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AFGHANISTAN

Advocates want Afghans who worked for US moved to Guam

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S. should evacuate thousands of interpreters and others who aided the U.S. military and government to the Pacific territory of Guam while they await decisions on their immigration visas, advocates and lawmakers said.

Worsening security in Afghanistan as U.S. troops withdraw has led to fears that those who worked with foreign forces may be left vulnerable to Taliban retribution.

"We must evacuate our Afghan friends and allies immediately," said a letter sent to President Joe Biden last week by the bipartisan Honoring Our Promises Working Group, which includes 21 House lawmakers led by veteran Reps. Seth Moulton and Jason Crow.

"We also recommend that the President's Interagency Task Force specifically consider the option of using Guam as a temporary evacuation site before moving our friends and allies to more permanent locations within the continental United States," the letter said.

More than 18,000 applicants have applied for the Special Immigrant Visa, which allows those facing threats after aiding the U.S. to immigrate with their families.

The vetting process for each SIV applicant could take far long-

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RELATED

Afghanistan's special operations troops could train in Europe
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PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

President Joe Biden speaks to American service members at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, England, on Wednesday.

Biden steps onto world stage

On 1st overseas trip, president seeks to reaffirm commitment to US role abroad

Associated Press

CARBIS BAY, England — President Joe Biden stepped onto the global stage Thursday, meeting with Britain's prime minister and outlining plans for the U.S. to donate 500 million vaccine doses around the globe.

Biden had arrived in Britain on Wednesday, landing at RAF Mildenhall and greeting U.S. service members based there. It was just the first stop on his first overseas trip.

The president seeks to reaffirm to allies his commitment to the U.S. role abroad, which stands in contrast to former President Donald Trump's "America First" approach. Biden will

RELATED

Biden praises US troops, families during speech Wednesday at Mildenhall
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meet with Group of Seven leaders before continuing to Brussels for a NATO summit, a meeting with heads of the European Union and face-to-face meetings with other world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva.

On Thursday, Biden and Prime Minister Boris Johnson met for more than an hour and signed a document "building on the commitments and aspirations set out 80 years ago" by predecessors Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in the Atlantic Charter.

That document led to the United Nations and NATO. The new one looks to the challenge posed by countries like China and Russia with its promises to promote free trade, human rights and a rules-based international order, and to counter "those who seek to undermine

SEE BIDEN ON PAGE 9

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.310	\$3.738	\$3.987	\$3.549	Azores	..	..	\$3.887	..
Change in price	+0.8cents	+1.3 cents	+1.3 cents	+1.9 cents	Change in price	..	..	+1.3 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.173	\$4.477	\$4.104	Belgium	..	\$3.157	\$3.387	\$3.249
Change in price	..	-1.8cents	-1.9 cents	-5.9 cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$3.637	\$3.886	\$3.448	Turkey	..	..	\$3.772	\$4.102*
Change in price	..	+1.3 cents	+1.3 cents	+1.9 cents	Change in price	..	..	+1.3 cents	+7.2 cents

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$3.779	..	\$3.339	South Korea	\$3.109	..	\$3.789	\$3.349
Change in price	..	+1.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents	Change in price	No change	..	+1.0 cents	+2.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.099	..	..	\$3.339	Guam	\$3.109	\$3.539	\$3.789	..
Change in price	+1.0 cents	..	..	+2.0 cents	Change in price	+1.0 cents	+1.0 cents	+1.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
For the week of June 11-17

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		
Euro costs (June 11)	\$1.19	
Dollar buys (June 11)	0.8009	
British pound (June 11)	\$1.38	
Japanese yen (June 11)	107.00	
South Korean won (June 11)	1087.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3769	
Britain (Pound)	1.4154	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2093	
China(Yuan)	6.3910	
Denmark (Krone)	6.1044	
Egypt (Pound)	15.6692	
Euro	.8209	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7602	
Hungary (Forint)	283.49	
Israel (Shekel)	3.2423	
Japan (Yen)	109.64	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3007	
Norway (Krone)	8.2765	
Philippines (Peso)	47.73	
Poland (Zloty)	3.67	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7506	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3242	
South Korea (Won)	1115.45	
Switzerland (Franc)	.8949	
Thailand (Baht)	31.15	
Turkey (NewLira)	8.4783	

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

INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	3.25	
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.75	
Federal funds market rate	0.06	
3-month bill	0.03	
30-year bond	2.17	

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

Iraqi interpreter inspired to join Army

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Standing 4 feet, 11 inches and weighing 110 pounds, Army Spc. Zainab Olivo had her work cut out marching with 60 pounds of gear during basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

The physical challenge of boot camp, which Olivo, 32, completed in March, was just the latest hurdle for someone who had seen her share of war before putting on a uniform.

As a child growing up southwest of Baghdad in the Iraqi city of Karbala, she dreamed of becoming a police officer or a soldier. Years later, during the war against the Islamic State, she got a taste of that life while working on the front lines as an interpreter and translator for Stars and Stripes.

Olivo was a 14-year-old schoolgirl when a U.S.-led coalition invaded the country and deposed dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. She recalled the chaos of that time in a May 14 telephone interview from Fort Leonard Wood.

"It was a mess," she said of post-invasion Iraq. "There was no government and no army left and just the American soldiers and Marines. They were handing out food and water to civilians."

Olivo said she was impressed by the seemingly superhuman strength of the U.S. troops who marched in the heat carrying their weapons and heavy equipment.

In 2011, as U.S. forces returned home, Olivo's family moved to the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, where she studied business at Dijlah University and continued to improve the English she'd learned in school.

But in 2014, ISIS plunged Iraq into conflict once more and brought U.S. forces back to the country. Olivo, who by then had a daughter of her own, answered a job advertisement and started working as a linguist for Stars and Stripes. Soon, she found herself face-to-face with the conflict.

"I am against extremists," she

said of her motivation to work with journalists. "I wanted to go to the battlefield and see for myself and do something and get the job done and help."

Olivo's duties with the newspaper took her to combat outposts, where she saw U.S. troops at work, and to the war-ravaged suburbs of Mosul filled with enemy snipers, improvised explosive devices and armed drones.

Stars and Stripes reporter Chad Garland, who worked with Olivo in Iraq, praised her bravery.

"Zainab had a way of getting us closer to the front lines than the Iraqis initially seemed to want to let us go," he said in a June 4 email.

On a ride into Mosul with the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service in 2016, the pair found themselves next to a Humvee with a gunner firing a .50 caliber machine gun, presumably at the enemy, Garland recalled.

"I don't think the Iraqis realized they'd brought us that close to the fight until we got there," he said.

The city was recaptured from ISIS by the end of July 2017, a year later, Olivo moved to the United States on a family visa.

She enlisted in the Army last summer and completed advanced individual training at Fort Leonard Wood on May 29 to become an engineer.

Olivo's company commander during engineer training, Capt. Zachary Hawkins, said she came into the Army with more military knowledge than most recruits since she had interacted with troops in Iraq.

"She saw how they presented themselves, and I think she came into basic training and advanced individual training already knowing a lot of things service members do," he said.

The other trainees, who are mostly 19 and 20 years old, looked to her for wisdom and knowledge, Hawkins added.

"She is small, but it doesn't seem to faze her," he said. "She is able to operate equipment just as



BRIAN HILL/U.S. Army

Army Spc. Zainab Olivo takes part in engineer training earlier this year with Company D, 554th Engineer Battalion at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

well as anyone and on ruck marches, carrying a heavy load with a weapon, she keeps up."

Part of the engineer training involved learning how to use heavy equipment such as tractors and excavators.

Olivo's experience in Iraq included working at Qayara Airfield West in October 2016. The facility, at that time recently recaptured from ISIS, had been repaired by Air Force engineers.

Olivo said her goal is to deploy somewhere with the Army, become an active-duty soldier and train as an officer.

She is also planning to become a U.S. citizen with the help of the Army, she said.

"I want to make a difference and I want to be part of something bigger," she said. "And that is why I chose the Army."

Editor's note: The author of this report worked with Zainab Olivo on several assignments in Iraq between 2014 and 2017.
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ZAINAB OLIVO

Zainab Olivo works in Iraq as an interpreter and translator for Stars and Stripes in 2017.

Army proposes tripling Arlington National Cemetery budget

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Arlington National Cemetery would receive nearly triple its current budget under the U.S. Army funding request for fiscal 2022.

The Army, which operates Arlington National Cemetery, proposed \$228 million for the cemetery — up from the \$82 million it received in 2021. Of the requested amount, \$141 million would go toward a project to expand the cemetery's border and add 80,000 burial spaces.

The Southern Expansion Project would add 37 acres to the cemetery. If Congress approves the budget request, construction

would begin late this summer, said Barbara Lewandrowski, director of public affairs for Arlington. The work would take about six years, with an estimated completion date in early 2027.

The project would expand the cemetery's border to encompass the U.S. Air Force Memorial. Tens of thousands of burial sites would be readied in the land around it. The cemetery acquired the land — both the existing green space and roads — last year.

Arlington National Cemetery, long viewed as a shrine to America's fallen heroes, is quickly nearing capacity. In 2018, the cemetery opened a 27-acre expansion

that had been in the works since the 1990s. Even with the extra acres from that expansion and the Southern Expansion Project, the cemetery is still expected to reach its limits by the mid-2050s.

The cemetery is expected to announce later this year new eligibility criteria for burial at Arlington. Currently, most veterans and military retirees are eligible for either above- or below-ground burial. The Army began a lengthy rulemaking process in 2019 to change the criteria.

At the start of the rulemaking process, the Army proposed restricting below-ground burial to service members killed in action, Purple Heart recipients, former

prisoners of war, presidents and vice presidents, combat veterans who were awarded the Silver Star or above, service members who had combat-related deaths and combat veterans who also served as government officials and "made significant contributions to the nation's security at the highest levels of public service." Arlington also would reserve 1,000 burial plots for Medal of Honor recipients.

"The hard reality is we are running out of space," Karen Durham-Aguilera, director of the cemetery, said at the time.

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MILITARY

Marine Corps general fired over AAV sinking

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps has fired its inspector general in connection with an assault amphibious vehicle accident last year in which nine service members died, the service announced Wednesday.

Maj. Gen. Robert Castellvi will not return to his position after Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger suspended him May 3 amid an investigation into the formation of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, which now oversees the AAV platoon that suffered the accident, the service said in a statement.

At the time of the accident, Castellvi served as commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, which was in charge of the AAV platoon in the training accident that killed eight Marines and one sailor about 70 miles off California's southern coast.

"The commandant took adverse administration action against



JAILINE ALICEA SANTIAGO/U.S. Marine Corps

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Robert F. Castellvi was punished for failing to properly train Marines and sailors and evaluate the platoon before a 2020 training exercise that resulted in nine deaths.

him," the Corps said in its statement. "The commandant personally and formally counseled him for his failure to properly train the Marines and sailors for whom he was entrusted and for the inadequate evaluation of the AAV platoon before it was attached to the 15th MEU."

An investigation published March 25 found maintenance procedures on the AAV were disregarded and troops were not properly trained in evacuation and safety procedures.

"Contributing factors included lack of training, the material condition of the AAVs assigned to 15th

Marine Expeditionary Unit, lack of safety boats in the water, a higher-than-anticipated sea state, and insufficient buoyancy provided by personal flotation devices at depth," the service said in a March statement announcing the findings. The investigation also determined Castellvi "bears some responsibility" in the accident, according to a Wednesday report by The Associated Press.

His removal comes after some family members of the troops who died in the sinking questioned why no generals were punished in the accident, according to the AP.

Castellvi's punishment did not include a reduction in rank, but his removal as inspector general will remain part of his permanent record "and must be considered if he is evaluated for promotion, retention, or roles of responsibility," according to the service's Wednesday statement.

"This action typically prevents an officer from being promoted or serving in a role where he/she

would be charged with the responsibility of caring for Marines and sailors," the Marine Corps said.

The investigation into the 15th MEU remains underway, and will be released once completed, the service said.

Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., in a statement Wednesday called the firing "an important step" toward "ensur(ing) that dangerous training required to prepare our service members for combat is done as safely as possible."

"It is my view that [Castellvi's] failures in ensuring the Marines under his charge were adequately trained prior to joining the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit were a direct and contributing factor to the tragic loss of eight Marines and one Navy corpsman last July," said Garamendi, who serves as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's subpanel on readiness.

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Marines on Okinawa resume waterborne AAV drills after incident

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps has resumed waterborne assault amphibious vehicle operations on Okinawa, nearly a year after nine service members died while training in one of the vehicles off the California coast.

A "demanding" training began last week and was completed Tuesday by Marines from Company B, 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion following a "thorough" review of safety, maintenance and operating processes and procedures, a III Marine Expeditionary Force statement said.

The maneuvers were conducted in compliance with updated policies and procedures following the fatal accident on July 30, 2020, according to the statement.

The incident took the lives of eight Marines and one sailor from Bravo Company, Battalion Landing Team 1/4 of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. The Marine Corps called it the deadliest AAV training accident in its history.

III MEF heralded the "return" of an "important capability," its statement said. "Everything possible" is being done to ensure safety.

"We completed a rigorous review to ensure we can operate our [amphibious assault vehicles] safely, protect our Marines and

Sailors, and complete our mission responsibly," the III MEF commander, Lt. Gen. H. Stacy Clardy, said in the statement. "We will continue to mitigate risk while employing a ready and capable force to deter aggression and respond to crisis in the region in support of our nation's interests and our allies and partners."

The AAV now in use was first fielded in 1983 to ferry Marines from ship to shore for both combat and humanitarian operations, according to the Marine Corps. It resembles an armored tank that can traverse both land and sea. It was designed to carry 21 combat-equipped troops and a crew of three at a maximum speed of 8 mph at sea. The 26-ton vehicles are much faster on land at a maximum of 45 mph.

The vehicles have been at the heart of Marine operations in the Pacific in recent years, often seen during exercises plunging into the surf off the back of one of the Navy's amphibious assault ships and heading toward shore for a beach raid.

The platform came under intense scrutiny after last year's accident, about 70 miles off California's southern coast. The AAV began taking on water while returning to the USS Somerset.

After the incident, waterborne use of the vehicles was suspended by Commandant Gen. David Berger while a review of equip-



DIANA JIMENEZ/U.S. Marine Corps

Marines from Company B, 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion train in an assault amphibious vehicle at Camp Schwab, Okinawa, on June 2.

ment, procedures and training was conducted. The AAVs were inspected to ensure watertightness, bilge pump function and emergency lighting.

An investigation found proper maintenance had been disregarded, Marines had not been properly trained and leadership had failed to evacuate personnel in a timely manner. The Corps also determined there was a lack of safety boats in the water that day, high waves and deficient personal flotation devices.

Commanders of the I Marine Expeditionary Force in California and III MEF on Okinawa

were directed to review safety practices and procedures and ensure commanders were directly responsible for safety. They were also ordered to improve training for exiting AAVs in an emergency and communications between vehicles during a mishap.

The service told a subpanel of the House Armed Services Committee last month that 11 Marine leaders had been disciplined so far for their roles in the sinking.

Maj. Gen. Robert Castellvi, who commanded the 1st Marine Division at the time of the sinking, was fired Wednesday from his position as Marine Corps in-

spector general after it was determined he was at least partially responsible.

Review boards are still considering separation for some of the disciplined Marine officials, Gen. Gary Thomas, the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, said at the May 3 hearing.

The service is in the process of replacing its fleet of AAVs with the next-generation amphibious combat vehicle by BAE Systems after abandoning plans to modernize the AAV fleet.

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MILITARY

DOD implements China Task Force proposals

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday issued a department-wide directive with initiatives meant to close “the say-do gap” between stated counter-China objectives and established policies and operations, a senior defense official told reporters.

The largely classified initiatives are based on recommendations by the Pentagon’s China Task Force, the official said during a teleconference. President Joe Biden announced the task force in February to assess the Defense Department’s China-related programs, policies and processes and identify top priorities and recommendations for the Pentagon.

“This directive from the secretary is ultimately about getting the department’s house in order and ensuring that the department lives up to the stated prioritization of China as the number one pacing challenge,” said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The task force consisted of 23 members from across the Defense Department, including representatives from each service branch, several joint-staff combatant commands, the intelligence community and Austin’s office, the official said.

The group “reviewed thousands of pages of documents, strategies and analysis,” interviewed “hundreds of current and former DOD officials,” and consulted Congress,



JACKIE SANDERS/Office of the Secretary of Defense

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin

the National Security Council and the State Department during their analysis, the official said.

“We decided early on that we didn’t want to produce a set of aspirational recommendations that would just sit on a shelf, so our team sought to understand the critical debates inside the department and what would be required to bring greater focus, unity of effort and coordination on the China challenge,” the official said.

The United States first identified China

as a “strategic competitor” in the 2018 National Defense Strategy because of the nation’s rapid military expansion and modernization, “influence operations and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage.”

While the 2018 strategy “was critically important in highlighting the need to prioritize China,” the task force found “a ‘say-do gap’ between the stated prioritization of China and what we saw in a number of areas related to attention, resources and processes,” the official said. “The directive today is really about ensuring that the department lives up to that prioritization.”

The Biden administration is drafting a new national defense strategy, which will be shaped in part by the task force’s findings, the official said. It is expected to remain critical of China.

The task force gave Austin their findings in April. He used them to issue the Wednesday directive with set “deadlines as soon as 30, 45, 60 days and beyond for components to come back with proposed courses of action and plans for implementation,” the official said.

The findings and most of Austin’s initiatives remain classified, but the Pentagon will “provide updates to Congress and publicly when possible,” the official said.

The official said the initiatives focus on major areas including “how the department

approaches deterrence, operational concepts, emerging capabilities, future force posture, technology [and the] civilian and military workforce.”

“For instance, to ensure that the department has the people that we need to compete effectively, the secretary tasked the undersecretary for personnel and readiness with updating professional military education and civilian professional development to align the department with the prioritization of China,” the official said.

Also as part of the initiatives, Austin will “personally be reviewing efforts to accelerate the joint-warfighting concept through joint experimentation and prototyping,” the official said.

“The internal directive is written with clearly stated objectives [and] defined tasks to specific components with deadlines for implementation and mechanisms for oversight and accountability,” the official said. “To the extent possible we design these efforts to run through the lifeblood of the department, leveraging existing institutions and only recommending new processes were necessary.”

The task force was given four months to complete the project and will stand down now that their findings have been presented, according to the Pentagon.

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WAR ON TERRORISM

Afghan special ops troops could train in Europe

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Afghan special operations troops could be headed to Europe for a NATO training mission that is expected to continue after the U.S.-led coalition completes its withdrawal from the country, the top U.S. military commander in Europe said.

Gen. Tod Wolters, who serves as head of U.S. European Command and as NATO's supreme allied commander, said the alliance is

looking at several possible locations to host Afghan forces.

