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WEEKEND
EDITION

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Arc Raiders may have secret sauce for extraction genre **Page 15**

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PHOTOS BY LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

A sniper from Croatia aims at a target Wednesday, during the U.S. Army Europe and Africa Best Sniper Competition at the Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany.

Taking their best shot

Snipers from Europe face off in revamped US Army-sponsored competition in Germany

BY LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Roughly 15 seconds is all a team of two snipers from the Netherlands had to get their required shots on target before sprinting to another firing line on hilly Bavarian ranges.

The Dutch duo, whose identities are being withheld due to their duties, were on the clock Wednesday at the Grafenwoehr Training Area for an event dubbed Operation Serpent Dawn, one of 16 in this year's European

Best Sniper Competition.

It challenged teams to rapidly engage moving targets while performing under heavy physical strain.

This year's competition demands far more than expert marksmanship, said Command Sgt. Maj. Miguel Antia, the Observer, Coach, Trainer team senior enlisted leader for the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels.

SEE BEST ON PAGE 6

Driscoll eyes check-ins for soldiers as holidays near

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll instructed unit leaders across the service to check in with all their soldiers every day of the holiday season, a time often associated with an increase in suicide attempts.

Driscoll demanded an officer or noncommissioned officer in every formation "call, text or visit" with their soldiers once every day through Jan. 15 "to see if they need help," in a memorandum sent service wide this week.

"The holidays can be a high-risk period for self-harm. We know it's a problem, it happens every year, so we'll address it head-on," Driscoll wrote. "... This isn't performative — it's real for me."

Driscoll, a former armor officer who saw combat in Iraq in 2009, said his initiative was based on efforts in the 11th Airborne Division, where unit leaders have "systemically prioritized soldier checks" in recent months to combat a once-high suicide rate among the division's troops at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The efforts, Driscoll wrote, have resulted in a 14-month period with no suicides reported in the division.

For years, the Army — and its sister services — has struggled to bring down the number of suicides in its ranks. The Defense Department began collecting and reporting quarterly surveillance data on service member suicides in 2018 to help guide prevention efforts.

Those efforts have seen mixed results. Suicides were up across the Army — and the military as a whole — in 2023, the last year for which the Pentagon has provided complete data. The Army saw 289 suicides across its entire force, in-



An American soldier oversees a Croatian service member clearing his sniper rifle.

SEE HOLIDAYS ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.492	\$4.078	\$4.438	\$4.298	Azores	..	..	\$4.301	..
Change in price	+0.6 cents	+0.5 cents	-0.2 cents	+3.1 cents	Change in price	..	..	-0.2 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$5.061	\$5.641	\$5.532	Turkey	..	..	\$4.093	\$3.953*
Change in price	..	+3.8 cents	+3.8 cents	+3.4 cents	Change in price	..	..	-0.2 cents	+3.1 cents
U.K.	..	\$5.433	\$5.797	\$5.668	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Nov. 21. The change in price is from Nov. 14.				
Change in price	..	+6.0 cents	+6.0 cents	+6.0 cents					

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$4.069	..	\$3.929	South Korea	\$3.149	..	\$4.099	\$3.959
Change in price	..	No change	..	+3.0 cents	Change in price	+1.0 cents	..	No change	+3.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.339	..	..	\$3.929	Guam	\$3.179**	\$3.759	\$4.119	..
Change in price	+3.0 cents	..	..	+3.0 cents	Change in price	+1.0 cents	No change	-1.0 cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade									
Pacific prices for the week of Nov. 21-27									

EXCHANGE RATES			
Military rates			
Euro costs (Nov. 21)	0.85	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8060
British pound (Nov. 21)	\$1.27	Thailand (Baht)	32.36
Japanese yen (Nov. 21)	151.00	Turkey (NewLira)	42.3648
South Korean won (Nov. 21)	1,431.00		
Commercial rates		(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3743		
Britain (Pound)	1.3110		
Canada (Dollar)	1.4048		
China (Yuan)	7.1075		
Denmark (Krone)	6.4746		
Egypt (Pound)	47.3704		
Euro	0.8669		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7832		
Hungary (Forint)	330.92		
Israel (Shekel)	3.2476		
Japan (Yen)	157.62		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3068		
Norway (Krone)	10.1715		
Philippines (Peso)	58.95		
Poland (Zloty)	3.66		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7461		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3062		
South Korea (Won)	1,467.11		
		INTEREST RATES	
		Prime rate	7.00
		Interest Rates Discount rate	4.00
		Federal funds market rate	3.88
		3-month bill	3.88
		30-year bond	4.76

MILITARY

‘Military Schengen’ in plan to combat threats

EU seeks easier tank, troop moves on short notice

By SAM McNEIL
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union rolled out a new defense package on Wednesday to allow tanks and troops to deploy more rapidly across the many borders of the 27-nation bloc in the event of a conflict, as concern mounts that Russia is already probing its defenses.

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU has watched warily as a full-scale war raged just across its eastern border. That nervousness has only increased in recent months, as the EU has scrambled to deal with mysterious drone incursions linked to Russia.

Europe’s foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said that spending on defense now might avert war.

“Weakness invites them to make their move,” she said, speaking of Russia. She said if the EU increases its defensive capabilities and readiness, “then Russia will not attack because we are not weak.”

The new military mobility proposal by the EU’s executive branch, the European Commission, would invest 17.65 billion euro (\$20.4 billion) into 500 locations that have been identified as choke points, such as bridges, ports and tunnels currently unable to handle heavy traffic and vehicles.

During conflict or disaster, emergency protocols would snap in place. Armed forces would be given priority access to infrastructure like airports, roads and railways during emergencies, and current regulations in some areas such as transporting dangerous goods



THANASSIS STAVRAKIS/AP

A drone flies above a Greek army armored vehicle in a live-fire exercise near the northeastern city of Alexandroupolis, Greece, testing domestically-developed drones and counter-drone systems as part of NATO's modernization efforts, on Nov. 14.

would be scrapped for militaries or private defense companies.

The defense package underscored a sea change in geopolitics spurred on by President Donald Trump, who has called into question 80 years of cooperation based on the understanding that the U.S. would help protect European nations following World War II.

The EU arose out of the determination to avoid a repetition of the horrors of the two world wars by binding the countries of Europe into closer economic and political cooperation. However, since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the bloc has increasingly focused on defense and security.

EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius said European intelligence services have warned that

Russia could attack the EU in the next three or four years, or test NATO’s Article 5 guarantee that says an attack against one member is an attack against all.

“Resilient infrastructure. Joint action. Safer Europe. Today’s Military Mobility Package will strengthen Europe’s readiness and ability to move quickly in crisis,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen posted on X after Wednesday’s announcement.

One of the biggest challenges facing the push for defense integration is updating transport systems so that they operate seamlessly across borders, in terms of languages and protocols used at ports and train stations. Some railway gauges, for example, are mismatched, making it difficult to send trains carrying ar-

mored vehicles from western Europe to the eastern flank bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Kubilius said that eventually it aims to forge a “military Schengen,” a reference to Europe’s ID-check-free travel zone, which is made up of 25 EU member countries, plus Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

He said that “frontier countries” like Estonia, Latvia and Finland on the eastern flank require deeper infrastructure connections to “continental countries” like France and Germany.

“This is how we turn industrial strength into operational readiness — and make sure Europe can move as one, with the speed and coordination of our security demands,” Kubilius said.

The new plan would be for each EU nation to send a representative to the Military Mobility Transport Group to streamline military deployments in times of peace, emergencies and conflict.

Auditors had warned in February that the EU’s military mobility was too small and poorly managed to be effective.

The commission also announced a Defense Industry Transformation Roadmap that aims to simplify and unify regulations on the EU’s defense industry, and corral investment into domestic production of weapons, vehicles, satellites, shells and bullets.

Both the package and the road map follow the Commission’s “Readiness 2030” security strategy built around the threat of Russian aggression. The commission estimates that EU defense spending this year will total around 392 billion euros (\$457 billion), almost double the amount of four years ago, before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

It believes that some 3.4 trillion euros (\$4 trillion) will probably be spent on defense over the next decade. To help, it intends to propose boosting the EU’s long-term budget for defense and space to 131 billion euros (\$153 billion).

EU member countries are being urged to buy much of their military equipment within the bloc, working mostly with European suppliers — in some cases with EU help to cut prices and speed up orders. Under the road map, EU nations should only purchase equipment from abroad when costs, performance or supply delays make it preferable.

The Trump administration has signaled it is prioritizing U.S. security on its own domestic borders and in Asia. It has told Europeans that they must fend for themselves and Ukraine in the future.

US ambassador envisions German taking over NATO commander role

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The top U.S. envoy to NATO said this week that he is eager for a German general to eventually take command of all allied forces, a job that has been held by an American officer since the bloc’s founding nearly 80 years ago.

Matthew Whitaker, the American ambassador to the 32-country alliance, told the audience at the Berlin Security Conference that such a significant shakeup at NATO would take time, according to several news outlets, including British newspaper The Telegraph.

“I look forward to the day when Germany comes to the Unit-

ed States and says that ‘We’re ready to take over the Supreme Allied Commander position,’” Whitaker said Tuesday. “I think we’re a long way away from that, but I look forward to those discussions.”

In a social media post following the discussions in Berlin, Whitaker did not mention the SACEUR issue.

He did, however, emphasize the need for allies to follow through on recent pledges to increase defense spending to 5% of gross domestic product.

Still, questions have swirled around the idea that a European could one day take the job of Supreme Allied Commander Eu-

rope, a post first held by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Earlier this year, there were discussions at the Pentagon about the idea of the United States relinquishing command of NATO forces, NBC News reported in March.

However, in July, U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich took over the job, signaling there was no immediate change in the works. Whitaker’s own remarks suggest that any shift would be years away.

There has long been debate among security analysts about whether the time has come for NATO to have a European general at the top.

Backers of the idea have argued that getting Europeans to shoulder



U.S. AMBASSADOR TO NATO/X

Matthew Whitaker, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, speaks at the Berlin Security Conference on Tuesday. Whitaker said he looked forward to eventually having a German as the alliance’s top commander, various news outlets reported.

more of the Continent’s security burden should entail a corresponding assumption of more command responsibility.

Critics, however, counter that

such a move would be interpreted as U.S. backpedaling from the alliance, which they say would ultimately weaken NATO’s ability to deter aggression in Europe.

MILITARY

Study narrows root cause of Gulf War illness

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A new medical study found that the wide-ranging symptoms of Gulf War illness appear to be caused by a failure of cells to produce adequate energy, bringing experts a step closer to finding the root cause and a treatment.

The study, released Thursday in the peer-reviewed journal “Scientific Reports,” builds on 30 years’ worth of research from project lead, Dr. Robert Haley, an epidemiologist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

“This is an important clue because it narrows things down,” Haley said Wednesday in a phone interview. “Now we’re trying to find the sweet spot that we could treat ... and then we have a really good chance of finding a treatment.”

Following the Gulf War, which

ended in 1991, returning veterans began reporting a wide range of chronic symptoms, including fatigue, fever, night sweats, memory and concentration problems, difficulty finding words, diarrhea, sexual dysfunction and body pain. The illness affects more than 25% of the 700,000 military personnel involved in the war, according to the research report.

Since then, academic researchers and the Department of Veterans Affairs have been looking for the cause among the many toxic exposures that veterans faced, such as burning oil wells, pesticides, nerve gas and anti-nerve gas medication, and depleted uranium.

At one point, it was even believed that it was the stress of war that caused the symptoms, Haley said. However, his own research released in 2022 linked the onset of Gulf War illness to some veterans’

exposure to sarin, a deadly nerve gas.

Sarin, which the military has confirmed was present during the war, is a toxic, synthetic nerve agent that was first developed as a pesticide. It has been used in chemical warfare, and its production was banned in 1997.

When people are exposed to either the liquid or gas form, sarin enters the body through the skin or airways and attacks the nervous system. High levels of exposure often result in death, but studies of survivors have revealed that lower-level sarin exposure can lead to long-term impairment of brain function, according to the Texas university’s research.

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognized Gulf War illness as a legitimate medical condition linked to military service and created a med-

ical diagnostic code for it. This move enabled doctors and scientists to more effectively track, document and treat patients.

In this latest study, which was funded through the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Army, Haley’s team looked at 39 specialized images of the brains of Gulf War veterans with the illness and 16 without it. The brain scans came from members of the Navy Reserve’s 24th Naval Mobile Construction (Seabees) Battalion — a group that Haley has followed since 1995.

MRI experts Richard Briggs and Sergey Cheshkov worked on the study to evaluate the scans and collect data, and the team found that those veterans with Gulf War illness had dysfunctional mitochondria, the structures responsible for generating the energy cells need to function. They identified this dys-

function based on increased creatine levels, Haley said.

“These veterans don’t have damaged neurons — which would be incurable — but an energy imbalance,” he said. “That suggests their symptoms could respond to new treatments.”

Haley studied brain scans about 25 years ago, but technology wasn’t advanced enough for him to pinpoint — as he has in this study — what exactly was going wrong in the brain cells.

With this information now confirmed, he’s focusing on moving upstream from the problem to find a root cause. That is where any future treatment would need to focus.

“That would be the Holy Grail of this 30-year-long quest. If we find that and can find a medication that can restore it to normal functioning, everything might just get better,” he said.

Senate Dems demand reversal of decision to delay PFAS cleanups

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats are demanding a reversal of the Pentagon’s decision earlier this year to delay the cleanup of “forever chemicals” at military installations around the U.S., arguing the postponed timetables will harm service members and communities.

Some 150 military sites have been given revised timelines for cleanups of chemicals known as PFAS, commonly found in firefighting foam and extensively used for decades by the military in training exercises that led to soil and groundwater contamination.

The Pentagon produced the new cleanup timetables at the end of March, pushing back the time frame for collecting information on the extent of contamination and studies to evaluate cleanup options for some installations by nearly a decade. The delays were a marked change from a timetable the Pentagon released in December 2024 under former President Joe Biden’s administration.

Nearly 30 Senate Democrats, led by Kirsten Gillibrand, of New York, called the delays “unacceptable” in a letter sent Wednesday to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. The senators are requesting the Pentagon revert to the timetable released last year and accelerate efforts to remediate PFAS contamination on military sites.

The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

At least 700 military sites in all 50 states are known or suspected to have pollution from PFAS, which is short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The chemicals linger in the environment and in people and have been linked to certain types of cancer as well as decreased fertility and developmental delays in children.

The Defense Department has spent at least \$2.6 billion addressing PFAS contamination since military communities began detecting high levels of the chemicals in their drinking water in 2017. Remediation is expected to take decades and cost billions of dollars, according to a February report by the



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Christopher Collier, left, and Airman 1st Class Jeremy Wright participate in a fluorine-free foam training exercise at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., in April 2024.

Government Accountability Office.

Further delaying cleanups will “only increase the health and economic costs to service members and communities across the country,” senators warned in their letter to Hegseth. They also expressed alarm at what they said was a lack of transparency by the Pentagon in notifying stakeholders about the change in cleanup timelines.

“Service members, their families, and the communities sur-

rounding contaminated military installations need to be able to make informed decisions about their health,” the senators wrote.

The push by Democrats comes as Republican-led legislation seeks to undo restrictions on the Pentagon’s use of PFAS.

The House and Senate versions of defense policy and spending bills for 2026 call for delaying a phaseout of PFAS firefighting foam and reducing funding for the cleanup of contaminated sites. Other provisions lift a moratorium

on incinerating firefighting foam and rescind prohibitions on the military’s ability to buy everyday products made with PFAS, such as cookware and carpets.

Lawmakers are now negotiating the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets policies for the Pentagon, and plan to vote on the legislation in December. Congress has until the end of January to pass an accompanying spending bill for the Pentagon under the deal that ended the government shutdown last week.

Selected Marine Corps Reserve offers lump sum bonus of \$20K to stay

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

The Selected Marine Corps Reserve is offering corporals through staff sergeants thousands of dollars to remain in certain military occupational specialties, the service announced in

an administrative message Wednesday.

The largest lump sum is a \$20,000 retention bonus for corporals through staff sergeants who agree to continue to serve in the SMCR for 36 months. There are lump sum bonuses of \$10,000

for 24 months of service, as well as \$5,000 for 12 months. Marines who agree to three years of service for certain specialties in specific units and locations could be eligible for a \$5,000 unit kicker in addition.

Some of the 100 jobs listed for

retention bonuses include intelligence specialists, combat engineer, infantry unit leader and flight equipment technician.

Recruiting and retention of service members, across all military service branches, has been a priority for several years as the

military failed to meet its recruiting goals due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tight job markets and recruits not being able to meet fitness and academic standards.

All military services in fiscal year 2025 met recruiting and retention goals.

PACIFIC



Actor and author George Takei speaks at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, Thursday.

‘Star Trek’ actor recalls detention in internment camp during WWII

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — George Takei, best known for his role as starship Enterprise helmsman Hikaru Sulu on the science fiction TV and movie series “Star Trek,” gave a Vulcan salute Thursday before speaking at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan.

The 88-year-old Californian was 5 when he and his family were forced at gunpoint from their home and into an detainment camp, he told a conference room packed with reporters, students and Trekkies.

Takei’s family was among the tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast whom President Franklin Roosevelt ordered forcibly removed to inland camps after Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941.

Takei said he and his family found themselves behind barbed wire at Camp Rohwer, Ark., and later at Tule Lake, Calif.

Meanwhile, young Japanese-American men proved their patriotism serving in the U.S. Army’s 442nd Regimental Combat Team, with the motto “Go For Broke,” he said.

Those soldiers fought with valor in Europe, Takei said.

The 442nd is the most decorated unit in U.S. military history for its size and length of service and sustained one of the highest combat casualty rates of the war, according to Arlington National Cemetery’s website.

Takei’s award-winning illustrated children’s book about his wartime experience, “My Lost Freedom,” was published in the



Takei gives the Vulcan salute from “Star Trek.”

United States last year. A translated version goes on sale this month in Japan.

Takei said he wrote the book for children who are the same age today that he was when he was incarcerated.

His acting career spanned six decades and included appearances in 40 films and hundreds of television episodes.

Between the first two seasons of “Star Trek,” Takei in 1967 filmed “The Green Berets” at Fort Benning, Ga., playing a Vietnamese captain alongside John Wayne, he recalled.

The outspoken social activist began campaigning as a teenager for an apology and compensation for Japanese-American detained during World War II.

That came in 1988 when President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act.

Immigrant roundups taking

place in the United States today “are deeply resonant” of what happened during the war, Takei said.

“Immigration, racism and the failure of political leadership ... it’s being repeated,” he said. “We must do everything to stop what’s happening again today because it was horrible.”

Japan’s efforts to reinterpret its pacifist constitution also came under fire from the actor, along with the country’s attitude toward homosexuality.

Japan is way behind on gay rights, Takei said.

“The gay rights people here are fighting a very valiant fight, but it’s still way behind what we’ve accomplished (in America),” he said.

After his speech, Takei posed for photographs with fans, turning a hallway outside the conference room into a mini sci-fi convention.

US paratrooper lands on rooftop after malfunction

By SETH ROBSON AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A U.S. Army paratrooper was forced to land in a Tokyo suburb Tuesday evening after drifting off course during parachute training, prompting a complaint from a local official.

The soldier, who had jumped from a C-130J Super Hercules, landed in Hamura city beyond the drop zone at Yokota, according to a statement emailed Thursday by the spokesman for U.S. Forces Japan, Air Force Col. John Severns.

The soldier deployed a backup parachute after the main chute failed, according to a Thursday news release from Fussa city citing information from the North Kanto Defense Bureau, a regional branch of Japan’s Ministry of Defense.

The paratrooper was not seriously injured, according to the release.

No one on the ground was hurt,

a police spokesman in neighboring Fussa city said by phone Thursday.

A witness called Fussa police at 4:37 p.m. Tuesday to report the incident.

The soldier landed on the roof of a home, Japan’s Yomiuri newspaper reported Wednesday.

Hamura and Fussa are among several municipalities bordering Yokota, home to USFJ, 5th Air Force and the 374th Airlift Wing.

Hamura Mayor Hirotaka Hashimoto lodged a “strong complaint” Wednesday with the defense bureau. Bureau officials met with the mayor to apologize, according to a news released on the city’s website.

The Air Force is “committed to performing safe flight operations in the interest of our one community,” USFJ’s statement said.

“We make every effort to minimize the impact to local communities while ensuring we maintain proficiency in our flight operations for the defense of Japan.”

DMZ explosion, injury trigger investigations

By YOONJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

South Korea reported two injuries this week in separate military-related incidents — one involving an explosion inside the Demilitarized Zone and the other a misfired mortar round that struck a civilian during training.

A South Korean noncommissioned officer was injured Thursday morning in the explosion in the DMZ, a spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense said.

An emergency helicopter airlifted the soldier from the scene.

The spokesman did not identify the cause of the blast, which occurred on the DMZ’s western front but south of the actual border with North Korea.

The Yonhap News Agency reported that a staff sergeant was hurt around 9:20 a.m. while searching for landmines.

In a separate incident Wednesday, a civilian was injured after being struck by debris from a mortar round during a military exercise about 65 miles northeast of Seoul, the spokesman said in a later message.

The civilian was hit during a

drill in Yanggu, Gangwon province, and was treated at a hospital, the spokesman said.

The military is investigating the incident.

He did not specify which unit conducted the training, though the 21st Infantry Division is headquartered in Yanggu.

During the exercise, an 81 mm mortar round landed nearly 2,000 feet from its intended target, the Korea JoongAng Daily reported Wednesday, citing an unnamed military source.

The mortar incident marks the second military training accident this year involving civilian injuries.

In March, a bombing mishap wounded 38 people, including local residents, when two South Korean air force pilots entered incorrect bombing coordinates during a KF-16 training flight on March 6.

Eight 500-pound MK-82 free-fall bombs struck a residential area of Pocheon, about 200 miles south of the North Korean border.

Pilot error was the “direct cause” of the incident, South Korea’s Criminal Investigation Command said in March 13 release.

MILITARY

Bill would raise vets' disability compensation

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Republican-led bill would provide the first significant increase in decades to the disability compensation rate for veterans with catastrophic injuries and their survivors, according to lawmakers on the House Veterans Affairs' Committee who are the sponsors.

The Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act would offer an additional \$10,000 annually to veterans who suffered critical injuries during military service, such as head trauma, loss of limbs and paralysis.

The bill also would increase monthly support by 1% a year for the next five years for the survivors of veterans and military members who died from their injuries.

A non-inflation increase was previously granted in 1993.

Veterans advocacy groups are offering early support for the bill, introduced Monday.

"Living with significant disabilities is not just difficult, it's costly," Paralyzed Veterans of America said in a written statement. "No one appreciates the full scope of benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs more than our nation's paralyzed veterans."

The legislation is led by Rep.



Eric Edmundson is shown during military training in the western U.S. before deploying to Iraq. In 2005, Edmundson was critically wounded in a roadside bomb attack.

Mike Bost, R-Ill., a Marine Corps veteran and chairman of the House Veterans Affairs' Committee, and Rep. Tom Barrett, R-Mich., a former Army helicopter pilot and committee member.

"For years, veterans service organizations have emphasized the need for improved benefits for catastrophically injured veterans, their families and their survivors," Bost said. "This bill would answer the call."

"This bill is about following through on our promises," Barrett said. "Our disabled veterans and Gold Star families have already given more for our country than

anyone should ever have to."

Co-sponsors include French Hill, R-Ark., chairman of the House Committee on Financial Services; Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C.; and Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas, a retired Navy SEAL and member of the House Veterans Affairs' Committee.

The bill is named for Sharri Briley, widow of an Army Black Hawk pilot killed in 1993 in Somalia, and for Eric Edmundson, a former Army sergeant who suffered shrapnel wounds, a heart attack and brain injury after his Humvee struck a roadside bomb in 2005 in Iraq.



Briley

past 32 years," said Sharri Briley, whose husband, Donovan Lee "Bull" Briley, was an Army special operations helicopter pilot who died supporting ground forces in Somalia.

Donovan Briley, 33, of Arkansas, had served in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, also known as the "Night Stalkers."

He was the co-pilot of a Black Hawk helicopter shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade in the Battle of Mogadishu, which killed 18 U.S. troops and wounded 73 others.

The actions of Briley and other special operators were the basis for the 2001 movie, "Black Hawk Down."

Eric Edmundson is a former Army sergeant whose vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device that caused him to suffer cardiac arrest and loss of oxygen to his brain, called an anoxic brain injury.

"We are compelled to ensure Eric and other severely injured veterans like him have the secur-

ity and care they need now, not tomorrow," said Edgar Edmundson, his father.

Eric Edmundson, 45, of North Carolina, continues to require round-the-clock medical care and support at home. He is nonverbal and primarily uses a wheelchair.

"Every aspect of his life requires assistance and monitoring," Edgar Edmundson said. "For an individual with complex-care needs, a simple medical problem or other small issue can quickly snowball into an avalanche."

About a dozen veterans advocacy groups voiced support for the legislation.

"For more than 30 years, surviving spouses and severely disabled veterans have been left behind by outdated benefit structures. The Vietnam Veterans of America stands firmly behind this legislation," said Thomas Burke, national president of the VVA.

James McCormick, past national commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart USA, said the legislation represents "long-overdue justice" for injured veterans and their families.

"The Brileys, the Edmundsons and thousands of others have carried the weight of sacrifice for decades," McCormick said. This legislation "ensures they receive the support and dignity they have earned."

Best: Snipers face off in Germany competition

FROM PAGE 1

Teams receive an order the night before each event and must plan their own equipment, consider potential enemy positions and prepare as if entering a real-world mission, he said.

The competition, which features 35 two-member teams, began Tuesday. This year's field has representation from 22 countries, 7th Army Training Command spokesperson Lacey Justinger said Thursday.

Antia, who played a major role in shaping the competition, said he aimed to replicate realistic combat conditions and treat targets like "a free thinking enemy."

To ensure that teams could fully understand the mission instructions, each pair was required to include at least one English speaker, he said.

"Some of them (are) not really used to integrating a physical event that's going to test their physical endurance and then try to go ahead and execute the mission," Antia said.

The competition is set to run through the remainder of the week. The top 10 teams will compete in a culminating event Saturday, and the best team will be announced later that day during a closing ceremony, Justinger said.



LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

A Dutch team readies for a stress-shoot course at Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany during the U.S. Army Europe and Africa Best Sniper Competition on Wednesday.

Holidays: Check-in visits ordered by Driscoll to continue through Jan. 15

FROM PAGE 1

cluding the National Guard and reserves. Preliminary data from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office for 2024 shows a drop to 260 suicides last year.

The top Army civilian said the

prevention effort also needed to be reciprocated by soldiers across the service. He encouraging them to "just pick up" when their leaders call and relay to them any troubles they were facing.

"Seeking help is not weakness

— it takes courage, faith and trust that your family, friends and community will accept you and help you," Driscoll wrote. "We want to pick you up, share your load and get you moving forward again. There is light beyond the darkness

that surrounds you. Just keep fighting through this moment, pick up your phone, and let us help you."

He instructed anyone who needed immediate help or knew of someone in need to call the Mili-

tary Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1 to speak with a trained responder.

"Every life is sacred," he wrote. "We're all in this together and just picking up can save soldiers' lives."

MILITARY

First, second ladies visit Marines, relatives

BY DARLENE SUPERVILLE
AND WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION NEW RIVER, N.C. — Melania Trump and Usha Vance on Wednesday marked the Thanksgiving season by visiting with Marine Corps members in North Carolina and saluting the sacrifices of military families, who make up “the quiet strength of our nation,” the first lady said.

The wives of President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance used their first trip together outside of Washington to visit with students attending school at Camp Lejeune, the largest Marine Corps base on the East Coast, and deliver upbeat remarks to some 1,600 uniformed, cheering Marines and their families at Marine Corps Air Station New River.

“Please know that our nation is thinking of you, praying for you and deeply grateful for your service,” Trump said of all service members stationed far from home during the holidays, speaking from a stage flanked by parked tanks and helicopters.

Trump also stressed the growing importance of artificial intelligence to the military, noting that “technology is changing the art of war.”

“Predictably, AI will alter war more profoundly than any technology since nuclear weapons,” she said, also noting that “we are moving from human operators to human overseers fast.”

Trump and Vance both recognized the just-passed 250th anniversary of the Marines, and the second lady said “military families are truly a model for our country and for my own family.” The vice president is a former Marine.

Brig. Gen. Ralph J. Rizzo Jr. said visits by dignitaries like the first and second lady “matter because they show our families their service and sacrifices are seen



PHOTOS BY MATT ROURKE/AP

First lady Melania Trump plays a game with students at DeLalio Elementary School on the Marine Corps Air Station New River in Jacksonville, N.C., Wednesday.



Second lady Usha Vance meets with students at DeLalio Elementary School on the Marine Corps Air Station New River in Jacksonville, N.C., Wednesday.

and appreciated.”

Trump and Vance’s speeches followed school visits where they discussed AI with high schoolers

and helped younger children with crafts, including making turkeys from cardstock and glue.

They listened to a presentation

by students in an advanced placement research class from the Lejeune High School “Devilpups,” recalling the Marine Corps’ “Devil Dog” nickname, and had discussions about technological development.

Four students demonstrated how they used AI to generate videos for their research into how electronic media affects sleep and adolescent wellbeing, as well as a study on social media addiction and how it affects young people’s esteem and body image.

Trump and Vance later walked to the gymnasium, where students had assembled 2,000 care packages of goodies, including jerky sticks, for service members away from home.

The first lady told the crowd that she and the president are always thinking of U.S. service members but “especially during

the holidays.”

They also spent time with kindergartners and first-grade students at DeLalio Elementary School, entering classrooms where each table had been laid with folders from Be Best, Trump’s child-focused initiative. The folders held a puzzle, pen and sticker for each student, along with a bookmark from the second lady.

Trump told one girl in pigtails that she was “beautiful.” The patriotic ribbon pinned to the girl’s light blue top meant one of her parents is deployed. Several of her classmates also sported the ribbon, as did many in the larger group of students making cardstock turkeys.

Trump also engaged in a lengthy conversation with a first-grade girl before offering: “Very nice. I love your story.”

Melania Trump has centered her work around children, launching Be Best during her husband’s first term to focus on their welfare, online safety and opioid abuse.

Last month, she announced that eight children displaced by the Russia-Ukraine war had been reunited with their families following talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earlier this year, the first lady lobbied Congress to pass legislation imposing federal penalties for online sexual exploitation, often targeting young girls.

The president signed the bill into law in May.

Usha Vance, a former lawyer, launched a “Summer Reading Challenge” to encourage students in kindergarten through eighth grade to read 12 books during the school break.

Certificates and prizes were promised to those who completed the challenge.

The second lady often accompanies the vice president on his trips and sometimes brings along their three young children.

Soldier arraigned for second time in death of sergeant

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A Fort Hood soldier was arraigned Wednesday for a second time on charges related to his role following the 2023 death of his sergeant after a night of heavy drinking in on-post housing.

Spc. Rene Heber, 25, is charged with accessory to murder after the fact, accessory to manslaughter after the fact and obstructing justice in the death of Sgt. Alfredo Martinez, according to charging documents. He pleaded not guilty.

Spc. Nicholas Lowery was charged with murder and obstructing justice for Martinez’s death, according to court records.

He pleaded not guilty, and his jury trial begins Jan. 5, according to the Army’s online court docket.

Martinez died from a gunshot wound in the early morning hours of Aug. 27, 2023, according to court records.

The two soldiers initially told criminal investigators that Martinez shot himself.

As investigators gathered evidence, they became skeptical and brought both soldiers in for questioning.

Lowery changed his story and told investigators that he shot Martinez. Heber told them this was not true and stuck with his original assertion that Martinez

was responsible for his own death, according to court documents.

All three soldiers were assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division’s Sustainment Support Brigade.

At a preliminary hearing in August to determine whether Heber should face charges at a court-martial, Maj. John Architzel, the prosecutor, said the evidence in the case included an expert’s report stating the firing range of the weapon was too far to be self-inflicted. The expert believed the gun was fired from at least 3 feet away, he said.

Maj. ReAnne Wentz, Heber’s attorney, said at the August hearing that Heber’s story had never

changed about what happened that night, and the prosecution had decided on a narrative and was now working to make the evidence fit.

The court-martial process has been complicated for both soldiers. Lowery’s case has gone twice to the Army Court of Criminal Appeals for the higher court to rule on decisions made on pretrial motions.

