Unemployment claims approach 41 million in US amid reopenings

By Christopher Rugaber
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Roughly 2.1 million people applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week, a sign that companies are still slashing jobs in the face of a deep recession even as more businesses reopen and rehire some laid-off employees.

About 41 million people have applied for aid since the virus outbreak intensified in March, although not all of them are still unemployed. The Labor Department’s report Thursday includes a count of all the people now receiving unemployment aid: 21 million. That is a rough measure of the number of unemployed Americans.

The national jobless rate was 14.7% in April, the highest since the Great Depression, and many economists expect it will near 20% in May.

States are gradually restarting their economies by letting some businesses — from gyms, retail shops and restaurants to hair and nail salons — reopen with restrictions. As some of these employers, including automakers, have recalled a portion of their laid-off employees, the number of people receiving unemployment benefits has fallen.

SEE CLAIMS ON PAGE 8

Military virus aid could look different if 2nd wave hits

By Lolita C. Baldor
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper said that as the U.S. military prepares for another potential wave of the coronavirus, it could do things a bit differently, providing more targeted aid for cities and states and possibly shorter quarantine times for troops.

Speaking as he flew back from a trip to the Marine Corps recruit base at Parris Island, S.C., Esper said the Pentagon is looking at a variety of plans. But he said U.S. forces might not be deployed the same way if or when the virus surges in a second large wave or even, more likely, a series of smaller bursts.

He also said that the military has started doing antibody tests on service members who had COVID-19 and recovered, in order to determine if their plasma can be used in others to prevent or treat the virus.

Esper said he spoke with military service members who had recovered from COVID-19 and are willing to donate their plasma.

SEE AID ON PAGE 8

VIRUS OUTBREAK
**EUROPE GAS PRICES**

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**PACIFIC GAS PRICES**

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**EXCHANGE RATES**

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(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 non-local 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-euros.)

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**Relocation guide**

Every Friday the European and Pacific editions of Stars and Stripes AND online daily at www.stripes.com/relo
Kansas soldier prevents shooting spree

From wire reports

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A Fort Leavenworth, Kan., soldier stopped a shooting spree when he rammed his vehicle into a gunman who had just wounded another soldier Wednesday, police said.

One soldier was seriously injured in the shooting on Centennial Bridge in Leavenworth, Kan., and the suspect was taken into custody after another soldier intervened, Leavenworth Police Chief Pat Kitchens said.

Leavenworth police had been called to investigate a report of a person firing shots on the bridge. It's unclear what led to the suspect seemingly firing shots at random on the bridge, Kitchens told reporters, but one person was struck — an active-duty soldier who appeared to be an unintended target.

Kitchens said another soldier from Fort Leavenworth was waiting in traffic when he witnessed the shooting. The soldier intervened, he said, "by striking the shooter with his vehicle."

Kitchens said the soldier’s actions brought an end to the shooting, “likely saving countless lives.”

Officers initially believed they were responding to a road rage incident on the bridge that connects Kansas and Missouri not far from Fort Leavenworth, Kitchens said. Instead, they discovered that a man had been using multiple weapons to fire randomly at vehicles.

The suspect was trapped under a car, Kitchens said.

The soldier who was shot was taken to a hospital, and was in serious but stable condition Wednesday afternoon.

The suspect was also taken to a hospital with serious injuries from the crash.

Two additional vehicles were struck by gunfire, Kitchens said, but no other injuries were reported.

Kitchens said police have not yet determined why the suspect, said to be a Platte County, Mo., resident, began firing shots on the bridge, but police were looking into the person’s history within the community.

The Leavenworth County Sheriff’s Office, the Platte County Sheriff’s Office, the Kansas Highway Patrol and other agencies assisted at the scene.

“What was a very, very dangerous situation fortunately was ended quite quickly,” Kitchens said. “Again, very likely countless lives were saved by the person who intervened.”

The Kansas City (Mo.) Star and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Marine infantry recruit, 18, drops 186 pounds to make it to boot camp

BY EMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

Gabriel Ramirez spent his childhood dreaming of being a Marine, but that dream seemed unattainable as a 365-pound teen nicknamed “Meatball.”

This week, Ramirez, 18, was on his way to boot camp, 186 pounds lighter.

At the end of Ramirez’s sophomore year at Rancho Buena Vista High School in California, Marine recruiter Staff Sgt. Anna Rodrigues spoke to his class and later asked him about his interests.

“She looked at me, not at my weight,” Ramirez said in the statement. “She told me, 'It’s all up to you if you want it,’ and from there I got her card.”

In his junior year, Ramirez sometimes doubted he could both get in shape and improve his test scores enough to get into the service. But after he saw Rodrigues again, he visited Recruiting Substation Oceanside and worked out with the Marines there.

“I did my first workout with them and it killed me,” Ramirez said in the statement. “I ran a 26-mile, minute-and-a-half mile and a half, I couldn’t do any pullups and I couldn’t even do 20 crunches. But they always encouraged me, motivated me and pushed me.”

Ramirez continued for a while, but at one point the obstacles in his life got to be too much, he said in the statement.

He put all the weight he lost back on and stopped coming to work out.

Rodrigues called and asked what had happened, at which point Ramirez said he asked her why she was wasting her time with him.

“There were a lot of people that put Gabriel down, and I would tell him you can be upset about it or you can show them you won’t be the person they think you are,” Rodrigues said.

Rodrigues kept motivating him, at times texting or calling daily. Ramirez lost the weight, graduated from high school last year when he was 17 and has enlisted for an infantry job, Rodrigues said.

“Tell me to stop doubting myself and just put my mind to what I want to accomplish,” Ramirez said. “I was the only one that could make this happen for me. No one could do it for me.”

Air Force resumes large-scale drills with exercise over Europe

BY BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

Air Force fighter jets and aerial tankers from across Europe converged over the North Sea for a quickly arranged exercise that simulated a large-scale attack by enemy forces.

The one-day drill Wednesday was hosted by the U.S. Air Force’s 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath in England. It involved 16 allied aircraft trying to intercept 18 adversaries before they reached the English coastline.

It was the first large-force exercise conducted by Air Force units in Europe since the spread of the coronavirus forced cancellations to several planned activities, service officials said.

Complex training events are usually planned months in advance and require considerable support. But U.S. Air Forces in Europe units, and in particular their younger pilots, have started planning events quickly using teleconferencing and other remote means, participants said.

They began planning about 45 days ago and much of the work was finalized Tuesday, a day before the exercise began.

“When I was making the training plan this spring, it was starting to look like we were going to miss out on a lot of training, but that hasn’t been the case at all,” said Maj. Sean Foote, chief of weapons and tactics for the 48th Fighter Squadron, based at Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany.

“Obviously there are going to be some challenges because we had to reduce some of the flying initially, but it was never to the point where it had an impact on our operations.”

Units from RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall, as well as the 52nd Fighter Wing from Spangdahlem, the 31st Wing from Aviano Air Base, Italy, and NATO at Gailenkirchen Air Base, Germany, participated in the exercise.

The 35 aircraft included F-16 Falcons, F-15 Eagles, KC-135 Stratotankers and a NATO Airborne Warning and Control System, or AWACS jet.

The opposition in the scenario had the same capabilities of real-world potential adversaries, officials said.

“If it was easy and we win every time, then the training’s not going to be good for anybody,” Foote said, adding that Spangdahlem will host a similar exercise in June.

“Our future goal is to eventually get NATO partners involved as well,” he said.

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Airmen won’t need their new uniforms until September

By James Bolinger
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force has delayed its switch to new uniforms, underwear and flag patches until September, citing “unnecessary stress” on its service members due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Airmen, including Space Force service members, by Sept. 1 must wear coyote brown boots, T-shirts and spice brown U.S. flag patches with their two-piece flight uniforms and utility uniforms in the operational camouflage pattern, better known as OCPs, according to a notice on the Air Force website. The original deadline was June 1.

Airmen who must wear black combat boots in industrial areas are exempt from wearing the new boots.

Other changes are delayed to Sept. 1. All officers in utilities must wear spice-brown rank insignia, except first lieutenants and lieutenant colonels, who will wear black threaded insignia.

Only coyote-brown T-shirts and socks of green or coyote brown and issued by the Defense Logistics Agency may be worn with OCPs starting Sept. 1.

Also, the spice-brown flag patch will be mandatory; infrared flag patches will not be authorized. Thermal undergarments must also be coyote brown.

On Sept. 1, airmen wearing the new two-piece flight suit must have all mandatory badges in place, spice-brown U.S. cloth flags, green or coyote-brown socks and coyote-brown boots and thermal undergarments.

The Air Force began transitioning to the Army’s utility uniform camouflage pattern in October 2018. It replaced the airman battle uniform, a gray, blue and green tiger-stripe pattern.

Airmen may wear the battle uniform until April 1, 2021, but many have already switched to the new pattern.

A new set of coyote-brown boots is on the exchange website ranges in price from $89 to $264, while T-shirts and socks can be had from Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support for about $5 and $2, respectively.

Global Hawk surveillance drones will return to Tokyo

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Air Force is sending unmanned RQ-4 Global Hawks to Tokyo starting this month to avoid typhoon season, according to the Ministry of Defense.

A pair of U.S. B-1B Lancers flew alongside 16 Japanese fighter jets during a mission over the Sea of Japan on Tuesday as U.S. forces prepare for typhoon season in the Pacific.

Global Hawks routinely relocate from Guam to Japan to avoid typhoon season, according to the Ministry of Defense.

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Army expects to finish Pathways 2020 exercises

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — U.S. Army Pacific expects to complete all Pacific Pathways exercises scheduled for this year, despite the coronavirus pandemic that has curtailed most multilateral training until the end of June, according to its commander.

“Things will normalize,” Gen. Paul LaCamera said during a virtual conference last week that included military commanders from allies and partner nations in the region.

“We will either return to a normal or adapt to a new normal, but either way, we will figure it out as a team of allies and partners,” LaCamera told listeners, according to a news release published by the Army on Wednesday.

Pacific Pathways is a series of exercises in which Army units link up with foreign militaries at various locations in an expeditionary-style deployment. Plans had called for Pacific Pathways exercises in Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Palau and Yap in the second half of 2020.

The Defense Department issued a stop-movement order for service members in mid-March, due to the pandemic, that had been expected to remain in place until June 30. Last week, the Pentagon issued a memo that, while making the stop-movement order indefinite, gives installations more leeway in relaxing travel restrictions based on improving conditions.

About 1,400 soldiers with the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division were in Thailand for the first leg of Pathways when the order was instituted. They returned home in early April and were placed in mandatory 14-day quarantine.

Soldiers with the 25th ID only recently began small-unit arms training after a total monthlong hiatus for such drills.

The service’s top officer also promised a resumption of multilateral Army exercises in the Pacific.

“Our intent is to get back with these exercises as soon as the conditions allow,” Gen. James McConville, the Army’s chief of staff, said in the news release. “We have to stay ready.”

The Army’s plan to resume collective training is based upon the experience with recruits at basic training sites, where the use of masks, physical distancing and virus testing proved successful in limiting spread of the contagion, the news release said.

“We’re putting procedures in place for our troops so they can still operate in this environment and make sure that we continue our relationships,” McConville said.

The coronavirus outbreak struck as the Army was set to launch Defender Pacific this year. The exercise would bring to the Pacific a division headquarters and several brigades from the continental U.S. for 30- to 45-day training stints in countries such as the Philippines and Thailand.

Defence News reported earlier this year that the Army had requested $364 million for Defender Pacific for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

Army officials did not mention Defender Pacific in the Wednesday news release.

It will likely be another month before a time frame for resumption of exercises is within reach, U.S. Army Pacific spokesman Col. Derrick Cheng told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

The teleconference last week was an opportunity for regional military leaders to share thoughts about “what are the mil-to-mil activities that are still viable and available” as nations cope with the pandemic, he said.

“There was discussion that everybody wanted to continue the virtual engagement to maintain the connections, but everybody was looking forward to the physical engagements, looking at the earliest opportunity to get back to the business at hand,” he said.

“There wasn’t a clear picture and set dates of when we could do that.”

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Navy completes probe into Roosevelt outbreak

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Ships at sea will now operate as clean “bubbles,” allowing only people aboard who have been medically screened and who adhere to health mitigation measures, according to new standards released Wednesday by the Navy.

After serious outbreaks of the coronavirus on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the destroyer USS Kidd, while the ships were at sea, the Navy has developed a new standardized operational guidance for the fleet during the pandemic based on lessons learned from combating the disease.

The outbreaks also prompted the Defense Department’s inspector general to initiate an evaluation of the Navy’s approach to preventing the spread of infectious diseases aboard its ships and submarines. The evaluation will determine whether the Navy has put in place policies and procedures to prevent and stop the spread of diseases, and if mitigation measures that are effective at preventing the spread of the coronavirus had been implemented across the fleet, according to an announcement May 11.

The new guidance also comes the same day that the Navy’s own investigation into its response to the outbreak on the Roosevelt was delivered to Adm. Mike Gilday, the chief of naval operations. The initial investigation was expanded April 29 after the admiral of a regional command like the Pacific Fleet — is required before they are allowed aboard the USS Kidd is the crew might be quarantined others and sanitize the vessel. The first inquiry left him with “unanswered questions.”

His decision followed Defense Secretary Mark Esper’s own request days before for more time to review the Navy’s first investigation after he was briefed by McPherson and Gilday on the report’s recommendations.

Much of the mitigation measures in the new guidance already have been implemented by recently deployed ships such as the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which had medical screenings and a restriction of movement for all sailors before they were allowed aboard. The Navy’s message Wednesday to the fleet makes the command investigation into the events surrounding the (coronavirus) outbreak aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt,” Gilday spokesman Cmndr. Nate Christensen said in a statement. “It will take time for the investigation’s recommendations to be reviewed and endorsed by [Gilday].”

The investigation was launched at Gilday’s request after he reviewed the results of a preliminary inquiry into the outbreak prompted by then-acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly’s removal of the ship’s commander in April. Modly made the decision after a letter Capt. Brett Crozier wrote pleading for help for his crew was leaked to the public. He called Crozier “too naive or too stupid” to command the carrier.

Details on the investigation’s findings were not immediately available. In a statement last month, Christensen said the report would “provide a more robust documentation of events and give a fuller consideration of the circumstances surrounding the matter.”

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Navy offers new guidance for ships at sea amid virus

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Ships at sea will now operate as clean “bubbles,” allowing only people aboard who have been medically screened and who adhere to health mitigation measures, according to new standards released Wednesday by the Navy.

After serious outbreaks of the coronavirus on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the destroyer USS Kidd, while the ships were at sea, the Navy has developed a new standardized operational guidance for the fleet during the pandemic based on lessons learned from combating the disease.

The outbreaks also prompted the Defense Department’s inspector general to initiate an evaluation of the Navy’s approach to preventing the spread of infectious diseases aboard its ships and submarines. The evaluation will determine whether the Navy has put in place policies and procedures to prevent and stop the spread of diseases, and if mitigation measures that are effective at preventing the spread of the coronavirus had been implemented across the fleet, according to an announcement May 11.

The new guidance also comes the same day that the Navy’s own investigation into its response to the outbreak on the Roosevelt was delivered to Adm. Mike Gilday, the chief of naval operations. The initial investigation was expanded April 29 after the admiral of a regional command like the Pacific Fleet — is required before they are allowed aboard. The Navy’s message Wednesday to the fleet makes the command investigation into the events surrounding the (coronavirus) outbreak aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt,” Gilday spokesman Cmndr. Nate Christensen said in a statement. “It will take time for the investigation’s recommendations to be reviewed and endorsed by [Gilday].”

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Pentagon working on plans for Afghanistan drawdown

BY DAN LAMOTHE AND SUSANNAH GEORGE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is preparing for President Donald Trump to withdraw thousands of American troops from Afghanistan before the presidential election as military leaders recommend keeping at least a small counterterrorism force to remain in the country, current and former U.S. officials said.

The troop cuts would follow the withdrawal of several thousand service members since the Trump administration signed a deal with the Taliban on Feb. 29. The agreement called for the United States to reduce the number of service members in Afghanistan from about 12,000 to 8,600 by mid-July, with a possible full pullout by next spring if the Taliban meets several conditions.

The Taliban has mostly remained from attacking U.S. forces since March, as required in the deal, but peace negotiations between the insurgent group and the Afghan government have largely stalled in a bloody quagmire. Scores of civilians were killed or injured as a result of Afghan government operations and in Taliban attacks last month, a significant increase over April 2019, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

U.S. officials, however, still expect Trump to cut more troops before Election Day as he seeks to deliver on a promise to end America’s “forever wars.”

At a news conference Tuesday evening, Trump declined to set a timetable for withdrawal. But he said that the U.S. has been in Afghanistan long enough, and that “we can always go back if we want to.”

“I have no target,” he said of a potential end to America’s 18-year-old war. “But as soon as reasonable. Over a period of time, but as soon as reasonable.”

Senior Pentagon officials are expected to meet soon with the president to discuss options, one defense official said. Several proposals have been drawn up for Trump, including one that would remove all U.S. troops this year, another defense official said. The officials, like some others interviewed for this story, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

The New York Times first reported Tuesday that senior U.S. defense officials and Trump would meet in coming days to discuss options for Afghanistan, including possibly removing all troops there.

Two Afghan officials said Wednesday that they are aware Trump wants a faster withdrawal, but that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has not officially been informed of any change in plans.

The discussions have been complicated by the coronavirus, which has spread rapidly in Afghanistan.

In-person military training programs have been suspended, joint operations curtailed and face-to-face meetings severely reduced, according to senior Afghan defense officials. U.S. troops who visited Afghan bases regularly are now largely confined to their bases, the officials said.

Army Gen. Scott Miller, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, has long understood that deeper cuts to the U.S. military in Afghanistan were possible this year, said one former senior defense official familiar with his thinking.

Before the U.S. deal with the Taliban was signed in February, Miller told other senior U.S. officials that he was comfortable with the terms of the agreement because they safeguarded American interests and included a counterterrorism force.

Last year, Miller directed his top officer overseeing Special Operations, Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, to form a network of U.S. forces that could carry out counterterrorism missions and partner with Afghan forces to collect intelligence if a few thousand troops or fewer remained in the country.

The network, built around what U.S. military officials called “regional targeting teams,” has been operating for months and can be adjusted if more troops are withdrawn, a senior U.S. military official told The Washington Post during a briefing in Afghanistan in February.

It would probably take a few months for the military to withdraw all of its troops, the former senior defense official said.

The effort would include shipping weapons and other sensitive equipment out on aircraft, transferring other items to Afghan forces and abandoning some items that are of lesser value. Several thousand forces from NATO allies also remain in Afghanistan, and some of the nations would need American aircraft to help remove their equipment, the former senior defense official said.

Miller has stressed to U.S. forces the need to determine what equipment should stay and go; some items have already been shipped out of the country in recent months.

U.S. military officials in Afghanistan declined to comment about ongoing planning, referring questions to the Defense Department.

The Pentagon’s chief spokesman, Jonathan Rath Hoffman, said in a news conference Tuesday that he had no updates on any forthcoming meetings between Defense Department officials and Trump.

“I think it’s been clear for some time that the U.S. has been looking at different options and how we are going to continue with our presence in Afghanistan,” he said.

The bottom line, he said, is that U.S. officials have said for months that the future of Afghanistan is “going to be best suited for peace” when there is an agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The planning for an expedited withdrawal comes as a rare three-day cease-fire between Afghan forces and the Taliban, established in recognition of the Islamic holiday Eid, appeared to be holding longer than initially conceived. The cessation of violence was scheduled to end Tuesday at midnight but had continued, according to Afghanistan’s national security council.

As recently as Tuesday, the Taliban was discussing whether to extend the cease-fire, according to Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the group. Taliban officials have declined to comment on the status of the truce since then.

Bringing down the levels of violence in Afghanistan is a key demand of Afghan, U.S. and Taliban officials as all parties wrangle over how to proceed. A condition in the U.S-Taliban agreement had also been a significant stumbling block, with senior Afghan officials balking at the idea due to security concerns.

Ghani ordered the release of up to 2,000 prisoners during the cease-fire this week as a goodwill gesture. U.S. officials praised the move, stressing that all parties should seize on the opportunity for peace.
Troops could receive hazard pay, awards

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—Thousands of troops who have deployed to help battle the coronavirus pandemic could soon receive hazard pay and awards to recognize their service, the military’s top general said Thursday.

A group of Pentagon officials comprised of the senior enlisted leadership from each service is now determining what the rules will be for hazard pay and awards for personnel, Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during a virtual town hall event at the Pentagon.

More than 55,600 Defense Department personnel have deployed throughout the United States for coronavirus relief efforts, including about 46,000 National Guard members, according to the Pentagon. Some of these service members have conducted testing or treated coronavirus patients, increasing their risk of becoming infected by the virus.

“I expect that we’ll put out some guidance that will be definitive under [Defense Secretary Mark Esper’s] signature about hazardous duty pay, about awards, about unit awards, individual awards, etc. All of that kind of stuff is absolutely under consideration,” he said.

Milley said the policy could be determined within the next 30 days.

During the town hall, Esper also reiterated his support for extending federal orders for Guard members who are on coronavirus missions approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Some National Guard members who were called up in late March to support relief efforts were set to have their orders end June 24, just short of the 90 days required to receive some GI Bill benefits.

“If it’s a valid mission assignment, we should certainly extend it. And we should extend the mission assignment until the mission is accomplished,” Esper said.

The Pentagon is also working to make certain Guard members receive time to quarantine once their mission is complete so they do not infect their families or community when they return home, the defense secretary said.

Aid: Pentagon to examine response for future outbreak

FROM FRONT PAGE

leaders the other day and asked if they would be interested in getting units of blood or plasma to send aboard ships or with deployed forces to use as needed. He said they all responded that it would be helpful. Esper said he has taken the test to see if he has the virus antibodies but doesn’t yet have the results.

Unlike the nasal swab tests being used to diagnose active infections, antibody tests look for blood proteins called antibodies, which the body produces days or weeks after fighting an infection. The blood test could show if someone had the coronavirus in the recent past, which most experts think gives people some protection.

It’s not yet known what antibody level would be needed for immunity or how long any immunity might last and whether people with antibodies can still spread the virus.

The Pentagon, Esper said, is also taking a broad look at how best to respond to any future outbreaks.

Noting that a lot of the military aid rushed to communities as the pandemic struck ended up going unused or was used much less than anticipated, he said the military may send medical staff rather than entire hospital ships to cities in need.