"We are in the process of looking at out-of-country special forces training in certain locations, to bring NATO special forces activities out of Afghanistan, into a remote location, probably somewhere in Europe," Wolters said Wednesday during a discussion at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

The U.S. and its allies are in the midst of a rapid withdrawal from

Afghanistan, which is expected to be complete by September. The U.S. has moved at least 500 C-17 loads of material out of Afghanistan and has turned over six military sites to the Afghan Defense Ministry, according to U.S. Central Command, which as of Tuesday estimated that the U.S. has completed more than "50% of the entire retrograde process."

Wolters said the aim is to continue training Afghan special operations troops in combat tactics and

techniques.

On Monday, NATO leaders will gather in Brussels for a summit that brings together allied heads of state, including President Joe Biden. The meetings will focus on NATO's 2030 initiative, which seeks to adapt the alliance for future threats. Among the issues to be discussed is getting NATO more focused on China's emergence as an economic and military rival.

Still, the conflict in Afghanistan, where allies have been involved for

the past two decades, will factor into the talks. Despite overwhelming superiority in numbers, firepower and mobility, the combined U.S., NATO and government forces haven't been able to inflict a decisive defeat on the Taliban guerrillas.

"We are still going to find ways to work with Afghanistan from a NATO perspective," Wolters said.

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Afghans: Advocacy group estimates 6-month stay for processing

FROM PAGE 1

er than the 90 or fewer days left until the U.S. withdraws all forces from Afghanistan. Moving families to Guam would allow them to be screened and processed for asylum in safety, the letter said.

Guam has hosted evacuees from America's wars before. After the fall of Saigon, the U.S. used Guam as a staging area to sort approximately 130,000 Vietnam War refugees, prior to moving them to mainland U.S. military bases for final processing.

In 1996, the island took in more than 6,000 Iraqi Kurds who were persecuted by Saddam Hussein. More recently, Guam housed sailors from the USS Theodore Roosevelt when a COVID-19 outbreak hit that aircraft carrier last year.

The island is ready to answer the call again if asked, said Jose Terlaje, a member of Guam's Senate.

"If we did it then, we can do it again," Terlaje said, adding that the primary concerns from islanders are where the evacuees will be housed and how COVID-19 measures will be implemented.

No order from the federal government has been given yet, Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero told the Guam Daily Post last week. A spokeswoman for the governor declined to comment Thursday, as did the State Department.

The U.S. military has been developing plans in case they are required to evacuate the Afghans.

"While there are no requests or



U.S. Marine Corps

Mohammad Nadir, center, poses with Marines in Helmand province, Afghanistan, in 2017. Nadir served as an interpreter for nearly three years before applying for a U.S. Special Immigrant Visa. Nadir later enlisted in the Marine Corps.

directives at this time, we remain confident that we have the capabilities and resources to execute such a mission if so tasked," Pentagon spokesman Maj. Robert Lodewick said in an emailed statement.

If flown to Guam, the average Afghan family would require about six months for administrative processing, said Chris Purdy, project manager of the D.C.-based Veterans for American Ideals ad-

vocacy group, which is lobbying for the evacuation.

The U.S. may need to build temporary housing, Purdy said, similar to the tent cities U.S. engineers made for Vietnamese evacuees. They could be housed at the large military bases on the island, Purdy said.

They could also stay at Guam's hotels, which have more than 8,400 rooms but have been mostly empty over the last year due to the

"We are all seeking a safe place."

Omid Mahmoodi

spokesman for a group of former Afghan interpreters

pandemic, Purdy said.

These rooms will soon fill, however, with 6,000 U.S. military personnel rotating to Guam for training from June to the first week of August, he said.

Guam has also launched campaigns aimed at gaining back tourists, who come primarily from Asia.

Some residents of the island told Guam's Pacific Daily News that they were concerned that the evacuees may be members of the Taliban and should be kept on base. While the U.S. does background checks on locally hired contractors and employees, military officials have said that Afghans other than SIV applicants could be evacuated.

Guam would also need a "robust vaccination and housing plan that defends against COVID-19" should it host Afghan evacuees, Del. Michael San Nicolas, the island's nonvoting representative in Congress, said in last week's letter.

Afghanistan has seen a rise in deaths from COVID-19 in recent months, but few in the country take the pandemic seriously or are willing to take vaccines.

"A pandemic is not an ideal time for a mass evacuation, but this is a matter of life and death," Adam

Bates, policy counsel for the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project, told Stars and Stripes. "I would hope that we know enough about COVID mitigation at this point that people can be moved to safety without undue risk to refugees, U.S. government personnel, or the host country."

In Afghanistan, most applicants waiting for SIVs would welcome going to Guam, said Omid Mahmoodi, spokesman for a group of former interpreters.

About 200 of these interpreters gathered at a Kabul mosque Thursday to protest delays in their applications.

"We are all seeking a safe place," Mahmoodi said.

In Guam, among those pushing to host Afghan translators and their families is Peter Sgro, a businessman whose family adopted a child who had been evacuated from Vietnam.

He said he has been reading avidly about the SIV issue and hopes that the Afghans can come to his island.

"Time is of the essence," Sgro said. "(I'm) hoping the decision is made soon so our community can prepare."

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Missiles target Iraqi army bases that host US troops, contractors

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Multiple rockets targeted two Iraqi military bases hosting U.S.-led coalition troops and foreign contractors Wednesday, Iraqi security officials and the military said.

Three rockets hit Balad Air Base, north of Baghdad, without causing any casualties or damage, an Iraqi military statement said.

The base housed foreign contractors.

Hours later, at least one missile hit close to a military base next to Baghdad airport, two Iraqi security officials said. It was unclear whether the explosion was caused by a rocket or a drone strike.

One Iraqi security official said they had heard two rockets. The second said preliminary findings indicated it had been a drone at-

tack and a trailer belonging to the coalition was set on fire by the attack. There were no casualties, they said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the strikes, but U.S. officials have previously blamed Iran-backed Iraqi militia factions for such assaults.

The attacks are the latest in a string that continue to target the U.S. presence in Iraq. Over a dozen have targeted Iraqi military bases and Baghdad's highly fortified Green Zone since President Joe Biden assumed office this year. More than 10 people have been killed, including two foreign contractors.

Lockheed Martin announced last month that it was withdrawing

contractors maintaining Iraq's F-16 fighter jets from the Balad base over security reasons.

Recent attacks have featured more sophisticated weaponry, such as drones, which has alarmed U.S. and Iraqi military officials. The attacks occur as Baghdad and Washington work on drawing up a timetable for the withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq.

MILITARY

Pilot disorientation led to deadly F-16 crash

By **KARIN ZEITVOGEL**
Stars and Stripes

A Wisconsin Air National Guard pilot who died when his F-16 crashed in Michigan during a nighttime training exercise in December had become disoriented after trying to fix a problem with his global positioning system, an Air Force accident report said.

“The cause of the mishap was the [pilot’s] failure to effectively recover from spatial disorientation,” Brig. Gen. David W. Smith, president of the Air Force Accident Investigation Board, said in the report released Wednesday.

Capt. Durwood Jones, 37, died when the F-16C he was piloting in an exercise involving one other F-16 fighter jet crashed into the Hiawatha National Forest in northern Michigan, the National Guard said in a statement in December.

Because the plane was totally destroyed in the crash, accident investigators had to rely on radio communications, radar data and witness testimony to compile the report.

The crash occurred during a



Wisconsin Air National Guard

Air Force Capt. Durwood “Hawk” Jones was killed when the F-16 that he was flying crashed into the Hiawatha National Forest during a nighttime training exercise in Michigan in December 2020.

practice mission that was supposed to include an air-to-air intercept of a Cessna aircraft operated by the Wisconsin Civil Air Patrol. But the CAP canceled the intercept because of poor weather conditions. The two F-16s instead conducted a practice scramble on a backup instrument profile, the report said.

Shortly after takeoff, Jones reported to his wingman that his GPS was not receiving satellite tracking data, and said he was initiating an in-flight alignment of another navigation system.

While Jones was troubleshooting the GPS issue, he entered a weather system and lost visual contact with the other F-16.

After the two pilots established where they were in relation to each other, Jones’ F-16 “went into a series of heading, altitude and attitude changes ... culminating with an extreme attitude” that resulted in the crash at 7:17 p.m., the accident report said.

The only checklist Jones had access to when he was conducting the in-flight alignment, or IFA, did not include a note to say GPS satellite tracking data is necessary for the maneuver, the report said.

The F-16 was traveling at 690 mph when it crashed, the report said. Its nose, which was pitched at 58 degrees low, and right wing tip both struck the ground. Jones did not try to eject.

When Air Force investigators recreated the crash, they determined that the fighter jet was in a 45-degree descent, traveling at about 630 mph when it was about 7,500 feet above the ground.

If Jones had recognized the problem and taken corrective actions, he would have recovered within 2,000 feet, the report said.

But environmental conditions,

including darkness and deteriorating weather conditions, had affected Jones’ vision, and his fixation on rectifying the loss of GPS data had impacted his “ability to recognize, confirm and recover from the unusual attitude created by the spatially disorienting event,” leading to the crash, the report concluded.

Jones, whose call sign was “Hawk,” joined the Air National Guard in 2011. He graduated from the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, in 2013, according to the report, and started flying F-16s in 2015, the Guard said. He deployed to Japan in 2015 and South Korea in 2017. In 2019, he served a combat tour in Afghanistan.

His awards included two Air Medals with “C” devices awarded for operating under hostile combat conditions.

He is survived by his wife and two children, according to the National Guard.

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Fuel leak reportedly forced Air Force to down costly drone over Africa

By **KARIN ZEITVOGEL**
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force destroyed a multimillion-dollar MQ-9 Reaper in June last year by deliberately crashing it somewhere in Africa after the drone had a “catastrophic” fuel leak during a mission, an accident report said.

The drone, assigned to the 162nd Wing of the Arizona Air National Guard and operated by the 214th Attack Squadron Mission Control Element at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, began to display warnings that its fuel levels were low about three hours before the crash, said the report, released Tuesday.

The remote flight crew initially thought they had enough fuel to return the Reaper to base, but an hour after the initial alert, the pilot and mishap mission crew commander determined that the leak was catastrophic and began planning to crash the Reaper “in a way that would minimize chances of a successful recovery effort” by

hostile parties.

MQ-9s are used by the Air Force to attack targets, gather intelligence and conduct search operations, among other roles. They can be equipped with laser-guided bombs and air-to-ground Hellfire missiles.

The pilot “controlled the glide of the aircraft to optimize the impact point” after the MQ-9 ran out of fuel, roughly three hours after the first alert that it was running low. Airspeed was increased until impact around a dozen minutes later, Air Force investigators said, and the drone was destroyed in the crash.

The monthslong probe into the accident found that fuel was leaking from the forward electric fuel heater. The problem was not new: another MQ-9 was nearly lost six months earlier due to a similar leak. In the nine months prior to the deliberate crash of the Reaper in Africa, eight electric fuel heater leak incidents were reported, the accident investigation found.

Two months after the accident last year, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc., which developed the MQ-9, released a technical order explaining how to bypass the fuel heater on the MQ-9. The proposed fixes would cost approximately \$37,000 for the entire Air Force fleet of MQ-9s, the accident report said. The June 2020

crash carried a tab of more than \$11 million, it said.

There was no reported damage to civilian property, injuries or fatalities when the MQ-9 was brought down, the report said.

The exact location in Africa of the crash has not been made public, although the report said the drone came down somewhere in

U.S. Africa Command’s area of responsibility. That includes 53 African nations and islands off the coast of the vast continent, which is three times the size of the continental United States, AFRICOM said on its website.

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

German cities with US troops ease restraints

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Restrictions on shopping, indoor dining, sporting events and other activities were eased further Thursday in parts of Germany with large U.S. military populations, as the number of new coronavirus infections continued to fall.

In Wiesbaden, home to U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters, the weekly average incidence rate dropped below 50 new cases per 100,000 people. As of Wednesday, Wiesbaden's incidence rate was 28.7 new cases per 100,000 inhabitants, a sharp drop from the end of May, when it was 82.6.

The lower threshold allowed municipal officials to ease federally mandated restrictions starting Thursday. People may shop without an appointment, dine indoors with a negative coronavirus test, and visit swimming pools, castles, museums, indoor zoos and botanical gardens in the city. Mask mandates still apply.

Other cities that announced more openings this week tied to lower case numbers include Kaiserslautern and Stuttgart, both of which have a sizable U.S. military

presence. They will allow more people to participate in group sports and attend cultural events.

In the state of Bavaria, home to U.S. bases in Grafenwoehr, Vilseck, Hohenfels, Ansbach, Illeshaim and Garmisch, restaurants were allowed to resume indoor dining Monday and may stay open until midnight.

Restaurants must require a negative coronavirus test in areas with incidence rates between 50 and 100 new cases per 100,000 people. But most cities and districts in Bavaria are below 35 and some are much lower. On Wednesday, the rate in Weiden was 4.7, and in the Amberg-Weizbach district, it was 10.7, according to Germany's Robert Koch Institute.

Experts say the combination of increasing vaccination rates and warmer weather following months of lockdown has helped to reduce the spread of the virus.

The nationwide seven-day incidence rate in Germany fell to 19.3 on Thursday, according to RKI. So far, 23.9% of the population has been fully vaccinated and 47% of the country has received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the agency.

In Kaiserslautern, where some



DAVID EDGE/Stars and Stripes

The outside seating at a Starbucks in Wiesbaden, Germany, is packed Thursday.

24,000 U.S. military members live, restrictions that limited opportunities for group contact sports were to ease starting Friday. The city recorded a weekly average incidence rate of 19.7 on Wednesday.

The city will again allow up to 20 people to participate in outdoor contact sports; indoors, the number is limited to 10 under supervision. Children 14 years old and younger may play contact sports indoors in groups of up to 25 people if a trainer is present. Up to 250 spectators are permitted at outdoor sporting and cultural events.

Kaiserslautern officials said that with the exception of sports and cultural events, people vacci-

nated or recovered from the coronavirus do not count toward participation limits.

In Stuttgart, up to 500 people are allowed at outdoor events. Bars and restaurants may stay open until 1 a.m.

Kaiserslautern officials announced Thursday that restaurants may keep outdoor seating open until 11 p.m. during the preliminary round of the European Football Championship, a series of soccer matches in 11 countries that starts Friday.

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Japanese workers on US bases to get vaccine

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The U.S. military will start inoculating Japanese base workers interested in receiving either the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, U.S. Forces Japan announced in a joint statement with the Japanese government on Thursday.

Details, such as when the vaccinations would begin or how they would be rolled out, were not included in the release. USFJ did not respond to requests seeking further information Thursday afternoon.

The inoculations will be performed in close coordination with Japan's own vaccination efforts, which are ramping up ahead of the Tokyo Olympics on July 23. Japanese base workers will not be "treated adversely" if they choose not to receive a vaccine, the statement added.

"Vaccinating local employees will contribute to the prevention of further spread of COVID-19 in Japan and will protect the resilience of the Alliance," the joint statement said. "The vaccinations will also ensure steady operations of USFJ, further enabling the USG to meet its Treaty obligations to the security of Japan."

Though Japan has lagged other developed nations in vaccinating its population, COVID-19 cases have been on the decline in recent weeks after a surge in April and May.

Japan reported 1,699 new coronavirus cases as of 7 p.m. Thursday, 1,362 fewer than the same day last week, according to public broadcaster NHK and the World Health Organization. There were also 59 deaths reported. The government has counted 765,000 COVID-19 cases during the pandemic and more than 13,500 deaths, the WHO said.

U.S. military bases in Japan and South Korea had reported 14 new COVID-19 infections — two at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa and a dozen on the Korean peninsula — as of 7 p.m. Thursday.

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White House: Agencies should not require vaccine

By ERIC YODER
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has told federal agencies that they generally should not require their employees to be vaccinated against the coronavirus to work on-site in federal buildings or to disclose whether they are vaccinated.

Employees who disclose they are unvaccinated or refuse to answer a voluntary question about vaccination status should be subject to safety requirements such as mask-wearing and social distancing, new guidance says.

"The Administration strongly encourages all Americans, including Federal employees and contractors, to be vaccinated," says a Tuesday posting by an interagency task force overseeing pandemic-related policies for the federal workplace. However, "at present, COVID-19 vaccination should generally not be a pre-condition" for federal employees or contractors to work in person, it states, while not specifying possible exceptions.

The guidance is the latest evolving workplace policy regarding the 2.1 million-employee federal

workforce as pandemic conditions ease and vaccination rates rise. It comes as the Biden administration is expected to release a broader policy about when and how federal employees can return to the office and remote work going forward.

Most recently, in response to updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the task force had said that fully vaccinated federal and contractor employees no longer need to wear masks or practice social distancing on-site except where separate policies apply

such as health care facilities.

The task force guidance for federal agencies comes after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission put out its own guidance this month saying that companies are permitted to require vaccines of employees who return to the office.

But so far many private companies have held back, wary of the fraught politics surrounding vaccine mandates and the untested legal issues involving vaccines cleared under the Food and Drug Administration's emergency authority.

US unemployment claims fall to 376,000, sixth week straight of decline

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell for the sixth straight week as the U.S. economy reopens rapidly after being held

back for months by the coronavirus pandemic.

Jobless claims fell by 9,000 to 376,000 from 385,000 the week before, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The number of

people signing up for benefits exceeded 900,000 in early January and has fallen more or less steadily ever since. Still, claims are high by historic standards. Before the pandemic brought economic ac-

tivity to a near-standstill in March 2020, weekly applications were regularly coming in below 220,000.

Nearly 3.5 million were receiving traditional state unemploy-

ment benefits the week of May 29, down by 258,000 from 3.8 million the week before.

The Labor Department reported Tuesday that job openings hit a record 9.3 million in April.

NATION

In England, Biden praises US troops, families

BY KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

During President Joe Biden's first overseas trip as commander in chief, he sent a clear message Wednesday that U.S. service members and their families are key to strengthening relationships at home and abroad.

"You are the solid steel spine of America around which alliances are built and strengthened," Biden told U.S. troops and their families, speaking in a hangar on RAF Mildenhall, England.

Biden's speech reflected the overall theme for his trip: "America is here to lead with strength."

The U.K. visit — the first stop on his eight-day trip — comes ahead of a meeting next week with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva and with leaders at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

"I'm meeting with Putin to let him know what I want him to know," said Biden to roaring applause. "The United States will respond in a robust and meaningful way when the Russian government engages in harmful activities. That there are consequences for violating the sanctity of democracy."

Among the matters Biden is expected to address with Putin are recent cybersecurity attacks directed at U.S. businesses and government agencies. Officials believe Russia was behind those attacks.

Biden will convene with NATO allies Monday to discuss security issues in Europe and the progress of the alliance's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Since he took office, Biden has talked up the value of NATO, which faced frequent criticism from former President Donald Trump on issues like defense spending. During Biden's first visit as president to NATO headquarters, the allies are likely to project a unified front.