In the latest decision, released Oct. 10, the appeals court agreed with military judge Col. Joseph Venghaus that Heber’s statement contradicting Lowery’s can be used during the court-martial.

The first set of charges against

Heber were withdrawn May 20, 2024, according to the online court docket.

The new round included an additional assault charge for unlawfully pushing another soldier, a corporal, while detained in the Bell County Jail in February 2024. The corporal’s name is redacted from the charge sheet.

Heber is no longer in pretrial confinement.

The 1st Cavalry Division, which prosecuted his case the first time, did not provide comment on why the charges were withdrawn. The Army’s Office of Special Trial Counsel is now prosecuting the case against Heber.

NATION

Trump signs bill to release Epstein files

BY PERRY STEIN,
JEREMY ROEBUCK,
THEODORIC MEYER
AND KELLY KASULIS CHO
The Washington Post

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he has signed a bill directing the Justice Department to release the Epstein files, documents related to the sprawling sex-trafficking investigation into the onetime powerful financier that are fervently sought by Trump's political opponents and members of his political base.

After Trump's announcement, made in a social media post, the Justice Department will have 30 days to release all unclassified documents about Jeffrey Epstein, who was arrested on federal sex-trafficking charges in 2019 and died in an apparent suicide while in federal custody.

But despite Trump's signature, there are many reasons to doubt that a bulk release of the files is imminent — the legislation includes major loopholes, and the Justice Department has said little about its plans.

In his post Wednesday, Trump again sought to shift the negative attention associated with Epstein to Democrats. He also credited himself with the bill's near-unanimous passage through Congress, though he had resisted calls to make the documents public for months — including personally whipping votes against the effort in public and private.

Trump's signature on the bill comes after a week in which the Epstein files were a frequent topic of conversation among officials in Washington. On Tuesday, the House and Senate agreed to pass the bill directing Attorney General



MATT MCCLAIN/The Washington Post

President Donald Trump with Attorney General Pam Bondi at the White House last month.

al Pam Bondi to release the files.

Earlier Wednesday, Bondi broke the department's official silence but only slightly. At a news conference on an unrelated issue, she parried repeated questions about the Epstein files, saying: "We will continue to follow the law with maximum transparency while protecting victims."

If Trump had always wanted Bondi to release all of the Epstein files, he could have ordered her to do so at any point in the past six months. He didn't.

On Sunday, when Trump did an about-face and said House Republicans should vote in favor of releasing the Epstein files, he notably did not say he favored releasing them. Instead, he said in a so-

cial media post that the House "can have whatever they are legally entitled to, I DON'T CARE!"

What Congress is "legally entitled to" is a complicated question.

The legislation that Trump and Congress agreed to pass gives the Justice Department a few exceptions under which it can refuse to release material. Among them: if release "would jeopardize an active federal investigation or ongoing prosecution."

On Friday, Trump ordered Bondi to launch a federal investigation related to Epstein — this one aimed at his ties to several prominent Democrats, including former president Bill Clinton, megadonor Reid Hoffman and former treasury secretary Lawrence H. Sum-

mers. Bondi said the top federal prosecutor in New York City would take on the task. Bondi began that investigation more than four months after the department said that it would not be releasing the files and that they contained no information that would lead officials to investigate anyone else.

Bondi said Wednesday that she had received information that led her to now investigate people.

"There is new information, additional information and, again, we will continue to follow the law and investigate any leads," she said.

That new investigation could become a reason for the Justice Department to block release of many files. Bondi and her depu-

ties have previously said they cannot release information about active investigations.

Other information could be covered by grand jury secrecy rules. The bill does not waive those.

The Justice Department has also said many of the files cannot be released because they contain sensitive victim information and pornographic material. The legislation contains another exception allowing the Justice Department to withhold material that "would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" or "depicts or contains child sexual abuse."

"Of course we are going to protect victims," Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said at the news conference alongside Bondi and FBI Director Kash Patel. "And the law as written allows us to do that."

There would not be much recourse if the Justice Department refused since the bill does not have any enforcement teeth.

If the House decided to issue a subpoena demanding the materials and the Justice Department refused, the chamber's leaders could refer officials for prosecution. But it would fall to Bondi to decide whether to prosecute herself or her deputies, rendering that threat potentially empty.

For months, Trump has struggled to contain backlash from within his own party over the Justice Department's decision this summer not to release the bulk of its investigative file on Epstein. Democrats have accused the president of attempting to hide embarrassing material documenting his years-long friendship with the disgraced financier.

Trump pushes for peace in Sudan after meeting with Saudi prince

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he plans to put greater attention on helping find an end to the brutal civil war in Sudan after being urged to take action by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Trump, who claims to have ended several wars since returning to office and has openly lobbied for the Nobel Peace Prize, admitted the conflict "wasn't on my charts" before his conversation with the crown prince.

But the president said he spoke in detail about the civil war with the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia during their White House talks on Tuesday. The crown prince, Trump said, urged him to use the

power and influence of the presidency to bring an end to the war.

"His majesty would like me to do something very powerful having to do with Sudan," Trump said in remarks during a joint appearance with Prince Mohammed before U.S. and Saudi business leaders.

The fighting for control of Sudan has killed over 40,000 people and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with over 14 million people displaced. The civil war, which started in April 2023, has pitted the Sudanese Armed Forces against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

"I thought it was just something that was crazy and out of control," Trump said as he shared the stage with the crown prince. "But I just

see how important that is to you and to a lot of your friends in the room."

Trump said Prince Mohammed told him that bringing an end to the war "would be the greatest thing you can do, that would be greater than what you've already done."

Trump's comments come after Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week called for a halt to the flow of military support coming to the paramilitary RSF from abroad.

The RSF's recent capture of North Darfur's capital, el-Fasher, left hundreds dead and forced tens of thousands of people to flee reported atrocities by the paramilitary force, according to aid groups and U.N. officials.

Trump set to meet with Mamdani Friday in DC

Associated Press

President Donald Trump said late Wednesday that the long-awaited meeting with New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani would happen in Washington later this week, setting up an in-person clash between the political opposites who for months have antagonized each other from afar.

The sit-down, which Trump said on social media would take place Friday in the Oval Office, could possibly represent a detente of sorts between the president and Democratic rising star, as Trump has since moved toward acceptance of Mamdani's winning campaign issue of affordability.

Calling Mamdani by his full name — and putting the mayor-elect's middle name of Kwame in

quotation marks — Trump posted Wednesday night that Mamdani had asked for the meeting, promising "Further details to follow!"

Saying it was "customary" for an incoming New York City mayor to meet with the president, spokesperson Dora Pekec said the pair planned to discuss "public safety, economic security and the affordability agenda that over one million New Yorkers voted for just two weeks ago."

Trump for months has slammed Mamdani, falsely labeling him as a "communist" and predicting the ruin of his hometown if the democratic socialist was elected. He also threatened to deport Mamdani, who became a naturalized American citizen in 2018, and to pull federal money from the city.

NATION

New Orleans awaits immigration crackdown

BY JACK BROOK
AND SARA CLINE
AP/Report for America

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans, the laid-back city known as the Big Easy and the birthplace of jazz, where lavish parades, bead-throwing debauchery and Creole cuisine attract tourists from around the globe, is about to become the next staging ground for the Trump administration’s mass deportation agenda.

Operation “Swamp Sweep,” an expansive, monthslong immigration crackdown, is expected to launch in southeast Louisiana Dec. 1, but Democrat-run New Orleans is anticipating the arrival of as many as 250 federal troops as soon as Friday, all with the backing of the state’s Republican governor.

Gov. Jeff Landry has sought to align New Orleans with federal immigration enforcement efforts through legislation and legal challenges, and the Border Patrol de-

ployment is just the latest drive to ramp up that pressure. And with the New Orleans Police Department being released from a federal reform pact Wednesday, its officers have lost a legal mechanism that has long shielded them from having to participate in immigration enforcement.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security operation will be led by Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino, who has already overseen aggressive campaigns in Los Angeles, Chicago and Charlotte, N.C.

Landry, who has close ties to the nation’s top immigration officials, has made immigration enforcement a priority.

Louisiana does not share a border with another country, yet it has become one of the nation’s largest detention hubs for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, with a capacity upward of 6,000 detainees. In September, the Bayou State opened the “Louisiana Lock-



GERALD HERBERT/AP

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry speaks to reporters at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, La., in September.

up” inside a notorious state prison to hold immigrants whom federal officials consider dangerous.

The governor has also highlighted crimes in which the suspect’s immigration status is in question,

such as the killing of a French Quarter tour guide by a group that included a Honduran man who entered the country illegally.

New Orleans’ Democratic leaders frequently butt heads with

Landry and other state officials who accuse the city of lax law enforcement and have pushed for collaboration with the Trump administration’s sweeping immigration crackdown.

Mayor-elect Helena Moreno, a Mexican-American immigrant, told The Associated Press there is “a lot of fear” in her city and that she is working to ensure those who could be targeted by federal agents know their rights.

“I’m very concerned about due process being violated, I’m very concerned about racial profiling,” Moreno said.

In September, Landry requested a National Guard deployment to New Orleans, citing rising violent crime, even though city police say crime is down and its elected leaders say federal troops are unnecessary. Landry told Newsmax on Wednesday that the “Swamp Sweep” operation is focused on “taking dangerous criminals off the street.”

Comey prosecution hits another hurdle

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The prosecution of former FBI Director James Comey hit another hurdle Wednesday as the Justice Department encountered mounting questions about how the case was presented to a grand jury for indictment.

The development risked further imperiling a politically charged prosecution already subject to multiple challenges and demands for its dismissal. It came during a hearing in which Comey’s lawyers asked U.S. District Judge Michael Nachmanoff to throw out the case on grounds that the government was being vindictive and as a separate challenge to Lindsey Halligan, the hastily appointed and inexperienced prosecutor who secured the indictment, is pending.

The Justice Department’s acknowledgment under questioning from a judge that the full grand jury did not review a copy of the final indictment is the latest indication of its seemingly disjointed pursuit of a criminal case against one of President Donald Trump’s political enemies. Comey was fired by Trump in May 2017 while overseeing an FBI investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump’s 2016 campaign. The two have been publicly at odds ever since, with Trump deriding Comey as “a weak and untruthful slime ball” and calling for his prosecution.

Concerns about the legal process came into focus earlier in the week when a different judge in the case

raised questions about what he said were “profound investigative missteps,” including misstatements of law to the grand jury. The Justice Department denies that the process was tainted by irregularities.

Halligan initially asked the grand jury to return a three-count indictment against Comey. But after the grand jurors rejected one of the proposed counts, the Justice Department subsequently secured a second two-count indictment that accused Comey of making a false statement and obstructing Congress. Comey has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing.



Comey

In a blistering ruling Monday, U.S. Magistrate Judge William Fitzpatrick, also handling parts of the case, said that after reviewing a transcript of the grand jury proceedings, he had questions about whether the full grand jury had reviewed the final two-count indictment that was returned.

Nachmanoff, the trial judge, pressed the Justice Department about Fitzpatrick’s concerns during a court session Wednesday that chiefly focused on Comey’s vindictiveness arguments. After conferring privately with Halligan, Tyler Lemons, one of the prosecutors, acknowledged that the revised indictment was not shown to all of the grand jurors.

Coast Guard no longer classifying swastika, nooses as hate symbols

The Washington Post

The Coast Guard will no longer classify the Nazi’s swastika as a hate symbol under a policy that takes effect next month.

Instead, the Coast Guard will classify the Nazi-era insignia as “potentially divisive” under its new guidelines. The new policy, set to take effect Dec. 15, similarly downgrades the definition of nooses and the Confederate flag, though display of the latter remains banned, according to documents reviewed by The Washington Post.

Certain historic displays or artwork where the Confederate flag is a minor element are still permissible, according to the policy.

Though the Coast Guard is not part of the Defense Department, the service has been reworking its policies to align with the Trump administration’s changing tolerances for hazing and harassment within the U.S. military. In September Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directed a review and overhaul of those policies, calling the military’s existing standards “overly broad” and saying they jeopardize U.S. troops’ combat readiness.

The Coast Guard did not immediately provide comment.

A Coast Guard official who had seen the new wording called the policy changes chilling.

“We don’t deserve the trust of the nation if we’re unclear about the divisiveness of swastikas,” the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity due to a fear of

reprisal.

The Coast Guard is a military service under the Department of Homeland Security and the purview of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi L. Noem. But the service, which has been central to President Donald Trump’s increased focus on homeland defense, has been swept up like the others in the administration’s rash of leadership firings and broader targeting of military culture.

Former Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan, the first woman to lead a branch of the U.S. military, was fired on Trump’s first day in office for what administration officials said then was her focus on diversity initiatives and her handling of sexual assault investigations.

Within days, Fagan’s replacement, acting commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday, ordered the suspension of the Coast Guard’s hazing and harassment policy that, among its other guidance, said explicitly that the swastika was among a “list of symbols whose display, presentation, creation, or depiction would constitute a potential hate incident.” Nooses and the Confederate flag also matched that description under the previous policy.

Lunday was later nominated by Trump to become the service’s commandant. His Senate confirmation hearing was held Wednesday, and he was due to meet with lawmakers Thursday. It is unclear when the Senate Commerce, Transportation and Science Com-

mittee, which has jurisdiction over DHS, may vote to advance Lunday’s nomination.

The Pentagon, where Hegseth has argued that prior administrations’ focus on racial diversity has harmed military recruiting, referred questions on the Coast Guard’s policy to DHS, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The new Coast Guard policy also limits the amount of time that service members have to formally report the display of a noose or swastika — which could be enormously problematic for personnel at sea. Like the Navy, Coast Guard members can be deployed for months at a time. The new policy gives them 45 days to report an incident whereas the previous policy did not have a deadline other than to advise that Coast Guard members who see a potential hate incident “should immediately report it to a member higher in their chain of command.”

Previous guidance put in place in 2019 said Coast Guard commanders could order swastikas, nooses or other symbols to be removed even if it was determined the display did not rise to the level of a hate incident. That policy was enacted months after a Coast Guard officer, Lt. Christopher Hasson, was charged with plotting an attack on Democratic lawmakers, including then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. In securing his conviction, prosecutors cited evidence in his case showing Hasson to be an avowed white nationalist.

NATION

Shutdown-delayed report shows solid US job growth

BY PAUL WISEMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers added a surprisingly solid 119,000 jobs in September, the government said, issuing a key economic report that had been delayed for seven weeks by the federal government shutdown.

The unemployment rate rose to 4.4% in September, the highest since October 2021 and up from 4.3% in August, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The unemployment rate rose partly because 470,000 people entered the labor market — either working or looking for work — in September and not all of them found jobs right away.

The increase in payrolls was more than double the 50,000 economists had forecast. But Labor Department revisions showed that the economy lost 4,000 jobs in August instead of gaining 22,000 as originally reported.

Altogether, revisions shaved 33,000 jobs off July and August payrolls.

Health care and social assistance firms added more than 57,000 jobs in September, construction companies 19,000 and retailers almost 14,000. But factories shed 6,000 jobs and the federal government lost 3,000.

Average hourly wages rose just 0.2% from August and 3.8% from a year earlier, edging closer to the 3.5% year-over-year increase that the Federal Reserve's inflation fighters like to see.

During the 43-day U.S. government shutdown, investors, businesses, policymakers and the Federal Reserve were groping in the dark for clues about the health of the market because federal workers had been furloughed and couldn't collect the data.

The report comes at a time of considerable uncertainty about the economy. The job market has been strained by the lingering ef-

fects of high interest rates and uncertainty around Trump's erratic campaign to slap taxes on imports from almost every country on Earth.

But economic growth at midyear was resilient.

Labor Department revisions in September showed that the economy created 911,000 fewer jobs than originally reported in the year that ended in March.

That meant that employers added an average of just 71,000 new jobs a month over that period, not the 147,000 first reported.

Since March, job creation has slowed even more — to an average 53,000 a month. During the 2021-23 boom that followed lockdowns, the economy was creating 400,000 jobs a month.

President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration is expected to reduce the number of people looking for work, which means that the economy can create fewer jobs without sending the unemployment rate higher.

With September numbers out, businesses, investors, policymakers and the Fed will have to wait awhile to get another good look at the numbers behind the market.

The Labor Department said Wednesday that it won't release a full jobs report for October because it couldn't calculate the unemployment rate during the government shutdown.

Instead, it will release some of the October jobs data — including the number of jobs that employers created last month — along with the full November jobs report on Dec. 16, a couple of weeks late.

That puts an even more intense focus on September jobs numbers released Thursday. They are the last full measurement of hiring and unemployment that Fed policymakers will see before they meet Dec. 9-10 to decide whether to cut their benchmark interest rate for the third time this year.



MATT ROURKE/AP

Former Presidents front row from left, George W. Bush with Laura Bush and Joe Biden with Jill Biden, look on as military pall bearers arrive with the casket of former Vice President Dick Cheney at the Washington National Cathedral, Thursday.

Cheney's funeral brings bipartisan tributes; Trump was not invited

BY CALVIN WOODWARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington National Cathedral on Thursday hosted a bipartisan show of respect and remembrance for Dick Cheney, the consequential and polarizing vice president who in later years became an acidic scold of fellow Republican President Donald Trump.

Trump, who has been publicly silent about Cheney's death Nov. 3, was not invited to the service.

Two ex-presidents came: Republican George W. Bush, who eulogized the man who served him as vice president, and Democrat Joe Biden, who once called Cheney "the most dangerous vice president we've had probably in American history" but now honors his commitment to his family and to his values.

"Solid and rare and reliable," Bush said of his vice president, praising a man whose "talent and his restraint" exceeded his ego.

Moments before the service began, figures of recent but now receded power mingled: Bush and

Biden and their wives sitting in a row together, former Vice Presidents Kamala Harris and Mike Pence chatting side by side in their pew with Al Gore and Dan Quayle together behind them.

Biden greeted Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell, the former longtime Senate leader, and his wife, former labor and transportation secretary Elaine Chao. Behind them sat Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker.

Daughter Liz Cheney, a former high-ranking House member whose Republican political career was shredded by Trump's MAGA movement, also addressed the gathering at the grand church known as "a spiritual home for the nation."

Others delivering tributes at Thursday's funeral are Cheney's longtime cardiologist, Jonathan Reiner; former NBC News correspondent Pete Williams, who was Cheney's spokesman at the Pentagon; and the former vice president's grandchildren.

Cheney had lived with heart disease for decades and, after the

Bush administration, with a heart transplant. He died at age 84 from complications of pneumonia and cardiac and vascular disease, his family said.

Trump's vice president, JD Vance, was also not invited to the funeral, according to a person familiar with the details.

The White House lowered its flags to half-staff after Cheney's death, as it said the law calls for, but Trump did not issue the presidential proclamation that often accompanies the death of notable figures, nor has he commented publicly on his passing.

The deeply conservative Cheney's influence in the Bush administration was legendary and, to his critics, tragic.

He advocated for the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the basis of what proved to be faulty intelligence and consistently defended the extraordinary tools of surveillance, detention and inquisition employed in response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Bush credited him with helping to keep the country safe and stable in a perilous time.

Starbucks union says 30 more US stores are joining strike

Associated Press

Starbucks' union is expanding its week-old strike against the company.

Starbucks Workers United said baristas from 30 more stores in 25 U.S. cities planned to join the strike Thursday, including stores in Cleveland; Memphis, Tenn.; Springfield, Mo., and Albany, N.Y. That brings the total number of stores with striking workers to 95 in 65 cities, the union said.

The strike began last Thursday on Starbucks' Red Cup Day, which is typically one of its busiest days of the year. Since 2018, Starbucks has given out free, reusable cups on that day to customers who buy a holiday drink.

Starbucks said the strike has caused minimal disruption to its operations and noted that this year's Red Cup Day was the strongest in the company's history in terms of sales and store traffic.

Placer.ai, a location data company, said Starbucks' foot traffic jumped 44.5% last Thursday compared to this year's daily average.

Starbucks said only 49 of the 65 stores that the union vowed to strike last week experienced any disruption, and 29 of those have reopened.

Around 550 of Starbucks' 10,000 company-owned U.S. stores are unionized. Starbucks also has 7,000 licensed locations in places

like airports.

"As we've said, 99% of our 17,000 U.S. locations remain open and welcoming customers, including many the union publicly stated would strike but never closed or have since reopened," Starbucks spokeswoman Jaci Anderson said.

Striking workers are protesting a lack of progress in labor negotiations with the company. They say they are seeking better pay, im-

proved staffing in stores and a resolution of hundreds of unfair labor practice charges filed against the company.

There is no date set for the strike to end, and more stores are prepared to join if Starbucks doesn't reach a contract agreement with the union, organizers said.

Starbucks said it is prepared to talk when the union is ready to return to the bargaining table.

WORLD

Report: US-Russia peace plan cedes Ukraine land

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The U.S. and Russia have drawn up a plan aimed at ending the war in Ukraine that calls for major concessions from Kyiv, according to a person familiar with the matter, including granting some demands the Kremlin has made repeatedly since the full-scale invasion began nearly four years ago.

It was not clear what, if any, concessions the proposal asks of Russia. The same person confirmed that promises from Moscow of no further attacks are part of the framework. As reports of the plan emerged, blindsided European diplomats insisted they and Ukraine must be consulted.

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff has been quietly working on the plan for a month, receiving input from both Ukrainians and Russians on terms that are acceptable to each side, according to a senior U.S. official.

President Donald Trump, the official added, has been briefed on the plan and supports it.

The talk of a secret peace plan piled more pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is marshaling his country's defenses against Russia's bigger army, visiting European leaders to ensure they continue their support for Ukraine and navigating a major corruption scandal.

Several high-ranking Army officials, including Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, were in Kyiv on Thursday to give a new push to peace efforts and assess the reality on the ground in Ukraine, U.S. officials said.

Zelenskyy's office said he formally received the peace plan Thursday. The statement said Zelenskyy expected to talk to Trump soon about what was needed for peace.

Zelenskyy underlined Ukraine's main conditions for peace and promised to work on the conclusions reached in the meetings with U.S. officials, the statement said.

European leaders have already been alarmed this year by indications that Trump's administration might be sidelining them and Zelenskyy in its push to stop the fighting. Trump's at-times conciliatory approach to Russian President Vladimir Putin has fueled those concerns, but Trump adopted a tougher line last month when he announced heavy sanctions on Russia's vital oil sector that come into force Friday.

"For any plan to work, it needs Ukrainians and Europeans on board," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said at the start of a meeting in Brussels of the 27-nation bloc's foreign ministers. She added: "We haven't heard of any concessions on the Russian side."

It was not clear whether the foreign ministers had seen the peace plan, which was first reported by Axios. The proposal was drawn up by U.S. and Russian envoys, and was said to include forcing Ukraine to cede territory, a prospect Zelenskyy has ruled out.

The proposal, which could still be changed, calls in part for Ukraine to cede territory to Russia and to abandon certain weaponry, according to the person who had been briefed on the contours of the plan. It would also include the rollback of some U.S. military assistance. Russia would be given effective control of the entire eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland made up of the Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk regions, even though Ukraine still holds part of it. Putin has listed the capture of the Donbas as the key goal of the invasion.



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WORLD

Israel strikes Gaza sites, kills dozens despite ceasefire

By Wafaa Shurafa
Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza — A pair of Israeli strikes in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis early Thursday killed five people, hospital officials said, bringing the death toll from airstrikes in the Palestinian territory over a roughly 12-hour period to 33. The strikes have been some of the deadliest since Oct. 10 when a U.S.-brokered ceasefire took effect.

The renewed escalation came after Israel said that its soldiers had come under fire in Khan Younis on Wednesday. Israel said that no soldiers were killed and that the military responded with strikes.

Four Israeli airstrikes on tents sheltering displaced people in Khan Younis late Wednesday and early Thursday killed 17 people, including five women and five children, according to officials at Nasser Hospital.

In Gaza City, two airstrikes on a building killed 16 people, including seven children and three women, according to officials at the Al-Shifa hospital in the northern part of the city where the bodies were taken.

The Hamas militant group condemned the Israeli strikes as a "shocking massacre." In a statement, Hamas denied firing toward Israeli troops.

At Nasser Hospital, scores of people gathered to offer funeral prayers for those who were killed in the Israeli strikes. Women wailed in mourning over the bodies of loved ones wrapped in white burial shrouds.

Among the mourners was Abir Abu Moustapha, who lost her three children, ages 1, 11 and 12, and her husband in an Israeli strike on Wednesday that hit their tent. She squatted beside their bodies as they were prepared for burial.

"My children are gone. What can I say? And my husband, my most precious. May God have mercy on them," Abu Moustapha said. "How was it my children's fault that they had to die? Why was it their fault that they died in front of my eyes?"

Hospital officials said that the bodies came from both sides of a line established in last month's ceasefire. The boundary splits Gaza in two, leaving the border zone under Israeli military control while the area beyond it is meant to serve as a safe zone.

The strikes came shortly after the U.N. Security Council gave its backing to President Donald Trump's blueprint to secure and govern Gaza. The plan empowers an international force to provide se-

curity in Gaza, approves a transitional authority and envisions a possible future path to an independent Palestinian state.

But there are still questions over how the plan will be implemented, especially after Hamas rejected it. The militant group said that the force's mandate, which includes disarmament, "strips it of its neutrality, and turns it into a party to the conflict in favor of the occupation."

Israeli strikes have decreased since the ceasefire agreement took effect, though they haven't stopped entirely.

Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants, reported more than 300 deaths since the truce began. Each side has accused the other of violating its terms, which include increasing the flow of aid into Gaza and returning hostages — dead or alive — to Israel.

The deaths are among the more than 69,000 Palestinians killed since Israel launched its sweeping offensive more than two years ago in response to Hamas-led militants killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251 people in the attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the war. Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals, maintains detailed records seen as a reliable estimate by the U.N. and many independent experts.

The remains of 25 hostages have been returned to Israel since the ceasefire began. There are still three more in Gaza that need to be recovered and handed over. Hamas returned 20 living hostages to Israel on Oct. 13.

The Gaza strikes coincided with a barrage of Israeli airstrikes in southern Lebanon on Wednesday on what the Israeli military said were Hezbollah sites in the country, including weapons storage facilities. A day earlier, an Israeli airstrike killed 13 people in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Hilweh, the deadliest of Israeli attacks on Lebanon since a ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war a year ago.

The Israeli military said that Hezbollah was working to reestablish itself and rebuild its capacity in southern Lebanon, without providing evidence. It said that the weapons facilities targeted were embedded among civilians and violated understandings between Israel and Lebanon. Israel agreed to a ceasefire and withdrew from southern Lebanon last year and Lebanon agreed to quell Hezbollah activity in the area.

Magdeburg Christmas market in Germany opens after last year's deadly car attack

Associated Press

BERLIN — The Christmas market in the German city of Magdeburg opened Thursday, nearly a year after it was the scene of a horrific car-ramming attack that left six people dead.

Five women and a boy died, and many more people were injured in the Dec. 20 attack.

On Thursday morning, more than 140 merchants opened their stalls, selling candles, wool hats, candied almonds, mulled wine and other Christmas treats, German news agency dpa reported. A Ferris wheel and an ice rink promised joy and activity for children and grown-ups alike.

"Expectations are hopeful, naturally with the utmost respect for what happened last year, and we simply hope that people will rediscover their Christmas market," Paul-Gerhard Stieger, the managing director of the Magdeburg Christmas Market GmbH, told RTL Television.

Earlier this month, the suspect in the attack went on trial on murder charges. Taleb al-Abdulmohsen, a 51-year-old Saudi doctor, has been charged with six counts of murder and 338 of attempted murder in the trial at the Magdeburg state court, for which sessions have been scheduled until March. He faces life imprisonment if convicted.



MATTHIAS BEIN, DPA/AP

Visitors walk through the Magdeburg Christmas market after the opening in Magdeburg, Germany, on Thursday. Last year, a driver rammed a car into the Christmas market, killing six people.

The city and the organizers of the market invested at least 250,000 euros (around \$290,000) in new security systems, including concrete blocks that are supposed to keep cars from entering the market, dpa reported.

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WEEKEND



‘Wicked: For Good’
can’t achieve liftoff
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Sure shooter

Arc Raiders finds successful formula with enhanced multiplayer experience

Video games, Page 15

Embark Studios

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Is thin really in?

Apple, Samsung may be rethinking plans for more superslim phones

BY CHRIS VELAZCO
The Washington Post

Philip Maddalena was drawn to the iPhone 17 Air because of its sleek look. He watched Apple’s keynote, read the reviews and bought it the day it went on sale.

The lawyer from Connecticut was smitten with its look, but the love didn’t last. The Air’s single camera wasn’t a good fit for capturing his two young kids, he said, and the speakerphone never got quite loud enough. Mostly though, he says he struggled with its battery — he needed it to last longer, to stay in touch with judges and clients. A few weeks later, Maddalena decided to exchange it for an iPhone 17 Pro.

“I think the idea of trying something a little different with an iPhone was appealing,” the 37-year-old said. “But, you know, I need my phone to perform for me.”

Maddalena isn’t the only one unimpressed with Apple’s thinner phone. Despite a wave of prelaunch hype and interest, lower-than-expected sales of superslim smartphones from Apple and its rival Samsung have forced the companies to rethink the mix of gadgets they plan to sell next year.

Apple is said to have dialed down production of the iPhone 17 Air after it debuted to mixed reviews two months ago, and has now delayed plans to introduce an improved follow-up model next year, according to The Information. Samsung, which beat Apple to market with its slim Galaxy S25 Edge phone in May, finds itself in a similar position. Soft demand prompted the company to scuttle plans for a sequel originally meant to debut next January, local media reports say.

Apple and Samsung did not respond to requests for comment. When asked on the company’s recent earnings call about the iPhone Air, CEO Tim Cook only said the company is “thrilled” with how the iPhone 17 devices have been received.

“So much goes into a brand new product, only to be launched for one year,” Nabila Popal, senior director at the research firm IDC, said. “That is something we haven’t seen.”

Ming-Chi Kuo, an analyst at TF International Securities, said iPhone Air demand has fallen short of expectations, leading Apple’s supply chain to begin scaling back both shipments and production capacity.

“Most suppliers are expected to reduce capacity by more than 80% by the first quarter of 2026,” he wrote on X last month.

Slimmer phones were a gamble for the world’s two biggest smartphone makers. They were designed to excite consumers who, tired of years of incremental changes, yearned for something meaningfully novel from their phones.

The catch? I’ve tested the thin smartphones from

both companies this year, and found that they ask consumers to deal with some real limitations — like smaller batteries and fewer cameras — in exchange for in-hand comfort and eye-catching style.

For some, that compromise can be worth it — these things *are* undeniably nice to hold. But the cost-benefit equation just doesn’t add up for everyone — and it didn’t help that Apple and Samsung’s thin phones were awkwardly priced between their more basic and premium models. Spend a little more, or a little less, and you’d wind up with an iPhone or a Samsung Galaxy that lasted longer and took better photos.

This new wave of thin phones certainly got people talking, but they accounted for just a tiny fraction — less than 3% — of the total smartphone market as of the third quarter of 2025, Popal said.

Does that mean the era of the superthin smartphone is already over?

Not just yet

For one, the iPhone Air isn’t dead, just delayed, according to The Information, which reported last week that Apple is committed to building a new version of the Air — said to include a larger battery and a second rear camera — it hopes to release in early 2027.

Meanwhile, consumers overseas have been more receptive to these gadgets, especially in China — a crucial market for smartphone makers.

Over there, thin phones just keep coming: Within the past month, Motorola released a smartphone a fraction of a millimeter thicker than the iPhone Air, while Huawei — the Chinese electronics giant that once dented Apple’s momentum in the region — unveiled a thin-but-large device called the Mate 70 Air for hundreds of dollars less than the comparable iPhone.

The design and manufacturing expertise that goes into crafting a thin smartphone can also be helpful as consumer tech companies fine-tune their foldable phones, said Avi Greengart, an industry analyst at Techsponential.

While its S25 Edge didn’t move the needle much, Samsung’s book-style Z Fold7 won acclaim from critics and a sales boost because of its comparatively thin profile.

“In terms of technology, [the iPhone Air] is obviously going to be leveraged into the foldable next year,” Popal said.

That means you might someday wind up using a sophisticated phone that wouldn’t exist if a super-thin one hadn’t come first. But that could take awhile.

None of this can convince Maddalena that returning his iPhone Air wasn’t the right move.

“I don’t think the benefits are significant enough to sacrifice any performance,” he said.