“If one were to assume that the biggest wave that hit is the first wave, we’ve demonstrated that we have the hospital capacity, the ventilator capacity, all those other,” Esper said. “If we can handle that first wave, we can handle anything else after that.”

Mark Esper
defense secretary

“I think that’s a big lesson learned,” Esper said.

Saying that he and Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, think the virus may come back in smaller waves, Esper said the result may be that the military may be more likely to provide personal protective equipment and doctors

Claims: Initial applications for jobless aid drop 8 straight weeks

FROM FRONT PAGE

First-time applications for unemployment aid, though still high by historical standards, have now fallen for eight straight weeks. In addition to those who applied last week, an additional 1.2 million applications were filed under a new program for self-employed and gig workers, who are eligible for jobless aid for the first time.

These figures aren’t adjusted for seasonal variations, so the government doesn’t include them in the overall data.

Analysts are monitoring incoming economic data to gauge how consumers are responding as many retail establishments gradually reopen. Jobs won’t return in any significant way as long as Americans remain slow to resume spending at their previous levels.

Data from Chase Bank credit and debit cards shows that consumers have slowly increased their spending since the government distributed stimulus checks in mid-April. Consumer spending had plunged 40% in March compared with a year earlier but has since rebounded to 26% below year-ago levels.

Most of that increase has occurred in online shopping, which has recovered to pre-virus levels after having tumbled about 20%. But offline spending, which makes up the vast majority of consumer spending, is still down 32% from a year ago, according to Chase, after having plummeted 50% at its lowest point.
S. Korea restores restrictions in Seoul amid new outbreaks

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Museums, theaters, parks and other public facilities in the Seoul metropolitan area will close for two weeks starting Friday, health authorities said as they raced to contain a new breakout of the coronavirus.

The announcement came Thursday after South Korea reported 79 new confirmed cases, its biggest daily number in nearly two months.

The spike underscored the risks of lifting strict containment measures as South Korea and other nations try to return to normalcy amid the ongoing pandemic. U.S. Forces Korea also eased restrictions on most bases in the country earlier this month except for those in the Seoul area but kept all bars and other “adults-only” establishments off-limits.

In addition, USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams renewed a public health emergency that gives him authority to enforce the rules for civilians as well as service members through Aug. 20.

Col. Edward Ballanco, the commander of the Army garrison in the southeastern city of Daegu, said Thursday that military patrols had found “a bunch of people in bars over the last week.” He didn’t give details.

Several American soldiers have been demoted and civilian employees and contractors have been banned from U.S. installations for violating the rules over the past few months.

“The penalties are severe and it’s just foolish right now … to suffer these penalties just to go into a bar when you can go into a restaurant and order a drink,” Ballanco said in a Facebook Live community update.

The latest increase largely stemmed from a cluster of infections among workers at a distribution center operated by South Korean e-commerce company Coupang in Bucheon, a satellite city to the west of Seoul.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control said it has linked at least 82 infections to workers there and was testing 4,000 more people who may have been exposed.

Similar outbreaks have been reported in recent weeks at nightclubs and bars in the Seoul area, which is home to about 25 million people, about half of South Korea’s population.

Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said government-run public facilities would close from Friday to June 14 in the densely populated capital and surrounding areas to slow the spread of the virus.

He urged bars, clubs and other entertainment facilities to do the same and called on companies to adopt flexible hours to minimize crowds and to follow quarantine rules including maintaining cleanliness and wearing face masks.

Residents were asked to avoid unnecessary gatherings and to stay home if they felt ill.

The government stopped short of reimposing restrictions nationwide, but Park warned the next two weeks would be “crucial” in determining if measures need to be expanded.

“If we fail to eradicate the spread of the virus in the metropolitan area at an early stage, it will lead to more community infections,” he told reporters Thursday after an emergency meeting.

South Korea never ordered severe lockdowns but has been lauded for its aggressive testing and tracing efforts that helped drive the daily number of cases from a peak of 909 on Feb. 29 to single digits earlier this month.

The government ended a strict social distancing campaign on May 6 and began what it calls “everyday life quarantine,” including a phased plan to reopen schools.

However, health workers are finding it increasingly difficult to track transmissions as public activity resumes, KCDC director Jeong Eun-kyeong said.

“We will do our best to trace contacts and implement preventative measures, but there’s a limit to such efforts,” she said.

The new measures in Seoul appeared to have little effect on the U.S. military community because Yongsan Garrison and the nearby K-16 base were the only U.S. installations kept under a heightened alert level known as Health Protection Condition-Charlie.

That means people affiliated with USFK in the area can’t eat at off-base restaurants or attend other social activities in the local communities, although they can travel to unrestricted areas to do so.

Nonessential travel to the capital, including the two main airports, is also prohibited without special permission.

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US deaths hit 100K; India, Russia cases rise

Associated Press

MOSCOW — As the United States crossed a somber landmark of 100,000 coronavirus deaths, India registered record numbers Thursday while Russia continued to swiftly ease restrictions in sync with the Kremlin’s political plans despite a continuing high pace of infection.

The once-unthinkable death toll in the U.S. means that more Americans have died from the virus than were killed in the Vietnam and Korean wars combined.

Elsewhere around the world, India saw another record daily jump in coronavirus cases, while Russia reported a steady increase in its caseload, even as the city of Moscow and provinces across the vast country moved to ease restrictions in sync with the Kremlin’s political agenda.

India, home to more than 1.3 billion people, reported more than 6,500 new infections, bringing its nation’s total to over 158,000.

The spike comes as the nation’s 2-month-old lockdown is set to end Sunday. The country has recorded over 4,500 deaths.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government is preparing guidelines to be issued this weekend, possibly extending the lockdown in hard-hit areas. Earlier this month, the country allowed the reopening of shops and factories and the resumption of some train service and domestic flights.

Meanwhile, India’s top court ordered state authorities to provide free train rides and proper food and water to hundreds of thousands of poor migrant workers returning to their villages in the blazing heat after being thrown out of work in the cities and towns.

TV images have shown desperate and hungry migrants looting food carts at train stations, and at least four people have died on the trains this week as daytime temperatures climbed to 113 degrees Fahrenheit.

South Korea on Thursday reported its biggest jump in coronavirus cases in more than 50 days, a setback that could erode some of the hard-won gains that have made it a model for the rest of the world.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday announced earlier this week that the country’s postponed Victory Day military parade marking the 75th anniversary of the Nazi defeat in World War II will be held June 24, declaring the nation has passed the peak of the outbreak.

Russian media reported that the Kremlin now plans to go ahead with another high-priority item on Putin’s political agenda — a referendum on constitutional amendments that could allow him to remain in power through 2036. He postponed the vote in April because of the outbreak.

The government reported more than 8,300 new infections Thursday, down from more than 11,000 earlier this month. The total number of infections topped 379,000, the world’s third-largest caseload behind that of the United States and Brazil.

Russian officials reported 174 new deaths, for a total of almost 4,150.

Some Kremlin critics argue that the relatively low mortality rate reflects manipulation by authorities trying to set a positive environment for the parade and the constitutional vote. Russian officials have angrily rejected the allegations.

Moscow, which accounted for about half of all infections, opened an easing of the tight lockdown in place since late March, saying that non-food stores, dry cleaners and repair shops can reopen on Monday. The mayor also announced that residents will be allowed to walk in the parks with some restrictions and engage in sports in the mornings.

Across the vast country, numerous provinces already have eased the lockdowns.

In the U.S., Las Vegas casinos and Walt Disney World have made plans to reopen, and crowds of unmasked Americans are expected to swarm beaches over the summer months. Public health officials predict a resurgence by fall.

Despite the risks, the pressure for easing restrictions has risen across the globe as the economic pain has worsened.

French unemployment claims jumped over 100,000 in April, as more than 300 more people sought work and the virus lockdown prevented companies from hiring. The jobless rate in France doesn’t include 8 million people who received paycheck subsidies from the government.

Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 5.7 million people and killed over 355,000, with the U.S. having the most confirmed cases and deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Europe has recorded about 170,000 deaths.

The true death toll from the virus is widely believed to be significantly higher, with experts saying many victims died without ever being tested.

Some nations are seeing improved conditions, with new cases in Spain and Italy have fallen steadily for two months. China reported just two new cases on Thursday, both from abroad. Norway has reported no new cases for six days and has just eight active cases remaining.

VA continues hydroxychloroquine trails despite concerns

BY NIKKI WENTLING

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs will continue to use hydroxychloroquine to treat some coronavirus patients despite warnings from experts and a decision by the World Health Organization to halt its clinical trials because of safety concerns.

Hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug that also typically is used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, remains an unproven treatment for the coronavirus. President Donald Trump held up the drug as a “game-changer” for the treatment of the virus and said that he took a dose every day for two weeks as a preventive measure.

The WHO announced Monday that it temporarily stopped its clinical trials of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for the virus after observational studies were published that found the drug might do more harm than good. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious-disease expert, said Wednesday that the drug is not an effective treatment, based on available research.

Fauci and the WHO referenced a study published Friday in the Lancet, a peer-reviewed journal, that looked at 96,000 coronavirus patients worldwide and found those who received hydroxychloroquine were at higher risk for death and irregular heart rhythms.

The VA, however, said it would continue to administer the drug to some coronavirus patients.

“In certain cases, medical providers and patients want to try hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19, and [Food and Drug Administration] guidance, which VA follows, permits that,” VA press secretary Christina Noel said in an email. “VA only permits use of the drug after ensuring Veterans and caretakers are aware of potential risks associated with it, as we do with any other drug or treatment.”

In late March, the FDA granted emergency approval for doctors to use hydroxychloroquine to treat hospitalized coronavirus patients in specific instances. The potential benefits of using the drug must outweigh the risks, and there must be no adequate, approved or available alternative, the FDA guidance says.

About 1,300 VA patients have received hydroxychloroquine. The department did not say how many of those patients recovered from the virus nor how many died. Fauci said only that the answers to those questions would require a review of all patient records.

The National Institutes of Health and the University of Virginia funded an analysis in April of the VA’s use of hydroxychloroquine on more than 200 coronavirus patients. Researchers found no benefits of using the drug and discovered a possible link between hydroxychloroquine and higher death rates. The researchers urged medical providers to wait for more rigorous studies of hydroxychloroquine before it’s used as a treatment for the virus.

As of Wednesday, 1,191 VA patients and 31 employees had died, with an additional 8,500 more receiving the drug. The department reported more than 13,500 positive cases of the virus among its patients, about 11,000 of whom have recovered.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin announced earlier this week that the country’s postponed Victory Day military parade marking the 75th anniversary of the Nazi defeat in World War II will be held June 24, declaring the nation has passed the peak of the outbreak.

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Some nations are seeing improved conditions, with new cases in Spain and Italy have fallen steadily for two months. China reported just two new cases on Thursday, both from abroad. Norway has reported no new cases for six days and has just eight active cases remaining.
WASHINGTON — The nation’s capital will begin a phased reopening Friday, even as Mayor Muriel Bowser warns that it presents a risk of more coronavirus infections.

Restaurants will be permitted to seat guests outdoors, barbers and hair salons will open with limited capacity and nonessential businesses will be allowed to offer curbside pick-up from parking lots.

Dog parks, tennis courts and golf courses will reopen, but playground equipment and children’s pools will remain closed.

Sports that involve close contact, including football, soccer and basketball, are still banned. For now, all area businesses are encouraged to work remotely as much as possible.

Bowser said Wednesday that the public health emergency she declared in March will remain in place.

“The virus is still in our city, in our region and in our country,” Bowser said. “We know, without a vaccine or a cure, there will be new infections.”

Washington remains an area of concern. There were 263.2 new cases per 100,000 people in the District of Columbia over the past two weeks, which ranks first in the country for new cases per capita.

Last week, Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House’s coronavirus response team, visited the nation’s capital.

“All must be done with a real understanding of the consequences of what the last move has been,” she told reporters Monday.

In less than 10 days, Newcomb has announced rules allowing 47 of the state’s 58 counties to reopen restaurants and malls, religious services, hair salons and gyms. Newcomb said Wednesday that gyms could open within weeks. All must be done with modifications.

Georgia

ATLANTA — Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp said Wednesday that he is stepping down after a health scare to spend more time with his family as the state continues to fight the coronavirus.

Rick Toomey’s decision to leave the Department of Health and Environmental Control came less than 15 months after he took over the agency. DHEC’s board had spent 17 months looking for its new director before choosing Toomey, who was a board member.

Toomey spent two weeks on leave starting in late March because of high blood pressure.

Toomey said that health care played a part in his decision to leave, along with wanting to spend more time in his Beaufort home, where his new grandson also lives.

“The lack of immunity to the coronavirus doesn’t qualify someone to cast a ballot by mail. The decision was unanimous by the Texas Supreme Court, which is stacked with Republican justices, including one who revealed last week that she had tested positive for COVID-19.

Texas

AUSTIN — Texas officials fighting to block widespread mail-in voting during the pandemic claimed victory after the state’s highest court ruled Wednesday that a lack of immunity to the coronavirus doesn’t qualify someone to cast a ballot by mail.

Justice Eva Guzman wrote the court was unified in the conclusion that “fear of contracting a disease is not a physical condition.”

The Texas Democratic Party blasted the decision and vowed its hopes to a similar challenge playing out in federal court. But the top elections lawyer in Houston, Harris County attorney Douglas Ray, said he believed the ruling leaves room for each voter to decide themselves whether they qualify, and gives clerks basically no ability to second-guess the reasoning. In Texas, voters do not have to describe their disability when requesting a mail-in ballot.
Africa’s endangered wildlife at risk as tourism falls

By Joe Mwihia  
Associated Press

NANYUKI, Kenya — The armed rangers set off at dusk in pursuit of poachers. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new alertness, and a new fear.

With tourists gone along with their money, protecting endangered wildlife like black rhinos has become that much more challenging. And the poachers, like many desperate to make a living, might become more daring.

Rhinos have long been under threat from poachers who kill them for their horns to supply illegal trade fueled by the mistaken belief that the horns have medicinal value.

Now there are concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic may increase such poaching, said John Tekeles, a patrol guide and head of the dog unit at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya.

“We are more alert because maybe more poachers will use this time to come in to poach,” Tekeles said.

The number of black rhinos in Africa has been slowly increasing though the species remains critically endangered, according to a report in March by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN. It credits effective law enforcement as one of the reasons for the improvement.

Ol Pejeta is home to more than 130 black rhinos, the single largest population in East and Central Africa, said Richard Vigne, the conservancy’s managing director.

Protecting them is expensive. Ol Pejeta spends about $10,000 per year per rhino on that protection, Vigne said.

“A ranger observes the last remaining two northern white rhinos — Fatu, left, and Najin, right — at the Ol Pejeta conservancy in Kenya.

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Cash, long a refuge in uncertain times, now under suspicion

By Zeina Karam  
Associated Press

BEIRUT — In troubled times, people have been known to hoard currency at home — a financial security blanket against deep uncertainty. But in this crisis, things are different. This time cash itself, passed from hand to hand across neighborhoods, cities and societies just like the coronavirus, is a source of suspicion rather than reassurance.

No longer a thing to be shoved mindlessly into a pocket, tucked into a worn wallet or thrown casually on a kitchen counter, money’s status has changed during the pandemic and not just among the older generation, paying with cash is also a status symbol.

Since the virus outbreak, however, shops that have remained open have posted signs encouraging people to pay with cards. Many are: According to Germany’s central bank, the Bundesbank, 43% of people have changed their payment behavior in the past few weeks; now, a large percentage are likely to make contactless payments with a card.

Japan, for its sophisticated reputation, is also a solid believer in cash. But the threat of the coronavirus could be the impetus the nation needed to move toward going cashless.

“The culture is slowly changing,” says Hiroki Maruyama, who heads the Fintech Association of Japan, a nonprofit.

Billionaire investor Warren Buffett has said that “cash combined with courage in a crisis is priceless.” And in crisis-hit countries and parts of the world gripped by conflict or inflation, cash is still carried in thick wads for simple shopping expeditions.

In Lebanon, as the economic situation deteriorated late last year and the fear of banks collapsing mounted, many people began saving cash in their homes and the sale of home safes likewise surged.

As banks imposed capital controls, trips to the bank to withdraw foreign currency — followed by a trip to one of the ubiquitous exchange shops to change money on the black market — became the norm.

“I wear gloves. But honestly? Cash is the last thing on people’s minds right now,” said a money changer in Beirut who asked to be identified by his first name, Ihsan, fearing unwanted attention from authorities.

Cash still rules in many other parts of the Middle East, as well as West and Central Africa. Monthly banking account fees are prohibitive for many, and the self-employed often keep their savings at home in hard currency. In parts of Africa, ATM machines often don’t work.

Dorothy Harpool, a director and lecturer at Wichita State University’s W. Frank Barton School of Business, predicted that the pandemic would lead some consumers to rethink their use of cash. But going completely cashless, she says, is a long way off.

“Until everyone and every country has reliable access to the internet, I do not believe the pandemic will singularly change past practices,” Harpool said. In particular, cash transactions are also likely to remain for businesses operating under the radar of government and other regulatory bodies.

Ihsan, the Beirut money changer, said that there are certain things you just can’t do without cash.

“Like how else can you bribe a government employee to get your business done? With a credit card?”
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*Valid February 1 – July 31, 2020 at Army & Air Force Exchange Service, Navy Exchange and Marines Exchange Overseas MILITARY AutoSource (MAS) locations. Includes new car, motorcycle and ATV purchases. Must be a single transaction. Excludes prior purchases and CANEX. MILITARY STAR is not a licensed automobile loan lender or broker. MILITARY STAR does not process, underwrite or make any credit decisions regarding auto loans and does not represent any of the lenders featured at MAS concessions or on the installation. PNL43306. MILITARY STAR promotions subject to credit approval. Standard account terms apply to non-promotional purchases and, after promotion ends, to promotional purchases. As of March 16, 2020. a variable 10.34% APR applies to retail plan purchases, and a variable 18.24% APR applies to accounts subject to penalty APR. Minimum interest change: 50c. See Exchange Credit Program agreement for more details.

†Receive a 10% discount for all purchases the first day, upon account approval. The 10% discount will apply as a credit on your first MILITARY STAR statement. Visit MyECP.com for details.

**Rewards exclude military clothing line of credit.
Chinese lawmakers endorse Hong Kong security law

BEIJING — China’s legislature endorsed a national security law for Hong Kong on Thursday that has strained relations with the United States and Britain and prompted new protests in the territory.

The National People’s Congress approved the bill as it wrapped up an annual session that was held under intensive anti-coronavirus controls. The vote was 2,878 to 1 with six abstentions, in line with the high-profile but largely ceremonial body’s custom of near-unanimous support for all legal changes decided by the ruling Communist Party.

The law will alter Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” framework and might be used to suppress political activity.

Premier Li Keqiang, the country’s No. 2 leader, defended the law as consistent with Beijing’s promises.

“The decision adopted by the NPC session is designed for steady implementation of ‘one country, two systems’ and Hong Kong’s long-term prosperity and stability,” Li said at a news conference.

The law and the way it is being enacted prompted U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday to announce Washington will no longer treat Hong Kong as autonomous from Beijing. That could hurt the territory’s attractiveness as a business center.

Pompeo’s notice adds Hong Kong to the Trump administration’s conflicts with China over trade, technology, religious freedom, Chinese handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the status of Taiwan, the self-ruled island Beijing claims as its own territory.

Li called for mutual respect and Sino-U.S. cooperation to promote “extensive common interests” in resolving global problems and promoting trade, science and other fields.

“Both countries stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation,” Li said.

On Thursday, three pro-democracy lawmakers were ejected from Hong Kong’s legislative chamber during a debate over a bill that would criminalize insulting or abusing the Chinese national anthem.

Also Thursday, the NPC approved a government budget that will increase spending to generate jobs in an effort to reverse an economic slump after Chinese industries were shut down to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Private sector analysts say as much as 30% of the urban workforce, or as many as 130 million people, lost their jobs at least temporarily during the shutdown. They say as many as 25 million jobs might be lost for good this year.

The budget calls for giving local governments $280 billion to spend on meeting goals including creating 9 million new jobs. That is in line with expectations of higher spending but a fraction of the $1 trillion-plus stimulus packages launched or discussed by the U.S., Japan and Europe.

Li, the premier, said Beijing is in a “strong position to introduce new measures” if necessary but wants to avoid flooding the economy with too much money. He said 70% of planned spending is aimed at putting wages in workers’ pockets in order to support consumer spending, the biggest driver of the economy.

“We will do our utmost to keep China’s economic growth stable,” Li said. “At the same time, we must make sure that all measures taken are well calibrated.”

In an anti-virus measure, Li sat on a dais in the Great Hall of the People, the seat of the legislature in central Beijing, and talked by video link with reporters at a media center 4 miles away. The reporters, wearing masks, sat in widely spaced chairs in an auditorium, watching Li on a video screen.

The premier called for international cooperation in fighting the coronavirus pandemic but didn’t answer a question about how an investigation into the origins of the pandemic demanded by Washington and some other governments should be conducted.

Hundreds flee quarantine in Zimbabwe and Malawi

BLANTYRE, Malawi — Manhunters have begun after hundreds of people, some with the coronavirus, fled quarantine centers in Zimbabwe and Malawi as officials fear they will spread COVID-19.

In Malawi, more than 400 people recently repatriated from South Africa and elsewhere fled a center at a stadium in Blantyre while police and health workers watched. At least 46 escapees had tested positive for the virus.

And in Zimbabwe, police spokesperson Paul Nyathi said officers were “hunting down” more than 100 people who escaped from centers where a 21-day quarantine is mandatory for those returning from abroad.

From The Associated Press
Installing acrylic shields at point of sale and customer service areas.

Disinfecting customer service and sales points multiple times.

Deploying posters, floor decals and other visual reminders for shoppers to keep a safe distance between themselves and others.

Transitioning the school meal program for military schoolchildren overseas to a grab-and-go format.

The Exchange is committed to ensuring Warfighters & families can get critical products while maintaining physical distancing in a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learn more about Exchange efforts to protect the Force at shopmyexchange.com/community
Bad weather delays SpaceX launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The launch of a SpaceX rocket ship with two NASA astronauts on a history-making flight into orbit was called off with less than 17 minutes to go in the countdown Wednesday because of thunderstorms in the southern part of the state where George Floyd, 46, died on Memorial Day after an officer knelt on his neck until he became unresponsive. Protesters also skirmished with officers, who fired rubber bullets and tear gas in a repeat of Tuesday night’s confrontation.

On Thursday morning, smoke lung over Minneapolis and looters carried merchandise from a damaged Target store with no interference by police. Video of the store’s interior showed empty clothing racks and shelves and debris strewn about. Obscenities were spray-painted on the exterior of the store.

