoted as saying Wednesday by the RND media group.

"There are very broad disinformation campaigns that promote anti-democratic parties and individuals in Germany, Europe and the USA and that are intended to divide our society, plus there is also espionage and sabotage," he said.

PACIFIC

General looks to converge Pacific special ops

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

WAIKIKI BEACH, Hawaii — The decade ahead will require an international coterie of special operations forces to counteract malign advances by the likes of Russia and China, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command said Wednesday.

“This is an era of converging waves, global challenges, so to speak, that require an interna-



Fenton

tional SOF convergence,” Gen. Bryan Fenton said during a keynote address at the three-day Indo-Pacific Irregular Warfare Symposium at Waikiki Beach.

The symposium is hosted by the Global Special Operations Forces Foundation, a nonprofit professional organization based in Tampa, Fla., dedicated to advancing the capabilities and efficacy of special forces.

Irregular warfare defies easy definition, but generally describes conflict carried out in domains such as economics, cyber and information rather than conventional, kinetic warfare.

“Irregular warfare is a critical tool for the Department of Defense to campaign across the spectrum of conflict, enhance interoperability and access, and disrupt competitor warfighting advantages while reinforcing our own,” De-



STEVEN PATZER/U.S. Navy

U.S. and South Korean special operations troops conduct training in Jinhae, South Korea.

fense Secretary Lloyd Austin wrote in an August 2023 memo announcing updated guidance for irregular warfare.

Interoperability is the military term for one country’s ability to use the training methods and equipment of another country.

U.S. Special Operations Command directs the special operator component commands of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force.

“This week’s gathering here of special operations teammates and academia and industry and businesses from all over the globe is an

international SOF convergence, and that makes this a conference of consequence,” Fenton told the audience, which included representatives from special operations units from more than two dozen nations.

Fenton oversees 70,000 special operations personnel and an annual budget of \$14 billion.

He is a former deputy commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and deputy commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii.

Christopher Maier, assistant secretary of defense for special

operations and low-intensity conflict, highlighted the tasks ahead for special operations during a speech Wednesday.

“The threats and challenges in the Indo-Pacific are transnational and coming at us through all domains — and it feels like with unprecedented velocity,” said Maier, who formerly headed the DOD’s Defeat-ISIS Task Force.

“From the perspective of the national defense strategy, which continues to be our North Star in the Department of Defense, it’s Russia’s malign activities that pose an acute threat to regional

and global stability, while North Korea continues to attempt to destabilize this region and the People’s Republic of China remains our long-term pacing challenge of those competitors,” he said.

But only China possesses the intent — and increasingly the economic, diplomatic, technological and military capability — to reshape the current rules-based international system, Maier said.

China’s “semi-permissive legal environment” allows it to piggyback on criminal activities to extend its influence throughout the region, he said.

“Here we see Chinese money-laundering organizations use many complex techniques, including trade-based schemes, informal value transfer systems such as cryptocurrency exchanges and underground banking systems to extend their reach,” Maier said.

“China sees the rising global reach and influence of criminal groups as another tool with which it can advance its Belt and Road Initiative and its new Global Security Initiative, which aims directly at countering global security norms.”

Fenton said that “international SOF convergence” to counter such gray zone activities means “creating new partnerships, uniting existing partners into a more resilient, powerful and capable network, woven together in this region by a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Report: AUKUS pact will boost allies’ submarine numbers in Pacific

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Allied firepower in the Western Pacific will get a significant boost with as many as five U.S. and British submarines operating from Australia by 2027, according to a report by an Australian think tank.

A 2021 pact by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States — AUKUS — would position one British and four U.S. submarines as Submarine Rotational Force-West at naval base HMAS Sterling in Perth, Western Australia, according to the Australian Defence Department website.

The first phase of the defense pact is on track to bring the vessels to Australia on a temporary basis within three years, according to a report by Australia’s nonpartisan Lowy Institute.

“Deterrence and alliance power: Why the AUKUS submarines matter and how they can be delivered,” by former Australian assistant defense secretary Ross Babbage, was released July 29.

Combined with Australia’s Collins-class conventional subs and unmanned systems, the rotational



JAMES CALIVA/U.S. Navy

The Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Asheville transits Apra Harbor near Naval Base Guam in May.

force will make maritime challenges in the region “much more daunting” for China and other authoritarian states, the report states.

Additional nuclear-powered American and British attack and guided-missile submarines could bring the number of AUKUS boats in the Western Pacific to 12 or 13 by 2028, according to the report.

In a second phase of the pact, the U.S. plans to sell Australia at least three Virginia-class subs, and potentially two more, in the early 2030s.

Australia in the third phase

would start building a new AUKUS-class submarine using a British design and U.S. technology. Australia expects the first of the new boats by the 2040s, when it would become the “future attack submarine” for the two Commonwealth countries.

Australian navy divers and their U.S. counterparts have already started training in Hawaii to support nuclear-powered subs, according to a May 22 U.S. Indo-Pacific Command news release.

“Having them here diving side-by-side with our guys, they get to see and understand the challenges

of diving around a Virginia class submarine,” Chief Warrant Officer Michael Tuft, the command diving officer at the Pearl Harbor shipyard, said in the release.

The U.S. Navy is embedding Australian maintenance workers at the shipyard, Naval Submarine Forces commander Vice Adm. Robert Gaucher said in April, according to the Lowy report.

The U.S. may have subs in Australia within three years as it disperses forces to deter China, according to Carlyle Thayer, an emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales and a lecturer at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

The U.S. could transfer three to five Virginia-class subs to Australia in case of delays producing the AUKUS vessels, he said by email Thursday.

Boat transfers would depend on the U.S.’s ability to build more submarines, the geopolitical situation in the North Atlantic and Indo-Pacific and continued support for AUKUS by future U.S. administrations, Thayer said.

Australia has committed \$662

million to constructing infrastructure needed for the U.S. and British subs Down Under, he said.

Delays may result if the British defense industry fails to meet deadlines, Australian labor and shipbuilding resources fall short, costs pile up or the Australians cannot recruit crews, he said.

Delays seem likely, Paul Buchanan, a U.S. security expert based in New Zealand, said by email Thursday.

“The U.S. is already stretched to meet its sub-building requirements, as is the U.K., so there will likely be delivery delays on the U.S. and U.K. made components of the AUKUS platforms,” he said.

However, given the small number of Australian and allied subs deployed in the Western Pacific at any one time, an increase of just a few boats will amount to an increase in the 30% range, Buchanan said.

“The rotation of U.S. and U.K. subs will accomplish that, and then the delivery of the first AUKUS subs next decade should boost the numbers even further,” he said.

PACIFIC

US bases in Tokyo area prepare for Typhoon Ampil

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Warships of the U.S. 7th Fleet quickly made their way toward open ocean Thursday as their homeport prepared for Typhoon Ampil’s arrival on Friday.

Ampil at 3 p.m. Thursday was heading north toward Tokyo at 15 mph, with sustained winds of 104 mph and gusts of 127 mph, securing its status as a Category 2-equivalent storm, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

U.S. military bases in the greater Tokyo area rescheduled events planned for Friday and Saturday, including a new school year “sneak peek” at Yokota Air Base and a Japanese festival at Naval Air Facility Atsugi. Base residents were advised to stock up on supplies and tie down loose objects as the storm approached.

Ampil is forecast to pass just about 90 miles southeast of Yokosuka and the Kanto Plain, home to numerous U.S. and Japanese military bases and major cities like Tokyo and Yokohama. It could reach Category 4 by 9 a.m. Friday, with sustained winds of 132 mph and gusts of 161 mph, according to



ALEX WILSON/Stars and Stripes

Sailors and civilians line up for gas at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, Thursday ahead of Typhoon Ampil.

the Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

At Yokota, an airlift hub in western Tokyo and the headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan, base commander Col. Richard McElhaney ordered mission-essential personnel only to report on Friday.

On Thursday at Yokosuka, about 25 miles southwest of Tokyo, residents stocked up on essentials, workers secured loose objects and guided-missile destroyers steered for Tokyo Bay.

The Navy routinely sends its warships to sea in the event of a storm to reduce potential damage

to the ships and piers. Yokosuka is home to more than a dozen vessels, but just four were in port Thursday afternoon.

The base moved into Tropical Cyclone Condition of Readiness 2 on Thursday morning, meaning winds of 57.5 mph or higher are expected within 24 hours.

Preparations for TCCOR 1, meaning high winds are possible within 12 hours, began around 5 p.m. Thursday. The base expected to enter TCCOR 1 no later than 7 a.m. Friday.

Most nonessential services, including gyms, shops and routine

services at Naval Hospital Yokosuka, will be closed Friday. A shelter for those who live off base and don’t feel safe will be established at the base’s Fleet Recreation Center.

Base residents are being encouraged to “ensure they are stocked up on water, food and supplies and to start securing loose items outdoors and conducting general cleanup to reduce flying debris as winds increase,” base spokesman Justin Keller said by email Wednesday night.

Camp Zama, a U.S. Army base 27 miles southwest of Tokyo, moved into TCCOR Storm Watch around 2:30 p.m. Thursday and warned residents to anticipate heavy rains. Storm Watch status doesn’t anticipate destructive winds but allows for preparations in case the storm deviates from its path.

Naval Air Facility Atsugi, 29 miles southwest of Tokyo, on Thursday afternoon declared TCCOR 3, the possibility of destructive winds within 48 hours, and planned to close the base to nonessential personnel between noon Friday to 9 a.m. Saturday, base spokesman Greg Mitchell

said by email Thursday.

“This will be extended if storm conditions or effects warrant. The Navy Exchange, and Commissary will also abide by this direction. [Morale Welfare and Recreation] services have been shortened as well, while the Galley will run at normal hours,” he wrote. “The health and safety of our staff, service members and their families is of utmost importance to us.”

Japan was also preparing for the storm, with numerous road closures due to the typhoon and plans to cease bullet train operations between Tokyo and Nagoya stations all day Friday, according to the Nippon Express Co. and Central Japan Railway Co. websites. Ampil comes in the middle of Japan’s Obon holiday season — a peak travel period that coincides with an annual Buddhist festival that began Saturday and concludes Sunday.

Yokosuka’s U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility rescheduled its own Obon festival from Friday to Aug. 30; Atsugi’s celebration was rescheduled to Sunday.

Stars and Stripes reporter Dave Ornauer contributed to this report.

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ARMY
MARINE CORPS
NAVY
AIR FORCE
SPACE FORCE
COAST GUARD
VETERANS

Our Members Are the Mission

MILITARY

Carrier: USS Reagan arrival strains housing

FROM PAGE 1

his career, I would meet him when he came home from sea," he said.

Lafayette Gardner said he knew what to do when he saw his father.

"Me and my buddies, we stopped, and we saluted him," the younger Gardner said. "Then I gave him a big hug."

Moms and dads, wives and husbands, girlfriends and boyfriends, and sons and daughters, plus slews of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends lined the pier in Bremerton to greet the crew of the carrier at its new homeport after nearly nine years based in Yokosuka, Japan.

The tugs and crews on the pier slowly nestled the 100,000-ton ship into a berth adjacent to USS Nimitz, giving the Navy two carriers homeported in the Pacific Northwest.

The Ronald Reagan arrived for a six-month maintenance at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

The rust spots, scrapes and smudges on the ship belied the Ronald Reagan's place as the third youngest aircraft carrier in the fleet, commissioned in 2003. Its blemishes stood out compared to the Nimitz.

The Navy's oldest carrier, which was commissioned in 1975, is fresh from a recent tune-up at the same shipyard.

Housing crunch

Having two carriers with nearly 3,000 sailors each in the town simultaneously creates a housing crunch at a base short on residences and an area with a tight housing market.

Though the Navy can send the 2,000 or so personnel assigned to each carrier air wing to air stations, the rest of the sailors who did everything from metal work to food service to communications and navigation stay with the ships.

Naval Base Kitsap officials in spring told some base housing residents that they would have to move out to make way for the influx in active-duty personnel.

Capt. Daryle Cardone, commanding officer of USS Ronald Reagan, said Tuesday that the housing issues should ease as the USS Nimitz is scheduled to depart Kitsap within two years. The Navy has plans to move the Nimitz to the East Coast to be de-



HEATHER C. WAMSLEY/U.S. Navy

Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan steams through the Puget Sound toward its new homeport, Naval Base Kitsap, Wash., on Tuesday.



GARY WARNER/Stars and Stripes

Rori Fox, 10, performs a handstand to welcome her father, Lt. Cmdr. Joshua Fox, an officer on the USS Ronald Reagan.

commissioned in 2026.

Demand for carriers

Cardone said there is a high tempo of activity now for the Navy that has created a demand for carriers around the world.

According to the Naval Institute's "Fleet Tracker" website, the USS Abraham Lincoln is in the Philippine Sea, the USS Theodore Roosevelt is in the Gulf of Oman in the Middle East, the USS Carl Vinson is on its way from Hawaii to San Diego after taking part in the multinational exercises, and the USS Harry S. Truman is training in the Atlantic. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, the USS George H. W. Bush and the USS Gerald R. Ford are in East Coast ports un-

dergoing maintenance. The mid-life overhaul and nuclear reactor refueling for the USS John C. Stennis is happening at a shipyard in Newport News, Va. It began in 2021 and is now scheduled to last into 2026.

The USS George Washington is preparing to depart San Diego to take up the Ronald Reagan's former position in Japan. The two carriers recently met at Naval Air Station North Island, Calif., for a "hull swap" of crew members — primarily operations specialists on the Reagan and other sailors who wanted to extend their service in Japan.

Cardone said about 350 sailors — about 13% of Ronald Reagan's crew "crossed the deck" to take up



Courtesy of Eugene Gardner

Navy Airman Lafayette Eugene Gardner, left, is greeted by his father, former Army Chief Warrant Officer Eugene Gardner.

jobs on the George Washington and return to Yokosuka.

The Navy has said the Ronald Reagan will remain homeported at Kitsap after its maintenance work. This is a return to the port where the carrier was last stationed in 2012.

Kitsap covers 12,000 acres on a peninsula just west of Seattle across a portion of Puget Sound. It is the Navy's third-largest fleet concentration in the United States. Along with the two aircraft carriers, it includes 70 tenant commands, and it is homeport to Navy submarines, engineering, fuel and arms depots.

Cardone said tensions through-

out the world — from Ukraine to the Middle East to the South China Sea — will dedicate what could be the Ronald Reagan's next mission.

"Even though Ronald Reagan's time in 7th Fleet is over, we are still in the fight," he said. "Everything we accomplished while forward-deployed carries over as we continue to improve the ship and prepare the crew for Ronald Reagan's next chapter."

Welcome home

The carrier's arrival at Kitsap on Tuesday meant for crewmembers and their families at least six months of reunions as the ship undergoes maintenance in Bremerton.

Rori Fox, 10, did a handstand to welcome her father, Lt. Cmdr. Joshua Fox, 38, to his new home at the naval base.

"We've lived in eight different states in 10 years, so we're used to a new home," said Kayla Fox, 36, Rori's mother. "We were lucky to get housing on-base. It's an expensive area to live in, but we're used to that from being stationed before in Hawaii."

Navy veteran Chip Stewart and his wife, Christine Stewart, traveled from Bay Minette, Ala., to welcome their daughter, Seaman 3rd Class Megan Stewart, 21. They wore T-shirts that read "CVN 76," the carrier number of the Ronald Reagan.

"She's been on the Reagan for two and a half years," Chip Stewart said. "She just loved living in Japan, a beautiful country. We asked what she wanted to do when she arrived today and she said, 'Go out to eat!'"

Eugene Gardner, a retired chief warrant officer, said despite tumultuous world affairs, he hopes his son signs up for another stint with the Navy.

"I'm hoping he extends in the Navy a little longer, gets some education, thinks about making it a career," he said.

Lafayette Gardner said his father might just get his wish but with a twist that might surprise him.

"I'm thinking about changing to the Army," he said. "I love my country and want to continue to serve but I don't always feel like I am doing enough. I think the Army might be a better fit for me."

Flags fly at half-staff in Japan to mark 79th anniversary of WWII's end

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Japanese and American flags flew at half-staff at the home of U.S. Forces Japan on Thursday to mark the 79th anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific.

On Aug. 15, 1945, Japanese Emperor Hirohito spoke for the first

time to the Japanese public by broadcasting on Radio Tokyo that their nation's military had finally yielded to the Allies.

He avoided using the word surrender.

The day is remembered by former allied nations as V-J Day, or Victory in Japan. In the U.S. the

date was Aug. 14.

The government of Japan ordered the nation's flags flown at half-staff to mark the day. Yokota ordered its U.S. flags lowered, too, in solidarity.

The war formally ended Sept. 2, 1945, with the signing of surrender documents aboard the battleship

USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay at a ceremony presided over by Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

The war in the Pacific lasted three years, eight months, three weeks and five days. The wider war in the Asian theater claimed

the lives of about 36 million people.

The U.S. and Japan, once fierce foes, became fast allies, tied by a mutual defense pact, and brought even closer recently by a common perceived threat from the growing military might of communist China.

MILITARY

Time: Exercise designed to mimic real-world scenario

FROM PAGE 1

adin howitzers were left at Fort Bliss, Ruether said.

Instead, the brigade requisitioned military hardware on standby in Daegu city, about 130 miles south of Seoul.

Those tanks and howitzers are the same “go-to-war set” in place should a conflict break out in South Korea, Little said.

“As it’s being used up north during the exercise, as it breaks, the unit is responsible to fix that equipment before they leave,” Ruether said. “The whole point is to have it fixed and ready to go. Once they leave and something happens, that’s the equipment we would draw for an armored brigade.”

Once the brigade familiarized

itself with the heavy weapons, they were shipped 160 miles north to the range by train.

Every aspect of the exercise, from the unit’s arrival to shipping the equipment, is timed to mimic a real-world scenario, Ruether explained.

“It’s hard to find a facet of the Army that is not being tested because of this exercise,” he said. “We don’t have the luxury of time, so it’s a good exercise to have.”

The Army learned the lesson of military logistics in South Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War.

The U.S. Far East Command, responsible for military operations in the Pacific at the time, was “unprepared for a ‘come-as-you-are’ war” in South Korea, ac-

cording to a 1985 U.S. Army War College study.

“As no plans existed to support U.S. combat operations in Korea, [Far East Command] and Eighth Army developed the logistics support system piecemeal from emergency to emergency,” the report said.

Army logisticians have since worked to rectify wartime supply issues and defend South Korea from a potential attack by the North, Ruether said.

“With this now, we have tanks to match tanks,” he said. “When we absorb an initial attack, we have that [equipment] that can be drawn in a week to help defend ourselves, push that equipment up north and to counter that attack.”



LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

An AH-64E Apache helicopter flies over the Rodriguez Live Fire Complex in Paju, South Korea, on Wednesday.

Ramstein opens new substation for vehicle registration

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — When three customer service windows for vehicle registration opened at 7 a.m. sharp Thursday at the new Ramstein substation, a lucky few walked out with the necessary paperwork in less time than it takes to get a haircut.

It’s a far cry from the pain a few miles away at Kapaun Air Station, where overwhelming demand and a dysfunctional online queuing system have left many waiting months to drive, leading some service members in community social media groups to attempt to buy and sell appointments for upwards of \$100.

The new substation and other changes are part of what military officials hope will restore normalcy to what was once a mundane but reliable task, so that service members can drive to work and families can take care of themselves.

Maj. Sheryll Frias showed up at about 6:45 a.m. and nabbed the first spot in the queue at the substation, a refreshing change from her 696th spot in the rolling queue — after seven days of moving up — before she could register her vehicle and turn in the family’s rental.

On Thursday, she just needed to add an additional driver.

“I thought there was going to be a lot of people,” Frias said.

By the end of the day, 46 customers had been served, base officials said, which may indicate that word has yet to get out about the substation’s availability.

Service members familiar with the situation say there are multiple reasons why the system has experienced such difficulties.

In May, the Army’s base in Sembach stopped offering licensing services for privately owned

vehicles, leaving Kapaun as the sole option for tens of thousands of people.

The change came ahead of the summer permanent-change-of-station season, when outgoing service members have limited time to ship or sell a vehicle, and new arrivals need to register their cars, trucks and motorcycles.

Kapaun was notified about the Sembach closing but wasn’t given much time to prepare, said Maj. Kevin Aguilar, the 569th U.S. Forces Police Squadron commander.

“We don’t know why they closed,” Aguilar said. “Once it did happen ... we looked at what do we have to do to hopefully make it better.”

Sembach will now reopen full-service vehicle registration services on a walk-in basis starting Tuesday through October, Ramstein officials said they confirmed with the Army.

Meanwhile, the 569th and other base agencies spent about three weeks pulling together a plan for the substation, which is located in the space formerly occupied by the Kaiserslautern Military Community Center satellite pharmacy.

But Chief Master Sgt. Tim Herrmann, the 569th’s senior enlisted leader, said the waitlist can’t be attributed to just the Sembach closure.

“We’re seeing an uptick in numbers more than we ever have,” Herrmann said.

Community members have laid considerable blame on a system that at times had limited appointments to between 15 and 22 per day, which are booked out for months.

That left hundreds and sometimes over 1,000 people contending for walk-in slots that would never come.

Herrmann and Aguilar expressed skepticism that people were buying and selling appointments given that they were made by name, though multiple people told Stars and Stripes that they had.

Kapaun has since converted to a rolling walk-in queue, but the line remains very long.

The Kaiserslautern area wasn’t the only U.S. military community in Germany to find its vehicle registration system needed an overhaul this summer.

U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria said the system they rolled out July 1 has helped reduce missed appointments and increased capacity. Getting an appointment

takes about two weeks on average since introducing the changes. The Tower Barracks no-show rate went from 41% in June to 11% in July with the new system, the Army said.

The Ramstein substation is open Monday to Thursday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. and on Friday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Customers are able to deregister and renew vehicles or change information. They must bring both the front and back license plates for car deregistrations, and the back plate for renewals.

Temporary-to-permanent plate transactions can be done at Kapaun and initial registration is still only available at the main office.

Renewals for nonoperational vehicles also need to be done at the main office. Aneas Turnbull learned that Thursday at Ramstein after his No. 9 in the walk-in queue was called.

The registration for his motorcycle, which needs to be repaired, expires at the end of the month. Turnbull doesn’t know whether he’ll get in on time, given that he was No. 1,151 in the rolling queue on Wednesday.

“I’ve done this a couple times, registration for my other cars,” he said. “Normally it’s not that bad. This is the worst it’s ever been.”

Stars and Stripes reporter Lydia Gordon contributed to this report.



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Harris’ policies are still taking shape

BY YASMEEN ABUTALEB
AND TYLER PAGER
The Washington Post

Kamala Harris, amid a furious battle for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2019, embraced a ban on fracking and offshore drilling. She supported Medicare-for-all. At one point, she advocated abolishing private health insurance. And she signaled an openness to a sweeping overhaul of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

Now, the vice president’s campaign says she would not pursue the fracking and offshore drilling ban — it’s a highly unpopular position in states like Pennsylvania where natural gas drives the economy — if she becomes president. She does not support a single-payer health care system, instead focusing on what she and President Joe Biden call “corporate price-gouging” by pharmaceutical companies. And she is taking a much harder line on illegal immigration, arguing that Republicans are to blame for blocking a tough border-control measure this year.

Since Harris catapulted to the top of the Democratic ticket less than a month ago, she has been forced to reiterate that she rejects a wide array of positions she embraced five years ago, a dynamic likely to become even more evident as she rolls out pillars of her agenda in coming days. On Friday in North Carolina, she is set to outline her economic plan, which is expected to largely mirror Biden’s efforts to lower costs for middle-class families, including by curtailing late

fees, hidden costs and junk fees. But Harris’ aides stress that she will roll out myriad policies that are unique to her.

In 2019, Harris articulated a series of liberal positions as she sought to distinguish herself among a crowded group of Democratic contenders, many of them tacking to the left to court voters in the primaries. Now her singular focus is taking on Republican nominee Donald Trump, with a big emphasis on winning over swing voters.

But Harris’ critics say her dramatic shifts on so many issues point to a deeper issue — that Harris has few core political beliefs and only a vague governing philosophy. That lack of a clear political identity, Republicans contend, gives them an opening to frame her image for voters.

“It’s clear the Kamala Harris who wanted to ban fracking, who supported Medicare-for-all ... couldn’t win Pennsylvania or a single swing state,” said Corry Bliss, a Republican campaign consultant. “The average voter does not have a well-defined vision of her, so we have a great opportunity to define her simply on her record.”

Harris ascended to the top of the Democratic ticket after Biden’s abrupt decision to drop out of the presidential race on July 21, which followed weeks of nervous Democrats calling for a new candidate after the president’s rocky debate performance against Trump. The party quickly coalesced around Harris, who is running on a tightly compressed schedule and has skipped many of the rituals of a

presidential race — including a drawn-out primary contest and months of campaigning across the country — that usually force candidates to specify their views on a range of issues.

The Democratic Party platform was locked in before Harris became the nominee, limiting her ability to put her stamp on the document. Since Harris’ emergence, many Democrats have felt relief and even euphoria after weeks of worrying that Biden would lose decisively, and they have shown little appetite to press her even on such contentious issues as immigration and the war in Gaza.

Harris, meanwhile, has inherited Biden’s campaign apparatus and kept on many of his senior campaign advisers, while adding some of her own. So far she has largely adopted the policies Biden pushed or implemented as president, in some cases adding her own touch, such as an emphasis on lower-income Americans. One Harris adviser said many of the policies the administration ultimately pursued — including the child tax credit, student debt cancellation for those who attended Corinthian Colleges, and solving the problem of lead pipes — were ones that Harris pushed the White House to execute.

“On day one, I will take on price-gouging and bring down costs,” Harris said at a rally in Atlanta last month. “We will ban more of those hidden fees and surprise late charges that banks and other companies use to pad their profits. We will take on corporate landlords



BILL O’LEARY/The Washington Post

Vice President Kamala Harris, shown with President Joe Biden outside the White House on Aug. 5, is set to outline her economic plan as Democratic nominee for president Friday in North Carolina.

and cap unfair rent increases. And we will take on Big Pharma to cap prescription drug costs for all Americans.”

When she has deviated from Biden, it is often a matter of tone rather than substance. Most notably, Harris often speaks forcefully about reproductive rights, while Biden, a lifelong Catholic, can appear uncomfortable talking about abortion.

Biden has devoted a half-century of his life to national politics and developed strong, well-known positions on many subjects. He spent 36 years in the U.S. Senate, chairing the Judiciary and Foreign Relations committees, while Harris spent four.

That could give her advisers more input as she shapes her agenda, according to people familiar

with her emerging policy agenda who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private and sensitive conversations.

Republicans have not waited for Harris to issue new policy proposals before seizing on her past statements to attack her as dangerously liberal. Pennsylvania GOP Senate candidate Dave McCormick, for instance, highlighted a series of Harris’ past positions in a widely shared ad he released last month.

A page on the Republican National Committee website calls the vice president “Flip-Flopping Kamala Harris” and lists several current policies that contradict past statements, such as her opposition to banning fracking, her embrace of fixing the “broken” immigration system and her dismissal of a single-payer health care system.

At NC rally, Trump blames Biden, Harris for high inflation

BY MARY RAMSEY
The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer

Former President Donald Trump’s speech Wednesday in Asheville, N.C., was billed as being about the economy, but this year’s Republican nominee spent much of his address on other topics.

Trump repeated familiar attacks on his opponents, immigration talking points and, when sticking to the script, pledged to generate an “economic boom” if reelected. He spoke during a campaign appearance at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium inside the Harrah’s Cherokee Center, where there was a line to get in hours ahead of Trump’s speech.

“They say it’s the most important subject,” Trump said of the economy. “I’m not sure it is, but they say it’s the most important. ... Inflation is the most important, but that’s part of economy.”

Trump laid the blame for high inflation on the Biden-Harris administration.

Inflation reached its highest level in four decades in 2022, but year-



MATT KELLEY/AP

Former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally Wednesday, in Asheville, N.C.

over-year inflation reached its lowest level in more than three years in July, according to a Wednesday report from the Labor Department. Consumer prices rose 0.2% from June to July after dropping slightly the previous month for the first time in four years, The Associated Press reported.

Even with numbers improving, Trump told the crowd that Americans have already paid the price for

more expensive gas, groceries and other expenses.

“[Vice President] Kamala [Harris] has declared that tackling inflation will be a day one priority for her, but day one for Kamala was 3½ years ago. Why hasn’t she done it?” he said.

Trump also accused Harris of throwing President Joe Biden “overboard” when she took over the Democratic ticket and called her “crazy” and a socialist.

“Our country has become a third world country ... We’re a banana republic,” he said of the Biden-Harris administration.

If reelected, Trump said his economic agenda would center on improving affordability and addressing supply chain issues.

He pledged to cut energy costs by 50% or more within 12 to 18 months in office by rolling back clean energy initiatives instituted by the Biden-Harris administration and increasing domestic oil production.

“We’re all environmentalists. We all want clean air, clean water,

but we don’t want to destroy our country. ... Drill, baby, drill,” he told the crowd, prompting attendees to chant the same phrase.

Trump also repeated his campaign promise to eliminate taxes on Social Security benefits and tips, though some economists say his Social Security proposal could imperil the long-term health of the program.

North Carolina Republican Party Chairman Jason Simmons told The Charlotte Observer shortly before Trump’s address he thought the candidate’s economic message would connect with voters.

“We’ve seen Biden and Harris just destroy our economy with inflation, and as we’re going to hear today, President Trump is going to talk about how his economic policies will once again restore our economy, lower inflation and put more money back into taxpayer pockets,” he said.

Amid some talk about the economy, Trump spent much of his address making familiar claims on

non-economic issues.

He reiterated his belief that Biden is angry with Harris for taking over as Democratic nominee despite the president endorsing his vice president.

“They took it away from him,” Trump said.

Trump claimed neither Harris nor her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, has ever held a job in the private sector and called both socialists. Harris worked as a prosecutor for years before running for office. Walz served in the National Guard and was a teacher.

On foreign policy, Trump said he can prevent another world war because leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin “respect” him.

“What did Putin take under Trump? Nothing,” he said.

Polls show a tightening race in North Carolina since Harris took over the ticket, but she’s still trailing Trump by an average of 2.4 percentage points according to RealClearPolitics’ average.

NATION



ALEJANDRO GRANADILLO/AP

The La Plata River floods a road after Hurricane Ernesto passed through Toa Baja, Puerto Rico, on Wednesday. Ernesto was forecast to become a major Category 3 hurricane on Friday and then decrease in strength as it approaches Bermuda, where it is expected to drop between four to eight inches of rain.

Much of Puerto Rico lacks power, water after Ernesto

By DÁNICA COTO
Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—Hurricane Ernesto barreled toward Bermuda on Thursday after leaving hundreds of thousands of people in Puerto Rico without power or water as sweltering heat enveloped the U.S. territory, raising concerns about people’s health.