WOLFBOX/TNS photos

The WOLFBOX MF200 Air Duster has many of the same features of the MF100, but additionally allows you to swap out its battery.

Clean nooks, crannies with these air dusters

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The WOLFBOX MF100 Air Duster is one of those gadgets you don’t think you need — until you try it, and suddenly you wonder how you lived without it.

The MF100 Air Duster packs an endless amount of compressed air into a hand-held device. There are three adjustable speeds (slow, medium, high) to suit specific needs, ranging from light dust removal to heavy-duty chores, with speeds up to 190 mph.

Knowing all this, you might wonder how you would use an air duster. First and foremost in my world, having a clean car is a priority. An air compressor, which many car washes have, is the best way to clean all the nooks and crannies of a car’s interior.

The MF100 Air Duster (on sale for \$79.99 at Amazon) was put to task for my car cleaning and won me over in seconds. In the interior, it cleans hard-to-get-to areas, like vents, dashboard corners, between seats, molding seams and similar places. For the exterior, water is often left in moldings, seams, edges of windows, side mirrors, etc., which were no match for the MF100.

If car washing isn’t crucial to you, how about blowing dust and crumbs off your keyboard or other hard-to-get-to areas of your household? It’s not hard to find other places to use it.

It weighs just 0.66 pounds, so it’s compact, and easy to use and store. It’s powered by an internal USB-C 6,000 mAh rechargeable battery, which is suitable for up



The WOLFBOX MF100 Air Duster includes five nozzles, two brushes, a charging cable and a lanyard.

to 100 minutes of use, depending on the speed that is used. A full charge will take 2.5 hours.

Five nozzles, two brushes, a charging cable and a lanyard are included. In addition to cleaning dusty areas, the MR100 can be used to fill air mattresses or pool floats in less than a minute. Blow leaves off your patio, clean an AC vent, or use a low setting to help a campfire get going.

It is also good for the environment when you consider how many uses it provides over its lifetime compared to disposable canned air, which gets a fraction of its uses before being tossed into the trash.

The MF200 Air Duster (on sale for \$89.99 at Amazon) has many of the same features but also includes a swappable 6,000 mAh rechargeable battery to extend the run time. Both models come with a 24-month warranty and 24/7 customer service. Extra batteries are \$35.99 each on the official website but are sale right now there and on Amazon.

Online: wolfbox.com

The slim design of the iPhone 17 Air, at the top of the page, is both its attraction and its flaw.

Apple

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



EMBARK STUDIOS/TNS

A Leaper Arc robot can overwhelm players if they're not armed to the teeth. It's better to listen for them and avoid them in Arc Raiders.

The secret sauce of the extraction genre

Arc Raiders' emphasis on audio and sound design helps the Embark Studios game stand out among other similar titles

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Faced with dozens of choices each week, gamers have an embarrassment of riches this holiday season, and developers face bigger challenges. With so many titles fighting for attention, it's more difficult than ever to break through the noise.

It's not enough to have engaging gameplay. The timing of the release, the visuals, price and momentum matter just as much. Arc Raiders is proof of that. The extraction shooter has launched to dramatic buzz, and it's a fantastic game. It also reminds me of a game that launched earlier this year, Bandai Namco's Synduality: Echo of Ada.

Synduality vs. Arc Raiders

The games share much of the same DNA. They're both player vs. player vs. environment shooters, in which players explore a postapocalyptic landscape and scavenge for materials. They face threats from enemies: In Arc Raiders' case, survivors battle robots called Arcs. In Synduality, the player-piloted mechs fend off mutated creatures called Enders, but that's not the only threat.

In both games, the goal for each trip to the surface is to bring back harvested resources to a base, so players can use them for facility upgrades that lead to the creation of better gear. The added challenge is that Arc Raiders and Synduality throw more than a dozen players onto a map, and that leads to the magic of extraction shooters.

Players meet others and don't know if they're friends or foes. It builds tension because players might not know their intentions and are also worried about the haul on their backs. It can lead to temporary alliances, friendships and betrayals, sometimes all in one match. It creates moments of emergent gameplay, where players make their own stories in the chaos of the game.

A more polished experience

So why does one have so much success while the other didn't? Arc Raiders gathered momentum after its release, following several test runs that built positive word of mouth, and it launched with a wealth of content and a more comprehensive road map. From launch, it felt like a more polished experience, though I do prefer the anime art-style and mecha conceit of Synduality.

Much of that has to do with Arc Raiders developer Embark Studios. The Swedish team has veterans from the Battlefield series, and it already has another project out,

The Finals. The team knows how to create multiplayer experiences and optimize elements, particularly on the audio side, that enhance the gameplay.

Arc Raiders leans exquisitely into sound design and makes it just as important as the visuals. Players have to listen for Arc robots, which can ambush them from the skies or overwhelm them on sight. In a world where danger is around every corner, hearing the buzz of a flying drone or the servo from a Leaper can be the difference between survival and surrender.

Excellent use of audio

That extends to other players. When scavenging, players need to be aware of their surroundings, but when searching drawers and cabinets, players get taken out of the world screen and into the menu as they wait for the results of their search. The sound of footsteps on concrete is a way to know whether a hostile player is sneaking up behind you.

Embark Studios also uses proximity chat. Players can hear others talking based on how close they are on the map. That is another wrinkle that adds to the emergent gameplay: Players can use that audio clue for an advantage if others are hostile, or they could make a temporary ally if they're friendly.

All of this creates an experience that can turn on a dime. Players can scavenge for parts in a low-key run that immediately intensifies when another player comes around and starts a gunfight.

Players may feel great escaping an ambush with a key upgrade piece, but in the next trip, they can lose it in an ambush.

The fact that players can lose a treasured gun or other equipment after surrendering again heightens the tension, but Arc Raiders gives players the opportunity to recover with the help of a chicken that gathers resources and a free loadout option that grants them starter items so they don't have to sacrifice their better gear.

The campaign rewards players who have stuck with the game by creating a progression system. Players gain experience points for actions on each run, and if they earn enough they gain a level and skill points. Players use those on a skill tree, but they have to carefully allocate their skills because right now Arc Raiders doesn't have an easy way to reassign points beyond the difficult Expeditions. If players make a mistake, they have to live with it, and that can be brutal.

Despite that issue, Arc Raiders brings the extraction genre to a wider audience than other titles before it by mitigating the more frustrating aspects of the category, while also introducing improvements that strengthen player-led adventure and interaction.

Platforms: PC, Xbox Series X, PlayStation 5
Online: arcraiders.nexon.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Q&A

New horizons

‘Rental Family’ star Fraser discusses his experience making the film, his life since winning an Oscar and ‘The Mummy’

By Jake Coyle
Associated Press

Brendan Fraser is staring at a cooling fireplace. “I have an urge to poke this fire so bad,” Fraser says with a grin.

The 56-year-old actor is midway through breakfast at a boutique Westchester inn in Bedford, N.Y., not far from his home. He arrived, as Fraser usually does, with wide-eyed excitement, cheerfully greeting the server, ordering up a plate of poached eggs and oatmeal, and occasionally eyeing the fading embers next to him.

Yet Fraser has already rekindled his career thanks to his Oscar-winning turn in 2022’s “The Whale.” His best-actor victory was widely cheered as the comeback for the former 1990s star of “Encino Man,” “George of the Jungle” and “The Mummy.” Still, Fraser’s victory was also in avoiding the trope of the comeback kid while simultaneously reclaiming a stardom derailed by a string of misfires and an alleged sexual assault experience.

Three years later, Fraser has his first leading role since, in “Rental Family,” a Tokyo-set drama by the filmmaker Hikari. In it, Fraser plays a struggling actor who, out of desperation, takes a job with a small agency that hires out actors to fulfill roles in real people’s lives.

Fraser played a more swaggering, idealistic American expat in 2002’s “The Quiet American.” But “Rental Family,” now in theaters, relates more to Fraser as he is now: sweetly sensitive, boyishly curious and seeking new horizons.

“I never, ever discount the power of dumb luck,” Fraser says, reflecting on his journey. “George of the Jungle was the Dumb Luck King. That was his secret weapon. George always won the day because of dumb luck. Nothing he did was forethought; it just turned out that way.”

Before flying out the next day for a “The Mummy” fan convention in Minnesota, Fraser spoke about his Oscar, his experience in Japan making “Rental Family” and his impending return to his marquee franchise:

Associated Press: I’ve read about your fondness for archery. Any new habits?

Fraser: I was just getting ready to decorate our rubber deer. I was thinking halves of Ping-Pong balls with googly eyes. And my dentist gave me this awesome set of molds of my teeth. So I thought I’d give him some teeth. Everyone at Thanksgiving has fun shooting the deer. Other than that, straight up, I’ve been playing Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom. (Laughs.) There are not enough bomb flowers in this game. Hyrule is the place I can go to at the end of the day, whatever happened. Sometimes I just want to float around. No harm in that.

Did winning the Academy Award change anything for you?

Honestly, I was kind of floating during that whole time without an agent. I was looking for that unicorn project that hadn’t been made into oblivion. I ended up: What is a rental family? Which dog do you like at the pound? I like the one with four teeth and one tweaky eye. Hikari gave me the

opportunity to kind of dovetail from whatever happens in the vacuum after you experience a recognition like that. I think about it often. In that envelope-opening-reveal moment that we all crave, it could have gone any way. It could have been any of the guys. It was a moment of: I guess things are going to be a little different going forward. It doesn’t intone automatic, carte-blanche VIP. It’s still the industry. We’re still chopping our way through the tall grass of AI and all this stuff. The industry needs a real B12 or something.

Well, one sign of the state of the industry was the shelving of the completed “Batgirl,” in which you co-starred.

A whole movie. I mean, there were four floors of production in Glasgow. I was sneaking into the art department just to geek out. The tragedy of that is that there’s a generation of little girls who don’t have a heroine to look up to and go, “She looks like me.” I mean, Michael Keaton came back as Batman. The Batman! The prod-



INVISION/AP

Brendan Fraser, shown at the 2024 Oscars where he won best actor for “The Whale,” recognizes that the award doesn’t make him an “automatic, carte-blanche VIP.” Case in point: He says his new movie “Rental Family” about a failed actor offers the message, “Don’t get too comfortable. It can happen to me.”

uct — I’m sorry, “content” — is being commodified to the extent that it’s more valuable to burn it down and get the insurance on it than to give it a shot in the marketplace. I mean, with respect, we could blight itself.

It’s ironic that after winning an Oscar, you chose your next leading role as a failed actor.

Yeah, like: Don’t get too comfortable. It can happen to me.

You’ve said this movie helped you get over some sense of insecurity. How so?

I struggle with confidence. I always have, the feeling of not being good enough. Believe me, no one can be harder on me than me. No critic, no pithy internet comment can be more biting to me than myself in my private thoughts. That’s OK. I grapple with overcoming that. I was doing “SNL.” I hosted twice. The first time, during the monologue, Lorne (Michaels) has a quick word with the host at dress rehearsal. He said, “You know, it’s all about confidence.” I don’t know if that

psyched me up or not. Forget everything you know and just own it. Can you do that is the question, the eternal one.

“Rental Family” presents acting as a kind of service industry. Do you see it that way?

It is, straight up. Service rendered, payment received. Rules and boundaries. Tokyo is a place you rent just about anything, from a Mario Kart to a hedgehog — which I’ve done. Sticky little guys.

Why did you rent a hedgehog?

There’s a café. You can go. They give you gardening gloves and a ticket for two drinks from the vending machine. You can sit there and play with these sticky guys. When are you going to do that? (Laughs.) Capybara, that’s another one. Capybara café. They have their own little swimming pool there. They’re just so chill. They’re like the original dude.

Making “Rental Family” in Japan must have been more an experience than a gig.

SEE FRASER ON PAGE 17

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW

Growth through connection, relationship

Fraser the emotional anchor of affecting 'Rental Family,' which is sweet, not treacly

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Hikari's beautifully moving and affably humorous story of human connection, "Rental Family," kicks off with one funeral and culminates with another, demonstrating the evolution that our protagonist, Philip (Brendan Fraser), goes through during his personal journey between these two events.

The first funeral is a shock. Philip is a struggling actor in Japan, with one massively successful commercial as a toothpaste superhero mascot under his belt. His agent has booked him a gig as "sad American," a role he can easily play with his looming height, doleful eyes and a heart he wears on his sleeve. Late as usual, he dashes to check in for work, and is shocked to bumble into a somber funeral. He's even more shocked when the formally dressed corpse starts emotionally reacting to the tearful eulogies.

The scene is a marvel of revelation and reaction from Fraser, and in fact, much of the genius of his performance in "Rental Family" comes from his reactions, especially as he discovers the weird and wonderful new job he's stumbled into.

In the screenplay by Hikari and Stephen Blahut, Philip finds himself working for Tada (Takehiro Hira), who runs a company called Rental Family, where he and his staff are hired by clients to role-play in various real-world scenarios — the fake funeral, for example, or as a mistress apologizing to a spurned wife, or just for friendship. Philip's first role is quite complex: He plays a Canadian man getting married to a young Japanese woman in a show wedding for her conservative parents. She's queer and needs an out in order to be with her partner. Philip, who is



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP photos

In one of his Rental Family roles in the titular film, Philip (Brendan Fraser), left, plays a journalist profiling aging iconic screen actor Kikuo Hasegawa (Akira Emoto).

earnest and honest to a fault, chafes at the "lie," but soon realizes that he's helping someone to live their authentic life, and so he throws himself into the gig.

The Rental Family service is about maintaining the Japanese values of propriety and politeness through performance, and the little (or big) white lies are manipulations to get what the clients want: an apology, companionship, love, admiration, closure.

Philip's most challenging high-wire act proves to be posing as the long-lost American father of a shrewd and emotionally intelligent young girl, Mia (Shannon Gorman), in order to secure her school admission. Both Philip and Mia's mom (Shino Shinozaki), his client, soon realize that it's much more complicated for Mia than just pretending to be a nuclear family for a school interview.

While playing daddy, Philip also juggles a role as a journalist profiling an aging, iconic screen actor, Kikuo Hasegawa

(Akira Emoto), from whom he learns surprising lessons about life, memory and legacy. He finds himself deeply connecting with his clients, young and old, and learning from both of them, while becoming tangled in their lives.

Empathy pours off Fraser in waves, which is what made his Oscar-winning performance in "The Whale" actually work. Hikari channels that quality to good use in "Rental Family," but never oversteps. The film is sweet and affecting, but never treacly or overly sentimental. She knows how to balance humor and poignancy, to allow Philip to be a grown man with his own needs and peccadillos and mistakes, though we never question his motivations because of the inherent goodness that radiates off Fraser.

Hikari's beautiful, naturalistic style also perfectly suits this story. A native of Osaka, the Tokyo that she showcases is one of quotidian everyday life, not the exotic, futuristic, neon city that an outsider might



Philip's most challenging role for Rental Family requires him to pose as the long-lost American father of Mia (Shannon Gorman), left, for her school interview.

show us. Her Tokyo is one of small, cramped apartments, karaoke bars, public transit, hotels, temples and schools. It's a world occupied by normal people who sometimes need a little help, a little push, a little assistance to get the things that they want in life. Philip is there to provide that service even though he's also in need of his own connection to others.

But it's the stumbles and mishaps along the way that actually help Philip to grow. By the time we get to the second funeral, we see how much he has bloomed in relationship to other people. Fraser has an openness to his expression that's like a flower unfolding, beaming in the sunlight of recognition and personal fulfillment. As an actor, Fraser's second act has been a sight to behold, and he is the emotional anchor of this wonderfully life-affirming and quietly resonant film about the importance of being together that announces Hikari as a major talent to watch.

"Rental Family" is rated PG-13 for thematic elements, some strong language and suggestive material. Running time: 103 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

Fraser: Amid personal and professional challenges, actor has stayed true to himself

FROM PAGE 16

It was personally what I needed. I wanted to remove myself from whatever this place is, just for a while.

Like what?

Look out your window, man. All of it. I had traveled to Tokyo once or twice professionally but I was always in a hotel room. But I knew it was a place I loved. I knew it was a place that was mysterious to me. A place of innovation, a feeling like it's the pointy part of the spear. For "Rental Family," I was staying in Minato City. It was very sleek and modern and new and convenient. Moving sidewalks and escalators everywhere, skybridges. You're living in "Blade Runner." If somebody flew by with a

jetpack you'd go, "OK, we're doing that now."

You seem to have remained sincere and sweet despite some tumult in your life in Hollywood. How?

I'm Canadian. (Laughs.) I get angry. Sure, I get frustrated. I see the shortcuts and loopholes that get taken. Sometimes you just feel like the proverbial bully has the palm of his hand on your forehead and you're throwing haymakers that don't land until you're exhausted and you're being laughed at. Who's going to stand up for that person or issue? I don't know if it's me, but I know if I don't contribute to that, maybe that's a way I can help.

I think it's why people respond to your performances. The more

vulnerable you've gotten, the more people like you.

Maybe I just stopped acting. Maybe I embraced relying on the things I really feel.

A fourth "Mummy" film has been announced, 17 years after the franchise seemingly ended. Did you think those movies were in your past?

The one I wanted to make was never made. The third one was a model of ... how can I say this to the AP reporter? NBC had the rights to broadcast the Olympics that year. So they put two together and we went to China. Working in Shanghai, an incredible experience. I'm proud of the third one because I think it's a good standalone movie. We picked up and did what we do



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES / AP

Brendan Fraser appreciated his experience filming "Rental Family" in Japan. He says Tokyo's a place of both mystery and innovation and filming there also allowed him to "remove myself" for a bit.

with a different crew on deck and gave it our best shot. But the one I wanted to make is forthcoming. And I've been waiting 20 years

for this call. Sometimes it was loud; sometimes it was a faint telegraph. Now? It's time to give the fans what they want.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Ariana Grande, left, and Cynthia Erivo return as witches on opposite sides of a public relations war in Oz in “Wicked: For Good.”

Plummeting back to Earth

Compared to first installment, shorter, less fun ‘Wicked: For Good’ is a letdown

BY NAVEEN KUMAR
The Washington Post

The kooky fraud played by Jeff Goldblum in “Wicked: For Good” has a ditty explaining how he maintains his wizardly dominance: Once people believe in something, he shrugs, they’ll keep on believing no matter what.

Given its already record-breaking box office, the same appears likely to hold true for the less marvelous second half of director Jon M. Chu’s behemoth adaptation of the Broadway musical. Even after a yearlong intermission, anyone whose jaw hung open during the final moments of “Wicked: Part 1,” as Cynthia Erivo obliterates “Defying Gravity” while tearing through the night sky, is probably champing at the bit to return.

Unfortunately, the laws of physics are back in effect, and the second film is a letdown. How could it not be? The kids are grown up, and the fun and games are over. There are only a couple of bangers left in Stephen Schwartz’s original score by the musical’s second act, which races to connect the narrative dots to “The Wizard of Oz.” With some additional material by screenwriters Dana Fox and Winnie Holzman (the latter also wrote the stage musical’s script), and a relatively fleet run time of 2 hours and 18 minutes (20-ish minutes less than the first), somehow “For Good” feels like it’s both scrambling between plot points and vamping to justify its existence.

First, an obvious warning: This is not a stand-alone movie. Don’t go in thinking you’ll

understand what’s going on if you haven’t seen the 2024 film and, perhaps more important, “The Wizard of Oz” from 1939 — or if your recollections of both are vague at best. As much as “For Good” is bogged down with a bonanza of incidents, there’s also *a lot* happening outside the frame that it assumes you’re easily following.

The major consequence of cleaving “Wicked” in two is that the second part is like a pair of munchkin legs scrambling toward the finish line with only the phantom presence of the heartbeat in its other (and much better) half. The first movie was essentially an effervescent high school comedy that culminated in an Emerald City road trip. It deepened the bond between the green and good witches in a way that surpassed what’s possible onstage. And it left us on a blaring emotional high.

Now, our engagement with the whole gang is meant to carry over from their school days, but the tremendous momentum and feeling generated by part one is tough to regain with a few gossamer flashbacks. Time has passed on-screen and off, and picking up in the middle of each character’s arc is disorienting.

Cast off and maligned, Erivo’s Elphaba is hiding out in an elaborate tree house lair, plotting to expose the wizard. Under his cruel crusade, the animal citizens of Oz have either been subjugated — some in service of building his signature, gilded vanity project — or forced to flee.

The movie smartly doesn’t force parallels to the present day: They are obvious and

baked into the source material, including Gregory Maguire’s 1995 novel and the 2003 stage musical. The ways of tyranny are timeless, apparently.

Meanwhile, Ariana Grande’s Glinda has been exalted as the face of good: The former friends are now opposing brands, with Michelle Yeoh’s Madame Morrible as the PR grandmaster.

Despite its packed agenda, the film can also feel meandering and directionless. The two added songs by Schwartz — Elphaba’s “No Place Like Home,” which earns mewing approval from the critters she’s entreating not to leave Oz, and “The Girl in the Bubble,” in which Glinda wonders whether “it’s time for her bubble to pop” — are pleasant at best, despite their clichés. They feel like necessary filler, written in the style of “Wicked” but without the verve.

Though fewer and far between, there are a handful of cinematic flourishes executed in high style, including Elphaba’s thundering lament “No Good Deed” and Glinda’s gorgeous walk down the aisle, “Crazy Rich Asians”-style, interrupted by a wild stam-pede, hoofs and feathers flying. For anyone already invested in the story, there will be moments of wonder and/or tears at least somewhere along the way.

But as Ozian lore, “For Good” is a companion text — merely a torn-out chapter that’s necessary reading to reach the end.

“Wicked: For Good” is rated PG for action/violence, some suggestive material and thematic material (some animals do appear frightened). Running time: 138 minutes. Now at select on-base theaters.

What others are saying

For anyone who somehow felt last year’s part one wasn’t enough, “For Good” will probably be a very welcoming second helping. Since these films were shot at the same time, much of the tone and tenor of the first chapter continues. There’s more Cynthia Erivo, more Ariana Grande and more soaring soliloquies. For most “Wicked” fans, more is good.

But for those of us who felt — what’s a non-wicked way to say this? — mildly waterboarded, in pink and green, by “Wicked,” “For Good” doesn’t offer much relief. There is, to be sure, great talent on display in these films. But “For Good,” like its predecessor, often feels more like a Production than a movie, with characters shuffled on and off-stage with Oz-like orchestration.

— Jake Coyle/AP

Grande, a plucky comic talent since her Nickelodeon days, gets several moments to shine, none greater than during a fight between Glinda and Elphaba where she gets to openly mock her opponent and her signature cackle. Erivo once again brings Elphaba to life especially through her soft eyes, which show the depth and humanity of her character. And both can sing to the high heavens, even if there’s nothing particularly memorable for them to wrap their voices around.

But often “Wicked: For Good” looks and feels clumsy, the story’s darker elements and themes at odds with Chu’s limited emotional range. The action scenes, meanwhile, are often a blur of CGI-enhanced imagery, especially scenes where Elphaba or the team of flying monkeys take to the air and suddenly the screen looks like viewers are playing “Wicked” for PlayStation 2.

— Adam Graham
The Detroit News

The two-part “Wicked” excels where at least some two-part novel adaptations — “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” “The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn,” etc. — have failed. Even though each movie tells half the story of the friendship of Elphaba and Glinda, “Wicked” offers a satisfying story arc for the former and “For Good,” one for the latter.

While Elphaba hardly takes a backseat in this affair, it is, ultimately, Glinda’s story, and Grande shines in it, taking the character from perky to powerful.

With apologies to the women, director Jon M. Chu probably deserves the most boisterous round of applause. What the director of “Crazy Rich Asians” (2018) and “In the Heights” (2021) has achieved at the helm here is, simply, next-level.

— Mark Meszoros
The News-Herald

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Quietly reflective

‘Train Dreams’ evokes Pacific Northwest past, stirs plaintive elegy of forgotten era

BY JAKE COYLE

Associated Press

It's popular in Hollywood to follow the tax credits wherever they go, but that was never going to be much of an option for “Train Dreams.”

When director Clint Bentley embarked on adapting Denis Johnson's 2011 novella, he knew the book's early 20th century Idaho and Washington setting would take him into the Pacific Northwest forests. Johnson's book is a small miracle: a slender and quiet tale of the simple life of a logger and railroad worker named Robert Grainier. He's a small, almost infinitesimal piece in a larger drama of time's march forward and the inexorable maw of progress cutting through an untamed landscape.

In scouting for “Train Dreams,” Bentley, 40, found it harder than ever to find the old-growth forests of the book. If “Train Dreams” is about unearthing a forever-lost American past, locating it for the film was fittingly elusive.

“When we were looking for locations, it proved the point of the film,” Bentley said. “It's hard to find those old trees. There are protected areas you can get to. We drove three hours north from Spokane, up to this grove of old trees by the Canadian border. You get there after a hike and it's not that big of a stand of old trees. It's the few they couldn't get to.”

“Train Dreams,” meditative and radiant, seeks to evoke an ever-changing land upon which Grainier anonymously labors. This is a time of seemingly slower pace but one constantly in flux, with forests being cleared, railroads being laid and lives being sacrificed along the way.

“The thing that's beautiful about the book is that it feels like an elegy for a lost time. That's what I wanted the movie to feel like,” Bentley said. “And I think a big part of that is we look around and we see, ‘Oh, that was a forest, and now there's a Costco there.’”

Bentley's film, now streaming on Netflix after a limited run in theaters, is resonating with audiences in part because of how deeply un-Hollywood it is. Grainier, played by Joel Edgerton in the film, doesn't talk much. He isn't leading a heroic or even a particularly notable life. It's more that life is happening to him.

“What hooked me was about the significance of what we would otherwise presume of an insignificant life,” Edgerton said. “We go to the cinema to watch what we hope for ourselves, that we would be more active and in control and heroic. But I think the majority of us share similarities to Robert in that we don't presume to have full control of things in the world, and we absorb the blows of the world. We're not the controllers of our universe.”

Cherished favorite

When “Train Dreams,” which first debuted at the Sundance Film Festival, was premiering at the Toronto Film Festival, Edgerton, Bentley and Greg Kwedar, the

co-screenwriter, gathered to discuss a movie that tends to inspire soulful rumination. Bentley and Kwedar, the writing-producer partners behind 2024's “Sing Sing” and 2021's “Jockey,” have shown a rare knack for crafting textured American stories.

“We want to build our stories from the dirt up,” said Kwedar, 41.

Bentley and Kwedar write together but take turns directing. Their script to “Sing Sing,” the acclaimed real-life-inspired prison drama populated by formerly incarcerated men, was Oscar nominated. (Clarence Maclin and John “Divine G” Whitfield were also credited as writers.)

Yet little about Johnson's novella, first published in a 2002 issue of The Paris Review, screams movie adaptation. It's harsh and unsentimental. Grainier experiences tragedy. His life is mostly hard and remains a mystery to him. But it contains small joys and moments of epiphany.

Over the years, “Train Dreams” has gone from a cherished cult favorite to an established classic, “an American epic writ small,” as one critic called it. In 2012, “Train Dreams” was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Last year, The New York Times included it on a list of the best books of the 21st century, praising how its soft-spoken protagonist “bears witness to the real-time formation of a raw, insatiable nation.”

Edgerton read it around the time “Train Dreams” was published as a book, and inquired about the adaptation rights. But they were taken.

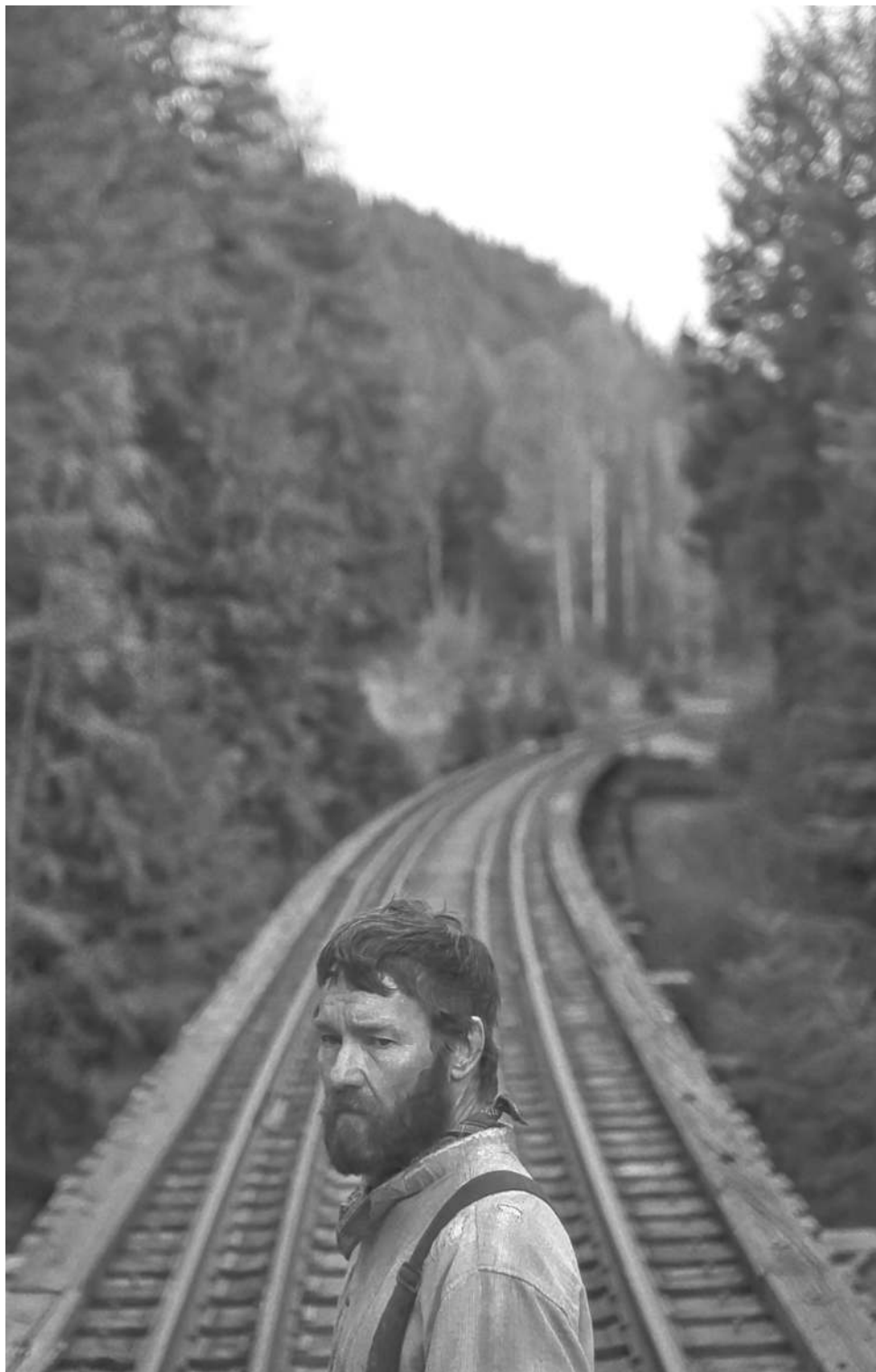
“I remember thinking there would be a great movie in here, but how difficult of an undertaking it would be,” Edgerton said. “The fear would be how much would you have to bend Denis' work and alter it so much that it lost a few of the elements so beautiful about it. In order to put it on the screen, you might end up destroying the best of it.”

Years later, when Bentley and Kwedar began writing the adaptation, they proceeded carefully, trying to stick to the spirit of the book while reshaping it for film. As they described the reverence they had for the book (“The quality of the prose, you feel like you're in the presence of greatness,” Kwedar said), Edgerton smiled.

“I just had the image of someone coming to you guys and going, ‘Hey, can you restore this church for me?’” Edgerton said.

Shadows of giants

The way “Train Dreams” evolves as a series of disjointed encounters, with narration and lyricism filling in between, has led to a lot of comparisons to the films of Terrence Malick. The film's supporting cast includes Felicity Jones as Gladys, Grainier's wife; William H. Macy as a well-traveled explosives expert; and Kerry Condon as a forestry services worker whom Grainier meets later in life. Like the book, the movie slowly, subtly gathers a



NETFLIX/AP photos

In the film “Train Dreams,” Joel Edgerton plays a railroad worker named Robert Grainier. Though Edgerton does not have many lines of dialogue despite being the lead, his contemplative performance still shines.



Director Clint Bentley sought to shoot the film on location in the same early 20th-century old-growth-type forests described in the book on which the film is based.

force that you only fully feel in the movie's final, profound moments.