Protests spread to other U.S. cities. In California, hundreds of people protesting Floyd’s death blocked a Los Angeles freeway and shattered windows of California Highway Patrol cruisers on Wednesday.

It was a second and much more violent night in Minneapolis since the death of Floyd, whom police were seeking to arrest outside a Minneapolis grocery store on a report of a counterfeit bill being passed. A bystander’s cellphone video showed an officer kneeling on Floyd’s neck for almost eight minutes as he eventually became unresponsive.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office and the FBI in Minneapolis said Thursday they were conducting “a robust criminal investigation” into Floyd’s death and was making the case a priority. The FBI had already announced it was investigating whether Floyd’s civil rights were violated. The new announcement came a day after President Donald Trump tweeted that he had asked an investigation to be expedited.

Mayor Jacob Frey tweeted for calm early Thursday. “Please, Minneapolis, we cannot let tragedy beget more tragedy,” he said on Twitter. He also asked for the public’s help in keeping the peace.

The officer and three others were fired Tuesday, and on Wednesday, Frey called for him to be criminally charged.

Trump and his campaign manager, Brad Parscale, said Twitter’s “clear political bias” had led the company to suppress advertising since last November. The campaign has been advertising on Twitter months ago.”

Trump preparing executive order targeting social media protections

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is preparing to sign an executive order targeting social media protections for political advertising since last November. The campaign has been advertising on Twitter months ago.”

Trump accused Twitter of “interfering in the 2020 Presidential Election” and insisting “as president, I will not allow this to happen.”

Veteran space shuttle astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken were supposed to ride into orbit aboard SpaceX’s sleek, white-and-black, bullet-shaped Dragon capsule on top of a Falcon 9 rocket, taking off from the same launch pad used during the Apollo moon missions a half-century ago.

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TEARING UP THE PLAYBOOK

Kumail Nanjiani on his unconventional new rom-com, sheltering in place and selling films during a pandemic  

Pages 20-21
**GADGET WATCH**

Apple’s latest, the iPhone SE, is actually affordable

**By Jim Rossman**
*The Dallas Morning News*

Affordable isn’t exactly the first word that jumps to mind when I think about Apple.

This isn’t a complaint. Apple products cost more than the competition, and I’m OK with that.

But a few weeks ago, Apple did something it doesn’t do very often — it released an affordable iPhone. The new iPhone SE starts at $399. Some might even call it cheap.

Is it right for you? Could it be right for me? Let’s take a look.

**Mom’s next phone**

The iPhone SE should look really familiar if you are an iPhone user. It shares the basic iPhone body design Apple has used since 2014. It has a home button with a touch ID sensor, pretty tall bezels above and below the screen and a glass back.

The new SE is identical to the iPhone 8 on the outside, but inside, it has the A13 Bionic processor from Apple’s newest phone, the iPhone 11.

Yes, the same iPhone 11 that came out last September with a starting price of $699.

This means the iPhone SE will be a viable phone for the next five years or so. What I mean by viable is the SE will continue to be supported for iOS updates. This is Apple’s second-generation iPhone SE.

The first SE was released in 2016. It had the body of an iPhone SE with the internal processor of the iPhone 6S. The new iPhone SE is the perfect next phone for my parents.

**Specs**

Everything inside the iPhone SE should be familiar, as the parts have been used before. This is an off-the-shelf upgrade, which means Apple used parts it already had to make this phone to keep costs down.

Apple has been using robots at the iPhone factories in China to make parts for the iPhone 8 for many years, so those machines are long-since paid for. Using them to churn out parts for the iPhone SE is very cheap for Apple.

There are lots of parts inside, though, from the battery to the CPU. Everything had to be reconfigured to fit inside the smaller case.

The display is a 4.7-inch Retina HD touch screen display. It is an OLED screen like Apple uses on its newest iPhones, but it’s still a great screen.

It has Touch ID, which is a fingerprint sensor inside the home button. I could easily use it to lock the Touch ID instead of using my face to unlock my phone, but I’m too used to wiping the mask to the store, I’m finding the Touch ID to be a better (faster) way to authenticate when I use Apple Pay.

Internal storage starts at 64 gigabytes ($399), with upgrade options for 128 GB ($449) or 256 GB ($549).

Doubling the storage to 128 GB for an extra $50 is a no-brainer if you can afford it.

The SE is water- and dust-resistant and can survive a dunk into 5 feet of water for up to 30 minutes.

The A13 Bionic CPU is Apple’s fastest-ever chip in a smartphone. The chip in the SE is exactly the same as the iPhone 11.

Battery life in the SE is the same as the iPhone 8, which is up to 13 hours of video playback.

It has wireless charging and it can fast charge with an 18w USB adapter (sold separately) up to 50% in 30 minutes.

The SE measures 5.4 by 2.65 by 0.29 inches and weighs just 5.22 ounces.

The radios inside the SE are an upgrade. It supports gigabit-class LTE, which means faster data transfers from cell towers.

It also has Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.0. The SE is a dual SIM phone, with one physical SIM card and one eSIM. This means you can have two phone numbers on the SE as long as one is an eSIM (electronic SIM).

**Cameras**

Apple describes the main camera in the SE as the “best single-camera system in an iPhone.”

The SE has a single camera on the back with a 12-megapixel sensor and a f/1.8 wide angle lens. There is no optical zoom, but there is digital zoom up to 5x.

The front camera has a seven-megapixel sensor.

Because the SE has the A13 Bionic processor, it can shoot portrait mode photos with the front and back cameras.

The SE also has next-generation Smart HDR, which is a mode that uses multiple exposures to create better tonal range. It also has auto image stabilization.

It can shoot 4K video at up to 60 frames per second, and you can capture 8 megapixel still photos while you are shooting 4K video.

**Conclusions**

The first thing I did when I unboxed the SE was take the SIM out of my XS Max and put it in the SE to use as my daily phone.

Aside from having to retrain myself to use a fingerprint instead of my face to unlock and use Apple Pay, I thought the SE was a great phone.

But I’ve found a screen size snob. I’m not sure I want to go back to using a phone with a smaller screen, but the experience of carrying the SE as my everyday phone has been flawless. It is fast and light and does everything I need it to do.

I do miss the zoom lens, but for a phone that costs one-third of what I paid, I could overlook it.

I have a few friends who don’t mind spending $1,000 and up on a new phone every year, but most of the people I know are looking to save money. For $400, this is the iPhone I’m recommending for almost everyone, including my wife and my parents.

Pros: Inexpensive, fast, great camera

Cons: Small screen

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**ON THE COVER:** Kumail Nanjiani’s latest project is “The Lovebirds,” a comedy originally scheduled for an April theatrical release. Costarring Issa Rae, it’s now streaming on Netflix.
“Carnival Row,” starring Orlando Bloom and Cara Delevingne, had to suspend filming in the Czech Republic in March.

Locally, film officials are working with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to establish criteria for filming on set and on location. Despite progress, no date has been set for the restart of filming, said Paul Audley, president of FilmLA.

Attorney Dan Stone, a partner in the litigation and entertainment and media groups of Greenberg Glusker, says the lack of a unified approach could further delay the return of domestic production. “Ultimately the industry will need some form of uniform guidelines,” he said.
"Lovebirds" star Nanjiani on new and upcoming films, how he's been faring during quarantine

Actor-comedian Kumail Nanjiani's latest film, "The Lovebirds," is now streaming on Netflix.

CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION / AP

BY SONAYA KELLEY
Los Angeles Times

Kumail Nanjiani is tired of romantic comedies ending with the boy and girl riding off into the sunset together. That’s why his latest rom-com, "The Lovebirds," centers around a couple on the brink of a breakup.

"There are all these movies that end when the couple gets together, but there aren’t as many movies about the couple living together and continuing to stay together," he said by phone while quarantined in Los Angeles. "It’s just not something I’ve seen to be the same? This thing is somehow just magically going to disappear. Right now the mandate in L.A. is, if you leave your house, have a mask on. My wife and I have started going on walks at night because when we would go on a walk in the afternoon, we were the only ones wearing masks. In the beginning (of the mandate), everybody was wearing a mask. Now it’s a surprise when you see someone wearing a mask. Even here in L.A., people are getting a little bit cavalier about it.

Why do you think people have been so cavalier about adhering to social distancing guidelines?

I think it’s hard to quarantine for this long. It’s an invisible thing, right? You don’t see the threat. Usually there’s a problem, you do the thing (you’re told), the problem goes away, life returns to normal. This is not like that. You don’t really see the effects of social distancing, the effects of quarantining. The entire point is that you don’t see any real change. Things stay the same and the curve flattens. That’s kind of hard, I think, for people to wrap their heads around.

I think people are feeling like, “did the thing, I was at home for nine weeks” — which is a very long period of time — "this should’ve solved the problem." That’s not how it works. I understand I’m speaking from a place of privilege: I have a home, I have a job, and a lot of people don’t have that. A lot of people need to go back to work to make ends meet."

I think they’ve done a good job. They should have shut down a little bit earlier, but they still did a lot better than many other places around America. They caught on quickly. Some other places in America, I feel like they’re ignoring warnings and hoping against hope that this thing is somehow just magically going to disappear.

Are you quarantining in LA?

Yeah.

What are your thoughts on how the local government is handling the shutdown and now reopening the county?

I think people are feeling like, “did the thing, I was at home for nine weeks”—which is a very long period of time—"this should’ve solved the problem." That’s not how it works. I understand I’m speaking from a place of privilege: I have a home, I have a job, and a lot of people don’t have that. A lot of people need to go back to work to make ends meet."

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Rom-com ‘Lovebirds’ plays it safe

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

The Lovebirds’ stars Issa Rae and Kumail Nanjiani are two working-class voices working in film and television today, as actors, writers and creators. Rae’s “Insecure” and Nanjiani’s “The Big Sick” are both vibrant, stimulating and fresh and rooted deeply in the diversity of their own experiences. So it’s at least notable that this film, a dark, night-goes-wrong comedy, seems very much in each of their wheelhouses, was not created or written by either. And at times it seems, for all意图, it is.

As it is, “The Lovebirds” feels a little too familiar and a little too safe, like all the edges have been smoothed out. Perhaps that’s because it was originally a studio film that was supposed to open in theaters nationwide. But the shutdown changed the course of things and the film is now streaming on Netflix. There are some amusing twists, turns and wardrobe changes as the night gets weirder and more dangerous for this ordinary couple who thought they were just headed to dinner party.

Directed by Michael Showalter, “The Lovebirds” stars Issa Rae as Issa and Kumail Nanjiani as Jibran, a couple who one night stands turns into an all-day hang for Jibran (Nanjiani) and Leilani (Issa Rae) as they try to figure out the strange relationship that de-velops between the painter and the man convicted of stealing her work. That event sets the stage, but it proves to be a bit of a MacGuffin for what this film unfolds: a story of deeply human connection between two souls that actually see each other, and the healing power wrapped up in that sense of visibility.

It begins like a procedural, with surveillance footage capturing crimes and courtroom sketches that illustrate the first conversation between Czech painter Barbora Kysilkova and Karl-Bertil Nordland. She’s curious about where her paintings are, but she’s curious about him too, and the film switches to his perspective as they each study the subjects, as they each study the other throughout their tumultuous but deeply bonded friendship. She comes to understand that Kysilkova doesn’t just look at Nordland as an aesthetic object. In him, she sees herself, her own trauma, her own addiction, which is painting, creating art out of all the dark and scary things in life.

It is an almost startlingly intimate film, following this strange relationship between these two, as they go through the challenges of life: a car accident that nearly paralyzes Nordland, during which Kysilkova becomes his greatest advocate; a stint in jail for him; her own struggles with relationships and money and her career. A frisson of mystery wafts throughout, the whereabouts of her paintings always on Kysilkova’s mind. Ultimately, though, it was never really about the paintings, but the grace that came out of their theft, because she chose to look further, to look beyond the crime and see the person behind it.

“The Lovebirds” is rated R for sexual content, language and some violence. Running time: 86 minutes.

Norwegian documentarian Benjamin Ree’s “The Painter and the Thief” is about a bold art world heist, and the strange relationship that develops between the painter and the man convicted of stealing her work. That event sets the stage, but it proves to be a bit of a MacGuffin for what this film unfolds: a story of deeply human connection between two souls that actually see each other, and the healing power wrapped up in that sense of visibility.

It begins like a procedural, with surveillance footage capturing crimes and courtroom sketches that illustrate the first conversation between Czech painter Barbora Kysilkova and Karl-Bertil Nordland. She’s curious about where her paintings are, but she’s curious about him too, and the film switches to his perspective as they each study the subjects, as they each study the other throughout their tumultuous but deeply bonded friendship. She comes to understand that Kysilkova doesn’t just look at Nordland as an aesthetic object. In him, she sees herself, her own trauma, her own addiction, which is painting, creating art out of all the dark and scary things in life.

It is an almost startlingly intimate film, following this strange relationship between these two, as they go through the challenges of life: a car accident that nearly paralyzes Nordland, during which Kysilkova becomes his greatest advocate; a stint in jail for him; her own struggles with relationships and money and her career. A frisson of mystery wafts throughout, the whereabouts of her paintings always on Kysilkova’s mind. Ultimately, though, it was never really about the paintings, but the grace that came out of their theft, because she chose to look further, to look beyond the crime and see the person behind it.

“The Painter and the Thief” is not rated. Running time: 102 minutes.
ARCADE SPIRITS

Charming visual novel set in an alternate future

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRD
Special to The Washington Post

For those who carry fond memories of basking in the backlit glow of arcade machines, Arcade Spirits will elicit some warm fuzzies. This visual novel written by Stefan Gagne and Aenne Schumann is about the ups and downs of a staff working to keep a small-time arcade afloat. The game, which was recently released on consoles, plays on nostalgic feelings with knowing references to game culture while speaking to the economic anxieties that underlie so much of modern life.

Arcade Spirits tells the story of Ari Cader, a 20-something (you can choose Ari’s pronouns at the start of the game) whose post-adolescent life has been marked by financial hardship. Owing to an unstable upbringing — punctuated by frequent moves and her parents’ slide down the economic totem pole — Ari has adopted a philosophy of apathy: “Going with the flow” is the favored catchphrase she uses to temper her ambitions and protect herself from disappointment. It’s also a way for her to come to terms with what she calls the “Cader family curse” — her notion of implacable struggles.

At the start of the game we find Ari, who has just lost another job, in the small apartment she shares with her friend Juniper. Eager to see Ari overcome this latest setback, Juniper advises her to download “Iris,” a digital assistant, to help with her job search. After securing her permission, Iris sifts through Ari’s personal data to gain a sense of her interests and motivations and recommends that she apply for a job at an arcade. As it happens, some of Ari’s favorite childhood memories — from before her parents’ fortunes took a nosedive — were of sinking quarters into arcade machines with nary a concern for the future.

Heeding Iris’ advice, Ari wanders over to the Funplex, a scrappy arcade situated along a strip mall. At the arcade, which was founded in the 1970s and is mostly a haven for retro games, she meets Francine, the Funplex’s octogenarian proprietor. Francine leads her through a strange job interview — “If you were a dinosaur, what dinosaur would you be?” — and eventually offers her an entry-level job. Ari’s duties include watching over the establishment to make sure that customers are happy and not engaging in unruly behavior as well as helping them to redeem tickets for cheap prizes. Francine tells her that while the Funplex can provide a steady paycheck, the employees who thrive there are those whose dreams align with working at an arcade. Over the rest of the game’s eight levels, the narrative explores the trade-offs that arise with following those dreams, where reality is capable of turning them to ash.

If players choose to help Ari fight for her dreams — at different points she can give up on them, which ultimately results in a Game Over — they’ll encounter the diverse set of employees and enthusiasts whose lives converge around the arcade. Each of these characters has their own struggles. Gavin, the Funplex’s technician who keeps the games running, is more at home with the arcade’s regular patrons, can be romanced if one wishes. As Ari takes on more responsibilities, Iris records her conversational choices and calculates which traits most exemplify her. Different conversation options are pegged to different character attributes such as gutsy, quirky, kindly, steady (i.e. prudent), and basically (as in basic — a person who sticks with the most pedestrian options). Raising specific character attributes closes off some conversational branches, so the story invites multiple playthroughs.

Though the story moves around to different locations, many static images are numbingly repeated. The art style, unfortunately, is not strong enough to bear such repetition. The story, on the other hand, held my interest in part for its levity and willingness to look at some of the downsides of gaming, like toxic players. In different ways, “Arcade Spirits” also raises the question of whether the Funplex’s most devoted patrons would be better off if they spent less time gaming. Accordingly, there is a note of ambivalence in its overall celebration of game culture, which adds a welcome counterpoint. Arcade Spirits is the video game equivalent of a beach read. It is charming, relatable and knows its audience.

Platforms: Mac, Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Online: arcadespirits.com
Lured by the siren song

Lorelei may not sing, but statue’s beauty is bewitching

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

The myth of a siren, the creature who lures sailors with her song to crash their ships upon rocky shores, is at least as old as Homer’s Odyssey. Not as old, but at least as popular in Germany, is Lorelei, the siren with her golden hair and melodic voice, who was the demise of many Rhine River boatmen.

She once sang her song from high atop a rocky outcrop where the Rhine flows at its narrowest point. Lorelei makes her first appearance in an 1801 Clemens Brentano ballad as Lore Lay, a woman who bewitches and murders men, but falls to her death from a cliff.

It was Heinrich Heine whose 1821 poem made her the river siren, bringing death and despair to boatmen.

The Lorelei rock, where the boatmen supposedly crashed, is an outcrop that rises 410 feet over the river. It gives a foreboding feel to those sailing downriver or driving past it on the highway.

The top of the Lorelei has long been a popular place for a fantastic view of the Rhine valley. From various points you can see where boats maneuver through the narrow opening between the rocks. Downriver is a view of Burg (Castle) Katz on the hillside above St. Goarshausen.

The top of the outcrop has been remodeled and last year the Lorelei culture and landscape park opened, along with a visitors center. Paths lead through rose bushes to the lookout points. Benches let you rest among the flowers or watch the river. There is even a rock where you can sit and pose, pretending you are Lorelei, high above the Rhine.

The Lorelei is also a stop on the Rheinsteig, a hiking trail that stretches 200 miles from Wiesbaden to Bonn, along the east bank of the Rhine. If you are hiking, there are stairs that lead down to St. Goarshausen in one direction, or 400 stairs down to the Lorelei statue.

In Heine’s poem, she sits on top of the outcrop high above the river, but here the statue of Lorelei stands at the end of a harbor breakwater stretching out into the Rhine.

The only way to get a good look at the siren is to take a 10-minute walk down a rocky path. By Russian artist Natascha Jusopov, it depicts a nude woman with long hair sitting on a rock. It’s not quite as romantic as having her sing her siren song from atop the cliff, but the setting also makes a nice place to take a break and watch the ships ply the Rhine.

After visiting Lorelei, take a stroll through St. Goarshausen’s old town. It features very narrow cobblestone lanes, a couple of wine taverns and restaurants in St. Goarshausen. Once there, follow the Lorelei signs up the hill.

From the Kaiserslautern area, take autobahn A 66 toward Ruedesheim. When it ends, follow highway B 42 to St. Goarshausen. Once there, follow the Lorelei signs up the hill.

From the Kaiserslautern area, take A 63 to A 61 to Bingen, then take L 400 to B 9 toward St. Goar. At Engelsburg, take the ferry across the Rhine to Kaub, then B 42 to St. Goarshausen. You can also take the ferry farther up the road to St. Goar over to St. Goarshausen.

The address is Auf der Lorelei, Lorelei 7, 56348 Bornich. The parking lot to see the statue is on the left, shortly before reaching St. Goarshausen on B 42.

ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS
From Wiesbaden, the easiest way to get there is to take autobahn A 66 toward Ruedesheim. When it ends, follow highway B 42 to St. Goarshausen. Once there, follow the Lorelei signs up the hill.

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COSTS
The Lorelei culture and landscape park is open 24/7, the visitors center is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. These are temporary hours due to the coronavirus pandemic. Social distancing on the rock is 6 feet, and masks need to be worn inside the visitors center. The Lorelei statue can be visited any time, but for safety reasons, it’s best to go only during daylight.

FOOD
There is a snack bar at the Lorelei culture and landscape park and restaurants in St. Goarshausen, but all are under coronavirus restrictions for now.

INFORMATION
German language-only website: www.loreley-besucherzentrum.de.

There is also a summer toboggan run at the Lorelei that just reopened if you want an adventure of a different kind.

— Michael Abrams
Southern Europe trying to lure back tourists

BY MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS AND BARRY HATTON

The Mediterranean resort town of Ayia Napa is known for its late-night parties. Each summer, thousands of young foreign tourists pack the dance floors of its nightlife district after dark. But the pandemic silenced the exuberant Napa Strip district as the island nation of Cyprus went into a lockdown to halt the spread of the coronavirus. Now nightclub owners wonder how social distancing rules will be eased enough for the party to resume — and what that will look like.

“We know at nightclubs, young people will go to dance and have a good time. But then you have to tell them that they have to keep 2 meters (6 feet) apart from each other,” asked Charalampos Alexandrou, the spokesman for a group representing local clubs, bars and restaurants.

Across southern Europe, in places where tourism is a major source of income, officials are weighing how to entice travelers to come back, even while the pandemic remains a threat. Juggling the sometimes-conflicting demands of health and business, authorities are introducing measures to reassure visitors that taking a holiday is safer than ever.

Social distancing rules may work in restaurants, but that’s not like to solve the quandary facing Ayia Napa’s nightclubs. Alexandrou said this will be “a season of trying to survive,” not seeking a profit. One idea being considered is asking holidaymakers to take a COVID-19 test prior to their arrival. Cyprus has reported 916 cases of COVID-19 and 17 deaths.

The country’s deputy minister for tourism, Savvas Perdios, said Cyprus will initially look to bring tourists from nearby countries that have managed to contain the virus — Greece, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and some central European and Nordic nations.

Authorities will take more time to assess the course of the pandemic in the United Kingdom and Russia, the island’s primary tourism markets, before rolling out the red carpet for those countries.

Tourists in the near future will have to navigate a different set of expectations, routines and rules to counter the virus.

Christos Angelides, president of the Cyprus Hotel Managers’ Association, said new rules being announced soon will mean that from the moment tourists step out of their bus or taxi from the airport, their luggage will be disinfected and taken straight to their rooms. Reception procedures will be done electronically, with employees behind a plexiglass screen and cleaning staff in full protective gear.