A hurricane warning was in effect for Bermuda, with Ernesto expected to pass near or over the island on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the spinning storm on Thursday was generating southern winds in Puerto Rico, which have a heating effect as opposed to the typical cooling trade winds that blow from the east.

“We know a lot of people don’t have power,” said Ernesto Morales with the National Weather Service as he warned of extreme heat and urged people to stay hydrated.

Nearly half a million of 1.4 million customers remained in the dark more than a day after Ernesto swiped past Puerto Rico late Tuesday as a tropical storm before

strengthening into a hurricane.

Hundreds of thousands of people also are without water given the power outages.

The situation worried many who lived through Hurricane Maria, a powerful Category 4 storm that hit Puerto Rico in September 2017 and was blamed for at least 2,975 deaths in its sweltering aftermath.

The National Weather Service issued a heat advisory on Thursday warning of “dangerously hot and humid conditions.”

Officials said they don’t know when power would be fully restored as concerns grow about the health of many in Puerto Rico who cannot afford generators or solar panels on the island of 3.2 million people with a more than 40% poverty rate.

Crews were still assessing the situation, although no catastrophic damage has been identified, said Juan Saca, president of Luma Energy, a private company that operates the transmission and distribution of power in Puerto Rico.

When pressed for an estimate of

when power would be restored, Alejandro González, Luma’s operations director, declined to say.

“It would be irresponsible to provide an exact date,” he said at a news conference late Wednesday.

The Category 1 storm was located about 605 miles south-southwest of Bermuda on Thursday morning. It had maximum sustained winds of 85 mph and was moving north at 13 mph.

“I cannot stress enough how important it is for every resident to use this time to prepare. We have seen in the past the devastating effects of complacency,” said National Security Minister Michael Weeks.

Ernesto was forecast to become a major Category 3 hurricane on Friday and then decrease in strength as it approaches Bermuda, where it is expected to drop between four to eight inches of rain, with up to 12 inches in isolated areas.

“All of the guidance show this system as a large hurricane near Bermuda,” said the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

White House: New deals will cut prices of Medicare drugs

By AMANDA SEITZ
AND ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The Biden administration said Thursday that drug price negotiations will knock hundreds of dollars—in some cases thousands—off the list prices of 10 of Medicare’s most popular and costliest drugs.

The discounts, agreed to after months of negotiations with drug manufacturers, range between 38% and 79% on the medication’s list price, which is the cost of medication before discounts or rebates are applied—not the price people actually pay for prescriptions.

Medicare spent \$50 billion covering the drugs last year and taxpayers are expected to save \$6 billion on the new prices, which do not go into effect until 2026. Older adults could save as much as \$1.5 billion in total on their medications in out-of-pocket costs. Administration officials released few details about how they arrived at those calculations.

The newly negotiated prices will impact the price of drugs used by millions of older Americans to help manage diabetes, blood cancers and prevent heart failure or blood clots. The drugs include the blood thinners Xarelto and Eliquis and diabetes drugs Jardiance and Januvia.

It’s a landmark deal for the Medicare program, which provides health care coverage for more than 67 million older and disabled Americans. For decades, the federal government had been barred from bartering with pharmaceutical companies over the price of their drugs, even though it’s a routine process for private insurers.

“For years, millions of Americans were forced to choose between paying for medications or putting food on the table, while Big Pharma blocked Medicare from being able to negotiate prices on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities,” President Joe Biden said in a statement. “But we fought back—and won.”

The drug deals will become a fo-

cal point for Vice President Kamala Harris’ presidential campaign, especially since she cast the tiebreaking vote to pass the law. She planned to join Biden on Thursday to announce the drug prices, in their first joint speaking appearance since she replaced him at the top of the Democratic ticket, as they both struggle to persuade voters that costs will trend down after years of above-normal inflation.

Harris is set to release part of her economic agenda on Friday in North Carolina, where she plans to detail other ways to help cut costs and boost incomes for the middle class.

The pair last appeared publicly together to welcome back to the U.S. Americans detained in Russia who were freed as part of a massive prisoner swap earlier this month.

Powerful drug companies unsuccessfully tried to file lawsuits to stop the negotiations, which became law in 2022, when a Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), overhauling several Medicare prescription drug regulations. But executives of those companies have also hinted in recent weeks during earnings calls that they don’t expect the negotiations to impact their bottom line.

Pharmaceutical officials blasted the news from the White House, saying it will spread health care costs to taxpayers in other ways, including their Medicare premiums.

“The administration is using the IRA’s price-setting scheme to drive political headlines, but patients will be disappointed when they find out what it means for them,” Steve Ubl, the president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA). “The ironically named Inflation Reduction Act is a bad deal being forced on American patients: higher costs, more frustrating insurance denials and fewer treatments and cures for our loved ones.”

Next year, the Department of Health and Human Services can select another 15 drugs for price negotiations.

US unemployment claims fall in sign of resiliency in job market

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week, another sign that the job market remains resilient in the face of high interest rates.

Jobless claims dropped by 7,000 to 227,000 last week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which

smooths out week-to-week ups and downs, fell by 4,500 to 236,500.

In the week that ended Aug. 3, 1.86 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits, down by 7,000 from the week before.

Weekly filings for unemployment benefits, which are a proxy for layoffs, remain low by historic standards. But they started rising in May, adding to evidence that high

interest rates are taking a toll on the U.S. job market.

The Federal Reserve, fighting inflation that hit a four-decade high just over two years ago, raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023, taking it to a 23-year high. Inflation has come down steadily—from 9.1% in June 2022 to a three-year low of 2.9% last month. Despite higher borrowing costs, the

economy and hiring kept cruising along, defying widespread fears that the United States would sink into recession.

But the higher rates finally seem to be taking a toll. Employers added just 114,000 jobs in July, well below the January-June monthly average of nearly 218,000. The unemployment rate rose for the fourth straight month in July, though it re-

mains low at 4.3%. Monthly job openings have fallen steadily since peaking at a record 12.2 million in March 2022. They were down to 8.2 million in June.

As signs of an economic slowdown accumulate and inflation continues to drift down toward its 2% target, the Fed is expected to start cutting rates at its next meeting in September.

NATION

State Fair of Texas enforces firearm ban

Move draws threats of legal action from Republican attorney general

By AMIE STENGLE
Associated Press

DALLAS — The State Fair of Texas is laying down a new rule before millions of visitors flock through the gates for corn dogs, deep-fried delights and a friendly wave from a five-story cowboy named Big Tex: No guns allowed.

But that decision by fair organizers — which comes after a shooting last year on the 277-acre fairgrounds in the heart of Dallas — has drawn outrage from Republican lawmakers, who in recent years have proudly expanded gun rights in Texas. On Wednesday, the state’s attorney general threatened a lawsuit unless the fair reversed course.

“Dallas has fifteen days to fix the issue,” Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said in a statement, “otherwise I will see them in court.”

Tensions over where and how gun owners can carry firearms in public are frequent in Texas, but the standoff with one of the state’s most beloved institutions has moved the fight onto unusual turf. The fair has not backed down since cowboy hat-wearing organizers announced the new policy at a news conference last week.

The fair, which reopens in September and lasts for nearly a month, dates back to 1886. In addition to a maze of midway games, car shows and the Texas Star Ferris wheel — one of the tallest in the U.S. — the fairgrounds are also home to the annual college football rivalry between the University of Texas and University of Oklahoma. And after Big Tex, the towering cowboy that greets fairgoers, went up in flames in 2012 due to an electrical short, the fair mascot was met with great fanfare upon its return.

But a shooting near the rows of food booths last year dampened the revelry.

Investigators said one man opened fire on another, injuring three people and resulting in police clearing the fairgrounds. Videos posted on social media showed groups of people running along sidewalks and climbing barriers as they fled.

Defending the new policy Wednesday, fair spokesperson Karissa Condoianis acknowledged it has attracted “both criticism and praise.” She noted that the fair previously allowed gun owners to carry concealed weapons “even after virtually all other



Dallas Fire-Rescue EMS loads one of the wounded onto a cart after a shooting at the State Fair of Texas on Oct. 14, in Dallas. The fair has implemented a new rule this year banning firearms, which has drawn ire.

public events ceased to allow the same.”

“This is the right decision moving forward to ensure a safe environment and family-friendly atmosphere,” Condoianis said.

Republican lawmakers urged the fair to reconsider in a letter signed by more than 70 legislators, arguing that the ban made the fairgrounds less safe and was “anything but a celebration of Texas.”

In a separate letter to the City of Dallas, Paxton argued that the ban infringes on the rights of Texas gun owners. The city owns Fair Park, where the annual fair takes place; Paxton argued that gun owners can carry on property owned or leased by the government unless otherwise prohibited by state law.

A city spokesperson said in a statement Wednesday that they were reviewing Paxton’s letter

“and will respond accordingly.”

Condoianis said Wednesday the fair, which is a private, not-for-profit organization, “is not a government entity nor is it controlled by a government entity.” She said they are aware of Paxton’s letter to the city, and that it appears he’s “seeking clarification” on the city’s relationship with the fair and its use of Fair Park under the long-term lease agreement between the two parties.

Hunter Biden reportedly sought US help for Ukrainian gas firm

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hunter Biden asked the U.S. ambassador to Italy for help regarding an energy project a Ukrainian gas company was pursuing while his father was vice president, according to The New York Times.

Hunter Biden, son of President Joe Biden, wrote a letter to the ambassador in 2016 seeking assistance for Burisma, which had been working on a geothermal project in Italy, the newspaper reported, citing newly released records and interviews.

At the time, Hunter Biden sat on the board of Burisma, which was having trouble getting regulatory approval for the project, a businessman involved in the project told the newspaper.

The revelation is likely to fuel Republican criticism of Hunter Biden’s foreign business dealings, which have been the center of GOP investigations into the president’s family. The report comes weeks before Hunter Biden is set to stand trial on federal charges alleging he failed to pay taxes on money he received from Burisma

and other foreign businesses.

Prosecutors indicated last week in court papers they want to introduce evidence at trial about Hunter Biden’s other business dealings, including an arrangement with a Romanian businessman who was trying to “influence U.S. government policy” during Joe Biden’s term as vice president.

Hunter Biden’s lawyer said his client’s outreach to the ambassador on behalf of Burisma was a “proper request” and that he had asked “various people” to help arrange an introduction between Burisma and the president of Italy’s Tuscany region.

“No meeting occurred, no project materialized, no request for anything in the U.S. was ever sought and only an introduction in Italy was requested,” attorney Abbe Lowell said.

The records suggest that embassy officials were uneasy about Hunter Biden’s request, according to the newspaper. One official wrote: “I want to be careful about promising too much.”

A White House spokesperson told The Times that the president

was not aware when he was vice president that his son had reached out to the embassy on Burisma’s behalf.

“He’s not in business with his son,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday of the president. “He’s certainly not aware of this and this is something that Hunter Biden has to speak to. He’s a private citizen, it is something for him to focus on.”

John R. Phillips, the U.S. ambassador to Italy at the time, said he received a lot of letters and did not remember Hunter Biden reaching out to him.

“I certainly would pay attention to it” if the younger Biden had contacted him, Phillips told the newspaper. “Out of courtesy, I’d probably make sure he got a response of some sort, but not necessarily from me. And I wouldn’t even want to encourage it, because I wouldn’t get us involved in something like that.”

Burisma’s project never materialized, and it’s not clear whether the embassy ever agreed to help the company.

Columbia’s head resigns after months of turmoil

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Columbia University President Minouche Shafik resigned Wednesday after a brief, tumultuous tenure that saw the head of the prestigious New York university face heavy scrutiny for her handling of protests and campus divisions over the Israel-Hamas war.

The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan was roiled this year by student demonstrations, culminating in scenes of police officers carrying zip ties and riot shields storming a building that had been occupied by pro-Palestinian protesters. Similar protests swept college campuses nationwide, with many leading to violent clashes with police and thousands of arrests.

The announcement also comes just days after the school confirmed that three deans had resigned after officials said they exchanged disparaging texts during a campus discussion about Jewish life and antisemitism.

Shafik was also among the university leaders called for questioning before Congress earlier this year. She was heavily criti-

cized by Republicans who accused her of not doing enough to combat concerns about antisemitism on Columbia’s campus.

Shafik, who began the role in July last year, announced her resignation in an emailed letter to the university community just weeks before the start of classes on Sept. 3.

The university on Monday began restricting campus access to people with Columbia IDs and registered guests, saying it wanted to curb “potential disruptions” as the new semester nears.

In her letter, Shafik heralded “progress in a number of important areas” but lamented that during her tenure it was “difficult to overcome divergent views across our community.”

Columbia’s Board of Trustees meanwhile announced that Katrina Armstrong, the CEO of Columbia University Irving Medical Center, will serve as interim president.



Shafik

Ruling: Ariz. pamphlet can use ‘unborn human being’

Associated Press

PHOENIX — An informational pamphlet for Arizona voters, who will decide in the fall whether to guarantee a constitutional right to an abortion, can refer to an embryo or fetus as an “unborn human being,” the state’s highest court ruled Wednesday.

The Arizona Supreme Court justices sided with Republican lawmakers, who drafted the language sent to all voters in the state, over proponents of the ballot measure on abortion rights.

The ruling comes as abortion foes have long worked to give embryos and fetuses the same legal and constitutional protections on par with those of the women carrying them. The issue was highlighted recently when the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are legally protected children, forcing lawmakers to scramble to enact protections for in vitro fertilization.

Democrats have made abortion rights a central message since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, and it is a key part of their efforts in this year’s elections. They hope the ballot measure in Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will determine which party controls the presidency and the U.S. Senate, will drive sympathetic voters to cast a ballot.

The ruling drew swift criticism from the ballot measure’s backers, who argued the phrase “unborn human being” is neither impartial nor objective. They said they were concerned that Arizonans would be subjected to biased and politically charged words.

“We are deeply disappointed in this ruling, but will not be deterred from doing everything in our power to communicate to voters the truth of the Arizona Abortion Access Act and why it’s critical to

vote YES to restore and protect access to abortion care this fall,” the group, Arizona for Abortion Access, said in a statement.

The ballot measure would allow abortions until an embryo or fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions allowing later-term abortions to save the mother’s life or to protect her physical or mental health. It would restrict the state from adopting or enforcing any law that would prohibit access to the procedure.

Arizona House Speaker Ben Toma, a Republican who co-chairs the legislative council, the panel that drafted the disputed language, said it’s intended to help voters understand the current law.

“The Arizona Supreme Court’s ruling is correct,” Toma said.

Arizona for Abortion Access sued the majority-Republican legislative council for including what the group called politicized language. The Superior Court agreed, finding that the GOP-favored language was “packed with emotion and partisan meaning.” That ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court, whose seven justices were appointed by Republican governors.

The brief ruling, signed by Vice Chief Justice John Lopez, did not explain the justices’ rationale, saying a full opinion would be released later. Justice Clint Bolick, whose wife is a Republican lawmaker on the legislative council, recused himself from the case.

The language describing an embryo or fetus as an “unborn human being” will go in a pamphlet that gives voters information on candidates and ballot measures to help inform their choices. The secretary of state’s office, which determines what gets printed on the ballot itself, said “unborn human being” would not appear there.

The secretary of state’s office said Monday that it had certified 577,971 signatures, far above the number required to put the question before voters.

As anti-abortion groups and Republican allies reel from a string of defeats at the ballot box, many have used an array of strategies to keep abortion rights off the ballot, including monthslong legal battles over ballot initiative language.

Disney wants wrongful death suit tossed because plaintiff had Disney+ trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Does signing up for Disney’s popular streaming service mean you have agreed to never sue the entertainment giant over anything forever?

That is what Disney argues in a wrongful death lawsuit involving a 42-year-old New York doctor whose family claims had a fatal allergic reaction after eating at an Irish pub in Disney Springs in October.

Disney is asking a Florida court to dismiss a lawsuit brought against it by Jeffrey Piccolo, the husband of Kanokporn Tangsuan, a family medicine specialist with NYU Langone’s office in Carle Place, on Long Island.

The company argues Piccolo had agreed to settle any lawsuits against Disney out of court through the arbitration process when he signed up for a one-month trial of Disney+ in 2019 and acknowledged that he had reviewed the fine print.

“The Terms of Use, which were provided with the Subscriber Agreement, include a binding arbitration clause,” the company wrote in its motion. “The first page of the Subscriber Agreement states, in all capital letters, that ‘any dispute between You and Us, Except for Small Claims, is subject to a class action waiver and must be resolved by individual binding arbitration.’”

Disney also notes in its response that Piccolo agreed to a similar arbitration provision when he created an account on Disney’s website

and app ahead of the ill-fated theme park visit.

But Piccolo’s lawyer, in a response filed earlier this month, argued that it was “absurd” to believe that the more than 150 million subscribers to Disney+ have waived all rights to sue the company and its affiliates in perpetuity — even if their case has nothing to do with the popular streaming service.

Piccolo’s lawsuit, which was filed in February, claims that he, his wife and his mother decided to eat at Raglan Road on Oct. 5, 2023 because it was billed on Disney’s website as having “allergen free food.”

After the couple informed their server numerous times that she had a severe allergy to nuts and dairy products, Tangsuan ordered the vegan fritter, scallops, onion rings and a vegan shepherd’s pie.

The waiter then “guaranteed” that the food was allergen-free even though some of the items were not served with “allergen free flags,” the lawsuit states.

About 45 minutes after finishing their dinner, Tangsuan had difficulty breathing while out shopping, collapsed and eventually died at the hospital, despite self-administering an EpiPen during the allergic reaction, according to the lawsuit.

A medical examiner’s investigation determined later she died as a result of “anaphylaxis due to elevated levels of dairy and nut in her system,” the lawsuit said.



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WORLD

Ukraine claims full control of Russian town of Sudzha

**BY SAMYA KULLAB
AND JON GAMBRELL**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday that the country's troops have full control of the Russian town of Sudzha in the Kursk region in their incursion into Russian territory.

The town, the largest that Ukraine has reportedly seized so far, had a prewar population of around 5,000 people. It holds a measuring station for Russian natural gas that flows through Ukrainian pipelines to Europe.



PLANET LABS PBC/AP

A damaged hangar is seen at the Borisoglebsk Air Base in Russia after an attack by Ukrainian drones on Wednesday.

Natural gas flows from West Siberian gas fields through pipes that pass through Sudzha and cross the Ukrainian border into Ukraine's system.

Zelenskyy said a Ukrainian military commander's office is being set up in Sudzha. He didn't elaborate on the details or the functions of the office.

The claim couldn't be independently verified. Russia did not immediately respond to Zelenskyy's statement, but its defense ministry said earlier Thursday that Russian forces had blocked at-

tempts to take several other communities.

There was no indication of any disruption of the gas flow through Sudzha, which accounts for about 3% of Europe's imports.

Satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press on Thursday show that a Ukrainian drone attack on Russian air bases damaged at least two hangars and other areas.

Images taken Wednesday by

jets and other aircraft there.

Kursk acting Gov. Alexei Smirnov on Thursday ordered the evacuation of the Glushkovo region, about 28 miles northwest of Sudzha, as Ukraine's daring incursion into the bordering Kursk region entered its second week.

The evacuation order suggests Ukrainian forces are gradually advancing toward the area. Authorities say more than 120,000 residents in the Kursk region already have been evacuated.

At a facility receiving evacuees, Tatyana Anikeyeva told of her flight from Sudzha. "We were rushing from Sudzha. ... We hid in the bushes. Volunteers were handing out water, food, bread to people on the go. The sound of the cannonade continued without any break. The house was shaking," she told Russian state television.

Evacuees milled around and waited in long lines for food and other supplies. One man stroked his pet dog and tried to comfort her, while saying that he felt nauseous and couldn't eat himself.

Russia also declared a federal-level state of emergency in the Belgorod region. A regional-level

state of emergency had been declared a day earlier in Belgorod, and the change in status suggests officials believe the situation is worsening and hampering the region's ability to deliver aid.

Residents who suffer severe health damage will be eligible to receive payments of up to \$6,600. Those who experience a loss of property are eligible for up to \$1,700, Russia's Emergencies Ministry said.

Ukraine's chief military officer, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, declared that Ukrainian forces have taken about 390 square miles of the Kursk region. That claim couldn't be independently verified. The contact lines in Kursk have remained fluid, allowing both sides to maneuver easily, unlike the static front line in eastern Ukraine where it has taken Russian forces months to achieve even incremental gains.

Russian military bloggers have claimed that Russian reserves arriving in the region have stemmed Ukrainian advances, but they also noted that Ukrainian small mechanized groups have continued to probe Russian defenses.

Mediators plan new Gaza cease-fire talks

Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — International mediators were set to hold a new round of talks Thursday aimed at halting the Israel-Hamas war and securing the release of scores of hostages, with a potential deal seen as the best hope of heading off an even larger regional conflict.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt were to meet with an Israeli delegation in Qatar as the Palestinian death toll from the 10-month-old war climbed past 40,000, according to local health authorities. Hamas, which is not expected to participate directly, accuses Israel of adding new demands to a previous proposal that had U.S. and international support and to which Hamas had agreed in principle.

A cease-fire in Gaza would likely calm tensions across the region. Diplomats hope it would persuade Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah to hold off on retaliating for the killing of a top Hezbollah commander in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut and of Hamas' top political leader in an explosion in Tehran.

The mediators have spent months trying to hammer out a

three-phase plan in which Hamas would release scores of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war in exchange for a lasting cease-fire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Both sides have agreed in principle to the plan, which President Joe Biden announced on May 31.

But Hamas has proposed "amendments" and Israel has suggested "clarifications," leading each side to accuse the other of making new demands it cannot accept.

Climate protests staged at German airports

Associated Press

BERLIN — Climate activists staged protests at several German airports on Thursday, forcing a temporary halt to flights at some of them in the latest of a string of similar demonstrations.

The Last Generation group said a total of eight activists were involved in the protests at Berlin, Cologne-Bonn, Nuremberg and Stuttgart airports, which started around 5 a.m. The group is demanding that the German government negotiate and sign an agreement on a global exit from the use of oil, gas and coal by 2030.

Flights were suspended at Cologne-Bonn after two people were reported to have attached them-

selves to the asphalt, but later resumed, German news agency dpa reported. Police said a hole was found in an airport fence. Flights also were halted for about an hour at Nuremberg. At Berlin Airport, two people who had attached themselves to the ground were removed and detained.

Last Generation last month staged protests at Cologne-Bonn Airport and Frankfurt Airport, Germany's busiest, which significantly disrupted passenger flights. Earlier this month, an overnight protest by climate activists at Leipzig/Halle Airport, a major air freight hub, forced a three-hour halt to cargo flights.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser wrote on social network X that

"these criminal actions are dangerous and stupid" and that protesters "are not just risking their own lives but also endangering others."

She pointed to legislation approved by the German Cabinet last month that would impose tougher penalties on people who break through airport perimeters.

The bill, which still requires approval by lawmakers, foresees punishment ranging up to a two-year prison sentence for people who intentionally intrude on airside areas of airports such as taxiways or runways, endanger civil aviation, or enable someone else to. Currently such intrusions only draw a fine.

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WEEKEND



King Gizzard in
their dad rock era
Music, Pages 28-29



DRIPPING WITH DREAD

2024 has a horror movie for every taste,
including this week's fresh 'Alien' installment

- **Movies, Page 15**
- **Review of 'Alien: Romulus,' Page 16**

20TH CENTURY STUDIOS/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY



The pros, cons of using apps to communicate with locals when abroad

BY DAVID KOO
TravelPulse

Traveling to destinations where you don't speak the local language can leave you lost in translation. Communicating in the local language helps advance cultural exchange and improves engagement with locals. Overcoming language barriers increases travelers' ability to immerse themselves in the local culture.

Translation apps are not a replacement for organic fluency, but they can help cross important communication barriers regarding local navigation, reading menus, managing public transportation, shopping or getting help, even in emergencies.

Risks and dangers of using translation apps

There are downsides to translation app technology.

For example, if you're an English-speaking lawyer on vacation in France and want to tell a local person what your profession is, you could ask Google Translate to provide the French version of "I am a lawyer."

Google Translate will suggest you say, "Je suis un avocat." Unfortunately, you just told your French friend that you are an avocado. In French, the word "avocat" means lawyer and avocado. The critical distinction is using the French word "un" before "avocat." With the word "un" before "avocat," it means avocado; without it, the meaning is "lawyer."

However, if you used Microsoft Translator, then it would recommend that you say, "Je suis avocat" — without the French word "un," and that means you are, in fact, a lawyer.

The lesson here is that these tools, though often helpful, don't always account for cultural nuances or context, and can stumble, sometimes disastrously, over colloquialisms, leading to bewildering misunderstandings and unintended comedy — or worse — when communicating with locals.

There are several other translation app risks, too, including:

- **Technical issues:** Apps that rely on internet connectivity can be unreliable or costly.
- **Privacy concerns:** Some translation apps require access to personal data.
- **Security risks:** Using public Wi-Fi networks to access translation apps can expose sensitive information to potential hackers.
- **Dependency:** Relying too heavily on translation apps may hinder language learning and cultural immersion.
- **Communication breakdown:** In complex or nuanced conversations, translation apps may not be able to convey tone or context accurately, leading to misunderstandings.

What apps are available?

Several apps can assist with language translation, text recognition and voice translation. The following are 10 of the best translation apps for tourists to consider using while traveling:

- **Waygo** specializes in visual translation and is quite useful for translating text from images and menus in Asian languages.
- **Papago** is a popular translation app in Asia, offering text and voice translation in multiple languages, including Asian languages like Korean, Japanese and Chinese.
- **TripLingo** is explicitly designed for travelers and has language guides, cultural information and voice translations in multiple languages.

- **Google Translate** is one of the most popular and widely used translation apps. It offers text, speech and camera translation in many languages and offline capabilities for some features.
- **Microsoft Translator** provides text and voice translation in multiple languages and the ability to translate conversations in real time with several participants.
- **ITranslate** offers text and voice translation, a dictionary, offline mode and the ability to save favorite translations for quick access.
- **SayHi** provides voice translation in multiple languages, allowing users to have multilingual conversations with real-time translation.
- **Translate Now** offers text and voice translation in numerous languages and the ability to save and organize translations for future reference.
- **Babylon Translator** has text and voice translation in multiple languages and a dictionary and language learning tool.
- **Easy Language Translator** provides text and voice translation in various languages with a simple and user-friendly interface.

Before traveling, it's wise to download and familiarize yourself with one or more of these translation apps to help facilitate communication and enhance your travel experience. It's also helpful to have a basic understanding of common phrases or greetings in the local language of the country you are visiting to show respect and courtesy to the locals. Finally, obtaining travel protection services that provide access to an in-person, live translation resource is essential for situations requiring more precision, like ensuring a prescription is filled correctly, sorting out a legal issue or managing a medical or security emergency.

Sennheiser, hearing aid company collaborate to create latest earbuds

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Sennheiser makes some of the best portable headphones, so it's no surprise the latest member of Sennheiser's portable portfolio, the Accentum True Wireless earbuds, sound great and have a consumer-friendly price point.

They launched this past May, and after weeks of use on the ground, in the air, at home and on the other side of the world, they are a winner. Three things are essential when choosing true wireless earbuds, in no particular order: the sound, the price and how they feel in your ears.

The sound of the Accentum True Wireless earbuds begins with Sennheiser's proprietary 7mm dynamic True Response Transducers, pumping crystal-clear audio from each side (left/right). The Sennheiser-made speakers are touted to produce powerful, signature sound with engaging bass, natural mids and crisp treble.

The Accentums have an ergonomic design to ensure comfort and a secure fit in your ear canals so that music is heard accurately. Multiple sizes of ear tips are included. Sennheiser credits the comfort to a collaboration with Sonova, a leading hearing aid manufacturer.

Accentum's True Wireless Hybrid Active Noise Cancellation and Transparency modes worked well on busy streets and airplanes to help drown out background and engine noise. The free Sennheiser companion app (iOS or Android) is excellent for controlling several features, including the ANC, and for selecting how much of the background noise you want to block.

The \$149.95 (on sale from \$199.95) Bluetooth 5.3 true wireless earbuds are loaded with many other features, including microphones in both earbuds. They will last for up to eight hours before a charge is needed in the self-charging storage case, which gives an additional 20 hours of battery life for up to 28

hours. The case itself charges either with Qi wirelessly or with the included USB-C cable. Quick charging for just 10 minutes will produce an hour of playback.

The Accentum True Wireless earbuds come in black or white. Online: sennheiser-hearing.com

The 1More PistonBuds Pro Q30 True Wireless Active Noise Canceling earbuds have been in and out of my ears for the past few months. Low-cost earbuds often only get a playlist or two with me, but I keep returning to the Q30s, so they must make a good impression.

With a price of just \$39.99 (on sale from \$49.99), I'd say the stem-styled true wireless earbuds are well worth the cost. But don't think you're getting a low-budget product, because the well-built earbuds are packed with features and deliver a clear and well-balanced sound with a good amount of bass.

Among the features: a 10mm dynamic driver inside each ear, proprietary QuietMax Adaptive ANC technology and a 30-hour battery life when combined with the portable storage/charging case and the ANC off. The Q30s should run about 7.5 hours before a charge is needed. With the ANC on, it's about 20 hours total, with 5 hours of use after each charge.

There are six microphones for wireless hands-free calls, with an algorithm to help eliminate ambient noise. They run on Bluetooth 5.3 and have a waterproof rating of IPX5, ensuring water and sweat resistance. The stem-styled earbuds stay in place thanks to ergonomic oblique-angled design and soft silicone ear tips. Built-in sensors detect whether the earbuds are in or out of your ears.

For personalized sound, they have their own companion app, the 1MORE Music App. Listening modes are accessible with tap controls to enable the sound to adjust to ambient noise.

Online: usa.1more.com/products; available in black or white



The 1More PistonBuds Pro Q30 earbuds last 20 to 30 hours when combined with their case.



The Sennheiser Accentum True Wireless earbuds come in black or white and have an ergonomic design and multiple sizes of ear tips.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



NEON/AP

Hunter Schafer is pictured in a scene from the recent release “Cuckoo,” a film that is part body horror, part psychological thriller. Partake in snacks at your own risk.

Finding the right fright

There’s a horror film for every kind of fan in the final months of 2024

BY LUCAS TREVOR
Special to The Washington Post

For every kind of horror movie, there is a kind of horror fan. Whether you love the most extreme and gory flicks the genre has to offer or you faint at the sight of blood, somewhere out there is a movie for you.

The films on tap for the remainder of the year are so varied that, for easier filtering, we’ve matched some of the buzziest titles to the audiences they’re likely to attract. And for those who don’t see their “type” represented, or are too impatient to wait for the theatrical rollout, try revisiting the best of what 2024 has already delivered: this month’s “Trap” and “Cuckoo,” the Lynchian coming-of-age movie “I Saw the TV Glow,” the inverted slasher flick “In a Violent Nature” or the

deeply unsettling “Longlegs,” with Nicolas Cage appearing as unhinged as ever.