"This summit will be a strong demonstration of trans-Atlantic unity, of Europe and North America standing together in NATO," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday after meeting with Biden at the White House. "Because we are stronger, we are safer together in a more unpredictable world."

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JOE GIDDENS/AP

President Joe Biden, right, greets U.S. military personnel and their families as he arrives at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, ahead of the G-7 summit Wednesday.

Biden: Surveys show favorable ratings of US starting to rebound

FROM PAGE 1

our alliances and institutions."

The new charter also took aim at "interference through disinformation" in elections and murky economic practices, charges that the West has leveled at Moscow and Beijing.

The two leaders also promised to build stronger global defenses against health threats, ahead of a summit dominated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Later Thursday, Biden outlined plans for the U.S. to donate 500 million vaccine doses around the globe over the next year, on top of 80 million doses he had already pledged by the end of the month. U.S. officials said Biden would also ask fellow G-7 leaders to do the same.

The U.S. has faced mounting pressure to outline its global vaccine sharing plan, especially as inequities in supply around the world have become more pro-

nounced and the demand for shots in the U.S. has dropped precipitously in recent weeks.

"We have to end COVID-19, not just at home — which we're doing — but everywhere," Biden told American servicemembers Wednesday at RAF Mildenhall in England. He added that the effort "requires coordinated, multilateral action."

The new U.S. commitment is to buy and donate 500 million Pfizer doses for distribution through the global COVAX alliance to 92 lower-income countries and the African Union, bringing the first steady supply of mRNA vaccine to the countries that need it most. A price tag for the 500 million doses was not released, but the U.S. is now set to be COVAX's largest vaccine donor in addition to its single largest funder with a \$4 billion commitment.

The global alliance has thus far distributed just 81 million doses

and parts of the world, particularly in Africa, remain vaccine deserts. White House officials hope the ramped-up distribution program can be the latest example of a theme Biden plans to hit frequently during his week in Europe: that Western democracies, and not rising authoritarian states, can deliver the most good for the world.

Also Thursday, the Pew Research Center released surveys conducted in 16 countries that showed majorities of the citizens across the nations — more than 6 in 10 in each — express confidence in Biden to "do the right thing" in world affairs.

Favorable ratings of the U.S. in the Pew surveys display how international opinions have started to rebound after declining considerably during Trump's four years as president, growing as much as 30 percentage points since last year in partner nations like France and Germany. In 2020, positive views

of the U.S. reached or neared low points in these two countries, as well as the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan.

In France, for example, 65% now have a favorable view of the U.S., up from 31% last year. No more than half in France rated the U.S. positively during Trump's presidency, but at least 6 in 10 had during each of Barack Obama's eight years as president.

And 74% of the public in France say they have confidence in Biden, a Democrat, to do the right thing regarding world affairs, compared with just 11% saying that for Trump, a Republican, last year. Across 12 countries surveyed in both 2020 and 2021, the gap in confidence in the two presidents is at least 40 percentage points — in Biden's favor in all 12.

Even as the U.S. global standing is rosier among the citizens of these nations around the world, Biden faces challenges as he looks to

transition the U.S. out of the Trump era. The surveys find many nations skeptical of the U.S., both as a global partner and as a functioning democracy.

No more than 2 in 10 across the 16 countries say the U.S. is a "very" reliable partner, with majorities in most calling the U.S. "somewhat" reliable. In Canada, France, Spain and Greece, roughly a third say the U.S. is not reliable as a global partner.

Germany is the only nation surveyed where a majority say relations with the U.S. will improve in the next few years. Across most other countries, more think the relationship will stay the same rather than get better.

The state of U.S. democracy also earns mixed reviews around the world. Majorities across most of the 16 countries say the U.S. democracy "used to be a good example, but has not been in recent years."

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Jury awards \$7.5M to man cleared of murder

IL CHICAGO — A jury on Tuesday awarded \$7.5 million to a man who was exonerated after spending nearly 30 years in prison for a murder in Chicago.

Daniel Andersen sued a group of current and former Chicago police officers, arguing that he was coerced into confessing to the slaying of Cathy Trunko in 1980. His lawyers also said that DNA results years later eliminated a link to the 20-year-old victim, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

“The entire criminal case was a lie,” Jonathan Loevy said in his closing argument.

Andersen was released from prison in 2007 and subsequently received a certificate of innocence.

A lawyer for the officers, Timothy Scahill, argued that Trunko and Andersen had not been completely excluded from the knife blade, which was found a few blocks away.

FBI, police dig to confirm cemetery burials accurate

MI DETROIT— Authorities using a backhoe were digging at a Detroit cemetery Monday in response to complaints that some deceased might not be buried in the right graves.

The FBI joined Detroit police at Gethsemane Cemetery, although no crimes were suspected. Seven graves were checked; six appeared to be proper, WDIV-TV reported.

A police commander, Eric Decker, said a marker was in the wrong place but the “loved one has been found.”

There were many calls after a complaint earlier this year about an improper burial.

The cemetery, which opened in 1909, is owned by the city but managed by a contractor, WDIV reported.

Town: Ferris wheel must be moved from its spot

MD OCEAN CITY — The company that owns a historic amusement park on the Ocean City, Md., boardwalk will be penalized for violating a zoning code if it doesn't move its Ferris wheel, the town council decided.

Trimper's Rides received its first fine over the weekend for violating the town's right of way on the boardwalk, the Salisbury Daily Times reported. The company said moving the Ferris wheel and other rides could cost more than \$100,000.

Antoinette Bruno, the president of Trimper's Rides, told the town council at its meeting on Monday night that the placement of the ride was the result of human error. She also said the company didn't know where the property line was before building the Ferris wheel.

“I think we made an error of a few inches, and we're sorry. It wasn't intentional,” Bruno said, according to the newspaper.

A surveyor contracted by the company found that the ride is at



DUSTIN SAFRANEK, KETCHIKAN (ALASKA) DAILY NEWS/AP

Showing moss who's boss

Cousins Avery Thomas, left, and Alli Thomas remove moss from roofing shingles that cover the top of the fish processing building at The Cedars Lodge in Ketchikan, Alaska, on Monday.

least 10 feet over the amusement park's property line, town leaders who reviewed the findings said.

Ocean City officials said they support the Ferris wheel but told Trimper's it can't stay where it is.

“You put yourself in this position, and you've put all of us in a very uncomfortable position because nobody wants to say no to Trimper's Rides, but we're put in a position where this is a zoning violation,” Mayor Rick Meehan said.

6-year-old boy who drove, crashed SUV isn't injured

ME LIVERMORE FALLS — A 6-year-old boy took the keys to an SUV, drove it and crashed it Saturday, but was not injured, police in Maine said.

The child's caretaker told police in Livermore Falls the boy had gone to bed around 8 p.m. but then got up and took the keys to the SUV from a nightstand, WCVB-TV reported. He drove up and down a street and crashed the vehicle while attempting to do a U-turn. The SUV was wedged between a utility pole and a building.

No one was hurt, police said.

Pacific Tsunami Museum to reopen in summer

HI HILO — The Pacific Tsunami Museum plans to reopen from a coronavirus pandemic-triggered shutdown by the end of the summer after finishing substantial renovations.

The downtown Hilo museum is working on relocating and renovating its Japan exhibit, which focuses on the 2011 tsunami, the Hawaii Tri-

THE CENSUS

835 The amount, in thousands of dollars, a Los Angeles nun who took a vow of poverty admits stealing, prosecutors announced Tuesday. Mary Margaret Kreuper, 79, was charged Tuesday with one count of wire fraud and one count of money laundering, the U.S. attorney's office said. Prosecutors said that in a plea agreement, also filed Tuesday, the now-retired elementary school principal acknowledged that over a decade ending in 2018, she embezzled about \$835,000 from St. James Catholic School in the LA suburb of Torrance. In her plea agreement, Kreuper acknowledged diverting money to pay for personal expenses that included credit card charges and “large gambling expenses incurred at casinos,” the U.S. attorney's office said. A statement from her attorneys said that Kreuper was “very remorseful for what happened” and had been cooperating with law enforcement.

bune-Herald reported. The new displays will also cover Japanese tsunami history.

Its Big Island tsunamis exhibit will be updated with new interviews from survivors and more photos from the most recent tsunami that hit the island in 1975.

“I always felt the local tsunamis exhibit is one of our most important exhibits, because it is informative for people living here,” aid Marlene Murray, the museum's director.

Owl rescued after getting stuck in batting cage

KS MAIZE — A great horned owl is on the road to recovery after getting stuck in the netting of a Kansas batting cage.

KSNW-TV reported that the owl was discovered Monday in the small town of Maize. Police contacted a local raptor center for help. Ken Lockwood of Eagle Valley Raptor Center talked officers through the process of removing the owl from the netting. The owl was then placed in a cardboard box and delivered to the center.

The owl had some damaged

feathers but is expected to heal in a few weeks.

Police: 2 in custody, 1 sought in air rifle incident

OH CINCINNATI — Authorities in Ohio say two sisters charged with shooting at homeless people with an air rifle from a car in Cincinnati are now in custody, and a third person is being sought.

Brittany Hopper, 29, and Kelsey Hopper, 28, have been charged with three counts of assault, accused of firing a BB gun at two people in the Over-The-Rhine neighborhood early in the morning on June 3, Cincinnati police said. Police said the sisters turned themselves in Tuesday.

Police also said they are seeking a third person in the case; their post didn't announce any charges against the 30-year-old man but said he has two unrelated outstanding warrants.

The police department had released surveillance footage on Twitter showing the car pulling up to a group of people lying on the side-

walk and at least two people are visible holding an air rifle out of the car window at different times. The car pulled away and then reversed back where the occupants again pointed the BB gun out of the window, the footage shows.

The car was later impounded, police said, but not before someone spray-painted the hood seemingly to attempt to prevent it from being identified. The shooting caused minor injuries to the people hit by the pellets.

Smokies visitors cited for feeding 100-pound bear

TN GATLINBURG — Some visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park have been accused of feeding peanut butter to a bear.

The feeding was captured on video, and rangers said the visitors confessed and were cited on Saturday, news outlets reported.

The 100-pound male bear had been feeding on walnuts for several weeks along Cades Cove Loop Road, rangers said. Biologists suspected it was fed by visitors because it started to appear food-conditioned.

“Managing wild bears in a park that receives more than 12 million visitors is an extreme challenge and we must have the public's help,” Park Wildlife Biologist Bill Stiver said. “It is critical that bears never be fed or approached — for their protection and for human safety.”

The bear was tranquilized and marked with an ear tag. It was released in the same general area.

From wire reports

NATION

Keystone pipeline nixed after Biden firm on permit

Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — The sponsor of the Keystone XL crude oil pipeline pulled the plug on the contentious project Wednesday after Canadian officials failed to persuade President Joe Biden to reverse his cancellation of its permit on the day he took office.

Calgary-based TC Energy said it would work with government agencies “to ensure a safe termination of an exit” from the partial-

ly built line, which was to transport crude from the oil sand fields of western Canada to Steele City, Neb.

Construction on the 1,200-mile pipeline began last year when former President Donald Trump revived the long-delayed project after it had stalled under the Obama administration. It would have moved up to 35 million gallons of crude daily, connecting in Nebraska to other pipelines that feed oil

refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Biden canceled the pipeline’s border crossing permit in January over long-standing concerns that burning oil sands crude could make climate change worse and harder to reverse.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had objected to the move, raising tensions between the U.S. and Canada. Officials in Alberta, where the line originated, expressed frustration in recent

weeks that Trudeau wasn’t pushing Biden harder to reinstate the pipeline’s permit.

Alberta invested more than \$1 billion in the project last year, kick-starting construction that had stalled amid determined opposition to the line from environmentalists and Native American tribes along its route.

Alberta officials said Wednesday they reached an agreement with TC Energy, formerly known

as TransCanada, to exit that partnership. The company and province plan to try to recoup the government’s investment, although neither offered any immediate details on how that would happen.

“We remain disappointed and frustrated with the circumstances surrounding the Keystone XL project, including the cancellation of the presidential permit for the pipeline’s border crossing,” Alberta Premier Jason Kenney said.

Federal investigation: Protest not broken up for Trump photo op

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An internal government investigation has determined that the decision to forcibly clear racial justice protesters from an area in front of the White House last summer was not influenced by then-President Donald Trump’s plan to stage a Bible-toting photo opportunity at that spot.

The report released Wednesday by the Interior Department’s inspector general concludes that the protesters were cleared by U.S. Park Police last June 1 so that a contractor could get started installing new fencing.

The demonstrators were protesting the

death of George Floyd, who died after a then-Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck and pinned him to the ground for about 9½ minutes. A half-hour after the Washington protesters were forced from the area with pepper pellets and flash-bangs, Trump walked across Lafayette Park amid the lingering scent of pepper spray and delivered a short speech while holding a Bible in front of St. John’s Church.

Park Police officials had already planned to clear the area and “had begun implementing the operational plan several hours before they knew of a potential Presidential visit to the park,” Inspector General Mark Lee Greenblatt said in a statement accom-

panying the report.

The report documents Trump’s attorney general, William Barr, encouraging commanders shortly before the push to clear the protesters because of Trump, but being dismissed.

The report determined the decision to clear the protesters was justified, but law enforcement agencies on the scene failed to effectively communicate with each other and failed to communicate warnings to the protesters about the impending crackdown. Several different law enforcement agencies moved ahead of schedule and started engaging with protesters before the protesters had been sufficiently warned.



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

President Donald Trump holds a Bible as he visits St. John’s Church across Lafayette Park from the White House, on June 1, 2020.

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WORLD

ISIS group: Boko Haram leader dead

Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria — The leader of Nigerian extremist group Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, has killed himself, according to a jihadi organization linked to the Islamic State group.

An audio recording purportedly from Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the leader of the Islamic State West Africa Province, or ISWAP, said Shekau detonated explosives killing himself after a battle between the two groups.

The audio message follows media reports last month that Shekau, one of Africa's most wanted men, blew himself up to evade capture by ISWAP fighters.

Neither Nigerian authorities nor Boko Haram have confirmed Shekau's death.

There had been several false reports about Shekau's death in the past, with Shekau later appearing in videos to refute them.

Al-Barnawi, a son to the founding leader of Boko Haram, the late Mohammed Yusuf, made the statement in an audio message heard this week by The Associated Press in the native Kanuri language.

The message, which lasts about 28 minutes, had what is reportedly al-Barnawi's voice, lacing his speech with quotes from Quran verses. The audio was obtained from a former jihadi who provides intelligence to the government and is familiar with al-Barnawi's voice.

Large protest in Bahrain after inmate dies of virus

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Hundreds have held a rare protest in Bahrain over the death of a prisoner from the coronavirus despite being vaccinated months earlier by the island kingdom.

The demonstration Wednesday night saw protesters march in the streets of the village of Diah over the death earlier in the day of Husain Barakat.

Videos of the protest, which corresponded to Associated Press reporting on the demonstrations, saw those marching shout that they held King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa responsible for Barakat's death over poor care.

An Interior Ministry statement said Barakat, 48, had been on a respirator and died at a hospital. The ministry said Barakat had received an unnamed two-shot vaccination for the virus.

The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy said Barakat received the Chinese vaccine Sino-pharm.

From The Associated Press



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- IFSM 300 Information Systems in Organizations (3) + 30 June
- IFSM 304 Ethics in Information Technology (3) 16 June (4 weeks)

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- HUMN 100 Introduction to Humanities (3) 16 June (4 weeks), 30 June
- ITAL 111 Elementary Italian I (3) 30 June
- ITAL 112 Elementary Italian II (3) + 1 July
- ITAL 312 Advanced Conversation II (3) + 30 June
- MUSC 210 Music as Cultural Expression (3) 30 June
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- GVPT 408 Counterterrorism (3) 30 June
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- PSYC 307H Sleep and Dreams (1) 12 June (2 weeks)
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WEEKEND

Anthony Ramos (left, foreground) and Melissa Barrera are pictured in the musical "In the Heights."

MACALL POLAY/Warner Bros. Pictures

In The Heights

Movie version of 'Hamilton' creator Lin-Manuel Miranda's first musical takes the beat to the streets of an NYC neighborhood



AP

MUSICAL MAN

Director Jon M. Chu calls back to some all-time classics

Page 15



WARNER BROS./AP

REVIEW

'Heights' is the film moviegoers have been craving during COVID

Page 16

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY



ANTHONY SOUFFLE/TNS

Detail of the Cyclone tribute bike designed by Minneapolis designers Jeremy Clark and Johnny Murphy. Riders can pedal the bike or engage the small gas-powered engine to reach speeds up to 25 mph.

Not your average bike

Two Minneapolis makers create cool engine-, pedal-powered two-wheelers

By RICHARD CHIN
Star Tribune

It's not surprising that sales of e-bikes are taking off.

The bikes, which are equipped with electric motors that make pedaling easier or even unnecessary, have become a convenient, easy-to-use, environmentally friendly transportation alternative to cars or even conventional bikes.

But are they cool? Would you ever think of an e-bike as a rideable work of art? Would Steve McQueen have ever been seen pedaling one?

He might have if it had been created by a couple of Twin Cities maker types who are building what they call "bespoke motovelos." They're mounting electric or piston engines on bicycle frames and adding vintage parts and design elements to produce pedalable homages to famous motorbikes of the past.

The bikes are designed by Minneapolis resident Jeremy Clark, in collaboration with his friend, Johnny Murphy, a Roseville, Minn., inventor and entrepreneur.

The two are serial tinkerer artists who have exhibited offbeat projects at places like Northern Spark, Art-A-Whirl and the Mini Maker Faire.

Their MotoVolta line of bicycles is a way for them to celebrate their love of historical motorcycles as mechanical works of art while using the bicycle as a platform that's more environmentally friendly and more accessible.

Designed as tributes

A bright yellow bike designed by Clark with a one-cylinder engine has a red logo labeled "Cyclone" and

"Joerns Motor Mfg. Co. St. Paul, Minn." on its gas tank.

It's a tribute to a famous board track racing motorcycle made by a short-lived St. Paul company in the early part of the 20th century. One of Joerns' 1915 Cyclone motorcycles that had been part of actor Steve McQueen's collection was sold at auction in 2015 for a record \$775,000.

Clark said he actually got a taste of the board track experience of a century ago by riding one of his motorized bicycles on the wooden National Sports Center velodrome in Blaine before it was torn down last year.

Clark has an art school background, experience as a furniture designer and a day job as a senior designer at Target Corp. But he's also been a longtime bike, motorcycle, moped and scooter enthusiast.

Some of his other motorized bicycles include ones modeled after vintage Harley-Davidson and Indian motorcycles. He made a yellow and green John Deere-themed motorized bicycle as a 70th birthday gift for his father, a former farmer and a fan of John Deere lawn mowers.