“Someone said, ‘Across this whole movie we're going to build a fire and at the end of it, we're going to light it.’”

Bentley said.

“You just hope the box of matches isn't wet,” Edgerton joked.

But they collectively trusted that “Train Dreams” could get there. They knew Johnson's book held a recognizable truth.

“I had a feeling that if I feel these things, someone else will have them, too,” said Edgerton, who gives one of his finest performances with only a smattering of dialogue. “And they'll reach into this film and see their own love in it, their own joy and it might allow them to reflect on their own loss and grief.”

There weren't only the words to go by, either. While shooting, the filmmakers felt dwarfed by the immensity of the Pacific Northwest forest around them. Grainier is often shown in the bottom of wide shots with trees looming overhead. On their outdoor sets, ancient stumps of even larger trees could be seen, too.

“Just being in the presence of these trees stirs some deep part of your soul,” Kwedar said. “And you can't avoid that. You can blindly go about this work, but there's still that latent pull towards that deeper question of the cost of things.”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Warsaw the best of modern-day Poland

Warsaw doesn't appear at the top of many European travelers' wish lists. But that's just one reason you may want to visit. With evocative sights, an epic history and low prices, Warsaw is a diamond in the rough.

Warsaw is both the national capital and the country's cosmopolitan business hub. Varsovians (as locals are called) are chic and sophisticated — and Varsovian by choice: According to some studies, as many as 8 out of every 10 Varsovians weren't born in Warsaw. Today's Warsaw has gleaming office towers, swarms of international businesspeople, inviting parks and pedestrian zones and a hipster culture to rival Brooklyn's or Portland's. For cobbled medieval charm Polish-style, head to Krakow and Gdansk. But to look modern-day Poland frankly (but no less enjoyably) in the face, make time for Warsaw.

Warsaw has good reason to be so forward-looking: Its past has been hard. Since becoming Poland's capital in 1596, it has seen wave after wave of foreign rulers and invasions.

Warsaw's darkest days came during the Nazi occupation of World War II. First, its Jewish residents were forced into a tiny ghetto. They rose up ... and were slaughtered. Then, its Polish residents rose up ... and were slaughtered. In retaliation, Hitler ordered the destruction of the city.

As the smoke cleared and the Nazis retreated, the Soviets marched in and claimed the pile of rubble that had once been Warsaw. It would be another 45

years before the Soviets would leave and the Poles could freely govern their capital and their country. But in this horrific crucible, the enduring spirit of the Polish people was forged.

After the war, the Poles almost gave up on re-creating old Warsaw, but ultimately they decided to rebuild, constructing a city of contrasts. Now, painstakingly restored medieval lanes border pedestrian-friendly parks and sleek skyscrapers. As one proud resident told me, "Warsaw is ugly because its history is so beautiful."

Today's Warsaw is safer, wealthier and happier than ever. Visitors encounter stylishly dressed locals, sophisticated shopping boulevards, and thoughtful museums covering World War II, Jewish history, hometown composer Frédéric Chopin and Polish art.

The city has two historic districts: the 13th-century Old Town and the 15th-century New Town. Both are nearly complete 20th-century reconstructions, right down to the higgledy-piggledy charm of the colorful buildings.

The countless restaurants in the historic district provide a good introduction to Polish cuisine — and the national drink, vodka. Many traditional dishes — herring, cold cuts, pickles, steak tartare — pair naturally with chilled vodka. And as any local will be quick to show you, Poles don't sip their vodka — it's a bottoms-up drink ("that way it only stings once").



Rick Steves



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

Visitors to Warsaw are astonished to learn that the “medieval” buildings ringing the Old Town Square are 20th-century reconstructions.

Remnants of Warsaw's earlier magnificence show up in huge, idyllic Łazienki Park. It's sprinkled with Neoclassical buildings, peacocks and young Poles in love. Poland's last king built the park in the 18th century for his summer residence and as a place for his citizens to relax.

A monument to Chopin, Poland's great Romantic composer and favorite son, graces the park's rose garden. Even

though Chopin left Warsaw for Paris, his final wish was to have his heart brought back to his native Poland. And so it was, after his death in 1849. It now lies buried in a pillar in Warsaw's Holy Cross Church (the rest of him is interred at Paris' Père Lachaise Cemetery).

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

Temporary ice rinks provide cutting-edge seasonal fun in Europe

As Europe gears up for the holiday season, temporary ice skating rinks are popping up in a variety of settings. While it's true that public rinks tend to get quite crowded at peak times, the opportunity to skate in a unique and beautiful locale such as near a palace or in a neon-lit square is sure to make one's turn on the ice memorable despite any space limitations.

Amsterdam: While many locals would no doubt prefer to be zipping up and down the city's famous canals, there's rarely a winter these days when it's cold enough for the water to freeze solid. But to feel like you have stumbled straight into a Dutch Master's painting, the next best thing is to make way to the ice rink on the Museumplein. With the Rijksmuseum and pop-up wooden chalets as their backdrop, skaters can go through their paces, stopping as needed for warming beverages or an oliebol, the Dutch answer to a doughnut. The rink will remain open through Feb. 4. The cost of a skating session is 16 euros, skate rental included. Online: tinyurl.com/muu6sd2t

Copenhagen, Denmark: For the better part of the past decade, the fairy tale-like wonderland that is Tivoli Gardens has set up its own skating rink. Here, families and friends can glide against the backdrop of its festively illuminated buildings, every now and then taking a break to warm up with steaming cups of gløgg, the Danish version of mulled wine. Having a go on the rink is included in the cost of entry to the park itself; the fee for renting a pair of skates is 65 Danish kroner, about \$10.15. The park will remain open through Jan. 4. Online: tivoli.dk/en

Florence, Italy: The Florence Ice Village, an outdoor rink 320 meters long, is billed as one of the longest ice rinks in Europe. Against a Christmas-themed backdrop



iStock

Ice skaters glide in front of the Kurhaus in Wiesbaden, Germany. The rink is open from Nov. 25 to Jan. 11.

crowned by a towering Ferris wheel in the Cascine Park, skaters can hone their skills or show off their best moves. The rink opens Dec. 1 and remains open through March 31. An hourlong session on the rink costs 8 euros; children under 10 pay 6 euros. Skate rental costs an additional 2 euros. Online: tinyurl.com/yc35wpss

London: The heart of London's entertainment district has long hosted holiday happenings, from a market to a tent for circus and cabaret performances. Skate Leicester Square makes its debut at the place for which it's named with a rink encircling a statue of Shakespeare. Skate sessions begin every 15 minutes, and if a time slot isn't fully booked already, walk-ins are welcome. A turn on the ice costs 14.50 UK pounds (about \$19.15) adults; children ages 3-12 pay 9.50 pounds. The cost of skate rental is included in the entry fee. The rink will remain open through Jan. 4. Online: skateleicestersquare.co.uk

Paris: In contrast to the other rinks mentioned here, the rink at the Grand Palais des Glaces is a covered space, its

beautiful glass roof protecting skaters from the elements. By day, the space is flooded with natural light; come nighttime, light shows and DJ sets transform the palace into a frozen dance floor. Renovations to the palace that commenced in 2021 are finally finishing up, allowing the space to reopen for a season kicking off on Dec. 14 and ending on Jan. 7. A go on one of the world's largest temporary indoor ice rinks costs from 27 to 39 euros, depending on the time slot; the price includes the cost of skate rental. Online: tinyurl.com/38xn2dec

Vienna: In Austria's cool capital, the skating is literally taken to the next level, as four spacious skating rinks are linked up by a system of elevated pathways. The Wiener Eistraum, or Vienna Ice Dream, will be set up in the shadow of the Town Hall from Jan. 22 through March 8. A viewing platform makes watching the skaters almost as much fun. The cost of an adult skating session begins at 6.70 euros for off-peak times; skate rental costs an additional 8.50 euros. Online: wienerestraum.com

Wiesbaden, Germany: Wiesbaden on Ice is a temporary rink made of artificial ice set up directly in front of the city's Kurhaus, a stately building housing a casino, concert venue and event space. From Nov. 25-Jan. 11, what's billed as Germany's largest mobile rink entices all ages to spin and glide to a lively soundtrack. It's also possible to book a lane to try "Eisstockschiessen," a sport described as the Bavarian version of curling. On Dec. 12 and Jan. 3, the local radio station FFH hosts parties with entertainment, cool beats and dazzling light effects; on both dates, there are both early and late sessions, the first one geared to kids and the second tailored to adults. The cost of a skating session starts at 15 euros for adults and 13 euros for children, inclusive of skate rental. The use of the rink without skate rental costs 8 euros for adults and 6 euros for children. Online: wiesbaden-on-ice.de



Karen Bradbury

WEEKEND: TRAVEL & FOOD

‘Spezial’ win for Gruyère

Swiss variety beats out more than 5,200 other entries at 37th edition of World Cheese Awards in Bern

By JAMEY KEATEN
Associated Press

The first thing that hits you at the World Cheese Awards is the smell. As the 37th edition — part competition, part a celebration of cheese — kicked off Nov. 13 in Bern, Switzerland, some visitors might’ve wished the offerings had more holes. With descriptions of odors including “stinky socks” and “sick dog,” it’s clearly a festival — and a challenge — for the nose as much as mouths, fingers and eyes. Welcome to sensory overload. Connoisseurs, culinary experts and curious consumers flocked to the three-day event in a country where cheese is both food and folklore. The first day got going with the competition, which featured more than 5,200 cheeses, nearly one-fifth from Switzerland. Some 46 countries took part, a record count of competitors from Australia to Austria, Bulgaria to Brazil. All those offerings in the same Bern exhibition hall made for an original mélange of odors. But once past that medley of smells, the sights, flavors and individual scents of the cheeses were tantalizing.

From ‘Stinking Bishop’ to camel cheese

John Farrand, managing director of the Guild of Fine Food in Britain, the event organizer, says some people who tell him they “don’t like cheese; it’s that awful smelly thing” just need to take time and consider the myriad choices. “I would grab them and sit down with them and take them on that journey through cheese,” he said. “I get so many people say to me just impulsively ‘I don’t like blue cheese,’ and that’s impossible, really. There’s so much of a range of blue cheese from over here to over here,” — Farrand gesticulated around the hall — “there’s always a blue cheese for somebody.”

He rhapsodized about a 265-pound wheel of cheese that teams rolled in and “broke” — or cut open — unleashing a powerful cloud of odor. “The aroma of this Emmentaler just hit me,” Farrand said. “That’s the first time that that cheese has released its greatness and the aroma ... just makes you hungry.” Some may turn up their noses at bacteria-blued cheeses or reject the strong odors of varieties like Limberger, Taleggio, “Stinking Bishop” and Époisses de Bourgogne — a Burgundy specialty reputed to be Napoleon’s favorite, and one so stinky that urban legend claims it’s banned from public transport in France. Others might not get over the hump of hesitation to taste a camel (or buffalo or donkey) cheese, or cringe at unpasteurized or squishy cheeses. More adventurous tasters will try the most gooey or moldy cheeses, looking for the most rich, creamy or meaty varieties on hand. For the judges, no such compunction: It’s more about scrutiny, savoring, criticism and curiosity.

Strict rules for judges and journalists

Scores of judges in yellow aprons circled the rows of long, numbered rectangular tables before digging in. They sliced wedges out of hard cheeses and pressed them to their noses, or used spreaders to scoop up soft cheeses, inspecting the consistency and licking or dribbling them onto their tongues. The judging zone was set off by a waist-high fence and ropes, and security guards kept watch. Journalists were allowed into the area only under escort, and were only



ANTHONY ANEX, KEYSTONE/AP photos

Members of the jury analyze and taste cheeses Nov. 13 during the 37th World Cheese Awards at the Festhalle in Bern, Switzerland. More than 5,200 cheeses, nearly one-fifth from Switzerland, were featured in the competition. Some 46 countries took part, a record count of competitors from Australia to Austria, Bulgaria to Brazil.



Swiss cheesemaker Pius Hitz, from the Vorderfultigen cheese company about 12 miles south of Bern, lifts the trophy Nov. 13 after winning the 37th World Cheese Awards with his Swiss: A “spezial” Gruyère.

“I get so many people say to me just impulsively ‘I don’t like blue cheese,’ and that’s impossible, really. There’s so much of a range of blue cheese from over here to over here, there’s always a blue cheese for somebody.”

John Farrand
managing director of event organizer the Guild of Fine Food

allowed to view and smell the cheeses, not taste or touch. It was a blind taste test for the 265-odd judges on hand: All identifying packaging or marking was removed from the cheeses. Their job was to poke, peruse, sniff, touch and taste the offerings — a tall order with so many to choose from — before making their selections for gold, silver and bronze awards based on attributes like aroma, body, texture, flavor and “mouthfeel.” Only those honored as “Super Gold” made the cut for the glitzy “Super Jury” selection of 14 finalist cheeses. The judges — and the public — only found out where the cheeses were from after the voting on each was completed.

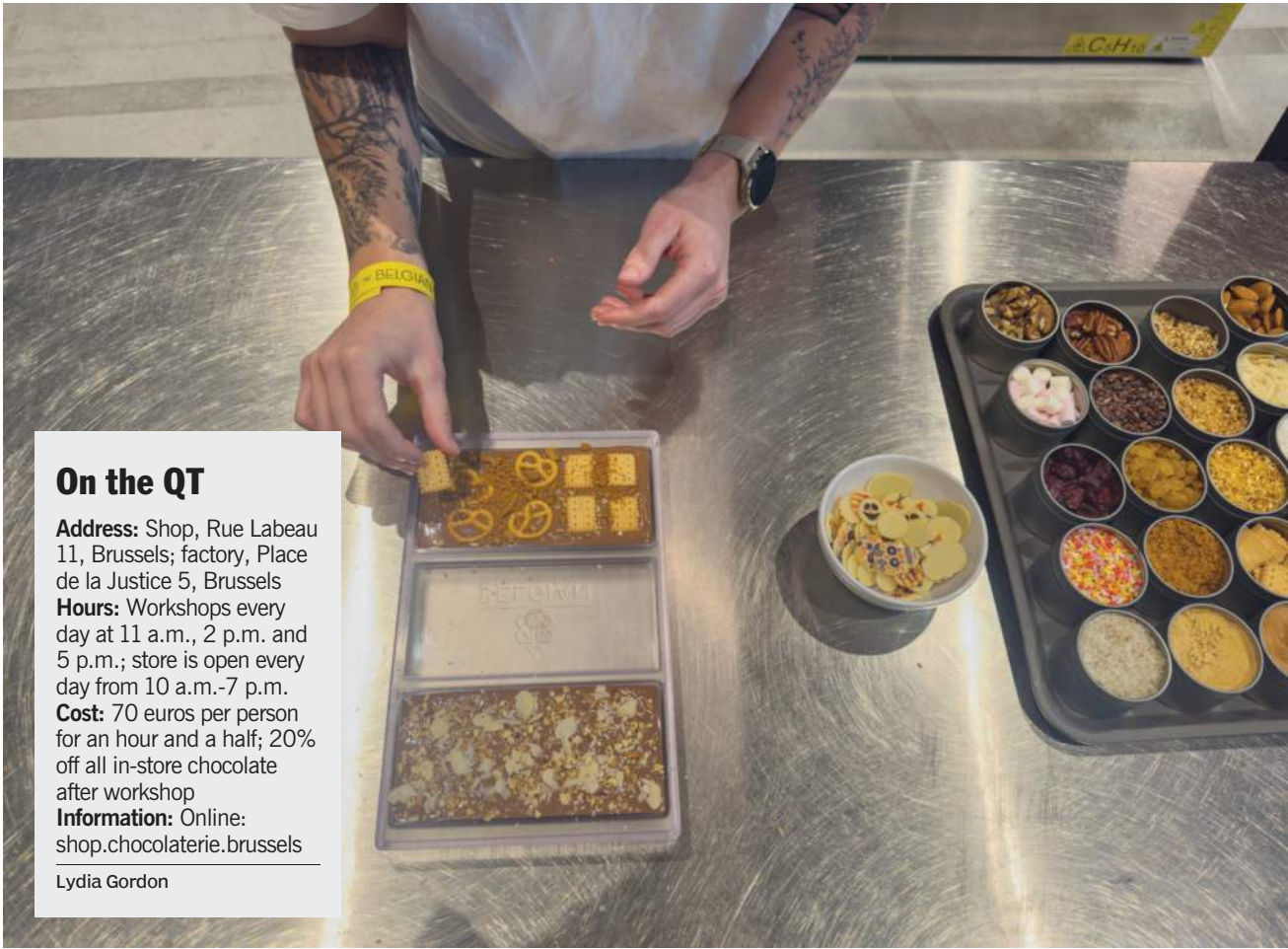
Paul Thomas, a cheesemaker from Urstrom Kaese, south of Berlin, sliced into a blue cheese covered with cherries and billed as having hints of a Manhattan cocktail. After tasting it, he said he was “pleasantly surprised throughout most of that flavor journey.” “But right at the end it leaves me with something just ... it’s a slightly off flavor toward the back of the tongue,” he added.

‘Gouda’ news for Switzerland

Experts admit that choosing a winner is tricky. While the final products from the “caseiculture” — the curdling, coagulating, cheddaring and other processes involved in making cheeses — can be judged on aspects like craftsmanship and quality, taste is an individual thing. This year’s winner was Swiss: A “spezial” Gruyère, from the Vorderfultigen Mountain Dairy about 12 miles south of Bern, which scored 85 points from the jury. The raw cow’s milk cheese was drained overnight and dry salted before being matured for more than 18 months. A creamy, flower-sprinkled “Crèmeux des Aldudes aux fleurs” from the village of Etxaldia in French Basque country was runner-up, trailed by a 9-month-aged Swiss Appenzeller Edel-Würzig. Other finalists were from Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Slovakia and the United States. Many cheeses come away with other accolades: More than 20 were selected as national or regional “bests” — such as best American, Basque-country, Japanese or Ukrainian cheese. Other trophies were given out by category such as the best cheddar, raw-milk, goat or ewe, or smoked cheeses.

While the U.S. state of Wisconsin hosts the World Championship Cheese Contest and a competition in France selects the world’s best cheesemonger, organizers of the World Cheese Awards say it’s the largest cheese-only event anywhere. The competition started in Britain, but Italy, Spain and Norway have also hosted. Charlie Turnbull, director of the Academy of Cheese, poked his nose toward a round, soft brownish-orange cheese with a pungent smell caused by the Brevibacterium linens — “a close relative to the kind of bacteria you get in boys’ trainers when they’re about 15 years old.” “It’s challenging,” Turnbull said with a slight wince. But he added that once one got past the smell, the cheese tasted wonderful, noting “hints of fruit, lots of meaty notes, some ham stock.” “At the end of the day, taste trumps everything,” he said.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



On the QT

Address: Shop, Rue Labeau 11, Brussels; factory, Place de la Justice 5, Brussels
Hours: Workshops every day at 11 a.m., 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.; store is open every day from 10 a.m.-7 p.m.
Cost: 70 euros per person for an hour and a half; 20% off all in-store chocolate after workshop
Information: Online: shop.chocolaterie.brussels
Lydia Gordon

Belgian Chocolate Factory

Stars and Stripes reporter Lydia Gordon customizes a milk chocolate bar during a Belgian Chocolate Makers workshop in Brussels. She added crushed Biscoff cookies and pretzels to her bar.

From bean to bar

Educational experience of making chocolate to take home is Brussels at its best

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

When I hear the word “Belgium,” the first thing that comes to my mind is chocolate — and not just because I have a sweet tooth. When researching activities for a recent trip to Brussels, I came across the Belgian Chocolate Factory and noticed it was hosting a chocolate-making workshop during my stay.

What drew me in was learning that this five-year-old chocolate-maker is the only one in the city to craft chocolate from bean to bar entirely by hand, with no factory machinery involved, according to our instructor.

That hands-on approach sealed the deal for me. The 18-euro discount I got thanks to a promotional rate didn’t hurt, either.

I presumed I would spend the nearly two hours making and eating chocolate, but the class turned out to be so much more than that. Upon arrival, I was gifted a very fashionable hair net and introduced to Patricia, our instructor for the afternoon.

But before making our own chocolate, we first learned where it comes from and the process that turns cacao into one of the world’s most recognizable sweets.

Patricia took us through the basics and showed us the three main varieties of cacao plants: Forastero, Trinitario and Criollo.

Unbeknownst to me, freshly harvested cacao beans are encased in a slimy membrane called mucilage, a sweet, slightly fruity coating that Patricia encouraged us to taste.

The texture might make some people hesitate, but it was fascinating to experience what a cacao bean looks and tastes like at the very beginning of its journey.

Our first project was milk chocolate. Patricia demonstrated each step, from tempering to piping the chocolate into molds, before letting us create our own custom bars.

The 20 or so toppings we could choose from to mix into our creations included chopped hazelnuts, almonds, shaved coconut, Biscoff pieces and pretzels.

I began with good intentions, but somewhere between



Belgian Chocolate Factory

Gordon holds her customized chocolate creations after completing the Belgian Chocolate Makers workshop.

the crushed Biscoff cookies and the pretzels, things got a little out of hand. I started out strong with a neat cracker-and-pretzel layout, but the second I added the crushed cookies, my neat display became a mound of cookie dust and salty sundries.

I’m more of a flavor-over-decor person anyway, so I figured a bit of chaos couldn’t hurt.

With our milk chocolate bars chilling in the fridge, Patricia led us back into chocolate history. We sampled a piece of pure, bitter cacao and learned about the techniques used to temper dark chocolate before creating our own small pieces.

I spent some time bonding with three of my classmates, discovering that our work station had an even split between milk and dark chocolate fans.

Despite our differences, we all agreed that a touch of sea salt in dark chocolate was irresistible, so we each added a little to our creations.

I tried my hand at a lopsided heart, a little snowman to



LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

Items made during a recent Belgian Chocolate Makers workshop in Brussels include a milk chocolate bar, truffles and assorted goodies featuring dark chocolate.



LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

Participants in the Belgian Chocolate Makers workshop in Brussels got to try their hand at making coconut and cacao powder truffles.



LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

Belgian Chocolate Makers in Brussels hosts workshops every day to teach the history and creation of chocolate. The company is the only one in the city that handcrafts its products from cacao bean to chocolate.

celebrate the winter season, a few round drops and even a Mickey Mouse silhouette.

The chocolate hardened faster than expected, so we added decorations quickly before moving on to the next and final challenge: truffles.

The process was a bit tedious but nevertheless so much fun, especially knowing I’d be taking home a box of chocolates I’d crafted myself.

Before leaving, I had to pick up a bar of the chocolate we’d tasted during the class. Patricia helped me choose one that matched my preferences, explaining the subtle differences between each type of cacao bean.

Educational experiences don’t get much more enjoyable. Toss in the fact that this one came with sweet souvenirs to boot, and, well, I’d say it was Brussels at its best, bar none.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

American-style burgers with a British twist

Penny Black Pub in Naples a fitting tribute to quintessential meal

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Many international chefs have tried and failed to re-create the classic American cheeseburger.

It's deceptively difficult to get that satisfying combination of a juicy ground beef patty, cheddar cheese, fresh toppings and soft bun just right.

But The Penny Black Pub in Naples, Italy, manages not only to offer a fitting tribute to the quintessential America mainstay but also to throw in a distinctive dash of British-Italian flair.

Located in the city's Vomero neighborhood, the pub offers a varied menu of burgers, fries and other bar food. And the fact that it celebrates its 25th anniversary this month is a testament to its popularity with diners.

The name refers to the world's first adhesive postage stamp, the penny black, which was issued by the U.K. in 1840. Inside you'll find British pub-style decor featuring warm color tones, cozy lighting and tributes to The Beatles, Queen Elizabeth II and England's famed red telephone booths. A playlist of mostly '80s music complements the ambience.

On the recent Tuesday that I and a companion were there for dinner, the pub quickly filled up shortly after its 7 p.m. opening. Penny Black doesn't take reservations, so come early if you don't want to wait.

While mainly focused on burgers, the diverse menu has beef, chicken or pork options. The burgers feature American or Italian cheeses and an enticing assortment of toppings, such as pancetta, ham, chimichurri sauce and sauerkraut.

My dining companion opted for the Ndujotto, a single-patty beef burger with fried Asiago cheese, caramelized red Tropea onions and 'nduja sauce made from spicy Calabrian peppers.

The ample burger arrived hot on a wooden platter, juicy and covered in melty cheese. It was tantalizingly delicious, with the patty and bun nicely crisped from the grill and the flavors melding together splendidly.

The only issue my companion had with her order was the beef quality, which she said could have been better.

I chose the plant-based smash burger with two meat-substitute patties, cheddar cheese, sweet potato fries and jalapeno slices. It's one of six vegetarian burger



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The Penny Black Pub in the Vomero neighborhood of Naples, Italy, offers a British pub-style vibe complete with odes to The Beatles, below, a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II and England's famed red telephone booths, above. The pub's name comes from a historic postage stamp issued by the U.K. in 1840.



options on the menu.

The combination of nicely grilled patties and bun plus the heat from the peppers made the burger irresistible.

Sadly, I filled up on the fresh, hot french fries delivered to our table as an appetizer and couldn't finish the burger. But our server offered to wrap it up so I could take it home.

Other menu options included the Big Pennies and the Spaccanapoli, named for the famed street in Naples. The former includes two beef smash patties, cheddar cheese, bacon, sweet and sour gherkins, julienned

salad and smoked bacon sauce. The latter features two beef patties, Italian pork roast, caciocavallo cheese from Irpino and caramelized red onion.

If you're not in the mood for a burger, chicken fingers, a variety of fries, pork ribs and pulled pork and brisket sandwiches are among other menu offerings. For example, there's the Elton John, which features a pork sausage from Caserta, caciocavallo cheese, grilled ham, honey and mustard dressing and basil leaves.

Despite our full stomachs, we couldn't resist trying Black Penny's cheesecake with salted cara-

mel sauce for dessert.

The New York-style cheesecake was rich and creamy with a tasty cookie crust but lacked the characteristic tangy flavor of cream cheese. However, with the drizzle of salted caramel, it was satisfying.

With a pleasing menu assortment, Penny Black offers a chance to partake of one of America's most popular exports in an atmosphere that will transport you out of Naples and into a British pub.

My advice: Come for the burgers, return for the vibe.

bath.alison@stripes.com
@alisonbath_



The Ndujotto burger includes a juicy ground beef patty, fried Asiago cheese, caramelized red onions and spicy Calabrese salsa on a soft bun.



The Penny Black Pub's plant-based smash burger features two meat-substitute patties, cheddar cheese, sweet potato fries and jalapenos.



A side of fried potatoes at the Penny Black Pub. The potatoes can be served plain or topped with either meatballs or sausage as well as bacon and cheese.



The Penny Black Pub

Address: Via Enrico Alvino 134b, Naples, Italy

Hours: 7 p.m.-12:30 a.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday; 7 p.m.-1 a.m., Friday and Saturday; closed on Monday.

Prices: 4.50-8 euros, appetizers and fries; 9-18 euros for burgers; 10-18 euros for ribs, platters and salads; 4-6.50 euros for desserts; 4-9 euros for beer, wine and cocktails; and 1-5 euros for water, soda and ginger beer. There also is a 15% surcharge added to the bill.

Information: Online: thepennyblack-pub.it; Phone: +39 081 014 5828

Alison Bath

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

An armory's worth of samurai weaponry

Iwakuni museum's cultural artifacts, bridge make great two-part attraction

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A museum packed with samurai weapons and armor stands near the iconic Kintaikyo Bridge in Iwakuni, a short drive from the Marine Corps air station in Yamaguchi prefecture, Japan.

The Kashiwabara Museum, formerly known as the Iwakuni Art Museum, stores everything from swords, spears and muskets to elaborately decorated armor. The collection of artifacts could be props from an Akira Kurosawa film such as "Seven Samurai." But they're the genuine articles — weapons that were used by real Japanese samurai. There's a sword, made for a shogun, that's been registered as a Japanese national treasure. It's kept inside a glass case, but you can heft a replica sword and try on an old helmet. The museum also has a collection of decorated sword guards.

There are all kinds of other old weapons including pistols and a wide range of spears and similar devices designed to kill, or at least seriously injure, an enemy. The museum promotes its weapons and armor collection as the "culture of life and death." "For samurai, risking their own lives to protect their country, territory and clan was the very meaning of 'living,'" the museum states on its website. Samurai armor and weapons were not only tools to protect their owners but also works of art that evoked their courage and magnified their short, potentially deadly lives, the website states. Helmets on display have intriguing decorations such as antlers, rabbit ears and crab claws. There's some elaborate shining ceremonial armor. There's also armor that was used by ordinary samurai in battle. Some pieces look as though they were damaged by swords or arrows. The older armor has quite a lot of protection around the mid-section — not because the ancient samurai were overweight, but because it was needed to protect horsemen from arrows. Alongside the weapons and armor, the museum has a collection of art including glassware, ceramics and antique furniture used by Iwakuni's feudal lords. The museum promotes this part of its collection as part of the



PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

The Kashiwabara Museum stores everything from swords, spears and muskets to elaborately decorated armor in Iwakuni, Japan.

On the QT

Directions: You can reach the museum by walking across the Kintaikyo Bridge from Iwakuni, Japan. The museum's address is 2-10-27 Yokoyama, Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, 741-0081.

Times: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closes at 4 p.m. December to February); closed on Tuesdays. Open on public holidays.

Costs: 800 yen for adults; 500 yen for high school and university students; 200 yen for elementary and middle school students. Discounts for groups of 15 or more.

Food: There are at least two ice cream shops near the Kintaikyo Bridge.

Information: Online: kashiwabara-museum.jp

Seth Robson

"culture of life." The samurai lifestyle was glamorous yet profound, the museum states on its website. "In particular, the everyday items used by women and children reveal the samurai class' deep and profound love for supreme works of art," the website states. When you've seen enough ancient samurai artifacts, take a stroll through the park near the museum at the foot of Mount Yokoyama near Iwakuni Castle and the Kintaikyo Bridge. The pedestrian bridge, at the same site more than 350 years,



Above: The Kashiwabara Museum is near Iwakuni's distinctive Kintaikyo Bridge.

Right: The museum's collection includes decorative helmets.

across the Nishiki River, is a series of five wooden arches. It's been destroyed multiple times by floods and rebuilt each time. There's a small fee to cross, 310 yen for adults and high schoolers, 150 yen for elementary-school kids.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Peace, love and pastries

Peel back the layers to discover delicious international treats at Seoul’s Cafe Onion

BY TREVARES JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

Who knew that onions could be this sweet? At Cafe Onion in Seoul, South Korea,

the first thing I noticed wasn’t the trays of croissants, but the warm welcome from two French women standing at the entrance. They weren’t staff, just travelers from Paris who waved me over like a long-lost cousin. Between laughs, they urged me to order the pain au chocolat, rating it a nine out of 10 compared to what they find in France. Before I moved on, they left me with a French phrase to carry into the café: le festin — a feast, plentiful and deeply satisfying. Inside, the place buzzed like an international airport terminal. I heard Korean, French, Spanish and English across the tables. Despite the linguistic maze, the service never missed a beat. Every cashier I overheard spoke fluent English. When I finally reached the counter, the cashier caught my eye and smiled. We chatted for a while, and he dropped some free coffee and



Cafe Onion

Locations: Anguk Branch, 5 Gyedong-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul. Nearest metro is Anguk Station, Line 3. A five-minute walk from Exit 3. Another branch is at 8 Ahasan-ro 9-gil, Seongdong-gu, Seoul

Hours: In Anguk, open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The Seongsu branch opens at 8 a.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. on weekends.

Dress: Casual

Information: 070-7543-2123, @cafe.onion on Instagram

Trevares Johnson

pastry samples in my to-go bag. He asked where I was from, shared how Onion brings in people from all over the world and laughed about how the café really is “like an airport lounge, but with better food.” It’s the style of service — casual and thoughtful — that gives Onion its charm. From the cash-



PHOTOS BY TREVARES JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes
A smiling cashier flashes a peace sign while serving customers at Cafe Onion in Seoul, South Korea.