■ **“Trap” (released Aug. 2), for the logline lover:** Through the relative ebbs and flows of M. Night Shyamalan’s career, there’s something consistent about his films. No matter what, they always sound intriguing. His latest, “Trap,” follows Josh Hartnett (“Oppenheimer”) as a father taking his daughter to a Taylor Swift-style pop concert. Except Hartnett is a serial killer known as “the Butcher,” and the concert is an elaborate sting set up by local police to catch him. Think that’s giving away too much? That’s all in the trailer. But we’re guessing M. Night has a few twists up his sleeve.

■ **“Cuckoo” (released Aug. 9), for the body-horror freak:** Starring Hunter Schafer (“Euphoria”), the film follows an American teen who moves to the German Alps

to live with family. What follows from director Tilman Singer is a mix of body horror and psychological thriller. Distributor Neon has cut its teeth (pun intended) with the body-horror subgenre, releasing films like “Titane,” “Crimes of the Future” and “Possessor” in recent years. If you liked those movies, “Cuckoo” should be right up your alley. Just maybe skip your mid-movie hot dog for this one.

■ **“Alien: Romulus” (Aug. 16), for the binge-watcher:** “Alien: Romulus” marks the seventh film in the science-fiction franchise, and it presents a fantastic opportunity. Beginning as a relatively straightforward creature feature directed by Ridley Scott and released following the success of “Star Wars” (1977), the franchise has been all over the map: a James Cameron-helmed action blockbuster (“Aliens”), a dread-inducing David Finch-



Warner Bros. Pictures

Josh Hartnett is a doting dad — but also a serial killer known as “the Butcher” — in the M. Night Shyamalan film “Trap.”

er project (“Alien 3”) and whatever Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s “Alien: Resurrection” was supposed to be. In the 2010s, Scott returned to the franchise with “Prometheus” and “Alien: Covenant,” shifting away from the original narrative and asking complicated questions like “Where do we come from?” and “How many Michael Fassbenders does it take to play a flute?” Now Fede Álvarez (“Don’t Breathe”) will helm

SEE FRIGHT ON PAGE 16

WEEKEND: MOVIES

The next Ellen Ripley

Spaeny proves herself a worthy ‘Alien’ heroine in ‘Romulus’

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

The beauty of the “Alien” franchise is that it has always allowed room for distinctive filmmakers to play with their own aesthetics and themes.

With “Don’t Breathe” and “Evil Dead” (2013) director Fede Alvarez at the helm of “Alien: Romulus,” it’s then no surprise that his version is a contained slasher flick drenched in goopy viscera, in which a group of scrappy youths are hunted down by an unknowable monster. Written by Alvarez and Rodo Sayagues, the screenplay for “Alien: Romulus” is ruthlessly efficient while touching down on recognizable themes from the series: pregnancy, feminine strength and the clash between human and artificial intelligence.

One could argue that “Alien” movies are like pizza — they’re good even when they’re not so great, and aside from a few head-scratching choices, “Alien: Romulus,” with its thrilling tactility and appealingly plucky cast, is a very enjoyable pie.

Cailee Spaeny steps into Ellen Ripley’s Reeboks as our heroine, Rain, who only wants one thing, to see the sun. She’s trying to make her way off the Jackson Mining Colony with her “brother,” a synthetic, or droid, named Andy (David Jonsson) and transfer to the farming planet of Yvaga. But the corporation keeps moving the goalposts, and she hasn’t fulfilled her quota of hours in the mine. Knowing that

the company will never do right by her, she joins up with a group of friends to scavenge for cryopods in a rogue Weyland-Yutani ship floating overhead, in hopes they can make their way to Yvaga themselves.

Naturally, the Weyland-Yutani ship, recently ravaged by the events of “Alien,” is crawling with facehuggers and xenomorphs, and the friends are separated and picked off, impossible decisions are made, and all manner of unholy creatures burst forth from various bodily cavities.

At the center of the story is the relationship between Rain and Andy. She wrestles with the idea of leaving him behind when considering their plans, but then a security upgrade to his software, which allows him to access different parts of the ship (with two halves named for Romulus and Remus, the twins of Rome), reboots him into something colder and more calculating. Initially programmed by Rain’s late father to do what’s best for her (and tell dad jokes), Andy’s new directive becomes finishing the mission for the company.

This doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Andy comes under the sway of a very persuasive new character left behind from the previous massacre, a chewed-up, half-destroyed synthetic called Rook, with a surprisingly familiar appearance. With a performance constructed from a voice actor and facial scans, Alvarez has brought back to life a memorable but deceased actor from “Alien.”



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS/TNS

Cailee Spaeny, left, and David Jonsson seek better lives in “Alien: Romulus.”

The trend of reanimation in “legasequels” or “intersequels” (the ghost of Harold Ramis in “Ghostbusters: Afterlife”; Peter Cushing in “Rogue One”) is both off-putting and ethically questionable, especially considering the ongoing fight of actors to control their own image against the looming threat of AI. Those questions aside, if it works at all in “Alien: Romulus,” it’s because they aren’t aiming for realism with this mangled droid. Still, it nags, especially given Alvarez’s commitment to practical sets, and the fantastic standout performance from Jonsson, which alternates between wounded puppy dog and dryly shrewd corporate proxy.

There are other pleasures in “Alien: Romulus,” including the stunningly rich cinematography by Galo Olivares, the scuffed-up and worn practical sets lit with glowing reds, shiny with extraterrestrial mucus. Benjamin Wallfisch’s score keens and groans ominously, sometimes dipping

into synthy electronic moments.

At the center is Spaeny as Rain, the locus of feminine intelligence. Her empathy complicates things, but her ability to read and interpret situations bests any synthetic calculation. Spaeny does not convey the lithe power of Sigourney Weaver or Katherine Waterston, nor the steeliness of Noomi Rapace, who have all taken up weapons against the xenomorphs in past “Alien” films.

But Alvarez gives Spaeny her hero moments, whether in her care of her comrades or destroying an invasive species, and she expresses the inner strength and utter determination to survive required of an “Alien” franchise heroine. Sometimes, that demonstration of sheer humanity and grit is all that’s required to make one of these films sing.

“Alien: Romulus” is rated R for bloody, violent content and language. Running time: 119 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

Fright: Schlock, a ‘Smile’ sequel and ‘Beetlejuice Beetlejuice’

FROM PAGE 15

an Alien project that promises to return the franchise to its horror roots. Prepare by rewatching all 12 hours, preferably where no one can hear you scream.

■ **“AfrAId” (Aug. 30), for the schlock doctor:** Seemingly capitalizing on 2022’s “M3GAN,” Blumhouse and writer-director Chris Weitz will be adding “AfrAId” to the anti-AI canon. The new release follows a family that has brought home an AI device (sort of Alexa on steroids). The device is intended to make parenting easier using artificial intelligence but quickly reveals itself to be more sinister than helpful. Schlock has long been an important aspect of horror films, which typically have smaller budgets and less serious plots. But as any acolyte of the late, great Roger Corman will tell you, that doesn’t necessarily mean lower quality.

■ **“Beetlejuice Beetlejuice” (Sept. 6), for the scaredy-cat:** Listen, horror isn’t for everyone. Some people need a less scary entry point to go there at all. Look no further than “Beetlejuice Beetlejuice.” Director Tim Burton returns to inject the genre with humor and camp while star Michael Keaton provides the Beetlejuice character’s anarchic energy. Perhaps most exciting is the addition of Jenna Ortega, the young star of “X,” “Scream VI” and Burton’s own “Wednesday” series. She seems like a perfect fit for the Burton oeuvre, alongside Keaton and other returning



Warner Bros. Pictures

Michael Keaton returns as Beetlejuice in “Beetlejuice Beetlejuice.”

franchise stars like Winona Ryder and Catherine O’Hara.

■ **“Speak No Evil” (Sept. 13), for the deep-cut disciple:** A remake of the 2022 Danish film of the same name, “Speak No Evil” follows Mackenzie Davis and Scoot McNairy as a young couple visiting the home of friends they met on vacation. All is not as it seems, and social norms are pushed to their limits as the situation becomes more and more unsettling. The 2022 original is a smaller film available to stream on Shudder and something of a

hidden gem for genre obsessives. Its graphic imagery and nihilistic ending make the film unique and certainly worth a watch in the run-up to the remake’s release.

■ **“The Substance” (Sept. 20), for the film fest aficionado:** Starring Demi Moore (“Ghost”) and Margaret Qualley (“Poor Things”), “The Substance” follows aging actress Elisabeth Sparkle. She takes an experimental drug that The Washington Post’s Jada Yuan explains “will allow her to essentially birth a younger version of herself.” Qualley plays Sue, the younger version of Sparkle. The Coralie Fargeat-directed film received mixed reviews when it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May. In the U.S., it could be a “Parasite”-like critical darling and awards powerhouse or an international curio like “Titane.”

■ **“Terrifier 3” (Oct. 11), for the blood-and-guts fanatic:** Since its debut in 2016, the Terrifier franchise has operated as a cult classic. From multi-hyphenate auteur Damien Leone, the films follow the gruesome adventures of Art the Clown (David Howard Thornton) as he terrorizes young women, pizza parlor employees and janitors. With minuscule budgets and increasingly gruesome imagery, both the 2016 and 2022 features found an audience with horror obsessives. Leone came up in special effects and makeup, and his films never lack for imaginative kills. With the

third entry in the franchise, Leone will be handing off special-effects duties and working with a bigger budget. Be afraid.

■ **“Smile 2” (Oct. 18), for the sequel devotee:** This sequel to the surprise hit “Smile” follows pop star Skye Riley (Naomi Scott) as she is terrorized by the entity from the first film. The trailer suggests more shocking and elaborate kills this time. The 2022 original wasn’t expected to be the box office success it was: A simple premise, great marketing and an easy-to-remember name brought in more than \$200 million worldwide. Can the sequel cash in again?

■ **“Nosferatu” (Dec. 25), for the old soul:** What has more Christmas spirit than a period-piece vampire movie? Former indie darling Robert Eggers will continue his ascent to the big leagues with “Nosferatu,” an adaptation of the classic Dracula tale. Eggers’ works so far, “The Witch,” “The Lighthouse” and “The Northman,” all explore horror within period settings. As a director, Eggers never sacrifices authenticity for mass appeal, making films that are of their time as much as our own. In the past year, two movies, “Renfield” and “The Last Voyage of the Demeter,” have transformed the classic Dracula story, with mixed results. If nothing else, “Nosferatu” is expected to be authentic to the mood and tone of the 1922 masterpiece of German expressionism.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



From left, director Fede Alvarez and stars Isabela Merced, Cailee Spaeny and David Jonsson pose for a portrait to promote "Alien: Romulus" during Comic-Con International on July 27 in San Diego.

CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

'Close encounter feeling'

Practical effects used in 'Alien: Romulus' to simulate creatures

By KAITLYN HUAMANI
Associated Press

While filming "Alien: Romulus," Cailee Spaeny didn't have to dig too deep to muster up sheer terror. She was often facing off against real creatures on set — or as close to real as they could get.

Under director Fede Alvarez, a prominent horror filmmaker, the actors played opposite animatronic and puppet alien creatures, including the famed "face-huggers" and the dreaded xenomorph.

"From an acting standpoint, it's such a gift because you're not having to act against a tennis ball, so it's right there. There's less work you have to do," Spaeny said in a recent interview.

Spaeny said using practical effects whenever possible was a priority for Alvarez from the beginning of the film's production.

"It needed that kind of close encounter feeling of seeing that the actors are in the same environment with whatever's the threat," Alvarez, known for "Evil Dead" and "Don't Breathe," said. "It works not just for the audience, but for us, as well. When it comes to making the movie, it



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS/AP

To simulate the terrifying xenomorphs during the filming of "Alien: Romulus," animatronics and puppets were used.

just makes everything way more complicated, but I think it makes for better movies."

To accomplish the practical effects, Alvarez enlisted a team of filmmakers who have worked with the infamous Stan Winston, the special effects artist known for his work in the "Terminator" series, the first three "Jurassic Park" films and, of course, "Aliens." Several of the behind-the-scenes creatives on "Romulus" have worked on previous "Alien" movies — including Ridley Scott, who is a producer on the upcoming movie.

"From a film lover's standpoint, these guys — they're responsible for some of the best creatures in Hollywood, so to have them around, it sort of adds to the joy of what filmmaking and entertainment is all about. That was just a real treat," Spaeny said. "I think it makes such a

difference, not just for the actors and the crew making the movie, but hopefully for the audience as well."

Despite recruiting "Alien" alums behind the scenes, casting fresh actors who aren't readily associated with larger-than-life characters was important to Alvarez. "Romulus" is nestled between "Alien" and its sequel, "Aliens," but Alvarez has made clear that the new film is a stand-alone. He said he valued giving every audience member, regardless of whether they've seen any other "Alien" movies, a "full meal" as they watched "Romulus," ensuring no one felt like they were missing any key details.

Still, as someone who grew up watching the "Alien" movies and admires the franchise deeply, Alvarez had to include some nods to his predecessors.

"When certain things happen that tie in with the other movies, if you're an older audience, or even if you're younger and you're a fan and have seen all of them, you'll get that pleasure of discovering and finding and connecting — and also sound like a smart-ass next to your non-fan friend," Alvarez continued.

With Alvarez's eye for detail, cast member Isabela Merced said much of the production process was "meticulous," down to the specks of fake blood on her face that had to be applied in the same exact spots for continuity. "It's a perfect pattern," she said.

The best way to binge 'Alien' films

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

In excellent news for fans of the "Alien" franchise, all six previous films in the franchise are now streaming on Hulu, in preparation of this week's release of "Alien: Romulus," the nasty new entry directed by Fede Alvarez and starring Cailee Spaeny.

But how should one watch or rewatch the movies in advance of the new installment (which serves as a stand-alone, so you don't have to rewatch any of them at all)? Would it be by which ones are best? Chronologically? Roll of the dice?

Here's a quick guide to all things "Alien" and how best to prep.

First things first, "Alien: Romulus" takes place in between "Alien" and "Aliens," so if you want to pop on the first film, the classic, that's all the prep you'll need. If you've never seen "Alien," what are you doing? Run, don't walk, to take in a rare perfect film, Ridley Scott's iconic 1979 horror-thriller, where in space, no one can hear you scream.

It would help to familiarize yourself at least with the xenomorphs and their whole thing, and the cast of characters piloting a Weyland-Yutani ship that gets invaded by a pesky stowaway. Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley is also the template for every badass female heroine to come. Plus, it features a very cute cat.

Why not watch "Aliens" (1986) while you're at it? This sequel, directed by a young upstart, James Cameron, takes the taut, tight and confined premise of "Alien" and blows it up into a swaggering, flame-throwing, robot suit-stomping bit of macho action cinema, when a hard-charging military wing decide to check out this xenomorph situation for themselves. A sequel that's just as thrilling as the first, in different ways.

One of the great things about the franchise is that it has allowed many directors to take a swing with their own personal themes and style. A young David Fincher made his directorial debut with the fantastically styled "Alien 3" (1992) set on a prison planet where Ripley turns up after the events of "Aliens." Due to studio meddling, the theatrical cut of the film is not what Fincher wanted, and he has disavowed his debut (unfairly, one might argue). The Assembly Cut is the fuller, richer film, and can be found on DVD and Blu-ray, but the theatrical cut is still quite fun, rich with industrial Soviet



20TH CENTURY FOX/TNS

Sigourney Weaver as Ellen Ripley and Carrie Henn as Newt in "Aliens." "Romulus" takes place in between "Alien" and "Aliens."

aesthetics and fantastic performances.

Then came "Alien Resurrection" (1997), from whimsical Frenchman Jean-Pierre Jeunet. This is definitely the wackiest of the bunch, and will likely rank low on many lists, but if you're open to it, it's so weird and fun and definitely comes from the unique mind of the man behind "Amélie," "Delicatessen" and "The City of Lost Children." Ripley playing basketball! Underwater chase sequences! Winona Ryder! This one is an outlier, but fun nevertheless.

Then there's "Prometheus" (2012), Scott's return to the franchise, with this heady prequel set in 2093. (If chronological is your preferred watch order, start with "Prometheus," then move on to "Alien: Covenant," then dig into "Alien.") With a script by Jon Spaihts and Damon Lindelof, the film follows a crew of humans exploring a star map that leads them to a mysterious structure. Michael Fassbender plays the not quite trustworthy android David and Noomi Rapace the steely female leader. "Prometheus" is a fascinating chunk of heavy-duty mythology and origin story in the "Alien" franchise, and it leads right into its sequel, "Alien: Covenant."

Also directed by Scott, "Alien: Covenant" fuses the mythical musings of "Prometheus" with the slasher movie origins of "Alien," this time with Katherine Waterston sporting the gamine haircut and big gun. Scott continues to wrestle with themes about the creation and destruction of life in this enjoyably bloody genre piece.

And if you must, "Alien vs. Predator" (2004) and "Alien vs. Predator: Requiem" (2007) are also streaming on Hulu, and if you're watching chronologically, they take place before "Prometheus."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

More than just a pet

Although underdeveloped, ‘My Penguin Friend’ and its tale of unusual long-distance bond is touching

By MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald
(Willoughby, Ohio)

It’s not easy to think of a much sweeter story than that of a man who rescues and cares for a penguin he finds, which in turn not only befriends him but swims thousands of miles each year to spend several months with him.

That is the true story of Joao Pereira de Souza, who in 2011 made his penguin friend, DinDim, which delighted folks the world over.

Their adorable bond is the inspiration for the charming family-friendly film “My Penguin Friend,” which wades and waddles its way into theaters this weekend.

Starring well-known French actor Jean Reno, as Joao, and Mexican star Adriana Barraza, as Joao’s initially befuddled wife, Maria, “My Penguin Friend” is written by Kristen Lazarian and Paulina Lagudi and helmed by David Schurmann.

The writers and Schurmann — director of “Little Secret,” Brazil’s official Academy Awards representative in 2017 — take a less-is-more approach with “My Penguin Friend,” which could have used a bit more in the story department.

There is some invention, of course, the film introducing us to younger versions of fisherman Joao (Pedro Urizzi) and Maria (Amanda Magalhães), along with their son, Miguel (Juan José Garnica), who live along the water of Ilha Grande, an island off the coast of Brazil. On this day — one before the fifth grader’s birthday — we see that theirs is a happy home, Miguel

joking with Joao that he smells like “stinky fish,” resulting in Dad deciding to spread that particular gift to his son (and wife) via a group hug.

The next morning, despite concerning weather, Joao gives into his son’s wish that he take Miguel out on the water with him. It is a choice that will change him forever.

Years later, Reno’s Joao barely speaks to the other fishermen, one referring to him as “broken.”

Enter the penguin. Swimming from the coast of Patagonia, Argentina, at migration time along with scores of other Magellanic penguins, our winged but flightless hero runs afoul of oil from a ship.

Spotting the bird in the water feet from the shore, Joao wraps it up, brings it home and begins to care for the creature.

Maria isn’t thrilled with the prospect of hosting this guest, but Joao assures his wife the penguin needs but a few days to rest. After a week, Joao asks for another.

He does attempt to take the penguin — by now given the name DinDim by Lucia (Duda Galvão), the daughter of Miguel’s childhood friend Calista (Thalma de Freitas) — away from the village to a spot from which he believes the penguin can swim home. Of course, that’s not the last the two will see of each other.

Maria seems to be noticing a change for the better in her husband, thanks to DinDim, but she still acts a bit frustrated after Joao builds a little living structure for his little buddy.

“It is for the penguin!” he says proudly. “EVERYTHING is for the penguin!” she says.



ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS/TNS

Joao (Jean Reno) goes for a walk with his pal DinDim in a scene from “My Penguin Friend,” which is based on a true story of a man who rescues and befriends a penguin.

Eventually, genuine conflict will emerge in the narrative, indirectly caused by well-meaning biologists Adriana (Alexia Moya-no) and Carlos (Nicolás Francella), who are studying the penguins of Patagonia.

You can understand Schurmann and company choosing to keep the tale pretty basic, as the director insisted on using real penguins, as opposed to animatronics or digital effects, with 10 penguins ultimately portraying DinDim.

In the production notes, he credits trainer Fabian Gabelli, whom he calls “a penguin whisperer,” for things going so well during the shoot. Furthermore, it’s funny to read that, perhaps, more chaos ensued from the fact that the Brazilian production boasted “a Brazilian director, a British cinematographer, an Argentine production designer and a cast from across North America, South America and Europe,” many of whom, he says, were speaking

different languages. (If you’re wondering, “My Penguin Friend” is an English-language film.)

Perhaps a top goal was to make the film suitable for children, and it should be for most, although parents should be aware of a scene or two in the third act in which things do not look so promising for DinDim.

With enjoyable performances from Reno (“The Da Vinci Code,” “Flushed Away”), Barraza (“Amores Perros,” “Babel”) and, last but not least, all the penguins, “My Penguin Friend” is easy to recommend even as it leaves you wanting a bit more from it.

This story of healing and of a friend, not a pet, that comes and goes as it wishes will put a smile on your face ... and, just maybe, a tear in your eye.

“My Penguin Friend” is rated PG for thematic content. Running time: 97 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

Despite Awkwafina, action-comedy ‘Jackpot!’ never pays off

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Paul Feig’s “Jackpot!” is a farcical twist on an old story that, if it doesn’t remind people of Shirley Jackson’s short story, “The Lottery” will surely sound familiar to those who enjoyed “The Purge” and its sequels. In a near-future California, buying a lottery ticket enters you in a chance to win billions. But there’s a catch.

Everyone else is free to try to kill the winner and take the prize money. The “winner” has until sundown to survive and keep their money. The only rule: No guns. Hovering drones keep an eye on winners, helping violent mobs find their way to him or her. This state-sponsored Hunger Game is the new low for a government depleted of funds. Meanwhile, the local TV news announces a few new billionaires every day.

This is a very high concept for a comedy, one that Feig and screenwriter Rob Yescombe lean into to craft a mildly entertaining, streaming-only film that’s only a touch less disposable than a losing Powerball ticket.

Mostly, “Jackpot!” is an action-comedy vehicle that pairs Awkwafina and John Cena for a romp through a few clever economic inequality gags and a lot of cartoonish mayhem. At the least, it’s a more satirical, silly take on a dystopian genre that usually receives more somber treatments. “Mockingjay — Part 1” certainly never had John Cena trying to stomp out a groin on fire.

“Jackpot!,” now streaming on Prime Video, stars Awkwafina as Katie Kim, a former child actor who, out of midlife desperation, has returned to Los Angeles in 2030



Amazon MGM Studios

Noel Cassidy (John Cena) tries to protect lottery winner Katie Kim (Awkwafina) from the violent mobs out to kill her for her money in “Jackpot!”

to try to break back into the movie business. A Hollywood where half the town is out for blood is, of course, not such a far-fetched, futuristic concept. That backdrop of raging competitiveness is a running gag in “Jackpot!” Katie is at an audition when she’s announced as the lottery winner, immediately sending the others auditioning in pursuit.

As the quickly forming mob closes in on Katie, a pin-stripe suit-clad man comes to the rescue, pledging to protect her for a 10% fee. Noel Cassidy (John Cena) is his name, and, as the two make their getaway, a buddy comedy ensues. Aside from the main task of staying alive, the abiding tension of the movie is how much Katie can trust

Noel, and why this very sincere special agent is so dedicated to saving lives. Not only does Noel keep Katie from harm, he makes sure to put a helmet on anyone’s head before kicking them out of a moving car.

Awkwafina’s sarcasm plays well off Cena’s nice-guy earnestness. In one scene, she says he looks like “a bulldog that a witch cast a spell on and turned into a human.” Any comedy with her in the lead role has a fairly high floor, yet “Jackpot!” never pays off. It’s amiably disordered, but the high concept always feels like a ridiculous goof, and its predictable machinations grow increasingly tiresome. Still, this is the rare film in which Machine Gun Kelly (whose panic room comes in handy for Katie and Noel) is a surprisingly perfect tonal fit. (Later, a turtle-necked Simu Liu turns up as the smarmy head of a larger, better funded protection agency.)

Feig, the director of “Bridesmaids,” “Spy,” “The Heat” and 2016’s “Ghostbusters,” may be more adept at balancing broad comedy and action sequences than any other working filmmaker. But the big-screen comedy heyday he was once so central to has largely faded in recent years, as studios have grown disappointingly reluctant to gamble with laughs in theaters. It’s hard not to see “Jackpot!” — which pales next to Feig’s better films — as an example of this diminished era for theatrical comedies. Then again, as Awkwafina notes in “Jackpot!,” Hollywood stardom isn’t what it once was. Now, she says, even wrestlers and YouTubers can do it.

“Jackpot!” is rated R for pervasive language, violence and sexual references. Running time: 104 minutes. Now streaming on Amazon Prime.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Ubisoft photos

Kay and Nix walk through the streets of Mirogana in *Star Wars Outlaws*. The game's developers tried to craft an open world in which players have as many options as possible.

Calling all former 'Star Wars' fans

Detailed open worlds in upcoming single-player title *Outlaws* make game critic fall in love again with galaxy far, far away

By GENE PARK

The Washington Post

The world of "Star Wars" was the first love of my life, but I can't stand the brand anymore.

I'm one of the many turned off by the Disney movies and TV shows about the galaxy far, far away. I grew tired of Jedi psychobabble, the remixed Joseph Campbell archetypes and the inability to explore new narrative themes. *Star Wars Outlaws*, releasing Aug. 30 on PlayStation 5, Xbox and PC, looked to be more of the same, starring a scoundrel and taking place in the year after "The Empire Strikes Back." On top of that, recent games by publisher Ubisoft have sometimes felt stale thanks to the influence its open-world formula had on the games industry. The "Ubisoft open world" has become a standard descriptor for a by-the-numbers video game.

But I admire the work of Massive Entertainment creative director Julian Gerighty, who steered the multiplayer shooting series *The Division* to great success. When I heard he helmed this project, I had to pay attention. After playing two hours of *Star Wars Outlaws*, I'm shocked to report that my fire for "Star Wars" is rekindled.

It's the simplicity of the concept. There's never been a single-player "Star Wars" digital experience that allows you to hang out in its seamless open world. When I walked our heroine Kay Vess into a cantina and started chatting with gang members, the high visual and audio fidelity made a real difference. After all, "Star Wars" is the franchise that used high-tech special effects to change popular entertainment forever. While I've yet to discov-

er whether this game will explore new narrative themes, it's at least tickling the right parts of nostalgia in ways that don't feel pandering.

"What we did with the very small core team when we kicked things off was reconnect with what "Star Wars" meant to us ... that feeling when I had that VHS tape that I wore out and playing with the Kenner toys," Gerighty said. "Before the internet, before streaming services, before sequels and prequels and TV shows, before you could find "Star Wars" everywhere, what was my imagination in love with? It was the universe ... sorry, I'm not allowed to say universe. It was the galaxy of substance, a galaxy where everything was possible."

It's a visceral thrill to ride Kay's speeder bike across the Tatooine sands. It matters that I have the agency to go wherever I want at the pace I want. The recent Electronic Arts *Star Wars Jedi* games are excellent, but remain linear narrative adventures. *Outlaws* wants us to feel like we live in the world.

This convincing illusion is helped by spaceship travel that rockets your customizable spaceship from the surface to punch through the atmosphere and into the stars. Xbox's *Starfield*, while a great game featuring a thousand planets, failed to provide an immersive spacefaring experience. Gerighty said *Outlaws* learned from a 2018 Ubisoft game, *Starlink: Battle for Atlas*. In that game, spaceships would seamlessly travel among three planets.

"[*Starlink*] was directed by a friend of mine, and we did meetings with the tech team there," he said. "The issue they had is that the worlds felt a little small, the galaxy felt small, so the solution to that



Kay, right, is a petty thief who barrels through the story in *Star Wars Outlaws*, making bad decisions and exhibiting a lot of humor, humility and toughness.

was that we're not going to build the whole planet. We're going to focus on smaller areas, make it dense, make it rich and full of handcrafted things that connected with the world and have that sort of funnel out into space, into orbit. And the orbit around the planet is also level-designed." He adds that the spaceship sequence in *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* was another source of inspiration.

Like the political sphere, the video games industry is racked with discourse and misplaced rage around diversity and representation. Ubisoft has been the target recently with its upcoming *Assassin's Creed Shadows* co-starring the historical Black warrior Yasuke in feudal Japan. Kay, meanwhile, is being picked apart for her appearance.

"Kay is meant to be approachable, a petty thief who ends up barreling through this story, making bad decisions and centered with a lot of humor, humility and toughness. That's what's important to me. And she's beautiful, come on," Gerighty said. "It makes no sense to me, and it's not

worth engaging with. If you engage with bad-faith people, there's no nuance and no possibility of real dialogue. So all we can do is make the best game possible."

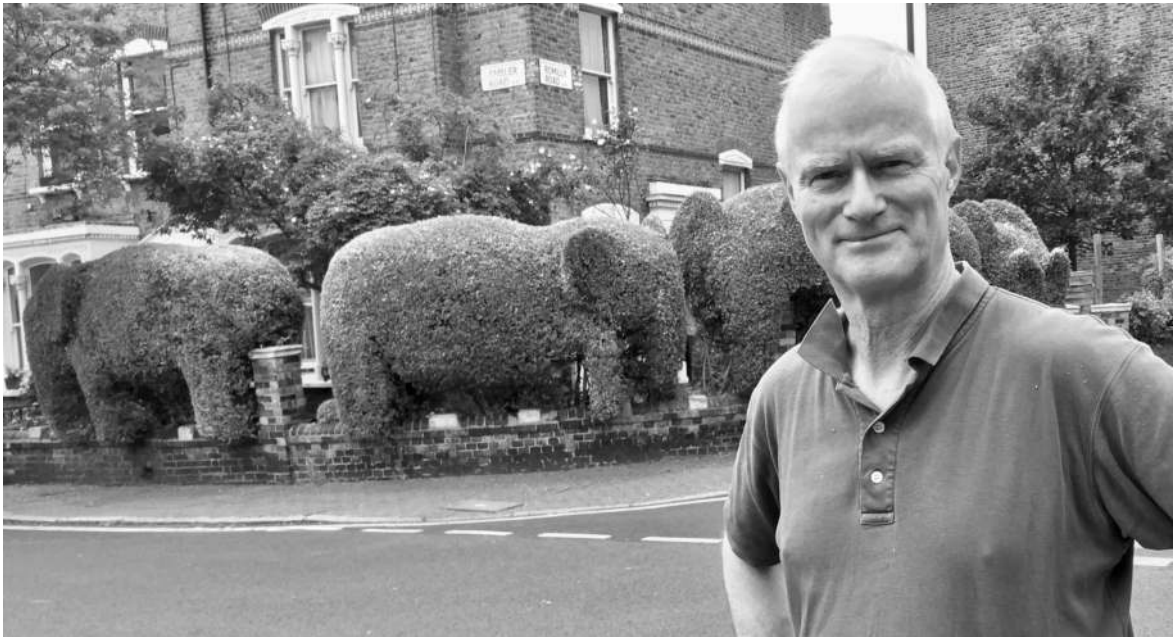
It's true that Kay feels like a great audience surrogate, stumbling her way through the open world. The player can make alliances and betray them. Faction dynamics like the gang relations of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* have been missing from the open-world formula for some years, and it's exciting to see them in the "Star Wars" setting.