Guests eyeing a vacation in Portugal, another major southern European holiday destination, will probably look beyond a hotel’s online booking site if it has the “CleanSafe” seal now being awarded by local tourism officials. The seal indicates that the establishment, be it a hotel, restaurant or other venue, has enacted recommended hygiene and safety procedures to protect against the virus.

That has been a success in a desperate sector that accounts for 15% of Portugal’s gross domestic product and 9% of the country’s jobs. The online classes needed to obtain the seal are being attended by around 4,000 people a week.

The Portuguese government says discotheques will be the last to open, but many hotels intend to start reopening June 1.

Among the changes being adopted: Guests will not check into their rooms until 24 hours after the last occupant has checked out, to allow time for thorough cleaning and airing of the space. Buffets are unlikely to be offered, but room service is expected to thrive.

Another challenge is how to reopen southern Europe’s famous beaches.

Portugal has come up with a plan to get people back on the sand starting on June 6. Sunbathers must stay 5 feet apart, with umbrellas at least 10 feet apart. New signs and an app will use a traffic-light system of red, yellow and green indicating which beaches are fully open or have few people. Paddle boats and water slides will be prohibited.

Explore the colors of the Continent’s Blue Flag beaches

Blue flags with circular white logos depicting a cresting wave flap gently in the wind by beaches throughout the world, assuring a would-be bather that the waters in which they’re about to plunge meet stringent quality standards. The program is operated under the auspices of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark. In order to fly this eco-label, a series of strict environmental criteria must be met and maintained, and issues pertaining to safety, access and public education must be addressed as well.

In 2019, 3,797 beaches, 695 marinas and 67 boating operations across 47 countries were awarded the right to fly blue flags. One of Iceland’s best-known tourist attractions, the Blue Lagoon thermal spa, is not only unique but also engages in environmentally friendly practices. A geothermal power company drills for the seawater, and after harnessing its energy, it is led directly to Blue Lagoon for bathing, wellness, medical treatments and the harvesting of ingredients for use in skincare products. The water’s milky blue shade is due to its high silica content, and the water temperature in the bathing area tends to hover around a balmy 102 degrees. At 44 euros, entrance to the Blue Lagoon, silica mud mask, towel rental and a drink is a slice of luxury within reach.

To virtually explore all the other Blue Flag beaches and properties, see blueflag.global/all-bf-sites.
Under clear, blue skies in mid-May at the Bremerhof beer garden in Kaiserslautern, Germans did what they do every spring when it’s warm enough to sit outdoors: They soaked up the sun and emptied their beer mugs. But all was not business as usual. The Bremerhof reopened its beer garden on May 13, after a monthslong closure due to the coronavirus, but with strict hygiene rules in place. Gone, for now, are the long tables crammed with strangers. No longer do guests sit a mere sausage-length away from neighboring diners. Face masks are a mandatory fashion accessory while walking to a table or the restrooms. Even the servers wear them.

Under new guidelines aimed at preventing a resurgence of the coronavirus, tables are supposed to be a minimum of 6.5 feet apart — and they were at least that, with room to spare, in the Bremerhof’s spacious beer garden. It was an odd feeling to have a sense of privacy, along with quiet, in a setting that’s typically loud and crowded.

It was my first time in a restaurant since the pandemic hit. For the most part, I felt comfortable, mostly because everyone was so spread out and the tables looked clean. They’re supposed to be disinfected after each use, but I didn’t see it with my own eyes and had to trust that it had been done. I wish I’d brought a few disinfectant wipes to do the job myself, to be certain.

The menu was printed in black and white on disposable paper. I’m guessing it’s thrown out after each use, since it would be difficult to sanitize a piece of paper. Though the food choices are fewer than before the pandemic, there’s plenty of variety, from traditional German fare such as rumpsteak or schnitzel to salads and flammkuchen. I tried the goulash, a Hungarian stew with chunks of beef and pork, onion and bell pepper. It was delicious and reasonably priced, at just under 8 euros (less than $9).

Beer usually flows aplenty in a beer garden — and the Bremerhof serves up the usual German lineup of pils, wheat and dark beer, cola beer and shandy, or radler in German — a 50/50 mix of beer and lemonade. Wine, alcohol-free beer, coffee and juice are also available.

The Bremerhof asks customers to make reservations, but it’s possible to be spontaneous and get a table without one. Either way, customers need to leave their names and a phone number, in case they have to be contacted if another guest or a staff member is diagnosed with the virus.

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Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this story.
American couple finally visits Pompeii site after being stranded in quarantine for 2-plus months

By Colleen Barry and Alessandra Tarantino
Associated Press

An American couple waited a lifetime plus 2½ months to visit the ancient ruins of Pompeii together.

Colleen and Marvin Hewson, retirees from the Detroit area, were first in line when the archaeological site reopened to the public Tuesday following Italy’s coronavirus lockdown. Their long-delayed visit capped an unlikely adventure that had stranded them in modern Pompeii, a small tourist town, since early March.

“We have been patiently waiting since then for the ruins to open,” Colleen Hewson said as the couple got the chance to stroll through the ruins of the Roman city destroyed in A.D. 79 by a volcanic eruption, trailed by journalists capturing another milestone in Italy’s reopening.

“It only took 2½ months,” Marvin Hewson added.

For the Hewsons, seeing Pompeii was meant to be the highlight of a trip celebrating his 75th birthday and their 30th wedding anniversary.

Marvin Hewson, a history buff, had visited once while serving in the U.S. Navy in the 1960s and always vowed to get back; the trip was his wife’s gift to him.

The couple arrived in Rome on March 5 for the vacation of a lifetime, her first time overseas. By the time they made it to the gates of Pompeii several days later, the popular tourist site was closed and Italy was under lockdown due to the coronavirus epidemic that broke out more than 500 miles to the north.

Attempts to book flights out failed, and they resigned themselves to life under lockdown. Back in the United States, their four adult children relaxed when they realized their parents were far from the epicenter of Italy’s virus outbreak and in good local hands.

“We made a great connection with our Airbnb host family,” Colleen, 63, said. The host translated news for her and her husband, and helped keep them busy, tasking them with picking oranges and lemons from trees near the condominium where they stayed and teaching them to make limoncello.

“It helped to pass the time,” Marvin said.

Under lockdown, they fell into a routine, walking more than 7,000 steps a day, often to a grocery store near the archaeological site that allowed time to sit on a bench and gaze upon the ruins, “wishing we could be inside,” Colleen Hewson said. In all those weeks, “our Italian never got better,” she quipped, and they would use charades to communicate things they were looking for in the grocery store.

The couple was leaving Pompeii on Tuesday for Rome, where they planned to spend a couple of days sightseeing before returning home to Michigan at long last. Since Italy’s restrictions on movement have eased, their Airbnb host has driven the couple to the Amalfi coast, expressing surprise at the lack of traffic.

The couple said they feel lucky to have been able to spend the lockdown in such a beautiful setting. From their condominium’s rooftop, the couple could see Mt. Vesuvius to one side, and the island of Capri to the other.

“We looked at real estate. It would be a dream,” Marvin said. “We saved a lot of money because all of the stores were closed. We really are thinking of coming back.”
Dressed for travel?

By Natalie B. Compton
The Washington Post

Last year, supermodel Naomi Campbell made headlines when she shared a video of herself very thoroughly sanitizing her Qatar Airlines seat. There were disinfecting wipes involved, plastic gloves and a face mask.

And that was before the coronavirus pandemic. With the world battling a highly contagious global health threat, Campbell has taken her in-flight hygiene habits a step further by wearing a hazmat suit on board.

Campbell is not alone in wearing hazmat suits on planes. The behavior is becoming more common for regular air travelers, as well as airline staff.

Disposable PPE suits can cost less than $20 online, but health experts aren’t advocating wearing them on planes during the pandemic.

“Wearing a hazmat suit on an airplane is unnecessary and could cause undue concern for other travelers,” Scott Pauley, a press officer for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) told The Washington Post by email. “CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.”

Nonetheless, multiple carriers are requiring flight attendants to wear hazmat suits on planes, including Philippine Airlines, AirAsia and, most recently, Qatar Airways, CNN reported.

On May 18, Qatar Airways announced it would require members of its cabin crew to wear disposable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) suits over their uniforms in addition to other gear including safety goggles, gloves and a mask.

“At Qatar Airways, we have introduced these additional safety measures onboard our flights to ensure the continued health and well-being of our passengers and cabin crew, and to limit the spread of coronavirus,” Qatar Airways Group chief executive Akbar Al Baker said in a statement.

According to Adrian Hyzler, chief medical officer for Healix International, a company specializing in security and international medical and travel-assistance services, neither the European Union Airline Safety Association (EASA) nor the International Air Transport Association (IATA) recommends hazmat suits for airline crew unless they’re dealing with sick passengers.

Hyzler said one concern with wearing hazmat suits is improperly getting out of them. If there’s any trace of the coronavirus on the suit, wearers may come into contact with it as they take off their PPE.

Another issue is they can give the wearer a false sense of security. “This is something with all PPE that makes the wearer think that they are somehow better protected,” Hyzler said. Hyzler warned there are other downsides to wearing hazmat suits.

“There are hundreds of different kinds of hazmat suits, and unless they’re sophisticated ones, they may be very hot as well,” said Hyzler.

Wearing a hazmat suit at the airport won’t necessarily get you stopped at security. “Travelers are screened at checkpoints regardless of what they are wearing. If they trigger an alarm, it could likely result in a pat-down,” TSA spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said in an email.

Hyzler, and the CDC, discourage wearing hazmat suits on planes but still recommend face masks.

“If everyone’s wearing a mask, there’s reduced risk of (coronavirus) transmission,” Hyzler said.
The wilderness awaits

Florida couple’s camper vans rigged for comfort, isolation

BY TAYLOR DOLVEN
Miami Herald

This was to be the year of expansion to Orlando for Ondevan, a camper van rental dream-turned-business for Hallandale Beach, Fla., residents Omar Bendezu, 34, and Haley Kirk, 28.

“My plan was to have a proper location with someone helping me there part time,” Bendezu said. “I was planning to add seven to eight campers this season. My plan was to grow the fleet and grow in the market coverage and grow the business in general.”

Those plans evaporated when the COVID-19 pandemic spurred travel restrictions in mid-March. Until then, around 95% of Ondevan’s customers were from outside Florida, many international. Kirk remembers the especially grim day that President Donald Trump announced U.S. airports would be closing to European travelers.

“This is supposed to be the high season,” she said. “The day after that, it was Omar just receiving calls after call after call after call of people trying to figure out if they could cancel their booking.”

It was an abrupt blockade for the growing business spawned over coffee at Moises Bakery in Hallandale Beach back in 2017, when Kirk and Bendezu were newlyweds. A stranger approached them and asked if they would like to buy her RV.

Bendezu, who had always dreamed of being his own boss, asked how much the camper van cost, thinking maybe he could rent it out on Airbnb. “$5,000,” the woman said.

The only parking spot the couple had was in their condo’s garage, so they regexfully turned the woman down. But it got them thinking.

“I remembered these types of campers in Australia that tourists were doing, and I thought, ‘why don’t I do that?’” he said. Where others may have seen an oversaturated market full of hotels, motels and vacation rentals, Bendezu and Kirk saw an opportunity in South Florida’s tourism scene: #VanLife.

Bendezu contacted a friend who had a van for sale. It was in terrible shape — and just what he needed, he said.

With each trip came insight into Florida’s most remote paths. The couple put together a state map for tourists based on feedback from customers about where the best natural attractions and bathrooms are located. By December 2019, the fleet had grown to 11 vans, and the couple was able to hire two employees to handle bookings and cleanings in between trips.

Instead of expanding to Orlando, this year the couple scrambled to reset their strategy. They settled on a policy where customers could cancel and get a credit to re-book their trip any time in the next two years, or receive a 50% cash refund and use the other 50% as a credit toward a trip in the next year. So far, it has worked, saving the couple was able to hire two employees to handle bookings and cleanings in between trips.

Within a month, the camper van rental company was born. By the end of the year, their fleet grew to three vans. Tourists from all over the world booked road trips. Some stayed in Florida to explore the Everglades, beaches and natural springs. Others drove cross country to see the Grand Canyon. One couple in their 70s from Spain took an Ondevan all the way to Alaska and back.

F3HIJKLM

Normally, the vans rent for around $120 per day. Now, they are available for around $69 per day.

Overnight, the company pivoted to focus on South Floridians, who are desperate for some travel after weeks of isolation, by offering a 30% discount. They launched a new business offering camping gear rentals for people who may not have enough money to spend on a van and still want to get outdoors. They listed the company on a website promoting local businesses during the pandemic called Support Local Florida and tweaked the main messaging on their website, which now reads, “Let’s save travel together, book your trip with a local business.”

Now all of their customers are from South Florida, most of them on long road trips while they can work remotely.

“Many people didn’t know I existed,” said Bendezu. “They’re finding the company, they are excited by the photos. Now people have the time to do all these long trips. All my customers are local.”

If bookings remain this low for the rest of the year, the couple will need to reassess the business. So far they’ve been able to keep their two employees working part-time, but with or without customers, they have to pay for auto insurance, parking rentals and administration fees that add up quickly. So far, they’ve received a loan of $1,000 from the Small Business Administration, and will be approaching banks about private loans.

The couple had planned to move into a house they bought last year, but instead they’ll remain in their one-bedroom rental and continue renting out the house to a tenant. It’s a small sacrifice compared to other small business owners who have fared far worse, they said.

“When that travel mandate went down, especially because most of the customers were international, that was really scary,” Kirk said. “Right now we’re a little optimistic. Right now we’ve gone through the worst of the terror.”
With sand so pure, it squeaks

Florida’s Grayton Beach tops list of best beaches in America

By Brendan Farrington
Associated Press

The sand along the coast of Grayton Beach State Park is so unique, some say it speaks to you. It’s compared to sugar, and is so white it’s almost blinding in bright sunlight. And people who have been cooped up because of stay-at-home orders can once again go walk along it and hear the unique sound the beach makes when bare feet sink in the sand. “It’s that fine powdery sand that talks to you,” said Dave Rauschkolb, a restaurant owner, surfer and beach enthusiast who lives nearby. “The ‘squeak, squeak, squeak’ of the sand when you walk in it.” It’s a large reason the beach was picked as the best in the United States by Stephen “Dr. Beach” Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, who has been ranking the nation’s beaches for 30 years. “It’s some of the finest white sand in the world. The first time I saw it I felt like I had to put on sunglasses, it was so bright. Some people thought it was snow. I said, ‘No that’s not snow!’” Leatherman said with a laugh. “The sand is the highest quality in the world. It’s pure quartz crystal.”

It is one of two Florida beaches that were on the 2020 list released May 21, along with Caladesi Island State Park at No. 6. The other beaches on the list, in order, are Lifeguarded Beach on Ocracoke Island, N.C.; Coopers Beach in Southampton, N.Y.; Duke Kahanamoku Beach in Oahu, Hawaii; Lighthouse Beach in Buxton, N.C.; Hapuna Beach on Big Island, Hawaii; Coast Guard Beach on Cape Cod, Mass.; Coronado Beach in San Diego, Calif.; and Beachwalker Park on Kiawah Island, S.C.

Leatherman says he gives bonus points for beaches where smoking is banned and that are staffed with lifeguards, which elevated the North Carolina beaches. “Beaches are not big, giant ashtrays, and that’s what some people use them for, which is really disgusting,” Leatherman said.

Grayton Beach State Park won the list’s top spot — even without a smoking ban — based on its sheer beauty. Beyond the sand, it has crystal-clear emerald water, freshwater ponds that are a geological rarity and towering dunes that are unique along Florida’s 1,350 miles of coastline.

Even the walk from the parking lot is special, Rauschkolb said.

“You have to take what I call the tree tunnel trail,” he said. “You can just walk in this little wonderland under the canopy of the scrub oak and poke your head out and suddenly see the Gulf.”

While there are currently some restrictions at the nearly 2,000-acre park because of the coronavirus outbreak, it is open. Groups larger than 10 are not allowed and the park is controlling capacity to allow for social distancing. Cabins and camping are temporarily closed.

In normal times, the park attracts 500 to 1,000 people during peak summer days. But with 1.5 miles of beach and plenty of trails, it doesn’t get overcrowded, said Ben Faure, who manages 37 state parks in the Panhandle for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

“Grayton Beach is one of the gems along the Emerald Coast of Florida,” Faure said. “We like to call it a desert oasis. It really is a unique place with the sugar-white sands that are almost 99.9% pure quartz. Your feet squeak as you walk on the beach, it’s so pure.” Lynn Cherry, a board member of the nonprofit support group Florida Parks Foundation, lives about an hour from the park and has visited many times.

“Oh, the fishing is great at Grayton Beach! I have caught lots of fish at Grayton Beach State Park,” Cherry said. And the Gulf of Mexico tends to have calmer surf than Florida’s Atlantic Ocean beaches.

“On a typical day, it’s a nice surf and very enjoyable swimming,” she said.
Tweets of a different kind
As the pandemic quiets the human world, wild birds seem to be singing even louder

By Darryl Fears
The Washington Post

In a strange new world where the volume was suddenly turned down — empty sidewalks, less traffic and fewer early-morning leaf blowers — people stuck in their homes are tuning their ears to a sweet natural sound they’ve long taken for granted: bird songs.

Across the country, scientists who study birds say they’re besieged by family members and friends asking the same question: Is the bird population exploding?

“I’m hearing from a lot of people saying, wow, there are so many birds,” said T. Scott Sillett, a wildlife biologist who heads the Smithsonian’s Migratory Bird Center, which runs the national Neighborhood Nestwatch — a kind of bird census conducted by volunteers. Sillett shakes his head.

“For one, we’re hearing more birds because there’s less human noise, fewer tires humming and horns,” he said. “We’re less conspicuous in our houses, and the birds are coming down to see. People are saying, wow, this bird is nesting right here under my window.”

The bird was probably there all along.

“There’s a surge in interest in birdwatching right now,” said Mike Parr, president of the American Bird Conservancy. “People are in their houses and running out of Netflix and Zoom meetings and wondering what to do and they’re realizing there are birds in their backyards.”

The scientists, or bird nerds as they’re called, say it would take more than a year of research before they could answer whether more robins, meadowlarks, blue jays, orioles, cardinals and sparrows are out because there are fewer tires humming and horns, or because people are in. But they’re sure about one thing: More people are paying attention.

Each year, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology holds an annual Global Big Day of birdwatching, which happened this year on May 9. The organizers didn’t notice an unusual increase in birds, but the number of people participating in the event rose to 50,000, a 45% increase from the year before, said Ian Davies, a project leader for eBird, the online portal that runs the event.

The birds they sighted and checked on a list grew 40% because there was less human noise, according to Sillett. “We’re less conspicuous in our houses, and the birds are coming down to see. People are saying, wow, there are so many birds,” he said. “People are saying, wow, this bird is nesting right here under my window.”

The event was so successful that the organizers are building a model of bird habitats in Washington, Oregon and Northern California and record their behaviors during a period of improved air quality and fewer cars on roads.

“I will only be able to better understand how social distancing impacted birds once we have 2021 data,” Sanderfoot said.

“One thing that’s especially true in urban and high-density areas, greatly reduced human traffic leaves more acoustic space out there,” Fitzgerald said. “Birds do respond negatively to a lot of human noise, according to acoustic studies. It’s quite reasonable to imagine birds are using more of that space with people in their houses. City parks are usually overrun with human beings, and now species are stopping to check them out and use them.”

As human-created noise has lessened amid the coronavirus pandemic, people are taking more notice of the birds in their backyards, such as these American goldfinches.

The irony is that scientists say bird populations have been declining over the past few decades. A study in September showed that nearly 3 billion birds have been lost in North America since 1970, a 29% drop in the United States and Canada.

Fewer sparrows and finches are visiting bird feeders every year, the study said. And the flute-like song of the western meadowlark is fading to silence. With such a reduction in bird totals, it would take a major drop in noise pollution to better hear those that remain, experts said.

One scientist is trying to determine if the coronavirus pandemic quarantines are having an impact on bird behavior and populations. Olivia Sanderfoot, a National Science Foundation graduate researcher at the University of Washington, launched a study that will observe bird feeders while monitoring air quality and noise pollution in the Pacific Northwest.

When the study launched on April 1, “I thought we would be able to get a few family and friends or maybe 30 volunteers,” Sanderfoot said. She now has 860.

“Yes, I do think the quarantine has to do with the number of volunteers. I don’t think we would have gotten this support if this were a typical spring,” Sanderfoot said. She called it “a very powerful data set for ecology. I could not go to 800-plus locations across the Pacific Northwest every week.”

For the study, birdwatchers have to commit to standing at one predetermined station for 10 minutes to record all the birds they see or hear. The information they collect is logged into eBird and reviewed.

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A world built of pillows and blankets

Fort-building can help kids process COVID-19 on their own terms

BY SUSAN C. MARGOLIN
Special to The Washington Post

My friend texts a photo from her living room — a mound of yellow- and green-fringed blankets draped over a chair, framed by a wall of couch pillows. “I need to go find a dark hole to climb into,” she writes. “Like this.” It is her son’s fort, which he erected on the first day of remote learning. It is now his reading nook when he ditches online classes. He sleeps there, too.

Being cooped up inside is hard. So in our living rooms, bedrooms and basements, kids are turning to fort-building to create safe havens as the COVID-19 world feels out of their control.

In Farmington, Mich., 9-year-old Malia Mitchell has not left her two-bedroom apartment for weeks, except for family drives. She understands why, but also worries about her grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ health.

So Malia built a fort behind the couch that she calls “my little apartment,” stocked with snacks, stuffed animals, blankets and an iPad charger. It is her go-to place to FaceTime friends, relax away from her parents and sister, eat and sleep.

“We don’t have a large space, but I feel like she needs her own little place — maybe just to process what’s going on or to be alone,” her mother says.

Forts have always been a part of childhood, says David Sobel, professor emeritus at Antioch University’s education department and author of “Children’s Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood.” Sobel researched the developmental function forts play in children’s lives across cultures. They are universal, he says, driven by “biological genetic disposition” as children develop a “sense of self,” separate from parents.

Metaphorically and physically, building forts reflects children’s growth as individuals, Sobel says; they create a “home away from home,” free from parental control.

All forts, according to Sobel, share common traits: They are handmade, somewhat secretive and “you can look out, but others can’t see in.” They are safe — physically and emotionally.

Inside, forts are kids’ private, secure worlds. “I feel like you’re in a safe place, your own bubble of coziness,” says 11-year-old Grayson Drewry, of Port Townsend, Wash. “There are no other things affecting you — you’re blocked out from the world.