Clark and Murphy also worked on a 1970s-influenced lowrider bike with an electric engine, a leather battery case and a fake raccoon tail dangling from the handlebars. And they modified an old pedal-powered Schwinn with a rack to carry an electric-powered longboard skateboard.

Functional, environmental

Some of their bikes have been purchased by businesses that use them as cool display objects. But they're all rideable.

"We want to make sure they're functional," Clark said. "It is an expe-

rience you can have with the art."

Their piston-engine models will feel familiar to anyone who rode a moped from the 1970s, with response, vibration and buzz of a little gas two-stroke engine that's peppy for its size but maxes out at about 25 mph. Their electric-drive models have the surprising, "Oh-it's-on!" silent acceleration similar to that of an electric scooter.

Clark wants to make his models with piston engines more environmentally friendly by running them on biofuels. He's growing algae in his basement with the hopes of creating a fuel that will burn cleaner than fossil fuels in his two-stroke engines and can be produced in enough volume to support microcommuting.

"An algae turbine bike is our next build," he said.

That's an admittedly "crazy" idea that Clark and Murphy have to repurpose an automobile turbocharger unit and turn it into a bicycle turbine engine powered by biofuel.

Clark said their motorized bicycles are an answer to what he sees as a "toxic masculinity" that is sometimes seen in mainstream motorcycle culture. In other words, less speed, less noise, more environmentally friendly, more accessible. But still cool.

He compares what he and Murphy are doing to a California company called Super73 that makes pedal-equipped two wheelers that resemble 1970s era mopeds, except they have electric engines.

Clark and Murphy recently showed off a batch of their bikes at a pop-up exhibit in Murphy's shop in the Midway area of St. Paul. Their hand-built machines range in price from \$2,500 to \$5,500.

GADGETS

Pocket-sized Tula Mic packed with features

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The first thing you'll notice about the Tula Mic is it's a cool-looking device, a look that can be considered retro. But once you use it, there's nothing retro about it.

The pocket-sized microphone is packed with features beyond just being a recording device. It connects to a computer with a USB-C connection but also works as a stand-alone portable audio recorder with 8GB of internal memory. An internal 700 mAh lithium ion battery will last for up to 14 hours of portable recording with the noise reduction off and 10 to 12 hours with it on.

The Tula works great. Audio is recorded with superb clarity and removes unwanted background sound with built-in noise reduction. The specifications list the frequency range as 50-20k, with a bit depth/sample rate of 24-bit 48kHz.

Recording is done in two manners. The cardioid unidirectional polar pattern is highly sensitive to sound directly in front of the microphone. With the omnidirectional recording, audio is gathered equally from all directions. Changing between recording choices is done with a mic select button on the side.

The Tula is about the size of a deck of playing cards and on the side is a 3.5mm input for your headphones or a lavalier clip-on microphone. A flip stand is great for rotating it to the angle needed.

A pair of LED lights on the front indicate when recording is taking place, the memory is full, battery level, and act as a gain meter. Controls are on the side for gain up and down, forward, back, mute, volume, recording on and off, play, power and noise reduction.

Getting recorded files off the Tula is simple. Just connect it to a PC as a drive, which allows the recorded .wav files to be copied in the same way files would be copied from an external drive.

Online: tulamics.com; \$229, in cream, black and red

The Monos Kiyo purifying water bottle is a simple way to ensure you have clean drinking water at home, work or travel. It's also a good way to eliminate many plastic water bottles from your life.

It's built and looks like many of today's portable water bottles, holding 500 mL and measuring 2.8-by-3.6-by-9.1 inches with an 11-ounce weight. A screw-on top and a carrying handle make it look just like a water bottle.

But what makes the Kiyo different is that it's built with 400 mAh of internal power and UVC technology to purify the water content. Monos states it purifies water in as little as 60 seconds, and neutralizes up to 99.99% of bacteria in deep clean mode.

A USB-C charging port is built into the top cap and is covered by a water-resistant tab. Assuming it's charged, to get the water clean just swipe across the cap, which activates the Kiyo's UVC purification system.

To get pure drinking water, there are two cleaning modes, both activated from a sensor in the top of the cap and show progress with a glowing light. The first is with one swipe for a quick clean (blue light), which takes 60 seconds, the second is two swipes for a three-minute deep clean (green light).

A USB-C charging cable is included. A full charge of the battery takes three hours, which should last for a month. With its double-wall vacuum insulation, beverages will stay hot for 12 hours or cold for 24 hours.

Online: monos.com; \$70, available in six colors



TULA/TNS

WEEKEND: MOVIES

The musical makes a comeback

For 'In the Heights,' Jon M. Chu draws inspiration from the early greats

By **ASHLEY LEE**
Los Angeles Times

There's a quieter moment in the opening of "In the Heights" when Usnavi, played by Anthony Ramos, shares his secret dream: He feels stuck to the bodega his parents left him, and longs to return to the Dominican Republic. He reveals this while staring out the store window at a crowd of dancers, visible to the viewer in the window's reflection.

This shot — combining footage of 75 performers on location in Washington Heights, and Ramos singing through a movie set's glassless window — is a visual reference to one of Jon M. Chu's favorite films, "Meet Me in St. Louis," the 1944 movie in which Judy Garland belts a now-iconic Christmas carol from a window of the home she's sad to leave.

"In our version, Usnavi is looking out at the block, feeling trapped in this classic 'Meet Me in St. Louis' kind of frame, yearning to even breathe the air outside," the director explains. "What's reflected in that glass isn't his community feeling sad for him or even ignoring him. Instead, they're challenging him. They're daring him to break through that window and dream bigger."

A later song sees two characters magically dancing on the side of a building — an ode to Fred Astaire's ceiling routine in the 1951 movie "Royal Wedding." And an exuberant set piece, with 90 dancers splashing in sync in the Highbridge Pool, echoes the kaleidoscopic water ballets of 1930s Busby Berkeley musicals. Chu's Warner Bros. release, now finally in theaters and on HBO Max, notably quotes these Golden Age moments with actors and characters of color.

"In the Heights" is Chu's first feature-length movie-musical — a four-quadrant live-action genre that, with rare exceptions, has been directed by a handful of white men over the past 20 years. It's the exact type of project the "Crazy Rich Asians" director dreamed of when he first decided to make movies — and a pursuit on which he'd long given up.

"It's so strange. I never thought this odyssey would end up right back at the musical," he says.

"But I'm so down. I've been waiting a long time for this."

It's a balmy afternoon in May, and Chu, 41, is doing paradiddle tap steps down some stone stairs in his Calabasas, Calif., backyard. Though he tried out piano, drums, saxophone and violin throughout his childhood, he only took to tap, and continued lessons for 12 years. He brushed up on his moves for his 2017 wedding reception — a surprise for his wife, Kristin Hodge, a graphic designer now pregnant with their third child.

"Be careful, Dada!" shouts his 3-year-old daughter Willow, whose name Hodge still

"There's a truthfulness of why music and dance exist in these stories in the first place. ... because just saying the words isn't sufficient to communicate whatever that character wants to express."

Jon M. Chu
Director of "In the Heights"

Usnavi. The daily rhythm of his bodega paralleled that of his father's Chinese restaurant in Los Altos, Calif.

Outside the restaurant, Chu unknowingly spent his childhood studying the storytelling power of music. His entire family gathered around the TV to watch classics like "Singin' in the Rain," Disney animated movies and even the latest Michael Jackson music video. And his parents ritualistically brought him and his four older siblings to ballets, operas and musicals all over the Bay Area.

"There's a truthfulness of why music and dance exist in these stories in the first place," says Chu. "It's not because a melody is catchy but because just saying the words isn't sufficient to communicate whatever that character wants to express."

Chu acted in school productions, and even played the Boy in San Jose Civic Light Opera's "Pacific Overtures" in 1991. "There was one performance where I'm up there in the tree, singing the song, and I skip a verse," he says. "The conductor is really angry, and the orchestra just keeps playing, but I've stopped singing because there's nothing else for me to sing! An adult comes back onstage and makes up words to a Sondheim song to fill in the time. When I got offstage, I thought, 'I'm

never doing this again.'"

He didn't realize his fondness for the form until he started film school at USC in the early aughts. "For a screenwriting class, I started writing something called 'The Last Great American Musical,' about a high school that was putting on a show, so it was a musical of a musical," he recalls passionately. "My teacher was like, 'Musicals are dead — you're supposed to write something you can actually sell once you graduate.'"

Instead, Chu doubled down with the tap-centric "Silent Beats" and the barber-shop-quartet short "Gwai Lo" — two music-driven pieces about racial and cultural identity. "'Gwai Lo' means 'white devil,' it's what they called me when I went to Hong Kong for the first time," Chu says solemnly. "My class liked the film, but I was so self-conscious because I didn't know how to define what an Asian American is. I didn't submit it to festivals, I never really shared it with anybody. I buried it."

For his final project, Chu pivoted to whimsy with "When the Kids Are Away," a jubilant, humorous and diversely cast 18-minute musical about housewives' weekday routines. It kicks off with a burst of color akin to Dorothy's "Wizard of Oz" arrival, and follows the busy women as they take genre-hopping dance breaks.

The roots of "In the Heights" in this short are undeniable, says cinematographer Alice Brooks, who shot both projects: "When we were filming the ["Heights"] opening with all the dancers in the middle of 175th Street, it immediately reminded me of this finale, when I sat on top of a crane to get 30 dancers dancing in the middle of that street in South Pasadena."

The piece got the attention of Hollywood, which, thanks to the success of "Moulin Rouge" and "Chicago," had deemed the movie musical undead. With the sudden support of Steven Spielberg, Chu quickly sold the "Romeo and Juliet" revamp "Moxie" and a contemporary "Bye Bye Birdie": Instead of getting drafted to war, superstar Birdie could go to jail, but not before pulling off a buzzy publicity stunt of cohabiting with a devout fan.

"The idea of fame was changing then — reality shows were just hitting, and everything was [all about celebrities like] Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan," he says of what he called a "remixed musical" at the time. "We could've made it super comedic and fun, with everyone trying to find their true selves in this fallacy of a reality series/PR campaign for this star."

Neither project materialized, and others fell apart. Though he finished film school with impressive attention, Chu didn't direct anything for five years. "Then this script for a straight-to-DVD dance sequel arrives and you're like, 'Is this what I've come to?'" he says, shaking his head.

"But it turned out to be the best thing that could've happened. It was some sort

SEE MUSICAL ON PAGE 16



Jon M. Chu

RICHARD SHOTWELL/AP

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Musical: Chu comes full circle with 'In the Heights'**FROM PAGE 15**

of intersection of destiny that started everything."

"Step Up 2: The Streets" ended up being a surprise hit, but the real win was the bond Chu forged with the movie's dancers.

Following the viral success of dance battle videos with Miley Cyrus, Adam Sandler, Amanda Bynes and Diana Ross, Chu teamed with choreographer Scott and cinematographer Brooks on the dance narrative series "The LXD." The trio began fine-tuning their formula for capturing the discipline on camera.

"The thing that the three of us love is telling a story through dance, and not just filming a big dance number for no reason," says Brooks. "During rehearsal, we each shoot the dancers in different ways — moving around with a Steadicam, standing on a ladder for high-angle shots, laying on the ground for low-angle shots. Jon quickly edits some of the videos together and we go over what works, what we can frame better and how we can better showcase the characters' expressions, because we never want to distract from that."

Miranda, who saw "Step Up 2" in theaters on opening weekend and followed "The LXD," first met with Chu about "In the Heights" in 2016. Miranda ultimately believed Chu to be right for "In the Heights" because "honestly, of all the directors we talked to, Latino and non-Latino, he had the lived experience that was closest to our characters."

Still, "In the Heights" — Chu's feature movie musical debut, nearly 20 years after he was predicted to disrupt the genre — might not have happened if it weren't for Chu's circuitous journey. Even the highly technical choreography of the mountain fight in "G.I. Joe: Retaliation" and the building excitement of the hidden-card sequence of "Now You See Me 2" were constructive to the already critically acclaimed adaptation.

"Those big action movies are

basically giant spectacles, performances," says Chu. "They work because there's a piece of danger that allows you to just go with it, no matter how unrealistic it is. That tension needs to be in a musical too; it can't just be a bunch of songs."

Chu intercuts the movie's more fantastical sequences with seconds-long vignettes of life in Washington Heights, featuring a group of actors known as the movie's "community chorus." In the opening, for example, they sing along with Usnavi while they're cooking breakfast, heading to work or getting their kids ready for school. It's Chu's way of saying that these residents, who live on this corner you may have never noticed, have their own dreams too.

At first, these snippets were too expensive to film. "But I knew if we didn't have these shots, the section wouldn't be complete," says Chu. An initial cut of the sequence with stock footage tested well but didn't exactly click, which convinced the studio to expand the budget for these specific shots. "The people here work hard for their families and their community — they're the magic of this place," says Chu.

Regardless of what he's working on, "In the Heights" will always be with him. The director's newfound love for the New York neighborhood spurred Chu to ask Miranda and Hudes a big question. "I want to be able to say the word 'heights' every day of my life, and I want my son to hear that word every day of his life," he told them. "Is it OK if I name him Heights?"

They both cried with Chu and gave him their blessing. Jonathan Heights Chu was born in the middle of the movie's shoot.

"I love the way the people take care of each other," Chu explains of the name. "And I love how they dream — they look out their windows and see past the horizon — and I want those same things for my son."



WARNER BROS./AP

"In the Heights" is a colorful, splashy, feel-good movie for audiences eager for a little sunny optimism after a bleak year. The film is now in theaters and streaming on HBO Max.

Sunny optimism

'In the Heights' is the cheerful movie audiences have been craving

BY ANN HORNADAY

The Washington Post

To quote "In the Heights" itself, the streets are made of music in the first genuinely cheerful, splashy, exuberantly life-affirming movie of the summer.

King Kong might have stomped his way back into filmgoers' hearts as they timidly made their way back into theaters while Cruella made stylish mincemeat of all comers. While it was cathartic watching the "Quiet Place" family vanquish an invasive and deadly pandemic, their ethos of hyper-vigilance and mistrust struck a little too close to home after a year-plus of isolation and social distancing. Finally, theatrical audiences are being rewarded with the sunny, restoratively optimistic movie they've been craving for the past year and a half.

Adapted by Jon Chu from Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegria Hudes' hit Broadway musical, "In the Heights" tells the story of New York's eponymous neighborhood: Washington Heights, where generations of strivers from around the world have put down roots in a simultaneously forbidding and seductive new home. As the film opens, Usnavi (Anthony Ramos) has gathered a group of young children to explain what the Heights mean to his family and friends who grew up there: the energy, camaraderie, rhythmic pulse and indefatigable work ethic of a place that functioned both as a tightly knit social hub and springboard for greater things. It's all laid out in a glorious performance of the film's title song, a classic musical-theater place-setter that introduces the plot, characters and overarching themes of "In the Heights" within a captivating, vibrantly staged production number.

Unfolding over the course of the hottest days of a torrid Upper Manhattan summer, the story of "In the Heights" isn't particularly new: It involves the complicated love affairs of two couples: Usnavi and Vanessa, a would-be fashion designer played with focused self-assurance by Melissa Barrera; and Benny and Nina, an off-license taxi dispatcher and a returning Stanford student, played by Corey Hawkins and Leslie Grace. The nail salon where Vanessa works is being priced out of the neighborhood, with her boss, Daniela (played by the sublime Daphne Rubin-Vega), packing up for the Bronx. Meanwhile, Usnavi, who runs a corner bodega, is nursing dreams of returning to the Dominican Republic, where he wants to take over his family's beachfront bar.

Less a narrative arc than a series of eye- and ear-catching vignettes, "In the Heights" poses predictable questions: Will Usnavi summon the courage to ask Vanessa out on a date? Will Vanessa get

enough money together to get her own apartment in the Village? Will Nina summon the courage to tell her proud father, Kevin (Jimmy Smits), that she doesn't want to return to Stanford? Will Usnavi's beloved adopted grandmother, Abuela Claudia, buy into his plans? Perhaps most pointedly, will the audience be able to un-hear the beats, songwriting conceits and lyrical tics that Miranda clearly improved on to create his subsequent — and exponentially finer — musical "Hamilton"?

Probably not — and that would be true even if Chu hadn't thrown in a clever needle-drop from "Hamilton" while a character is stuck on hold. While "In the Heights" isn't nearly as strong a show as its more famous cousin, it overcomes those minor flaws with sheer force of gumption and unflagging good cheer. Chu has assembled a powerhouse ensemble of veterans as well as promising newcomers. Although "Hamilton" fans won't be surprised by Ramos' natural charisma, this is a breakout moment for the gifted actor; both Barrera and Grace acquit their roles with a combination of starry-eyed idealism and grounded credibility. They also serve as welcome relief from female characters who too often hew to the "saucy Latina spitfire" trope.

As appealing as the individual cast members are, the real stars of "In the Heights" are the production numbers, all-out extravaganzas of singing, dancing, color and contagious joie de vivre that Chu perfected as long ago as "Step Up 3-D." That sensational opening sequence turns out to be a tantalizing amuse-bouche in advance of an increasingly impressive feast for the eyes and ears. Melding rap, salsa, merengue and Latin pop, and name-checking the specific countries and cultures too often flattened out with the over-generalizing term "Latino," the big-screen version of "In the Heights" preserves what might be Miranda's most revolutionary accomplishment: reframing American musical theater within an entirely familiar — yet specific, authentic and invigorating — vernacular.

"In the Heights" drags just a little bit, a limitation Chu seems to be aware of when he seeks to liven things up by way of on-screen animations and snazzy visual effects. But for the most part, this time-honored fable of restless ambition and romance — embodied by an amazingly athletic and versatile group of actors — does precisely what it feels designed to do: Welcome us back to a uniquely American summer, with all the heat, intensity and exhilaration the season promises at its very best.

"In the Heights" is rated PG-13 for some strong language and suggestive references. Running time: 143 minutes. In select theaters and streaming on HBO Max.



WARNER BROS./AP

Director John M. Chu, left, and Lin-Manuel Miranda confer on set.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Relive the past, preserve the future

Though silly and too full of exposition, 'Infinite' a spectacle suitable for summer

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

The new Mark Wahlberg movie "Infinite" poses an intoxicating scenario for all down-on-their-luck know-it-alls: What if you're actually a reincarnated immortal who is not just the smartest and the best at everything, but also necessary to save humanity? In the world of Hollywood wish fulfillment premises, women get to discover they're secret princesses. Men get to discover they're secret geniuses who can wield a katana while riding a motorcycle in a high-speed chase. (I know, I know, there are exceptions.)

This particular story is based on a book, "The Reincarnationist Papers" by D. Eric Maikranz, which the author self-published in 2009 with the goal of getting a movie adaptation made. He offered up a cash reward to a reader who could connect him with a literary agent, a publisher or a Hollywood executive. That it worked, and attracted the likes of Wahlberg and director Antoine Fuqua, is almost as far-fetched as "Infinite" itself.