After my preview, I went on with my workday. When I came home, I was excited to play more *Star Wars Outlaws* and find out what happens when I betray that criminal overlord I just helped, or maybe upgrade my speeder bike. Then I realized that I don't even have the full game yet — I had caught the bug. It's a nice feeling to be excited, once again, for a Ubisoft open-world game, and for "Star Wars."

Platforms: PC, Xbox X/S, PlayStation 5

Online: starwars.com/games-apps/star-wars-outlaws

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



Tim Bushe with the elephant hedges in North London that he cut in 2012. His unique hedges have received the attention of both local and international media. These hedges in particular are also a Google Maps landmark, which now has a 4.7-star rating.

Hero in the hedges

English man honors late wife, helps charities his with landscaping art

BY SYDNEY PAGE
Special to The Washington Post

Tim Bushe makes his way around North London with a hedge trimmer in hand, tending and shaping his enormous creations, which include a pair of cats, a herd of elephants, a fish, a hippo and a monster head.

“It’s a completely bonkers thing to do, and I think people like bonkers things in their lives to cheer them up,” said Bushe, 71, an architect who turns his neighbors’ lackluster landscaping into cartoon figures.

Bushe’s herd of elephants in Islington is so head-turning that it has become a local landmark and tourist attraction with reviews on Google Maps.

“Best hedge in North London,” one reviewer wrote.

“Superb hedge, would recommend visiting if ever in London!” another commented.

“At that point, I realized how popular they were because I had a lot of people coming and taking photos,” Bushe said of his elephant topiary, which he made in 2012. “There’s a continual stream of people.”

Bushe started experimenting with hedges about 15 years ago, when his now-late wife, Philippa, asked him to.

“I had a boring, rectangular hedge in my front garden, and as I left the door, she said, ‘Can you cut me a cat or something?’” recalled Bushe, who met his wife at art school when she was 17 and he was 18. “She knew I could sculpt things.”

Bushe attempted to turn the hedge into a cartoon cat, but he found it too tricky. Instead, using

an electric hedge trimmer, he turned the rectangular bush into a cylinder, and then into a steam train.

“Because I thought the steam train was a little bit childlike, I did a monster head on the other side of the garden,” said Bushe, who lives in Islington.

Not long after he made the train and the monster head, a man living across the street fell off a ladder while trying to trim his own hedges, Bushe said.

Bushe’s wife convinced the man to let her husband finish the job.

“Because it was directly opposite the house, I gave her the cat she was asking for,” said Bushe, who ended up making two cats and a squirrel — each about 8 feet wide by 15 feet tall — out of his neighbor’s shrubs.

Bushe’s ornate front yard hedges quickly captivated tourists and passersby.

“Lots of people admired the cats and squirrel and the train,” he said.

Then came the requests. In 2012, Naomi Schillinger, a gardener, happened upon Bushe’s topiary, and asked him to work his magic on a large overgrown hedge in her nearby neighborhood. The hedge was outside a home managed by a local housing association, and nobody was tending to the garden.

“It was this hugely overgrown hedge,” Schillinger said.

In a matter of hours, Bushe transformed the hedge into a herd of elephants. That’s the one that became a Google Maps landmark, which now has a 4.7-star rating.

“We are very lucky to have such a beautiful bit of public art

in our area,” said Schillinger, who refers to Bushe as “Topiary Tim.” “Everybody loves them. It’s a real part of the neighborhood.”

Over the years, Bushe has completed about 15 topiary projects, all in North London. Several local and international media outlets have featured his unusual landscaping work.

Although it only takes Bushe a few hours to style the shrubs into a sculpture, it takes roughly three years before they get to their intended shape. Plus, they require frequent maintenance.

“I start with a general cut and then it needs time to grow and gain density,” explained Bushe, adding that he visits each sculpture several times a year to trim it and tend to it. “Because they are living things, they don’t always grow in the right way. ... It gives it more character if they aren’t perfect.”

Bushe said he does not sketch them in advance or work off a picture. All of his hedges are done freehand.

“I have the image in my head, so I can just find it in the hedge eventually. I cut them to match the cartoon version in my head,” he said, noting that in art college, he made sculptures out of clay, plaster and fiberglass. “It just comes from practicing sculpture, where you start with a block of something and work with it.”

People commission Bushe to turn their hedges into art, and he donates all of the money to causes that are important to him. Prices vary based on the size and complexity of the hedge, but he typically charges about \$320 for the initial design, and \$100 for



About 15 years ago, Bushe turned one of his front yard hedges into a steam train because his wife didn’t like its boring, rectangular shape. Bushe had attempted to turn the hedge into a cartoon cat, but he found that too tricky at the time.



The squirrel and cats that Bushe created in the yard of his neighbor across the street. Each is about 8 feet wide by 15 feet tall.



Bushe has turned hedges into a pair of fish, among other designs.

each maintenance session, which typically take about two hours.

At first, he raised money for Hft, a U.K. charity that supports people with learning disabilities in England and Wales. Bushe’s sister, Martha, has Down syndrome, and Hft has been a help to her, Bushe said.

After donating nearly \$13,000 to Hft, Bushe pivoted his fundraising efforts to focus on environmental organizations, including the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Fridays for Future and the Good Law Project.

“People are constantly trying to get me to do new ones,” said Bushe, explaining that tending to each topiary project requires work, which limits how many he can take on.

While it’s a lot of upkeep, Bushe said he plans to continue creating hedges, in part to honor his late wife, who died of breast cancer in 2017.

“They are a legacy of her, which is nice,” said Bushe, who has three children and three

grandchildren. “I think she’d be tickled pink if she knew how much fuss was made over it over time.”

Bushe’s latest hedge design is a reclining nude woman, which he calls the “Henry Moore hedge,” after the English modern artist known for making reclining figures.

“He’s one of my favorite sculptors,” said Bushe, who plans on crafting a giant rabbit hedge this summer.

Beyond raising money for worthy causes and honoring his late wife, Bushe said, he loves that his hedges make people smile.

“I cannot tell you how many people have come up to me and said how much they enjoy seeing them every day,” Bushe said. “People thank me for brightening their neighborhood up.”

That’s mainly what motivates him to keep going.

“I get a lot of satisfaction out of knowing that people like them,” he said. “It’s a joyous thing.”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Europe’s authentic, lively second cities

Each European country has its marquee city that attracts the vast majority of travelers — think Rome, Paris, Amsterdam. And all too often, that tourist-pleasing destination is a traveler’s one and only stop.

While I’d never suggest skipping those places, I like to complement them with a visit to the country’s “second city.” If you have four days to spend in any of these capitals, I recommend cutting your visit a day short to make time for these cities.

While lacking the popularity and the bucket-list sights, Europe’s second cities tend to enjoy a creative edge, a Rust Belt toughness, fun-loving eateries with cutting-edge menus, entertaining street art ... and far fewer tourists, which also means lower prices, a more authentic welcome and arguably a more honest cultural experience.

In Portugal, visitors flock to Lisbon. But the second city of Porto — three hours north by train — is smaller and more manageable, with more than its share of diamond-in-the-rough architecture. European Union money has been funding upgrades to its public transportation system and historical sites.

Tourism here has taken off in a big way. Locals are rising to the occasion, filling the characteristic streets with trendy eateries and boutiques. It’s also the birthplace of port.



Rick Steves

In Scotland, the capital city of Edinburgh — with its prominent castle, its Royal Mile and its romantic cityscape — grabs travelers’ attention. But just a one-hour train ride away, funky Glasgow entertains with a laid-back attitude, sassy street murals and Scotland’s best food and live music scene.

In France, the great sights of Paris dominate most visitors’ itineraries. But I’ve enjoyed wonderful days in the livable culinary capital of Lyon, and in the bustling Mediterranean shipping center of Marseille. The same goes for London — understandably England’s top draw — and rejuvenated postindustrial cities that Anglophiles love to explore: Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and more.

Brussels, the capital of Belgium and the European Union, boasts the stunning Grand-Place.



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves’ Europe

In underrated Glasgow, Scotland, visitors enjoy a dynamic mix of architectural styles.

But after you’ve strolled through that thrilling square, nibbled some pralines and seen the Manneken-Pis, why not hop on a train to explore the equally historic and entertaining design capital of Antwerp? Come for the fun-to-explore neighborhoods, abundant al fresco café tables and an inviting main market square with a carillon that jingles the hour.

Visitors to Ireland shouldn’t

miss Dublin. While they’re at it, they can take a short train ride up to visit Northern Ireland’s capital, Belfast, with glittering architecture, an energetic commercial metabolism and important 20th-century Irish sights.

Berlin has world-class museums and Cold War history. But the German capital is also swarmed by international travelers. Meanwhile, Hamburg has

rebuilt its futuristic and fascinating harborfront, and boasts a legendary nightlife scene.

Unshackled by the obligation to be their country’s role model, second cities are free to just be themselves. And that’s why they’re so wonderful.

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Thrilling rides await the bold at seasonal European volksfests

For some it’s the food. For others, it’s the beer. For almost everyone, it’s the atmosphere— there are countless reasons to love a volksfest or fun fair. Another important element for the young and young at heart is the mid-way rides, often at a caliber high enough to rival the stationary attractions found in many amusement parks. Here are some of the latest, most innovative or hair-raising rides just waiting to spin, drop or otherwise thrill you.

Gäubodenvolksfest



Karen Bradbury

Straubing, Germany
Dates: through Aug. 19
SkyFall: This free-fall tower provides brave souls with ample time to appreciate a breathtaking view of the ant-sized festival down below before plunging 240 feet back to earth. This ride has been a hit with the fest-going public since 2013. The Sky-Fall will also make an appearance at Munich’s Oktoberfest.

Nürnberg Herbstvolksfest

Nuremberg, Germany
Dates: Aug. 23-Sept. 8
Wilde Maus XXL: This mobile roller coaster was built to be as fun as it is scary. The ride queue includes distractions such as a suspension bridge and rotating discs. Once on board, riders reach a height of 100 feet and experience three drops, as well as a dousing with water jets.

Schouberfouer

Luxembourg City, Luxembourg
Dates: Aug. 23-Sept. 11
Mr. Gravity: Mr. Gravity is an elevated ride consisting of 10 two-seated gondolas arranged in a circle. The gondolas sit atop a disc that rotates in both directions, and the disc itself is mounted on the end of another rotating arm.



iStock

European festivals have fun rides and entertainment experiences as well as delicious food and drink options.

Wormser Backfischfest

Worms, Germany
Dates: Aug. 28-Sept. 1
Anubis the Egyptian Giant: This Egyptian-themed propeller ride belongs to a class of attractions known as boosters. It consists of a long arm with 360-degree spinning cars attached to both ends. The Anubis stands at 180 feet tall and accelerates to a speed of 75 miles per hour in just three seconds. Up to 16 passengers can ride simultaneously, legs dangling.

Rosenheimer Herbstfest

Rosenheim, Germany
Dates: Aug. 31-Sept. 15
Hangover: Described as the world’s highest mobile gyro-drop tower, up to 24 passengers seated in a circular formation have 360-degree views as the gondola rotates on its journey toward the heavens. On the way back down,

riders plummet from a height of 280 feet and achieve speeds of up to 56 mph. More than 250,000 LED lights make the Hangover a real standout against the night sky.

Dürkheimer Wurstmarkt

Bad Dürkheim, Germany
Dates: Sept. 6-10 and Sept. 13-16
Escape Flight of Fear: This high-riding carousel was built in 2022. It can accommodate up to 30 passengers, seated in pairs. Riders fly randomly along a 25-foot-high flight path, with rapid changes of direction. The ride is touted as family-friendly and easy on the tummy.

Oktoberfest

Munich, Germany
Dates: Sept. 21-Oct. 6
Olympia Looping: Also referred to as the Five Looper, the world’s largest transportable roller coaster whisks riders head over heels a remarkable five times, reaching speeds of up to 62 mph along the ride’s ¾-mile long track.
Crazy Island: Not a ride at all but rather a funhouse, the largest such structure in Germany stretches over five floors and is strewn with 50 obstacles, including climbable torches, a hanging bridge and a waterfall. Caribbean décor adds an exotic touch to the walkthrough.

Cannstatter Volksfest

Stuttgart, Germany
Dates: Sept. 27-Oct. 13
The King: This giant swing consists of four gondolas attached to a long arm that rotates 360 degrees. The rings that attach the gondolas to the arm swivel as well, and the ride achieves speeds of up to 75 miles per hour.
Gladiator: This giant propeller ride has a long arm that rotates at a speed of up to 50 mph. At the end of both arms are what resemble two-pronged forks holding two gondolas that are also capable of independent movement.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Fresh out of the kiln

Salt-glazed, gray-and-blue pottery still being baked in Alsace’s Betschdorf

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

In the northeast of France’s clay-rich Alsace region is the village of Betschdorf, which has been producing its signature salt-glazed, gray-and-blue pottery for hundreds of years.

But only a handful of local artisans remain, making this a good time to go see how the pottery is made and pick up a few pieces while there’s still an opportunity.

When I stopped at the Stecher pottery shop, it was hard to tell whether the place was closed for lunch or shuttered for good. The storefront of the ramshackle half-timbered house on the main street displayed pretty pots and stoneware mugs — along with a few cobwebs.

The side-entrance door was locked, so I decided to check back in the afternoon.

On the outskirts of Betschdorf, I met Marie-Line Remmy at Les Gres de Remmy, which is run by her and her husband, Vincent.

Remmy showed me the couple’s large workshop stacked with unfinished pots of various shapes and sizes and a wood-burning kiln, where they bake their hand-made designs.

They add salt to the oven, which, when combined with temperatures higher than 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit, produces a strong, durable glaze.

It’s why the traditional pottery from Alsace is good for storing and keeping items fresh, everything from wine to mustard and vinegar.

Remmy invited me to watch as she picked up an unfinished piece and etched a horse into the soft clay. She then filled in cobalt oxide to the design with water and a brush.

She gave me a brochure with a dated map that listed a total of eight pottery houses in Betschdorf, noting that the number now was fewer and circled which ones she thought might still be open.

Poterie Fortune Schmitter was one, and it looked to be thriving. The family has been making pottery for seven generations, said a business card. A boutique in a half-timbered house next to an even larger workshop sold a nice variety of pieces, from clay animals to stunning vases with bright blue flourishes, flowers and other designs.

Some of the pottery houses don’t keep regular hours, as I discovered when stopping again at Stecher. The door was still locked, but a shirtless older man was in a back lot doing yard work. He motioned that he would be right there.

A few minutes later, a shirt-wearing Pascal Stecher opened his tiny, one-artist operation and donned an apron as he went back to his workshop. Customers can call or message him ahead of time about opening his shop.



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

Ceramic cats, storks and owl faces carved into mugs are among some of the unique works found at Fortune Schmitter, a family of potters that has been making gray-and-blue pottery for seven generations in Betschdorf, France.

On the QT

Directions: The village is about 56 miles south of Kaiserslautern in France. The GPS addresses for two pottery shops with regular hours: Les Gres de Remmy, Rue de Soufflenheim 8, Betschdorf; Poterie Fortune Schmitter, Rue des Potiers 47, Betschdorf. Pascal Stecher’s shop is a few houses away from Schmitter at Rue des Potiers 43.
Costs: Parking is free.

Food: There is one convenience store in Betschdorf serving sandwiches, drinks and a few pastries. There’s also a café open Wednesday through Sunday. Otherwise, food options are limited.

Hours: Les Gres de Remmy, Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2-6 p.m.; closed on Sunday. Poterie Fortune Schmitter, Monday to Friday 9 a.m.-noon and 2-6 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m.-noon and 2 p.m.-5 p.m.; closed on Sunday.

Information: Online: potiersalsace.com; poterie-schmitter.com. Call or text Pascal Stecher in advance at +33 641-575002 about opening his shop.

Jennifer H. Svan

He loves witches and dragons, he said in English, and paints them on bowls and molds their images with exaggerated features into mugs. He’s sculpting a large dragon that he doesn’t plan to sell.

I asked about a strangely shaped bowl with a lid and odd-angled handles. It’s meant to look like a witch’s pot, he said, and it’s the only one in the shop.

I ended up buying something at each place, including Stecher’s sorcery bowl. Prices weren’t flea-market cheap, but some of the smaller pieces that I encountered cost between 25 and 35 euros.

Each item has an artist signature or stamp etched on the bottom, certifying its authenticity as a unique Betschdorf piece.



Eclectic pottery works are displayed in the window of Pascal Stecher’s tiny workshop in Betschdorf. Stecher is fascinated by witches and dragons and often includes their images on his pottery. Stecher’s is a one-artist operation; it doesn’t keep regular hours.

If you want to fill up your cupboards even more, head eight minutes down the road to Soufflenheim, which is known for its more colorful crockery used in baking. Expect to wander there too: The village has more pottery shops than Betschdorf, but they are more spread out.

Also, be sure to bring cash. Some places in Betschdorf took credit cards, but I had to scrape together my last coins to buy Stecher’s witch’s pot, which now makes for a great kitchen conversation piece.

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Marie-Line Remmy etches a horse into the soft clay of a pot in her and her husband Vincent’s pottery workshop, Les Gres de Remmy, in Betschdorf.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Still hunting for good pizza in Bahrain

Italian restaurant Melenzane in Manama, which features reinvented Sicilian recipes, misses the mark on its pies

BY SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

I delayed my hunt for good pizza after moving to Bahrain, mostly out of fear of disappointment. My standards are admittedly lofty after my arrival from Washington, which has excellent options. Train rides to Philadelphia and New York also offered life-changing pizza experiences. Just sit at the East Village Una’s counter, if you’re ever so lucky, and tell me differently.

I decided on Melenzane because it reminded me of my time in Sicily, and the name translates to eggplant, which I love. The website describes the cuisine as Italian but reinvented: a fusion of Sicilian recipes “when tradition meets innovation.”

Melenzane is in the new Avenues Mall at Harbor Gate in Bahrain Bay at the far end near the food court, and you can’t miss it. Its towering decor makes it look like it was pulled off the set of “Mad Max.”

I would have preferred to watch the pizzaola, but the wrought-iron chairs surrounding the marble pizza bar lacked cushions and didn’t look comfortable. It wasn’t crowded, so I opted to sit at a table for four.

Four pizzas are on the menu, including the classic Neapolitan-style Margherita and one with pepperoni. The two more adventurous pies were a truffle ricotta pizza and another with smoky chicken and mushroom, topped with kale and a creamy sauce.

No seasonal specials were available, though there are options for pasta, risotto and other main courses, including eggplant Parmesan.

I started on the Botanica salad with kale, baby spinach, cranberries, walnuts, sunflower seeds and grapes dressed in passion fruit and pomegranate salad dressing with crumbled goat cheese.

There were also threads of crispy phyllo tossed throughout the salad. I didn’t expect much from it but was pleasantly surprised with the variety of textures and the welcome balance of sweet and tart. I will loyally order the Botanica if I ever return.

A plate of complimentary breadsticks and a ramekin of labneh drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and chili flakes were brought to the table.

The idea of serving them with the labneh, a thick Middle Eastern yogurt, rather than just the olive oil was genius.

For the pizza, the waiter let me mix and match because I considered only pepperoni too dull. I



Melenzane

Address: The Avenues Mall, Bldg. No. 3977, Road 4660, Manama, Bahrain
Hours: Noon-11:45 p.m. daily
Prices: Pizzas are 5-6 BD (\$13-\$16); salads are slightly less. Expect to pay 12-15 BD per person for full courses and a drink.
Information: Phone: 973 1616 3526; Online: order.melenzanebh.com/en

Shannon Renfro

settled on a pie with pepperoni, mushroom and extra basil and hoped for the best.

The pizza arrived quickly, as it should, from the wood-fired oven. The charred, bubbly crust looked promising. But the first cut revealed flat, dense dough. The crust has some pleasant chew to it, even though it lacked the air pockets that vary texture. Unfortunately, this and the varied mushrooms were the best part of the pizza.

The “pepperoni” were made from beef rather than pork, which is to be expected in Bahrain. The problem was lack of flavor. I drizzled chili-infused olive oil, added salt and chili flakes and ultimately gave up after two slices, returning to my salad.

I washed it all down with a Bahraini classic mint lemonade. Alcoholic beverages aren’t served here, and the mocktails are essentially fruit juices.

I didn’t want to completely give up on the pizza, so I sought redemption in getting the rest of it to go. But the slices were layered in the Styrofoam box. By the time I got home, the pizza was a soggy mess.

I salvaged it somewhat with a pan, quality olive oil, smoked sea salt, lemon zest, Aleppo pepper and unconditional love. While my Melenzane visit was worth it thanks to the salad, my search for a good pie in Bahrain continues.

It should be noted that the air conditioning in the restaurant was running full blast when I was there. I advise bringing a shawl or sweatshirt to stay warm.

Also, be aware that there may be children screaming in the background, electric play trains driving around the mall and shoppers walking by and watching you eat. It’s not ideal for a first date or an anniversary, but it’s an option after a round of shopping or a casual day out.

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PHOTOS BY SHANNON RENFROE/Stars and Stripes

While only four pizzas are on the menu at Melenzane in Manama, Bahrain, including the Neapolitan-style Margherita, the restaurant lets patrons customize them by mixing and matching ingredients. Above is a pepperoni and mushroom pizza with extra basil.



The Botanica salad was a highlight of the experience at Melenzane. It includes kale and baby spinach with cranberries, walnuts, sunflower seeds and grapes, with a passion fruit and pomegranate dressing.



Toasted breadsticks are served with labneh, a thick yogurt, and topped with olive oil and spices at Melenzane in Manama.



Melenzane is in Manama’s The Avenues mall, situated at Bahrain Bay. The towering design is reminiscent of something out of a “Mad Max” film.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Bay dreams

Drive in Japan’s southern Fukui Prefecture provides panoramic views, quiet comfort

By HARUKA HAMASAKI
The Japan News

The Sea of Japan, which Fukui prefecture faces, is often thought of as a rough sea. However, in Obama Bay — in the southern part of the prefecture — the sea is almost wavelessly calm.

I feel a sense of comfort and familiarity around Obama Bay, perhaps because its calmness reminds me of the tranquil waters of the Seto Inland Sea by my hometown in Hiroshima Prefecture.

The Angel Line is a scenic drive with a panoramic view of Obama Bay and Wakasa Bay beyond. The road leads to Mt. Kusuyagadake on the Uchitomi Peninsula.

As with the prefecture’s Rainbow Line, the Angel Line started out as a toll road, but both are now free to use.

One day in June, I went for a drive along the Angel Line.

The Angel Line’s steep slopes and many curves run through the woods. As I continued my trip, I gradually got a strong feeling that I was climbing a mountain.

From time to time, a gap opened in the woods, revealing a view of the peninsula, the ocean and villages. The buildings in the distance became smaller and smaller as I drove on.

After I passed the No. 2 parking lot on the way to the summit, I spotted a monkey sitting on the side of the road staring at me.

As I drove farther, the hills became even steeper. The car’s engine buzzed as if it were exerting itself, while in the opposite lane, cars came down the hill one by one.

Kyoto, Shiga, Toyota ... Most of them bore license plates from places outside Fukui Prefecture, which made me once again realize that the road is a popular driving course.

About 15 minutes after passing the No. 2 parking lot, I reached the No. 1 parking lot — the end of the line.

The view from the observatory atop Mt. Kusuyagadake, a moun-

If you go

Information: The Angel Line is approximately 6.2 miles long. “Angel Line” is the nickname chosen by the public. Its official name is the Tomari-Obama Station Route.

Hours: Closed overnight (from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.) and during winter (December to March).

Cost: Free

Japan News

tain enclosed by the sea, the peninsula and other mountains, was a panorama of blues and greens.

Spread out before my eyes was the cityscape of Obama, Obama Bay and Wakasa Bay. As I shifted focus from place to place, the Tsunegami Peninsula came into view, accompanied by the outline of Cape Echizen in the distance.

I took a deep breath as a pleasant breeze blew over me and then I looked back at the scenery. I saw the setting sun dyeing Wakasa Bay red. In fact, the entire city was tinged faintly with a reddish hue at twilight, creating a picturesque scene.

Later, I drove down the steep road, descending slowly. Two deer watched me pass. I smiled softly at them as if to say good evening.

The sea and the sky were transitioning into a shade of ultramarine blue. And Obama Bay remained calm as always.

A huge rock decorated with a sacred straw rope stands out when you drive along the Angel Line. It’s called “Okami Ishi” (Great deity rock).

The rock is an object of worship for Kusuya Shrine at the foot of Mt. Kusuyagadake. Legend has it that the shrine’s deity once sat on the rock.

Mt. Kusuyagadake is said to be a sacred mountain, and probably got its name from the shrine.

As my prayers for a safe trip up the mountain had already been answered, I simply gave a nod of gratitude and continued my journey home.



The Yomiuri Shimbun

A clear evening is a particularly beautiful time at Wakasa Bay, one of the sites along the Angel Line drive.

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STARS AND STRIPES

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Yoshinoya promotion a hit with Kirby fans

Japanese beef bowl chain attracts long lines of customers hoping for Nintendo character

By Aaron Kidd
Stars and Stripes

One of Nintendo's cutest — and hungriest — game characters is causing long lines outside Japan's oldest beef bowl chain nationwide.

Kirby — a pink, rotund guy with rosy cheeks and blue eyes — can inhale enemies and objects, either consuming them to gain various powers or spitting them out as projectiles.

Named after a lawyer who helped Nintendo win a major copyright lawsuit, the series debuted in 1992 with Kirby's Dream Land.

There are 39 titles, including the latest, Kirby's Return to Dream Land Deluxe, released last year.

Now through Aug. 31, Yoshinoya is offering a special Kirby set that includes the chain's famous gyudon — thinly sliced beef and onions atop a bed of

white rice — and your choice of a small salad or apple juice. A small bowl is 600 yen (about \$4.10); medium is 630 yen.

But that's not all. Patrons also get one of four collectible Kirby figures that show the lovable character in a variety of poses, from holding Yoshinoya's signature beef bowl triumphantly atop his head to spilling a glass of green tea, wide-eyed.

Four more figures with different poses will be offered Sept. 3-30.

Takeout sets are served in a special pink bag featuring Kirby's adorable mug.

Most Yoshinoya locations begin selling the Kirby sets at 10 a.m. each day.

Only a certain number are available daily, for some reason, so you may have to line up early to add these figures to your collection.

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PHOTOS BY AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Yoshinoya, one of Japan's most popular beef bowl chains, is offering special meals featuring Nintendo's Kirby character on the container and including a collectible figure through Sept. 30.



People line up for the special Kirby meal with collectible figure at a Yoshinoya restaurant in the Yokohama area.



Yoshinoya patrons who order the special Kirby meal also get a collectible Kirby figure that shows the lovable character in one of a variety of poses, including holding Yoshinoya's signature beef bowl.

Yoshinoya

Location: There are more than 1,200 locations in Japan, including near most U.S. military bases.
Hours: Most are open 24/7, but the Kirby set typically goes on sale at 10 a.m.
Prices: 600 yen for small; 630 yen for medium.
Dress: Casual
Directions: Search online for your nearest location.
Information: Online: yoshinoya.com
Aaron Kidd



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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Go dino hunting

Imaginative prehistoric park in Connecticut offers education, entertainment

By JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

The imaginations of children and adults can run wild at the 60-acre Dinosaur Place inside Nature's Art Village north of New London, Conn.

Everyone will enjoy searching for life-like dinosaur models hidden in trees or behind rock formations, some creatures towering high above them.

On a recent summer trip, my son and I were excited to visit the theme park's dinosaurs — more than 60 of them. Tickets are available at the entrance, near the gift and ice cream shops.

Nature's Art Village features shopping and other attractions, but Dinosaur Place is the centerpiece.

Names and descriptions of the individual types are written on signs near each dinosaur. Some of our favorites were the Triceratops and Tyrannosaurus rex models and the Atrociraptor, one of the carnivores featured in the blockbuster movie "Jurassic World: Dominion."

A Dilophosaurus, another carnivorous dinosaur, was placed in a cave-like enclosure behind a pretend electric fence; it would shake, roar and spit water, simulating venom, an attribute ascribed to it in the "Jurassic Park" movie.

Children may cool down in the steamy summer weather at the Splashpad. The water playground features a dinosaur Rib Cage waterfall and T. rex water cannons. Kids must wear slip-resistant shoes to enjoy the zero-depth water there.

The two-story, enclosed T-Rex Tower, which the park's website boasts is "The Largest Playscape on the East Coast," takes kids through a series of obstacles, including a rope ladder, zipline and slippery slides. Children must remove their shoes, but wear socks before entering.

A-MAZE-asaurus challenges visitors to find their way through a large maze or risk meeting a carnivore at a wrong turn.

There is also a slide in the maze that sends you out of the giant maw of a T. rex. For additional fees, there is a miniature train ride, pedal go-karts and an 18-hole mini golf course next to the park.

Toward the end of our visit, we found a large simulated volcano near a marshy pond that erupted on the hour. It spewed steam seconds before erupting into several jets of water for a volcanic effect.

A hike around the 1½-mile trail took about two hours while enjoying all the attractions. Outside the Dinosaur Place, shops selling toys, fossils, jewelry and more await.



PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

The Dinosaur Place, a stateside dinosaur-themed adventure park in Oakdale, Conn., features more than 60 prehistoric creatures.



A Dilophosaurus behind a pretend electric fence shakes, roars and spits pretend venom.



Lifelike dinosaur models await in trees or behind rock formations, and some tower high above visitors, at Dinosaur Place.



A-MAZE-asaurus challenges visitors to find their way through a large maze or risk meeting a carnivore at a wrong turn.



A simulated volcano erupts on the hour.

On the QT

Directions: 1650 Hartford-New London Tpke, Oakdale, Conn., 06370; Google Plus Code: CQJH+P4 Oakdale, Montville, CT, USA
Times: Dinosaur trails are open daily, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.; see website for other attraction times. The park may close due to inclement weather.
Costs: \$36.95 for ages 6-17; \$32.95 for ages 2-5 and adults; \$30.95 for 60 and older; free for 2 and younger.
Food: Food and drinks available at Monty's Munchies or bring your own lunch and coolers.
Information: Phone: 860-443-4367; Online: naturesartvillage.com/experience/the-dinosaur-place

Juan King

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

A villainous addition to Magic Kingdom

Disney announces park expansions, attractions based on popular films as part of 10-year, \$60B investment

By Hannah Sampson and Kelsey Baker
The Washington Post

A slate of villains and monsters are getting ready to move into Disney theme parks. Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom in Florida, home to Cinderella Castle, roller coasters and kiddie rides, is making space for the darker side of fairy tales with a long-hoped-for “Villains Land.” And Disney’s Hollywood Studios in Florida will add a land devoted to the Pixar franchise “Monsters, Inc.” The company announced the additions, part of a \$60 billion expansion over the next 10 years, to a cheering crowd of roughly 12,000 at the D23 fan convention last weekend in Southern California.