“Everything is wrong right now, but it’s a safe space where no one worries about you,” she adds. “If you locked yourself in your room, people would worry, but if you hide in your fort all day, no worries.”

Grayson’s mother, Tiffany Drewry, agrees, saying that an assigned school fort-building competition lifted Grayson’s spirits. For the school competition, Grayson transformed her room into a pastel-pink tent constructed with sheets and pillows propped up by a mop. She decorated it with photos, created a welcome video and spent most of her day inside.

“I needed that!” Grayson told her mom.

But are quarantine forts any different from the archetypal rainy day or weekend forts?

“It’s the same, but intensified,” says Emily King, a child psychologist in Raleigh, N.C. “Kids make sense of the world through play. In quarantine, all our needs are amplified.”

Fort-building can help kids process this unnerving new reality on their own terms — through imagination and, most importantly, control.

“Everything is different,” King says. “They’re facing uncertainty — not knowing how long we’re going to be doing this.” With so much disruption, “They’re feeling what we’re all feeling — great loss.”

Without familiar routines, children need to feel in control of something, she adds. “Whatever kids create in their imaginative world feels safe and predictable to them. It’s like ‘Every time I go into this fort, it will be just like I left it.’”

Forts also help children reset their stressed bodies and brains, says Carol Stock Kranowitz, educator and author of “The Out-of-Sync Child.” The darkness inside a fort eliminates the stimulus they do not need and intensifies what they do need — such as physical comfort and solitude.

In the COVID-19 world, our nervous systems are on high alert. We are wired to defend ourselves from environmental threats — which feel more acute for kids with sensory issues.

Our brains react with “self-therapy” for protection, Kranowitz says. Self-therapy can also be soothing and fun, such as with forts.

“It’s primal,” she says.

Kranowitz adds that everyone can relate to the impulse to build forts.

“It’s all about safety and control. We seek out comfort. We need to restore order,” she says. “And in COVID, we’re doing more of these things.” A person who likes chocolate may eat a little more. A walker may go farther, longer. A child who builds forts constructs more elaborate ones. And maybe moves in for a while.

King, Sobel and Kranowitz agree that forts can nourish parent-child connections, under one condition: Children must be in charge. Parents can help build or enter, but only if invited.

“Don’t mess with their fort,” King says. Do not take over, alter or dismantle it. If the fort is tolerable, she adds, “let them go to town on making it feel safe and comfortable. It’s theirs.”

If a child asks for help, “enter whatever world they create,” Sobel says.

Six-year-old Nacelle Bumford of Forest Hill, Md., alternates among several forts in quarantine — including a tent she calls her “office.”

“We use them as her safe place,” her mother, Linette Bumford says. Inside, Nacelle savors two minutes of “cuddle time,” which benefits them both. “She calls me into her ‘office’ for meetings that we both schedule on her calendar. It makes her feel in control of her day.”

Parents and children feel off another one, after all. We absorb and deflect one another’s moods. That may be true now more than ever.

“If I were to build a fort or lock myself in the laundry room or bedroom. I have to tell you it’s the same impulse. We all need comfort now.”

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Many songwriters going online to craft the next hit remotely

BY KRISTIN M. HALL
Associated Press

During a recent songwriting session, singer-songwriters Sarah Loethen and Christoffer Wadensten pieced together the lyrics and melody of a song they were writing about the global pandemic.

Loethen played the first verse and Wadensten, who performs under the artist name Meadows, came up with a melody after playing the melody herself many thousands of miles away.

This songwriting session spans two continents. Loethen lives in Fayetteville, Ark., while Wadensten is in Örebro, Sweden. But like many songwriters and artists confined to their homes during the pandemic, they are still collaborating with each other as technology allows.

Remote songwriting during the pandemic gives a creative outlet for many songwriters during a recent songwriting residency program called House of Songs in Bentonville, Ark., which has been helping to set up more remote co-writing sessions with artists living in different locations during the pandemic.

“I don’t generally do a lot of co-writes,” Wadensten said. “I feel very good doing this with Sarah because I know a bit more how that works and how our chemistry is.”

In Nashville, hit songwriters spend hours every day writing with each other, sometimes at a house, or a publisher’s office, or a recording studio. So when state and local officials started issuing stay-at-home orders, the writers moved online with Zoom or Skype to keep their musical ideas flowing.

“I actually love it, to be honest,” said Ross Copperman, a producer and writer in Nashville who has co-written 17 No. 1 country hits, including his latest, “Nobody But You,” performed by Blake Shelton and Gwen Stefani.

“I have found that it works really good if somebody has a studio that can make tracks,” Copperman said from his home in Nashville. As a producer, too, he’s been using various iPhone apps and other technology that can be used at home to finish songs for upcoming albums.

“Michael Hardy used, like, a headset speaker microphone plugged into his iPhone, and the vocal sounded incredible,” said Copperman. He said he’s been trying to stay busy despite the slowdown in the music industry and has been working remotely with artists like Dustin Lynch and Michael Ray. But he admits that the attention that video calls require can be draining.

“My attention is good for, like, an hour and half on Zoom, and then I just start getting a headache,” he said.

Grammar-winning songwriter and producer Shane McAnally, who has co-written hits like “Body Like a Back Road” by Sam Hunt and “Space Cowboy” by Kacey Musgraves, is less of a fan of video-call songwriting.

“I have a hard time with it because I am the kind of person who needs to feel the other person in the room and tap into their energy,” said McAnally, who said he’s been writing online with Brandy Clark.

McAnally also said the sound quality on video calls is lacking, and he finds himself getting distracted easily when staring at a screen.

“It’s hard for me to stay focused,” he said. “It feels very one dimensional.”

Country star Brad Paisley said he’s been experimenting with online co-writing for a while. He even co-wrote his 2007 song “Online” over Skype. He said he feels more dialed in when he’s online with a co-writer.

“You’re focused,” Paisley said from his home in Franklin, Tenn., where he recently wrote online with Country Music Hall of Famer “Whisperin’” Bill Anderson, who has co-written hits like “Myra and the Mercury” by Kacey Musgraves, is less of a fan of video-call songwriting.

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**Indigo Girls**

Look Long (Rounder)

“Look Long” is the Indigo Girls’ first studio album in five years, a passionate and tuneful collection on which the combined voices of Amy Ray and Emily Saliers sound as instinctive and magical as ever.

Recorded in England at Peter Gabriel’s Real World Studios, it’s where they made 1999’s “Come On Now Social,” one of their most memorable albums.

This one forgoes the all-star guests, which then included Sheryl Crow and Garth Brooks, but sees the return of producer-drummer John Reynolds and some of the excellent supporting players, like bassist Clare Kenny and keyboardist Carol Isaacs.

With 11 songs covering themes from romance and parenting to family memories, gun culture and gay identity, Ray and Saliers do their best to rinse the salt out of a few wounds, gently dress others and also attempt some preventive care.

The yearning “Country Radio” is about “just a gay kid in a small town” who hears and loves the songs, even if the stories don’t quite fit his identity.

“Feel This Way Again” and “Favorite Flavor” deal with the challenges of being a parent, the sweet harmonies and banjo of the former reminding of the Dixie Chicks, while the latter is a joyful pop tune with backing vocals from Lucy Wainwright Roche. It’s a quirky creation, like a collaboration between fellow Georgians R.E.M. and the B-52s.

Indigo Girls are their most elemental and best on “Look Long,” with Reynolds and the ace band sprucing up the tunes without breaking the duo’s foundational folk-rock mold.

— Pablo Gorondi
Associated Press

**Marshall Chapman**

Songs I Can’t Live Without (Tallgirl Records)

As Marshall Chapman sings the great North American songbook on her new album, the style of tunes chosen is all over the map, probably because they came from such diverse locales as New York, Tennessee, Detroit, Oklahoma and Canada.

That’s part of the beauty to “Songs I Can’t Live Without,” and Chapman makes them all her own. The South Carolina native, who lives in Nashville, covers nine mostly familiar tunes so convincingly it’s easy to envision her recording an entertaining set devoted to any one of the composers.

Leonard Cohen, for example, would be a good choice. Chapman’s slight twang and thoughtful phrasing bring out the wit in his “Tower of Song.”

Her sultry alto is a fine match for Bob Seger’s road-warrior narrative “Turn the Page.”

There are compelling performances of songs identified with Johnny Cash, Chet Baker, J.J. Cale, Bobby Charles and Elvis. The lean arrangements throughout benefit from the work of guitarist Will Kimbrough, who masterfully creates appropriate atmospherics.

The finale is the sauntering gospel of “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hands,” with Chapman resurrecting a favorite from her childhood. She grew up to become a fine songwriter, but it’s her skills as an interpreter that make this album — her 14th — perhaps her best.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press

**Steve Earle & the Dukes**

Ghosts of West Virginia (New West)

Contemplating the treacherous political landscape of West Virginia, Steve Earle decided to build a bridge.

The singer-songwriter known for his liberal views undertook a project that would speak for the other side on the issue of coal mining. Earle’s empathetic attempt to address the divide has resulted in one of his best albums: “Ghosts of West Virginia.”

The record draws material from the 2010 Upper Big Branch mine explosion that killed 29 men. Earle wrote folk songs for a play about the disaster, and has used them as the foundation of a concept album that considers coal’s role in the life of West Virginians from their perspective.

Earle’s grunting, gravelly tenor is perfectly cast as he assesses the state’s mythology and geology. On the song “It’s About Blood,” a fanfare for the common man, Earle lists the victims of the 2010 tragedy, his voice more anguished with each name recited.

“Black Lung” offers a nuanced, wrenching look at another aspect of the risky profession. “If I Could See Your Face Again” is a lament from a miner’s widow sung beautifully by Eleanor Whitmore, part of the crack quintet that provides Earle with mostly acoustic support in mono, reinforcing the rootsy vibe.

There’s poetry in the simple observations of the songs, which are even more topical than Earle intended as his characters weigh the need to make money versus the risk of not being able to breathe. Sound familiar?

— Steven Wine
Associated Press

**Victor Wainwright and the Train**

Memphis Loud (Ruf)

Here’s an hourlong set to help fill the void created by all of these canceled summer music festivals. “Memphis Loud” was tracked live in the studio by Victor Wainwright and the Train, creating a vibe suitable for a crowd enjoying a sunny, lazy weekend afternoon, when time seems to slow down.

The Memphis-based Wainwright and his six-piece band are right for the job because they serve up something for everyone with their rootsy, funky, well-cooked jam-band mix of R&B, jazz and Americana. Influences run deep, and piano man Wainwright even honors Little Richard with his shouts of “Woo!”

“The Memphis Divide,” and slow down.

Memphis Loud (Ruf)

There’s poetry in the simple themes of not being able to breathe. Sound familiar?

— Steven Wine
Associated Press
The Louvre is shuttered now, empty of human-kind for the first time in eight centuries. But in a normal year, 10 million people cross the threshold of the world’s largest museum, one of the biggest structures on the planet. Theirs can be a bewildering, even forbidding, experience. The Louvre’s 36,000 holdings, only a 10th of which are on display, are chronologically diffuse and pro-miscuously inclusive. The building’s eccentric footprint and daunting size — its longest gallery is nearly a half-mile long — may be why most visitors settle for paying their respects at the five stations of the cross: the Mona Lisa, the Venus de Milo, the Winged Victory of Samothrace, “Liberty Leading the People” and the gift shop.

In his courageous and erudite new book, “The Louvre: The Many Lives of the World’s Most Famous Museum,” critic James Gardner is bold to take in, and take on, what few mortals have the chance or the stamina to do. Think of reading this book as the full experience you are temporarily denied today, or may never have had the energy to undertake.

Alone among the greatest museums of the contemporary age, the Louvre was not built as a museum. The foundations (unearthed only recently) date to the 12th-century fortress of that name, and upon them were erected over centuries a sprawling palace that became, off and on, the seat of the French monarchy.

In whatever incarnation, the Louvre has always been intimately tied to the glorification of the French king and, before and after royalty’s final demise in 1871, to the transcendent eminence of France. Yet as a residence it had to share the monarch’s affections with other, more sumptuous dwellings (Amboise, Blois, Fontainebleau). Louis XIV spent the first decades of his long reign enhancing and investing in the Louvre, then abandoned it entirely for the magnificent palace he built at Versailles, where he moved the court. The Louvre stood idle and decaying for more than a century afterward.

The Louvre grew up and out (westward), not abstractly but toward another magnificent pile, the Palais des Tuileries. The museum’s 1610 Grande Galerie — in Gardner’s words, “phantastic in ambition and almost superhuman in scale” — was conceived as a grand passageway to the Tuileries, home to the kings and the Napoleons. In 1871, at the bloody end of Napoleon III’s rule, the angry citizens of the capital burned the Tuileries to the ground, making it a “phantom limb,” today remembered by the eponymous gardens that stretch to the Place de la Concorde.

That bitter denouement of the Second Empire does not diminish the Bonapartes’ contributions to the Louvre. Napoleon I was a prodigious looter of art and antiquities from every realm he conquered, of course, but the credit for the great museum as we know it goes especially to his nephew Napoleon III, in power from 1848 to 1870. His passionate reinvigoration of the Louvre as a public showcase for Western civilization’s greatest art is singular in a reign better remembered for the wholesale modernization of the Paris cityscape, which the emperor delegated to Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann.

The contemporary visitor to the Louvre enters via the Carrousel, through the late-20th-century glass pyramid of architect I.M. Pei. That once-shocking addition and the radical reorientation of the whole museum created a new public nexus in a zone that was originally the Tuileries’ backside. One casualty, for Gardner — who admires the Pei — is the facade few visitors today may see: the one that faces east. Often called the Colonnade, and in contrast to the “drab adequacy” of the façade facing the pyramid, this eastern front is “as fine a piece of architecture, classical or otherwise, as will be found anywhere in the world.”

Here and throughout, Gardner is intent on persuading us to see the Louvre for itself, to appreciate the container as much as the content.

Most visitors to the Louvre today do not come to admire its interiors but what those interiors contain. They are so eager to get to the paintings on the second floor that they most often ignore the stairways that enable their ascent. They are so dazzled by the masterpieces on the walls that they miss the ceilings of those chambers, ceilings which, to the “period eye” of the Second Empire, were among the crowning glories of the age. Every molecule of the Louvre’s Second Empire interiors feels charged with meaning and formal consequence, and each room is a product of hundreds of discrete acts of aesthetic judgment.

As for the museum’s best-known artifact, the tiny Mona Lisa (La Joconde), Gardner recalls that Leonardo da Vinci’s early-16th-century portrait became the icon it is today only in the late 19th century, and ponders the peculiarity of its celebrity. He laments the difficulty of appreciating the painting from continued on page 35.
Netflix show host says viewers need an escape from quarantine

By Kevin C. Johnson
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The third season of Justin Willman’s “Magic for Humans” launched this month on Netflix, and it might be just the trick to elevate quarantined viewers’ spirits.

Willman says the timing of the new season is a blessing when people need it.

“Right now people are craving escapism, wanting something to watch and feel good about, something you can watch with your grandmother and kids,” he says.

The series blends magic, comedy and social experiments without the use of CGI or camera tricks. The seven new episodes that were filmed in 2019 and will explore themes of fear, self-care, tradition, vices and more.

Even from home, though, he’s busy promoting his show.

“I’m playing to the new medium and still blowing minds within these limitations and challenges and coming up with creative strokes,” he says. “We were thrown a curveball, but it’s a curveball we’re able to handle.”

Being in quarantine, he says, has been a shock to the system. He had been scheduled to be on his “Magic in Real Life” tour, “and all in the course of a week, everything slowed to a halt.”

“It’s super sad, but I’m trying to find the silver lining — trying to make the best of it,” he said.

Willman has been enjoying spending time with his son, who appears with him in a series of occasional videos on social media. Jackson unwittingly spoils his dad’s “Quarantined Magic Lessons.”

“He’s at an age where everything is magic to him — he’s a funny straight man,” Willman says. “I’ve discovered he has a pretty amazing comic timing, busting me on my tricks. People are finding it very funny. I found its comedic angle truly by accident.”

“I’m looking forward to showing it to him when he’s older. He’ll probably roll his eyes at me.”

Willman hopes to inspire other young magicians with his Social Distancing Magician Starter Kit.

“I always wanted to make a magic kit and put it out there,” says Willman. As a youngster, he was disappointed with the quality of the magic kits that were available. Back then, he became interested in magic after breaking both arms in a fall (from a bike, while wearing in-line skates). During his recovery, he felt isolated.

“This was my chance,” he says. “I’ve got time now, so I said, ‘Let’s create that magic kit. ‘We’re all stuck in our homes feeling helpless.’

“The response has been great. A lot of parents are getting it for their kids, but they’re also getting it for themselves. Some of the parents always liked magic, but never had a chance to do it.”

Proceeds from the kits ($49 at justinwillman.com) go to DirectRelief.org, a COVID-19 relief fund, and the End Alz Association’s efforts in the Alzheimer’s community, which is being hit disproportionately by the pandemic. Willman’s mother, Sonja Willman, has Alzheimer’s. The final episode of season two of “Magic for Humans” addressed her recent diagnosis.

Willman says the pandemic will cause viewers to see elements of the series through a different lens. In a recurring segment called “Close-Up Magic,” he approaches strangers and leans in so close that their noses nearly touch.

“Hey, you wanna see some close-up magic?” he asks them. “And I do the trick right to their noses. With social distancing, it now takes on an element of danger we didn’t expect.”

Another episode finds Willman performing magic at a nudist colony — where his also nacked.

“That may sound scandalous on the surface,” he says, but the episode includes a lot of blurred scenes. The episode plays to his fear of being onstage without clothes.

“As a magician, it takes on an extra layer. I need pockets — places to put my stuff. I need my props. In the fear episode, I pick five of my real-life fears and face them head-on.”

In season three, he also lampoons influencer culture, levitates at a car wash and talks to kindergartners about their bucket lists.

Videos from the show have been viewed more than 150 million times on social media.

Willman, whose first magic and comedy special was “Sight of Mouth” in 2015 on Comedy Central, is astounded by the success of “Magic for Humans.”

“You don’t realize the reach of a streaming platform like Netflix that goes around the world, where people don’t have to wait for a specific time to see a show,” he says.

“Every day is like a premiere day when someone sees your show. You’re in their living room, and you’re making them smile — entertaining them.”

From 2009 to 2013, Willman hosted “Cupcake Wars” on Food Network and has seen his fan base grow as a result of “Magic for Humans.”

But as much as Willman loves the series, he’s eager to get back on the road to perform for fans in person, his favorite part of his career. The new tour dates are now scheduled to run August to November.

“Hopefully that sticks,” he says. “We’re all playing it day-by-day. But fans have been really understanding and eager to see it happen when it happens.”

“I’m eager to get back out. The TV show is a passion, but the goal is to create new fans to entertain in packed theaters. I feel I’ll come back better than ever with even more gusto.”
**WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS**

**Gyms working it out**

Smaller classes, reservations the new norm as gyms reopen

By KELLI KENNEDY
Associated Press

Mike Weeks and his wife are fitness junkies. During quarantine, they tried home workouts — push-ups, planks, bike riding around town — but it wasn’t the same. The semi-retired oil and gas explorer longed for his old gym routine. “To say I missed it immensely is an understatement.”

“I’m 66 years old,” he says, and “purportedly in the high-risk category.”

For Weeks, the benefits ultimately outweighed the risks. But as businesses across the United States reopen, even the most dedicated gym rats are concerned about returning to a seemingly healthy habit during a pandemic, and doing it in a place known for sweat, germs and hard-to-clean equipment.

Big-box gyms and local fitness studios are reopening under a patchwork of protocols based on state and local guidance, but most are following these basics: spacing out cardio machines, touchless entry, smaller class sizes, increased cleaning and requiring users to clean all equipment before and after each use.

Musculo, an online booking platform for fitness classes, salons and wellness appointments, reported all bookings down 70% compared to last year but says they have picked up as states lift restrictions. Florida bookings were up 99% week over week, Texas jumped 91% and Georgia is up 46%.

New Horizon Athletics in Jamestown, Tenn., is not allowing new members since it had to limit class sizes for social distancing.

At Body Renew Alaska in South Anchorage, workout-goers have to reserve a 45-minute time slot; only 40 are allowed per slot, and the gym closes at 45 minutes past every hour for a 15-minute deep clean.

CycleBar in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., installed a pricey HVAC system and cut class sizes in half, but the pent-up demand has been so overwhelming that they had to add classes for Tuesday’s reopening.

At Urban Body Fitness in Atlanta, gymgoers get a touchless thermometer check and their own disinfectant bottle along with a stem warming to clean equipment before and after use. Only 30 are allowed at a time in the 14,000-square-foot gym.

Owner Rad Slough had plenty of diehards desperate to return — and a slew of members who canceled.

“They are the same people who are just really scared, and some of them have lost their jobs. The bulk of them are just still freaked out and not coming back for awhile,” said Slough.

He warns that those who don’t follow protocol will have their membership revoked. Experts, though, say there’s a lack of uniform standards and enforcement across the fitness industry.

“I’m still very concerned,” said Dr. Kristin Englund, an infectious diseases expert at the Cleveland Clinic. “If they’re not wearing a mask or wiping down the equipment, what is the ability to enforce that or not allow them to come back?”

Most experts agree: For the majority of healthy Americans under 65, the physical and mental benefits of working out outweigh the risks. And there are always risks.

Jason Nichols, facilities operation manager, disinfects equipment May 18 at the Life Time Biltmore in Phoenix as it opens for business after being closed due to the coronavirus. State and local guidance mandates increased cleaning, among other protocols, for reopening.

“For 66-year-olds, a lot of that stress was pretty key for me,” said Fowler, 35, who oversaw transportation at an Atlanta university. He signed up for the next class, but will assess the risk day by day. He expects the virus threat to last a year.

“And,” he says, “I don’t know if I can go that long without it.”

Most experts agree: For the majority of healthy Americans under 65, the physical and mental benefits of working out outweigh the risks. And there are always risks.

How to stay safe when you do head back to the gym

Are some workouts, like yoga or spinning classes, less safe than others? Should I wear a mask? Do I need more than six feet apart in cardio classes where there’s panting and heavy breathing?

There are many legitimate concerns about how gyms and fitness studios can safely reopen without furthering the spread. But infectious disease experts say risk can be greatly mitigated by following some simple rules.