And yes, "Infinite" is infinitely



PARAMOUNT+/AP

"Infinite" stars Mark Wahlberg and Sophie Cookson as reincarnated immortals who must save the world.

silly, but it's not without some pleasures, many of which come from Wahlberg delivering lines like "are you talking about reincarnation?" and "I've been analyzed in every way possible" in that way that only Mark Wahlberg can — with manic earnestness that under the right circumstances can be passed off as intentional comedy. And although this is overall a sincere endeavor, the existence of Jason Mantzoukas playing a hedonistic

sadist with impeccable eyeliner and a glam rock wardrobe even invites the possibility that the filmmakers aren't asking us to take this too seriously either.

And there are some thrilling stunts with cars and motorcycles that may have Tom Cruise and Vin Diesel sending some notes to their respective "Mission: Impossible" and "Fast & Furious" producers wondering why they don't have that in their new films.

Other notes might include

warnings about too much exposition, though. Building a world like this, with warring factions of Infinites (people who remember their past lives), requires a lot of voice-over and explanation woven into conversations. "Infinite" never quite figures out how to do that gracefully while building worthwhile characters and moving the story along.

As Evan, Wahlberg is attempting to be a kind of everyman here, a maitre d' for high-end

restaurants who is unemployable after a mental health incident and is worried about paying rent and running out of the pills that keep his mind in check. He has big questions about why he is the way he is, and no answers yet.

But the Infinites catch wind of his existence after he constructs an authentic samurai sword for a local drug dealer in exchange for meds. (Sense memory from his apparent past life as a samurai aside, where this unemployed maitre d' who can't afford to pay rent got access to the materials and space to make this item is left unexplored.) It puts him on the radar of Bathurst (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a nihilist Infinite who'd like to destroy everything, and Tammy (Sophie Cookson), a believer Infinite who'd like everything to not be destroyed. From there it's a race to explain everything, get Evan to remember his past lives, stop Bathurst and save the world.

The most novel thing about "Infinite" is that it's not about teens or very young 20-somethings, but it still feels very young adult-adjacent. And it's exactly the kind of big, silly, occasionally exciting spectacle that has come to define summer movie season, for better or worse. There's even an opening for a sequel.

"Infinite" is rated PG-13 for sequences of strong violence, some bloody images, strong language and brief drug use. Running time: 106 minutes. Now streaming on Paramount+.

Rough visuals of 'Spirit Untamed' make film difficult to appreciate

BY CHRIS HEWITT
Star Tribune

We've been spoiled by the high quality of most feature animation, so substandard work like "Spirit Untamed" really sticks out, especially on the big screen.

A belated sequel to the 2002 "Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron" and to Netflix's "Spirit Riding Free" series, "Untamed" boasts animation that is nothing to boast about. A wild horse, Spirit has a coat that resembles the texture of those polyester throws they used to give airplane passengers. The "mountains" in the unspecified western setting where Spirit roams look like fake rocks you'd find on a miniature golf course. And the characters have the rudimentary appearance of people in a carpeting commercial, as if animators planned to take a couple more passes to add shading and depth but forgot to do so.

The roughness of the visuals makes it difficult to appreciate that "Untamed" is not a bad movie. The dialogue is nimble, albeit too contemporary sounding to fit a time frame that appears to be about a century ago, and there's at least one beautifully written, wordless montage.

Rambunctious preteen Lucky (voiced

by Isabela Merced) has been sent from the East Coast to the frontier in order to live with the dad (Jake Gyllenhaal) she doesn't know. Against his wishes, she's determined to make friends with lively Spirit. Beginning with an apple that she rolls to him from a distance, the scene patiently explores how a horse-loving girl might gain the trust of a suspicious mustang, ending with Spirit daintily plucking a piece of fruit from Lucky's outstretched hand.

We know from the beginning that the city girl will realize she was a country girl all along, and the title essentially guarantees that Spirit will remain free. But "Untamed" earns points by focusing almost exclusively on female characters, including Lucky's Aunt Cora (Julianne Moore) and pals Pru and Abigail, who help the budding cowgirl prevent an attempted kidnapping of Spirit and his pals.

The movie's message — that wild creatures were not put here so humans could tame them — may not feel like it suits the period, either. But it's a welcome one, just the same.

"Spirit Untamed" is rated PG for mildly scary moments. Running time: 87 minutes.



DREAMWORKS, STAR TRIBUNE/TNS

Pals Abigail (Mckenna Grace) and Pru (Marsai Martin) help Lucky, center (Isabela Merced), stop Spirit from being kidnapped in "Spirit Untamed."

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

A decade ago, mobile gaming was underestimated and considered “casual” by both gamers and developers, compared to its more sophisticated siblings, like PCs, PlayStations and Xboxes. But the mobile gaming sector is so big now, it can’t be ignored: In 2019, player spending in mobile gaming surpassed console and PC gaming combined, according to Matt Piscatella of The NPD Group, a market research company. And though the pandemic dented mobile game spending in 2020, in part due to higher unemployment, it was still significantly larger than consoles or PCs, according to a variety of market analysis firms.

Mobile gaming brought in an estimated nearly \$80 billion in 2020 revenue, compared with PC making almost \$37 billion, and consoles — such as the Nintendo Switch, Sony’s PlayStation and Microsoft’s Xbox — totaling \$45 billion, according to gaming analytics company Newzoo.

Massive game publishing companies like Activision Blizzard and tech giants like Apple have awakened to the opportunity of investing in mobile gaming. As new, lucrative business models have sprung up — such as free-to-play titles with in-game purchase options — companies have generated more revenue by building out elaborate and complex games on mobile.

The growth has been rapid. In 2015, Apple and Google, who control the two primary mobile app download markets, saw almost \$27 billion gross revenue from games globally. That figure jumped by almost 300% over the next five years, according to Craig Chapple, mobile insights strategist at Sensor Tower.

The mobile gaming boom has changed the way people play games, how games are built and our expectations for what’s available on mobile platforms. Last month, two companies that have both grown rich from mobile gaming — Apple and Epic Games — fought in court over whether the Apple App Store has become a monopoly. It is a case that could change how the App Store operates and whether Epic’s game, Fortnite, a title that has generated over \$1 billion through the App Store, will ever make a return on the iPhone.

The belief among mobile game developers over a decade ago was that people would open their phones for a few seconds to kill some idle time and then put them away.

“A few years ago, anybody would have laughed you out of the room if you’re a 17-minute ... game on a phone,” said Michael Chow, who helped create Words with Friends, which launched in 2009. Chow worked on that game when he was at Newtoy, a company he founded with two cousins and later sold to social and

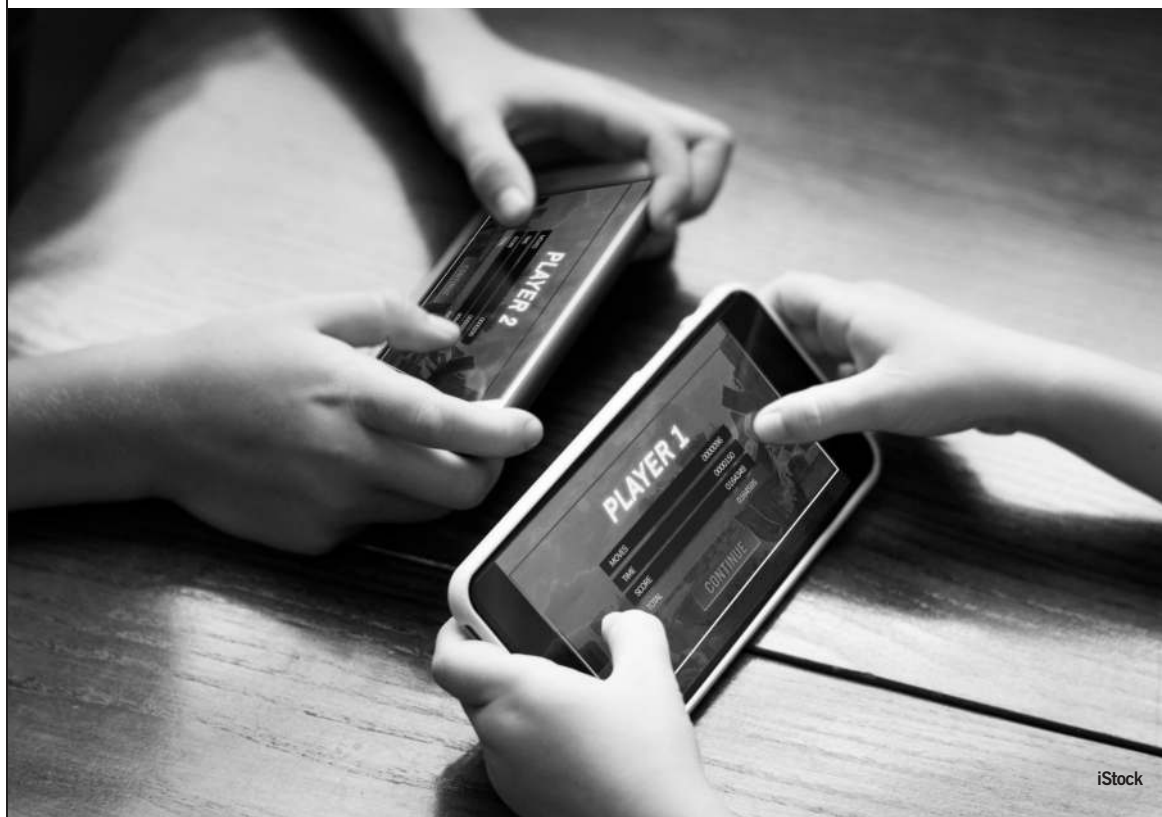
Play EVERYWHERE

The world’s most popular console is also the smallest — and many people carry them wherever they go

BY SHANNON LIAO
The Washington Post

When the first smartphones debuted in the early 2000s, mobile gaming consisted of simplistic titles such as Snake, where the player leads a snakelike chain of pixels around the screen to eat other pixels and grow longer. Soon the market expanded into word games, like 2009’s Words with Friends and three-in-a-row matching games like Candy Crush Saga in 2012, both primarily played by people whittling away time on public transportation or in a doctor’s waiting room.

Today, more than three billion people have smartphones and more than two billion of them play games on those phones. Some of those mobile titles now even rival the quality of games traditionally enjoyed on consoles and expensive PCs.



mobile game company Zynga. Multiplayer games like Words with Friends were designed to open in less than three seconds and allow for a few minutes of gameplay (spelling a word to play on a board), as people took their turns asynchronously.

“That was our target and that

was the right target actually, for that era of the industry and that era of our players,” Chow said. “Now, I mean, if you look at the top 10 global games, none of them meet either of those bars at all.”

Chow is now the executive producer of Riots Games’ new

mobile title, League of Legends: Wild Rift, which can take roughly 15 to 30 minutes per round while players act in real-time.

Advancements in smartphone technology have opened up more room for expansive mobile gaming experiences, but developing games for iPhones with basic

hardware a decade ago was a different story.

“As beautiful as the original iPhone was, it’s a much smaller screen,” said Humam Sakhnini, president at King, which makes the Candy Crush franchise. Sakhnini took over as president after the company was purchased by Activision Blizzard in 2016. The touch [was] very different ... the processing was different, the battery life was different.”

Back then, “games will come and go in a quarter,” Sakhnini said. But titles like Candy Crush have thrived for nearly a decade. That endurance helped change expectations and attract more developers to mobile gaming.

Mobile gaming’s ability to find successful business models early on has also fostered that attraction. The free-to-play model has worked well for many games, encouraging downloads at no cost to users while driving revenue through in-app purchases or the inclusion of in-game advertisements. “Candy Crush,” for instance, sells players virtual gold bars in exchange for real money. The gold bars can be used to buy candy that helps with matching combos and solving levels, and they can also be used to buy extra lives and continue playing.

Mobile games have explored various ways to monetize, from gacha systems — where players can spend currency for a chance to win precious in-game loot — to battle passes in games like Fortnite and Call of Duty: Mobile — which, after an upfront payment, unlock more rewards for users as they spend more time playing. Brand sponsorships with retailers and licensing popular properties, like Marvel and Star Wars, for in-game characters and items is another way mobile developers have gotten fans to pay.

Fortnite, which has incorporated dozens of brand sponsorships, has generated almost \$1.2 billion in player spending on Apple’s App Store, from its 2018 release to its 2020 removal. Apple made over \$100 million from Fortnite revenue commissions during the last 11 months the game was in the App Store, Apple executive Michael Schmid estimated in court testimony during its trial with Epic.

Mobile gaming has traditionally pulled in a more diverse audience, as just about anyone can have a smartphone. About 45% of Candy Crush Saga iPhone players in the U.S. in April were over the age of 45, according to Ted Krantz, CEO of App Annie, a company that measures apps. About half of mobile gamers are women, according to the Entertainment Software Association. Krantz said that mobile is “democratizing gaming to the masses by putting a portable gaming experience in the pocket of every

SEE MOBILE ON PAGE 19

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Mobile: Smartphone the default gaming platform**FROM PAGE 18**

smartphone owner globally.”

In developing countries, people often game on their phone rather than any other device.

“I’ve been living in Southeast Asia now since 2012,” said Mighty Bear Games CEO Simon Davis. Mighty Bear developed the multiplayer battle royale game “Butter Royale” for Apple Arcade, Apple’s gaming subscription service that costs \$5 a month after a free trial. “This part of the world is just mobile first, but there’s no snobbishness around mobile because mobile is just the default gaming platform for close to a billion people here.”

Console and PC developers have used mobile to tap into that wider audience, with titles like Call of Duty: Mobile and Crash Bandicoot: On the Run!

“The chipset in a phone is better than the PlayStation 2.”

Michael Pachter
gaming analyst

“Over the years, there have been a number of significant deals by Triple-A console companies to get a foot in the mobile market,” Sensor Tower’s Chapple said. “Far from just offering small, casual titles, the mobile games market now caters for all tastes with titles that are regularly updated to keep players engaged for years.”

One of the biggest moves into mobile by a major game publisher focused on consoles and PCs came in 2016 when Activision Blizzard acquired King for \$18 in cash per share, or a total equity value of \$5.9 billion. The deal drew attention in the gaming industry, as did the success of other mobile titles like Angry Birds (2009), Clash of Clans (2012) and Pokémon Go (2016).

King’s Sakhnini, previously the Chief Strategy and Talent Officer at Activision Blizzard, described being part of the company’s decision to acquire King.

“I’m a lifetime gamer and I love games, and you could tell that there’s something there [in the mobile space],” Sakhnini said of his first time playing Candy Crush in 2012. “We saw the hallmarks of what we’re seeing in console and PC, which is that this could be a very long-lived franchise, which it turned out to be.”

It has also helped that technology has continued to advance so developers can build more

complex games on phones.

“The chipset in a phone is better than the PlayStation 2,” said Michael Pachter, an analyst at private financial services firm Wedbush who covers gaming. “The screen size is obviously tiny, but you can really have stunning games on mobile now.”

Games developed for mobile today now have big ambitions. Runescape Mobile, a mobile version of the 2001 multiplayer title slated for a June release, will be a live service game — like many free titles on PC and console — and will be updated with more content over time.

“It just became an opportunity that we couldn’t possibly ignore,” said Dave Osbourne, lead game designer for Runescape at Jagex. “Our players are finding that they have less and less time for an MMO [Massively Multiplayer Online Game]. But yet they do have time for mobile.”

Ryan Ward, executive producer of Runescape at Jagex, said that the plan is to launch Runescape’s mobile version to start, receive player feedback and continue to support and update the game.

“Our first job was getting it all kind of ported there,” Ward said. “And we’d see if having a large-scale MMO [on mobile] is actually doable.”

Runescape on mobile will have transparent walls so users can see their scenery at a glance and navigate the massive maps more easily, and it features other tweaks to make the game playable on a smaller screen.

Tech giants like Apple, Google, Microsoft and Amazon are also experimenting with different approaches to mobile gaming. Apple uses the subscription service strategy with Arcade, introduced in 2019, that offers access to a curated collection of over 180 games that don’t run ads or microtransactions.

As more gaming studios invest in mobile, that could shift how games are designed, as they deal with the constraints of people’s free time, attention spans and the hardware limits of smaller screens, cellular data and more.

“The future is actually to develop mobile first, and then do slightly modified or upscale versions on desktop platforms,” said Davis, the Mighty Bear Games CEO. “Because if you can really nail the mobile experience, it will play beautifully on everything else. You design with the greatest number of limitations, that always gives you the most innovative solutions ... and over time, you’ll probably see more and more developers taking that same approach.”



HOUSEMARQUE/TNS

Returnal combines bullet hell shoot-'em-ups with new rogue-lite elements.

Difficult horror head trip

Returnal requires players to adapt to each one-of-a-kind playthrough

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Difficult games always have a breaking point. It’s the moment when players have to decide if it’s their execution that’s holding them back, or their tactics. It’s the idea of doing the same thing over and over again, hoping for a better result or changing the approach altogether. The key to success is figuring out what the situation requires.

In Returnal, players face that decision constantly in Housemarque’s genre-bending project. The developers behind Alienation and Resogun take their expertise in bullet hell shoot-'em-ups and



apply it to a third-person rogue-lite for a unique but challenging experience.

It all begins rather suddenly as Astra space scout Selene Vassos crash lands on the planet Atropos after being drawn in by a mysterious signal. Upon awakening, she finds herself amid an ancient alien civilization that has crumbled, and her only way off the planet is to investigate the broadcast that drew her in.

That’s where Returnal starts, but where it ends up is messy. You see, Selene eventually dies while exploring the ruins and she finds herself in a “Groundhog Day” situation. Upon death, she wakes up around her ship and has to do the same exploration again. That’s how Housemarque writes the rogue-lite element naturally into the gameplay.

Each run-through, players start at the ship, Helios, and they have to venture through a procedurally generated world. It starts

in a rainy forest and moves through five other biomes. The developers essentially made several room pieces and the game puts them together with different creatures and power-ups each time. That makes each playthrough one of a kind, and it also means that players can’t rely on rote memorization to go through the campaign.

Instead, players will have to rely on strategy and skill to advance. That means learning how to adapt to the environment and knowing how to use trees and pillars for cover while dodging fire from the fauna, flora and sentients that inhabit Atropos. Players will have to learn their attack patterns and figure out the best ways to defeat them. Players must maximize every advantage they have because once a player dies, they have to start from square one.

It’s brutal at first, but as players master the basics, they’ll discover a game with incredible depth. Every decision they make is important. Early on, they should bypass treasure chests and secret rooms until they level up their weapon proficiency, which increases the strength of weapons they find. When collecting spoiled resin or malignant power-ups, they have to determine whether they have the health or skill to survive bad side effects, such as a malfunction. When coming across a parasite, they have to decide if its stat boost is worth the drawback.