Also coming soonish to the company’s global parks: destinations or attractions themed after Marvel’s “The Avengers,” “Avatar,” “Cars,” “Coco,” “Encanto,” “Indiana Jones” and “The Lion King.”

Disney Cruise Line, which sails five ships and is awaiting four more, will add another four to bring its fleet to 13.

Unlike previous “blue-sky” conversations that merely hinted at what could be possible in new developments, executives have vowed that the projects they revealed at D23 were “in active development.”

“This means that plans are drawn; this means that dirt is moving,” Josh D’Amaro, chairman of Disney Experiences, said during the three-hour event Aug. 10. “I just want to be clear to all the fans out there: This isn’t blue sky. We are going to do all of this.”

That was welcome news to fans who have expressed frustration with the lack of details about rides in development from Disney, even as rival Universal Studios is preparing to open a major new park in Orlando next year.

The announcements came just days after Disney executives said they had seen a “moderation of consumer demand” domestically in the previous few months that they expected to continue for the next few quarters.

Rival Comcast has also seen softer business at domestic parks.

Dennis Spiegel, CEO of International Theme Park Services, said theme parks have “hit the pricing wall” with visitors, especially after demand roared back as pandemic restrictions eased.

Despite the hesitation on the part of visitors, Spiegel said Disney needs to keep delivering new experiences to get its fans to return — and return and return.

“They have to keep the new product and the new ideas coming,” he said. “We live on repeat visitation, and repeat visitation is driven by the new product. They’re doing the right thing.”

Here’s what Disney has said about the new projects:

Villains Land at Magic Kingdom

The company provided a brief hint in 2022 about the concept of a land built around the villains of Disney lore. Anticipation has been building ever since.

“The crowd went absolutely wild; people were on their feet cheering for Villains Land,” said Quincy Stanford, project manager for the Disney fan site AllEars, who attended the weekend event.

Villains Land, located beyond the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride in the Magic Kingdom, will feature shopping, dining and two major new attractions. The company did not release a timeline for construction.

The Disney Parks blog post announcing the land does not include specifics, but the language invokes some iconic baddies: “poison apples” a la “Snow White” and “poor unfortunate souls,” a reference to Ursula in “The Little Mermaid.”

An Instagram post from the Disney Parks account featured ominous music and a compilation of villains from classic Disney films, like “Snow White” and “Sleep-



TNS

Attendees dress up for Oogie Boogie Bash, A Disney Halloween Party, at Disneyland’s California Adventure in Anaheim, Calif., in 2021. Disney announced over the weekend that it plans to add a “Villains Land” to its Magic Kingdom park in Florida, among other additions to the company’s global parks.

ing Beauty,” along with newer villains from “The Emperor’s New Groove” (2000) and “The Princess and the Frog” (2009).

Combined with a “Cars”-themed area, the expansion will be the largest at Magic Kingdom, the company said.

‘Monsters, Inc.’ land at Hollywood Studios

Actor Billy Crystal, who voiced one of the lead characters in the 2001 Pixar film “Monsters, Inc.,” appeared at D23 to announce that a new land modeled on the film will be built in Disney’s Hollywood Studios in Florida. Described as “not at all scary,” the land will let humans visit the world where the Monsters live, one that’s powered by laughter.

The area will include a roller coaster inspired by a scene from the movie where characters ride around on hanging doors; it will be the first “suspended” roller coaster in a Disney park. Renderings show guests seated under the ride track. Construction is set to begin in 2025.

Stanford said the Monsters news was the biggest surprise of the night — especially because Hollywood Studios has already had two major expansions with Toy Story Land in 2018 and Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge in 2019.

“It is the talk of the town,” she said. “Everyone’s high on the doors coaster.”

There is one big question that Disney hasn’t answered yet: What the new land might replace.

“Everybody is really wondering where Monsters, Inc. is going to go,” Stanford said.

‘Avatar’ sequels at California Adventure

Executives have discussed plans to bring an attraction inspired by the “Avatar” movies to California since last year.

This weekend, they said a new destination modeled on Pandora, the moon depicted in the films, would open at Disney California Adventure. Unlike the Avatar land in Florida, which is based on the original movie, this one will be inspired by “Avatar: The Way of Water” and future sequels.

Renderings show otherworldly terrain and a boat that encounters native marine creatures, but the announcement did not specify what the ride would be or when it would open.

Disney described the new attraction as a “thrilling excursion” and a “dynamic, intense and emotional experience on a grand scale.”

Avengers expansion at California Adventure

Disney California Adventure’s Avengers Campus is doubling in size with two new attractions set to begin construction next year.

Avengers Infinity Defense was announced as “a multi-world adventure experience” and major attraction that includes visits to the fictional realm of Asgard, the Kingdom of Wakanda and New York City and an encounter with King Thanos. The ride had been announced previously, but without many details.

Stark Flight Lab, starring Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark, will put people in two-person pods and whirl them around in a flight simulation.

‘Cars’ ride for families at Frontierland

At Magic Kingdom in Florida, Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island in Frontierland will be replaced with a new area built around the “Cars” characters from Pixar, including Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater. Two attractions are coming: a “thrilling rally race through the mountains” and a second family ride appropriate for smaller fans.

Work will start on the area early next year.

‘Encanto’ house at Tropical Americas

Disney’s Animal Kingdom in Florida is set to say goodbye to DinoLand U.S.A. and will welcome Tropical Americas instead. The company teased the change last year but announced more details for the 11-acre area over the weekend.

The magical casita that comes to life in the 2021 film “Encanto” will serve as a new attraction for parkgoers who can explore the enchanted house. A new carousel featuring animals from Disney movies will be nearby. Also in Tropical Americas: an “Indiana Jones”-themed ride that will explore an ancient Mayan temple.

Tropical Americas is expected to open in 2027 after construction begins this fall.

‘Coco’ ride at California adventure

The first ride in any Disney park based on the Pixar film “Coco,” in which a boy travels to the land of the dead, will open at Disney California Adventure. Imagineers — the ride developers at Disney — are taking a cue from rides like Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean for the attraction.

Work is starting on the ride in 2026.

Additions to parks in Paris and Shanghai

A new attraction based on “The Lion King” is coming to Disneyland Paris, though the timeline wasn’t specified. The themed area will include characters, dining, shopping and a water ride inspired by the movie.

New “Avengers”-themed attractions featuring Spider-Man are heading to Shanghai Disneyland and Hong Kong Disneyland. Dates for their opening were not provided.

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Maclay Heriot

King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard: Stu Mackenzie, foreground; standing from left, Ambrose Kenny-Smith, Joey Walker, Michael Cavanagh, Lucas Harwood and Cook Craig.

Self-soothing sounds

Aussie rock band King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard gets nostalgic

BY KRYSTA FAURIA
Associated Press

King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard is in their dad rock era — and not just because most of the band members now have kids.

Following their highly technical heavy metal concept album released last year, the remarkably prolific Australian rock band wanted to take it back to basics with their latest album, embracing a sound that reminded them of why they fell in love with music in the first place.

Taking a page from 1970s classic rock for “Flight b741,” their 26th studio album, the band didn’t use guitar pedals and recorded on cheap, second-hand amps from a local pawn shop, according to frontman Stu Mackenzie. Once in the studio, they relied on instinct, not strategy, for the band’s most collaborative album to date.

“At this moment in time, the easiest thing was the right thing to do,” Mackenzie, 33, said of how the men approached their record. “Don’t come in with too many ideas, just pick up the guitars. Don’t

worry about your bloody headphone mix, just make the music that comes out.”

The album’s lyrics maintain many of the poetically dark and poignant themes the band has come to be known for — like battling depression or escaping parental strife. “I’ve been drinking on the job / Not much thinking going on about the passengers I got on board / Satan’s winking, givin’ me the nod,” they croon in “Sad Pilot.”

But the sound of “Flight b741” is decidedly upbeat and nostalgic, thanks in part, Mackenzie said, to some of their relatively



“Flight b741,” the latest album from the prolific King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard, is inspired by classic rock.

new identities as fathers.

“Being a parent, I think, changes everybody. It has to. I think if it doesn’t, you

SEE GIZZARD ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC

REVIEW

J Balvin

Rayo (Capitol/Polydor)

The titanium sheen is a distraction. The cover of “Rayo,” Colombian singer-rapper J Balvin’s first album since 2021’s “Jose,” depicts a futuristic-looking vehicle wrapped in chrome. On closer inspection, it’s a Volkswagen Golf, a popular-the-world-over, nondescript city car. In Balvin’s universe, it’s blinged out — his characteristic smiley face logo emblazoned on the rims underneath opened scissor doors, a feature typically reserved for a luxury vehicle, like a Lamborghini.

It serves as a perfect allegory for the album: A familiar figure, made in Balvin’s image, and a direct reflection of his early hustle and future success.

A VW Golf, it turns out, was his first car. And on “Rayo,” J Balvin returns to his first love: feel-good, party-ready music.

Last year, Balvin told The Associated Press about his song “Amigos,” what he dubbed a return to “romantic reggaetón” — the music that made him a name in the first place. It was at least partially a response to his fiery single “Dientes,” a ’00s club-inspired Latino urbano track that interpolates Usher’s “Yeah!.” When that was released, he said his fans loved it, but they were expecting reggaetón — his “original sound,” as he put it. “Rayo” is the organic continuation of that idea. Across 15 tracks of life-affirming dembow and synth-y pop, stacked to the brim with collaborations, the album does not attempt innovation. It succeeds as a single, self-sustaining playlist, all high-octane club bangers for the backyard and South Beach in equal measure.

Not that there aren’t new attempts: “3 Noches,” one of the few solo songs, experiments with Afrobeats. On “Gato,” Balvin enlists Catalan urbano singer Bad Gyal, whose raspy vocal tone offers a new texture.

But it is, of course, reggaetón that drives “Rayo.” Don’t take our word for it, take his: Balvin asks you to dance with him to the stuff (the lyric “Ven y bailemos reggaetón,” in “3 Noches”), and he instructs you to put it on (“Ponle reggaetón” in “Swat.”)

Highlights are found in some of the energetic collaborations, like in the earworm “Origami” with Ryan Castro and Blessd, or “Doblexxó,” which features fellow Colombian superstar Feid.

J Balvin has been known as a hitmaker across his career. That continues on “Rayo.” But what comes next?

— Maria Sherman
Associated Press

Gizzard: Band’s loyal fan base allows for lots of creative freedom

FROM PAGE 28

might be a psychopath,” said Mackenzie, who has a 3-year-old and 9-month-old baby. “I actually have more gratitude in my heart than ever before. And I think that’s in the songwriting, from probably everybody’s perspective. And I think we did have a lot of fun making this record.”

That four of its six members now have kids makes the band’s sustained output and touring schedule even more impressive. And it’s not just their personal lives that have undergone major shifts since they got together. A lot has changed in the music industry since King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard first put music out in 2010.

In those two and a half decades, they’ve cultivated a loyal fan base, allowing them to explore disparate genres of rock and avoid creative constraints or expectations that many artists nowadays feel bound to, such as factoring in TikTok virality or Spotify algorithms.

“Maybe we are in an unusually fortunate position where people actually expect us to do the thing

you’re not supposed to do. And that’s a liberating feeling because it kind of just means I’m not sort of beholden to any industry trope,” Mackenzie said.

That liberation is apparent in their unapologetically nostalgic album, which sounds like it was pulled from a time capsule buried during the heyday of rock and roll.

“That was very intentional. We had had this playlist of lots of ’60s and ’70s, just like, classic rock,” said bassist Lucas Harwood. “It’s just you and your instrument. And it’s like, ‘What can I do without all the other bells and whistles that technology affords?’”

When asked about maintaining their current level of productivity, Mackenzie acknowledged the difficulty of finding time to write and record music at this stage in their lives. Despite those challenges, however, the band leader is reluctant to stop.

“I’m just trying to stay on the treadmill because if I get off the treadmill, I’m going to use my time in probably some form of self-destructive way. So, I need to just keep busy,” he said.

Q&A

Chaos, catharsis and a bit of crowd surfing

St. Vincent channels something primal playing live music

By KRISTA FAURIA
Associated Press

As sweaty fans pushed up against one another, clutching their drinks and swaying to the music, Annie Clark, known professionally as St. Vincent, was being transported.

She recounts that surprise concert in May at the Paramount, an intimate, historic East Los Angeles venue, as a kind of “exorcism” that allowed the singer, songwriter and guitar virtuoso to channel something she doesn’t ordinarily have access to.

As the Grammy winner stood on stage and hypnotically manipulated her guitar, Clark spat on the crowd — a welcomed gesture — before leaping into it to be propelled around the dimly lit room, something artists with her caliber of fame rarely do. The show was a preview for what was to come during her All Born Screaming tour, which kicked off Aug. 8 in Bend, Ore.

Clark spoke with The Associated Press ahead of the tour about the catharsis she finds through performing, punk music’s influence on her and how the idea of chaos informed her self-produced seventh album.

The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

The Associated Press: I saw your recent show at the Paramount and was struck by how much you lean into the theater of performing live music, like with the crowd surfing and the spitting. I’m curious when you start thinking about that aspect of a tour.

Clark: Well, it’s interesting that you bring up the Paramount and theatrics, because there were no theatrics. Like, that was just a full primal moment. The band had been rehearsing, but we hadn’t had any, like, production rehearsals or anything like that. It was just like, “Let’s get up there and play music and just, like, melt the house.” So, there was nothing consciously performed.

I kind of go into a little bit of a fugue state when I’m performing. Like, something else takes over that I don’t have access to in my normal day to day. And the spitting, for example, like, sometimes singing is very, like, visceral-



AP

Annie Clark, known professionally as St. Vincent, performs in 2023. The artist kicked off her All Born Screaming tour last week.

al. And sometimes you just need to spit in order to, like, I don’t know, clear your mouth to keep singing. It’s not like a bit or anything like that. There’s just something so primal about playing in general that it’s just, like, everything comes out.

Does the size of the venue play into that? Are you able to channel that primal energy more when it’s such an intimate space?

Oh yeah, you go more. In a 200-cap punk club, you’re like, “The Germs played here,” you know? I started off playing small clubs and would be lucky to, like, drive to Denver and be psyched to have, like, 200 people in a club. So you know it, in a certain way, really excites me and takes me back. You can see people’s faces — you can see people’s faces in other venues, certainly — but you can see people’s face, they’re right there. There’s no barricade, there’s no nothing. I mean, listen, I love performing in any context except, like, karaoke or unsolicited at a party with an acoustic guitar. It’s kind of an exorcism for me.

It seems like you’re really leaning into punk history. Can you talk about your relationship to punk music and what it’s meant to you?

I’m a fan of music with a capital F. So I can be as moved by

Fugazi and Big Black as I can by Duke Ellington. And it’s all music to me. But I definitely remember seeing Lightning Bolt a lot of times. And obviously this ethos of just, like, it’s not a stage and performer. We are all one. Also, you didn’t really see the show if you didn’t get, like, an injury of some kind. I am physical in that way. Just this idea of, like, a loud, visceral show where we are all in this together. This isn’t about, you know, glitter and capitalism. This is about people having a place to freak the (expletive) out.

You used vintage equipment for “Daddy’s Home.” And the analog synths were such a big part of “All Born Screaming.” Is there an energy that you feel from that?

Everything about the making of this record needed to be tactile. It needed to start with moving electricity around through discrete circuitry. And not just to be a nerd, but because it had to start with the idea of chaos and chance and “I don’t know what’s gonna happen.” Because that’s how life is. I don’t know what’s going to happen — chaos. But then somehow through a process of intuition and work and magic, you take chaos and you turn it into something and make some kind of sense. That was the reason for starting with analog modular synths and stuff like that.

WEEKEND: BOOK REVIEWS

Fantastical flourishes, gritty reality

Stephen King-like themes abound in bold and brutal novel ‘House of Bone and Rain’

By MALCOLM FORBES
Star Tribune

Gabino Iglesias’ new novel, “House of Bone and Rain,” opens with a promise and a pact.

Five Puerto Rican teenagers, all friends since childhood, finish high school with hopes and dreams for the future. “Then Bimbo’s mom hit the sidewalk with two bullet holes in her face, and the blood drowned out all those plans.” Aware that the police will do nothing, Bimbo vows to avenge her by killing those responsible. His band of brothers agrees to stand by him.

According to Gabe, the main narrator, he and his friends resemble “the tight-knit group of kids in a Stephen King novel.”

However, these boys were forced to grow up fast a long time ago. Iglesias has not written a coming-of-age tale but, rather, a bold and brutal story about how a single-minded quest for justice tests loyalties, frays nerves and corrupts souls.

Gabe and his crew have a shared sense of purpose but individual personalities. Xavier is the smart one, Tavo is the voice of reason and Paul has the shortest fuse. Gabe is a thinker but also a shirker, unable to make a decision about moving to the United States with his girlfriend. Bimbo is the most reckless: He was imprisoned for failing to pay child support and is now involved in a marriage scam

to grant a Dominican woman citizenship. When it comes to tracking down his mother’s killers, he also proves to be the most ruthless.

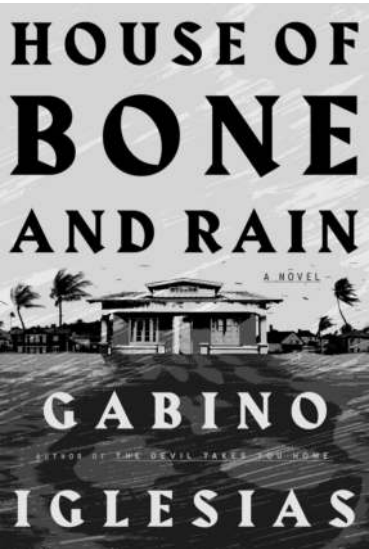
The stakes are raised when it transpires that Bimbo’s mother, a small-time dealer, was bumped off by Papalote, an infamous and untouchable drug kingpin. As Gabe notes, “This was like jumping in a puddle and finding out it’s deeper than the Mariana Trench.”

Then Xavier is murdered and Gabe finds two coffins drawn on his door. Instead of backing down, the boys double their efforts to get the job done. But they aren’t just up against professional killers. When a hurricane

rages, it wreaks devastation and brings malevolent spirits. Soon, there is so much carnage and chaos that Gabe starts to wonder if their murderous undertaking is in fact a suicide mission.

Iglesias’ last novel, “The Devil Takes You Home,” followed a hit man in over his head in a demonic criminal underworld. “House of Bone and Rain” is streaked with similar supernatural elements, from ghosts and myths to babies with piranha teeth and men without shadows.

Sometimes these fantastical flourishes don’t work alongside Iglesias’ gritty reality. At other times, they help lighten dark episodes. Certain bloody scenes are too long and too lurid, but



when Iglesias gets the balance right there is no denying the raw, visceral power of his prose and the relentless driving force of his narrative.

This novel’s real strength is in its examination of friendship and its depiction of the ripple effects of violence.

On the Edge

Nate Silver

By the time you finish Silver’s new book, you’ll probably want to do something risky.

Not for the sake of adrenaline or to the point of being reckless, but because you might be convinced that the occasional gamble — more than most people are comfortable with — is worth it.

In “On the Edge: The Art of Risking Everything,” Silver compellingly theorizes that humans are in general too risk averse, and that those who can discerningly fight that impulse often benefit greatly in life.

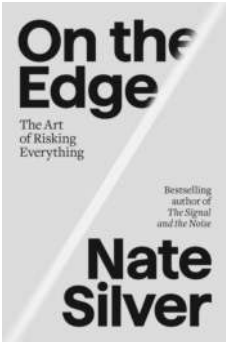
In addition to his day job — which made him a recognizable name — as a forecaster, statistician and writer, Silver is an accomplished poker player. He fittingly, then, begins his analysis of those with high tolerances for risk through a detailed look at the game and those who play it.

It turns out, Silver argues, poker players, astronauts and hedge fund managers have more in common than people may assume, even on a physiological level. “The biggest risk is not taking any risk,” Mark Zuckerberg famously said — a widely-held sentiment in Silicon Valley that Silver explores at length in this book.

Given his knowledge of and affinity for poker, Silver tends to belabor that angle — perhaps to a fault. Those uninterested in stats or strategies may have a hard time getting through this book. But if you don’t mind or are intrigued by the game, Silver eventually broadens his perspective, notably in what might be his most interesting chapter discussing the “habits of highly successful risk-takers.”

Although Silver admittedly spends a lot of time talking about poker, “On the Edge” is a thought-provoking interdisciplinary book that covers many timely topics from artificial intelligence, political theory and what happens when risk takers go too far.

— Krysta Fauria/AP



The Cheesemaker’s Daughter

Kristin Vukovic

This year, Marina’s annual summer visit home to the island of Pag in Croatia turns into an extended stay. Marina has a lot to figure out, and home seems like the place to do it, if indeed Pag is still home.

Vukovic’s debut novel is a mouthwatering platter of culture, history and the everlasting struggle for balance between tradition and progress. “The Cheesemaker’s Daughter” is told from Marina’s perspective on Pag, where she spent most of her childhood and teen years, as Croatia counts down the days before officially joining the European Union in 2013.

After moving to New York as a refugee from the Yugoslav wars, Marina built a life in the bustling city. But her job is unfulfilling, her coworkers unfriendly and her husband is inattentive and unfaithful.

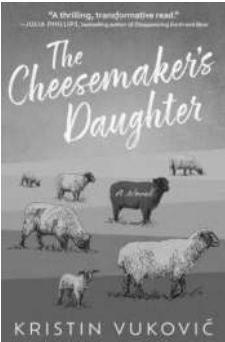
There are plenty of distractions for Marina back on Pag, including a struggling family cheese business with failing Soviet-era machines and a rival cheesemaker whose son, Marina’s first love, could be her family’s reputational ruin if sparks keep flying between them.

Meanwhile, there’s an ongoing push and pull between the characters over gender issues — when to jostle for parity and when to respect tradition and leave it be.

OK, so it may seem like everything is going wrong. And it honestly is. But at least there’s mouthwatering food.

Reading “The Cheesemaker’s Daughter” gave me a thorough craving for cheese and a deep desire to visit Croatia. Vukovic employs beautiful, all-encompassing sensory descriptions, from the smell of the herbs in the air to the squawk of seagulls, or the faded floral print on the sheets. These rich details build an enticing world — a scraggly yet comfortable one, cold but cozy.

— Donna Edwards/AP



All the Way Gone

Joanna Schaffhausen

Professor Maura Delaney’s book, “The Good Sociopath,” is about to hit the market with a neurosurgeon, Dr. Craig Canning, as her primary example.

Canning is arrogant and lacks genuine emotions (although he’s good at faking them), but his surgical skills have saved hundreds of lives. Canning doesn’t care about his patients, but he glories in his reputation as one of the best in his profession.

Then a young woman plunges to her death from a balcony in an apartment building where Canning also resides. Police rule it an accident, but Maura says she isn’t so sure. If Canning was responsible, Maura’s academic career will be in ruins, so she hires newly-minted private eye Annalisa Vega, a former Chicago PD detective, to recheck the police work. So begins Schaffhausen’s fourth novel featuring Annalisa.

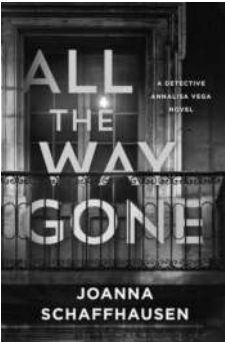
Famous for tracking down a serial murderer dubbed the Lovelorn Killer, Annalisa is skeptical of the very idea of a good sociopath. Nevertheless, it’s a widely recognized phenomenon. Most sociopaths are not criminals. But when Vega meets Canning, she immediately gets a “bad vibe.”

Meanwhile, Vega’s newly-discovered teenage stepdaughter, Cassidy, the product of one of her husband’s extramarital affairs, needs help with her own problem. Cassidy’s girlfriend, Naomi, will die if she doesn’t get a kidney transplant, and so far no match has been found.

Vega juggles the two cases with the skill readers of the series have come to expect of her.

The author’s prose is clear and tight, and she does a fine job of moving the story along at a swift and sometimes frantic pace, piling on twists that readers are unlikely to see coming.

— Bruce DeSilva/AP



Five-Star Stranger

Kat Tang

As our lives become more automated, increasingly niche jobs materialize to fill in the gaps. Ours is a society in which people hire celebrities to make birthday videos, or pay “job leaving agents” in hopes of a more frictionless quitting experience. What would it be like to be that stranger for hire, to inhabit whatever role someone paid you by the hour to be?

Tang’s debut novel follows one man over a monthslong spiral as he realizes he’s getting attached to his clients — a violation of his first rule for himself as a rental stranger — forcing him to confront his past and examine why he got into the business in the first place.

Tang never reveals the Stranger’s real name — one of the many ways he becomes a blank slate onto which others can project what they want.

An insidious isolation has crept into the world’s hyperconnected psyche, and loneliness might have been solved genuinely and for free had individuals just met the right kind of person — or anyone at all.

But why risk rejection when you can hire someone instead? The Stranger notes that, “like everything else in this intensely connected yet deeply lonely life, there was an app for that.”

The narration often dips into philosophical before yanking back to the safety of light-hearted and funny; a whiplash between deep interrogations of society and the Stranger’s humorous deflection to avoid getting too lost in it.

Tang makes it easy to become invested in the characters. Even the brief encounters are made interesting by the psychoanalytical lens the Stranger sees them through. It’s a smart book, and it tackles its topic in a thought-provoking way without falling into an existential hole.

— Donna Edwards/AP



WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Q&A

Back to business

Cookbook author Sandra Lee makes TV comeback with state fair-focused baking competition show on Netflix

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Corn dogs, funnel cakes and fried Oreos may come to mind when you think of state fair food, but fairgrounds are also the place where bakers test out their creations by entering competitions.

The sense of community and creativity found at state and county fairs is especially meaningful to Sandra Lee, a cookbook author and TV personality known for the Food Network shows “Semi-Home-made Cooking” and “Sandra’s Money Saving Meals.” Lee won a blue ribbon at the Los Angeles County Fair in 1992 for display and design. (Her TV shows also featured segments with tablescapes and arts and craft ideas inspired by each meal, so it tracks.) Next, she’s taking state fairs to a global streaming audience with “Blue Ribbon Baking Championship,” now on Netflix.

On the show, 10 talented pastry chefs compete in Bake-Offs for a blue ribbon prize and a shot at \$100,000. Lee co-hosts with “American Pie” actor Jason Biggs, who she says is a talented baker: “He’s got a banana bread recipe that is unbelievable.” She’s also a judge alongside former White House pastry chef Bill Yosses, and award-winning baker Bryan Ford.

The venture is a part of Lee’s new chapter, both professionally and personally. She battled breast cancer in 2015 and ended a 14-year relationship with former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2019. Lee’s beloved uncle Bill was battling cancer himself at that time and she moved from New York to California during COVID-19 to help him.

“I really cleaned house of my life over the last decade, which was extremely painful and very hard to do,” said Lee over Zoom from her Malibu, Calif., home. “I’m finding peace now with my decisions and with my new life. Part of my new life is coming back to television, hopefully wiser, and back to business hopefully even better than ever.”

In a Q&A, Lee tells The Associated Press about starting over, her new show and Christmas trees. Answers are shortened for length and clarity.

Associated Press: You seem to be at a really great place where you have ideas and you’re ready for what’s ahead.

Lee: I took enough time off to really replenish myself and to really think about what I wanted to do. When I was coming out of being sick in 2015, it really made me focus on what I want to accomplish. And, for me, work has always been extremely important. There’s things on my career bucket list to get done. One of them is “Blue Ribbon Baking Championship.”

What are the others?

I have an idea for a show that will change daytime television. That’s my heartstring and it’s a big deal. The



NETLIX/AP photos

“Blue Ribbon Baking Championship” judges Bill Yosses, a former White House pastry chef; cookbook personality and TV personality Sandra Lee; and award-winning baker Bryan Ford in the baking competition series, which is co-hosted by Lee and “American Pie” actor Jason Biggs.

“The camaraderie and sense of family among the contestants. They lifted each other up. Many of the bakers would actually leave their station and go help the other one.”

Sandra Lee

“Blue Ribbon Baking Championship” co-host talking about one of the things that sets the show apart

other one is with a character that I launched on “Today” with Jenna Bush. Her name is Aunt Sandy Clause, which is what my niece and nephews call me. During COVID, I wrote a ton of content, so I have a lot of TV show (ideas). I would love to do a reality show based on real estate and home staging. My sister has a huge real estate and staging business in Seattle. I want to go up there and do a family reality show.

Besides its premise, what makes “Blue Ribbon Baking Championship” different than other cooking competition shows?

The camaraderie and sense of family among the contestants. They lifted each other up. Many of the bakers would actually leave their station and go help the other one. I don’t think the world sees who we really are as Americans. They hear the politics and they hear the kerfuffle in the news. I think that it’s going to be kind of amazing for viewers from other countries to get to watch us and to get to see what our fairs look like and our lifestyle and how kind people are. And — unlike other competitive shows — we shoot in real time. There was no stop and pick up the next day. We were shooting an 18-hour day. There was no cool-off time or swap outs.

What’s your first love? Cooking? Baking? Entrepreneurship?

My first love is cake decorating. When kids were playing with dolls, I was playing with powdered sugar and Wilton icing tips. When most kids were looking at Teen Beat, I was getting cake decorating books.

What do you do in your spare time?

I antique a lot. I’m a huge antique collector. I also go to stores to see how others shop. I can see things differently



The 10 pastry chef contestants on the new show compete for a blue ribbon prize and a shot at \$100,000.

than most people walking up an aisle. I can stand back and scan a room and I can see where the voids are. I can see what’s needed. I can calculate what’s missing and how to fix it.

That must help in business.

It’s very helpful. There’s always the challenge of people saying no, like with “Semi-Homemade,” everybody said, “No, it won’t work.” I go, “I’m telling you, it’s going to work.” Finally, I had to write two books to even get the show. And the show was No. 1 for, like, five years. I went to them and I said, “We’ve got to do a show called ‘Money Saving Meals.’” They said, “No one wants to save money on food.” So I called my publisher. I go, “I want to do a new book and I want to call it ‘Money Saving Meals.’” And they go, “Great.” We had it on the shelf within a couple months. The Food Network saw it, and called me back. They’re like, “Oh my gosh, we need a show called ‘Money Saving Meals.’”

Let’s jump ahead to the holidays. How many Christmas trees do you put up?