Wash, rewash, repeat

“When you put down that dumbbell, you’ve got to immediately wash your hands. You’ve got to assume that if you were to accidentally touch your eyes, you’re putting yourself at risk,” says Dr. Deverick Anderson, director of the Duke Center for Antimicrobial Stewardship and Infection Prevention.

Bring your own towel, wash every piece of equipment before and after using it so you’re not relying on whether someone before you followed the rules. Most gym wipes aren’t strong enough, so bring your own disinfectant or inquire what the gym is using. And before you hop on the treadmill or grab your weight, let the spray sit on the equipment for a minute or two.

Surfaces, not people, may offer more opportunities for contact with the virus. Experts have said different things, but some believe the virus can last for up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to two or three days on plastic and stainless steel. But the federal Centers for Disease Control says — and re-emphasized recently — that surfaces are not thought to be a major path for transmission.

If respiratory droplets from an infected person do land on surfaces, “they absolutely can spread there, and it’s a very committed thing to wipe off your forehead,” said Dr. Kristin Englund, an infectious disease expert at Cleveland Clinic.

“But if you wipe past your eyes or nose, you’re going to be carrying the virus there.”

Cardio

Cardio workouts and fitness classes may pose increased risks.

“Being on an elliptical machine and breathing heavily, those activities make me anxious about being able to spread the virus more heavily because people are going to be panting and sweating,” Englund said. “I think there’s a greater risk for taking classes where you are going to be doing a sweat off your forehead.”

Anderson agrees that there should be at least six feet of distance in cardio settings — along with an understanding that the risk there is “not the same as walking into the grocery store six feet apart.”

Masks

Anderson acknowledges that it’s impractical to wear masks while sweating, but he suggests wearing them to enter and exit facilities. Employees, he says, should definitely be wearing masks.

An abundance of signs stressing hand washing and a vigilant cleaning protocol is helpful, at first, but eventually people become inured to them, he says.

Bottom line

To some degree, since guidance varies by city and state, your workout will be as safe as you choose to make it. Each facility is bound to have folks who are and aren’t following safety precautions.

So is it worth it?

Says Anderson: “For many people, I think the answer to that is yes. For some people, the answer to that is still no as we learn more and more about this disease and who is at most risk.”

— Kelli Kennedy
COVID-19 is forcing boomers to think about their mortality

By TAMARA LUSH

Elizabeth Hubbard was booked for a cruise that followed the path of Lewis and Clark’s expedition in the Pacific Northwest. Joel Dernski was set to watch and cheer his grandson graduating from the Naval Academy. James Kelly planned a trip to Scotland, to scatter his father’s ashes in the Clyde River near Glasgow.

They are all older than 60. And like millions of others, they now face the realization that their plans, their hopes, their slip-lab-list-item, were not simply deferred but in many cases denied thanks to the coronavirus. The global pandemic has left them wondering about the time they have left, and how to spend those remaining years when time is severely limited. Instead of taking in the Seven Wonders of the World or making family memories, many are worried about the future, and whether it’s safe to grocery shop or even go outdoors.

Guilt, anger and frustration seep in, with all this precious time lost.

“One less year is one less trip,” said 72-year-old Bob Busch, an avid traveler from Sarasota, Fla. He canceled a 35-day camping trip with his wife. They are healthy this year, but what about the future, after the pandemic has passed?

“How many times can you hook up the trailer and head west?”

As headlines blare about elders being more susceptible to dying of the coronavirus, the healthy wonder: Will I be able to achieve, see and do everything I wanted out of life?

“Boomers are thinking back about whether it has been a good life, and what was it all about,” he said. “Now there are fewer options in the near term. The next two years are off the table, and how many good years are left?”

Kelly, a 63-year-old psychologist, also plays guitar and writes country rock and Americana songs. Lately, he’s been pondering his fate as he sits alone in his Atlanta home, thinking about when he’ll be able to bring his father’s ashes to his native Scotland.

“My most recent songs have been about aging. Dealing with life and loss,” he said. “The road behind and the road ahead, about how much is behind me and how little is in front of me.”

“There’s not a lot more road in front of me,” he recently wrote in a song lyric. At the same time, many acknowledge that their sacrifices are also a product of privilege. Millions of people who are unemployed or working in essential, yet low-wage, jobs don’t have that luxury now—or possibly ever.

“Some of my emotion, in all honesty, is guilt,” said Judy Foreman, a 70-year-old from Florport, Pa. “We’re inconvenienced and we’re scared, and we’re able to handle it,” she said. “I try to help as much as I can. When I get a food order, I leave a huge tip. I give to food pantries.”

But the feeling that time is slipping away gratifies her. She can’t travel to visit one of her daughters in California. She can’t even hug her three grandsons, who live across the street.

“It’s depression, loneliness. It’s boredom. Fear. Mostly fear,” she said. She spends hours wiping down groceries, sanitizing doorknobs and thinking about how the future will be permanently different from now on.

“Do I do this because I don’t want to die? So yeah, I’m feeling my mortality,” she said in a quiet voice.

Helen Miltiades, a professor of gerontology at Fresno State in California, said older adults are struggling in ways younger folks aren’t.

“The whole phrase ‘the new normal.’ People are using that, but what does that mean?” she asked. “People make jokes about it. That’s a way of coping with change without really understanding what the changes entail. I don’t think we have that figured out yet.”

Hubbert, who was supposed to go on the cruise with her husband, canceled that. The 70-year-old Miami resident is holding onto a shred of hope that she can see Hugh Jackman — her favorite actor — on Broadway this fall, but she’s prepared for disappointment.

“This was supposed to be my decade,” she said. “And it’s going to be very different than I expected.”

Dena Davis is more optimistic. She’s a 73-year-old professor of bioethics at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Penn. She has postponed her sabbatical because of the pandemic and figures her plans for retirement have been pushed back.

“If you’re lucky, the reason there isn’t that much more time is because you’ve already had a lot of time ... It depends on the way you look at it,” she said. “I’m not seeing endless vistas in front of me. There are pretty big vistas behind me. You can’t have it both ways.”

As headlines blare about elders being more susceptible to dying of the coronavirus, the healthy wonder: Will I be able to achieve, see and do everything I wanted out of life?

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Pandemic ramps up PCS move rivalries

It’s summer PCS season, when 40% of the 400,000 military and DOD civilian moves take place each year. This time brings back memories of our family’s final military move in May 2017. It was our 11th in 23 years of marriage, and it was pretty much like all the rest — a stressful experience involving tedious planning, unexpected crises, broken and lost belongings and no little frictions thrown in.

Like most military spouses, I’ve told stories of PCS moves to my friends around kitchen islands, bunco tables and backyard barbecues. Like the one time I stopped the leg off our dining room buffet, or when they neglected to put our crib back together when I had a newborn baby and a toddler, or that move when my husband’s entire collection of military paraphernalia disappeared. Within military spouse culture, telling tales of moving mishaps is a sort of competitive sport. Kind of like talking about childbirth. The spouse who has endured the most misery wins.

It’s hard to imagine the PCS experience getting worse for military families, but given the coronavirus pandemic, moving hassles have reached epic new levels. The Stop Movement Order announced by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper in April has been extended through June 30, cancelling that plan that created until the end of the year.

Two-thirds of PCS moves have been delayed, causing a massive backup. Some military families who had already moved the new moves pushed in between two locations, paying double housing costs due to leases or mortgages executed before the Stop Movement Order. Adjustable-hold good and moved into temporary housing, then got stuck without their belongings.

Parents can’t register their children for the 2020-21 school year because they don’t know where they will be living this year. Planning to enter new schools at the end of summer may have to enroll mid-school year, making it even harder for them to adjust socially and academically. The new PCS moves — or possibly ever.

For military spouses, the possibility of spending two-thirds of the year in temporary housing, then getting stuck behind their belongings, parents can’t register their children for the 2020-21 school year because they don’t know where they will be living this year. Planning to enter new schools at the end of summer may have to enroll mid-school year, making it even harder for them to adjust socially and academically.

However, those who are able to move will be required to undergo a 14-day quarantine period. While Congress is working to pass legislation that would provide financial relief to many of the affected families, uncertainty and stress abounds.

To make matters worse, the backup is further complicated by the efforts of military bases that are offering incentives to delay retirements and separations, and to reenlist those who had already retired or separated. They hope those who are able to move will be required to undergo a 14-day quarantine period. While Congress is working to pass legislation that would provide financial relief to many of the affected families, uncertainty and stress abounds.

One day, when life returns to some form of normalcy, military spouses will inevitably gather together like they are always used to, to chat around fire pits, bunco tables, kitchen islands, base housing patio, backyard barbecue and coffee shops. They will share bottles of wine and pots of coffee; they will laugh, and they will tell miserable tales about childbirth, deployments and PCS moves — just like military spouses have for decades. The only thing that remains to be seen is, now that the pandemic has upended the ante, who will win the unspoken competition over who has endured the most hardship?

I, for one, will resist the urge to offer up my often-told PCS stories while in the company of anyone who has endured a PCS move during the pandemic. Out of respect, I will graciously concede defeat.

But there’s no guarantee I won’t try to get back in the game with a good labor and delivery story. Our firstborn weighed more than nine pounds, so it’s a doozy.

Score.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari’s columns at: themeatandpotatoesoflife.com.

Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@googlemail.com.
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

WIDE-OPEN SPACES
BY BYRON WALDEN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Friday, May 29, 2020

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**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Deputies: Man posed as officer, pointed gun**

**SPARTANBURG** Deputies arrested a man who allegedly flashed a badge, pointed a gun and pulled the trigger on a group of people during a fight at a South Carolina apartment complex, according to a sheriff’s office report.

David Wayne Coburn, 57, is accused of first pulling out a badge and telling the group to disperse Monday evening, according to the Spartanburg County report. Witnesses said they told Coburn to leave because the fight didn’t involve them and they knew he wasn’t an officer. Coburn left but later returned with a gun, the report stated. A witness said Coburn pulled the trigger but nothing came out because there wasn’t a magazine in the gun.

**Scallop fishing to be limited for months**

**MA** Scallop fishing off New England will be subject to limitations for about the next 10 months, federal regulators have said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said it has closed the northern Gulf of Maine fishing area, which means vessels fishing under federal regulations can’t fish for or possess scallops in the area until March 31. The closure is necessary because of projections that the total allowable catch for the area has been spent, NOAA said.

**Classic car in diocese fundraiser stolen**

**NM** Gallup — A Roman Catholic diocese in New Mexico says thieves stole a classic car officials were using to raise money for a vocations program.

The Gallup Independent reported security cameras from the Diocese of Gallup captured two men in a dark cherry Silverado stealing the 1966 Plymouth Sport Fury to raise money for a vocations program a couple of years ago.

**Man accused of trying to kidnap nurse**

**NJ** Howell Police Chief Andrew Kudrick said a Lakewood resident was then sent to Monmouth Medical Center Southern Campus for a psych evaluation where he had a brief interaction with the nurse he would later go on to track down, Kudrick said.

Upon his release, Kudrick said Larrarte walked 6 miles from his residence to the nurse’s home in Howell where he proceeded to attack the caregiver’s 64-year-old mother before punching and choking the nurse. Larrarte ran away after the victim fought him off, Kudrick said.

**A great sunset setup**

**SC** Couples watch the sun set from the Cherry Hill, N.J., side of the Cooper River on Tuesday, a day when local temperatures reached the 80s.

**The number of sea turtle eggs two men had in a bag when they were arrested in Florida over Memorial Day weekend, wildlife officials said. Bruce Bivins, 63, was spotted putting objects he dug out of the sand into the bag as he walked on Singer Island, a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission affidavit said. An officer later stopped Bivins, who was in a truck driven by Carl Cob, 63, the affidavit said. Bivins and Cobb were each charged with unlawful possession of more than 11 sea turtle eggs, which is a third-degree felony. Both men have previous encounters with the law for mishandling sea turtle eggs, the Palm Beach Post reported.

**Ten teen swimmers to shore to save dad and sister**

**ME** Waterville — A 16-year-old Maine girl swam great lengths to save her dad and sister when their boat took on water and capsized.

Kiana French swam to shore to find help after the 12-foot aluminum boat capsized on Parlin Pond on Sunday afternoon, the Morning Sentinel reported.

She said her father, Gary French, and sister, Cierrah French, were in a state of shock and could not swim to shore.

Cierrah French, a cancer survivor, still feels pain in her knee from chorioniccimoma, a rare form of cancer. She said the water was cold and that her fingers and toes went numb.

Kiana French said she strapped on her life jacket in the water, and then recovered the other two jackets floating near the boat and helped her sister put one on as her dad clung tightly to the boat. She knew if she waited with them the currents would get worse, so she headed to shore.

Kiana French walked along the shoreline and called out for help until she saw a boat and was taken in by Maine Game Warden Kris MacCabe and his wife. Her father and sister were rescued by another boat.

**Nurse reunited with her savior firefighter**

**NY** New York — A Virginia nurse has been reunited with the New York firefighter who saved her from a burning building nearly 40 years ago.

Deirdre Taylor, who is working in New York to fight the coronavirus pandemic, was reunited Monday with retired FDNY firefighter Eugene Pugliese, 75, the New York Daily News reported.

Pugliese, a Vietnam Marine Corps veteran, said he remembers saving Taylor and her mother from a burning building in Solfo like it was yesterday.

“I didn’t even have gear on,” Pugliese said. “I had a helmet and an ax. We took the elevator up and we went to the floor below. We went upstairs. The hallway was pretty well charged. There was a lot of smoke.”

Taylor said she thought she would never have the opportunity to thank Pugliese for his bravery.

“The fire obviously shaped the rest of my life,” she said. “I always knew I was given a second chance at life.”

**100-year-old shipwreck exposed by storm**

**UT** A shipwreck can be seen protruding from the Great Salt Lake and it could be more than 100 years old.

Utah State Parks posted a photo of a tangle of brown beams Monday on Facebook after a recent storm eroded part of the beach and exposed the shipwreck, The Salt Lake Tribune reported.

The wreck is of a steel hold boat with wooden planking that dates back to the start of the 20th century, park manager Dave Shearer said.

Shearer believes the boat could have been used by the Southern Pacific Railroad to build the causeway across the lake in 1902 or to maintain the causeway in the years after.

**Troopers arrest 4 after chase that hit 174 mph**

**NE** Gibbon — Four people from Illinois have been arrested in Nebraska including a driver accused of leading troopers on a chase exceeding 170 mph in southeastern Nebraska, officials said.

The Nebraska State Patrol said the arrests came Monday night, about 24 hours after a trooper had tried to pull over a Chevrolet Camaro for excessive speeding on Interstate 80 near York. The car fled, reaching a speed of 174 mph before troopers disabled it with spike strips, the patrol said. It exited the interstate at Gibbon, and troopers later found the car abandoned at Gibbon High School.

On Monday night after receiving a tip, troopers pulled over a Jeep in Gibbon and found the suspected driver of the Camaro, Tyler Liles, 22, of Creve Couer, Ill., inside. The driver of the Jeep, who is suspected of having traveled from Illinois to pick up Liles, and two others from Illinois also were arrested on suspicion of a range of charges, from obstruction to minor drug counts.

Liles faces charges of willful reckless driving, felony flight to avoid arrest, and seven other counts.

From wire reports
Generating comedy like a hurricane

By Thomas Floyd
The Washington Post

Before Ben Schwartz and Thomas Middleditch stride onstage to do long-form improv, the comedy duo, at Schwartz’s behest, always share a hug. “I love you,” Schwartz utters every time. “OK,” Middleditch often responds, not exactly saying “you too” but sheepishly acknowledging his affection, nonetheless.

“What’s nice — though he had to drag me there, because I’m a man, you understand — is it just implies this sense of trust,” Middleditch says of the ritual. “That’s very Ben. He’s a real sap, but he’s a lovely sap.”

Middleditch isn’t alone in highlighting Schwartz’s sincerity. “You need a man with him, and you like him,” says Billy Crystal, who starred with Schwartz in the film “Standing Up, Falling Down.” Greg Daniels, the co-creator of Schwartz’s next project, Netflix’s “Space Force,” says the actor “just generates comedy at you like a hurricane — but he’s also very vulnerable, and he just wears his heart on his sleeve.”

Raised in the Bronx by a music teacher mother and social worker father, Schwartz had the virtues of honesty ingrained in him early. Before he was booking roles, selling scripts and packing theaters, he interned for the Upright Citizens Brigade comedy troupe and worked as a page for the “Late Show With David Letterman,” pitching jokes for the monologue on the side.

Nearly two decades later, Schwartz, 38, is still hustling. “Standing Up, Falling Down” and “Sonico the Hedgehog,” in which he voices the central speedster, hit theaters in February to favorable reviews. Last month, Netflix released in which he voices the central speedster, hit theaters in February to favorable reviews. Last month, Netflix released “The Wrong Mans,” one wouldn’t ken it from his prolific and eclectic run of recent projects.

Schwartz also spent the past few years honing his long-form improv shows with Middleditch, which体贴 regularly perform on tour and at Los Angeles’ Largo at the Coronet nightclub. Setting out to bring exposure to the form — in which the improvisers use a conversation between characters as a starting point to create spontaneous 50-minute sketches — they filmed four shows last year in New York. Netflix released three of those performances in April, showcasing the duo’s knack for threading together fresh, funny characters and narratives.

“Anyone gives me credit for coming up with weird characters,” Middleditch says. “But I would say that they don’t mean anything if Ben’s not there to give them purpose for the story that we’re telling. A lot of improvisers and comedians have said that, and that’s definitely one of his.”

Reflecting on how the “Wrong Mans” detour rerouted his career, Schwartz shares no regrets. Even when he’s not onstage, he remains an improviser at heart — and he knows better than most that improv is about taking chances.

“A lot of this art form is living and breathing and making mistakes,” Schwartz says. “The biggest thing I’ve learned for myself from all of this, starting with improv, is you get out there, you take a risk, you fail, you learn from your risk, and you repeat.”

“The more you do that, the more likely you are to find your voice.”

Improv helps Ben Schwartz move from bit player to star

New ‘Hunger Games’ book sells more than a half million copies

Associated Press

A decade after the “Hunger Game” series had apparently ended, readers were clearly ready for more.

Suzanne Collins’ “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” sold more than 500,000 copies last week, even as many of the country’s bookstores were closed or offering limited service because of the coronavirus pandemic. The total includes print, e-books and audiobooks, according to Collins’ publisher, Scholastic.

NPD BookScan, which tracks around 85 percent of the print market, reported Wednesday that the book registered a “cutoff” or offering topped last week’s list with 270,000 books sold. Collins’ book, a prequel to her previous “Hunger Games” novels, came 10 years after the author seemingly wrapped up the dystopian series with “Mockingjay.”

The opening for “Songbirds and Snakes” was slightly higher than the numbers reported for “Mockingjay” in 2010, when Scholastic announced first week sales of more than 450,000. Collins’ novels, which also include “The Hunger Games” and “Catching Fire,” have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide and are the basis for a billion-dollar movie franchise.

ASCAP to honor songwriters, publishers with virtual awards

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers announced Thursday that it will hold three-day virtual events for its four awards shows, which focus on pop, R&B, Latin and film music.

The ASCAP Pop Music Awards will be held June 17-19; the ASCAP Screen Music Awards on June 23-25; the ASCAP Latin Music Awards on July 7-9; and the ASCAP Rhythm & Soul Music Awards on July 15-17.

ASCAP will honor some of today’s top songwriters and publishers at its ASCAP Virtual Awards; winners and guest participants will be announced later. Last year the organization gave awards to Billie Eilish and her brother-collaborator Finneas, Ben Pasek and Justin Paul, Cardi B and Daddy Yankee.

Simon & Schuster names Jonathan Karp as new CEO

Jonathan Karp, who has worked with authors ranging from Sen. Edward Kennedy to Susan Orlean, has been named the new CEO of Simon & Schuster. He replaces Carolyn Reidy, who died two weeks ago.

Karp, who joined the company in 2010, most recently served as president and publisher of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing. He takes over Simon & Schuster at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has devastated the economy and when the publisher's future ownership is uncertain.

Other news

Apple Music is launching its first radio show in Africa. The streaming platform announced Thursday that “Africa Now Radio with Cuppy” will debut Sunday and will feature a mix of contemporary and traditional popular African sounds, including genres like Afrobeat, rap, house, kuduro and more.

The winner, and still champion, is CBS. The network finished the traditional television season, which ended last week, as the most-watched broadcaster for the 12th consecutive year, the Nielsen company said.
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**ACROSS**
1. Energy  
4. Irene of “Fame”  
8. Difficult  
12. Blackbird  
13. Construction piece  
14. Jai —  
15. 7, on older phones  
16. Title skin to POTUS  
17. Meditative practice  
18. Signed a contract, perhaps  
21. “Right you —!”  
22. Triumphed  
23. Historic mission  
26. Zero-star review  
27. Boxer  
30. Animated Betty  
31. Bashful  
32. Achy  
33. Piercing tool  
34. Sashimi fish  
35. Speak one’s mind  
36. Hot tub  
37. Transcript no.  
38. Practiced what one preached  
45. Jacob’s twin  
46. Algerian port  
47. Cornfield noise  
48. Stitches  
49. Merlot or Chianti  
50. Mound stat

**DOWNS**
1. Microwaves  
2. Concerning  
3. Gallileo’s birthplace  
4. Roman orator  
5. Tolerate  
6. Harangue  
7. Curved entrance  
8. “The Creation” composer  
9. Skin soother  
10. Sitar music  
11. Use an old phone  
19. Genie’s home  
20. A billion years  
23. Lawyers’ org.

51. Gas container  
52. Fly high  
53. Quarterback  
54. Mimic  
55. First game of the season  
56. Striped critic  
57. Accra’s country  
58. Papper Kanye  
59. On the Baltic, say  
60. Grassy area  
61. Half a sextet  
62. Scored 100 on  
63. Yuri Zhivago’s love  
64. Olympic skater  

**Answer to Previous Puzzle**

5-30  **CRYPTOQUIP**

**BX Y OAZ BJ GNFISHUHIHZ BOWNDYWI YLNAI SDNIUBW, GYDLNPZQDYIUJ YWQ XYIJ, BJ PU WAIDBUWI-QUWJU?**

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: COUNTRY LEADER WHO IS VERY MUCH IN FAVOR OF THE RIVER FLOWING IN LONDON: PRESIDENT PRO THAMES.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: X equals F
Lockdowns’ effect on young people is cause for alarm

By Henry Olsen
Special to The Washington Post

T he pandemic’s death toll and economic damage have been horrific. Its psychological impact on the young has been particularly pronounced, with its most enduring and dangerous effect of all.