Like learning how to read the rooms, players will find that experience is the best teacher when it comes to choosing what power-ups to pick up. One parasite may be a poor choice during one run-through, but another may factor in a follow-up run could make it be beneficial.

Thankfully, as players progress through Returnal, they’ll reach a point where they don’t always have to start at zero. They’ll find permanent items such as ether that stay with players even after death. They’ll also discover a sword, a grappling hook and other tools that open up the world of Atropos for more exploration and improve the odds of survival. Players will also reach certain unlock points that offer a shortcut through a playthrough.

Selene’s narrative helps keep fans interested in Returnal. During the campaign, she discovers bodies and data pads of herself from previous runs. The feeling behind each missive runs the gamut from grim determination to scientific curiosity to madness. After each major breakthrough, Selene also has access to her 20th-century home, which is impossibly remade on planet Atropos and further deepens the mystery behind the planet and its alien civilization.

That’s almost enough to get players through the frustrating moments of the campaign, but what will really drive players through Returnal is a feeling of progress. The game does it out in different doses. Sometimes it’s drip-like, figuring out how to deal with one enemy. Other times, it’s a decision to play differently and aggressively kill enemies while collecting obolites, the in-game currency, that makes a huge difference. Whatever the case, Returnal is about reaching that maddening breaking point, finding a way through it and ultimately getting that sense of triumph at beating seemingly impossible odds.

Platform: PlayStation 2
Online: housemarque.com/games/returnal

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Escargot and the significance of 'terroir'

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

Walking through France's finest vineyards in the fabled Côte d'Or ("Gold Coast") of Burgundy, the proud vintner guiding me becomes evangelical.

Pointing to the ground, she says, "A good grape must suffer. Look at this soil — it is horrible ... it is only rocks. That is why these grapes have character. The roots of these struggling vines are thin as hairs. Searching as much as 30 meters down, they reach, reach, reach for moisture. The vines in the flat fields" — she motions, almost disdainfully, to fields just a kilometer away — "have it too easy ... a silver spoon in their mouths. It's like people. Paris Hilton, she is not interesting. The fine wines of humanity, they are the ones who have suffered."

"Like Tina Turner?" I ask.

"Exactly!" she says.

"The best vintners don't force their style on the grape. They play to the wine's strength, respecting the natural character of the sun, soil, and vine ... the terroir. They play the wine like a great musician plays classical music. You don't want to recognize the musician. You want to hear the Beethoven."

That afternoon, I bike through these revered vineyards, where road signs read like a list of fine wines. Wines here are named not for the grape, but for the place of their origin. The more specific the place name, the higher the quality. A wine called simply "Burgundy" for the region would be a basic table wine. A wine la-

beled by the village (for instance, "Pommard") would be better. Those named for the vineyard (such as "Clos de Pommard") would be excellent, and for a certain patch of land within that vineyard (cru or grand cru) the very best.



Rick Steves

I head to a restaurant set in a vineyard that I remember from a previous visit, a place called Le Relais de la Diligence. Two years ago, the vines were lapping at its tables. Today, it's in a wheat field. I'm told that with the whole world making good wines, the French are cutting back on quantity, using marginal land for other crops, and working to build the quality.

Despite the view of wheat instead of grapevines, the food is delightful, as is the wine. I'm struck by the sophistication of the presentation and service as well as the casual atmosphere, with families and even dogs enjoying the scene. (There is a doggy meal printed on the menu.)

Feeling adventurous, I order the escargot, a classic French dish that's sourced a little differently these days. Good escargot must grow wild. The great French snail was once so common that early-19th-century train companies hired women and children to clean them off the tracks so the trains could get a grip. Today, the French snail has gone the way of the great American buffalo. As effective chemicals have successfully killed off weeds and undesirable insects, they have also decimated the slug and snail populations. Much of the escargot in France is now farmed. Locals



RICK STEVES

When in France, escargot awaits the adventurous eater. The best snails grow wild.

know that the farmed gray snails are mediocre at best. The top-quality, free-range snails most likely last slithered in Poland.

Through my meal, I ponder, not for the first time, whether there is something pseudo-sophisticated about all this finicky French food culture. While buying wine, if you ask what would be good with escargot, the wine merchant will need to know how you plan to cook the snails. "Oh, you're cooking it that way? Then you need something flinty — a Chablis." Too bad if you were hoping for a good chardonnay.

Then I think of the way an American who pooh-poohs the French passion for fine points in cuisine might celebrate the

nuances of baseball. Take a Frenchman to the ballpark. All the stuff that matters to me — how far the runner is leading off first base, who's on deck and how he does against left-handed pitchers, how deep the bullpen is, put in a pinch runner! — is nonsense to him.

The next time I put a little ketchup on my meat and my French friend is aghast, I'll accept it with no judgment. I'll just remember that with two outs and a full count, he'll have no idea how I know the runner's off with the pitch.

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

Finding Europe's finest playgrounds is as easy as A-B-C

From the London Eye to Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, there's certainly no shortage of European landmarks that kids are bound to enjoy as much as the adults will. Once a destination's must-see sights have been checked off the to-do list, clear an afternoon for a laid-back play date in a spot so unique it just might crowd out the memories of the place you came for to begin with.



Karen Bradbury

Here's an elementary list of epic places young families are sure to find adventure.

Acrefair, Wales: The Land Plas Madoc Adventure Playground encourages adventures and risk-taking for youth ages 5 through 16 with its assortment of hammers, saws and other building materials. This space strewn with pallets and old tires might look like a junkyard to some, but to

kids with a bit of imagination, it's a land of infinite possibilities. Three "playworkers" on site are there to help, rather than teach or supervise.

Bennebroek, Netherlands: The Linnaeushof playground near Haarlem is billed as Europe's largest playground. More than 350 play sets, many of which employ modern technology, encourage interactive role play. Attractions include cable cars, trampolines, bouncy castles, pedal boats, a miniature golf course, a super slide, a 30-foot-tall replica of a pirate ship and other attractions, all grouped into age-appropriate zones. Admission to the park costs 15 euros. Online: linnaeushof.nl

Cologne, Germany: Since 1998, the German Alpine Association has maintained a massive climbing wall on the Hohenzollernbrücke, a busy railway bridge spanning the Rhine River. This free-entry public facility offers some 70 different climbing possibilities of varying de-



iStock

London's Diana Memorial Playground was inspired by Peter Pan and includes a pirate ship surrounded by sand.

grees of difficulty. The wall can only be used between the months of March and October, and visitors must register online prior to entry. Online: tinyurl.com/zwr4y5uy

Copenhagen, Denmark: Tower Playground resembles a tiny version of the Danish capital, with five of its most famous buildings in miniature: Our Savior's Church, City Hall, Round Tower, Marble Church and Exchange Tower. Each structure's tower incorporates elements of play, from rope bridges to climbing walls. The play area makes up park of the expansive Fælledparken, in the eastern part of the city. Online: tinyurl.com/tt56ahbf

The Hague, Netherlands: The Monkeybos is a forest perfectly formed for active play, with trees pruned specifically for climbing and stumps left to form pathways. Zip

lines offer a quick way down, and piles of branches take on the form of huts and caves. The setting, a seaside dune between The Hague and Wassernaer, is magical in and of itself. Online: dunea.nl/duinen/spelen

London: The Diana Memorial Playground near Kensington Palace built two decades back in honor of "the people's princess" was inspired by the timeless tale of Peter Pan. Mermaid fountains, teepees, totem poles, slides and sensory trails beckon, but the real star here is a massive wooden pirate ship, perfect for climbing in and around, surrounded by sand and palms. Expect waiting times to enter, as the park is popular year round. Online: tinyurl.com/4hmytr38

Stockholm, Sweden: The Fruit and Scent Park is a produce-themed playground featuring a banana slide, orange seesaw, pear huts, watermelon jungle gym and cherry swings. Online: parker.stockholm

Valencia, Spain: Based on the story penned by Jonathan Swift, the "Parque Gulliver" is designed around a giant's body sprawled across the ground. Children can make like Lilliputians by climbing, hiding and exploring his fiberglass physique covered by slides, stairs, ramps, caves and other fun spaces. The giant makes his home in the Jardí del Túria gardens. Online: tinyurl.com/kwb7kmw2

Wattens, Austria: The Swarovski Crystal Worlds is a unique attraction in the Tyrolean town in which the glass manufacturer's headquarters are located. At once a park, art museum, restaurant and retail space, in 2015, a playground entered the mix. A four-story play tower with rope swings, climbing net and slides is complemented by outdoor play space, water play area, maze and carousel. Admission costs 19 euros for adults and 6 euros for ages 6-17. Online: tinyurl.com/2x5463by

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY CHAD GARLAND/Stars and Stripes

Perfectly golden and lightly salted french fries May 30 from Lutra Burger, along with their sweet potato cousins.

Lutra burger

Location: Friedrichstrasse 1, 67655 Kaiserslautern
Hours: Weekdays 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. (Fridays until 10 p.m.); Saturdays 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Sundays 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.; closed Tuesdays. Hours are subject to change.

English menu: Menu on Lutra Burger app in German and English; German in the shop and on Lieferando.de.

Prices: Burgers from about 8 to 14.50 euros; fries 3.50 euros and sweet potato fries 5 euros.

Information: Online: lutra-burger-kl.de/en/home; Phone: +49 (0) 631-41261794; Email info@lutra-burger-kl.de

Chad Garland



Evening shadows fall June 1 on Lutra Burger in Kaiserslautern. The restaurant is slightly off the beaten path of the pedestrian zone, but its golden hand-cut-style fries and meaty burgers are strong attractions.

The fry's the limit

A golden guide to finding french fries in Kaiserslautern

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Potatoes are rich in potassium, a mineral few Americans get their daily recommended intake of — a fact that gave me enough of an excuse to take a tasting tour of Kaiserslautern's french-fried potato offerings.

It also seemed like a good time to get reacquainted with the salty snack, as summer weather finally arrived and downtown again murmured with sounds of life from outdoor dining in early June. They're fine for delivery, but fries are ideal

when still hot from the fryer, whether enjoyed at an open-air table or while strolling through the pedestrian zone.

Though sweet potatoes are much lower in potassium, I sampled a variety of those, too, but found them about the same everywhere. Good news for anyone who prefers mushier, sweeter fries.

Regular fries have somewhat more variability, though the bistro and standard-cut styles doled out at countless kebab stands, imbiss shops and American-style fast food restaurants featured strongly in the orders I tried at seven places over a week in late May and early June.

Euro-style bistro pommes are often fried twice for the most crunch, New York Times food writer Julia Moskin wrote in a 2018 ranking of the various cuts. The slimmer standard cut — think McDonald's fries — can achieve golden crispness after being cooked once, Moskin wrote.

Sissi und Franz, teeming with diners in its outdoor seating in early June, serves up a variation on bistro fries, golden brown outside and fluffy inside, for 3.45 euros a serving. Though somewhat boring on their own, they're spruced up with dips for 1 euro each — I'm a fan of the "truffelketchup" and "currymayo."

At Burgerme, a hefty portion of slimmer-cut fries at

the salty snack, as summer weather finally arrived and downtown again murmured with sounds of life from outdoor dining in early June. They're fine for delivery, but fries are ideal



A heaping helping of fries at Burger 16/57 dwarfs the juicy bacon-and-egg burger in a takeout order June 1.

2.69 euros is likewise perfectly fine with ketchup or on its own, but substantially improved by sauces like the curry mango dip for an extra 50 cents.

I was excited to see red spice dusted on the pommes from Mister Fried Chicken, a newer entrant on the scene, but the added flavor was a bit weak. From a hole in the wall in the pedestrian zone, MFC slings fried chicken sandwiches, burgers and monstrosities that combine beef or chicken — or both — with jalapeno poppers between the buns. Its fries come in three sizes, including a bucket for 9.99 euros. I had the large for 2.99 euros, which still seemed on the small side.

On the other end of the spectrum is Goodies Food Factory, offering the beefier steakhouse frites for 2.99 euros. I can only imagine this starchier style still has its fans, though it feels like we should have evolved beyond it.

I'm not quite sure if Hans im Glueck's fries qualify as steakhouse cut or just a thicker bistro style, but for 3.90 euros a serving, or 6.90 a pound, they're just okay. A variety of dips might help slightly, but 1.70 euros each is a



Delightfully weird burger art greets customers entering Burger 16/57 in Kaiserslautern, where the hand-cut style fries are a standout.

step price to solve the problem.

This brings us to my two favorites. They're both from locally owned shops a little off the beaten path, offering something like hand-cut-style fries with bits of skin still on and odd little pieces that fry up like chips.

Burger 16/57, a burger-and-fry joint on Moltkestrasse in the shadow of St. Maria Catholic Church's spire, sells a heaping of square-cut fries for 3.60 euros. On a recent visit, they were cooked a little beyond golden and slightly oversalted, but were still a great complement to the juicy, cheesy bacon and egg burger.

At Lutra Burger, a couple of blocks from the pedestrian district, a portion of hand-cut-style fries is 3.50 euros. Golden brown, lightly salted and firm, though not the crispiest on this list, these are the fries I frequently crave.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Beauty by the acre

Experience the romance of an English-style garden at Parco Giardino Sigurta in Verona

BY NORMAN LLAMAS
Stars and Stripes

My wife and I took our two kids on a long-awaited trip from our home near Aviano Air Base to Parco Giardino Sigurta (Garden Park Sigurta), arguably the most beautiful garden park in Italy, as soon as the Italian government relaxed its coronavirus restrictions.

Its history dates back to 1407, when Nicolo Contarini bought the property near Verona and farmed it. In 1792, a new owner came up with a plan for building a romantic English-style landscape garden. Several of the buildings in the 150-acre park, including the neo-Gothic Castelletto, date to this time.

It passed between owners and into ruins until local doctor and businessman Giuseppe Carlo Sigurta bought it in 1941. He restored it, tripled its size and passed it on to his family members, who still run the park.

Walking along the paths and taking in the abundant flowers and greenery are great ways to experience the park if you're up for the hike. Hourly bike rentals and a train ride help cover more ground, or splurge on a golf cart for 18 euros an hour, complete with an English-language recorded guide.

Among the highlights is the avenue of roses, where bushes full of the flowers line the walkway. If you're traveling south, you'll get a beautiful view of the Castello Scaligero, a castle dating back to the Middle Ages, located in the nearby town of Villafranca di Verona. Some scenes from William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" used this castle as a setting. The castle is also open for visitors and provides beautiful views of Verona.

All along the western edge of the park are grazing deer at the appropriately

On the QT

Address: Via Cavour, 1; Valeggio sul Mincio, Verona 37067

Cost: 14 euros for adults, 7 euros for children aged 5 to 14.

Opening hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, from March to November.

Food: Five snack bars, with meal combos at about 9 euros

Information: Phone +39 045 6371033; Online: sigurta.it

Norman Llamas

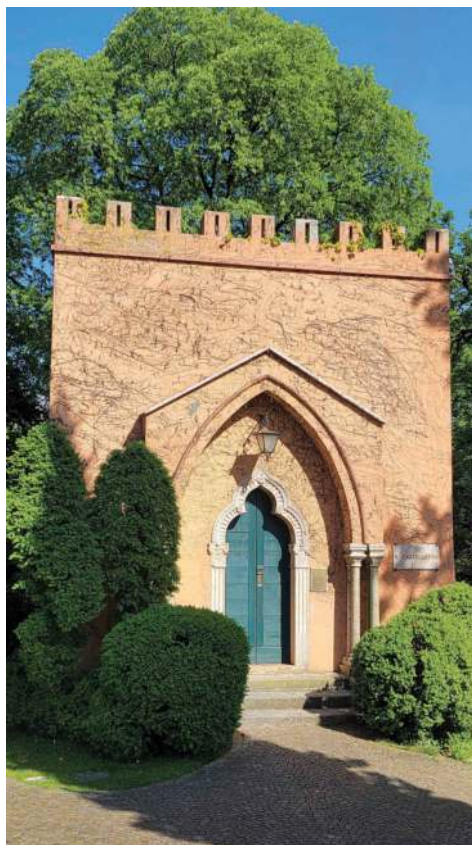
named Deer Valley. A farm with Venetian poultry breeds, donkeys, goats, chickens, turkeys and ducks is a great educational opportunity for children. Perhaps another life lesson for kids awaits at the dog cemetery, where decades of Sigurta family pets are buried.

The horizontal sundial, designed to work for 26,000 years, was built in 1990. Then in 2011, after six years in the making, the maze was inaugurated.

The maze hedges include 1,500 yew trees and encompass more than 27,000 square feet. The maze is a huge hit and it seems to be busy all the time. My kids couldn't wait to go through it.

There are also several seasonal events, such as a tulip exhibition in the spring, that are expected to resume as the pandemic situation improves. The hour trip from the Army garrison in Vicenza and even the two-hour haul from Aviano are well worth making to see the park and the greater Verona area.

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The Castelletto building inside the Garden Park Sigurta was originally used as the armory. The park property's history dates to the 15th century.



PHOTOS BY NORMAN LLAMAS/Stars and Stripes

Visitors walk along a path with a view of the Scaligero Castle in Villafranca di Verona, from the Avenue of the Roses, inside the Garden Park Sigurta.



The maze inside the Garden Park Sigurta, near Verona, Italy, opened in 2011. Visitors can make their way around hedges made up of around 1,500 yew trees. The paths wind their way among tall evergreens on a footprint of almost 27,000 square feet.



The Water Gardens at the Garden Park Sigurta offer lovely views of the surroundings.



Park Giardino Sigurta's train takes visitors on about an hour's ride through the entire property. It's a nonstop guided and narrated tour that costs 3.50 euros and is free for children under 3 feet tall. Golf cart and bike rentals are also available.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Pushing play on super-heroic fun

After pandemic pause, Avengers swing and soar into Disneyland

By ANDREW DALTON
Associated Press

Now that it's getting safer to assemble, the Avengers are at last descending on Disneyland.

A Spider-Man ride that lets visitors blast bots with virtual webs from their bare hands and a show of strength from the royal guard of Wakanda are among the highlights of the new Avengers Campus at Disney's California Adventure Park, whose debut was paused for about a year by the coronavirus pandemic before it opened to the public June 3.

The Avengers Campus seeks to be an immersive experience that allows guests to become super-heroic across a series of rides, shows and eateries from the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

"We're excited to finally open up the gates and let everybody in," Scot Drake, a portfolio creative executive with Walt Disney Imagineering, said. "We had 70-plus years of stories and amazing characters to pull from, 23 epic films, and for us it was, 'What is the best way to get our guests right in the middle of those stories, right in the middle of the action?'"

Central to that aim is "WEB SLINGERS: A Spider-Man Adventure," which combines classic ride structure with an array of cameras that capture guests' body motion and allows them to play Peter Parker.

They're asked to help onscreen Spidey Tom Holland fight an outbreak of small, smart and powerful Spider-bots, creations that he and a team of inventive teens developed but lost control of in an old building donated by Tony Stark.