It depends on how many rooms I have in the house. I like to put one in every room. There’s certainly something in every single room of my house.

Do you stick to a theme, or is each tree different?

If you’re decorating your rooms differently, and most people do, then I think that trees should represent those rooms. I don’t go over the top, unless you think that toilet paper with Santas on it is over the top, which I don’t.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

New perspectives on lice season

It might be time to change our point of view on these parasitic scalp hitchhikers

BY CAITLIN GIBSON
The Washington Post

The email arrives on a Friday afternoon. The subject line is a three-word horror story: *Lice at camp.*

“No,” I say, out loud, even though I am alone.

I immediately flash back to last year, when my preschooler brought a headful of lice home and I paid hundreds of dollars to a trained lice-removal specialist to quell my panic, followed by 14 days spent dutifully combing my children’s hair with a professional-grade comb, scrutinizing every particle of scalp detritus and repressing the urge to gag.

This time, mercifully, there are no signs of bugs when I anxiously examine my daughter’s head. But plenty of others aren’t as lucky. Just say the word “lice” in a group of parents and you’ll know who has experienced the scourge: Their faces will squinch, their mouths will twist, their shoulders will hitch upward in a shudder of revulsion.

This is especially the case right now, as summer nears its end and kids everywhere migrate from camps and family vacations back to classrooms, with crowns of parasitic hitchhikers in tow.

We are in peak lice season, and the lice seem to arrive, always, at the moment when we are least equipped to deal with them. If you’ve endured them even once, odds are you still have at least a touch of lingering paranoia and phantom itching.

“Every time I see a speck in my kids’ hair, I’m like, ‘Let me look through your head,’” says Michelle Mervis, a mom of two in Washington whose family has dealt with lice numerous times, including twice this summer. “Oh, my God, I’ve given them a complex.” She’s planning to comb her kids’ hair regularly between now and the start of the school year, or possibly between now and their teenage years — “They do outgrow this at *some* point, right?”

We might triumph in our individual battles against lice, but the war itself has been raging since the dawn of humankind, and we are not winning. Our prehistoric ancestors scratched at their heads the same way we do. Lice eggs have been found glued to the petrified hairs of ancient mummies in Egypt and South America. About 3,700 years ago, one desperate soul in Israel etched a timeless plea into the ivory of a small comb, unearthed by archaeologists in 2016: *May this tusk root out the lice of the hair and the beard.* It is, to date, the first known human sentence written in an alphabet. (“I suspect the last human sentence will also be about lice,” said one tormented mom friend, who has battled lice half a dozen times, when I shared this fact with her.)

They were there when Hannibal and his army crossed the Alps. They were there when both World Wars were fought. Now



“When lice come knocking and we don’t understand them, we make them more formidable than they really are.”

Nancy Pfund

co-founder of the Washington-based Lice Happens mobile removal service

it is 2024 and we have Mars rovers and artificial intelligence and, still, lice. We can’t change the reality of them. Should we try to change the way we think about them?

Nancy Pfund believes so.

“I’ve developed a pretty deep respect for them as creatures that have perfected the ability to continue to be here,” says Pfund, who co-founded Lice Happens, a mobile lice-removal service based in the Washington area, after her twin sister and her children dealt with lice in 2008. “One way I look at lice, in theory, is as a little gift given to a family that is just a reminder of how precious normal, day-to-day life is, because that’s all you want back after lice.”

This feels true to Megan Gray, whose kindergartner brought lice home four days before Christmas last year. She’d been consumed by the chaos of preparing for the holiday, and then all of that was instantly eclipsed by a panicked dash to a pharmacy, followed by furious shampooing, followed by a late night spent combing her son’s hair while he watched many, many episodes of “Bluey.” She was successful: By the next day, she says, the school nurse couldn’t spot a single nit on her son’s head. (There were, however, seven adult lice in Gray’s hair.)

In the end, “it was a reminder that all the things you’re worrying about are tomorrow’s problems,” Gray says. “I had been worrying a lot about Christmas, and that mattered less, suddenly, because I had to just take care of what was in front of me. In a way, it was a gift?” She laughs. “A gift of mindfulness, and being present.” Or perhaps a gift of perspective: “Thank all that is good and holy that it was not bedbugs.”

Maybe we should think of lice that way — as what they are not. They are not bedbugs, or ticks, or fleas. They do not fly, they do not jump, they cannot survive for long apart from a human head, and they do not transmit disease. This is information Pfund emphasizes to clients, she says; she wants them to learn about lice and feel empowered to get rid of them. She doesn’t want parents to feel freaked out or ashamed when they find bugs or nits (aka lice eggs) on their kids’ heads.

“When lice come knocking and we don’t understand them,” Pfund says, “we make them more formidable than they really are.”

We tend to consider lice a childhood problem, but adults are frequent collateral. Ask Katrina Southard, who, the day before going to the hospital to deliver her baby in 2017, hugged a friend twice at a party, their heads close together. Southard would learn (much) later that her friend unknowingly had lice, courtesy of her preschool-age child.

“A week or so after I gave birth to my first and only baby, my scalp started itching,” Southard says. For weeks, she thought the itching was just another postpartum symptom among a constellation of physical weirdnesses; at one point she wandered into a cosmetic store and mentioned “postpartum scalp itching” to a saleswoman, who told her this was indeed a thing (it is not a thing), and sold her a hot oil treatment. A few weeks after that, Southard scratched her head and plucked a live bug from her hair.

A dear friend had just dealt with lice with her kids, Southard says, and she came over to comb out Southard’s hair, for hours, while Southard nursed her baby.

When she remembers this, she’s actual-

ly rather moved.

“There is something very intimate about that,” she says. “That’s a real friend.”

Now, when Southard thinks of lice, she recalls a sense of connection — to her friend, and also to the natural order of things, from which even modern humans can’t escape.

“I think we have this sense that we’re disconnected from, or different from, other animals — like we’re outside the environment somehow,” she says. “But when you have other things living on you, you’re like, ‘Oh, I guess we are all here together.’”

Marina Ascunce, an evolutionary geneticist at the U.S. Agriculture Department in Gainesville, Fla., marvels at the long history of this particular relationship: “As an evolutionary scientist, you consider that lice have been there with us throughout our evolution, and that’s amazing.”

Ascunce started studying lice DNA in 2010, understanding that the tiny bodies of our parasites contain vital information about the history of their hosts. By analyzing the genetic variation of more than 270 lice specimens, she and her colleagues identified two distinct genetic groups, and found that some lice from the Americas had genetic components of both — potentially the result of interbreeding. The scientists hypothesized that one group of lice had accompanied the first humans to cross into North America, between 15,000 and 35,000 years ago; and the other arrived only hundreds of years ago, on the heads of European colonizers.

The implications are significant, Ascunce explains: Lice offer a meaningful way to understand where and when our ancestors migrated, how they lived and with whom they interacted. The potential discoveries are thrilling, she says: “If we study more lice from other parts of the world, then our data can be combined, and we can answer even more questions about human evolution.”

Lice are still telling stories of where we’ve been — whether that’s the Bering Land Bridge tens of thousands of years ago, or a Boy Scout camping trip last weekend. They are showing us who we really are: exhausted, overwhelmed people desperate to reclaim some modicum of control over our daily lives. Lice reveal our place in the animal kingdom, among the myriad creatures who also have their own personalized strains of parasitic companions. They remind us to appreciate the people in our lives who love us enough (or are well compensated enough) to help us with the grossest of tasks.

Still, I have to ask Ascunce: Will we *ever* be free of them?

On the video call screen, she pauses and half-smiles, considering a nuanced response. She had lice once as a child, growing up in Argentina; her sister had them nearly every year, and it drove their mother mad. Ascunce’s own daughter never brought lice home — she was luckier. No one wants lice in their own household. But in terms of humanity at large, there is no sign of lice going anywhere soon.

“They are an annoyance,” Ascunce says. Then she smiles in earnest. “But as a researcher, I don’t want them to disappear.”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



MIKE SCHNEIDER/AP

Anita Stevenson, left, leads preschoolers and parents in a parachute game Aug. 1 during story time at a public library in Sumter County, Fla. The event has become a lifeline for young families in the Wildwood-The Villages metro area as one of the few activities offered to kids.

Balancing families, retirees

Fastest-growing place for children is in the metro with the oldest residents

By MIKE SCHNEIDER
Associated Press

As one of the world’s largest retirement communities, The Villages in central Florida is known for its endless golf courses, having the oldest median age in the United States and its traffic-stopping golf-cart parades usually supporting a Republican candidate during campaign season. What it’s not known for is kids.

Yet the area that is home to The Villages has become the fastest-growing metro for young children in the U.S. this decade.

The number of children age 14 and younger has grown this decade by 18.4% in the Wildwood-The Villages metro area. The big reason is that the working-age population has risen by 19.1%, making it also the fastest-growing metro area in the U.S. for that age group this decade, according to population estimates released this summer by the U.S. Census Bureau.

“Someone has to provide services to that growing population of retirees and many of these workers will be young adults with children who live in the county,” said Stefan Rayer, population program director at the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Those workers include lawn care providers, plumbers, electricians, financial advisers, nurses, construction workers, real estate agents, roofers and physical therapists for a retirement community that has grown from a remote and rural enclave to one of the fastest-growing places in the U.S. since the 1990s.

The Wildwood-The Villages metro area had more than 151,500 residents last year, most of whom are retirees, up from 130,000 residents in 2020.

Because of the demographics of the area, raising children has its challenges.

Morgan Philion, 31, has to drive to a neighboring central Florida county for obstetrician visits or to take her 2-year-old son to a pediatric dentist since there aren’t any appointments available locally. When they want to visit a children’s museum, they drive 80 miles southwest along Interstate 75 to Tampa.

Story time at the local public library has become a lifeline for Philion and other young families in the Wildwood-The Villages metro area.

“It’s really hard finding things to do, and this is the one activity they offer kids,” Philion said.

During weekdays, librarians including Anita Stevenson lead anywhere from a dozen to two dozen preschoolers in songs about reading, shooting bubbles from a handheld device and telling stories with titles like “Betty Goes Bananas” and “Cock-a-Doodle Quack! Quack!”

“There are a lot of new families moving in,” said Stevenson, pointing toward recently built apartment buildings down the street.

Eldresah St. Fleurant, 28, her husband and two young daughters were among those families who moved into the apartments by the library after having difficulty finding a home, since many communities in the area were geared only toward people age 55 and older.

“It’s good and it’s bad,” St. Fleurant said about raising children in the area.

On the one hand, the breakneck growth offers countless job opportunities and new store openings, but the county also lacks family-friendly facilities like an urgent care center for children. The library’s story time is an exception.

“If you don’t come to something like this, you’re not going to find young families cruising around here,” she said.

No one younger than age 19 can live in The Villages, and at least one member of the household must be 55 or older. Because of the age restriction, the growth of young families has been in some small communities just outside The Villages, like Wildwood and Oxford.

Recognizing the youth surge, The Villages recently opened Middleton, a master-planned residential development adjacent to the retirement community geared toward employees and their families.

For older residents of The Villages like 60-year-old Chris Stanley, the influx of families is a breath of fresh air, but she worries about the growing lack of affordable housing and overcrowded schools. The school district has 13 schools for its 9,400 students. The highly rated Villages Charter School is limited primarily to the children of employees.

“We are here until we croak. We’re frogs,” Stanley joked. “We built this enormous infrastructure here and we need people to run it. If we don’t have young people here with children who are able to afford living here, and can pay for day care and housing, we have a real problem here.”

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Choosing your words, and your battles, wisely

“Kids! Dinner!” I often bellowed shamelessly from the window of our fourth floor walk-up on Patch Barracks when our family was stationed in Germany. The Vermont Strasse playground adjacent to our building was typically crowded with military children at that time of day, but if I yelled loudly enough, our three children always came running.

Primarily, I use words to communicate information, give directions, ask questions and explain things. As a busy military wife and mother of three, I’ve adopted a no-nonsense approach involving direct and informal use of words, with plenty of colloquialisms thrown in.

In order to get my family to clean up after dinner, I might say, “Okay kids, everyone’s gotta pitch in. This kitchen’s not gonna clean itself, ya know.” At bedtime, I’d say, “C’mon kiddos, time to hit the hay! And don’t dilly-dally unless you wanna drive your poor mother cuckoo.” And in the morning, “For criminy’s sake, you kids are slow as molasses!”

I thought I was being a good mother, but I recently discovered that some people in today’s divisive, politically correct, oversensitive, everyone’s-a-victim, cancel culture society of snowflakes believe that by using the word “kids,” I degraded my children.

“Children aren’t baby goats!” they argue, offended that lazy, inarticulate reprobates like me compare children to dirty, braying farm animals.

As someone who raised goats when I was a kid (see what I did there?), my children should feel fortunate that I compared them with such sweet, affectionate creatures. Trust me, locking horns with my billy goats, Popeye and Brutus, was easier than getting Hayden, Anna and Lilly to eat their broccoli.

Yet, the belief that the term “kids” is demeaning to children persists today. While it’s true that the word’s Norse origins prove a clear connection to goats, its use as a reference to human children dates back to 16th-century England as a term of endearment similar to “lambs.”

My casual language also got me into trouble on social media, when I inadvertently started a dumpster fire on Facebook by posting the following question in a military spouse forum: “Do you think military brats are more resilient than their civilian peers?”

“Your use of ‘military brats’ is offensive!” one milspouse immediately shot back, firing the opening salvo of a war of words that raged on for hours until the Facebook page’s monitor shut off the comments. In the melee, I was thrown summarily under the bus by one faction of military spouses, who characterized me as a careless “older” military spouse oblivious to contemporary perceptions about archaic and offensive language. Other milspouses and actual military brats came to my defense, commenting that they took pride in the term “military brat” because of the honor and sacrifice it represents.

When the digital dust settled, I researched the history of the term “military brats” and found that the Facebook fracas was much ado about nothing. Research reported by the U.S. Department of Defense indicates that the term “military brat” has two possible origins, neither of which imparts any negative meaning.

In the British Army, the term “barrack rat” was used to describe children of soldiers in the 18th century, and it is believed that the phrase may have been shortened to “brat” sometime thereafter. Also, children of British Army soldiers posted to British colonies were referred to as British Regiment Attached Travelers, or B.R.A.T.s.

With so many real conflicts in our world today, it seems silly to wage wars of words over what is often used as a term of endearment. With only good intentions, I’m proud to say, my kids are military brats.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa’s book, “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.” Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

WEATHER, MAN!

BY SCOTT HOGAN AND KATIE HALE / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Scott Hogan is a patent lawyer in Michigan. Katie Hale, of London, is the assistant crossword editor for The Los Angeles Times. This is their third collaboration for The Times, all Sundays. Scott pitched the idea for this one, and Katie helped flesh out the rest of the examples. Their joint favorite is 125-Across.

ACROSS

1 “Aw, phooey!”

7 Tiki-bar cocktail

13 Fluid holder

16 Resort amenity

19 ____ pork (Chinese dish)

20 Register

21 Tech purchase when traveling abroad

23 High chance of parties celebrating a baby’s arrival?

25 Formula 1 powerhouse

26 Its national symbol is the khanjar, a dagger worn for self-defense

27 Casino fixture

28 Rental agreement

30 A li’l bit

31 Collars

33 Member of a grungy Gen-Z subculture

35 Where one might sleep in a cabin

37 A cherry represents one, in Arcimboldo’s famous portrait

40 A pear represents one, in Arcimboldo’s famous portrait

42 Like one’s mental state before morning coffee?

46 Section of the Rockies

48 Stare in astonishment

50 Temporary hair-color treatment

51 Subject of museums in Richmond, Va., and Baltimore, Md.

52 Terrible TV reception?

54 Madden of fashion

56 Biting

58 Desert ____

59 Feels lousy

61 Maker of precious violins

63 Loads

64 High-pitched bird calls

67 Furry friend of Rosita

69 ____ Chimpsky, primate raised as a human in a landmark language-acquisition study

71 What you might find on the counter after making ice cream sundaes?

76 Long, long time

77 Earned

78 What a detective might be demoted to

81 ____ for Sore Eyes (punny name for an ophthalmologist’s office)

84 Dressy tie

87 “The Elephants” painter, 1948

89 Start of an incantation

90 Informal beckoning

92 Schleps

94 Eclectic holiday-party playlist?

97 Shout accompanying a realization

98 Photographer Arbus

100 Reflex that really is contagious

102 Brand of hydrating drops

103 “The Road Not Taken” enjoyed over breakfast?

106 Content

108 Seventh notes on scales

109 Not keep hidden from

110 Silently plot revenge, say

112 Works of acclaim

114 Kit-chats?

116 Filmmaker Cameron

118 “It’s ____!” (“Full speed ahead!”)

120 Surname of the only all-brother outfield in M.L.B. history

123 G.I. morale booster

125 Smashing clarinets and oboes?

129 “It stands to reason . . .”

130 Skips over

131 “We have that in common”

132 Shrub with small, yellow flowers

133 Shooter in a game of marbles

134 Without profit

135 ____ Corner, suburb of Washington, D.C.

DOWN

10 Some skating jumps

11 Shortcuts in a chase scene, perhaps

12 N.H.L. great Kovalchuk

13 Social programs like Medicare, Medicaid and disability insurance, collectively

14 Fruity finish?

15 Line on an auto graph

16 Protégé, say

17 Saucy

18 Puccini’s “Recondita armonia,” e.g.

22 Bit of marketing

24 Lip

29 Mouthwatering stuff

32 One who manages to get by?

34 Company whose “W” stands for “Werke”

36 Motorcycle-engine units, for short

37 Set of principles

38 “That is . . . not good”

39 And others, in Latin

41 Bigheaded sort

43 Quake

44 Wonderland bird

45 Forcefully throw, in modern slang

47 Work supervisor

49 Piercing tool

53 Place to get a pricey cab

55 Compacted, with “down”

57 February 14 and March 17, e.g.

60 Calm

62 Closes, as a deal

65 Babe in the (Hundred Acre) Wood

66 Arm bone

68 Purported influence on the lyrics of “I Am the Walrus”

70 Sort

72 Ham

73 Running out of gear

74 German word that sounds like a number in English

75 Turn in

79 Certain Caribbean islander, informally

80 Lines for which x = 0

81 Rip-off

82 “Methinks,” online

83 Rip off

85 They provide a change of scenery

86 Bestow

88 “That’s so sweet!”

91 Removes, as from a draft

93 Widespread, as a problem

95 Spot to watch, in brief

96 Gallop off, say

99 Connections

101 Got down

104 Animals that can grow lungs after being born

105 Comic actor Patton

107 Bird on a Canadian dollar

111 Pay

113 Reduces, with “down”

114 “The Ghost and Mrs. ____” (1947 film)

115 Whom Jacob confronts the day after wrestling with God

117 Greek theaters

119 Point to “get”

121 Suspicious of

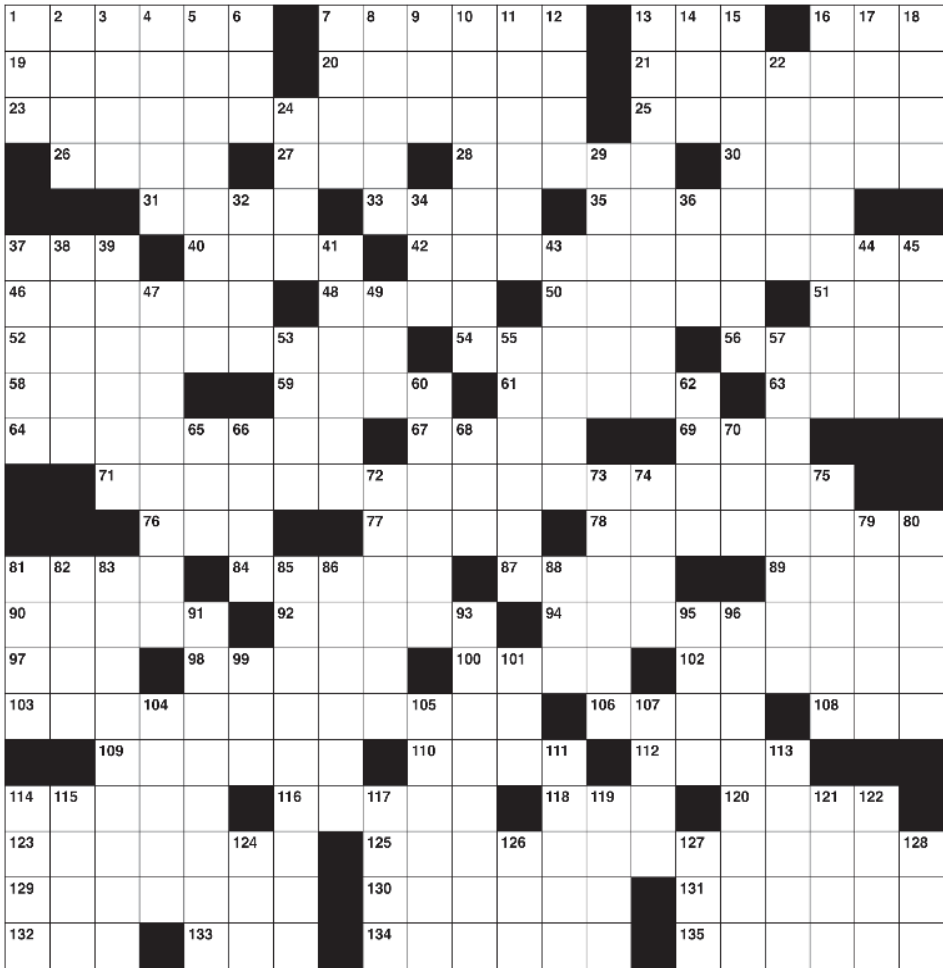
122 Noodle used in shabu-shabu

124 Actress Thurman

126 Rigmarole

127 “Skedaddle!”

128 ••• — — •••



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127 “Skedaddle!”

128 ••• — — •••

GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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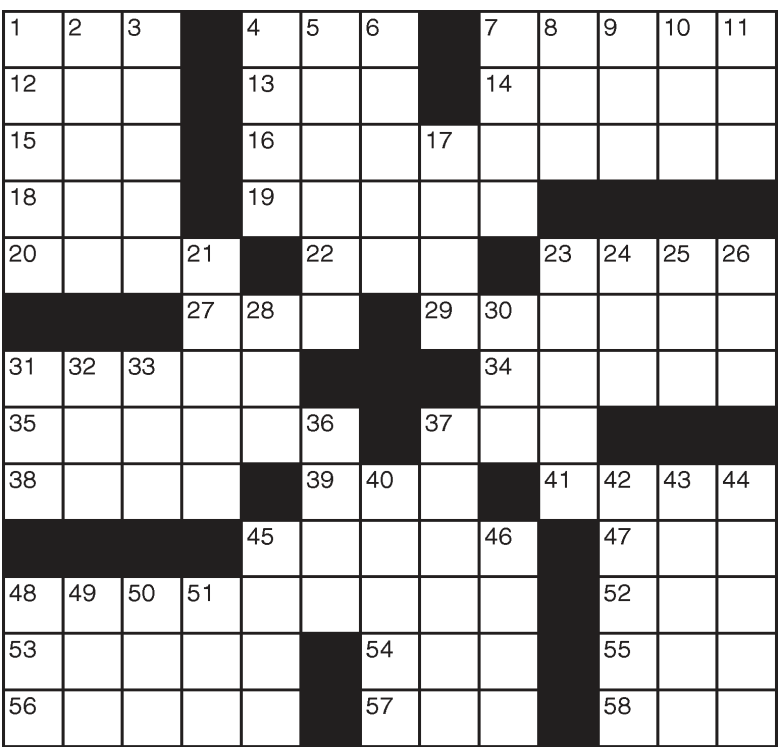
Bizarro



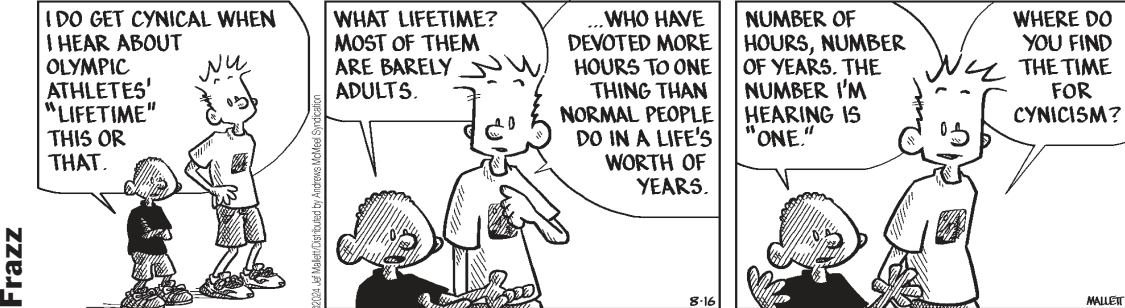
Loose Parts



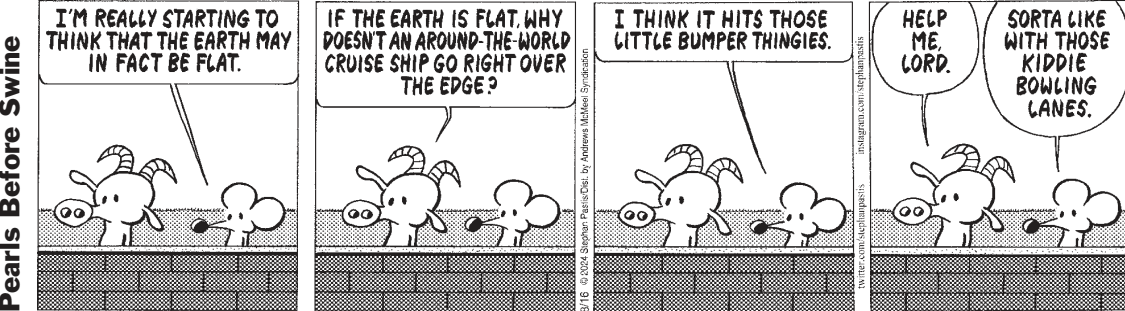
Eugene Sheffer Crossword



Frazz



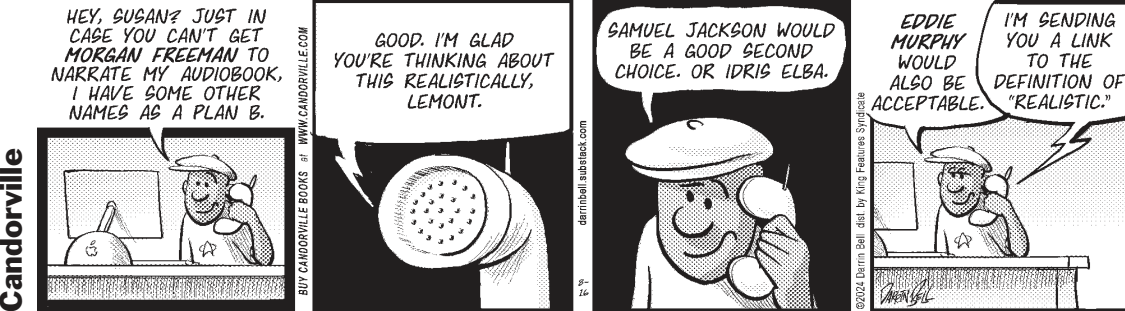
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



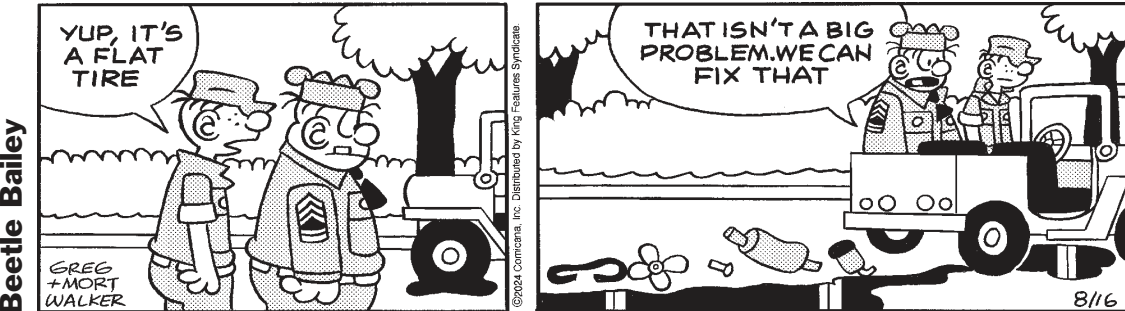
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



ACROSS

- 1 Uncle, to Pedro
- 4 St. with a panhandle
- 7 Seizes
- 12 Pt. of speech
- 13 Vegas opener
- 14 Painter's stand
- 15 Salonga of "Miss Saigon"
- 16 Arm or leg
- 18 Dig in
- 19 Bo of "10"
- 20 Downhill racer
- 22 — Salvador
- 23 Slender
- 27 "Guinness Book" suffix
- 29 Lengthen
- 31 Early synthesizers
- 34 Cries from sties
- 35 Living
- 37 MSN rival
- 38 Youngsters
- 39 Guffaw syllable
- 41 Dalai —
- 45 Party beverage
- 47 Garfield, for one
- 48 Hand over, in a way
- 52 Vat
- 53 Defy authority
- 54 Stannum
- 55 — pro nobis
- 56 Indian tea region
- 57 Rm. coolers
- 58 D.C. baseballer

DOWN

- 1 Yarns
- 2 Perfect
- 3 Egg-shaped
- 4 Skedaddled
- 5 Least strict
- 6 "Ad —" (2019 sci-fi film)
- 7 Tech whiz
- 8 Aries
- 9 "— was saying ..."
- 10 Wager
- 11 Devious
- 17 Actress Russo
- 21 Painter of ballerinas
- 23 Unmoving
- 24 Novelist
- 25 Pen filler
- 26 ER workers
- 28 Tax form ID

- 30 Tic-tac-toe loser
- 31 Bumped into
- 32 Kitchen gadget brand
- 33 Mel of Cooperstown
- 36 Dull sound of impact
- 37 Polar
- 40 "Sweet Love" singer Baker
- 42 Take, as advice
- 43 Tierney of "The Affair"
- 44 Facing the pitcher
- 45 Tropical tree
- 46 Coop group
- 48 Time line period
- 49 Ballot marks
- 50 "Conan" channel
- 51 "Angie" actor

Answer to Previous Puzzle



8-16

CRYPTOQUIP

CGSI UHMG I YFN TSBB S
EYBHTN YXXHTNQ CGY HR
USHFISHFHF M YQJNQ HF SF
HTN QHFL? S RLSIN IQYYENQ.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SINCE THAT MAN MADE A SIZABLE FORTUNE FROM ORGANIZING DEBUTANTE BALLS, IS HE A COTILLION-AIRE?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals I



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 Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
 Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

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OPINION

Paris Olympics’ success a hard act for LA to follow

BY LEE HOCKSTADER
The Washington Post

PARIS
 After the epic success of the Paris Olympics, the risk for the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles is that the inevitable contrast will cast a harsh light on the dysfunction afflicting so many big U.S. cities.