A recent study from the Census Bureau showed that about half of Americans reported symptoms of depression in early May, double that from a similar study in 2013-2014. In one sense, that’s unsurprising: more than 100,000 people have died of COVID-19, and more than 40 million have lost their jobs. Without a doubt, that’s exhausting. But there is, however, is that symptoms of psychological distress are directly correlated with age.

The younger the person, the likelier he or she is to experience mental health issues. The data are stark on this point. Among those aged 18 to 29, 42% reported symptoms of moderate to severe depression. Those numbers decline with each successive age cohort, reaching their low points among respondents 80 years old or over. This is because more elderly have had experience with anxiety symptoms, and only 9% presented as depressed.

This is not a counterintuitive, since the elderly are most at risk of dying of COVID-19. But it becomes less surprising after considering the impacts of the measures taken to deal with the pandemic. The shutdown has devastated the economy, and younger workers have borne the brunt of the layoffs. According to one study, workers under 25 years of age are 93% more likely to have lost their jobs than those over 35. The most recent unemployment report bears this out: More than a quarter of workers between 18 and 24 are unemployed, roughly double the unemployment rate for 25 or older.

Millions of college students were also forced to go home as campuses closed. Moving is tough at any time, but moving from a largely independent life to one with enforced dependency is even more stressful. These students also had to suddenly trade socializing with dorm mates for sitting at desks with classmates. They couldn’t even go to the grocery store; more than 100,000 people have died of COVID-19. It has been a wrenching time.

The shutdown also crushed their social lives. Most people over 30 are married or in a stable, adult relationship, so they have the option of turning to their partners for solace. Younger people see them as a picture of normalcy. It’s not surprising, then, that the psychological toll has been felt by those decisions. That is potentially a very real crisis.

This paradoxically creates an opportunity for Trump. While younger voters have tended to be the most hostile to him throughout his presidency, he is also the leading figure in favor of letting them return to a world where they can have hope and health. It makes sense for him to say, Vice President Joe Biden walks out with a mask on and says, “Embrace life.” Many pundits have noted that Biden is doing better than expected in polls among seniors, but those polls also show Trump doing better than expected with younger voters. The shift could be real.

The mental health plight of the young should be of prime concern to all regards for the rest of the nation. The risk aversion and desire for creature comforts that characterized the generations that came of age in the 1940s and 1950s was not limited to the young. Those trends might be related. The mental health plight of the young ought to be of prime concern to all regards for the rest of the nation. The risk aversion and desire for creature comforts that characterized the generations that came of age in the 1940s and 1950s was not limited to the young. Those trends might be related.

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Trump is debasing his office with tweets on Scarborough

Trump sometimes traffics in conspiracy theories — recall his innuendo in 2016 about Ted Cruz’s father and JFK assassination — but his latest accusation against MSNBC host Joe Scarborough is ugly even for him. Trump has been wagging his finger at Scarborough for months, suggesting that Scarborough might have had something to do with the death in 2001 of a young woman who worked in his Florida office when Scarborough was on-air. A “lot of interest in this story about Psycho Joe Scarborough. So a young marathon runner just happened to faint in his office, hit her head on his desk, & die? I would think there is a lot more to this story than that! An affair? What about the so-called investigator? Read story!” Trump tweeted Saturday while retweeting a dubious article on the case.

He kept it going Tuesday with new tweets: “The opening of a Cold Case against Psycho Joe Scarborough was not a Donald Trump lie. Scarborough was fired for going on for years, long before I joined the chorus....” So many unanswered & unanswerable questions, but I won’t bring them up now! Law enforcement eventually will!” Nasty stuff, and from the Oval Office to more than 80 million Twitter followers.

There’s no evidence of foul play, or an affair with the woman, and the local coroner ruled that the woman fainted from an undiagnosed heart condition and died of head trauma. Some on the web are positing a conspiracy because the coroner had left a previous job under a cloud, but the parents and husband of the young woman accepted the coroner’s findings and want the case to stay closed.

Trump always hits back at critics, and Scarborough has called the president mentally unstable. But suggesting that the talk-show host is implicating in the woman’s death isn’t political hardball. It’s a smear. Trump rightly denounces the baseless conspiracy theories했는데, yet here he is trafficking in the same sort of trash.

Adam Kinzinger, a Republican from Illinois, had it right when he tweeted on the weekend: “Completely unfounded conspiracy theory is not an accident. Let’s stop spreading it, stop creating it, stop corporating it. It will destroy us.” We don’t write this with any expectation that Trump will stop. Perhaps he even thinks this helps him politically, though we can’t imagine how. But Trump is debasing his office, and he’s hurting the country in doing so.

Twitter’s fact-checking plan can’t be implemented fairly

The New York Post

After President Donald Trump’s favored conspiracy tweets about Joe Scarborough’s former intern Lori Klausutis, her widow, she weighed in on Twitter: “Stop spreading this nonsense. These tweets were a living record of the nation’s president, and the company wasn’t going to take them down.”

But later on Tuesday, Twitter decided on what is considered a compromise. It would flag Trump’s tweets for “misinformation,” beginning with his rants against mail-in voting.

Dorsey should have stuck to his hands-off approach.

This isn’t a free-speech issue, as Trump claimed this week. Twitter is a private company and can decide what’s published on its platform. But Dorsey understands that Twitter is documenting history here. If he bans Trump, he’s making a political statement — not providing the neutral forum for ideas that the company invented.

But now Dorsey walked into the trap he was trying to avoid. What will be labeled misinformation? Will liberals, too, get warning labels? Who decides? Will every user be read and reviewed, or just Trump?

Already, one sees that the “fact-checking” services of social-media giants such as Facebook are more about stifling the conversation than the truth. One day’s conspiracy theory can turn into another day’s investigative report, and vice versa. Most of all, it’s a patronizing, liberal form of engineering — deciding that readers can’t judge for themselves.

Twitter already has a robust form of “fact-checking”: All the people who comment on a post, retweet a post, rebut, argue and insult. Let them handle it, Jack.

Police actions in the death of George Floyd were inexcusable

The Wall Street Journal

Another day in the United States, another unarmed black man dead following unwarranted, inappropriate, outrageous police violence. When will it end?

In Minneapolis on Monday evening, a white officer bore down with his knee on the neck of a handcuffed black man who lay sprawled on the street, rasp ing: “I can’t breathe” and “Don’t kill me.” The man died a short time after.

The suspect, George Floyd, was in his 40s. He was arrested when officers responded to what they called a suspected “forgery in progress.” They said the man appeared to be intoxicated and that he resisted arrest, though no evidence has been presented for either assertion.

There is plain evidence of what came next, however, from a video recorded by someone in a group of witnesses who stood a few feet away. In it, the white officer appears impassive, almost bored, as the suspect gasps for breath. He is unmoved as witnesses curse and plead with him to get off the suspect’s neck, as they warn that the man’s nose is bleeding, that he can’t breathe, that he isn’t resisting. Nor does the officer relent when an ambulance medic arrives and checks the man’s neck for a pulse.

When finally, the officer lifts his knee, the man appears to have lost consciousness, as he is dragged onto a stretcher.

On Tuesday, that officer and three others were fired. Now the FBI is investigating the incident. Now the outrage and condemnation are erupting in social media. It is all painfully familiar. Police killed 1,099 people last year in the United States, according to Mapping Police Violence. Black Americans represented 24% of those who died, nearly twice the proportion of the population.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, a Democrat, was blunt. “Being black in America should not be a death sentence,” he said.

“This officer failed in the most basic, human sense. What I keep coming back to is this: This man should not have died.”

In a jarringly anodyne statement Tuesday, as if describing a highway pileup, the Minneapolis police said that officers at the scene “infilamed’’ to be suffering medical distress.”

Incredibly, the statement made no mention of the fact that the “medical distress” occurred in the course of having the weight of an officer’s body bear down on the man’s neck. The title of the statement is almost risible: “Man Dies After Medical Incident During Police Interaction.”

Six short years ago, Americans watched, horrified, as Eric Garner, his neck in a police officer’s chokehold, pleaded again and again, “I can’t breathe” on a sidewalk in New York City. It might be no coincidence that macabre videos showing the deaths of Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice and other black Americans, all shot to death by police, have greatly increased.

Perhaps the suspect in Minneapolis was intoxicated. Perhaps he did resist arrest. The officers at the scene activated their body cams; that footage should be released immediately. Even if it confirms the police account, it will do nothing to justify what occurred next. No police protocols recommend kneeling on a human being’s neck until he passes out. That is a protocol for homicide, not law enforcement.

It’s not corny for fans to pine for the return of baseball

The Washington Post

How desperate are Americans for sports right now? The most obvious yet was last Sunday’s charity golf match featuring two top professional players partnered with two angry bird enthusiasts. The weather was rainy. It was dull. There were technical glitches. It was full of artifice (like an actual conversation about how Peyton Manning might have chosen Tom Brady’s ex-coach Bill Belichick as his caddy). And it was the highest rated golf event in the history of television with 6.3 million viewers at its peak. Imagine what Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods thought of that. Here’s what they likely thought: Let’s make some more of this easy money from America’s clearly sports-starved populace.

The sudden loss of sporting events from high school track to National Basketball Association games clearly isn’t the worst consequence of the coronavirus pandemic that has left more than 200,000 Americans dead. It isn’t even the worst economic impact as tens of millions have lost their jobs and face financial hardship. But for millions of fans who participated in “The Match” can scarcely dream about. But make no mistake, it hurts. Sports is entertainment without the prede- termined result. It offers pathetic wrestling or so some experts on prehistory wonder about evolution. It fills some basic human need and not just the need for the basic building of participants. There is a cultural necessity to bearing witness, as a society, to the power, grace and courage of athletes in competition. And that’s not even mentioning the cool merchandise. Or the beer commercials.

As fans turn out on the links is a poor substitute. But you know what might do wonders for the country’s psyche right about now! A return of the national past-time is the perfect sport for COVID-19. It’s got a lot of social distancing (just look at the whole concept of outfields). It’s got some of the most amazing athletes on the planet and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game: it’s a part of our past. Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good and that could be again.”

Yes, well, whatever “Field of Dreams.” The point is that the sport where participants stand apart (javelin throwing comes immediately to mind), there is something especially reassuring about a quintessentially American game. Or, as the James Earl Jones character in that is easily the corniest movie about a sport where the average American could live the dream explained: “The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It’s been harnessed, or at least tamed.” Another day in the United States, an uninformed person, who is perhaps convinced that baseball fans who are stuck watching the Los Angeles Dodgers’ 9-6 victory over the Colorado Rockies on ESPN? Let’s just say the Samsung Lions are no Baltimore Orioles. They need you, too.
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Title IX hampers cost-cutting measures

Schools mulling eliminating certain sports must be compliant with law

By Aaron Beard  Associated Press

Established in 1972, Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving federal funds, such as student financial aid. It applies to schools by ensuring men and women have equitable participation opportunities, as well as access to facilities, programs and other benefits.

Financially challenged schools considering cutting sports in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic are making difficult decisions of who gets to keep playing and who can’t.

The choices aren’t just about money when they involve women’s sports, and while Title IX doesn’t prevent women’s sports from being eliminated, the federal law is a huge part of the conversation.

“I wouldn’t say that women’s sports are at more risk,” said attorney Timothy J. O’Brien, who is based in Montana with a practice focused on employment and college sports law. “I would say that all sports in any economic downturn will be scrutinized. But it should be done in a fair and equitable manner so at the end of the day the institution is compliant with Title IX.”

The civil rights law, which applies to each gender, is credited with expanding women’s opportunities and participation in sports.

With the shutdown of college and professional sports in March amid the pandemic, it’s unclear how many schools will be able to have sports on reopened campuses this fall. Some — including Appalachian State, Cincinnati, East Carolina, Furman and Old Dominion — have already cut nonrevenue sports programs, but any move must ensure equitable treatment of remaining men’s and women’s athletics programs to comply with Title IX.

Currie

O’Brien, who joined Judge in co-authoring the NCAA gender equity manual, said schools are “keenly aware” that decisions can’t be based solely on which programs cost the most money with the least return. That’s because any decision to cut sports could affect the “delicate balance act” in complying with Title IX when it comes to the school’s gender breakdown of athletes and sports, he said.

Still, it doesn’t mandate schools offer men’s and women’s programs proportional to the school’s gender breakdown. As an example, NCAA guidelines require Football Bowl Subdivision schools to sponsor at least 16 varsity sports with a minimum of six for men mixed-gender teams, and eight for women.

O’Brien said compliance can be measured in multiple ways, including whether the overall sports program’s gender breakdown is proportionate to that of the general student body.

“That’s really the focal point of the analysis: what’s left, not what was eliminated,” O’Brien said.

Like O’Brien, Judge does not believe women’s programs are at more risk because it would be “difficult” for schools to comply with Title IX while widely cutting women’s sports. So far, they’re right; more men’s programs (16) have been cut than women’s (four) in Division I as of Tuesday, according to a count by The Associated Press.

Old Dominion said in early April it would discontinue wrestling, saving about $1 million. The school said that decision followed a six-month outside study of its athletics program that included Title IX compliance considerations with athletics director Camden Wood Seleg saying the decision to cut a sport “became even more clear” with the pandemic.

Later that month, Cincinnati eliminated a men’s soccer program in existence since 1973. In May, Florida International dissolved its men’s indoor track and field program. Akron eliminated three sports — men’s cross country, men’s golf and women’s tennis — to save $4.4 million.

Bowling Green followed with the shutdown of baseball to reduce the athletics department’s operating budget by $2 million.

Last week, Furman cut baseball and men’s lacrosse, while East Carolina eliminated four sports — men’s and women’s swimming and diving, men’s and women’s tennis — in a plan to save $4.9 million.

And Tuesday, Appalachian State cut men’s soccer, men’s tennis and men’s indoor track and field to save $1 million.

There are other financial considerations, too.

Wake Forest athletics director John Currie noted that non-revenue sports frequently have athletes on partial scholarships, meaning a team roster could have the equivalent of numerous athletes paying full tuition.

So cutting a sport might reduce expenses for an athletics department yet cause a net revenue loss for a school more broadly.

It’s just one example, he said, of detailed evaluations any school must make while also fulfilling Title IX requirements.

Meeting that threshold is not optional, though Currie noted a harsh reality: “Not every school can be everything to everybody.”

“Allocation of resources is among the most difficult decisions that leaders have to make, and the prioritization of how they’re going to allocate those resources,” Currie said. “Because there’s lots of great things we could do. We can’t do everything, if we want to do things in an excellent fashion.”

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#StarsAndStripes

By Howard Fendrich  Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington Wizards point guard John Wall declared himself fully recovered after two operations that sidelined him for the past 1½ years and said he is “itching” to get back on the court this season.

“I’m 110%,” the five-time All-Star said. “I felt like I was doing what I love to do before. "It’s a little bit easier to get back in shape knowing that the injury is behind me," Wall said.”

With play halted, the Wizards were “itching” to get back out there,” he said Tuesday.

The choices aren’t just about money when they involve women’s sports, and while Title IX doesn’t prevent women’s sports from being eliminated, the federal law is a huge part of the conversation.

“I wouldn’t say that women’s sports are at more risk," said attorney Timothy J. O’Brien, who is based in Montana with a practice focused on employment and college sports law. “I would say that all sports in any economic downturn will be scrutinized. But it should be done in a fair and equitable manner so at the end of the day the institution is compliant with Title IX.”

Still, it doesn’t mandate schools offer men’s and women’s programs proportional to the school’s gender breakdown. As an example, NCAA guidelines require Football Bowl Subdivision schools to sponsor at least 16 varsity sports with a minimum of six for men mixed-gender teams, and eight for women.

O’Brien said compliance can be measured in multiple ways, including whether the overall sports program’s gender breakdown is proportionate to that of the general student body.

That’s really the focal point of the analysis: what’s left, not what was eliminated," O’Brien said.

Like O’Brien, Judge does not believe women’s programs are at more risk because it would be “difficult” for schools to comply with Title IX while widely cutting women’s sports. So far, they’re right; more men’s programs (16) have been cut than women’s (four) in Division I as of Tuesday, according to a count by The Associated Press.

Old Dominion said in early April it would discontinue wrestling, saving about $1 million. The school said that decision followed a six-month outside study of its athletics program that included Title IX compliance considerations with athletics director Camden Wood Seleg saying the decision to cut a sport “became even more clear” with the pandemic.

Later that month, Cincinnati eliminated a men’s soccer program in existence since 1973. In May, Florida International dissolved its men’s indoor track and field program. Akron eliminated three sports — men’s cross country, men’s golf and women’s tennis — to save $4.4 million.

Bowling Green followed with the shutdown of baseball to reduce the athletics department’s operating budget by $2 million.

Last week, Furman cut baseball and men’s lacrosse, while East Carolina eliminated four sports — men’s and women’s swimming and diving, men’s and women’s tennis — in a plan to save $4.9 million.

And Tuesday, Appalachian State cut men’s soccer, men’s tennis and men’s indoor track and field to save $1 million.

There are other financial considerations, too.

Wake Forest athletics director John Currie noted that non-revenue sports frequently have athletes on partial scholarships, meaning a team roster could have the equivalent of numerous athletes paying full tuition.

So cutting a sport might reduce expenses for an athletics department yet cause a net revenue loss for a school more broadly.

It’s just one example, he said, of detailed evaluations any school must make while also fulfilling Title IX requirements.

Meeting that threshold is not optional, though Currie noted a harsh reality: “Not every school can be everything to everybody.”

“Allocation of resources is among the most difficult decisions that leaders have to make, and the prioritization of how they’re going to allocate those resources,” Currie said. “Because there’s lots of great things we could do. We can’t do everything, if we want to do things in an excellent fashion.”
Backstory was no miracle for Muncie Central

By Michael Marot
Associated Press

The 1954 Indiana high school basketball tournament remains so vivid in Leon Agullana’s memory it’s as if he never left Muncie Central.

He can rattle off the magical, same-day sweep of top-ranked Fort Wayne North and second-ranked Mississinewa that set up the Bearcats’ chance at a fifth state championship. He can recall spending four days that next week preparing to face Terre Haute Gerstmyer, only to see the previous season’s state runner-up lose to tiny Milan High.

Agullana also remembers this about the storied title game that followed: grabbing the final inbound pass, peeking at the clock and angrily heaving a three-bound pass, peeking at the clock and angrily heaving a three-bound pass.

Indianapolis star was the scene for

Central fieldhouse was the scene for both.

The stirring and universal theme of a champion underdog is as old as David and Goliath and it’s likely why the 1986 film was the winner in the AP vote. Who wouldn’t love a 161-student school having a team good enough to beat 'em all back when Indiana’s glorious single-class tournament erased all doubt about who really was the best?

Well, back in Muncie, Agullana and his teammates had to cope with the result.

They boarded a bus outside Hinkle and made the 55-mile trek home in near silence. At Muncie Fieldhouse, one of the state’s largest high school gymnasiums, they were greeted by a full house that had filed in to see the Bearcats basketball.

“They were unknown to us but not to everybody,” said Joe Beck, a 1956 Central graduate who was at Hinkle that fateful day thanks to winning a ticket lottery. “They had destiny written all over them. . . . It just didn’t work out. We got outcoached.”

There were two high schools in Muncie back then and Central represented the city’s working class. The Bearcats captured their first state title in 1928, courtesy of Charles Secret’s last-second heave from beyond midcourt to beat John Wooden’s Martinsville team. The school board spent 15 years paying off the debt from the massive fieldhouse that opened in December 1928. And while Central wasn’t a big school with roughly 1,500 students, it wasn’t even the biggest in its conference.

Central had become a basketball powerhouse by the 1950s. It won state titles in 1951 and 1952 and entered the 1953-54 season with the billing of “tallest team in Indiana history,” a favorite to win it all. Five regular-season losses put that status in jeopardy but reaching the final had most thinking another title was likely.

Up until Plump delivered the dagger, darting to the basket and then pulling up from 15 feet with 3 seconds left for the winner. Final: Milan 32, Muncie Central 30.

“I knew nothing about their history,” recalled Plump, who has a restaurant in Indianapolis called “Plump’s Last Shot.” “We were just a bunch of naive kids having fun playing basketball. We knew it was a big deal to win the state tournament, of course, but we didn’t realize the significance or that (win) at the time.”

In the years since, the former players have forged a unique bond. After Beck took Plump to Central’s memorabilia room and showed him an authentic jacket from “Hoosiers” — and the autographed ball from Plump — the former Milan player joined the Central alumni association and still pays his $10 annual dues.

Beck and Plump also teamed up to campaign against multi-class basketball in the late 1990s; the 1997 tournament was the last of the single-class format. When a tornado severely damaged the area in November 2017, flooding Central’s basketball court, Beck again called Plump.

“I told Bobby that the memorabilia room was completely untouched,” Beck said. “That tells me God was responsible for the tornado and that basketball is still king in Muncie. And it makes me wonder how we beat you in the first place.”

After $1.8 million in repairs, the 91-year-old fieldhouse reopened in December.

The 1954 Milan Museum also contains a Central section, and even the reunions have taken on “Hoosiers” themes. When the Bearcats held a 40th anniversary celebration of the game, one year early because former coach Jay McCreary was ill, players from both teams participated.

“One of the guys from Milan came up and said, ‘Who in the world ever could have imagined we would be here with a team that now wants to celebrate their defeat?’” Beck said. “It was a great line and it was absolutely the truth.”

Muncie Central won the state championship in 1963 and went on to win three more titles for an unprecedented eight single-class crowns. Plump and Agullana have become friends and they sometimes reminisce about that famous ending — and the one that could have been.

“I walked into his office and the secretary said ‘Can I help you?’” Agullana said, describing his first meeting with Plump years later. “I walked past her and I just stood there in front of him. He said ‘Can I help you?’ and I just stood there.

“He got kind of nervous and then he said, ‘What do you want?’ I said, ‘I want to fouls you on your last shot’.”

Editor’s note: Recently, the Associated Press revealed its Top 25 of sports movies, as voted by 70 writers and editors around the world. After compiling the list, the AP assigned writers to present stories examining the Top 10 from unique perspectives. This is the 10th in the series, a look at the impact of the film that finished No. 1, “Hoosiers.”
DODEA Europe athletes celebrate moving on to college sports teams

BY GREGORY BROOME
Stars and Stripes

Student-athletes from DODEA Europe are moving on from coronavirus-affected senior years and looking forward to promising careers at the collegiate level. DODEA Europe canceled its 2020 spring season in response to the pandemic, costing senior soccer, baseball, softball, and track and field athletes their final prep season and one last opportunity to impress. Still, spring-focused stars are well represented among the DODEA Europe athletes extending their sports careers beyond high school.