The experience resembles the videogame competition of Disneyland's Buzz Lightyear ride, but the action and the tech behind it are in a different galaxy. With no equipment necessary (though enhancement gadgets for the wrist can be bought next door), riders can blast swarms of the little spider-bots (which can also be purchased next door), and a couple of not-so-little ones.

"What was really important to us was to try and make the interface disappear so the guests just had the super-powers themselves," said Brent Strong, executive creative director of Walt Disney Imagineering. "So in order to do that, we did a whole bunch of invention to try and make the technology as un-obvious as possible."

Journalists got to take the ride for a few spins June 2. With each pass the experience changes, as guests start to master their web-slinging and figure out they can do more than just blast away with their powers.

"You can start to grab on to shipping containers, open doors, grow things and shrink things," Strong said. "We've hidden a million Easter eggs and fun little surprises in there."

Elsewhere, majestic music blasts to announce the marching arrival of the Dora Milaje — the royal guard that protects T'Challa in "Black Panther." With their leader Okoye, the shaven-headed women of Wakanda twirl their spears and explain their principles to give wannabe warriors in the audience a lesson in the fighting arts.

The show includes something rare for a day at Disneyland: a moment of silence for the dead. While Okoye tells the crowd she seeks to honor fallen kings and ancestors, the ritual, in a time of many such moments, feels like an acknowledgment of the many deaths during the pandemic that kept the park dark for more than a year. (It also feels like an acknowledgement of "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman, whose death last year stunned the world.)

Disney's two Anaheim parks reopened with restrictions on April 30 and will reopen at something nearing normal on June 15.

The new section was also built to incorporate "Guardi-



PHOTOS BY CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP

A Spider-Man character performs June 2 during "The Amazing Spider-Man!" show at the Avengers Campus media preview at Disney's California Adventure Park in Anaheim, Calif. The campus opened to the public June 3.



A Doctor Strange character performs June 2 during the "Doctor Strange: Mysteries of the Mystic Arts" show at the Avengers Campus media preview at Disney's California Adventure Park.



Characters from the film "Black Panther" perform June 2 during "The Warriors of Wakanda: The Disciplines of the Dora Milaje" show at the Avengers Campus preview at Disney's California Adventure Park.

ans of the Galaxy — Mission: Breakout!" a drop-tower ride with funky tunes in place since 2017.

The storytelling on the Avengers campus even extends to the food, including an outlet of the Shawarma joint that Iron Man suggests his allies hit up after the Battle of New York depicted in 2012's "The Avengers." It was open for sampling for journalists and as Tony Stark promised, it is indeed good.

Another Avengers Campus is planned for Disneyland Paris. The California version will have major additions. Other heroes, including Thor and Iron Man, will make appearances, and Doctor Strange will work his wizardry in his Ancient Sanctum several times a day.

Some of those heroes, in Marvel's movies, are dead, and for those who follow the events of the Marvel Cinematic Universe with near-religious precision, it can be tough to tell what time period the campus is set in.

Don't overthink it, the creators say.

"We've summoned heroes from across all of space and time," Strong said. "Time is a lot more squishy than any of us think. Trying to put a specific date to it can be challenging. But to us, Avengers Campus is here and now."



A Spider-Man character poses for guests June 2 after "The Amazing Spider-Man!" show.

WEEKEND: FOOD

A slippery concept with a certain appeal

Banana peels are having a moment as banana-peel bacon is growing in popularity on Instagram and TikTok

By EMILY HEIL

The Washington Post

Hashtagging teenagers certainly aren't the first people to eat banana peels.

The rubbery yellow fruit casings have long been used in cooking; in India, they are sometimes used in curries and in thoran, a South Indian stir-fry. But even for those more accustomed to tossing them in the trash instead of a pan, banana peels are having a moment.

The Washington Post recently featured a recipe for banana bread based on one from Zingerman's Bakehouse in Ann Arbor, Mich., that incorporates both fruit and peel.

And two British TV chefs have recently drawn attention for recipes using peels — Nigella Lawson mixed hers with cauliflower, and Nadiya Hussain suggested turning them into a substitute for pulled pork or chicken. The New York Times wrote about the across-the-pond phenomenon, citing a Guardian story that asked, "Are banana skins about to become a must-eat ingredient?"

Possibly. But another question is whether banana-peel bacon, a dish that's popular on Instagram and TikTok, is the scrap's ultimate glow-up.

There's reason to think so. It ticks a lot of buttons: a novelty factor and double-take looks that make it perfect for social media, and appeal (yeah, I went there) to the zero-waste and vegan/vegetarian crowds.

The origins of the dish are murky. A 2019 recipe for "fake-un" posted on Life Hacker calls for frying the peels first, then glazing them. But a popular and much-cited iteration making the rounds now comes from Charles Hunter III, a personal chef and food blogger at the Salted Table.

Hunter says he took his inspiration from a video posted by vegan TikTok star Tabitha Brown. Brown's carrot bacon was a viral hit, but she didn't like the banana version she attempted. Her verdict? "It ain't right in my spirit."

"I took that as a challenge," Hunter said in an interview. "One of my favorite things is to get people to like vegetables they don't think they like."

He ditched her air-fryer method and experimented a bit, finally landing on marinating the peels in a mixture that mimics the flavor of bacon, with Liquid Smoke and smoked paprika, then crisping them in a pan. Some of the iterations on TikTok (and Brown's, too) only briefly



EMILY HEIL/The Washington Post

Banana-peel "bacon" is a novel concept going viral on social media, but it's hard to beat the real thing.

soak the peels in seasoning, but Hunter said a couple of hours is essential to infusing the peels with bacony essence.

Pleased with the results, he posted the recipe on social media and his blog, where it was widely shared and imitated.

I made it according to Hunter's directions. I was tempted to omit the Liquid Smoke, which I usually find off-putting, and Hunter said that if I did, to add extra smoked paprika to amp the smoky flavors. But I decided to go with the original recipe, and mixed up the potent marinade, letting the peels sit for a few hours. So far, so easy.

Cooking them was the challenge. They're easier to scorch, since unlike real bacon, the peels have no fat (duh) to render, and the sugar in the marinade goes from caramel to char in seconds. Despite

Hunter's advice to go "low and slow," I accidentally cranked the heat a little too high and wound up burning them. (Turns out, burned banana peels smell as bad as you would imagine they do!)

I went easier with the next batch and got glossy, brown sticks that looked ... kinda like bacon — or at least not like banana peels. The flavor was similarly bacon-adjacent: Mostly it tasted like the marinade — that is, smoky and intensely salty, though there was a bitter note you don't find in the real deal. And they weren't as crisp as I like my bacon, with a chew that wasn't ideal.

Hunter acknowledges that this is not a perfect clone of the beloved meat. "It's definitely better in something rather than something you'd eat straight out of the skillet," he says. He has tucked them into

BLTs, crumbled them on salads, and garnished carrot-jam crostini with them.

The use of peels can be polarizing. Hunter started his blog post with this disclaimer: "First things first, I don't really care about any negative opinions you may have about this recipe. It is not for everyone, and I'm fully aware of that."

Critical commenters on our whole-banana bread also broke into two broad categories. There are the folks who are just grossed out by the very idea, with some citing the fact that monkeys discard the peel as evidence that humans should, too. And others fret about pesticides in the peels, even though the recipes recommend organic bananas to avoid that issue.

But the faux bacon has its fans — or at least there are plenty of bacon-curious folks out there.

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STARS AND STRIPES

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



ON THE QT

Directions: 5-6-1 Shinnishihara, Fujiyoshida, Yamanashi prefecture 403-0017. Google-plus coordinates are FQPJ+Q6 Fujiyoshida, Yamanashi.

Times: Hours of operation vary by season and holidays; visit the park's website for a schedule.

Costs: Entrance to the park is free, but you'll have to pay per ride or purchase a Free Pass for unlimited rides. Prices for those vary. For example, a Free Pass for two adults costs 10,000 yen.

Food: The park has more than 20 eateries with varying prices, as well as snack and drink machines throughout.

Information: Online: www.fujiq.jp/en

Theron Godbold



PHOTOS BY THERON GODBOLD/Stars and Stripes

Above: Fuji-Q Highland's Takabisha roller coaster holds the Guinness World record for steepest incline for a ride of its type, 121 degrees.

Left: Fuji-Q Highland at the base of Mount Fuji is one of Japan's most popular theme parks, offering something for everyone.

Not-so-cheap thrills

The roller coasters at Fuji-Q Highland at the base of Mount Fuji promise excitement, but at a price

BY THERON GODBOLD

Stars and Stripes

As a kid growing up in Texas during the late 1980s, hearing names like Astro World and Six Flags were whispered delights, the promise of a day of thrilling rides and carnival-style food.

In Japan, Fuji-Q Highland brings those memories back to life.

This venue at the base of its namesake Mount Fuji is one of Japan's best and most well-known theme parks. Built in the late 1960s, Fuji-Q is now home several major roller coasters for hardcore thrill-seekers.

Fujiyama boasts the world's best view of Mount Fuji. However, that view quickly disappears as you hurtle down a 20-story drop at nearly 80 mph and your eyes clench shut.

Do-Dodonpa is a rocket ship on rails that accelerates to 111 mph in just 1.56 seconds, and then throws you sideways through a curve into the world's largest loop, which measures 130 feet.

Takabisha, which means "domineering" in Japanese, holds the Guinness World record for steepest incline for a roller coaster, 121 degrees. You first shoot into a dark tunnel, followed by a quick drop that brings you back into the light and a climb up what seems a never-ending slope.

You crest the peak, pause for a moment

and then abruptly free fall, upside down, jetting toward the ground and gaining speed to carry you through the outside loops and twists that make up the rest of the ride.

Ejajanaika mocks you with its name, which translates to "Come on, it's OK." The taunt is real. Standing in line and watching riders scream will psych out even diehard adrenaline junkies.

The ride starts by taking you backward up the first peak. As you drop, your seat rotates and you come face to face with the rails you are riding. Loops, rolls and hills make this ride one of the most exciting I have ever ridden.

If you're looking for more than roller coasters, Fuji-Q has something for everyone. The park has 20 eateries on the premises and several themed areas, including one for small children.

Thomas Land is a family-friendly portion of the park with 11 attractions based on the popular blue tank engine series, "Thomas & Friends," as well as restaurants and shops where families can spend the day.

Carnival-inspired rides like a Ferris wheel, spinning cups and chain swings dot the park.

But the childlike glee you'll feel approaching the park is tempered as the fees start to rack up. Ticketing can be confusing. For example, entrance is free,



THERON GODBOLD/Stars and Stripes

If you're looking for more than roller coasters, Fuji-Q Highland in Japan's Yamanashi prefecture offers more than 20 snack shacks and eateries.

but you'll have to pay per ride unless you buy a Free Pass for unlimited rides.

Free Pass prices vary depending on the number of people. For example, two adults can get unlimited rides for 10,000 yen (about \$92). The cost is 9,200 yen for two junior high or high school students and 7,200 yen for two elementary school kids.

Cheaper tickets are available for families with small children but don't include the roller coasters. Fear not, for each ride has its own ticket kiosk where you may purchase an additional ride.

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AARON KIDD/Stars and Stripes

Fuji-Q Highland eateries serve a variety of snacks, including this Mount Fuji-shaped pizza with a snow cap of cheese.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

BY PAYNE LUBBERS
AND ALEX TANZI
Bloomberg

Pandemic-induced challenges and a fevered hunt for child care are making the lead-up to this year's summer camp season the most stressful ever.

The old-fashioned American institution serves a particularly important role this year, not only freeing parents to jump back into their own jobs, but providing children social and psychological relief after more than a year stuck at home in front of computer screens. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has loosened its guidance in hopes of allowing as normal a summer as possible.

"As of now, my kiddo is on three waitlists," said Molly Martin, a mother from Hinesburg, Vt., in search of summer care for her 6-year-old daughter Varya. "I was able to find a camp with an opening, but it's a two-hour round trip, so I'm hoping one of the waitlist camps will open up."

At Washington state's Four Winds Westward Ho, which offers \$1,600-per-week sessions that include horseback riding, archery and sailing on a 61-foot yawl, parents of second-, third- and even fourth-generation campers have tried to nudge their offspring higher on the waitlist.

"They'll name-drop, or something like that," said Paul Sheridan, executive director of the nearly century-old camp. "It's frustrating, and parents want to try whatever they think is appropriate or can increase their chances."

As economies lurch back into life, work forces and supply chains are disrupted in industries from computer chips to auto-making, and summer camps are no different.

In a normal year, the \$20 billion U.S. industry employs over a million people and serves almost 16 million overnight campers, according to the American Camp Association. The singalongs, canoe voyages and capture-the-flag mayhem are a chance for children to enjoy controlled adventure and for parents to enjoy blissful solitude.

They need it more than ever after a pandemic that killed almost 600,000 Americans. Mothers between 25 and 54, who shoulder the bulk of child care duties, remain out of the workforce at higher rates than everyone else, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

Kids themselves must recuperate from months of indoor isolation.

"We have all been in a marathon and not a sprint. When you finish a marathon, you celebrate briefly and then go rest," said Madeline Levine, a San Francisco psychologist and author who has written about preparing

Waiting for summer fun

Parents hoping to enroll their children at camp have found there are few vacancies due to a post-pandemic rush for kids to experience normalcy



JOHN TULLY/BLOOMBERG

Molly Martin and her daughter, Varya Smith-Martin, 6, pose for a photo at their home in Hinesburg, Vt., May 31. Martin has been searching for a summer camp for Varya but said that vacancies have been few.

children to face an uncertain world. "Getting kids out in nature and with their own age group is critically important right now."

The rush to get kids enrolled adds to the usual hassles: home-sick campers, helicopter parents,

director of Maine Summer Camps, which represents more than 140 camps. Now, they'll arrive from any number of home and schooling situations. While the federal government has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech

states that allowed camps to operate last summer, but only about 20% opened their cabin doors. This year, all are set to open at 80% capacity, though some are operating only as day camps. Hall said parents are

"They'll name-drop, or something like that. It's frustrating, and parents want to try whatever they think is appropriate or can increase their chances."

Paul Sheridan

executive director, Four Winds Westward Ho in Washington state

wildfires and lawsuits. Throw in the still-potent virus and the labor shortage, and you have the potential for more chaos than a lice outbreak.

In Maine, campers who did turn up last year all came from the common experience of lockdown, said Ron Hall, executive

vaccine for children between 12 and 15, camps anticipate that most won't have received their second dose — if they've been vaccinated at all.

"In some ways, this year is more difficult than last year," Hall said.

Maine was one of a handful of

taking what they can get.

"Day camps mostly are already full, and it's not the norm," he said.

New guidance from the CDC says that fully vaccinated campers will no longer need to wear masks or practice social distancing for the coming season

after the agency received criticism for its previous, stricter recommendations. The agency said the guidance is meant to supplement, not replace, other regulations.

For camps, the challenge of reopening after many missed the entire 2020 season will be substantial as they struggle to find workers. Before the pandemic, U.S. summer camps each year enlisted about 25,000 foreign workers, many of them college students, as counselors.

With international travel constrained, only about 13% of overnight camps had any foreign staff in 2020, down from 73% in 2018, according to an American Camping Association survey. Visa programs were reinstated in March, but processing has been delayed by limited U.S. embassy and consulate services due to the pandemic.

Hall said that in Maine, usually a third of all of camp staff are students with visas allowing them to work for the summer. Many domestic employees have moved on after missing the 2020 season.

"It's very much up in the air, and we are starting to go to plan B," said Danny Kerr, director of Camp Pemigewasset in New Hampshire, the country's oldest sleepaway boys' camp still owned by the original family. Even with a shortage of help, Kerr said, he is "blessed with a team of senior staff," who return each summer. "Our graybeards are all back," he said.

Even camps less dependent on foreign workers are struggling.

Adam Boyd, executive director of Camp Merri-Mac and Camp Timberlake in Black Mountain, N.C., said his usual contingent recruited from Christian campus ministries isn't showing up.

"There's an inertia when you have college students that have been home, and have a Netflix account that works just fine and parents that cook for them," he said.

Meanwhile, the onslaught of parents and children is unrelenting.

"This summer more than ever, kids really need camp," said Kerr of Pemigewasset. "We've had to turn away a number of families."

He's hard pressed to accommodate them: State guidelines forced him to cut his usual 168-child sessions to 160.

Increasing the space crunch, some farsighted families rolled their canceled 2020 tuition to 2021, locking up cots. That turned out to be a smart decision, given the demand upswing.

"We had a feeling that after America was locked down for a year, there was going to be in a huge rush to have their kids experience normalcy," said Joe Deoudes, an executive at a digital advertising firm from Bethesda, Md., whose 13-year-old son is off to camp in Connecticut.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

By NICK EHLI

Special to The Washington Post

Norman Maclean's book novella "A River Runs Through It," about fly-fishing and Montana, is more poetry than narrative. It's also a triumph of American literature.

His son, John N. Maclean, is also an author, and his latest book, "Home Waters," is a lyrical companion to his father's classic, chronicling their family's history and bond with Montana's Blackfoot River. His storytelling — from the fishing with his dad to the life and death of his uncle Paul — is reliable, elegant and charming.

After a 30-year career as a journalist, mostly as a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune in Washington, D.C., the younger Maclean took to writing well-received nonfiction about wildfires in the American

West. He hadn't considered a family memoir.

Then, he caught a big trout — a really big trout — while fishing a stretch of the Blackfoot that his father memorialized in "A River Runs Through It," published in 1976. He wrote about that fish, "the fish of a

lifetime," he called it, for a local club of anglers, and then, with some prodding, expanded the tale for a regional magazine. That was the end of it, he thought, until a couple years later when an editor unearthed the magazine article while on vacation in Montana.

Did Maclean want to write a book?

"I thought this was going to be a big fish story, but then it turned into something very different," says Maclean, now 78. "I don't call it a memoir. I call it a chronicle. A memoir is about you, and this isn't all about me."