It’s tough to think of two major first-world cities more dissimilar than Paris and Los Angeles, and not only on the obvious points of scale (Paris’ dense 40 square miles vs. L.A.’s sprawling 503), public transit (Paris’ 4.7 billion in annual ridership vs. LA’s 327 million) and walkability (Paris: yes; LA: no).

Those factors will put the Olympics in the City of Angels at a qualitative disadvantage compared with the City of Light. But LA staged the Games with impressive success in 1984, and Mayor Karen Bass is laying plans to mitigate the city’s most glaring challenges for 2028.

Taking a cue from Paris, which prioritized minimizing the Olympics’ carbon impact and maximizing their sustainability, the mayor has pledged a “no-car Games,” with venues accessible only by public transportation, including a fleet of several thousand borrowed buses. And she says she’ll ask LA businesses to allow employees to work from home for the Games’ duration, a plausible way to ease traffic in a city notoriously hooked on driving.

Those measures might help. But the more confounding challenges arise not from LA’s layout and infrastructure but from its profound social disorders, which will be all but impossible to patch.

If the Paris Games were a showcase for the city’s gorgeous venues and iconic monuments, which wowed the world anew despite

their familiarity, LA’s Olympics might easily throw into relief a dystopian downtown, where thousands of unhoused people sleep in tents and on sidewalks, and dangerous, drug-infested neighborhoods.

People on both sides of the Atlantic know, of course, that America’s problems with violent crime, homelessness and substance abuse dwarf those across most of Europe.

That doesn’t mean Europe is a problem-free paradise, or that France isn’t beset by episodic strikes and street protests; pockets of poverty; ingrained racism and discriminatory policing; or its own surge in narcotics trafficking and drug-related violence.

But it remains the case that the range and depth of U.S. social ills, especially in cities, are jaw-dropping when measured against Europe’s. Even for many Americans broadly aware of the disparity, the stark statistics might come as a shock.

For example, it is well understood that the homicide rate in most European capitals is low compared with those of most major U.S. cities. Yet it might still be jarring to consider that there were roughly as many people murdered last year in Omaha, Neb., (population 485,000) as in Paris (population 2.2 million). That number was about 30.

France’s No. 2 city by population, Marseille, has been the subject of lurid headlines as the epicenter of a recent spike in drug trafficking and violence. But it looks relatively safe when measured against Indianapolis, which, with a similar population, had quadruple Marseille’s 49 murders last year.

As for Los Angeles, its murder rate last year was more than six times higher than Paris’ — even as homicides declined sharply in LA while they rose in Paris.

That should be food for thought for Bass,

I lost my wife on 9/11. The plea deals still should go forward.

BY THEODORE B. OLSON
Special to The Washington Post

Recently, three of the men responsible for the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, entered into signed plea agreements with the government. As someone who lost his wife in those attacks — and served as solicitor general in their aftermath — this was not the justice I had originally hoped for. Yet hearing the news, all I felt was relief. It was high time 9/11 be put to rest.

My relief, however, was short-lived. About 48 hours later, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin moved to withdraw the agreements.

I believe this was an error. The plea deals were the best possible resolution to the tragedy of 9/11 and should go forward.

Under the signed agreements, these men responsible for the deaths of thousands of Americans would admit their actions and plead guilty to all the charged offenses. They would waive their right to any appeal and would have to answer the long-held questions of 9/11 victim families and listen to their statements about the impact of the devastating attacks. In return, alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, as well as his co-defendants Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi, would not have to face the death penalty. Mohammed would then begin to serve a minimum sentence of 2,976 years — one year for each victim of his plot. He would spend the rest of his life in obscurity in prison.

I have grappled with the complexities of the 9/11 prosecution for more than two decades. I had at first supported the military commissions by which the terrorist suspects detained

at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, are being tried but ultimately came to realize that they were doomed to collapse under their own weight. We had hoped to pursue justice expeditiously by creating an entirely new legal system, with untested rules of evidence. But despite the government’s best intentions, we have been mired in seemingly endless litigation, largely focused on the treatment of detainees and on government secrecy.

Of the roughly 780 men detained at Guantanamo at some point since the facility opened, there have been eight convictions. Six of these were by plea bargain, three of which were overturned and three remain on appeal.

Because of this flawed system, there has been no justice, no resolution and no finality for 9/11 victims or their loved ones in the 23 years since the attacks. The case against Mohammed and his co-defendants epitomizes this failure. Since they were charged in 2008, four different judges have presided over their case, and no trial date has ever been set. And although prosecuting the 9/11 defendants in federal civilian courts would have been the right decision 15 or 20 years ago, Congress foreclosed that option in 2010 by banning the transfer of detainees to the United States for any purpose. This is why a growing chorus of voices — from 9/11 family members to human rights groups to military commission officials themselves — supports these plea agreements.

Some argue that abandoning the death penalty for the defendants betrays 9/11 victims. I understand and respect those views — particularly from victims’ family members. But as

who attended the Paris Games’ Opening Ceremonies, returned there last weekend for the Closing Ceremonies and pledged to emulate lessons from the city’s Olympian achievements.

So should LA’s homeless population — some 46,000 in the city, about 10 times the number in Paris, and another 29,000 in surrounding Los Angeles County. Ahead of the Paris Olympics, French authorities bused several thousand homeless people to temporary accommodations outside the capital. It’s unlikely that LA would try the same feat, let alone manage it.

LA won’t be the first crime- or drug-ridden city to host an Olympics. Rio de Janeiro, where the 2016 Games were held, struggled to keep fans and athletes safe against its own squalid backdrop of violence and insecurity. The resulting headlines — dignitaries robbed at knifepoint, a crowd of stone-throwers attacking an Olympics bus carrying journalists — didn’t do Rio any favors.

Plenty of factors beyond crime, safety, drugs and urban dysfunction will play a role in LA’s success or failure as an Olympics host. With Hollywood as a touchstone and one of the world’s most vibrant music scenes as another, it’s a good bet the city will figure out how to generate buzz and throw a great party.

But it’s worth remembering that the Olympics aren’t just a stage for an array of exciting sporting events. They’re also a crucible for the host city, and the spotlight can be harsh. If Los Angeles can’t keep the Games safe, gunplay might steal the glory from the world’s finest athletes.

Lee Hockstader has been The Washington Post’s European Affairs columnist, based in Paris, since 2023. Previously he was a member of the Post editorial board; a national correspondent, a foreign correspondent, and a local reporter.

both a 9/11 family member and a lawyer, I have reluctantly concluded that the government has proved itself unable to bring this case to trial, secure convictions and obtain death sentences that would survive the inevitable federal court appeals.

Instead, pleas in exchange for life sentences are the surest way to guarantee that the defendants die in prison. I agree with the 9/11 prosecutors who told family members, “It is our collective, reasoned, and good-faith judgment that this resolution is the best path to finality and justice in this case.”

And that is why I was disheartened that Austin mistakenly believed all victims’ families demanded commission trials and moved to withdraw the agreements negotiated and signed by his own prosecutors. It is far from clear that he can legally do so. When he authorized the prosecutors two years ago to engage in negotiations, he and everyone else involved knew that the plea-bargain terms for Mohammed had to include an admission of guilt in exchange for life imprisonment. Since the contours of the negotiations for the potential plea bargain had to have been known to leaders in the Defense Department, Justice Department and even the White House, what changed?

Our government cannot justify continuing this flawed commissions prosecution. I urge the defense secretary to respect the judgment of his own prosecutors and reinstate the plea agreements. Only then can we begin to close this painful chapter in our nation’s history.

SCOREBOARD/SOCCER

TENNIS

Barranquilla Open
Wednesday
At Parque Distrital de Raquetas
Barranquilla
Purse: \$115,000
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16
Viktoria Hrucnakova, Slovakia, def. Emi-na Bektas (5), United States, 7-5, 7-6 (4).
Mariam Bolkvadze, Georgia, def. Elsa Jacquemot (8), France, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (4), 7-6 (3).
Suzan Lamens (6), Netherlands, def. Francesca Jones, Britain, 6-4, 1-6, 6-4.
Anastasiya Soboleva, Ukraine, def. Mar-tina Okalova, Slovakia, 6-4, 7-5.
Nadia Podoroska (4), Argentina, def. Gao Xinyu, China, 6-1, 2-0, ret.
Solana Sierra, Argentina, def. En-Shuo Liang, Taiwan, 6-4, 6-2.
Antonia Ruzic, Croatia, def. Varvara Lep-chenko, United States, 3-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Cincinnati Open
Wednesday
At Lindner Family Tennis Center
Cincinnati
Purse: \$6,795,555
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 64
Felix Auger-Aliassime, Canada, def. Aleksandar Kovacevic, United States, 6-3, 6-1.
Fabian Marozsan, Hungary, def. Coren-tin Moutet, France, 6-4, 7-6 (2).
Stefanos Tsitsipas (9), Greece, def. Jan-Lennard Struff, Germany, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Adrian Man-narino, France, 6-4, 3-6, 6-1.
Holger Rune (15), Denmark, def. Matteo Berrettini, Italy, 2-6, 6-1, 6-4.
Max Purcell, Australia, def. Tomas Ma-chac, Czechia, 6-4, 7-6 (1).
Jack Draper, Britain, def. Jaume Munar, Spain, 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (5).
Gael Monfils, France, def. Alexei Popy-rin, Australia, 7-5, 6-3.
Pablo Carreno Busta, Spain, def. Sebas-tian Korda (16), United States, 7-5, 6-1.
Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Argentina, def. Matteo Arnaldi, Italy, 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-2.

Round of 32
Jannik Sinner (1), Italy, def. Alex Michel-sen, United States, 6-4, 7-5.
Frances Tiafoe, United States, def. Lo-renzo Musetti (14), Italy, 6-3, 6-2.
Jordan Thompson, Australia, def. Sebas-tian Baez, Argentina, 6-2, 6-4.
Jiri Lehecka, Czechia, def. Daniil Medve-dev (4), Russia, 7-6 (2), 6-4.
Women's Singles
Round of 64
Diana Shnaider, Russia, def. Zhang Shuai, China, 6-1, 6-4.
Paula Badosa, Spain, def. Peyton Stearns, United States, 6-2, 7-5.
Anna Kalinskaya (13), Russia, def. Kate-rina Siniakova, Czechia, 1-6, 6-2, 6-3.
Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, def. Yuan Yue, China, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.
Taylor Townsend, United States, def. Caroline Dolehide, United States, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7).
Liudmila Samsonova (10), Russia, def. Wang Xinyu, China, 6-4, 6-4.
Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, Spain, def. Lu-cia Bronzetti, Italy, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (1).
Mirra Andreeva, Russia, def. Emma Na-varro (11), United States, 6-2, 6-2.
Karolina Muchova, Czechia, def. Dayana Yastremska, Ukraine, 7-6 (6), 6-2.
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, def. Beatriz Haddad Maia (17), Brazil, 4-6, 7-6 (4), 6-3.
Caroline Wozniacki, Denmark, def. An-helina Kalinina, Ukraine, 6-2, 6-4.
Magdalena Frech, Poland, def. Marie Bouzkova, Czechia, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup points leaders		
Through Aug. 12		
1.	Kyle Larson	779
2.	Tyler Reddick	774
3.	Chase Elliott	773
4.	Denny Hamlin	758
5.	Ryan Blaney	702
6.	Christopher Bell	701
7.	William Byron	678
8.	Martin Truex Jr.	662
9.	Brad Keselowski	636
10.	Alex Bowman	615
11.	Ty Gibbs	602
12.	Bubba Wallace	587
13.	Chris Buescher	584
14.	Ross Chastain	584
15.	Joey Logano	557
16.	Daniel Suárez	497
17.	Chase Briscoe	485
18.	Kyle Busch	465
19.	Todd Gilliland	454
20.	Austin Cindric	451
21.	Michael McDowell	431
22.	Carson Hocevar	414
23.	Josh Berry	412
24.	Noah Gragson	400
25.	Ricky Stenhouse Jr.	376

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL preseason
Thursday's games
Philadelphia at New England
Saturday's games
Atlanta at Baltimore
Cincinnati at Chicago
N.Y. Giants at Houston
Detroit at Kansas City
Minnesota at Cleveland
Arizona at Indianapolis
Buffalo at Pittsburgh
N.Y. Jets at Carolina
Seattle at Tennessee
Washington at Miami
L.A. Rams at L.A. Chargers
Tampa Bay at Jacksonville
Dallas at Las Vegas
Sunday's games
Green Bay at Denver
New Orleans at San Francisco
Thursday, Aug. 22
Indianapolis at Cincinnati
Chicago at Kansas City
Friday, Aug. 23
Jacksonville at Atlanta
Miami at Tampa Bay
San Francisco at Las Vegas
Saturday, Aug. 24
Baltimore at Green Bay
Carolina at Buffalo
L.A. Rams at Houston
Minnesota at Philadelphia
Pittsburgh at Detroit
L.A. Chargers at Dallas
N.Y. Giants at N.Y. Jets
Cleveland at Seattle
Sunday, Aug. 25
Tennessee at New Orleans
Arizona at Denver
New England at Washington

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions
BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League
BOSTON RED SOX — Placed LHP Cam Booser on the 15-day IL. Agreed to terms with RHP Brad Keller on a minor league contract. Activated OF Jarren Duran. Optioned 2B Enmanuel Valdez to Worcester (IL). Recalled LHP Brennan Bernardino from Worcester.
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Sent RHP John Schreiber to NW Arkansas (TL) on a rehab assignment.
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Optioned LHP Kenny Rosenberg to Salt Lake (PCL). Activated LHP Brock Burke.
MINNESOTA TWINS — Recalled RHP Louie Varland from St. Paul (IL). Optioned RHP Josh Winder to St. Paul.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Placed 2B Jazz Chisholm Jr. on the 10-day IL, retroactive to August 13. Designated RHP Enyel De Los Santos for assignment. Recalled SS Oswald Peraza from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (IL). Recalled RHP Will Warren from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre. Sent RHP Lou Trivino to Somerset (EL) on a rehab assignment.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Placed OF Brent Rooker on the paternity list. Sent LHP Kyle Muller outright to Las Vegas (PCL). Re-called 3B Armando Alvarez from Las Vegas.

National League
ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Optioned OF Alek Thomas to Reno (PCL). Recalled SS Blaze Alexander from Reno.
ATLANTA BRAVES — Designated RHP Parker Dunshee for assignment. Reinstated OF Michael Harris II from the 60-day IL. Optioned SS Eli White to Gwinnett (IL).
COLORADO ROCKIES — Sent LHP Josh Rogers outright to Albuquerque (PCL).
LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Reinstated RHP Walker Buehler from the 60-day IL. Optioned RHP Landon Knack to Oklahoma City (PCL).
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Sent RHP Carl Edwards Jr. outright to El Paso (PCL).
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Optioned SS Marco Luciano to Sacramento (PCL). Se-lected the contract of OF Grant McCray from Sacramento.
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Released RF Harold Ramirez.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
NEW YORK KNICKS — Re-signed F Jacob Toppin to a two-way contract.
Women's National Basketball Association
DALLAS WINGS — Released F Monique Billings and G Odyssey Sims.
FOOTBALL
National Football League
ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed LB Storey Jackson to a contract. Waived P Ryan San-born. Placed RB Robert Burns on the re-serve/PUP list.
BUFFALO BILLS — Placed WR Bryan Thompson on injured reserve after clear-ing waivers.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed DB Rudy Ford to a contract. Waived DB Clayton Is-bell. Waived DL Kemoko Turay from in-jured reserve.
CINCINNATI BENGALS — Placed DL Jeff Gunter on the retired list.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed LB Jere-miah Owusu-Koramoah to a three-year contract extension.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Signed OL Cole Ca-bral to a contract. Waived DL Shaka Toney with an injury designation.
DENVER BRONCOS — Signed LB Alec Mock to a contract. Waived DL Jaylon Al-

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA
EASTERN CONFERENCE
W L Pct GB
New York 21 4 .840 —
Connecticut 18 6 .750 2½
Indiana 11 15 .423 10½
Chicago 10 14 .417 10½
Atlanta 7 17 .292 13½
Washington 6 19 .240 15
WESTERN CONFERENCE
W L Pct GB
Minnesota 17 8 .680 —
Seattle 17 8 .680 —
Las Vegas 16 8 .667 ½
Phoenix 13 12 .520 4
Los Angeles 6 18 .250 10½
Dallas 6 19 .240 11
Tuesday's games
No games scheduled.
Wednesday's games
No games scheduled.
Thursday's games
Phoenix at Chicago
Washington at Minnesota
New York at Los Angeles
Friday's games
Phoenix at Indiana
Seattle at Atlanta
Connecticut at Dallas
Saturday's games
Minnesota at Washington
New York at Las Vegas
Chicago at Los Angeles

DEALS

len with an injury settlement.
DETROIT LIONS — Signed DB Javelin Gui-dry to a contract. Waived DB Morice Norris with an injury designation. Placed LB Da-Ron Gilbert on injured reserve after clear-ing waivers.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed RB Nate McCrary and LB Chris Russell to contracts. Waived LS Peter Bowden and DB Tyler Coyle.
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Signed WR Greg Ward to a contract. Re-signed DL Derek Rivers to a contract. Waived DB Kendall Brooks. Waived WR Ethan Fernea with an injury settlement.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Waived WR Kee-lan Doss from injured reserve with a set-tlement.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed TE Tucker Fisk to a contract. Waived TE Ben Mason.
LOS ANGELES RAMS — Signed DL Carlos Watkins to a contract.. Waived K Tanner Brown.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed DT Robert Cooper to a contract.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Placed LB Jabril Cox on injured reserve after clearing wai-vers.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Waived DE John Morgan III from injured reserve with a settlement.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Signed TE Ma-son Fairchild to a contract. Waived DL Kyl-er Baugh. Waived WR Jermaine Jackson from injured reserve with a settlement.
NEW YORK JETS — Waived DB Myles Jones and WR Hamze El-Zayat from in-jured reserve with a settlement.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Activated DB Cooper DeJean from the non-football in-jury (NFI) list.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed WR T.J. Luther and DB Zyon Gilbert to contracts. Placed WR Tarik Black on injured reserve after clearing waivers.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed DL Nick Williams to a contract. Waived LB Ezekiel Turner.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed LB East-on Gibbs to a contract. Waived DL Nathan Pickering with an injury designation.
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Signed QB Trace McSorley to a contract. Waived OL Mason Brooks. Waived OT Alex Aking-bulu from injured reserve with a settle-ment.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer
CHICAGO FIRE FC — Agreed to terminate the contract of MF Xherdan Shaqiri.
COLUMBUS CREW — Acquired G Abra-ham Romero from LAFC in exchange for \$50,000 of 2024 General Allocation Money (GAM).
PHILADELPHIA UNION — Recalled F Nel-son Pierre from Swedish side Skövde AIK, and will loan him to Charlotte Indepen-dence (USL).
REAL SALT LAKE — Acquired M/F Domin-ik Marczuk.
SAN ANTONIO FC — Acquired MF Jesús Brígido on loan from Chivas de Guadala-jara.
National Women's Soccer League
NJ/NY GOTHAM FC — Acquired \$100,000 in allocation money from the Utah Royals in exchange for a 2024 and 2025 interna-tional roster spot.
COLLEGE
GEORGIA TECH — Promoted B.J. Elder to assistant men's basketball coach. Named Greg Gary quality control specialist and James Forrest special assistant to the head coach. Announced Courtney Shealy Hart is resigning as swimming and diving coach.



ALASTAIR GRANT/AP

The U.S. Soccer Federation is trying to hammer out a deal to bring Mauricio Pochettino on as the men's national team coach.

Source: US trying to land Pochettino

By STEVE DOUGLAS
Associated Press

Mauricio Pochettino and the U.S. Soccer Federation are work-ing toward a deal for him to be-come the men's national team coach, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

Pochettino, the former Totten-ham, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain coach, has agreed to take over as the U.S. coach but the deal is not complete, the person said Thursday, speaking on the condi-tion of anonymity because the agreement was not finalized.

Pochettino would succeed Gregg Berhalter less than 22 months before the Americans host the 2026 World Cup.

The USSF declined to comment. A 52-year-old Argentine, Po-chettino would become the first foreign-born coach to head the U.S. since Jurgen Klinsmann from 2011-16. He has coached Es-panyol in Spain (2009-12), South-ampton (2013-14), Tottenham (2014-19) and Chelsea (2023-24) in England and Paris Saint-Germain in France (2021-22), leaving after winning a Ligue 1 title.

Matt Crocker, the USSF's sport-ing director in charge of the search, was Southampton's acade-my director when Pochettino started at that club.

The U.S. has four friendlies up-coming, against Canada on Sept. 7, New Zealand three days later, Panama on Oct. 12 and an oppo-nent to be determined on Oct. 15. The next competitive matches are a two-leg CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal in November.

Mikey Varas, a Berhalter assis-tant, could be in charge of the team for the September games and Pochettino could take over for the October matches.

Berhalter was fired on July 10, a week after the Americans were eliminated in the first round of the Copa America. He was hired in December 2018, was allowed to leave when his contract expired following a 3-1 loss to the Nether-lands in the second round of the 2022 World Cup, then was rehired in June 2023 to return in Septem-ber.

Pochettino would inherit a player pool led by Christian Pulis-ic, Weston McKennie and Tyler Adams, who have thrived with Eu-ropean clubs. But goalkeepers Matt Turner and Ethan Horvath and midfielder Gio Reyna have failed to gain playing time with first-tier teams, and Chris Ri-chards — at Crystal Palace in Eng-land — is the only central defender in his 20s playing regularly with a top-league European club.

Berhalter minimized Major League Soccer players, not using any during the Copa America. Be-fore heading the national team, Berhalter coached Columbus in MLS.

On-field discipline has been a problem, with defender Sergiño Dest getting two red cards in the past 13 months, and McKennie and winger Tim Weah receiving one each.

Pochettino was a central defender who played for Newell's Old Boys in Argentina and Espanyol, PSG and Bordeaux in Europe from the late 1980s until 2006. He made 20 appearances for Argenti-na, playing at the 1999 Copa Amér-ica and the 2002 World Cup, where his foul of Michael Owen led to David Beckham's penalty kick in Argentina's 1-0 group-stage loss.

AP sports writer Ronald Blum contributed to this report.

GOLF

PGA Tour releases schedule for 2025; no LIV involvement

By Doug Ferguson
Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The PGA Tour released its 2025 schedule Wednesday with no real surprises and every indication the tour and Saudi-backed LIV Golf will be going their separate ways at least until 2026.

PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said talks with the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia are “complicated discussions” but that the sides continue to meet as they try to work out a deal for an investment with the commercial PGA Tour Enterprises.

“As it relates to times and timeframes and where we are, I’d just say that we’re in a good place with the conversations,” he said. “That’s the most important thing.”

Asked if the release of the 2025 schedule suggested there would be no involvement with LIV through 2026 or 2027, Monahan replied, “That’s fair.”

The only real change in the schedule was putting the Memorial and the RBC Canadian Open back to where they were previously — the Memorial on May 29 through June 1, followed by the Canadian Open and then the U.S. Open at Oakmont.

In an effort to create space between the signature events this year, the Memorial was the week before the U.S. Open — a week after Memorial Day — and Memorial host Jack Nicklaus expressed his displeasure.

The 2025 season begins Jan. 2 with the Sentry Tournament of Champions at Kapalua. Without the Olympics on the calendar, the regular season ends Aug. 24 at the Tour Championship. The rest of the tournaments are in the same order as 2024.

The eight signature events will

now have a minimum of 72 players. There were times last year the field dipped below 70 if there was a withdrawal.

LIV Golf players, such as Jon Rahm, Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka, are only together with the best of the PGA Tour at the four majors, if eligible.

Rory McIlroy, who is on a transaction subcommittee that is negotiating with PIF, said he hasn’t been on a call since the first week of June. He had referenced conference calls that occur Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but “players aren’t expected to hop on those.”

Patrick Cantlay is on the board of the PGA Tour and the for-profit PGA Tour Enterprises and noticed that chatter has “definitely quieted down.”

“There’s going to be ebbs and flows, depending on what kind of information comes out or what announcements,” he said. “But I know all of us are working incredibly hard all the time to get the best outcome.”

The only other changes to the 2025 schedule are the venues. The BMW Championship is the only postseason event that moves around, and it will return to Caves Valley outside Baltimore next year, the course where Cantlay rallied to beat DeChambeau in a playoff.

The U.S. Open returns to Oakmont for the first time since 2016. The PGA Championship will be at Quail Hollow for the second time, and the British Open goes to Royal Portrush, a quick turnaround for the links in Northern Ireland where Shane Lowry won in 2019.

The Truist Championship is moving from Quail Hollow next year because of the PGA Championship and will be held at the Philadelphia Cricket Club.



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Scottie Scheffler hits onto a practice green at the St. Jude Championship Wednesday in Memphis, Tenn. The tournament is scheduled to begin Thursday, which kicks off the FedEx Cup playoffs.

Scheffler’s playoff amounts to Super Bowl at East Lake

By Doug Ferguson
Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Scottie Scheffler goes into the PGA Tour’s postseason as the No. 1 seed, and it’s not even close. Winning the FedEx Cup and its \$25 million bonus still feels far away.

The FedEx Cup playoffs begin Thursday at the St. Jude Championship for the top 70 from the season standings. The leading 50 players after this week move on to the BMW Championship, and from there it’s the top 30 who reach the season finale at the Tour Championship.

Scheffler doesn’t see this as a chance to put an exclamation point on his remarkable season of winning the Masters, an Olympic gold medal, The Players Championship and four signature events against the strongest fields.

The FedEx Cup playoffs are so fickle that no matter what he has done since January, and no matter what he does the next two weeks, the best he can do is start the Tour Championship at East Lake with a two-shot lead.

Scheffler was the No. 1 seed going into the Tour Championship each of the last two years. He lost a six-shot lead on the final day in 2022, and last year shot 73 in the third round to fall out of contention. East Lake has gone through a renovation, so maybe that will help.

“At the end of the day, it really comes down to East Lake,” he said Wednesday. “I didn’t have my best stuff at East Lake the last couple years. I’m kind of excited that they changed the course a little bit. It may give me some new vibes around there.”

For the PGA Tour, it was a choice between bringing some excitement to its version of a Super Bowl by having all 30 players with a mathematical chance, or rewarding someone with a dominant year that Scheffler has produced.

Since the PGA Tour switched formats in 2019 — two playoff events with quadruple the points, then the top seed starting the Tour Championship at 10-under par with a two-shot lead — none of the top seeds going into the playoff have won the big prize.

“You’ve got to figure out a way to strike a balance between it being a good TV product and it still being a season-long race,” Scheffler said. “Right now ... I know for a fact you can’t really quite call it the season-long race when it comes down to one stroke-play tournament on the same golf course each year.”

If it were a true season-long race, this would be something akin to a ceremonial three weeks before crowning Scheffler.

“That’s not good, either,” he said. “It would be great for me. But those aren’t the rules.”

The system now is great for Rory McIlroy, the only three-time FedEx Cup champion. He won the titles in 2016, 2019 and 2022, never as the top seed to start the postseason or even going into the Tour Championship.

“I love this format because if it wasn’t this format, then none of us would have a chance against Scottie because he’s so far ahead,” McIlroy said.

“Is it the fairest reflection of who’s been the best player of the year? Probably not,” McIlroy said. “But I think at this point we’re not in for totally fair. We’re in for entertainment

and for trying to put on the best product we possibly can.”

The more compelling part of the FedEx St. Jude Championship is toward the bottom. Top 50 is the golden ticket in this era of \$20 million signature events. The players who make it to the second playoff tournament — the top 50 — are guaranteed the eight signature events that have big money and elevated FedEx Cup points.

Even that advantage is no guarantee, however. Seven players — including Lucas Glover, the defending champion at the TPC Southwind — didn’t make it to the postseason.

Among those on the outside of the top 50 going into this week are Jordan Spieth at No. 63.

Scheffler does not have the stage to himself in the postseason. Xander Schauffele is No. 2 from not only winning the PGA Championship and the British Open, but ripping off nine top 10s in his last 12 starts.

In his favor is East Lake, a course he dominates. He has broken par in 25 of his 28 rounds at the Tour Championship — the other three were at even-par 70. He had the low 72-hole score in 2020 and matched the low score in 2023. Both times, he started too far back in the staggered start, and the FedEx Cup went to someone else.

Only twice has he gone to East Lake among the top 10 seeds, so these next two weeks will be critical for Schauffele to at least hold his position. Of course, he’s going to a new East Lake that has gone through a tee-to-green restoration project by architect Andrew Green.

“I’m looking at it like I’m going to be there for the first time,” Schauffele said.



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan implied there would be no involvement with LIV through at least 2027 despite continuing talks between the two sides to work out a deal.

AUTO RACING/WNBA

NASCAR revokes Dillon's playoff eligibility

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

Austin Dillon's automatic spot in NASCAR's playoff was revoked — though he retained his victory at Richmond Raceway — after it was determined the driver “crossed a line” in his intentional last-lap wreck of drivers Joey Logano and Denny Hamlin.

Dillon won for the first time in nearly two years in the Cup Series on Sunday night, but the checkered flag seemed out of reach before he spun Logano out of the way and then sent Hamlin into the wall as well — all in the final few seconds.

Logano and Hamlin railed against Dillon's aggressiveness and the highlight-reel finish set off days of controversy in NASCAR.

NASCAR said Wednesday that Dillon committed “actions detrimental to stock car auto racing” in its decision to kick him out of a spot in the 16-driver field. There are three Cup Series races left before the field is set, starting Sunday at Michigan International Speedway.

Elton Sawyer, the senior vice president of competition, said NASCAR considered suspending Dillon for his actions. Dillon and the Richard Childress Racing No. 3 team also

were docked 25 points in both the drivers' and owners' standings. Dillon dropped from 26th to 31st in the driver standings.

Dillon's spotter, Brandon Benesch, was suspended for three races for yelling “wreck him!” over the radio as the driver battled with Hamlin down the stretch.

“The No. 1 thing is we want to make sure is we're protecting the integrity of the playoffs as well as our championship when we get to Phoenix,” Sawyer said.

RCR said it would appeal, stating on social media it was “very disappointed” in NASCAR's decision.

In NASCAR's view, Dillon's moves went beyond the hard-racing ethos that's been part of the Cup Series' DNA since its 1948 inception.

Logano also was fined \$50,000 for smoking his tires on pit road as he drove by Dillon and his team.

“It's ridiculous that that's the way we race. Unbelievable,” Logano said Sunday. “I get bump and runs. I do that. I would expect it. But from four car lengths back, he was never going to make the corner. And then he wrecks the other car. He wrecks the 11 to go with it. What a piece of crap.”

Dillon said he was trying to move Logano's car, but hitting Hamlin as well was more of an instant reaction.