Freshly baked fig-topped croissants await.

ier who offered free pastry samples to the French travelers who waved me in like family, there’s a sense of openness here that you don’t always find in Korea, where service can sometimes

feel brisk or distant. With multiple locations around Seoul, this chain manages to feel both modern and welcoming. If you have the time, it’s worth stopping by. Not just for the



A Lotus Biscoff pastry sits ready to be served.

croissants or coffee, but for the chance encounters. You never know who might greet you at the door, or what new friends you’ll leave with. johnson.trevares@stripes.com

Spicy peanut noodles are fast, flexible and full of flavor

BY AARON HUTCHERSON
The Washington Post

This isn’t my first spicy peanut noodle recipe, and more likely than not, it won’t be my last. That’s because it’s generally a fast, flexible and flavorful dish. Ground beef stars in this version, which features an aromatic base of garlic, ginger and scallions. What I love about the sauce is that it is greater than the sum of its parts. At its core, all you need are peanut butter, hot sauce and water (for the right consistency). The result is beautifully nutty, rich and spicy. The fat from the peanut butter helps to tame the heat, allowing you to enjoy more flavor without setting your mouth on fire. It’s also infinitely customizable. I prefer a conventional peanut butter for the added sugar to bring further dimension to the sauce, but any smooth nut or seed butter will do. For heat, this recipe calls for chile-garlic sauce, which is basically crushed chiles and garlic. I’ve also used sriracha, and sambal oelek or gochujang would work. If you don’t eat beef, you can use any type of ground meat, or a plant-based substitute if you’re vegetarian. Using fresh noodles eliminates the need for a second pot to boil them in, making the recipe especially weeknight-friendly. If you have an Asian grocery store nearby, you can find fresh noodles in the refrigerated section. Or you can find vacuum-packed shelf-stable versions in the international aisle.



LAUREN BULBIN/The Washington Post
Spicy Peanut Noodles With Ground Beef is a fast, customizable and affordable weeknight dish.

Spicy Peanut Noodles With Ground Beef

Servings: 4 (makes about 6 cups)
Total time: 20 minutes

Ingredients

1 tablespoon neutral oil, such as canola or peanut
1 pound ground beef, preferably 93 percent lean

¼ teaspoon fine salt
4 scallions, sliced, white and green parts separated
2 garlic cloves, minced or finely grated
1 tablespoon minced or finely grated fresh ginger
½ cup water
½ cup smooth peanut butter
2 tablespoons chile-garlic sauce
14 ounces fresh Asian noodles, such as Hokkien stir-fry or Japanese udon
Chopped roasted peanuts, for serving

Directions

In a large (12-inch) nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the beef, season it with the salt and cook, stirring and breaking up the meat into small chunks with a spoon or spatula, until only slightly pink, about 4 minutes. Add the scallion whites, garlic and ginger and cook, stirring occasionally, until the beef is no longer pink, about 1 minute.

In a liquid measuring cup, whisk together the water, peanut butter and chile-garlic sauce until well combined. Add the noodles and peanut sauce to the skillet, bring to a simmer, cover and cook until the noodles start to soften, about 2 minutes. Uncover, and continue to cook, tossing gently, until the sauce reduces and coats the noodles, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat, divide among bowls and serve, with the scallion greens and peanuts sprinkled on top.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Q&A

‘I was part of a quite lucky generation’

Margaret Atwood’s ‘Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts’ contemplates her upbringing, literature and feminism

BY HILLEL ITALIE
Associated Press

The cover of Margaret Atwood’s memoir shows a close-up of the author holding up a finger to her mouth, a mischievous look in her eyes, as if to suggest a riddle or two: Is this a book in which secrets will be revealed, or perhaps one in which secrets are kept?

Yes, and yes. “Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts” is a 600-page look at the personal and creative life of one of the world’s most acclaimed, influential and provocative authors. The 85-year-old at times has been called a prophet — a reluctant one — for the repressive society she conjured in the dystopian classic “The Handmaid’s Tale.” And she has lived many lives, as the new book’s title suggests, probing her journey from the Canadian wilderness to the international stage.

While Atwood has discussed everything from childhood to parenthood in essays and interviews, she has otherwise been more at home with understatement than with confession. But after years of resisting requests from her publishers to tell her story, she came to like the idea of a memoir, of sorts, about “what you remember, rather than a biography, which is a lot of things you don’t remember or would rather not remember,” she told The Associated Press.

Atwood writes in the introduction that she wasn’t immune to the “lurid phosphorescent glow” of gossip and score settling, but didn’t want to limit herself to “squalid moral bookkeeping.” Her book is, in part, a story of how a writer writes — and gets inspired. “The Handmaid’s Tale” began with a concept Atwood once thought too “weird”: What if the United States became a totalitarian theocracy? “Alias Grace” was based on a pair of murders in 19th century Canada. “The Robber Bride” is her take on a Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

“Book of Lives” has its moments of frustration, grief and betrayal: One of her most vivid childhood memories, a source for her novel “Cat’s Eye,” was of being tricked by a circle of alleged friends into letting herself be buried in a hole, left in the snow and other ordeals meant to “improve” her. But, as Atwood acknowledges, her memoir is also a story of good fortune. She is a prize-winning author who has lived off her work without having to compromise. She is the child of parents she loved and admired and was the longtime companion of the late author-adventurer Graeme Gibson, a bond sealed in part by a canoe trip to Canada’s Georgian Bay and continued through excursions everywhere from Trinidad to Australia.

Atwood says that mortality is another reason she felt ready to write “Book of Lives.” Her parents are long gone, as are any number of onetime friends and rivals. Asked if she would have published the book were Gibson, who died in 2019, still alive, she says no. She adds that she didn’t struggle to return to their years together.

“I quite enjoyed writing those parts,” she says. “I didn’t like the part where he dies — that wasn’t fun. But it’s real life. And in real life, people die.”

During a recent interview, Atwood also spoke of luck, feminism, the reason for imagining the worst and why she didn’t rebel against her parents. This conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity:

Associated Press: I came out of this book thinking you’ve had a good life.

Atwood: On the whole, yes. I think I was part of a quite lucky generation in many ways. And on the whole, nothing terrible happened to me. Hurray for me (laughs). And I lived in a place where, you know, it wasn’t war-torn. People were not dropping bombs on it. They were not, you know, massacring everybody. And that cannot be said of other parts of the world.

Did the relative stability of your life make it easier for you to explore some of the dark themes in “The Handmaid’s Tale” and elsewhere?

I am part of the World War II generation. And it may seem odd to say that we were a lucky demographic. But remember, we were children during that time, so we weren’t being sent to the war. We knew people, we had relatives, but we ourselves were too young to actually be in it. But it made me very interested in not only the war, but dictatorships in general.

There are so many stories of writers rebelling against their parents, the need to break from them. I don’t sense that’s true for you.

I was a sneaky little teenager. But no, I didn’t have a sense of rebelling against my parents. But I did have a sense of not always doing what they would have preferred. And, their preferences were reasonable. I mean, they didn’t think that being a writer was a good choice in 1957. Only 10% of writers ever actually make their living in it, unless they’re employed by somebody. So my mother said, “If you’re going to be a writer, you better learn to spell.” And I said, “Others will do that for me.”

You write about the girls who tricked you when you were 9. Something that strikes me about that story is how hard it is for me, and probably for a lot of people who know you and your work, to imagine you as naive and easily fooled.

Well, it’s not that I hadn’t known any children, but they’d mostly been boys. And boys are, excuse me, easier to figure out. And sort of simple. But girls are quite complex. Boys have a hierarchy which is predicated on actual things. Who’s best in baseball. Who’s the best at video games? Things like that you can measure. Whereas girls, somebody can be queen one day and deposed behind her back the next. And she doesn’t know why.

You’ve talked about this a lot, saying please don’t turn women into saints. And don’t just say the patriarchy made them do it.



RICHARD DREW/AP

Author Margaret Atwood appears during an interview in New York on Nov. 6. She recently published “Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts.”

You can live within the system and still make moral choices, as many have done.

Especially because of “The Handmaid’s Tale,” people say, “There’s Margaret Atwood, the great feminist.”

So we have to be a bit careful with that word, right? Because I do think words are important. And that word has been over-used and applied to all sorts of things, like “Communist” and “Christian,” just for instance. So there are at least 75 different kinds of feminism and you can find them, I believe, on Wikipedia.

Which type of feminist are you?

The kind that’s interested in equality under the law. So that means I’m interested in organizations like Equality Now, because that’s what they work on. So I was never interested, during second-wave feminism, let’s say 1972, in the part that said you had to wear overalls and work boots. That did not appeal to me. I didn’t mind wearing overalls and work boots, but I didn’t feel I had to wear them all the time.

Did you imagine writing a book like “Handmaid’s Tale” might make it less likely that such a scenario in the book would occur?

Well, all dystopias are warnings. So they’re all saying there’s a big hole in the road up ahead and you better be careful you don’t fall into it. Whereas if I wanted you to fall into the hole, I wouldn’t say anything about it. “Yeah. It’s a smooth road ahead. It’ll be great.”

Your inspirations come from so many different sources. It seems there’s almost no area of knowledge that’s not interesting to you, whether it’s science or

how-to manuals or military history. Is there any field of knowledge that just doesn’t interest you?

Trigonometry.

What’s wrong with trigonometry?

Let me count the ways. I never studied it, and it seems impenetrable to me. I do have a nephew who’s a physicist, specializing in the nature of the universe. And our conversation is fairly limited.

Do you view your life differently now, having written this memoir? Did it make you say, “My life looks a little bit different to me now”?

What a funny question.

There are writers who talk about how writing helps them learn what they think.

I think that comes earlier. I think by the time you’re 85, you pretty much know how you think. And if you don’t know, maybe you should go take a cognitive test (laughs).

Are there any of your books that you look at in particular and think “That was a real peak for me.”

I have never answered that question.

Why?

The others will hear about it. They’ll say, “I spent all this time with you. I gave you my all and let you edit me six times and you’re not even grateful.”

We’ve talked about how on balance you feel you’ve had a good life. Is gratitude a word you would apply to yourself?

For sure, “lucky” is a word I would apply.

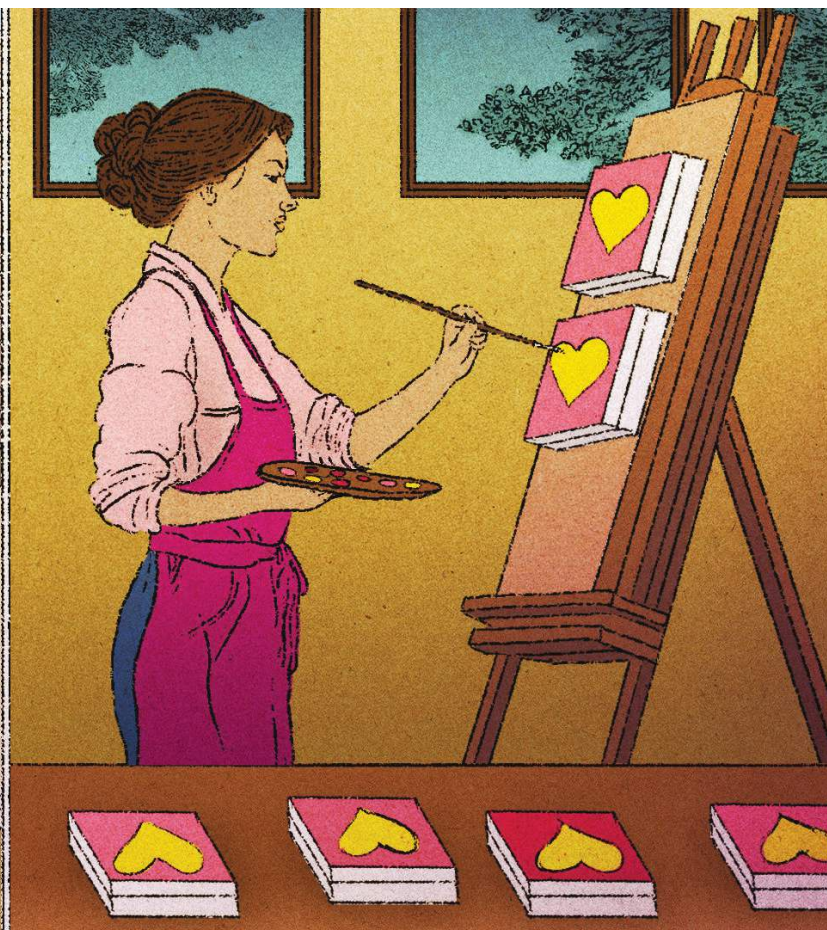
But you didn’t want to call your book “Lucky.”

That sounds like somebody’s dog.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HAMLIN/AP



Building yourself an income ‘safety net’

People turning to ‘polyworking’ to combat frozen salaries and inflation, build different valuable skills

BY CATHY BUSSEWITZ
Associated Press

As workers face frozen salaries, inflation and fear of layoffs, some have decided to branch out from their traditional careers. They’re taking on side jobs to bring in additional income and provide a backup plan should they find themselves out of work, or adding second, third and sometimes fourth jobs — what some call “polyworking” — to the mix.

Take Katelyn Cusick, 29. She beautifies displays as a visual merchandiser for Patagonia at her full-time job. Then she works a side gig managing social media influencers for a German shoe brand for 10 to 15 hours per week. She also has an Etsy shop where she sells paintings. If that wasn’t enough, she ushers at concerts in the San Francisco Bay Area — a way to see live shows for free.

“Every day is different and every day feels like a new day,” Cusick said. “That is ultimately why I started doing all these side hustles, just because I wanted to switch it up. I don’t want to just do the same thing every day.”

The extra income also helps her pay her student loans and manage the high cost of living, a welcome assist since wages at her full-time job have stayed flat for several years, she said.

Some are drawn to side jobs because of instability in their workplace, or the perception that they may lose their income. Still others, reluctant to trust one employer to provide a steady job that lasts, are supplementing their main roles with gig work on apps such as Uber and Grub-hub.

“We have seen stagnant salaries, we’ve seen inflation, we’ve seen the cost of living overall increasing, even beyond our in-

flation measures,” said Alexandra Ravenelle, sociologist and gig economy researcher at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. “So people are looking for ways to supplement and to build themselves a little bit of a safety net.”

Some are creating “portfolio careers” where they work a variety of jobs, each building different valuable skills. In Cusick’s case, side work keeps her social media marketing skills current.

“Rather than having one job that you can have for many, many years and thinking about your career progression as a linear pathway, some people are putting together multiple side hustles based on their skills and interests and making the money work by having multiple revenue streams,” said Elaine Chen, director of the Derby Entrepreneurship Center at Tufts University.

Career experts and those with side jobs share tips on how to get started and what to avoid if you’re considering branching out from your 9-to-5:

Follow a passion

If you’re embarking on a side business on top of a full-time job, consider picking something you’re naturally interested in, since you’ll spend a lot of free time on the venture.

“You have to love it,” Chen said. “Usually it is something that the person is really passionate about.”

For Josie White, 31, that passion was mental health. After struggling with schizophrenia and finding effective treatment, she wanted to help others who have mental health challenges feel less alone.

While working full-time as a fundraiser for Shelter the Homeless, a nonprofit organization in Salt Lake City, White de-

cided to pursue public speaking on the side and began looking for opportunities to address groups and conferences where she could share her own experiences with mental illness “to reassure people that there is hope and a light at the end of the tunnel.”

Be realistic about money

Launching a side hustle may require initial investment, and it can take a considerable amount of time before it generates income.

When White started her side business, she began by offering her speaking services as an unpaid volunteer. She landed some gigs training nonprofit staff and speaking about fundraising, which wasn’t her original goal, but those opportunities helped her gain experience.

Over the past year she’s booked 10 speaking engagements, and four of those will be paid, she said. She’s taken the money she earned so far and reinvested it into developing her public speaking skills.

“The goal is ultimately to get paid, but right now I’m putting in the legwork to reach that,” White said. “It’s starting to snowball.”

Know the risks of gig work

Some side jobs, such as gig work delivering groceries or driving passengers, may generate income right away.

Tom Ritter of Syracuse, N.Y., was supplementing his income as a workforce management specialist at a nonprofit by making deliveries for Instacart and Spark, Walmart’s delivery platform, on top of his full-time job. The side work helped him pay his bills, especially when he recently lost his day job.

“For me, even that extra couple hundred dollars a month went a long way,

and it still does,” Ritter, 39, said.

Ravenelle cautioned against relying too heavily on gig work for income. It can be hard to transition back to full-time, permanent jobs, where workers typically wait two weeks or more for a first paycheck, and gig work carries a stigma among some employers, she said.

Plus, if gig workers are earning good wages, the platforms will typically change the algorithms so they earn less money, Ravenelle said. “The house always wins when it comes to the gig platforms.”

Be skeptical

Once people are looking for side jobs, they should be cautious if an opportunity found online seems too good to be true. Some online influencers promote business ideas that are more akin to scams.

In Ravenelle’s research she’s spoken with people who saw online videos about making money selling microgreens.

“They thought they could make thousands of dollars a month, working from home, growing microgreens in their kitchen and then selling them to high-end restaurants,” Ravenelle said. “No. The person who sells you the grow lights and gives you the classes is the person who’s making the money.”

Finding the time

Starting a second job or career can dig into personal time, reducing opportunities to exercise or be with family and friends.

White works Monday through Thursday at Shelter the Homeless, clocking 40 to 45 hours per week. With Fridays off, she spends that day practicing speaking skills or generating new business.

“I wouldn’t describe my life as balanced,” she said. “But am I enjoying it? Yes. And I think that matters.”

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Meghan Trainor says new album, tour are about growth

By Maria Sherman
Associated Press

In the decade following her debut album, Meghan Trainor has lived myriad lives — but the message of her bright, cheery pop music has remained the same: Stay true to who you are and ignore the haters. That spirit endures on her lead single, the jovial “Still Don’t Care,” the first tease of her forthcoming seventh full-length album, “Toy with Me,” out April 24.

And in true Trainor fashion, “Still Don’t Care” was inspired by real-life situations. “I was seeing a lot of hate all over the world, but I was getting a lot of hate when I started posting more pictures of ... my fitness journey and my health journey. And I didn’t really expect that,” Trainor told The Associated Press. “I would get really upset at comments and I was like, ‘I wish I didn’t feel like this. I wish I didn’t give them so much power.’

“And so, when I write songs, I always write in the perspective of how I wish I thought, like ‘All About That Bass.’ I didn’t feel like that when I wrote it,” she continued. “And all my self-love anthems. But when I perform them and I see how it affects other people, I start believing them.”

“Still Don’t Care” is yet another example, with its maximalist, ’80s pop production and choir courtesy of Pentatonix’s Scott Hoying. Her mom, brother and sister-in-law contribute background vocals on it as well — perhaps softening the song’s gloves-up approach to combating online hate. “You could tear me apart,” Trainor sings. “But I sleep well at night.”

It’s the first taste of “Toy with Me,” which Trainor teases will have a few self-love bops, songs to excise her anger through and lots of familial love. “The only features I have right now in this moment are my kids, Riley and Barry, because I wrote them

a beautiful song, the only, like, slower song. It’s called ‘Little One’ and it’s about how I wish they could stay little forever,” she said, smiling. “When I play it, Riley goes, ‘Oh, this is my song. Play my song!’ It’s literally my lullaby for them. And at the end of the song they say, ‘I love you, Mama,’ and it’s just the cutest thing ever. And that’s when everyone’s crying.”

Trainor said she worked on the album for eight months. “I exhausted myself, and I went a little too hard. I got excited to be home with the kids and work on my songs, but then I definitely, I overdid it, and my body started doing weird things, giving me signals. Like, my tongue started burning one day. And I was like, ‘What’s this?’ And it wouldn’t go away forever. And the dentist was like, ‘Oh, you’re stressed,’” she recalled.

Songwriting, too, was a challenge. “I usually write a song in one day and I’m done with it, but each song on this album took, like, months to finish,” she said. “So that was the only difference from this album than any other album I’ve done.”

A lot of that was because she enlisted songwriters she’s never worked with before — people who would push her to make the song the best it could be — challenges she welcomed with open arms.

The work is fulfilling, and so she continues: Trainor will also embark on a North American tour in 2026 with openers Icona Pop. The Get in Girl tour kicks off June 12 at the Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston, Mich., and ends Aug. 15 at Los Angeles’ Kia Forum.

Trainor’s last tour, the Timeless Tour, marked her first in seven years. It proved to Trainor that she can do this thing again.

“I’m not absolutely petrified like I was for the Timeless Tour,” she said. “I know I can survive it and it can be really fun.”

Rosalía

Lux (Columbia)

Before Rosalía became an international pop powerhouse, she was Rosalía Vila Tobella, a student of flamenco at the hypercompetitive Catalonia College of Music. There, she learned Spain’s folkloric traditions. And then she broke away from them, bringing heritage performance into modern style.

On her fourth studio album, her sonic rebellions have come full circle. “Lux” is an offbeat, full-hearted embrace of her classical training through huge orchestral movements. It is also a demanding collection meant for keen listeners. That is accomplished with the use of 13 languages, a phonetic miracle all performed by Rosalía.

The song “Berghain,” named after the famed Berlin club, features Björk, a Catalan choir, the experimentalist Yves Tumor and the London Symphonic Orchestra. Allow that to be its own kind of provocation: Berghain is known for debauchery; Rosalía positions her “Berghain” as a kind of divinity, singing in a distinctly operatic style.

It’s been three years since the celebrated “Motomami” further cemented her unique position as a genre-agnostic talent, one who could combine flamenco with reggaeton, bachata, future-tech and Björk-indebted ballads. It was clear then that Rosalía offered something truly new, asymmetrical — as well as offering something quite familiar: concerns around cultural appropriation. Rosalía, a white Catalan woman, was experimenting with Afro-Caribbean genres like dembow, and receiving worldwide acclaim for it. But the 18-track, hourlong “Lux” instead delves into a profound contemporary classicism in sound and stylistic Catholicism in content.

Hits, here, are hidden and unusual — “Porcelana,” performed partially in Japanese; “De Madrugá,” with its Ukrainian and unexpected key change; the movements of “Dios Es Un Stalker” and the swaying “La Perla,” which will no doubt inspire fan theories about Puerto Rican singer Rauw Alejandro.

Joys, however, are not hard to parse. Like the ancestral rhythms of “La Rumba Del Perdón,” written with El Guincho, or the ascendant and operatic “Mio Cristo,” performed in Italian. Stay tuned for the break at the end, where the curtain is pulled back for a brief second on Rosalía’s process. “That’s gonna be the energy,” she smiles after a refined falsetto. “And then —” she’s cut off by its cinematic coda.

On repeat: “Porcelana,” “La Perla,” “La Rumba Del Perdón”
Skip it: “Sauvignon Blanc”
For fans of: The classics, supernaturalism, Kate Bush



— Maria Sherman
Associated Press

Mavis Staples

Sad and Beautiful World (ANTI-)

Mavis Staples’ latest album hums with hope that could only be delivered by the 86-year-old American treasure’s raspy contralto.

“Sad and Beautiful World” sees the gospel and R&B icon, who briefly considered retirement in 2023, deliver a peaceful, even-keeled sound that is neither thunderous nor sleepy. Instead, Staples invites world-weary listeners to join her steady march forward across 10 tracks propelled by bouncy horns and tranquil, finger-picked guitars.

The record features nine covers and an original, “Human Mind,” written by Hozier and Allison Russell. On that track, Staples decries “children dying by machines of war” and the sadness of missing family now passed. Yet the chorus finds space to cautiously celebrate humanity. “God bless the human mind / Who would dream the sweet design,” she sings. “Even in these days I find / This far down the line / I find good in us sometimes.”

Elsewhere, Staples’ warm vocals give new weight to the music no matter how familiar. After all, hers is the same voice that helped power the Civil Rights movement with songs like “Freedom Highway,” the 1965 voting rights anthem by her popular family group, the Staple Singers.

Nowhere is that combination of new and old more powerful than on Staples’ cover of “Godspeed” from Frank Ocean’s critically acclaimed 2016 album “Blonde.” Her outro grows even more transcendent than the original with an atmospheric brass instrumental arranged by Brad Cook, the producer behind recent releases from Bon Iver and Waxahatchee.

Staples’ cheerful disposition earned her the nickname “Bubbles” as a child. This album might lack that same energy — but nevertheless strikes an uplifting tone.

On repeat: “Beautiful Strangers,” “Human Mind,” “Hard Times”
Skip it: “Chicago”
For fans of: Nodding your head, slide guitars, realistic optimism



— James Pollard
Associated Press

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Straight from family’s vault

New Netflix documentary about Selena a more intimate portrait of the singer

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

For many, the name Selena Quintanilla-Pérez is the stuff of mythology. The Queen of Tejano broke barriers for women in Latin music genres of all kinds; it’s easy to see the through line between her contributions to the current success of regional Mexicana music. But it’s been 30 years since the singer known simply as Selena was killed at 23 — and those who love her are working hard to ensure her legacy endures for decades to come.

One such example: “Selena y Los Dinos: A Family’s Legacy,” a documentary from director Isabel Castro and executive-produced by Selena’s siblings, Suzette Quintanilla and AB Quintanilla III. It hit Netflix on Monday.

“I do understand what Selena means so many years later, to the Latino world,” Suzette Quintanilla says. “Who better than to tell our story other than us?”

Making the movie

The Quintanilla family, ready to share with the world never-before-seen archival material, reached out to Castro following the release of her 2022 film “Mija,” sensing she might be the correct person to tell Selena’s story.

“Suzette, we met, we kind of immediately hit it off,” Castro says. “We are both older sisters.”

The feeling was mutual. “She was a fan,” Suzette Quintanilla says. “She totally understood the struggle between being Mexican American and embracing both cultures.”

Then the work began: years of combing through and cataloging “floor-to-ceiling, like, DVDs, VHSes, canisters of raw film, flash drives,” Castro says. There were duplicates, too, which required identifying the best quality footage — all the while “trying to turn a myth into a personal story.”

“We call it ‘the vault,’” Suzette Quintanilla says of their collection. “We have everything that you could possibly think of.”

Across the footage, Selena the sister, daughter and person emerged — not just the superstar face of her family’s band, Los Dinos. The moments that meant the most to Castro were the most intimate: Suzette holding a camcorder and filming her sister, a handwritten letter Selena gave to her husband Chris Pérez and scenes from inside their first tour bus, the infamous Big Bertha.

Selena’s mother, Marcella Quintanilla, had not done an interview about her late daughter since her death — and even before, remained largely behind the scenes. For the documentary, she opened up, sharing photo albums and reflecting publicly for the first time.

“I love my mom in the documentary,” Suzette Quintanilla beams.

Selena “became representative of something so vital for me about, like, what it means to be a Latina in this country,” Castro says. “Seeing the home video reminded me that she was just a young girl who died when she was 23.”

Selena, the cultural icon

For those who grew up with the music of Selena as a cultural touchstone, it might seem like her story is well-mined: There is the now-classic 1997 biopic “Selena” — which helped launch the career of its lead, Jennifer Lopez



NETFLIX/AP

The singer Selena appears in a scene from the documentary “Selena y Los Dinos: A Family’s Legacy,” which focuses less on her murder than previous projects. The documentary, executive-produced by Selena’s siblings, features extensive interviews with her family and the members of her band, Los Dinos, but none with critics or historians.

“The most challenging part of the editing process was trying to thread the needle between making this film for her built in audience — which is vast and extremely dedicated and extremely knowledgeable — and new audiences around the world and also new generations.”

Isabel Castro
director of “Selena y Los Dinos: A Family’s Legacy”

— a 2020 Netflix series and much more. “Selena Y Los Dinos” nods to that legacy, but appeals to both the loyal fan and the viewer who might only know her name.

“The most challenging part of the editing process was trying to thread the needle between making this film for her built in audience — which is vast and extremely dedicated and extremely knowledgeable — and new audiences around the world and also new generations,” Castro says.

For those not well-versed in her music, Selena’s public-facing story often focuses on the details surrounding her death. (Selena was killed by her fan club’s president, Yolanda Saldívar, in 1995. Saldívar, serving a life sentence in Texas, was denied parole in March.) “Selena Y Los Dinos” doesn’t spend much time at all with the end of her extraordinary life.

“We do not focus on the murder,” says Castro, noting that her film is about a Latina’s joy and power. “I’m kind of fed up with this expectation that Latino stories are often centered around victimhood.”

“This is about her life, our life and our growth, and telling our story at Selena y Los Dinos,” Suzette Quintanilla says. “The person who took her life and everything that has to do with her death is off the table. This is about what we created.”

Getting personal to tell a bigger story

“Selena y Los Dinos” also makes it a point to emphasize the undercelebrated facets of Selena’s story: her learned bilingualism and bicultural identity, her fight to make it to the top of the music industry as a Latina and her marriage to Pérez, Los Dinos’ guitarist. He also appears in the documentary; their elopement was controversial in the Quintanilla family as Selena was just 20 at the time. (“I’m glad that she did experience love,” says her sister. “I realize now that I’m older, and now that she isn’t. ... I do realize that life is short and we only have one life. So, you have to live it.”) That is accomplished through extensive interviews with the Quintanilla family and members of Los Dinos alone — there are no critics or historians jumping in to provide additional context.

“A huge goal of mine was to try to really take this symbol and make the film feel as personal as possible. And I felt that if it was told from the perspective of her family and those who knew her best, it would allow viewers to kind of have that experience,” Castro says.

Suzette Quintanilla’s hope is that Latino audiences find great representation in the film.

Her dream is that it “continues her legacy, our legacy” as well as furthers understanding of Selena “and what she represents to us as Latinos and to the younger generation. It’s also hopefully to inspire that if you have a dream, go for it.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



APPLE TV/AP photos

Approximately 50-60% of the costumes worn by “Palm Royale” actors (Leslie Bibb, left, Kristen Wiig, top, and Kaia Gerber, right) in Season 2 are original vintage designer pieces, sourced by shoppers and costume designers, designer Alix Friedberg says.



Costumes take center stage

How ‘Palm Royale’ fashions further the series’ storytelling

BY BROOKE LEFFERTS

Associated Press

When Kristen Wiig steps out of a vintage Rolls-Royce in the opening scene of Season 2 of “Palm Royale,” she’s sporting a tall, yellow, fringed hat, gold platform sandals and sunny bell-bottoms, with fabric petals that sway with every determined step. It’s the first clue that the costumes on the female-driven comedy are taking center stage.

The Apple TV show made a splash in its first season with the starry cast, high production values and ubiquitous grasshopper cocktail. Wiig’s character, Maxine, tries to break into Palm Beach high society in 1969 and bumps heads with co-stars Carol Burnett, Allison Janney, Leslie Bibb and Laura Dern.

But also playing a starring role are the vintage designer frocks that reflect each character.

For Season 2, which premiered last week, Emmy-winning costume designer Alix Friedberg says she and her team coordinated “thousands” of looks that reflect the characters’ jet-setting style. She says 50-60% of the brightly colored and graphic print costumes are original vintage designer pieces, sourced by shoppers and costume designers.

“The looks are so iconic. Sometimes Kristen will walk in in something, and it brings tears to my eyes,” Kaia Gerber — who plays Mitzi — told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

More than shopping

If not original vintage, Friedberg’s team builds the costumes, and if a character has to wear an outfit in multiple scenes or in big dance numbers, the team may create duplicates to preserve continuity.

Friedberg says she was lucky to find so



Allison Janney marveled at Friedberg’s talent at finding pieces for “Palm Royale” that are like works of art. “All of them just make me feel divine,” she says.

many vendors with vintage designer pieces in great condition.

“(Bibb’s character) Dinah wears a few original Oscar de la Renta pieces that are really so perfect. Bill Blass was a big one, Oleg Cassini,” Friedberg says. “There’s a dress that (Janney’s character) Evelyn wears that’s this all emerald green jersey; it’s an original Halston and it’s so stunning on her and it really does sort of evoke what’s to come in the ’70s.”

Janney calls Friedberg “brilliant” and marveled at her talent at finding pieces that are like works of art. Some of her favorites were the characters’ après-ski looks in the Swiss Alps — but she finds it hard to pick an ultimate favorite.

“All of them just make me feel divine. And the hair is just a masterpiece, and the makeup — it all goes together to just create Evelyn, and I barely have to do anything,” Janney says.

Costumes can be funny

The costumes also help heighten the comedy. Friedberg says Evelyn’s stoic and deadpan character elicits laughs with some of her over-the-top getups.

“She’s delivering this dialogue, these lines with, like, seven wigs on top of her,” Friedberg says. “The absurdity comes out really in how these women present them-



Carol Burnett says her “Palm Royale” costumes helped her find her character. “I work from the outside in. I have to know what I’m going to look like,” she says.

selves time and time again. ... It was just so much fun to get to laugh and wink at the audience.”

Burnett called costume fittings on the show “great fun” and said they helped her find her character, the scheming Norma. “I work from the outside in. I have to know what I’m going to look like,” she says.