Aviano

The Saints will send a student-athlete from each category of spring sports on to college. Nick Smith, the leader of Aviano’s breakout 2019 championship baseball team, is headed to Division III Waynesburg University in Pennsylvania. Athletes at Division III schools sign a non-binding, celebratory signing form. Smith was an All-Europe mainstay in baseball and also represented Aviano in football, volleyball, and wrestling.

On the soccer pitch, Saints senior Danielle Kandle will continue her career at Mars Hill University, an NCAA Division II school in Mars Hill, N.C. Kandle was a 2019 All-Europe selection, leading the Saints to a strong third-place finish at the European tournament. Saints track star Donavin Robinson, Europe’s 2019 runner-up in the 100-meter dash and long jump, will compete for NCAA Division I program Tiffin University in Ohio, while Robinson will compete in track and field at Tiffin University in Ohio.

Aviano seniors Danielle Kandle, left, and Donavin Robinson sign their letters-of-intent. Kandle will play girls soccer at Mars Hill University in North Carolina, while Robinson will compete in track and field at Tiffin University in Ohio. 119 hitters in 61 innings and hitting .415 with 22 RBIs.

Ramstein

The Royals will send six seniors across three sports to college programs. All-Europe hoops stars Shannon McCray and Jason Jones Jr. will continue their basketball careers at NCAA Division III programs. McCray is headed for Southern Maine College in Portland, Maine, while Jones will play for Austin College in Sherman, Texas.

Two Ramstein boys soccer players are bound for NCAA programs in Massachusetts. Conner Mackie, also a DODEA Europe wrestling champion, will play at Division II Assumption College in Worcester. Matthew Reismann, who also served as the Royals’ football placekicker, is headed for Division III Elms College in Chicopee.

Two other Ramstein seniors are headed for NAIA athletic programs. Royals volleyball star Tamiya Bruce will move on to Montreat College in Montreat, N.C. Delaney Purtee, who competed for German club SV Zwickau in Germany, will play soccer at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.

Stuttgart

Panthers baseball star Jack Harris is bound for Randolph-Macon College, an NCAA Division III program in Ashland, Va. A dominant pitcher and all-around standout, Harris earned first-team All-Europe honors in the spring of 2019, leading the Panthers to a berth in the Division I European championship.

SHAPE

Samantha Macalintal will graduate from the Spartans’ cheer squad to the football and basketball cheer team at Division III University of West Florida in Pensacola.

Sources: Players want more games, not more pay cuts

BY RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball players appeared likely to propose more regular-season games this year while holding to their demand for full prorated salaries, people familiar with their deliberations told The Associated Press.

Washington pitcher Max Scherzer, among eight players on the union’s executive subcommittee, issued a statement late Wednesday night calling management’s proposals for salary cuts non-starter.

A day after Major League Baseball proposed a sliding scale of salary slashing for a pandemic-delayed season with an 82-game schedule in ballparks without fans, the union held a conference call Wednesday that included its executive board, player representatives and alternate player representatives, the people said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because no details were announced.

Scherzer, among the sport’s highest-paid players, confirmed the call without divulging who was on it.

“After discussing the latest developments with the rest of the players there’s no need to engage with MLB in any further compensation reductions,” he said on a statement posted to Twitter.

“We have previously negotiated a pay cut in the version of prorated salaries, and there’s no justification for another cut based upon the current information the union has received.”

“I’m glad to hear other players voicing the same viewpoint,” he added, “and believe MLB’s economic strategy would completely change if all documentation were to become public information.”

It was unclear when the union will respond to MLB’s plan, the people said.

Stars Mike Trout and Gerrit Cole would be cut to $10 million or less would keep at least $36 million each they were set to be paid this season. In all, the players would lose billions of dollars by playing with no ticket money and gate-related revenue.

MLB would like to start the season around the Fourth of July in empty ballparks and proposed an 82-game regular season. It can’t do that because it would lose billions of dollars by playing with no ticket money and gate-related revenue.

MLB union head Tony Clark has not commented publicly on MLB’s proposal and has said very little publicly since late March. Agent Scott Boras has repeatedly criticized MLB for proposing more salary reductions and has questioned the accuracy of management’s financial claims.

“Hearing a LOT of rumors about a certain player agent meddling in MLBPA affairs,” Cincinnati pitcher Trevor Bauer tweeted Wednesday. “If true — and at this point, these are only rumors — I have one thing to say... Scott Boras, rep your clients however you want to, but keep your damn personal agenda out of union business.”

Boras declined to comment on Bauer’s remarks.

“Working together to manage the public health issue has brought great solidarity among the players,” Boras said earlier in the day. “They are a strong united front and resolute in their support of the MLBPA.”
NHL/College Basketball

NHL monitoring situation before selecting sites

Several arenas meet qualifications

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

Concerns about Canadian coronavirus restrictions could push hockey south of the 49th parallel into the U.S. this summer.

Seven of the 10 locations the NHL has zeroed in on to hold playoff games if it resumes are American cities not restricted by Canada's 14-day mandatory quarantine upon arrival. As 24 teams figure out how to squeeze an expanded roster and limited personnel into one of two "hub" cities, the Vancouver Canucks are even considering relocating training camps to the U.S. if the situation doesn't change in the coming weeks.

"It's something that we're thinking about, but also, too, we just want to give it a few more days just to see if something is going to change," Vancouver general manager Jim Benning said Wednesday.

"The perfect scenario we'd like to use our facilities. We're probably in the front-runners, but that isn't stopping NHL executives from pitching the ability to host playoff games. "We have a state-of-the-art facility in Cranberry, the Lemieux Center, and the medical center attached and we have plenty of hotels and everything like that," Pittsburgh Penguins GM Jim Rutherford said. "We meet the criteria but we understand there's other cities that do, also." The two biggest surprises on the NHL's list were Chicago and Los Angeles. The Blackhawks and Kings each said they were honored to be considered. But not being a coronavirus hotspot and having a surplus of testing are key elements to the decision.

AP sports writers Will Graves and Mitch Stacy contributed to this report.

Report: Hurley says Arizona State AD minimized scandal

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Arizona State men's basketball coach Bobby Hurley sent an email to Ray Anderson last season alleging the Arizona State athletic director minimized sexual harassment allegations by the wives of three athletic staff members against booster Bart Wear.

Before the NHL commits to where games could be held, officials are planning for multiple scenarios. Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly is engaged in regular dialogue with the U.S. and Canadian governments and medical experts to determine what the health and safety landscape might look like this summer.

That doesn't mean we get to look for any type of exception or any type of favoritism," said Toronto Maple Leafs captain John Tavares, who's on the Return to Play committee. "I think we just want to continue to follow the guidelines that are set out for us and do the best that we can. Hopefully things improve to a point where those things could be possibly loosened up, not just for us but for all of society."

Because testing is lagging in Ontario and British Columbia's government isn't expected to make exceptions for the NHL, Edmonton could be Canada's best hope. Oilers GM Ken Holland said with an attached practice rink and hotel and nearby restaurants, "Edmonton checks off in my opinion all the boxes."

Except that Daly said Canada's 14-day quarantine would be a nonstarter. The NHL is already facing what Winnipeg forward Andrew Copp called a "time crunch" to fit in effectively five rounds of playoffs, and if the focus shifts solely on U.S. locations, Las Vegas and Columbus appear to be the front-runners.

Beyond the abundance of hotels and the sparkling new rink the Las Vegas Strip can offer, the arena district in Columbus could serve as an effective bubble for the NHL. "Whether it's from the building or the facilities surrounding the building to accommodate hotel rooms, meals — whatever it needs to be, we've covered it," Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen said. "Also, the state of Ohio is in pretty good shape as far as flattening the curve and providing a safe environment that way. The transportation is easy if needed between facilities in Columbus, and we have a lot of rink facilities that we can use for the amount of teams that would be in the tournament."

There wouldn't be much of a home-ice advantage without fans, and the league is considering moving the "home" team to the other city. But that isn't stopping NHL executives from pitching the ability to host playoff games.

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European Tour to return with British Masters

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

The European Tour plans to resume its season the last full weekend in July with six tournaments in England and Wales that will include COVID-19 testing and depend on the U.K. lifting its quarantine restrictions.

It would start July 22 with the British Masters, hosted by Lee Westwood. The next five in the “U.K. Swing” are new tournaments the European Tour will pay for out of its tournament development fund. Three will be at former Ryder Cup venues — two at Celtic Manor in Wales, one at The Belfry in England.

The purse at each new event is 1 million euros. The tour said it will add 500,000 euros for the U.K. Swing for charities — half for the markets they play, half for the top 10 players from a “mini money list” to decide.

No spectators will be allowed at least for the UK swing.

“There is no question that we’re back,” Keith Pelley, the tour’s chief executive, said in a conference call Thursday.

The European Tour also set dates for four Rolex Series events — the Scottish Open and BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth in October, the Nedbank Challenge in South Africa and DP World Tour Championship in Dubai in December.

Pelley expects the rest of the schedule — with hopes for 24 events — to be announced later.

He said the U.K. Swing depends largely on lifting the 14-day quarantine for players arriving from other countries. The PGA Championship in San Francisco is scheduled for Aug. 6-9. If the quarantine is not lifted, top European Tour players would have to choose between a major and four European Tour events with minimal prize money.

“Hotels need to be in operation and the quarantine needs to be lifted to continue with these events,” Pelley said.

He said he was encouraged and optimistic that will be the case, based on numerous conversations with government officials.

“We wouldn’t be announcing these events without having had significant dialogue with the UK government,” Pelley said. “They know about the announcements. They’re worked feverishly with us.”

The tour returns under an initiative called “Golf for Good,” which Pelley said will underpin the rest of 2020. The key points are the charitable contributions — 50,000 euros to the five venues and 250,000 euros for the leading 10 players from a money list of the U.K. Swing.

He recalled a conversation with one European Tour partner in which Pelley said, “This might not be the biggest event that you have ever done in terms of crowds and hospitality, but it will be the most important event, and it should be the most emotional event.”

The European Tour was last played March 8 at the Qatar Masters. Eight tournaments have been canceled, including a World Golf Championship in Texas and the British Open. Nine others have been postponed, and officials across several tours worldwide have been trying to piece together the season.

The majors set the framework with the PGA Championship going to Aug. 6-9, the U.S. Open planned for Sept. 17-20 in New York and the Masters moving to Nov. 12-15.

Pelley did not take any questions on the Ryder Cup — with or without fans — except to say it remains on the schedule for Sept. 25-27 in Wisconsin.

The Scottish Open, originally planned for July, moves to Oct. 8-11 and precedes the European Tour’s flagship event, the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth.

He said other events, such as the Irish Open and other key stops in continental Europe, were close to being announced. Pelley was quick to point out the tour’s strength — a worldwide tour — has become an obstacle from having to work with so many different governments and their regulations for the pandemic.

Moving 30 events with one in its place (Dunhill Championship in Scotland on Oct. 1-4) has been challenging,” he said.

Andrew Murray, the tour’s chief medical officer, says testing will include an antigen test for the coronavirus when players arrive, along with daily thermal readings and questionnaires about their health.

No media will be allowed at tournaments for the U.K. Swing, and the tour expects no more than 500 people on site.

Vegas: Partial blueprint for safety rules established by UFC events in Florida

FROM BACK PAGE

safety protocols on Wednesday to accompany the return of combat sports to their hometown. The UFC and Top Rank have worked closely with the commission in recent weeks to create the protocols, according to Bob Bennett, the commission’s executive director.

“Throughout this process, we’ve been working hand in glove with the UFC,” Bennett said. “I’m aware of their operations plan, and everything is moving forward based on their operations plan and our protocols.”

The UFC established a partial blueprint for the safety rules when it staged three shows in Jacksonville, Fla., earlier this month while waiting to get approval from the Nevada commission to return to its hometown.

The Nevada commission’s safety protocols include immediate testing and mandated quarantine at a hotel upon all participants’ arrival in Las Vegas, followed by another test and isolation period before the events.

The UFC is expected to stage several domestic cards in Las Vegas over the upcoming weeks, and President Dana White still intends to hold other shows on a private island for fighters not based in the U.S.

White said the events in Jacksonville included more than 1,110 processed tests for COVID-19. Veteran fighter Jacare Souza and two of his cornermen tested positive before the first event in Florida, but no other positive tests were reported.

The UFC show Saturday will be headlined by former welterweight champion Tyrone Woodley facing Gilbert Burns.

The main event of UFC 250 on June 6 features dominant two-division champion Amanda Nunes defending her featherweight belt against Canadian challenger Felicia Spencer. UFC 250 initially was scheduled for May 9 in Nunes’ native Brazil, but was postponed and eventually moved.
Fitzpatrick says schedule could benefit Steelers

By Will Graves
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Minkah Fitzpatrick is missing the somewhat leisurely pace of the NFL’s organized team activities, when free time in the evening allows teammates to develop the chemistry the Steelers safety considers critical to success.

“You’re learning about each other and how each other think and life outside of football,” Fitzpatrick said Tuesday.

Not so much this season, at least not in the way Fitzpatrick is used to. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Fitzpatrick to work out on his own. It’s limited his interactions with other members of one of the league’s top secondaries to group chats and virtual conference calls.

It’s not ideal, but these aren’t ideal times.

While Fitzpatrick is preparing as if the Steelers will report to St. Vincent College for the 55th straight summer for training camp in July, that’s more pragmatism than optimism. The way the third-year All-Pro figures it, if he’s ready for the grind of camp then he’ll be overly prepared if camp is scrapped or the pre-season is altered in response to the coronavirus.

If the NFL does tinker with the schedule, Pittsburgh might be one of the least impacted clubs in the league. The Steelers return 10 of 11 starters to a unit that finished fifth last season — and was the primary reason Pittsburgh hung around the playoff picture until late December despite losing quarterback Ben Roethlisberger to a right elbow injury at halftime of Week 2.

“We have some young faces and new faces, (but) some teams, half their roster, half their secondary or half their linebackers are gone,” Fitzpatrick said. “(A shortened pre-season) will definitely give us an advantage because we all have a year (together) under our belt or more than that. I think it’s more of an advantage.”

Fitzpatrick has been keeping an eye on Roethlisberger’s recovery from elbow surgery. So have the Steelers, who spent free agency and the draft trying to provide more punch to an offense that faltered late in the season in Roethlisberger’s absence.

Pittsburgh signed tight end Eric Ebron and used its first draft pick on Notre Dame wide receiver Chase Claypool, leaving a defense that led the league in sacks largely untouched.

The message couldn’t be more clear. The Steelers anticipate Roethlisberger returning to form and the team returning to the playoffs following a two-year absence. So does Fitzpatrick.

“I expect him to be Ben Roethlisberger,” Fitzpatrick said. “He’s a great leader and a great man. He has a lot of experience and wisdom to share. I think he’s going to keep being himself. He’s going to go out there and compete and challenge myself as a defensive player.”

It’s a challenge Fitzpatrick figures he and the rest of a defense that produced four Pro Bowlers last season, will be ready to answer whenever the Steelers are given the go-ahead to get together.

The Los Angeles Rams’ Nickell Robey-Coleman breaks up a pass intended for the New Orleans Saints’ Tommy Lewis during the NFC championship game in New Orleans on Jan. 20, 2019. The missed interference call led to NFL pass interference review rules last season that will likely now be rescinded.

NFL missed the call with pass interference reviews

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press

Remember back to the NFC championship game in the 2018 season. Deep in the fourth quarter at the Superdome.

And the missed call — one of the worst officiating gaffes in pro football memory.

Not only did it likely prevent the New Orleans Saints from winning the conference title, and perhaps beating New England in the Super Bowl, but the embarrassment of the lack of yellow flags on the play sent the NFL into crisis mode.

What the league came up with was a one-year trial in which pass interference calls could be reviewed in the video replay system; it was hailed as major step to aid officiating.

But the NFL blew it, and on Thursday, barring a turnaround, the rule will disappear.

“We passed that rule for one year,” says Falcons President Rich McKay, the longtime co-chairman of the powerful competition committee. “Forever prior to that time, we were really nervous about having a review of something that is a subjective foul.

“We always had a fear that if we do that, you’re necessarily going to have complete disagreement about whether a play should be reversed or not reversed. It’s not black and white, it’s gray. On all other reviews, there are objective markers. Did his foot touch the white line? Did the ball cross the plane? Those are objective markers, not subjective markers.”

Early last season, virtually every challenge on interference was denied. Some coaches became reticent to even bother.

Later, officials seemed to open up their consideration of the challenges. But there was little to no consistency to their decisions.

Mike Pereira, who oversaw league officiating for more than a decade and now is an analyst for Fox, believes the system set up was doomed for failure.

“It is the toughest call to make; I think replay proved that last year,” Pereira told SiriusXM Radio. “Is it offense, is it defense, and it was that simple — that is the way I used to teach it in the NFL. Block/charge. If it is a charge in the NBA or in college basketball, it is offense (at fault). When it comes to football, if it is a block it becomes a defensive foul. And it is really the simplest way to look at it when you are talking about collisions. Not push-offs, but collisions.”

Unfortunately, Pereira believes, the NFL expanded what it was examining in replays.

“I think the real case was the fact they used a different standard in replay than they did on the field, and that was where everybody got lost,” he said. “They wanted to adopt a rule that basically addressed the one play that happened in the Saints-Rams game, and basically only get involved if it reached that level, which was like a huge, huge miss.

“Poor (NFL officiating chief) Al Riveron is trying to decide is that big enough or is it not big enough? I can put myself in his seat, ‘Yep this is interference, but is it big enough for me to get involved?’ That was the downfall of the rule.”

Few would argue that the league has far too many rules and tangents to those rules. When the NFL simplifies things, such as with the hotly debated “catch rule,” it eventually reaches something logical.

What it came up with after the Rams-Saints fiasco was, it turns out, no help at all.

“I did not feel like it worked,” McKay said. “We put New York in some really tough, tough spots. Whatever New York did, someone was going to criticize it on the other side. It was a no-win situation. That had always been the fear and was why we were scared — or I should say hesitant — to make those fouls subject to review. We didn’t make a recommendation to have a continuation of that after the one-year trial, so the rule dies on its own accord.”

The NFL's new flagless pass interference review system was critically examined after the NFC championship game in the 2018 season.
Big names remain despite season’s uncertainty

Offseason shopping ongoing

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

NEW YORK

Offseason shopping is still in full swing in the NFL. Even with the status of the upcoming season uncertain because of the coronavirus pandemic, teams continue to tinker with their rosters by adding players they hope will help them win — whenever or if they actually play.

Virtual workouts are being held all around the league, with some facilities beginning to reopen but still closed to coaches and players. General managers work the phones and chat with agents and unsigned players through video conference calls.

During the last few weeks, Joe Flacco (Jets), Carlos Hyde (Panthers), Ty Montgomery (Saints), D.J. Fluker (Ravens) and Prince Amukamara (Giants) have found new homes.

Other big names remain unsigned and could end up filling major needs for someone. Here’s a look at some still waiting to find a home.

Many believed Clowney would be snatched up quickly by a team desperate for a pass-rushing presence. And for big-time bucks. Instead, the 2014 No. 1 overall draft pick is still unsigned two months later and potentially looking at a one-year, prove-it deal. A return to Seattle isn’t out of the question.

Larry Warford, G

After making the last three Pro Bowls, Warford was cut by New Orleans earlier this month; the Saints drafted Cesar Ruiz in the first round as his obvious successor at right guard.

New Orleans also saved $7 million on the salary cap by releasing Warford. He immediately became the most enticing backup, at least at first — remains an intriguing story line of the offseason.

Everson Griffen, DE

Minnesota’s four-time Pro Bowl pick has 74½ career sacks, including 26½ the past three seasons, but he exercised his option to void the remaining three years on his contract. Griffen is reportedly being patient and waiting until he can take in-person visits before they or the teams make a decision.

Cam Newton, QB

The former Panthers star missed all but two games last season because of a foot injury and was released in March after Carolina failed to find a trade partner. Newton is 31 and five years removed from his NFL MVP season. He’s been posting workout videos on Instagram to show he’s now healthy. Where he eventually ends up — likely as a backup, at least at first — remains an intriguing story line of the offseason.

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Everson Griffen, DE

Minnesota’s four-time Pro Bowl pick has 74½ career sacks, including 26½ the past three seasons, but he exercised his option to void the remaining three years on his contract. Griffen is reportedly being patient and waiting until he can take in-person visits before they or the teams make a decision.

Cam Newton, QB

The former Panthers star missed all but two games last season because of a foot injury and was released in March after Carolina failed to find a trade partner. Newton is 31 and five years removed from his NFL MVP season. He’s been posting workout videos on Instagram to show he’s now healthy. Where he eventually ends up — likely as a backup, at least at first — remains an intriguing story line of the offseason.

Jadeveon Clowney, DE

Many believed Clowney would be snatched up quickly by a team desperate for a pass-rushing presence. And for big-time bucks. Instead, the 2014 No. 1 overall draft pick is still unsigned two months later and potentially looking at a one-year, prove-it deal. A return to Seattle isn’t out of the question.

Larry Warford, G

After making the last three Pro Bowls, Warford was cut by New Orleans earlier this month; the Saints drafted Cesar Ruiz in the first round as his obvious successor at right guard.

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Back in business

Boxing, UFC set for Las Vegas return

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

Mixed martial arts and boxing are back in business in Nevada.

The Nevada Athletic Commission unanimously agreed Wednesday to allow two UFC events and two Top Rank boxing shows in Las Vegas over the next two weeks.

The decision ends the moratorium on combat sports that has been in place in Nevada since March 14, when the commission stopped competition amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The UFC immediately confirmed its plans to stage a show without fans in attendance Saturday night at the UFC Apex arena on its expansive corporate complex in Las Vegas, followed by the UFC 250 pay-per-view show at the same place June 6.

Top Rank is expected to hold fan-free boxing shows at the MGM Grand on June 9 and June 11.

Citing the importance of sports to the state’s economy and morale, Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak announced Tuesday night that sporting events could return if promoters followed health rules approved by the appropriate authorities.

The commission approved stringent coronavirus

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Top: Former welterweight champ Tyron Woodley, pictured, will face Gilbert Burns on Saturday at UFC Fight Night in Las Vegas after the Nevada Athletic Commission voted to end the moratorium on combat sports in the state Wednesday. Right: Boxing promoter Bob Arum will stage a pair of fan-free fight events at the MGM Grand on June 9 and June 11.

PHOTOS BY JULIO CORTEZ, TOP, AND NICK Wass, RIGHT / AP

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