“I've seen Denny and Joey make moves that have been running people up the track to win,” Dillon said. “This was the first opportunity in two years for me to be able to get a win. ... I've seen a lot of stuff over the years in NASCAR where people move people, and it's just part of our sport.”

It was his first win since Aug. 28, 2022, at Daytona. He had just two top-10 finishes this year. Dillon emerged from all the chaos with a victory in his No. 3 Chevrolet. That number

was famously driven — often aggressively — by Dale Earnhardt.

“That's not the way we want our races to end,” Sawyer said. “That's not the way we want to decide a champion. That's not the way we want to decide an event.”

The win-and-you're-in nature of postseason qualification means the difference between first place and second can be massive. In this case — in the moment, at least — it meant the difference for Dillon between another lost season and a championship chase.

“The record book won't care, right, about what happened,” Hamlin said on pit road Sunday. “He's going to be credited with the win.”

He will — the fifth of Dillon's career over 395 Cup starts. The victory won't mean much if Dillon is just racing out the string once the final 10-race postseason starts.

Dillon, of course, could regain a playoff spot with a victory in any of the next three races. Entering Michigan, 12 drivers have their spot secured with four spots open. Martin Truex Jr., Ty Gibbs, Wallace and Chris Buescher hold the final four spots on points. Michigan, Daytona International Speedway and Darlington Raceway close NASCAR's regular season.

“That's not the way we want our races to end. That's not the way we want to decide a champion.”

Elton Sawyer
senior vice president of competition

Rookie stars use break to reset for sprint to playoffs

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Caitlin Clark took full advantage of her snub by the U.S. Olympic team.

She visited Mexico, attended a friend's wedding in Iowa and even got to see the New York Yankees' clubhouse. So when the Indiana Fever star returned to practice Tuesday, she was rested, revived and revved up to restart the WNBA season.

For Clark and the rest of this year's remarkable rookie class, the nearly monthlong Olympic break was a welcome and perhaps necessary respite before the final sprint to the playoffs.

“Oh yeah, I think it was very helpful just to reset,” Clark said. “Coming in here, I didn't know my teammates very well and you're just kind of tossed out on the court, trying to figure each other out. I think you can tell I'd gotten more comfortable over the last few games heading into the break, so I was kind of like ‘Oh, I need the break.’”

Clark was hardly alone in her assessment.

In Chicago, coach Teresa Weatherspoon acknowledged her two rookie stars — Angel Reese of LSU and Kamilla Cardoso of South Carolina, both NCAA champions — came back re-energized after enduring an unprecedented whirlwind for almost a full year.

From the moment college practices opened last fall, these rookies played under a white-hot glare rarely experienced in women's basketball — nightly sellout crowds, soaring ticket prices on



NOAH K. MURRAY/AP

Caitlin Clark signs autographs before a Yankees game Aug. 10 in New York. Despite being snubbed from the U.S. Olympic team, Clark said the break was a helpful reset before the WNBA season resumed.

secondary markets, record-breaking television ratings and their own incessant desire to live up to growing expectations.

“You talk about those two, especially coming from the college level, they just went year-round and the body needs a break,” Weatherspoon said. “You want the body to have that break to remain productive.”

With only eight days between the NCAA championship game and the WNBA Draft and two more weeks before the start of training camp, the fast pace continued into their pro careers.

Fans debated what long-term

impact these women could have on the sport while salaries, endorsement deals, chartered flights and, yes, even the Olympic selections continued to fuel interest in the sport.

In mid-May, the rookies began a 40-game regular season — one made all the more challenging by a modified schedule, compressed because of the long break.

“I think mentally we're all refreshed,” said Reese, who went shopping in Paris during the layoff. “We needed that little break because we were playing back-to-backs, we were with each other on road trips for a really long



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Angel Reese went shopping in Paris during the layoff and says she is now mentally refreshed.

time. I even tell my teammates I got lucky with this Olympic year, and they spoiled us because now I'm looking forward to it every year.”

Don't bet on it. When the break comes again, in 2028, Clark and Reese could be forming the nucleus of the U.S. team in Los Angeles, while Cardoso hopes to represent Brazil.

But that doesn't discount how this trio benefited this time around.

Cardoso, who missed the Sky's first six games with a shoulder injury, got some extra time to recuperate. Reese and her teammates also healed up.

Clark, meanwhile, used the non-

practice time to bond with teammates. They held a “home run derby,” competed on an Indianapolis ropes course and braved some of the hottest temperatures of the summer to attend the Indiana State Fair.

Now, it's time to get back to basketball.

“Definitely need a game,” Fever coach Christy Sides said after running a game between her players and the men who practice against them. “It's time to see some competition. Like, it's been a long time.”

Indiana and Chicago begin their stretch runs holding the final two spots in the league's eight-team playoff bracket.

The Fever have 14 games left, starting at home against Phoenix and Seattle, teams that have four players who returned from their Olympic break with gold medals — Diana Taurasi, Brittney Griner, Kahleah Copper and Jewell Lloyd.

The Sky have 16 games left, which began Thursday night at home against Phoenix and followed by a three-game trip to Los Angeles, Phoenix and Connecticut.

The race to the playoffs is what matters now.

“I've been ready to get going and play games for a while,” Clark said. “I think we're all kind of ready. We're kind of beating up on each other, beating up on the boys and I think we want to get out there and feel like we're ready to play more games. I think this prep has been really good, but eventually you get to the point where it's like ‘All right, let's go now.’”



The New York Yankees’ Aaron Judge is doused by his teammates after he hit his 300th career home run, the fastest player to do so in MLB history, against the White Sox on Wednesday in Chicago.

Yankees’ Judge becomes fastest to 300 home runs

BY ANDREW SELIGMAN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Aaron Judge noticed his teammates dancing in the bullpen as he rounded first. He got quite the reception when he crossed the plate, too.

Not only did he hit his 300th homer, the New York Yankees’ slugger reached that milestone faster than any other player when he connected against the Chicago White Sox during a 10-2 victory on Wednesday night.

“It’s a great achievement,” he said. “Like I said a couple days ago, I was hoping it would come in a win. It came in a big win for us. We were down for a little bit, couldn’t get much going, so I was just excited it was there in a big moment.”

Judge hit the mark in his 955th game and 3,431st at-bat with a three-run drive in the eighth inning. The six-time All-Star and 2022 American League MVP drove a 3-0 up-and-in sinker from Chad Kuhl into the White Sox bullpen in left for his major league-leading 43rd homer.

The Yankees let loose as the ball cleared the wall, jumping up and raising their arms and banging the dugout railing. After the game, DJ LeMahieu and Austin Wells doused Judge with a tub of water.

“That means a lot,” Judge said.

“These guys grind with me every single day. I know the hard work they put in. They see what I do. That was pretty special.”

Ralph Kiner reached 300 homers in his 1,087th game, and Babe Ruth did in his 3,831st at-bat.

“Those are some guys that have done a lot of great things in this game,” Judge said. “You throw around a lot of those names to people who don’t know baseball and they know who they are. It’s a special group to be in.”

Judge continues to amaze his teammates. Juan Soto thinks Judge has a chance to surpass Barry Bonds’ 762 homers.

“Why not?” Soto said. “I think he’s the guy who can literally break the record. ... I hope he got the health to do it and I’m going to enjoy it as much as I can, too.”

Chicago was trailing 6-2 when interim manager Grady Sizemore intentionally walked Soto to bring up Judge, who had not homered on a 3-0 pitch since 2021.

“You guys all saw how he’s swinging the bat this week,” Judge said. “It makes sense. The guy had three homers yesterday, a homer to start the game today. Why wouldn’t you?”

Judge leads the major leagues with 14 intentional walks. Soto was intentionally walked for the first time this season after hitting

three homers Tuesday and another in the first inning Wednesday.

Judge wouldn’t say if he thought the White Sox made the right call. But either way, he made them pay.

“If they’re going to do that, you’ve got to come up and drive those runs in,” he said. “I was lucky I was able to do that there.”

Sizemore made the decision in his fifth game after replacing Pedro Grifol as manager. He said the four homers by Soto caused him to make the decision.

“It’s pick your poison. I’m not trying to get to Judge. I got a base open,” Sizemore said. “There’s no solution or an easy way out of that jam, but Soto’s definitely been the hotter of those two bats, even though Judge has been hot, too.”

Judge, who hit an American League-record 62 homers in his MVP season, is batting .333 and leads the major leagues with 110 RBIs. No. 300 came eight years and one day after he homered in his first big league at-bat.

“Definitely caught us off guard,” Yankees manager Aaron Boone said of the intentional walk, “but Aaron was ready to throw up a great at-bat.”

“I thought he expanded the zone a little bit too much there on 3-0,” the manager added playfully.

MLB scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	72	50	.590	—
Baltimore	71	50	.587	½
Boston	63	56	.529	7½
Tampa Bay	59	61	.492	12
Toronto	57	64	.471	14½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	72	49	.595	—
Minnesota	67	53	.558	4½
Kansas City	66	55	.545	6
Detroit	58	63	.479	14
Chicago	29	93	.238	43½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	65	55	.542	—
Seattle	63	58	.521	2½
Texas	56	65	.463	9½
Los Angeles	52	69	.430	13½
Oakland	51	70	.421	14½
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	70	50	.583	—
Atlanta	64	56	.533	6
New York	62	58	.517	8
Washington	55	66	.455	15½
Miami	45	76	.372	25½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	68	52	.567	—
Cincinnati	60	61	.496	8½
St. Louis	60	61	.496	8½
Chicago	59	63	.484	10
Pittsburgh	56	64	.467	12
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	71	50	.587	—
Arizona	69	53	.566	2½
San Diego	69	53	.566	2½
San Francisco	61	62	.496	11
Colorado	44	78	.361	27½
Wednesday's games				
Kansas City 4, Minnesota 1 Baltimore 4, Washington 1 Cleveland 6, Chicago Cubs 1 Texas 9, Boston 7, 10 innings Detroit 3, Seattle 2, 10 innings Houston 2, Tampa Bay 1, 10 innings N.Y. Mets 9, Oakland 1 N.Y. Yankees 10, Chicago White Sox 2 Toronto 9, L.A. Angels 2 San Diego 8, Pittsburgh 2 Arizona 11, Colorado 4 Cincinnati 9, St. Louis 2 Philadelphia 9, Miami 5 Milwaukee 5, L.A. Dodgers 4 Atlanta 13, San Francisco 2				
Thursday's games				
Oakland at N.Y. Mets Seattle at Detroit L.A. Dodgers at Milwaukee Atlanta at San Francisco Boston at Baltimore Washington at Philadelphia Minnesota at Texas				
Friday's games				
Toronto (Rodríguez 1-5) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 3-10) Washington (Corbin 2-12) at Philadelphia (Nola 11-6) Kansas City (Lorenzen 5-6) at Cincinnati (Martínez 6-5) N.Y. Yankees (Cole 3-2) at Detroit (TBD) Seattle (Gilbert 7-8) at Pittsburgh (Skenes 6-2) Arizona (Nelson 8-6) at Tampa Bay (Peñón 6-5) Boston (TBD) at Baltimore (Burnes 12-4) Miami (Muñoz 2-6) at N.Y. Mets (Manaea 8-5) Minnesota (Woods Richardson 3-3) at Texas (Heaney 4-12) Chicago White Sox (Crochet 6-9) at Houston (Arrighetti 5-10) Cleveland (Williams 2-4) at Milwaukee (Civale 3-8) L.A. Dodgers (TBD) at St. Louis (Mikolas 8-9) San Diego (Waldron 7-9) at Colorado (Quattrilli 7-8) Atlanta (Schwellenbach 4-5) at L.A. Angels (Soriano 6-7)				
Saturday's games				
Seattle at Pittsburgh N.Y. Yankees at Detroit Toronto at Chicago Cubs Arizona at Tampa Bay Miami at N.Y. Mets Washington at Philadelphia Kansas City at Cincinnati Boston at Baltimore Minnesota at Texas San Francisco at Oakland Chicago White Sox at Houston L.A. Dodgers at St. Louis Cleveland at Milwaukee San Diego at Colorado Atlanta at L.A. Angels				

Lions coach says Gibbs’ leg injury will be ‘fine’

By PAULA PASCHE
Associated Press

ALLEN PARK, Mich. — Detroit Lions running back Jahmyr Gibbs, dressed in shorts, watched training camp from the sideline Wednesday after he left practice earlier in the week with a leg injury.

As a rookie last season, Gibbs rushed for 945 yards with 10 touchdowns along with 316 receiving yards and a score. After he was sidelined with a soft tissue injury in the spring, he was healthy at training camp. The team called it a leg injury with ESPN reporting that it’s a hamstring.

Coach Dan Campbell does not seem concerned about the injury status of Gibbs or rookie cornerbacks Terrion Arnold (upper body) and Ennis Rakestraw (ankle), who were also injured Monday.

“I think we’re going to be fine here, I think we’ll be good,” Campbell said in a radio interview Wednesday, without offering specifics on the injuries.

Arnold, a first-round draft pick, has impressed in camp and has lined up mostly with the starters during drills. On Wednesday, he worked apart from the team running on a grassy hill near the practice field.

Defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn could not say if he’ll be ready for the season opener Sept. 8 against the Los Angeles Rams.

“We’ve seen enough, but he’s not where he needs to be. He needs a lot of improvement to do,” Glenn said. “Once he gets back from his injury, he has to get out there and grind and continue to work.”

Backup quarterback Hendon Hooker, who suffered a concussion in Thursday’s preseason loss at the Giants, was back at practice Wednesday. Campbell said there’s a “good chance” he’ll be able to play the preseason game on Saturday at Kansas City.

“It’s frustrating because I want to play so bad after a year sitting out. Not being able to go was the worst part about it, other than that I felt really good and wasn’t too scared,” Hooker said Wednesday.

Hooker and Nate Sudfeld are competing for the No. 2 quarterback spot behind Jared Goff.



Gibbs

NFL



SETH WENIG/AP

Linebacker Matthew Judon thrived in Bill Belichick’s defense in New England, making 15½ sacks in 2022.

Source: Patriots trade 4-time Pro Bowler Judon to Falcons

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

The New England Patriots have traded four-time Pro Bowl edge rusher Matthew Judon to the Atlanta Falcons for a third-round draft pick, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Wednesday because the teams haven’t announced the trade.

Judon had 28 sacks in his first two seasons with the Patriots before finishing with four in four games last year when he was limited by injuries.

Judon became available because of a contract dispute. He has a base salary of \$6.5 million this season and is seeking a new deal.

“I signed the deal. My signature’s on it so I got to play on it. Do I think that’s my value? No. But, again, that’s not up to me,” Judon said last month. “I hope I can continue to play here and be a catalyst to one of the best defenses in the league. If that’s not the case, that’s not the case. It’s hard not to be jealous or envious. But honestly, I’ve got to focus on myself. As much as everyone would like me to stay around here for a long time, it’s not up to me. I would pay myself a lot of money and be cool with it.”

The Falcons needed a pass rusher to bolster a defense that hasn’t had a player with double-digit sacks since Vic Beasley had 15½ in 2016.

Judon, who turns 32 on Thurs-

day, played his first five seasons in Baltimore. He had 34½ sacks for the Ravens and made two of his four Pro Bowls. He thrived in Bill Belichick’s defense in New England, making a career-high 15½ sacks in 2022.

The Falcons pursued the trade for Judon after losing rookie edge rusher Bralen Trice to a season-ending knee injury.

Trice, a third-round pick from the University of Washington, was competing for a starting job after leading the nation in quarterback pressures the last two seasons.

Trice had been listed as the No. 2 outside linebacker behind Arnold Ebikeite before the injury.

Now, it’s Judon who figures to take a prime pass-rushing role on the Falcons’ defense.

Vikes’ McCarthy to miss season

Rookie QB has surgery for torn meniscus

By TOM WITHERS
Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — J.J. McCarthy’s rookie year with the Minnesota Vikings is already over.

The former Michigan star quarterback and first-round NFL Draft pick will miss the season after undergoing surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee, which he injured in his preseason debut last week.

McCarthy had the operation on Wednesday after suffering the injury at some point against Las Vegas. McCarthy had been having a solid training camp and was pushing starter Sam Darnold, who signed a one-year, \$10 million contract with Minnesota in March.

Vikings coach Kevin O’Connell delivered the news about McCarthy shortly after the team arrived for two days of joint practices with the Browns.

McCarthy’s loss was especially tough for a franchise looking for a fresh start after letting Kirk Cousins go as a free agent.

While some may have doubted Minnesota’s decision to take McCarthy with the 10th overall pick, the 21-year-old, who led the Wolverines to a national title last season, checked all the boxes over the past few months.

“I really believe that J.J. has kind of confirmed to me and a lot of our coaches and players that we got the right guy in the building for the future,” O’Connell said. “And he did it in a short amount of time. That’s what makes this news hard.”

McCarthy went 11-for-17 for 188 yards with two touchdowns and one interception in the 24-23 win over the Raiders — a performance that may have led to him getting



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Quarterback J.J. McCarthy was selected by the Vikings with the 10th overall pick in the draft.

more reps with the starters.

Following the game, he told the Vikings his knee was sore and imaging tests confirmed the meniscus tear. The Vikings initially hoped McCarthy would only miss a month while acknowledging they wouldn’t know for certain until he had surgery.

“I’m the most crushed for J.J.,” O’Connell said.

According to Sportradar, there have been 135 quarterbacks drafted in the first round since 1967, and McCarthy will be just the eighth not to play as a rookie. The most recent to sit out his whole rookie year was Green Bay’s Jordan Love in 2020.

With McCarthy no longer in the mix, Nick Mullens will be Minnesota’s No. 2 quarterback. Jaren Hall is No. 3 on the depth chart.

The 29-year-old Mullens started three games for Minnesota last year, when the Vikings’ season was derailed by an injury to Cousins and the team cycled through multiple backups.

Target: Panthers hope Johnson gives boost to struggling offense

FROM PAGE 48

nales said. “The defense is going to be looking for someone and I think that opens everything else. So I think the patience of the quarterback going through progressions and finding the next guy, and I think the (other) receivers and tight ends will come alive after that.”

Johnson sat out Wednesday’s practice with what Canales described as a mild groin sprain, but the injury is not considered serious.

It was unclear if he was going to participate in the team’s joint practice with Aaron Rodgers and the New York Jets on Thursday in Charlotte.

The Panthers could certainly use a boost from Johnson.

He joins an offense that was one of the



CHUCK BURTON/AP

Wide receiver Diontae Johnson was traded by the Steelers to the Panthers after his role dropped off significantly last season.

worst in the league last season and was shut out the final two games of the season with rookie Bryce Young struggling to make his mark at quarterback. Young was 2-14 as a starter and finished with 11 touchdowns and 10 interceptions.

But Johnson likes what he’s seen from Young in practice saying he has poise and confidence. Johnson said Young has the skills to excel at the NFL level.

“I think he’s going to surprise some people,” Johnson said. “I think this offense will surprise some people.”

The Panthers spent the offseason putting some new players around Young.

They invested more than \$150 million on guards Robert Hunt and Damien Lewis to bolster a porous offensive line, and drafted wide receiver Xavier Legette from South

Carolina in the first round to go with Johnson. Adam Thielen, by far the team’s most reliable receiver in 2023, returns and the Panthers are optimistic former second-round draft picks Jonathan Mingo (2023) and Terrace Marshall Jr. (2021) can take the next step and develop into consistent playmakers.

Young has already developed a good rapport with Johnson in practice with the duo hooking up on short and intermediate routes on a consistent basis.

That has Young excited for the season.

“To see the amount of fire that he comes out with every day, saying, ‘hey, let’s get this right after practice’ and just how competitive he is, you can see how much he cares about this,” Young said. “He cares about the details and little things.”

NFL

Chiefs starters to play first half against Lions

By Dave Skretta
Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes and the rest of the Kansas City Chiefs' starters are expected to play most of the first half of their preseason game against Detroit on Saturday, though it's possible Carson Wentz will get some snaps with the first-team offense, too.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid announced his plan for the second preseason game Thursday, shortly after the defending Super Bowl champions wrapped up the final practice of their training camp at Missouri Western State University.

Mahomes was 3-for-4 for 27 yards against Jacksonville in the Chiefs' preseason opener, helping to set up a field goal on their first possession. He typically plays into

the second quarter of the second preseason game before taking the third exhibition game off ahead of the season opener, which in this case comes Sept. 5 against Baltimore.

After playing the Lions, the Chiefs will conduct the rest of camp at their training facility in Kansas City.

"I think you've been able to see the growth," said Reid, one of the few coaches left in the NFL who prefers to take his team away for camp. "We've added a ton in the last few days up here. The guys have digested it and been able to spit it back — retain it. That has been a positive. And then maybe most of all getting yourself in football shape, kind of re-amping up to our first game."

"We still have a couple of weeks ahead of us here 'til that all takes

place," Reid added, "but we'll keep working on it. We're not ready yet, but we'll keep working and sharpening ourselves up to play. I appreciate the attitude the guys have had."

Reid said right tackle Jawaan Taylor would not play against the Lions after hurting his right shoulder during Thursday's practice, which means Lucas Niang will likely replace him.

Reid also said he would not "force it" to get veteran left guard Joe Thuney onto the field for a preseason game. Thuney recently came off the PUP list and began to practice after a pectoral injury that caused him to miss the Super Bowl.

Running back Clyde Edwards-Helaire missed his fourth straight practice with an illness Thursday, though Reid said he was feeling



Chiefs quarterbacks, from left, Carson Wentz, Patrick Mahomes and Chris Oladokun arrive for practice Wednesday in St. Joseph, Mo.

better. Safety Bryan Cook also remained out of practice for personal reasons.

The biggest missing piece, of course, remained wide receiver Marquise Brown, who sustained a sternoclavicular posterior dislocation in the Chiefs' game in Jacksonville. Brown was fortunate the shoulder injury, similar to one that caused former Chiefs wide receiver Tyreek Hill to miss four games in 2019, did not require surgery.

"We're lucky it wasn't as bad as

it could have been," Mahomes said Thursday. "He's in good spirits, doing well. Getting him back going again, moving around. Obviously we lost a little bit of that veteran-type receiver in that room. We have other guys that can replace a little bit, but to have that much talent and understand what I want — but he's in that room. That's important."

Reid was noncommittal this week when asked whether Brown could be ready for Week 1.

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NFL

Cards practice in Indianapolis sees Harrison's return

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

WESTFIELD, Ind. — The first joint practice between the Indianapolis Colts and Arizona Cardinals felt like a throwback day.

Reggie Wayne was working on the field. Edgerrin James signed autographs for fans. Cardinals coach Jonathan Gannon spoke glowingly about the Colts ownership.

And, yes, Marvin Harrison Jr. returned to the only NFL city his father ever called home. It was a big moment for the Cardinals' 22-year-old rookie receiver.

"Yeah, it's kind of crazy," Harrison said, flashing that familiar smile his father made popular. "Just really special. So happy to be here."

Like his dad, he got right down to business.

Harrison wasn't exactly a prominent personality when his Hall of Fame father was catching passes from Peyton Manning and challenging Wayne to keep up with his record-breaking pace. The elder Harrison preferred to keep his private life, well, private.

So the younger Harrison did most of his initial work behind the scenes. He attended periodic games, occasionally attended a training camp practice, even managed to walk on the Colts' home turf. He also attended his father's induction into Indy's Ring of Honor in 2011, dreaming of

getting the opportunity to one day follow in his father's footsteps.

It didn't take long to see the comparisons.

The Philadelphia prep star quickly caught the attention of college scouts. During his three seasons at Ohio State, Marvin Harrison Jr. swept the awards, too, twice earning unanimous All-American status while taking home last year's Biletnikoff Award for the nation's top receiver, and the Big Ten MVP Award.

Meanwhile, guys such as Wayne — now a receivers coach on Indy's staff — and James, who received a Super Bowl ring from Colts owner Jim Irsay after signing with Arizona as a free agent, kept track of what the young, aspiring Harrison was doing through their former teammate.

Now Colts players are learning how tough Harrison can be to handle.

"You've got to kind of understand what he's looking for on certain routes," Indy safety Julian Blackmon said. "But he's got a lot of talent. That's just fun for our DBs to go all out against him."

But one thing has eluded Harrison on his journey to stardom — playing at Lucas Oil Stadium, the Colts' home field and site of the Big Ten football title game. He hopes that changes Saturday when the Cardinals and Colts are set to meet in their second preseason game.



DARRON CUMMINGS / AP

Arizona Cardinals wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. (18) talks with former Indianapolis Colts player Edgerrin James during a joint practice with the Colts on Wednesday in Westfield, Ind.

First, there was another practice Thursday at Grand Park Sports Complex in Westfield, Ind., a northern suburb of Indy, on Thursday. Gannon, the Cardinals coach, said he won't decide who will play in the game until after the second and final practice with the Colts.

"No, we're not going to pull back," Gannon said. "I mean we'll evaluate who's going to be up and down after these two practices, but they know, all 90 guys know, they're coming to practice twice, we've got a day off and then be ready to play."

Arizona quarterback Kyler Murray won't play Saturday. Gannon announced last week that Murray, who returned from a torn anterior cruciate ligament midway through last

season, won't play in any preseason games.

While it's unclear if Murray's absence may impact Harrison's playing status, the No. 4 overall pick in April's draft doesn't like taking snaps off — even in practice or the preseason — just like his dad.

"Definitely," he said when asked if it would mean something to him to play on the same field as his father.

"Unfortunately, haven't gotten a chance to play there. Never got a chance to make it there, but I've been there before."

This will be Harrison's third trip to Lucas Oil Stadium in 13 months.

He showed up in a blue suit with blue-and-white checkered shoes for the Big Ten media days in July 2023.

He returned in March for the NFL's annual scouting combine, but did not work out and declined to do interviews.

And now that he's back, he wants to show everyone in Indianapolis he's every bit as good as his father, maybe even better than the Colts' career leader in receptions, yards receiving and touchdown catches.

"There's really nothing that he can do that I can't do or vice versa," Harrison said. "I'm my own person. But he was more of a smaller receiver when I was watching him grow up. I use my size a little bit more. I think I've made it to this point on my own path, and I'm going to continue to work hard and see where it takes me."

Aiyuk watches 49ers practice as 'hold in' enters 4th week

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Star receiver Brandon Aiyuk was back out at San Francisco 49ers practice as a spectator as his contract hold in enters a fourth week still in search of a resolution.

Aiyuk had mostly stayed off the field the past two weeks after making waves with his boisterous handshakes with general manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan two weeks ago.

Aiyuk skipped the entire offseason program and hasn't practiced yet in training camp as he seeks either a long-term contract with San Francisco or a trade to a team that can agree with the receiver on a new deal and give the 49ers enough compensation to part with him.

Neither of those options has come to a resolution yet, though an end may be getting closer with NFL Network reporting earlier this week that the Niners have a



CARLOS AVILA GONZALEZ, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/AP

San Francisco 49ers wide receiver Brandon Aiyuk speaks to reporters during opening night for Super Bowl 58 in Las Vegas on Feb. 5.

framework for a potential deal with Pittsburgh in place but are waiting to see if they can reach a deal with Aiyuk before making any trade.

Aiyuk came out to practice late in the session Wednesday. He shook hands with Lynch and watched part of practice, chatting at times with teammates Deebo

Samuel and George Kittle.

"I don't see him all the time, because I'm in camp mode. So being able to have a conversation with him is fantastic, to see how he's doing and if everything is going the way that he wants it to go," Kittle said. "Just the chance to see him is always fantastic. I love the smile on his face."

Even Aiyuk's choice of wardrobe caught his teammates' attention as he wore a red 49ers shirt.

"Wearing red for the first time, too," Kittle said. "It's crazy."

Aiyuk had been set to play on the fifth-year option worth about \$14.1 million this season and wanted San Francisco to make him the latest receiver to cash in with a long-term deal. Ten receivers before Aiyuk had signed contracts worth at least \$70 million already this offseason, with Justin Jefferson's four-year, \$140 million extension with Minnesota setting the top of the market.

Aiyuk was a key part of San

Francisco's offense last season as he formed a great connection with quarterback Brock Purdy. Aiyuk had 75 catches and a career-high 1,375 yards last season with seven touchdowns as he earned second-team All-Pro honors.

His absence would be hard to overcome if San Francisco has designs on getting back to the Super Bowl and winning it this upcoming season.

"The season hasn't started yet so we don't know how much we miss him yet," cornerback Charvarius Ward said. "I don't want to say nothing crazy but they'll figure it out eventually, for sure."

Notes: The 49ers signed DL Nick Williams to a one-year deal after losing Kalia Davis to a knee injury in the exhibition opener. ... LB Ezekiel Turner was released to make room. ... WR Danny Gray (shoulder) had the blue no-contact jersey removed. ... First-round rookie WR Ricky Pearsall (shoulder) remains sidelined.

SPORTS



Yankees slugger makes history
Outfielder Judge becomes fastest player to 300 home runs » **MLB, Page 44**

NFL

Ready to be the top target



New Panthers WR Johnson relishes role as No. 1 option

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Diontae Johnson is relishing the prospect of being a No. 1 wide receiver again.

When Johnson was acquired by the Panthers in an offseason trade from the Pittsburgh Steelers, he was informed by new head coach Dave Canales that he'd be the primary option in Carolina's passing game.

"I liked to hear that," said Johnson, who is entering his sixth season in the league. "Now it's up to me to run my routes and get open."

Johnson is familiar with being the go-to guy.

From 2020-22, he averaged 94 catches, 989 yards and five touchdowns per season for the Steelers, including a huge season in 2021 when he had a career-high 107 receptions for 1,161 yards and eight touchdowns while being targeted 169 times.

But Johnson's role dropped off significantly last season with the emergence of wide receiver George Pickens and Pittsburgh's

inconsistency at quarterback. He was targeted a career-low 87 times and finished the season with just 51 catches for 717 yards and five TDs.

Although he declined to provide any personal statistical predictions for this season, Johnson said he feels "very confident" that he can get back to the production level of 2021 and be a dominant receiver.

The Panthers feel that way too, which is why they sent starting cornerback Donte Jackson to the Steelers to get Johnson.

"As we build our offense, we will really try to feature someone — and for us right now it's 'Where's Diontae Johnson at?'" Canales said.

Canales said the Panthers plan to move Johnson around in different formations, and he has been spotted lining up in the backfield during training camp. Canales isn't worried about teams focusing their attention on Johnson.

"Tendencies are OK as long as you know you have them," Canales said.

SEE TARGET ON PAGE 45



Canales



NELL REDMOND, ABOVE, AND CHUCK BURTON, RIGHT/AP

Panthers wide receiver Diontae Johnson, above, was acquired in a trade with the Steelers and was told by his new team he will be the primary receiver in the offense. He's already developed a rapport with second-year quarterback Bryce Young, right. "I think he's going to surprise some people," says Johnson.

NASCAR revokes Dillon's playoff eligibility » Auto racing, Page 43