Norma’s signature turban started as a practical idea to help Burnett save time in hair and makeup.

“The first time she put it on, we were both like, ‘Oh, that’s really so fabulous,’ and every time she came out as Norma without the turban, I really missed it,” Friedberg says. “Each time we built her a dress, we always had to sort of think about what the turban would be, and then it started to switch, and we started designing the turbans before the dress!”

Deeper than sparkly sequins

The costumes also help set the tone for the female empowerment theme that permeates this season.

“Evelyn wore a lot more pants — which seems ridiculous to say today — but back then that was a real power move,” Friedberg says.

Bibb had ideas to show how Dinah evolves from her trophy wife persona.

“I knew this season was about her finding sort of her own wealth without a man ... and what that looked like. I always have been obsessed with Sharon Stone in ‘Casino,’” Bibb says — and so they “stole” a bit of that look. “We really have Dinah going into pantsuits and just a different sense of her and she’s really becoming her most modern self.”

Friedberg conveyed the privilege and simplicity of the rich men in the series through clothing as well.

Josh Lucas plays Douglas, who suffers some disappointments this season, reflected in his costumes.

“What if we approach Douglas where he’s always been dressed by women in his life? He’s always been dressed by someone else. He’s never shopped,” Lucas says he posed to Friedberg (who happens to be his sister-in-law in real life). “And for the first time, (his wife’s) character is not doing that, so he only has three hole-filled Hawaiian shirts.”

He’s in fact the rare character who repeats outfits, Friedberg notes. “You can kind of see them, as the series goes along, getting a little bit more and more threadbare,” she says.

Gerber’s character gets a major makeover this season after coming into money. The actor gushed about Friedberg’s intentional designs as Mitzi finds her “womanhood and her power.”

“It was so fun to be able to be wearing these expensive gowns and jewelry and the hair and the makeup, and how that really sort of parallels Mitzi’s inner journey as well,” she says.

The costumes may be eye candy, but Friedberg says each look also carries deeper meaning.

“Maxine wears this dress that was an original Oscar de la Renta dress,” Friedberg says. “It’s very much something that Norma would wear, and it is saying to the audience without saying to the audience that she’s arrived: It’s her time; it’s time for her to rule.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

The #MeToo of the 18th century

HBO Max's steamy 'Seduction' reimagines 'Dangerous Liaisons' from a female angle

By JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

The trailer for "The Seduction," HBO Max's steamy new French-language drama inspired by "Dangerous Liaisons," beckons with "Welcome to the delicious hell that is high society."

And indeed, when most of us last saw the Marquise Isabelle de Merteuil, she was in her own private hell, wiping white powder off her tear-stained face. This 18th-century Parisian socialite, memorably played by Glenn Close in the 1988 Stephen Frears movie, was ruined every which way — schemes exposed, reputation in tatters, shamed and booed at the opera.

Well, "The Seduction" has something to say about her story — or at least, her backstory. The latest adaptation of the 1782 epistolary novel by Choderlos de Laclos, somewhere between a prequel and a remake, retains much of the main story but takes a radical detour into the female gaze.

In other words, "it's the #MeToo of the 18th century," says director Jessica Palud, of the six-episode miniseries that launched last week.

So how does one make a #MeToo version of a society where men had all the power — and the swords, too? Where the only weapons available to women were their feminine wiles?

The show, an origin story for Isabelle (its title in French is simply "Merteuil"), accomplishes this partly by elevating a minor character, the elderly aunt named Rosemonde, into a powerful figure played by Diane Kruger. Kruger's wealthy and independent Rosemonde forms a surprising alliance with young Isabelle (Anamaria Vartolomei) as the two women seek to navigate a repressive Parisian society and "reverse the codes," as Palud puts it, becoming masters of their own destiny.

Also playing major roles are Vincent Lacoste as Valmont (Rosemonde's nephew), stepping

into the devious shoes of John Malkovich from the Frears film, and Lucas Bravo (yes, the "hot chef" from "Emily in Paris") as the villainous Gercourt. In interviews, the cast and director explained the new approach to a well-known — and oft-adapted — tale.

Trying to understand Isabelle de Merteuil

Vartolomei plays Isabelle, the future Marquise de Merteuil, as a poor convent girl when she first falls in love with Valmont, whose trickery launches her onto an entirely different path — into the lion's den of top Parisian salons.

The actor says she so admired the performance of Close in the Frears movie that she felt she had to "take some distance from it." Wherever Isabelle may end up at the end of the series, she says, what's new here is an understanding of from whence she came.

"She's a victim, she's an orphan ... no money, no power, no contacts, no support," says Vartolomei, of her character's roots. "With the help of Rosemonde, she will slowly build her way into pleasure, into high society, and she will navigate them and find her freedom and her independence."

"She's a very complex character," she adds. "What thrilled me is that I can dig inside of her and try to understand her."

Shifting the gaze

Kruger says she was "quite apprehensive" when she first received the script, thinking: "Do we really need another adaptation of a pretty perfect movie and pretty perfect book?"

But then she considered the possibilities of a new approach to the story.

"What really struck me is that as I get older," Kruger says, "I realize that all these classic stories are told to us from a male protagonist, a male point of view. What would those stories look like if we shift the gaze and dive into the female storylines?"

Even if the show portrays



HBO/AP photos

In "The Seduction," Diane Kruger, left, plays Rosemonde, an elevated version of the minor character in "Dangerous Liaisons." The wealthy and independent woman forms a surprising alliance with young Isabelle, played by Anamaria Vartolomei, right, as the two seek to navigate a repressive Parisian society and become masters of their own destiny.



Vincent Lacoste plays Valmont, Rosemonde's nephew.



Lucas Bravo as the villainous, pleasure-seeking Gercourt.

18th-century women finding their own strength, Kruger notes that they were limited to the weapons at their disposal — basically their virtue, seductiveness and money. Rosemonde is getting older, which means she is starting to lose currency. (Her character faces some of the same challenges that Close's Isabelle faced in the Frears film.)

"It was very important who you married, what family you were born in, how youthful you were, how pretty you were," Kruger says. "Women used different weapons (from today.) This was what was available to them. But on the other hand, they also were women with feelings and emotions and rage." Kruger relished exploring such feelings.

Men in 'The Seduction'

It's hard to perceive of the scheming Valmont as innocent — after all, he deceives Isabelle brutally at the beginning, using his aunt as an accomplice. But Lacoste plays the viscount in a

writing a bit of something that's been so iconic for a long time."

The actor feels that having a female director was crucial in casting a completely fresh eye on the well-known story.

"It changes everything, to be honest," Bravo says. "Because the way the eye lands and where it focuses is completely different than what a man is trying, the stories a man's trying to tell."

Refreshing an old tale

True, Kruger's Rosemonde is initially hardly a paragon of female solidarity — she helps her nephew, Valmont, deceive and humiliate Isabelle as a young woman.

But the two women, each needing something only the other can give, form a growing alliance that director Palud interprets as an 18th-century #MeToo moment.

"We have this woman (Rosemonde) who thinks in a certain way, freely ... but finally who is still locked up in an extremely masculine world. And then there is this young woman who arrives, Isabelle de Merteuil, who represents a bit the #MeToo of the 18th century, who is saying, 'With me, it won't happen like that. I'm going to reverse the codes.'"

"And indeed, that's what's happening today," Palud says. "In fact, we have young women who dare to speak more, who dare give their voice, who dare say things, with an older generation who sometimes says: 'We can't say that.' That's what the show is about."

"It changes everything, to be honest. Because the way the eye lands and where it focuses is completely different than what a man is trying, the stories a man's trying to tell."

Lucas Bravo

of having a female director switch the perspectives between "Dangerous Liaisons" and "Seduction"

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Pitching peptides

FDA warming to unproven, unapproved wellness trend

By **MATTHEW PERRONE**
Associated Press

More Americans are injecting themselves with unapproved chemicals that are pitched as ways to build muscle, rejuvenate skin and extend life, the latest example of the nation’s fascination with alternative therapies and wellness hacks.

Behind the trend is the surging popularity of GLP-1 weight loss medications, a class of so-called peptides approved to help users quickly shed pounds.

But the peptides being promoted by influencers, celebrities and wellness gurus are different: Many have never been approved for human use and much of their purported evidence comes from studies in rats and other animals. Several peptides, such as BPC-157 and TB-500, are banned by international sports authorities as doping substances.

“None of them are proven,” said Dr. Eric Topol, a research methods expert and director of Scripps Research Translational Institute. “None of them have gone through what would be considered adequate clinical trials, but nonetheless many people are taking these. It’s actually quite extraordinary.”

Those who have highlighted peptides’ benefits include Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has built a national following among Americans who are deeply skeptical of health experts, pharmaceutical companies and traditional medicine.

For years, the Food and Drug Administration has been trying to crack down on the space, sending warning letters to clinics that promote the products and adding more than two dozen peptides to a list of ingredients that should not be made by specialty pharmacies that often custom mix the formulations.

That approach may be coming to an end.

Kennedy has vowed to end “FDA’s war” on peptides and other alternative treatments that are embraced by many in his Make America Healthy Again movement.

Some of Kennedy’s friends and associates are among the biggest proponents, including self-described “biohacker” and “longevity expert” Gary Brecka, who sells peptide injectables, patches and nasal sprays online for \$350 to \$600 each.

In a May appearance on Brecka’s podcast, Kennedy again promised to “end the war at FDA” on peptides, stem cells, psychedelics and other fringe therapies.

‘Circus’ of products

Peptides are essentially the building blocks of more complex proteins. Inside the human body, peptides trigger hormones needed for growth, metabolism and healing.

The FDA has approved a number of peptides as medications, including insulin for diabetics who don’t naturally produce it and human growth hormone for children with developmental disorders caused by low levels of the hormone.

But many peptides promoted online have never been approved, making them

technically illegal to market as drugs.

Under current FDA guidance, these peptides also are ineligible for compounding — the process in which pharmacies mix made-to-order medications for patients.

That hasn’t stopped celebrities and influencers from touting them.

Joe Rogan, for example, has repeatedly praised BPC-157, a peptide derived from acids found in the gut.

“I had tendinitis in my elbow; I started using BPC-157 and it was gone in two weeks,” Rogan told his podcast audience last year.

He is among the celebrity clients listed on the website of Ways 2 Well, a Texas-based company that offers peptides, stem cells, vitamin infusions and other alternative treatments.

It’s all part of “the circus of unproven, expensive and possibly dangerous” offerings promoted by wellness and longevity clinics, said Topol, who has written about the industry.

For \$99, Ways 2 Well offers a “peptide consult” with a physician, after which the company ships the peptide vials along with a “full kit with dosing, instructions and syringes,” according to its website.

Company founder Brigham Buhler is a former pharmaceutical sales rep. He did not respond to requests for comment.

A natural alternative

Andrea Steinbrenner, a consulting executive, said she became intrigued by peptides after hearing about their benefits for “longevity, repair, antiaging and energy,” from an acquaintance who runs a clinic outside of San Diego.

Steinbrenner and her husband now receive monthly infusions at the clinic, in addition to daily supplements.

“I think peptides are popular right now because we are the aging generation and we are looking for alternatives to modern-day medicine,” she said. “I absolutely believe in modern-day, western medicine— it’s necessary. But there’s a lot of other things in the universe that the Earth supplies.”

Peptide proponents often suggest their products are safe because they are based on substances found in the body.

“Unlike synthetic pharmaceuticals, peptides are naturally recognized by your body,” Brecka told his more than 2 million Instagram followers in February.

Critics point out that the peptides for sale are often imperfect synthetics and are taken at doses much higher than any peptides in the body, raising the risk of allergic reactions and other harms.

Brecka sells more than a half-dozen peptides, including ipamorelin and CJC-1295 — both of which the FDA has flagged for serious safety risks.

Like other peptides sold on Brecka’s website, the ipamorelin vials carry the labeling: “research use only.”

Ploy to dodge regulators

The “research use” language is pervasive across the peptide space, even in forums where users trade tips for buying,



JAVIER ARCIGA/AP

Andrea Steinbrenner receives an IV infusion Nov. 11 at Pure Alchemy Wellness in Chula Vista, Calif. Steinbrenner, who receives monthly infusions and daily supplements with her husband, says she does still believe in the necessity of modern medicine.

dosing and “stacking” drug combinations.

One Facebook group instructs members what words to avoid: “instead of ‘taking,’ you are ‘researching’ peptides.”

Lawyers in this field say the language is an attempt to skirt FDA regulations. The agency does not oversee chemicals that aren’t intended for human use.

It’s often unclear whether such peptides are being produced in the U.S. by pharmacies and mislabeled for research or whether they are being purchased from chemical manufacturers, many located in China and not subject to FDA drug quality standards.

“Research-grade peptides are going to have junk in them,” said Paul Knoepfler, a cellular biologist at the University of California, Davis. “They’re going to have chemicals used in the purification process and fragments of peptides that you don’t want.”

FDA restriction attempts

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA issued over a half-dozen warning letters to businesses promoting peptides with “immune-boosting powers.”

Then in 2023, the agency added nearly 20 peptides to a list of substances that should not be compounded due to safety risks. Pharmacies violating the measure risk fines, legal action or potential loss of their state licenses.

That triggered pushback from wellness entrepreneurs and compounding pharmacies, including lawsuits.

A lawsuit brought by a large compounding pharmacy alleged that regulators had

skipped legally required steps when adding peptides to the FDA’s list of high-risk substances. The litigation forced the agency to backtrack, and the FDA late last year agreed to convene two public meetings of outside advisers to review several peptides flagged for safety risks.

In each case, the experts agreed with the FDA, voting that the substances were too risky to be compounded.

Some in the industry disagree.

“Physicians should have every available arrow in the quiver to treat illness and, because of the FDA’s inaction, they don’t,” said Lee Rosebush, who helped bring the lawsuit against FDA and represents a group of large compounding pharmacies.

Changes may be coming

The FDA, under Kennedy’s authority, recently removed a number of experts from the compounding advisory panel.

That could pave the way for appointing more peptide-friendly experts who might vote to allow some of the drugs that the FDA previously barred. Alternately, the FDA could release a list of peptides and tell pharmacies and clinics that the agency won’t enforce bans against them.

For now, doctors say they are fielding more questions from patients excited about peptides and seeking prescriptions.

“Patients should be really asking their health care professionals: Are these medications safe long term?” says Dr. Anita Gupta of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, who served on the FDA’s compounding committee until earlier this year. “That’s the question I would ask.”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



This September 1994 photo shows Heather Robb, left, and Laine DiPasquantonio, right, at Robb's wedding in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Mass.



Robb, left, and DiPasquantonio pose in April in Denver, Colo., when they reconnected.

PHOTOS BY HEATHER ROBB/AP

Staying in touch matters

Tales of old friends who reconnect show that such attachments have value

BY CATHY BUSSEWITZ
Associated Press

When Jennifer Austin met Molly in second grade, they quickly became best friends. They giggled through classes until the teacher separated them, inspiring them to come up with their own language. They shared sleepovers and went on each other's family vacations. But they gradually drifted apart after Austin's family moved to Germany before the girls started high school. Decades passed before they recently reconnected as grown women.

"Strong friendships really do stay for the long haul," Austin, 51, said. "Even if there are pauses in between and they fade, that doesn't mean they completely dissolve or they go forgotten. They're always there, kind of lingering, like a little light in the back."

Early friendships are some of the deepest: the schoolmates who shared bike rides and their favorite candy. The roommates who offered comfort after breakups. The ones who know us, sometimes better than we know ourselves.

But as adults take on jobs and the responsibilities of homes and families, it can be challenging to stay connected with everyone we've loved.

Technology plays a role, too. Loneliness has increased since the television was invented and intensified with the introduction of smartphones, according to psychologist Marisa Franco, a University of Maryland assistant clinical professor and author of "Platonic," a book about the science of attachment.

Once they've lost touch with friends, some people are reluctant to reach out, fearing rejection. But most of those on the receiving end appreciate the effort more than we expect, Franco said.

"People are delighted to hear from their old friends and open to connections," she said.

Franco suggests reminiscing about a shared memory to span the time and distance. It can be something as simple as, "This pic came up and I just realized I wanted to check in on you," she said. Propose a meet-up. If the friend lives far away, try scheduling a phone date to catch up.

Below, a few stories from people who tried to rekindle lost friendships as they reflect on distance, loss and reconnection.

A missing piece

Heather Robb and Laine DiPasquantonio were nearly inseparable in their 20s, when they lived in Boston. They went to concerts and vacationed together. DiPasquantonio was there when Robb met her future husband and attended their wedding as a bridesmaid.

But sometime after Robb married and DiPasquantonio moved to Colorado, their circle of friends scattered. They became busy raising children, juggling jobs and caring for aging parents.

"It's terrible because you don't know it's happening," Robb, 60, said in a joint interview. "I think it was simply space and time. We were all in different cities; we were all in that busy time of toddlers."

Years passed with occasional holiday cards and texts, but few meaningful interactions.

The women found their way back to each other when Robb, president of Heather Robb Communications, had a business trip to Denver in April. She called to see if DiPasquantonio wanted to get dinner. "I didn't know if she was going to be that happy to hear from me. I actually had some trepidation in reaching out," Robb said.

When she did, Robb learned her friend was about to undergo surgery for breast cancer. Instead of meeting for dinner, DiPasquantonio, a placement specialist at Harmony Senior Referrals, invited Robb to stay for the weekend. A mutual friend flew out to join them.

"I was so tickled that you called and wanted to get together. It was awesome," DiPasquantonio, 63, said during their interview. "What took us so long, right?"

They've remained close since. "It just feels so good. It feels like there was a missing piece," Robb said.

Staying close

Andrew Snyder's best friend since fifth grade lives a plane ride away, but that hasn't stopped them from keeping in touch. They call or email at least once a month and see each other several times per year.

At key points in their lives, they've visited each other's homes "so when we talk about things, we actually can understand," said Snyder, 50, who teaches philosophy and economics in New York City.

Living in different cities means it requires work to stay connected, but it's important to Snyder, who feels that friendships are thinning out as people spend more time looking at cellphone screens.

"Friendship and cooking your own food, and exercising and being outside, these are the things that used to be real life, and now I think they're all fading," Snyder said. "I don't think the real issue is time anymore. I think the real issue is a sense of overwhelm and a sense of depletion that we all feel."

Chance encounter

After Austin's family moved to Germany, she didn't see her childhood best friend for 20 years, until a chance meeting on a New York City subway platform. They reconnected briefly, but contact lapsed again.

Molly's 2021 visit with one of her children to a college near Austin's home provided another chance to restore the friendship. They've remained close since.

"Something at that point just shifted," Austin, owner of KindPoint Communications, said. "Things really picked up and we just basically outright said, 'Let's just keep this momentum going. Let's not wait another 20 years.'"

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Home is where the pottery is displayed

The upcoming holiday shopping season has me wondering ... Do military families stationed overseas with modest incomes stick to strict budgets? When they must spend so much on travel, they don't have money for frivolous purchases, right? Don't military folks avoid buying breakable or irreplaceable objects because they move so frequently?

Negative. Nah. Nope.

To the contrary — military spouses living overseas are often caught in a veritable riptide of frenzied shopping that belies common sense. They travel long distances packed into uncomfortable buses or jammed into crowded minivans to spend money they don't have on unnecessary foreign artifacts that are easily damaged and hard to replace.

When our family was stationed in Europe, my milspouse friends and I headed to Boleslawiec, Poland, multiple times to experience polka-dotted pottery-purchasing pleasure. We scurried to the Czech Republic like ferrets in search of glittery crystal objects to hide in our dens. We minvanned to Soufflenheim, France, to explore new pottery patterns. We endured sleepless bus rides to peruse the rich colors of ceramics in Nove, Italy.

We rummaged through piles of country table linens in charming Ribeauville, France. We hopped the border to Switzerland to swap cash for totes, purses and rucksacks made out of World War II-era Swiss Army blankets. We haggled for Italian leather goods in Florence, Italy.

In the meantime, we drained our bank accounts and packed every surface of our homes with stuff. But why?

Despite the many Polish pottery items that I collected while stationed in England in the mid-'90s, I once agreed to go pottery shopping in Soufflenheim, France, with a friend who was moving back to the States in a month. She was on a mission to acquire more Alsatian ceramics for her vast collection. I asked her why we submit to these shopping urges.

She thought a minute, then produced a guess: "In the military we don't acquire wealth, so we buy stuff from the places we've lived so we can be 'culturally rich.'"

When another friend returned from a trip to Tuscany, she told me that she witnessed fits of unbridled acquisition she'd never seen before, such as one friend clearing a store shelf of every bottle of a particular Italian wine, and another hyperventilating upon entering a leather handbag store. My friend splurged on a Deruta ceramic platter with matching oil and vinegar cruets for almost 100 euros. She told me that, even if she uses it infrequently, the platter will serve its purpose by clearly communicating, "Look! I was in Italy!"

A gaggle of women knocking each other over for a polka-dotted plate may look like superficial materialism, but is there a more positive aspect to milspouse shopping gluttony?

In our 28 years as an active-duty Navy family, home was wherever the military sent us. Therefore, to some degree, what made *our* home look like *our* home at each duty station was the stuff we put inside it. Undeniably, "home is where the heart is," but what if that heart is ceramic and I bought it in Soufflenheim for 13 euros on a girls trip? If I don't own the woodwork, walls and windows, then I should be able to create a home with my teacups, tapestries and tables. After all, every piece I purchased has a story to tell, an experience behind it, a foreign place explored.

Notable people throughout history have pondered what makes a home, and the morality of materialism, but even their famous musings don't resolve this debate. Ralph Waldo Emerson ruminated, "But it is a cold, lifeless business when you go to the shops to buy something, which does not represent your life and talent, but a goldsmith's." However, I agree more with Oscar Wilde who astutely observed, "Anyone who lives within their means suffers from a lack of imagination."

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

SWING STATES

BY AMIE WALKER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Amie Walker is an attorney in Chandler, Ariz., a locale that's relevant to this puzzle. Her starting point was her reinterpretation of the answer at 117-Across. Along with the theme, Amie writes, "I was happy to get to mention Taylor Swift's newest music [at 118-Down], which my three daughters have been playing nonstop!" — W.S.

- ACROSS
- 1 Prepares for baking, as flour

6 Joan of Arc, for one

12 Aruba or Jamaica

16 Pinochle action

19 Popular Japanese beer

20 "Sort of"

21 Exam for a future OB/GYN

22 www.asu. ____

23 Iconic line from Robert De Niro in "Taxi Driver"

25 Have a little snack

26 End-of-Ramadan feast

27 "No other option for me"

28 Early chat app with a Buddy List, in brief

29 Challenges

31 What distinguishes "bet" from "vet" in Hebrew

32 Reminder to oneself

36 M.L.B. shortstop Miguel

38 "Don't see this movie" rating

41 "I've had it!"

43 Seasoned rice dish

45 Prefix meaning "all"

46 Call it a night

47 Something a majorette twirls

50 Part of STEM, for short

55 Animation sheet

56 Form a clump

57 Certain expectant parent

59 A.P. math subj.

60 Intuitive sense

61 Woulda-shoulda connector

63 Very lite

65 Sam of "Jurassic Park"

67 Was gone in a flash?

69 G.I. entertainment grp.

70 "... you get the picture"

74 Elevated seabed

75 Moisturizing product

77 Meme feline

78 Emergency alerts, for short

81 "Don't dillydally!"

83 Gymnast Biles

85 "Sorry, I don't think so"

86 Phillipa of the original "Hamilton" cast

87 Traveler's check, in brief?

89 Wrapped garment

90 Wear for just a moment, say

91 "Put your wallet away"

93 Tournament advantages

95 Show host

97 Any activities on them need to be wound up

101 "Best of" collections, often

105 Circus prop

106 Crate & Barrel product

108 Home shopping channel

109 1990s ABC sitcom about kids growing up without their parents

111 ____ pal (rhyming friend)

112 Leave with no doubt

115 Homer Simpson's dad

116 Repetitive way of learning

117 Telegraph pioneer, or a description of four squares in this puzzle

120 Do a restaurant job

121 The "N" in E.N.T.

122 Like someone who experiences little to no amorous and sexual attraction, for short

123 Wine specialty of the Burgundy region

124 Sponsored spots

125 Hide

126 ____ Cucamonga, Calif.

127 Features of some wineglasses

6 1,002, in old Rome

7 Peace Nobelist Kofi

8 Kiwi or ostrich

9 Like the teams of Starsky & Hutch and Cheech & Chong

10 West African crop

11 Bread for a corned beef sandwich

12 "Treat me like an adult, MOM!"

13 Servings at teas

14 Hold up well

15 Way to get online

16 V8 component

17 "Au contraire"

18 Disappointing firework

24 "The ____ Smith Show" (Apple TV offering)

29 After-dinner brandy

30 Residue on Santa's suit

33 Muse of lyric poetry

34 Bathroom, to Mary Poppins

35 Like a foot that's fallen asleep

37 Pistachio eater's discard

39 Pristine

40 Cookie container

42 "Spamalot" co-creator

44 Scarce

47 Emails discreetly

48 Bunches and bunches

49 Sightseeing excursion

51 Whisper affectionately

52 Howard and Spelman, for two: Abbr.

54 Pet-biting pest

57 Wager

58 Reduces, as anxiety

60 Handcrafted items in a fishing tackle box

62 "Lah-di-____!"

64 Nocturnal primate of the Indian forest

66 Language in which "one, two, three" is "neung, song, sam"

68 "Frozen" queen

71 "____ Breaky Heart"

72 Paul ____, "There Will Be Blood" actor

73 Bunches and bunches

76 Actress Thurman

78 New Balance competitor

79 "Eye" on a spud

80 What strong leadership may be perceived as

82 Former QB Manning

84 Rain clouds

87 "All sales final"

88 Phobia

90 State that spans two time zones: Abbr.

92 City that's home to the Munch Museum

94 Beauty spot

96 Funny O'Brien

98 Athol Fugard novel adapted as an Academy Award-winning film

99 Goads into action

100 Airport near Puget Sound

102 Like onagers and zebras

103 Where you might put on a show?

104 Air freshener choices

107 "Yuck!"

110 Corner chess piece

113 Has an evening meal

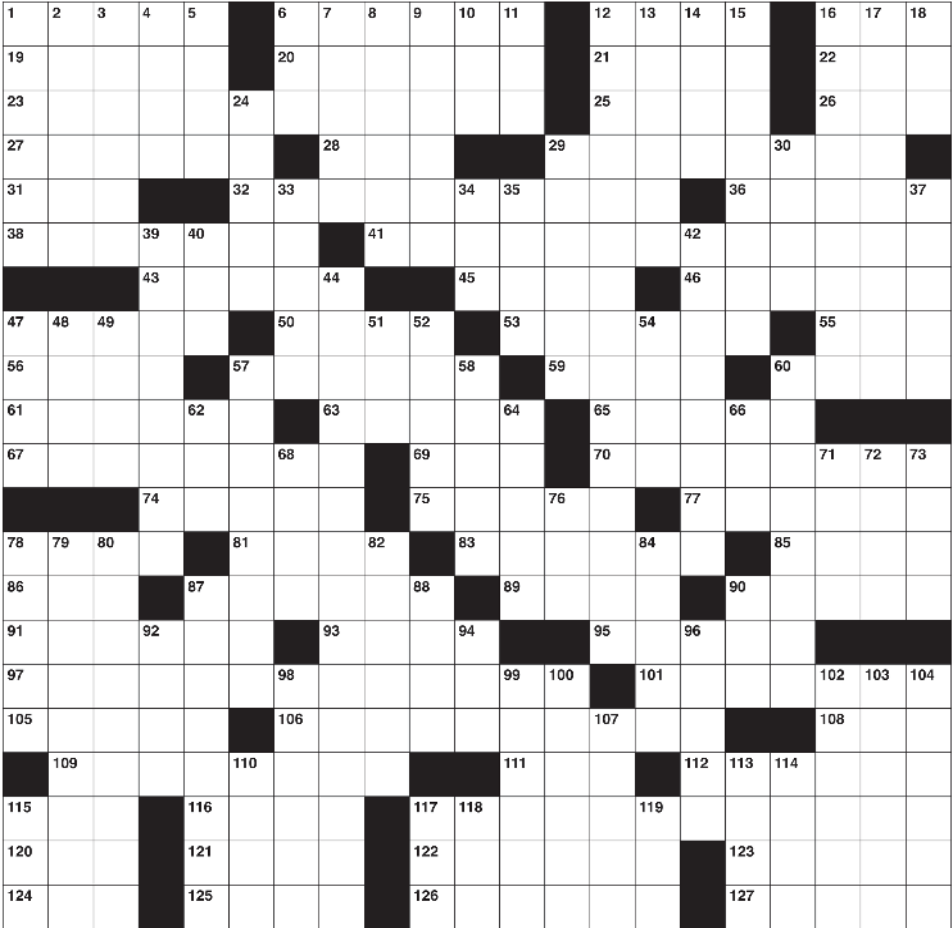
114 Grumpy mood

115 Org. for lawyers

117 Luck-based card game

118 "The Life of a Showgirl," for Taylor Swift

119 Rock's ____ Speedwagon



- 60 Handcrafted items in a fishing tackle box
- 62 "Lah-di-____!"
- 64 Nocturnal primate of the Indian forest
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GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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NATION

Cow cuddling gives boost to mood, farms

By KYLE MELNICK
The Washington Post

Donald Scherber bought a Minnesota dairy farm in 1958. His son, John, bought it from him in 1995 and will probably pass it down to his children.

For decades, the family has made a living selling the milk of their dairy cows. But recently, Scherber's Morningstar Dairy has become known in the Minneapolis area for another business: cow cuddling.

Donald Scherber's grandchildren, Quinci Schmidt and Caleb Scherber, created the side business as a fun revenue source, charging visitors to cuddle their calves for 30 minutes at a time — while classical music plays.

Cow cuddling isn't new: It grew in popularity when people were seeking connection during the coronavirus pandemic. But it has taken on new meaning in recent months for farmers who are looking for extra revenue sources amid decreasing dairy prices in the United States and other parts of the world.

Some farmers train their cows by teaching them to sit and snuggle. Others only use calves for cuddling since they're smaller and learning to trust people.

Once the cows are ready, some

lie their heads on people's laps and fall asleep. People relax amid hay bales by placing their heads near the cows' chests and listening to their slow resting heartbeats, farmers said.

It's similar to having a dog on your lap, said Fiona Wilson, whose farm in Arram, England, offers cow cuddling.

"It's a bit like a cow's spa day, really," Wilson said. "They just sprawl out while people are stroking them and cuddling them."

Looking to expand their family's farm last year, Scherber and Schmidt were inspired to start cow cuddling after seeing Sunset View Creamery in Odessa, N.Y., offered the activity.

Jessica May Hoffman, co-owner of the creamery, said that as a child, she hugged heifer cows in her family's Pennsylvania pasture when she was upset. She wanted to give others the calming experience.

"If it worked for me," Hoffman said, "then why wouldn't it work for everybody else?"

Hoffman, 36, calls the calves that cuddle customers a "Kindergarten group" because they are between 3 and 6 months old. Cows typically weigh 60 to 100 pounds at birth and usually grow to between 1,200 and 1,500 pounds.



FIONA WILSON/Dumble Farm

A guest cuddles a cow at Dumble Farm in Arram, England.



JESSICA MAY HOFFMAN/Sunset View Creamery

A guest cuddles with cows at Sunset View Creamery in Odessa, N.Y.

Hoffman, whose farm has 40 dairy cows, said her customers range from children to near centenarians. Customers sometimes read books when lounging on cows or scratch them in their favorite spots — under their chins.

As dairy prices have decreased

since July, Hoffman said the \$15 she earns for every 30-minute cuddling session has helped.

While bringing in extra hundreds or thousands of dollars might not make a huge difference to large farms — ones with hundreds of cows — the income could

be a help for small farms, said Christopher Wolf, an agricultural economics professor at Cornell University.

The milk supply has increased in recent years partly due to selective breeding — some farms breed their cows so they produce large quantities of milk, Wolf said. Inflation has caused fewer people to eat at restaurants — where people typically eat more dairy products — lowering the demand for those products, Wolf said.

Wolf added that trade disputes between President Donald Trump's administration and other countries — including the enforcement of tariffs — has impacted dairy farms by increasing the price of fertilizer, machinery and other equipment.

"If we have a bad year in 2026, as far as it gets real tight or negative in profit margins, then there will be farms that exit the business," Wolf said.

Advocacy groups urge parents to avoid AI toys this holiday

Associated Press

They're cute, even cuddly, and promise learning and companionship — but artificial intelligence toys are not safe for kids, according to children's and consumer advocacy groups urging parents not to buy them during the holiday season.

These toys, marketed to kids as young as 2 years old, are generally powered by AI models that have already been shown to harm children and teenagers, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, according to an advisory published Thursday by the children's advocacy group Fairplay and signed by more than 150 organizations and individual experts such as child psychiatrists and educators.

"The serious harms that AI chatbots have inflicted on children are well-documented, including fostering obsessive use, having explicit sexual conversa-



RORY ERLICH, THE PUBLIC INTEREST NETWORK/AP

Artificial intelligence-powered toys tested by consumer advocates at PIRG.

tions, and encouraging unsafe behaviors, violence against others, and self-harm," Fairplay said.

AI toys, made by companies such as Curio Interactive and Keyi Technologies, are often marketed as educational, but Fairplay says they can displace important creative and learning activities.

They promise friendship but also disrupt children's relationships and resilience, the group said.

"What's different about young children is that their brains are being wired for the first time and developmentally it is natural that for them to be trustful, for them to seek relationships with kind and friendly characters," said Rachel Franz, director of Fairplay's Young Children Thrive Offline Program. Because of this, she added, the amount of trust young children are putting in these toys can exacerbate the harms seen with older children.

Fairplay, a 25-year-old organization formerly known as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, has been warning about AI toys for more than 10 years. They just weren't as advanced as they are today. A decade ago, during an emerging fad of internet-connected toys and AI

speech recognition, the group helped lead a backlash against Mattel's talking Hello Barbie doll that it said was recording and analyzing children's conversations.

"Everything has been released with no regulation and no research, so it gives us extra pause when all of a sudden we see more and more manufacturers, including Mattel, who recently partnered with OpenAI, potentially putting out these products," Franz said.

It's the second big seasonal warning against AI toys since consumer advocates at U.S. PIRG last week called out the trend in its annual "Trouble in Toyland" report. This year, the organization tested four toys that use AI chatbots.

"We found some of these toys will talk in-depth about sexually explicit topics, will offer advice on where a child can find matches or knives, act dismayed when you

say you have to leave, and have limited or no parental controls," the report said.

Dr. Dana Suskind, a pediatric surgeon and social scientist who studies early brain development, said young children don't have the conceptual tools to understand what an AI companion is. While kids have always bonded with toys through imaginative play, when they do this they use their imagination to create both sides of a pretend conversation, "practicing creativity, language, and problem-solving," she said.

California-based Curio Interactive makes stuffed toys, like rocket-shaped Gabbo.

Curio said it has "meticulously designed" guardrails to protect children and the company encourages parents to "monitor conversations, track insights, and choose the controls that work best for their family."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Suit: Police ‘misconduct’ shielded the real killers

MA BOSTON — Karen Read, who was found not guilty of charges in the death of her boyfriend, has filed a lawsuit accusing members of the Massachusetts State Police and several others of targeting her and shielding the real killers.

Read walked out of court earlier this year after more than three years and two trials over the death of her boyfriend, Boston police officer John O’Keefe, who was found on the lawn of a fellow officer’s home after a night of heavy drinking.

Read was accused of striking O’Keefe with her SUV in 2022 and leaving him to die alone in the snow outside of a house party in Canton. She was charged with second-degree murder, manslaughter while operating a vehicle under the influence and leaving the scene.

A mistrial was declared last year after jurors said they were at an impasse. In the second trial, a jury found her not guilty of second degree murder and manslaughter charges but did find her guilty of a lesser charge of drunken driving.

Instead of Read, the lawsuit alleges O’Keefe was killed at the house party during an “altercation during a late night house party with other defendants after a night of heavy drinking.” It alleges there was a vast conspiracy by members of a well-connected and close social group in the house to cover up the crime. It also accused investigators of shoddy police work, manufacturing evidence and failing to investigate the house for blood, DNA or other evidence or interview anyone at the house.

City pays owner of deaf, blind dog killed by officer

MO STURGEON — A city in Missouri has agreed to pay a dog owner \$500,000 after a police officer fatally shot the man’s 13-pound blind, deaf pet — an incident that led to a mayor’s resignation and calls to disband the local law enforcement agency.

Officials in Sturgeon, Mo., and one of the city’s police officers agreed to the payout to Nicholas Hunter, who had owned Teddy — a 5-year-old Shih Tzu — since the dog was 12 weeks old. Hunter sued the city in May 2024 after Police Officer Myron Woodson shot Teddy twice at close range while responding to a call from a neighbor reporting a lost dog.

The Sturgeon mayor’s office did not respond to a request for comment. Woodson, who has left the department, could not be reached for comment Monday.

Teddy escaped his fenced-in kennel while Hunter was at dinner and wandered into a nearby yard. The neighbor called police, hoping to reunite Teddy with his owner. Woodson responded and fruitlessly tried to secure Teddy with a “catch pole” for about five minutes before drawing his gun and firing twice on Teddy as the small dog was facing away,



BEST FRIENDS ANIMAL SANCTUARY/AP

Guess who’s on the mend

Best Friends Animal Sanctuary small animals manager Sierra Medlin examines the wing of an owl that was taken to the sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, this month after it fell into a concrete mixer.

according to Hunter’s lawsuit and body-camera video.

The city posted on its Facebook page that the officer shot the dog out of concern that it had rabies.

Kevin Abrahamson, Sturgeon’s mayor at the time, initially defended the shooting before abruptly resigning. The new mayor suspended Woodson, who eventually left the department, according to ABC17.

Kroger to close delivery centers, take \$2.6B hit

OH CINCINNATI — Kroger Co. said it would close some e-commerce fulfillment centers and expand partnerships with delivery companies, a shift in its digital strategy.

The grocer said these efforts would result in impairment and related charges of about \$2.6 billion in its fiscal third quarter.

Kroger recently said it would deepen partnerships with Instacart and DoorDash in an effort to reach more consumers and offer faster delivery options. These efforts will help Kroger deliver profitable sales growth, interim Chief Executive Officer Ron Sargent said in a statement.

The grocer said it’s closing standalone fulfillment facilities in three locations and would closely monitor the performance of its remaining centers. The facilities — in Frederick, Md.; Pleasant Prairie, Wis.; and Groveland, Fla. — are expected to close in January, accord-

ing to a filing from Kroger partner, British company Ocado Group PLC. The two companies will continue to operate centers in other cities.

Kroger signed a deal with Ocado in 2018, betting on expensive automated warehouses to deliver online grocery orders.

But even back then, some analysts questioned the gamble, given the less costly alternative of fulfilling online orders from stores and uncertainties around the strategy’s calculus.

Recreational marijuana question closer to ballot

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida elections officials have taken early steps under pressure from activists to advance a proposed initiative to legalize recreational marijuana to next year’s ballot, legal filings show.

The procedural move comes after the campaign behind the issue, Smart & Safe Florida, filed a complaint with the Florida Supreme Court, alleging that officials in Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’ administration were trying to improperly block the measure from getting on the ballot in 2026.

In a Nov. 17 legal filing, Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd argued that the lawsuit is now moot and should be dismissed. That’s after state officials issued a formal letter to Smart & Safe Florida and submitted the proposed ballot amend-

ment to the state’s attorney general.

Those steps represent official confirmation that the campaign has gathered the hundreds of thousands of voter petitions needed to qualify for the ballot, triggering the process for the state Supreme Court to ultimately review the proposed amendment language. Those steps are required by state law in order for the issue to advance to the ballot.

Alleged plot to bribe juror upends ex-boxer’s trial

NY NEW YORK — Three men were arrested Monday for allegedly trying to pay up to \$100,000 in cash to a juror at the Brooklyn drug trial of a former heavyweight boxer, leading a judge to abruptly dismiss the jury as it was about to hear opening statements.

John Marzulli, a spokesperson for federal prosecutors in Brooklyn, said an anonymous jury will be chosen when the trial of Goran Gogic resumes in a month.

Gogic, of Montenegro, was set to stand trial for allegedly conspiring to smuggle 20 tons of cocaine to Europe from Colombia through U.S. ports using commercial cargo ships. He has pleaded not guilty. His lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Gogic fought professionally in Germany from 2001 to 2012, compiling a 21-4-2 record, according to boxing website Sport & Note. He was listed as 6-foot-5 and weighed in at anywhere from 227 pounds to

250 pounds.

In a criminal complaint in Brooklyn federal court, an FBI agent wrote that one of the men charged in the plot, Mustafa Fteja, already knew a juror described in the complaint as “John Doe #1” and called him multiple times. During a meeting Sunday, Fteja told the juror that associates were willing to pay him between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to corrupt the trial, the complaint said.

DOJ asks court to release ex-officer as he appeals

KY LOUISVILLE — The U.S. Department of Justice is arguing that a former Louisville police officer convicted of using excessive force during the deadly Breonna Taylor raid should be let out of prison while he appeals his conviction.

Federal prosecutors filed a brief last Friday before the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, arguing that Brett Hankison should not be in prison. The same prosecutors asked the trial judge ahead of Hankison’s July sentencing to give him no prison time, but that request was denied and Hankison was sentenced to 33 months in prison.

Hankison, a former detective, became the first officer involved in the March 2020 raid to be convicted on criminal charges. But new prosecutors brought in by the Trump administration earlier this year sought leniency for Hankison.

Hankison, 49, is serving the sentence at a federal prison in New Jersey. His release date is February 2028, according to online records.

Hankison fired 10 shots into the windows of Taylor’s apartment the night of the deadly raid, but didn’t hit anyone. Two other officers shot Taylor as they returned fire, after Taylor’s boyfriend opened fire when police broke down the door.

Hankison said at trial he was trying to protect his fellow officers, who he believed were coming under fire from someone inside with a rifle.

Corrections officer slain by inmate, officials say

VA INDEPENDENCE — An inmate killed a corrections officer at a prison in Virginia, the state corrections department said Monday.

Corrections officer Jeremy Lewis Hall, 40, was killed in what the Virginia Department of Corrections called a “vicious attack.” Hall had worked for the corrections department for a year and a half.

The attack occurred at River North Correctional Center in Independence, a town in the southwestern part of the state.

The attacker was not immediately identified. It was not clear what preceded the attack.

The killing remains under investigation by the corrections department’s law enforcement services office.



WHERE HEROES SHOP

All honorably discharged Veterans and Department of War civilians with CAC can shop tax free at ShopMyExchange.com.

In addition, the Department of War expanded in-store military exchange and commissary shopping privileges as well as MWR resale facility use to all Veterans with service-connected disabilities.



EXCHANGE

The Exchange is a Department of War Organization

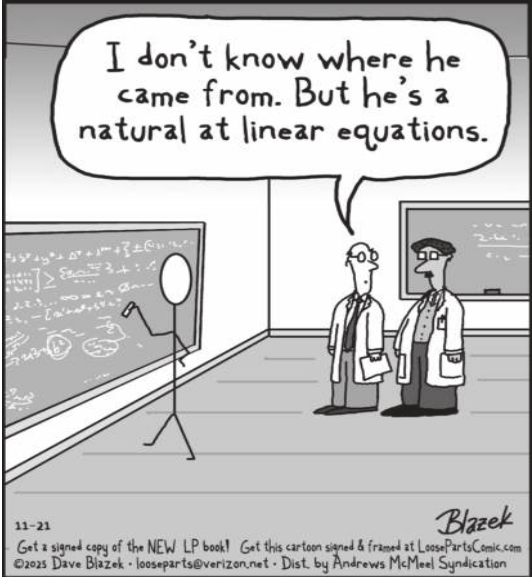
LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE BENEFITS AT
[SHOPMYEXCHANGE.COM/VETS](https://ShopMyExchange.com/VETS)



Bizarro



Loose Parts



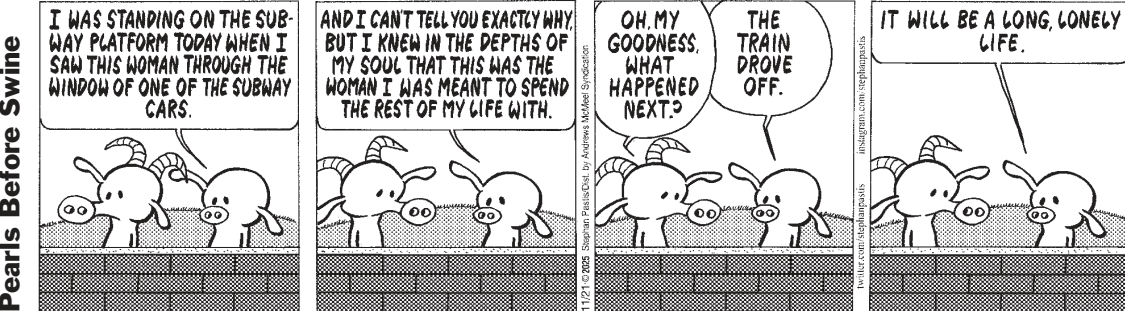
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
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			21				22			23	24	25
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31					32				33			
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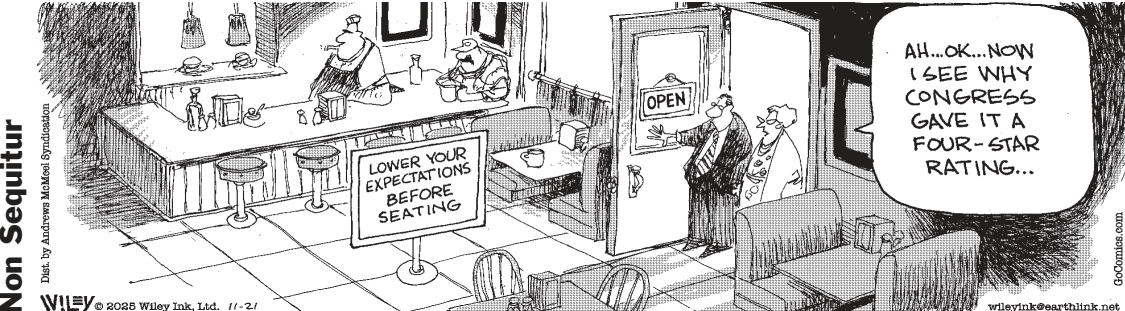
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



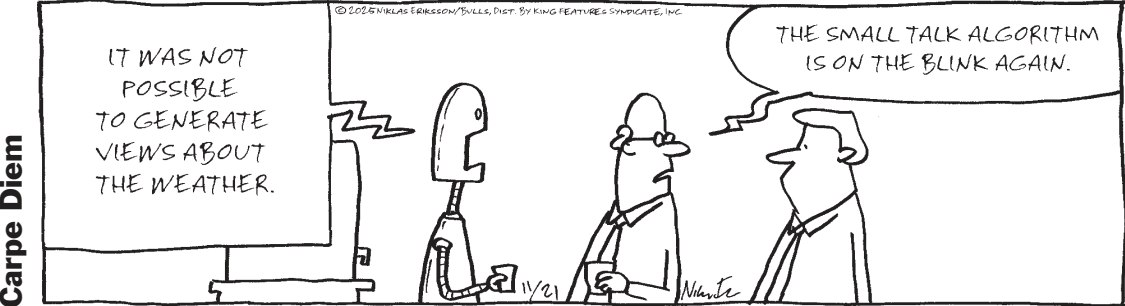
Non Sequitur



Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



ACROSS

- 1 Danson of "The Good Place"
- 4 Wound cover
- 8 Sharp tooth
- 12 Carte lead-in
- 13 NYC gallery
- 14 "On the Waterfront" director Kazan
- 15 Hybrid fruits
- 17 Crystal-tapping sound
- 18 Bassett of "Malcolm X"
- 19 Squeeze (out)
- 21 UFO crew
- 22 More like Unger
- 26 Pottery ovens
- 29 Happy hour venue
- 30 Eastern "way"
- 31 Notion
- 32 Badge metal
- 33 Injure
- 34 Speck
- 35 Apply cream
- 36 Big name in California wine
- 37 Campaign phrase
- 39 Susan of "L.A. Law"
- 40 Antlered animal
- 41 Firstborn
- 45 Ballet leap
- 48 Many a Braves or Falcons fan
- 50 Sty cry
- 51 Source
- 52 French vineyard

- 53 Tolkien creatures
- 54 Sitcom pioneer Arnaz
- 55 Gold-record earner

DOWN

- 1 "See ya!"
- 2 Panache
- 3 "Phooey!"
- 4 Refines, as ore
- 5 Fizzy drinks
- 6 Latin 101 word
- 7 Sunburn inhibitor
- 8 Threw a party for
- 9 "Love Story" actress MacGraw
- 10 Diarist Anaïs
- 11 Joke
- 16 Davis of "Thelma & Louise"
- 20 White wine cocktail
- 23 Slanted type (Abbr.)
- 24 — Grey tea
- 25 Former QB Tony
- 26 Baby goats
- 27 Fan fave
- 28 Jared of "House of Gucci"
- 29 Clothing protector
- 32 Alehouse vessel
- 33 "The Creation" composer
- 35 The Cowboys, on a scoreboard
- 36 Trattoria desserts
- 38 Tech whizzes
- 39 Apollo's birthplace
- 42 Engrave
- 43 Rani's wrap
- 44 Threaded fastener
- 45 Average guy
- 46 Aachen article
- 47 Potent stick
- 49 Small digit

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	A	B	Y		A	M	P	M		R	A	M
O	B	O	E		S	A	G	E		E	L	I
C	E	L	E	S	T	I	A	L		M	E	T
A	L	T	H	E	A				E	R	E	C
				A	X		S	T	E	A	D	
F	W	I	W		D	I	I		T	I	E	D
A	R	M			E	L	L			A	V	A
T	T	P	E		C	L	E		P	L	A	Y
				E	N	J	O	Y		E	L	
K	O	R	E	A				S	M	U	R	F
A	M	I			S	A	R	T	O	R	I	A
V	I	A			O	K	A	Y		A	G	R
A	T	L			N	A	P	E		L	A	M

11-21

CRYPTOQUIP

W G N R X K I Z T U Z K T F K

K S N O D G F L X G U H I M F G X W S R X X

O G M C B A D B G U L R H - I S C O K M G X R X :

“Z K G B R I J J I M C S U R .”

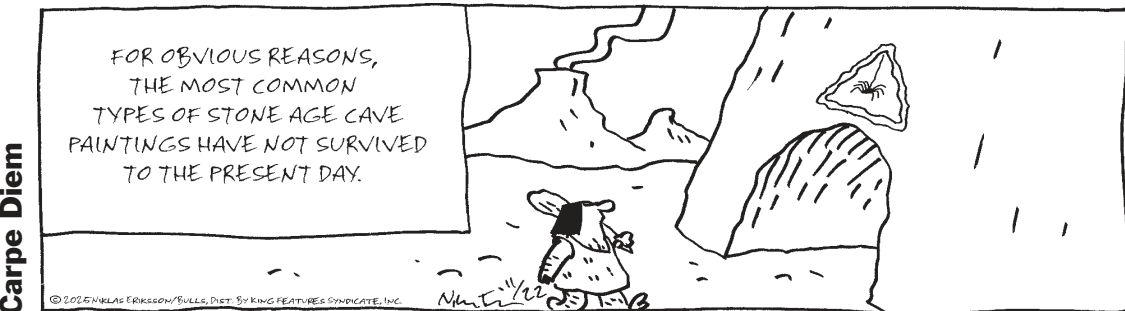
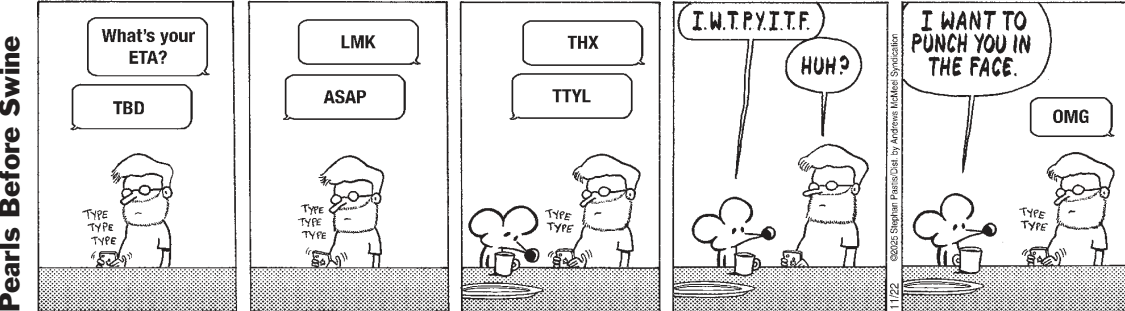
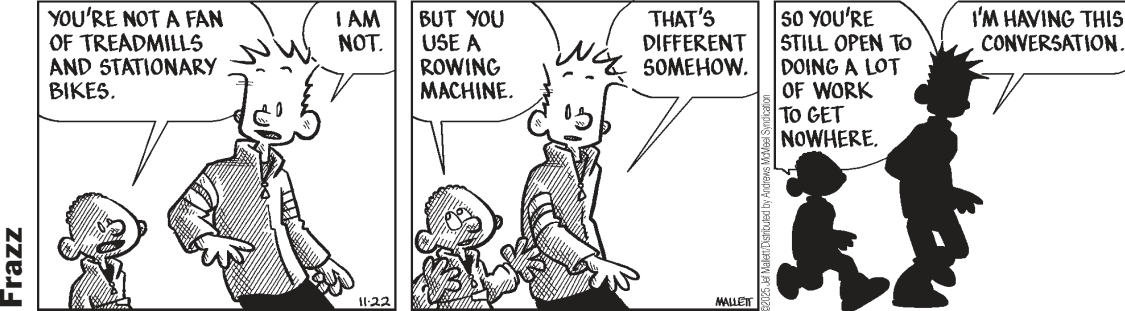
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A SNAKE IS IN THE PROCESS OF SHEDDING A LAYER OF SKIN, DO PEOPLE SAY IT'S SCALING DOWN?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals W

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11
12							13					
14							15					
16					17	18				19		
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32			33				34					
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		38		39		40			41			
42	43			44	45				46	47	48	49
50			51				52	53				
54							55					
56							57					

- ACROSS
- 55 Van Gogh painting
- 56 Feels
- 57 Gave as an example
- 1 Evidence
- 6 Locales
- 12 Swiss cereal
- 13 One way to serve café
- 14 Actor Christian
- 15 Brown pigment
- 16 Conference leader?
- 17 Heroic verse
- 19 Hanoi holiday
- 20 Hayseed
- 22 Comic Gasteyer
- 24 Select, with "for"
- 27 Coal source
- 29 Online crafts site
- 32 Attraction in Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 35 1012, in Old Rome
- 36 French perfume brand
- 37 "Diamonds" singer
- 38 Napkin's perch
- 40 Fed. accident investigator
- 42 Zero
- 44 Ginormous
- 46 Different
- 50 Nike rival
- 52 Tennis star Nadal
- 54 Plaza Hotel girl
- DOWN
- 1 Whine
- 2 Genuine
- 3 Blender brand
- 4 Flamenco cheer
- 5 Stravinsky ballet, with "The"
- 6 El —, Texas
- 7 "— Miller" (Verdi opera)
- 8 Pub brew
- 9 Bach choral works
- 10 Aachen article
- 11 Doc's "Now!"
- 12 Rockies hrs.
- 18 Like some patents
- 21 Ms. Thurman
- 23 Modern, in Bonn
- 24 Resistance unit
- 25 Peace, to Caesar
- 26 13-figure figure
- 28 Mysterious
- 30 Lanka lead-in
- 31 Verily
- 33 Itinerary word
- 34 P followers
- 39 Stage
- 41 Suit
- 42 Burnsian denials
- 43 Not busy
- 45 Exploits
- 47 Emit coherent light
- 48 Feeder filler
- 49 Golfer Ernie
- 51 Insult, slangily
- 53 "Exodus" hero

Answer to Previous Puzzle

T	E	D		S	C	A	B		F	A	N	G
A	L	A		M	O	M	A		E	L	I	A
T	A	N	G	E	L	O	S		T	I	N	G
A	N	G	E	L	A		E	K	E			
			E	T	S		T	I	D	I	E	R
K	I	L	N	S		B	A	R		T	A	O
I	D	E	A		T	I	N		H	A	R	M
D	O	T		D	A	B		G	A	L	L	O
S	L	O	G	A	N		D	E	Y			
			E	L	K		E	L	D	E	S	T
J	E	T	E		A	T	L	A	N	T	A	N
O	I	N	K		R	O	O	T		C	R	U
E	N	T	S		D	E	S	I		H	I	T

11-22 CRYPTOQUIP

RO E GEHWMQJNPC ORYC RY

HMSRPRZW E LJLNGEH SEPCJGRS

LHEVMH, QRWCP RP KM E

CERG QEHV KEYY?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: GAME SHOW IN WHICH HUMPBCKS AND ORCAS GUESS PARTLY BLANKED-OUT PHRASES: "WHALE OF FORTUNE."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals P

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Lt. Col. Daniel “DQ” Quinlan, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Lucas Crouch, Pacific commander
John Albaugh, Pacific chief of staff

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OMBUDSMAN

Jacqueline Smith

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper's independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at ombudsman@stripes.com, or by phone at 202.886.0003.

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OPINION

Stripes’ Pacific origin story lauded by lawmakers

By JACQUELINE SMITH
Stars and Stripes Ombudsman

The fierce fighting raged on the Japanese island of Okinawa in the final months of World War II. In the middle of that horrific three-month battle, on May 14, 1945, the first issue of Stars and Stripes Pacific was published to tell the news.

Not the news as seen only from the government’s point of view. The news reported by Stars and Stripes was for, and of, the military community. What did service members need to know, what was their reality on the ground? For 80 years Stars and Stripes Pacific has continuously published and adhered to that purpose. It is called “the soldiers’ newspaper.”

“From the fiery days of World War II to the Cold War standoff in Korea, from the Vietnam War to the long fight against terrorism, Stars and Stripes has been the eyes and ears of those who serve,” wrote Stripes’ Publisher Max Lederer Jr. in an essay marking the 80th anniversary. “Our journalists have embedded with troops, walked the streets of post-war Japan, and documented the changing face of U.S. military strategy across the Indo-Pacific.

“Through it all, our mission has remained the same: to report the facts, give voice to the men and women in uniform, and help their families understand the sacrifices they make,” he wrote in a special section commemorating the anniversary. “One principle has never changed: our commitment to independent journalism.”

That unyielding commitment and “invaluable” and “indispensable” service is recognized in a U.S. Senate resolution, introduced Nov. 7 by Sens. Reuben Gallego, D-Ariz., and Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska.

The resolution “commemorates this important milestone in the history of an important institution of the United States and congratulates and honors the men and women of Stars and Stripes, past and present, who have so diligently served the United States military community.”

The first issue, only eight pages, was printed in Honolulu and described a daylight 90-minute raid on Nagoya, Japan, by 500 B-29 bombers that must have seemed relentless. The page-one story was from the United Press news wire service; before long Stripes had its own reporters on Okinawa.

Within five months, Stripes was printing the newspaper in Tokyo. It is difficult to picture what that must have been like back on Oct. 3, 1945, in a country devastated weeks earlier by two atomic bombs.

An editorial staff of 19 soldier newsmen “wedged into working space so narrow that typewriter carriages regularly crashed into elbows” in an office area requisitioned at the Japan Times, that only days before had been publishing anti-America propaganda, as noted in a history of the first 40 years (“Stars and Stripes Pacific, The First 40 Years: 1945-1985”). News stories went from “typewriter and teletype, to editor before they were lowered on a jerry-built dumbwaiter, a bucket on a string, to printers” who formed hot lead into words on linotype machines. After a few more steps, the output was rushed by jeep or motorcycle blocks away to the Asahi newspaper press where circular plates were made and the newspaper finally printed.

What would those workers think to see the Stripes of today, which delivers the news digitally in a continuous 24-hour operation from central headquarters in D.C. to Stars



U.S. Army Signal Corps

Yukichi Ono, right, adjusts the printing machine setting while fellow pressman Kensuke Oizumi checks a Stars and Stripes Pacific edition newspaper coming from the machine at Hardy Barracks in Tokyo on Nov. 1, 1956. Stripes still prints at Hardy Barracks.



Stars and Stripes

Artist Shel Silverstein works on drawing cartoons at his desk. Silverstein worked for Pacific Stars and Stripes as a cartoonist from 1954-56 and drew the cartoon “Take Ten.” He would go on to write the childrens book “The Giving Tree.”

and Stripes Europe in Kaiserslautern, Germany, to Stars and Stripes Pacific in Hardy Barracks, Tokyo, to an estimated 1.4 million readers a day? Still, though, challenges remain with delivering the printed paper to troops in battle areas.

As I’ve been reading about Stripes’ Pacific history of 80 years ago rooted in the ravages of war, I find it difficult to reconcile the images with the country I experienced last year when visiting Stripes Pacific headquarters and nearby military bases. All the Japanese people I met were unfailingly polite and welcoming.

The bond forged in peacetime among Stripes, the military community and the Japanese is strong. So much so, that the U.S. military relief efforts involving 24,500 service members after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and resulting tsunami as high as 90 feet, was referred to as Operation Tomodachi, which is the Japanese word for “friends.” (By the way, the Stripes’ headline the day of the tsunami was “Hell And High Water.”)

The legacy of Stripes Pacific includes journalists covering the Korean conflict and the Vietnam War and reporting from the Philippines and Guam, among other places.

Stars and Stripes’ history goes back well before the Pacific arena. The first issue can be traced to Nov. 1, 1861, in Bloomfield, Mo., during the Civil War. Gen. John J. Pershing reinstituted the newspaper as a weekly during World War I and since World War II Stars and Stripes has published continuously in times of fighting and of peace.

Senate Resolution #491 refers to Stars and Stripes “as ‘the hometown newspaper’ for members of the Armed Forces, civilian employees, and family members stationed around the world.” Both senators who introduced the resolution, members of the Armed Services Committee, have served in the Marine Corps; Gallego deployed to Iraq in 2005 and Sullivan retired in 2024 as a colonel after 30 years.

Gallego recalled reading Stars and Stripes while in Iraq — it was the only newspaper they got.

I’m not surprised. So many veterans I’ve spoken with since becoming Stripes’ ombudsman are quick to tell of how much the newspaper meant to them as a source of credible news and a connection to home.

“Thousands of servicemembers around the world read it for the kind of stories that just isn’t covered anywhere else,” Gallego elaborated in a statement. “Now more than ever, it’s vital that we protect independent, trusted journalism for those who serve.”

Gallego gave meaning to the word “protect” when five years ago as a House of Representatives member he joined a bipartisan effort to save Stripes from defunding by the Defense Department. The news organization is within the Defense Department but is editorially independent.

The resolution commemorates Stripes’ service of “honoring the men and women in uniform, preserving our shared history, and strengthening the spirit of the military community,” Sullivan said in his statement. The resolution was referred to the Judiciary Committee where I hope it is approved and will be sent to the full Senate for a positive vote. It will underscore the importance historically and today of Stars and Stripes delivering uncensored, balanced news to the American military community around the world.

NHL

Bedard starts strong for Blackhawks

Scoreboard

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Connor Bedard called his first goal “extremely lucky.” He highlighted Ryan Greene’s cross-ice pass on his second goal. He talked about committing a turnover right before his third goal for Chicago.

The 20-year-old center tried his best to share the spotlight, but his teammates were having none of it.

“He’s really, obviously, coming into his own right now,” Blackhawks forward Ryan Donato said.

It sure looks that way.

Bedard has seven goals and six assists in his last six games after he recorded his second career hat trick in Chicago’s 5-2 victory over the Calgary Flames on Tuesday night. He got his first one when he had three goals and an assist in a 7-3 win over the Ottawa Senators on Oct. 28.

The No. 1 overall pick in the 2023 NHL draft has 13 goals and 16 assists in 19 games this season. He scored his 13th goal last season in his 45th game on Jan. 16.

“What I like the most about it is the consistency in his approach,” coach Jeff Blashill said. “And you know points do come and go; for a guy like him, they come more than they go. But his consistency in his approach has been really good.”

Led by Bedard, it looks as if the Blackhawks are on the way out of a painful rebuilding process. Chicago is 5-0-1 in its last six games and 10-5-4 overall. It didn’t get its 10th win last season until Dec. 15.

“We’re just really determined, and have a lot of fun together,” Bedard said. “We love each other and we want to play for each other.”

Bedard was just 18 when he made his highly anticipated NHL debut in 2023. He was heralded as the new face of the Blackhawks, and he won the Calder Trophy as the league’s rookie of the year. He had 23 goals and 44 assists while appearing in all 82 games in his second season.

By any objective measure, it was an impressive transition for a teenager adjusting to life in the NHL. But Chicago kept losing while Be-



Blackhawks center Connor Bedard celebrates his goal against the Ottawa Senators during the second period Oct. 28 in Chicago. Bedard has 13 goals and 16 assists in 19 games this season.

dard was chased by the expectations that were placed on him long before he entered the league.

That seems like a long time ago at the moment.

“I don’t think there’s a lot of

guys in the league that could say they’ve had the same experiences, you know, as he has,” Donato said.

“Obviously he’s got a lot more pressure than a lot of people in this league. And you wouldn’t know it if you were on the team with him. He’s fun to be around the locker room and one of the hardest workers.”

With captain Nick Foligno and fellow forward Jason Dickinson sidelined by injuries, Bedard served as an alternate captain for the matchup with Calgary.

“The refs were way nicer to me today — way nicer,” a smiling Bedard said. “I didn’t get kicked out of a draw for the first time in my career.”

Showing off his improved speed, Bedard got his first goal against the Flames with 4:49 left in the second period.

Sam Rinzel chipped the puck out of the Blackhawks’ defensive zone, and Bedard took off. After Dustin Wolf whiffed on a clearing attempt, Bedard touched a backhand between the goaltender’s legs while fighting off Calgary defenseman Yan Kuznetsov.

The game was tied at 2 when Bedard pulled the puck inside of Calgary defenseman Kevin Bahl’s stick before ripping a shot over Wolf’s right shoulder at 4:57 of the third period.

“Obviously any goals, made by other people,” Bedard said. “So they did a lot of work on that one. And the first one as well, (Rinzel) makes a great play.”

Bedard added an empty-netter in the final minute from the other end of the ice, delighting the United Center crowd of 17,518. He became the fourth player in franchise history with multiple hat tricks before age 21, joining Alex DeBrincat (three), Jeremy Roenick (three) and Bobby Hull (two).

“I think what he’s doing right now is huge and it’s obviously huge for our team, but it’s something that he can keep doing,” forward Oliver Moore said. “I think the way he’s playing both sides of the puck, it’s leadership.”

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Detroit	20	12	7	1	25	62	62	
Boston	21	12	9	0	24	69	69	
Montreal	19	10	6	3	23	63	66	
Tampa Bay	19	10	7	2	22	59	56	
Ottawa	19	9	6	4	22	64	65	
Florida	19	10	8	1	21	58	59	
Toronto	20	9	9	2	20	70	74	
Buffalo	20	7	9	4	18	58	71	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	20	13	5	2	28	73	58	
New Jersey	19	13	5	1	27	62	57	
Pittsburgh	19	10	5	4	24	62	50	
N.Y. Islanders	20	11	7	2	24	64	64	
Washington	20	10	8	2	22	60	53	
Columbus	20	10	8	2	22	62	65	
N.Y. Rangers	21	10	9	2	22	53	52	
Philadelphia	18	9	6	3	21	51	51	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Colorado	19	13	1	5	31	78	47	
Dallas	20	12	5	3	27	66	57	
Winnipeg	19	12	7	0	24	64	52	
Chicago	19	10	5	4	24	64	49	
Minnesota	21	10	7	4	24	60	64	
Utah	20	10	7	3	23	62	61	
St. Louis	20	6	9	5	17	55	78	
Nashville	20	6	10	4	16	49	70	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Anaheim	19	12	6	1	25	70	60	
Vegas	19	9	4	6	24	60	55	
Los Angeles	20	10	6	4	24	56	57	
Seattle	19	9	5	5	23	51	54	
Edmonton	22	9	9	4	22	67	82	
San Jose	20	9	8	3	21	59	65	
Vancouver	21	9	10	2	20	67	77	
Calgary	22	6	13	3	15	51	69	
Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.								
Wednesday's games								
Washington 7, Edmonton 4 Calgary 6, Buffalo 2 Minnesota 4, Carolina 3, SO Boston at Anaheim								
Thursday's games								
Columbus at Toronto N.Y. Islanders at Detroit New Jersey at Florida St. Louis at Philadelphia Washington at Montreal Edmonton at Tampa Bay Seattle at Chicago N.Y. Rangers at Colorado Vegas at Utah Dallas at Vancouver Los Angeles at San Jose Ottawa at Anaheim								
Friday's games								
Chicago at Buffalo Minnesota at Pittsburgh Carolina at Winnipeg Boston at Los Angeles								
Saturday's games								
Columbus at Detroit St. Louis at N.Y. Islanders Edmonton at Florida New Jersey at Philadelphia Ottawa at San Jose Seattle at Pittsburgh Tampa Bay at Washington Toronto at Montreal Colorado at Nashville N.Y. Rangers at Utah Dallas at Calgary Vegas at Anaheim								

Forward Luostarinen latest in rash of injuries for Panthers

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers are now dealing with even more injuries, including one sustained in a grilling accident.

And coach Paul Maurice, when looking at the big picture, is seeing all of this as a way for the champs to get even better.

Forward Eetu Luostarinen will be listed as week to week, Maurice said Wednesday, with what he described as “a barbecuing mishap.” But the already-shorthanded Panthers don’t seem to have a concrete timeline in mind for Luostarinen’s return.



Luostarinen

“We don’t have a lot of experience with this,” Maurice said. “When he comes back and feels comfortable with the equipment on him, away we go.”

And forward Cole Schwindt, who Florida claimed off waivers last month to help with its injury problems, is now on the injury list himself. Schwindt will need surgery in the coming days to repair a broken arm and the Panthers expect that he’ll miss 2-3 months.

Luostarinen and Schwindt become the latest entries on an injury log for Florida that

already included long-term issues for captain Aleksander Barkov (preseason ACL tear), Dmitry Kulikov (upper body), Jonah Gadjovich (upper body), Tomas Nosek (knee) and Matthew Tkachuk (groin). Barkov, Kulikov, Gadjovich and Nosek all still have months to go in their recoveries; Tkachuk may start skating by the end of this month and could make his season debut sometime in December.

It is not at all what the Panthers expected to start the season. But that’s where Maurice sees opportunity; the roster depletions have forced Florida to change its playing style somewhat, and he thinks that could wind up providing valuable lessons.

“There’s an awful lot of good if you can capture, if you can learn some new things, things that you have to learn to survive,” Maurice said. “And that’s really in some ways what we’re doing, is trying to survive. When you get to seven guys out of your lineup, you’ve got a problem. We can survive that and then learn through the adversity of it eventually.”

“We’re going to have, slightly after the trade deadline, the biggest movement in the league,” he added. “We’re going to get some players back. We can be a better team than we were going into the playoffs last year, if we can learn how to do this. It’s just going to be hard. It’s going to be uncomfortable right now. And we’ve got to be good with that.”

NFL

Packers DBs just trying to hold on

Scoreboard

Associated Press
GREEN BAY, Wis. — With a young quarterback up next on their schedule, the Green Bay Packers are hoping to make the most of their opportunities for a potentially important turnover.

By an unofficial count, the Packers had five chances for interceptions against Jameis Winston on Sunday, and they came away with one of them: Evan Williams' end-zone pick in the fourth quarter that helped seal a 27-20 victory over the New York Giants.

"I mean, coulda, woulda, shoulda. You had five opportunities to come away with interceptions, and we had one," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said. "You guys saw the game. Those were in our hands. The expectation is we're going to make those plays."

The good news for the Packers (6-3-1) heading into Sunday's matchup with the Minnesota Vikings (4-6) at Lambeau Field is that J.J. McCarthy is throwing interceptions at an alarming rate.

Not only has McCarthy been picked off eight times — including at least once in each of his five starts this season — but his 5.7% interception rate is the worst in the NFL among current starters.

"I think in some ways, you definitely are like, 'OK, there's going to be a lot of (opportunities),' " Packers safety Xavier McKinney said. "But I also think that they have really good playmakers, where they can kind of make the game a little bit easier for him.

"From a back-end perspective, we've got to make sure that we're on our job, doing what we're supposed to do."

The Giants scored two of their three touchdowns on Sunday after a Packers defender dropped a potential interception. The missed opportunities also allowed the Giants to run 69 plays, the second-most for a Packers opponent this season.

Both McKinney and cornerback Keisean Nixon pointed out that Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell is one of the NFL's top offensive play-callers. They expect O'Connell to do what he can to reduce the number of situations that could lead to a mistake by McCarthy.

The 22-year-old McCarthy, the No. 10 overall pick in the 2024 draft, was sidelined for his rookie



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Green Bay's Carrington Valentine drops a potential interception against the New York Giants during the first half on Sunday in East Rutherford, N.J. The Packers held onto just one of a possible five picks.

season because of a knee injury.

Green Bay lost both of its matchups with Minnesota last season as Sam Darnold completed 74.7% of his passes for 652 yards for the Vikings with six touchdowns and two interceptions. So the Packers know they can't take McCarthy lightly.

"I don't think he's considered a rookie, right? Second year but (basically) a rookie, you know?" Nixon said. "He's just young. (It's) hard for guys to come in and just excel right away. But he's definitely a good player. He's got the arm talent. He has a hell of a coach. That always helps. Scheme up a lot of guys."

McKinney said he didn't impose any punishments on his fellow defensive backs for their drops — Nixon blamed McKinney for tipping the one he couldn't hold onto — but emphasized how those



**Minnesota Vikings (4-6)
at Green Bay Packers (6-3)**

AFN-Atlantic
7:00 p.m. Sunday CET
3:00 a.m. Monday JKT

missed opportunities can be costly.

He also believes the opportunities the defense had against the Giants are a sign of things to come.

"The picks are going to come. Just, believe me when I tell you. The. Picks. Will. Come," McKinney said.

"It's just not all the way there right now. But they will come, and

when they do, I'm going to come back to the camera like, 'I told you.' It's going to happen. Sometimes, you've got be patient. And once they do come, we've just got to make them."

Notes: Running back Josh Jacobs, who bruised a knee against the Giants, was one of five players who didn't practice on Wednesday. If Jacobs can't go against the Vikings, third-year back Emanuel Wilson would start in his place. ... Starting middle linebacker Quay Walker, who suffered a neck stinger against the Giants, also didn't practice. ... The Packers haven't yet opened up the 21-day practice window for wide receiver Jayden Reed, who remains on injured reserve after breaking his collarbone Sept. 11 against Washington.

"He's excited to get back," LaFleur said of Reed. "As am I."

American Conference

East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
New England	9	2	0	.818	292	206
Buffalo	7	3	0	.700	292	229
Miami	4	7	0	.364	226	269
N.Y. Jets	2	8	0	.200	209	268

South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Indianapolis	8	2	0	.800	321	206
Jacksonville	6	4	0	.600	240	226
Houston	5	5	0	.500	220	163
Tennessee	1	9	0	.100	143	273

North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	6	4	0	.600	246	232
Baltimore	5	5	0	.500	252	251
Cincinnati	3	7	0	.300	228	334
Cleveland	2	8	0	.200	162	234

West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Denver	9	2	0	.818	257	192
L.A. Chargers	7	4	0	.636	246	238
Kansas City	5	5	0	.500	254	181
Las Vegas	2	8	0	.200	155	253

National Conference

East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	8	2	0	.800	234	201
Dallas	4	5	1	.450	296	293
Washington	3	8	0	.273	236	296
N.Y. Giants	2	9	0	.182	237	300

South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	6	4	0	.600	252	250
Carolina	6	5	0	.545	207	249
Atlanta	3	7	0	.300	195	239
New Orleans	2	8	0	.200	155	250

North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Chicago	7	3	0	.700	258	264
Green Bay	6	3	1	.650	240	196
Detroit	6	4	0	.600	292	216
Minnesota	4	6	0	.400	218	232

West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	8	2	0	.800	272	172
Seattle	7	3	0	.700	294	193
San Francisco	7	4	0	.636	261	252
Arizona	3	7	0	.300	224	256

Thursday's game

Buffalo at Houston

Sunday's games

Indianapolis at Kansas City
Minnesota at Green Bay
N.Y. Giants at Detroit
N.Y. Jets at Baltimore
New England at Cincinnati
Pittsburgh at Chicago
Seattle at Tennessee
Cleveland at Las Vegas
Jacksonville at Arizona
Atlanta at New Orleans
Philadelphia at Dallas
Tampa Bay at L.A. Rams
Open: Denver, L.A. Chargers, Miami, Washington

Monday's game

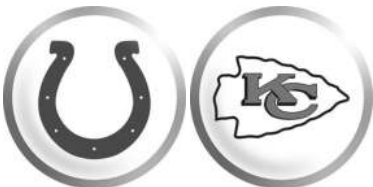
Carolina at San Francisco

Thursday, Nov. 27

Green Bay at Detroit
Kansas City at Dallas
Cincinnati at Baltimore

Friday, Nov. 28

Chicago at Philadelphia



**Indianapolis Colts (8-2)
at Kansas City Chiefs (5-5)**
AFN-Sports2
7:00 p.m. Sunday CET
3:00 a.m. Monday JKT



**Pittsburgh Steelers (6-4)
at Chicago Bears (7-3)**
AFN-Sports
7:00 p.m. Sunday CET
3:00 a.m. Monday JKT



**Philadelphia Eagles (8-2)
at Dallas Cowboys (4-5)**
AFN-Atlantic
10:30 p.m. Sunday CET
6:30 a.m. Monday JKT



**Jacksonville Jaguars (6-4)
at Arizona Cardinals (3-7)**
AFN-Sports
10:00 p.m. Sunday CET
6:00 a.m. Monday JKT



**Cleveland Browns (2-8)
at Las Vegas Raiders (2-8)**
AFN-Sports2
10:00 p.m. Sunday CET
6:00 a.m. Monday JKT

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

BYU-Cincinnati could spell chaos for Big 12

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Utah coach Kyle Whittingham turns 66 on Friday and certainly wouldn't mind a belated birthday present from Cincinnati. It would be a gift for several teams around the Big 12, actually.

Because if the Bearcats knock off No. 11 BYU at home on Saturday night, the door opens for chaos in the conference standings.

Assume, for the sake of argument, that No. 6 Texas Tech (10-1, 7-1) — off this weekend — grabs the top seed. And assume, again for the sake of argument, that the Cougars (9-1, 6-1) fall, there could theoretically be a five-way tie for the other spot in the title game.

So, yeah, those teams with two conference losses — that's BYU, No. 13 Utah (8-2, 5-2), No. 25 Houston (8-2, 5-2), Arizona State (7-3, 5-2) and Cincy (7-3, 5-2) — have a lot invested in Saturday. If five teams were to be tied, the tiebreaker scenarios could become quite complex.

Cougars coach Kalani Sitake has an ideal way to avoid all the clutter — just keeping winning.

"That really," Sitake said, "is the best style to me."

The spotlight will certainly be on this game, with Fox's Big Noon Kickoff pregame showing up in Cincinnati. BYU, which is a 2½-point favorite, has won 13 of its last 16 conference games since 2024.

"We need to make sure that we don't let this win make us hot-headed," Cougars running back LJ



GEORGE FREY/AP

BYU running back LJ Martin is tackled by TCU cornerback Channing Canada on Nov. 15 in Provo, Utah. If the Cougars lose to Cincinnati, it could lead to a five-way tie for a spot in the Big 12 title game.

Martin said after a 44-13 win over TCU. "The preparation doesn't change for Cincinnati. If we do what we just did this past week, we will be all right."

The Bearcats, led by quarterback Brendan Sorsby, had won seven in a row before dropping their last two games.

"There's a lot riding on these games at the end of the year, espe-

cially when you're playing teams that are in the mix," Sitake said. "We know that. We understand that."

The Big 12 championship Dec. 6 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, would see two new teams in Texas Tech and BYU. The Red Raiders, who own the tiebreaker over the Cougars, are firmly in the driver's seat with a bye this week

before finishing at West Virginia on Nov. 29. They can wrap up a spot with a loss by Arizona State (at Colorado) and a BYU win. Another clinching scenario for Texas Tech is if Arizona State, the Cougars and Utah (the Utes host Kansas State) all lose.

"They know," Red Raiders coach Joey McGuire said of his players and what's potentially at



**No. 11 BYU (9-1)
at Cincinnati (7-3)**
AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Sunday CET
10 a.m. Sunday JKT

stake this weekend. "There's not going to be anything that I need to tell these dudes other than, 'Guys, no matter what anyone else does, if we win in two weeks, we're in Dallas.' They will be really focused on that."

BYU is also in control of earning a spot. It can clinch with a win over Cincinnati and losses by the Sun Devils and Houston (the Cougars host TCU). Another way is a win coupled with an ASU loss and a Utah win.

The Cougars play UCF to close out the regular season. Winning with ease the next two weeks would go a long way in making an impression on the College Football Playoff selection committee. Only don't bring that up to Sitake, whose team sits behind several two-loss teams.

"When I say I don't really pay attention to it, I know it exists. I'm not dumb. I know all the stuff that's out there," Sitake said. "I know what people are saying and the metrics and analytics and style points and all that stuff. My focus is not on that."

Georgia Tech-Pitt prime-time game to have CFP implications

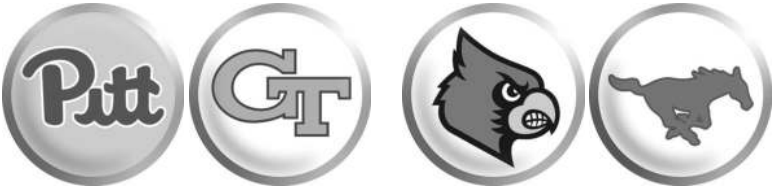
By ALAN COLE
Associated Press

ATLANTA — A shot at the College Football Playoff is on the line for both No. 15 Georgia Tech and Pittsburgh ahead of a prime-time matchup Saturday night.

The Yellow Jackets (9-1, 6-1) will clinch a spot in the Atlantic Coast Conference title game Dec. 6 if they beat the Panthers (7-3, 5-1), while a Pitt victory would keep it alive for the same goal heading into its regular-season finale against No. 14 Miami.

"This is a championship game in its own right," Georgia Tech coach Brent Key said Tuesday. "That's the way we're viewing it, that's the way we're approaching it. It's on everybody to get the job done."

Regardless of the outcome, the ACC standings remain in flux. No. 19 Virginia, SMU, Miami and Duke are all in the mix for the title game, but the Yellow Jackets are the only team completely in control of their destiny.



**Pittsburgh (7-3)
at No. 16 Georgia Tech (9-1)**
AFN-Sports2
1 a.m. Sunday CET
9 a.m. Sunday JKT

**Louisville (7-3)
at SMU (7-3)**
AFN-Atlantic
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

Key said simply put, games this time of year are "different," and he doesn't "shy away from that."

Georgia Tech trailed Boston College (1-10, 0-7) 28-17 late in its game last week, but rallied to escape with a 36-34 victory. Still, the scare against the conference cellar dweller coupled with a Nov. 1 loss at N.C. State has created an uneasy feeling around the Yellow Jackets, particularly with their struggling defense.

Georgia Tech leads the Football Bowl Subdivision in total offense,

but resides near the bottom of 136 teams in total defense.

"I got after them pretty good," Key said of his defense. "But it's telling them, 'You're good. Let's fix it and go play that way.'"

Pittsburgh is coming off a disappointing game in its own right, albeit one with no bearing on ACC positioning. The Panthers stepped out of conference play and fell flat in a 37-15 defeat against No. 9 Notre Dame, but would still reach the conference title game with wins in their final two games plus



MARK STOCKWELL/AP

Georgia Tech running back Malachi Hosley, center, runs the ball during the first half against Boston College on Nov. 15 in Boston.

one loss by either Virginia or SMU.

"We just take it one game at a time," Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi said. "We treat everything the same. The word pressure is bad. Our guys know what they've got to

do. They've got to go out and win one football game."

The Panthers are seeking their third trip to the ACC title game under Narduzzi and first since 2021, while Georgia Tech is aiming for its first appearance since 2014.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Leading: Aggies QB looks to establish personal relationships with teammates

FROM PAGE 48

To that end, he made it a priority to know the names of everyone in the locker room from the stars to the walk-ons. And he's not simply memorizing names. He works to establish a relationship with each player, something he learned from his father Rod Reed, a former Tennessee State coach.

"I try to make it known who I am as a person, not just a football player," he said.

Teammates often rave about Reed's leadership and credit him for much of Texas A&M's success this season.

"Marcel has turned around this program for sure," said linebacker Taurean York, one of the team's three captains. "He's the leader on the forefront of it and he's out there playing his best in the biggest moments and that's something that you can't measure."

He's also impressed those who have been in his shoes in the past. Jerrod Johnson, the Aggies QB from 2007-10 who is currently the Houston Texans quarterbacks coach, said Reed is everything you want at the position.

"Just his command of the offense, he just looks like he's in complete control," Johnson said. "You can see he looks a lot more comfortable. You can see his anticipation is a lot better than last year. But just big picture wise, man, you can see he's a leader of that team."

Johnson, whose late father Larry Johnson also played football at A&M, knows the pressure of lead-

ing a major college team and can only imagine how much more difficult it is in the current landscape of college football.

"It's a privilege to play at Texas A&M," Johnson said. "I was two generations at it and I never took the opportunity to run out in Kyle Field and lead the Aggies lightly. And I can tell he cares about Texas A&M, he cares about his teammates and he has a sense of appreciation and importance of the position he's in. Being the starting quarterback for Texas A&M is a huge deal and he's making the most of it and we're all rooting for him."

Establishing himself

Reed made a name for himself as a dual-threat quarterback after throwing for more than 6,000 yards and 62 touchdowns, while rushing for over 2,000 yards and 38 more scores in high school. Last season, he threw for 1,864 yards with 15 touchdowns and six interceptions and added 543 yards rushing and seven TDs.

When the Aggies struggled down the stretch last year, losing three of their last four games to fall out of contention for the College Football Playoff, many criticized Reed for not being a strong enough passer. Though he said the criticism didn't bother him because he knew what he was capable of, he spent much of the offseason working on improving his passing skills and it's clear his hard work paid off.

This year, he's thrown for 2,632 yards and leads the Southeastern

Conference with 22 touchdown passes.

Reggie McNeal, who threw for 6,992 yards and ran for 1,889 yards for Texas A&M from 2002-05, sees many similarities between himself and Reed. Though McNeal finished his Aggies career before Reed was out of diapers, Reed named McNeal as one of A&M's former quarterbacks that have inspired him.

"What he's probably got more of than I had was the shiftiness," McNeal said. "I made people miss but he's more shiftier than I am. ... So it's a joy to watch him play and it's so similar to the things that I used to do back when I played. And the offense that he gets to play in is top notch and it fits him perfectly."

McNeal has been impressed with how Reed has developed as a passer.

"Each week he's gotten better," McNeal said. "You hear people talking and he is quieting all the talk down week by week. ... So I mean the kid — he's a player."

Bringing an edge

In addition to the other qualities that have elevated the quarterback this season, Reed has helped bring an edge to Texas A&M that it lacked in recent years. He ruffled some feathers after the Aggies cleared out the stadium with a 49-25 rout of LSU last month when he said Death Valley "didn't do much to me."

Reed doesn't care if people were bothered by his comments.

"If it does, then do something better so it don't irk you," he said. "That's not my problem."



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Texas A&M quarterback Marcel Reed celebrates with coach Mike Elko after a come-from-behind win over South Carolina on Nov. 15.

Last week, Reed was asked about past Heisman moments as he enters the final two weeks of the regular season as A&M's first contender for the trophy since Johnny Manziel won it in 2012. He mentioned Cam Newton and Manziel.

Then on Saturday, after the Aggies fell into a 30-3 hole to South Carolina at halftime after three turnovers by Reed, it looked like his Heisman hopes and possibly Texas A&M's chances to make the playoff for the first time were slipping away.

Instead, Reed had what could be his Heisman moment by spearheading the biggest comeback in school history in a 31-30 victory. He finished with a career-high 439 yards passing, including 316 yards and three touchdowns in the second half to earn Associated Press player of the week honors.

"That probably should hold a lot of stock with Heisman voters, I would hope," coach Mike Elko said. "He has elevated himself

week in and week out. When we've needed him to step up and make plays to win football games, he's done it. There's been a lot made of some other people across the country when they've had opportunities to step up and make plays, and they were rewarded for it. I'd like to see our quarterback rewarded for it the same way."

Reed is happy to be gaining more recognition as the Aggies chase their first national title since 1939. But he's far more focused on helping A&M continue its perfect season and setting an example for those who come after him.

"It's cool to be the person that you always dreamt of being," he said. "I wanted to be a college football player and succeeding at the highest level. And there are people before me who I looked up to, so it's just great to be in this position and have other people look up to me. And I try my best every day to go out there and put on a great example for the younger ones."

STARS AND STRIPES

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The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

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944

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Top 25 games in SEC, Big Ten to have major impact on CFP races

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Two matchups of Associated Press Top 25 teams will have College Football Playoff implications Saturday, and a bevy of other games will impact conference races.

No. 16 Southern California heads to No. 6 Oregon for what will essentially be a battle for the third spot in the Big Ten's CFP pecking order behind Ohio State and Indiana. No. 23 Missouri visits No. 8 Oklahoma, a game the two-loss Sooners need to win to further strengthen their position for a bid.

With two weeks left in the regular season, six teams remain alive for spots in the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game. The game to watch is Pittsburgh at No. 15 Georgia Tech, which would lock up a spot in Charlotte with a win.

No. 11 BYU plays at Cincinnati in the Big 12's top game. The Cougars and No. 6 Texas Tech have the inside track to the conference title game. BYU would clinch Saturday if Arizona State (at Colorado) and Houston (vs. TCU) lose their games. The Red Raiders have an open date before finishing at West Virginia.

No. 3 Texas A&M and No. 10 Alabama are first in line for the Southeastern Conference championship game with Georgia and Mississippi still alive. Nothing will be solved until next week, though, because the Rebels have an open date and the other three teams are playing non-conference games.

No. 1 Ohio State and No. 2 Indiana remain on a collision course in the Big Ten. Oregon and USC still have improbable paths to the title game, and so does No. 18 Michigan.

No. 22 North Texas controls its destiny in the American. The Mean

Green hold the tie-breaker over Navy and would play for the title if they win out against Rice (road) and Temple (home). The Midshipmen are in if they win at Memphis next week. Tulane must win out and have UNT or Navy lose.

The Ducks and Trojans are meeting for the first time since they moved from the Pac-12 to the Big Ten last year and their first as ranked opponents since 2015. The key matchup is USC's top-10 offense against Oregon's third-ranked defense.

Nothing has come easily for the Trojans since their loss at Notre Dame. Nebraska gave them a four-quarter game, Northwestern pushed them into the second half and they had to come back from a 14-point deficit late in the first half to beat Iowa.

The Ducks had an extra day to prepare for this game after easily handling Minnesota a week after escaping Iowa with a win on a field goal with three seconds left.

Flying under the radar, No. 21 James Madison has already locked up a spot in the Sun Belt Conference championship game and is a serious contender for the Group of Five's automatic CFP bid. The Dukes have one loss, to Louisville, so that makes their nonconference game against Washington State crucial. The selection committee almost certainly won't take a two-loss team from the Sun Belt.

JMU is a 13½-point favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, but this is not a gimme. The Cougars have beaten Mountain West-leading San Diego State and have two road losses by a combined five points against then-No. 4 Mississippi and then-No. 18 Virginia.



PAUL BEATY/AP

Jeremiah Love, center, could be the first Notre Dame running back to win the Heisman Trophy since 1953.

Notre Dame's Love chasing bigger goals beyond Heisman

By CURT RALLO
Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame running back Jeremiah Love appreciates hearing his name in the Heisman Trophy conversation.

He's just focused on bigger goals such as helping the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish stay in position for a second straight playoff berth and winning the school's first national championship since 1988.

"I try to keep everything just straight as possible," he said. "I definitely see stuff, and it's good to see. That's also a tribute — the buzz — to us doing good as a program in general, because at end of the day, this is a team sport, and the performances are not really just because of me. It's because the whole team is playing complementary football. So it's great to see, but we have to finish the rest of the season."

Love certainly has done his part to help Notre Dame (8-2, No. 9 CFP) rebound from two straight losses to start the season by winning eight straight to put the Irish back in the postseason debate.

He ranks third in the Football Bowl Subdivision with 113.5 yards rushing per game, 17 total touchdowns and 1,409 scrimmage yards — the only player to appear in the top three of each category. He's also the first player in Notre Dame's storied history to produce multiple TD runs of 90 or more yards, a 98-yarder against Indiana in the first round of last year's playoffs

and a 94-yarder against Boston College earlier this season.

But Love's impact goes far beyond numbers.

He's padded his Heisman resume with a series of highlights displaying an uncanny ability to maintain his balance while hurdling defenders, spinning out of tackles or rolling off opponents. He's also managed to team up with Jadarian Price to create one of this season's top running back duos, a combination that has helped first-time starter CJ Carr emerge as one of the nation's best young quarterbacks.

Coach Marcus Freeman thinks Love has improved as both a receiver and pass blocker, making him a more complete running back.

"He's as special of a football player as I've been around," Freeman said. "Every time he has the ball in his hands, he can make something positive happen. He is as dangerous of an offensive weapon that I've probably been around."

The question is how special do the Heisman voters think Love is?

In a sport increasingly dominated by high scores and aerial attacks, Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza and Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin remain the betting favorites ahead of the Dec. 13 trophy presentation in New York.

The last two running backs to win the Heisman both played at Alabama: Derrick Henry in 2015 and Mark Ingram II in 2009. The

last one before that was Reggie Bush of Southern California in 2005. The most recent of Notre Dame's seven Heisman winners was receiver Tim Brown in 1987, and the only Fighting Irish running back who captured college football's most prestigious award was Johnny Lattner in 1953.

"I'm the type of guy that wants to break off a touchdown run every single play," Love said. "So if I'm to consistently get one, two to three-yard gains, it's just not what I want. But I have made myself OK with getting the hard yards and waiting for that one opportunity to hurt the defense by breaking off a long run."

It's also unclear how much longer he'll be doing that for Notre Dame, considering he's widely regarded as a top-five talent in the upcoming NFL draft.

Love still has some unfinished business to take care of first. Wins over struggling Syracuse (3-7) on Saturday and at Stanford to finish the season may be enough to earn one of the coveted 12 playoff spots and give the Irish an opportunity to play their way back to the national championship game — and this time win it — regardless of what happens in New York.

"I think Jeremiah Love would be the first to tell you that winning a game is way more important than that individual award," Freeman added. "He's going to do everything in his power to make sure we prepare to win a game, and if the Heisman Trophy comes with it, then great. That's amazing."



No. 22 Missouri (7-3)
at No. 8 Oklahoma (8-2)
AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT



Kentucky (5-5)
at No. 14 Vanderbilt (8-2)
AFN-Atlantic
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
5:30 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 20 Tennessee (7-3)
at Florida (3-7)
AFN-Atlantic
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
9:30 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 15 USC (8-2)
at No. 7 Oregon (9-1)
AFN-Sports
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
5:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

SPORTS



Stepping up

Bucks will need to rise to occasion with Antetokounmpo hurt » **NBA, Page 43**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Leading the way

Reed has thrust No. 3 Texas A&M to its first 10-0 mark since 1992

BY KRISTIE RIEKEN
Associated Press

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Marcel Reed wasn't always a quarterback.

He got his start in Pee Wee football as the team's star running back. But it quickly became clear he could throw better than anyone on the team, so they implemented halfback passes for the young Reed.

That wasn't nearly enough to showcase his athletic ability, and by fifth grade he moved into the position that made him a star.

He knew it was where he was supposed to be all along.

"It just felt natural, just because obviously I got to touch the ball every play," he said. "So who can complain about that?"

Years later, Reed has developed into one of the country's top quarterbacks and a Heisman Trophy contender as he's led third-ranked Texas A&M to its first 10-0 record since 1992.

Aside from his physical gifts, Reed's rapport with his teammates has helped him and the Aggies make a big jump in his second year as the starter.

"I have the charisma and the character just to be able to lead people," he said. "I tell people a lot that the way I lead is kind of connecting with all of my teammates, not just on a football level, but just kind of understanding them."

SEE LEADING ON PAGE 46

Texas A&M quarterback Marcel Reed is a contender for the Heisman Trophy with 2,632 throwing yards on the season and an SEC-best 22 touchdown passes.

DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP



No. 4 Arizona squeezes by No. 3 UConn » College basketball, Page 41