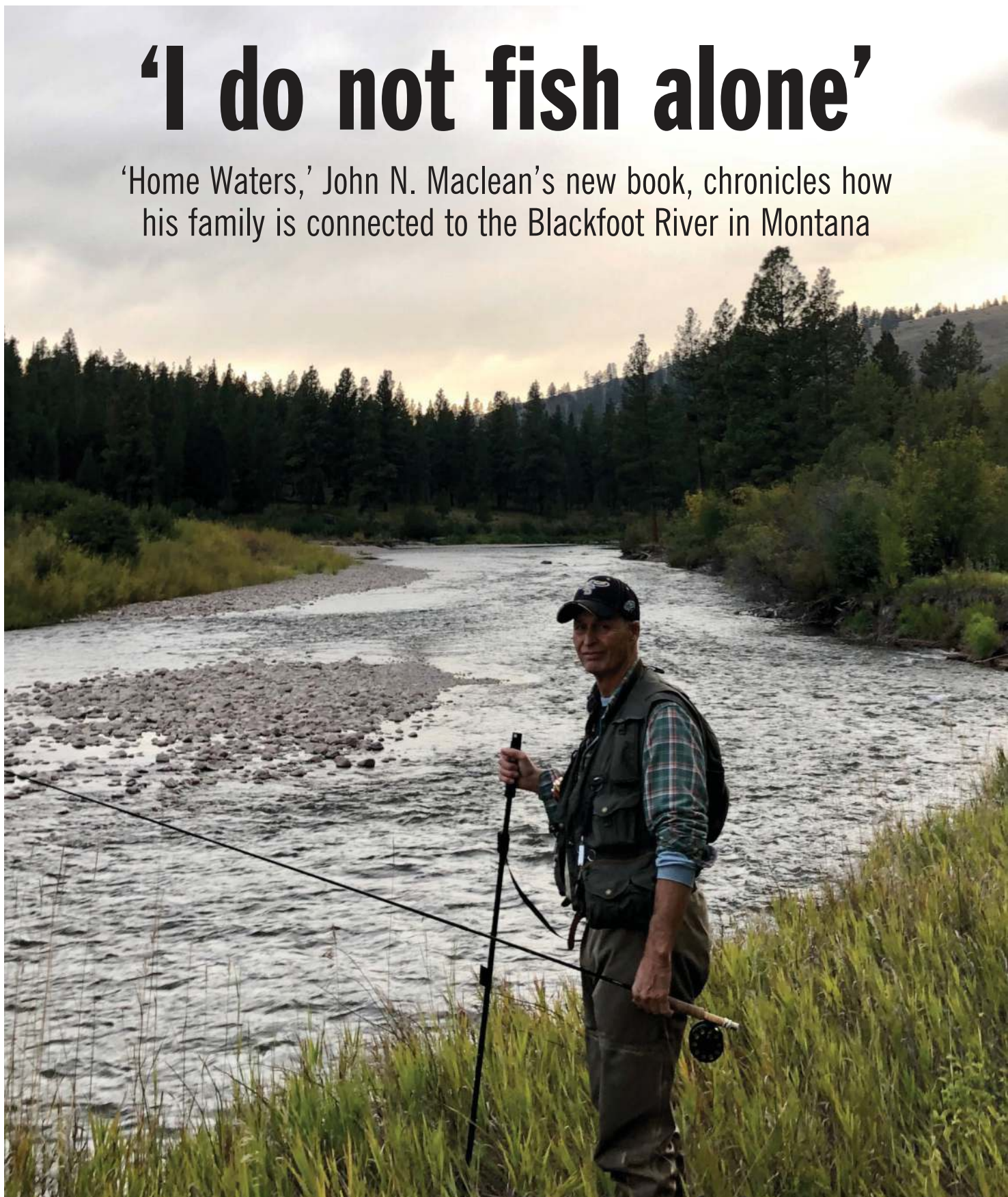
Indeed, "Home Waters" is about geology and glaciers and the forming of a river. It's about history and Meriwether Lewis and how larch trees grew to be giants. It's about nostalgia and cross-country car rides to a family cabin by Seeley Lake in Montana and how generations of Macleans became tied to a place. There's also a fair bit about trout and his famous father's book.

"I do not fish alone on the Blackfoot River, ever," Maclean writes, "even though now I mostly fish by myself. When I'm on the water, and especially when no one else is around, I feel the presence of generations of my family whose stories run through it."

Maclean's writing is often intimate. Family lore, told and retold, can be a fuzzy thing, but some memories about his father, like their first time fishing together, remained spectacularly vivid and personal.

"I could not write it," Maclean says of that childhood outing. "It was just too much. Too overpowering. But when I got to a place in 'Home Waters' where it was appropriate, I knew I had to do it."

"Home Waters" was not meant as a "conscious parallel" to his father's literary achievement, Maclean says, but we do learn more about the characters and stories that made "A River Runs Through It" so splendid. After reading an early version of "Home Waters," a friend told Maclean, "You've written the backstory to 'A River Runs Through It.'"



Peter Hubbard

Author John N. Maclean fishes in Montana. Maclean wrote "Home Waters," which became a sort of backstory to "A River Runs Through It," the book novella written by his father, Norman. He says it was not meant as a "conscious parallel" to his father's work.

"I said, 'I've done what?' I almost fell off my chair."

"Home Waters," though, stands nicely on its own.

Fans of "A River Runs Through It," and particularly those of the movie adaptation, will find intrigue in Maclean's investigation into the death of his uncle. In the film, Paul — played by a young Brad Pitt — is beaten to death in Montana. In reality, he was murdered in a Chicago alley, and, although conspiracy theories abound, the circumstances remain a mystery.

"I wanted to straighten people out," Maclean says.

Maclean concedes that his father's book is "more consistently poetic" than his own, but he makes no apologies, noting that the older Maclean was a renowned English professor at the University of Chicago.

"I didn't spend my career teaching

Shakespeare and Wordsworth," he says. "I spent my career writing hard news. That's me."

While Maclean's journalistic prose is sharp and concise, it can also be beautiful. In one instance, he describes coming upon his father as daylight faded on the Blackfoot.

"He stood there next to the river, framed by bluffs and mountains to either side and the river running through them," he writes, "and with his arms outstretched he gazed upward at the sunset with that open, ecstatic expression on his face that arose only in moments of greatest joy. He stood like that for minutes."

When "A River Runs Through It" was published 45 years ago, the Blackfoot River was a polluted mess and a lousy spot to fish. The book — and certainly the film in 1992 — brought celebrity status to the

river, and conservation efforts brought its restoration.

"It's better now than anything I remember from when I was a kid," Maclean says.

The river's prominence and renewal, though, have created contemporary challenges. "Fisherfolk," Maclean writes, "dressed in fresh-from-the-box Stetson hats and vests" crowded onto Montana rivers, and "the Blackfoot River became a heavily trafficked 'must' stop."

The pandemic has hastened that spectacle. Celebrity, even for a river, has its price.

"There is trouble on the river now because it is overused and nothing is being done to sensibly restrict its use," Maclean says. "But I'm hoping that 'Home Waters' contributes toward the general movement to try to do something. Otherwise, we will love it to death."

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Right now

Wolfgang Van Halen, the son of the late, great guitar hero Eddie Van Halen, is finally releasing his debut album, 'Mammoth WVH.' He doesn't care whether you like it.

By GEOFF EDGERS
The Washington Post

Wolfgang Van Halen plays the last guitar his father, Eddie, went out on tour with, at the recording studio his dad built.

DAMON CASAREZ/For The Washington Post

The master plan, as Wolfgang Van Halen told his dad late in 2019, would please everyone.

One last Van Halen tour.

Eddie, the guitar hero, and brother Alex, the drummer, would bring back both original singer David Lee Roth and his replacement, Sammy Hagar. They would also recruit Michael Anthony, the bassist replaced by a teenage Wolfgang in 2007.

To top it all off, the opening act would be none other than Wolfgang Van Halen.

Fans would go crazy, getting to relive the iconic band's past with both the "Unchained" and "Why Can't This Be Love" editions sharing a single stage. Wolfgang, who had been sitting on his debut solo record, a driving hard pop album on which he played every instrument, would finally get a proper career launch of his own.

Looking back, Wolfgang wonders whether it was just wishful thinking.

In late 2017, doctors had diagnosed Eddie Van Halen with Stage 4 lung cancer and told him he might not make it through the year. But Eddie didn't listen. He flew to Germany for treatments and seemed to stabilize, which allowed him to drop by the studio as his son recorded his first album. Eventually, when the cancer spread to the guitarist's spine and brain, the trips to St. John's Hospital became more frequent.

Then, in spring of 2020, COVID hit, bringing what remained of normal life to a halt. Touring, like everything else, shut down. It was just a few months later, on Oct. 6, that the great Eddie Van Halen died of cancer at 65.

Now 30, Wolfgang Van Halen struggles with his father's death even as he is about to release his debut, "Mammoth WVH," and spend the summer opening stadiums for Guns N' Roses. It's an exciting time for Wolfie, as he is known to family and friends. But he remains sad and more than a little angry as he considers how the pandemic altered what should have been his dad's final encore.

Without COVID-19, he reasons, maybe Pop flies to Germany for more radiation. Maybe in the summer of 2020, instead of standing outside the window of his father's house to say hello, and instead of surrounding a hospital bed as he slips away, they are on the road together, one last time.

"The way we figured it, if I were to open for Van Halen, he would come out and play a solo for a song," Wolfgang says. "That would have been the end-all dream.

"I will forever loathe COVID and how it was handled," he adds in an unusually sharp political rebuke, "because they stole that moment from me."

Son before solo artist

On a Monday night in April, Wolfgang Van Halen is wearing his standard uniform, a black hoodie and matching jeans.

He sits behind a mixing board under a wall lined with guitars. This is 5150, the Studio City, Calif., headquarters for Van Halen for more than three decades and now home base for Wolfgang.

He clicks through his phone to share demos of songs that landed on his first record. The jangly "Resolve" emerged during a 2015 stop in Buffalo, N.Y.; "Horribly Right" in a hotel room in New York City during that same tour. He also plays an early version of "Distance," a song released in December with a heart-wrenching video that rose to No. 1. Stitching together home footage, the clip opens with Eddie, circa 1991, cradling a swathed Wolfie and ends with him eating an ice cream next to his grown-up only child in a darkened cinema. That 2017 screening of "It" would be one of their last carefree outings.

"Mammoth WVH" could have come out three years ago. It was done. Except that in late 2017, at that showing of "It," Eddie couldn't stop coughing. He went to the doctor soon after and received his dire diagnosis. That's when Wolfgang's career went on hold.

"Ed was encouraging him to put (the record) out," says Valerie Bertinelli, his

SEE NOW ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Now: Wolfgang's independence bothers some Van Halen fans

FROM PAGE 28

mother and Van Halen's wife from 1981 until their divorce in 2007. "But he just shut down everything when Ed got diagnosed. He said, 'I am not going anywhere. I'm going to be here for my dad.'"

Wolfgang Van Halen was about 8 when his father put a stack of magazines on the kitchen table and had him hammer out something that would approximate snare drum hits.

"If you can do this in time," he told the boy, "this is what playing drums is."

He got a kit for his 10th birthday and would sit at it, playing along to Van Halen's 1996 compilation album, "Best of: Volume 1," and Blink 182's "Enema of the State." He got a guitar somewhere around his 12th birthday.

"In the beginning, when Ed and I were still together and Wolfie showed an aptitude for music, Ed would beam," Bertinelli says. "That's all he ever wanted. He wanted somebody to play with."

Music was always part of the Van Halen family. Jan, the patriarch, started on clarinet and saxophone in his native Netherlands. Eddie played drums and piano, winning competitions throughout his teens. He heard Cream and Jimmy Page and shifted his focus to guitar. Alex, the older brother by two years, played drums. In the early '70s, they formed Mammoth, later renamed Van Halen.

"The brothers Van Halen, how do you compete against the brothers Van Halen?" says Matt Bruck, who started with Eddie in the early 1990s as a guitar tech before rising to help co-manage EVH Gear, the line of guitars designed by Van Halen. "It's just not a fair fight. They're so gifted. And Wolf is equally that gifted, but he is his own person."

Which seems to bother some Van Halen fans.

"Wolf," wrote a Twitter user named FoodieAcademy after the Van Halen scion played "Distance" on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" in February. "Don't know your music well. What I've heard was a guitar solo that was one note. Boring & uninspired and in a tribute to your legendary dad. I know he taught you better than that."

Wolfgang, who is not one to ignore his trolls, fired back.

"The solo for distance is ALL emotion," he responded, "and at the emotional height of the song. It's why Pop loved it."

And then a follow that ends with a red heart emoji: "(So go f— yourself.)"

Finding his own sound

On "Mammoth WVH," Van Halen wasn't looking to flaunt his



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Wolfgang and Eddie Van Halen perform during a 2012 concert in Los Angeles. "That's all (Eddie) ever wanted. He wanted somebody to play with," said his ex-wife and Wolfgang's mother, Valerie Bertinelli.

finger work. Sometimes, as on "Distance," that meant a solo built off a single, furiously picked note on the 22nd fret. On "Mammoth," the title track, a melodic, three-note solo surges against a thick wall of sound. It feels full and wide-open, reminiscent of 1980s U2.

There's also the guitar work on the album's opener, "Mr. Ed," where he offers enough searing licks and finger tapping to power a '79 Camaro.

But one of rock's greatest guitarists didn't play a note on his son's debut. Neither did anyone else. Wolfgang played every instrument and sang every vocal. He wrote all of the songs. This was by design. After years of working for the family business, he wanted to establish his own voice. And if "Mammoth WVH" contains shades of his many influences, from AC/DC to Foo Fighters to Jimmy Eat World, there is one band it doesn't sound much like: Van Halen.

"When I first started hearing it, the first thing I did was send little love notes saying, 'Hey, I'm so proud of you,'" says Sammy Hagar, Van Halen's singer from 1986's "5150" through 1995's "Balance." "Some of the fans were giving him s— because they wanted it to sound like Van Halen. I told him, f— these people. You have the right to be your own man, your own musician."

Insecurity struggles

Wolfgang has never been good about taking compliments.

"I think he's had those (musical) skills and that talent for so long, he doesn't realize that, dude, that's not normal," says Andraia Allsop, his girlfriend.

"The first thing I did when I heard the album is, I texted him and said, 'You have no idea how this has moved me,'" Bertinelli says.

How did her son respond?

"He didn't," she says. "He's just like, 'Oh, thanks, mom.'"

"Compliments go right through my ear," Van Halen says. "There's something wrong with me, I guess."

Insecurity runs in the family. If David Lee Roth was the sexy clown in leather chaps, Eddie was the silent, musical superhero with a lit cigarette in his headstock. He revolutionized the instrument with his creativity, dexterity and finger-tapping technique, posing with his duct-taped "Frankenstein" guitar in seemingly every issue of Circus, Creem or Rolling Stone.

But backstage was different. Bertinelli recalls her husband crying, inconsolable, after receiving an award in the early 1980s and worrying how it would affect his relationship with Roth. She watched as his drinking — shrugged off in the days when a Jack Daniels bottle next to a Marshall stack was as standard to the rock star costume as a mane of feathered hair — began to change his behavior. The shy artist grew temperamental; the perfectionist began to forget solos. There are clips all over the internet of Eddie Van Halen, glassy eyed and rambling at instrument conventions or backyard jams. The drinking eventually ruined his marriage. It is unclear how much of his career it cost, but his son had a front-row seat to the worst of it.

The tipping point, for Wolfgang, came in Florida during the 2007 reunion tour with Roth. He was disgusted to see his father so out of his mind onstage and refused to grab his hand for the final bow.

"The only person who could actually get through Ed's head was Wolf," says Pat Bertinelli, Valerie's brother, who traveled on that tour.

After that Florida show, weeks of concerts were canceled so

Eddie could go to rehab.

Support system

In person, Wolfgang Van Halen speaks softly and is polite. He does not drink or smoke and admits that the pandemic shutdown, in some ways, hasn't been as hard on him as others. He's always been an introvert. He shies away from parties, preferring virtual, video game hangs with buddies he's had since kindergarten.

Van Halen is not alone. He and Allsop, a software engineer from Utah, have been together for six years. He talks to or texts his mom and Uncle Alex virtually every day. He knows he can always call up former Van Halen manager Irving Azoff for advice. He depends on the trio he calls "The Trusted Humans," made up of Bruck, Uncle Pat (Bertinelli) and manager Tim Tournier.

That can involve deciding how to handle a request from the Grammys that Wolfgang perform his father's signature instrumental, "Eruption," as a tribute. (A terrible idea, they all agreed.) It can be processing why a guitar magazine promises to write a story about him, then puts his father's photo on the cover. And it can also be making the difficult decision to put off his debut album release and tour.

And plans can shift. Even before the terrible 2020, Van Halen struggled with anxiety and depression. Since his father's death, there are still days when he struggles to get out of bed.

During this stretch, some of the least supportive people have been Van Halen fans. Toughen up, they write. You wouldn't be anything without your dad.

They continue to blame him for replacing Anthony, which prevented a full reunion of the glorious "Jump"-era Van Halen. Those who insist that the band's original bassist should have been

in the room in 2012 working on their final studio album don't realize what might have happened had Wolfgang Van Halen not been there, Bertinelli says.

"Van Halen does not make a final record without Wolfie," she says. "(Fans) got three extra tours out of Van Halen because of Wolf."

Forging ahead

This should be a triumphant time. There are already signs that "Mammoth WVH" is destined to be a hit. "Distance" topped the Billboard charts in December, and nearly 5 million people clicked on the video on YouTube. Terrie Carr, the program director at the influential WDHA-FM in New Jersey, said that as a potential radio artist, "Wolfgang checks all the boxes."

"When you see a musician that is able to do the things he does, playing all the instruments but playing them so professionally, that's sort of a rock 'n' roll Prince," says Carr. "He can appeal to a younger audience. Everyone knows Eddie, and now you've got this next generation of this wunderkind making music and people saying, 'Wow, that apple doesn't fall far from the tree.'"

For Van Halen, the battle remains how to move forward in his own career while protecting and promoting his father's. Money won't be an issue. Eddie Van Halen left a quarter of his estate to the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation, which donates instruments to students who need them. Most of the rest went to his son. Van Halen also owns his father's likeness and decision-making rights. Alex controls the Van Halen recordings, but Wolfgang says the two will work together to preserve the band's legacy.

That won't be easy. Wolfgang doesn't feel emotionally ready to start going through the walls of tapes Eddie left behind at 5150. There may be tributes to Eddie Van Halen down the road, but don't expect Wolfgang and the other band members to tour together. He and Uncle Alex are close, but his relationship with the others, he says, is little more than cordial. And this summer, you won't hear Wolfgang Van Halen in an arena throwing "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" or "Poundcake" into the set list.

It is the same reason he turned down the Grammy request for "Eruption" in March.

"My whole life, I've worked so hard to be my own musician, and even my dad would be like, 'What are you doing?'" says Van Halen. "Do your own s—. Stop pretending to be me.' That's why I said no. Because I'm not my dad."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

BY YVONNE VILLARREAL
Los Angeles Times

When a marginally famous family made its reality TV debut in October 2007, Hollywood writers were on the brink of the longest work stoppage since 1988 and our long-lost friend, the BlackBerry, was still riding high as the smartphone of choice. Instagram? Hadn't been invented yet.

Modeled after MTV's popular reality series "The Osbournes," which followed the antics of rocker Ozzy Osbourne and his family in the early aughts, E!'s "Keeping Up with the Kardashians," featuring Kris Jenner, Caitlyn Jenner, Kim Kardashian, Kourtney Kardashian, Khloe Kardashian, Rob Kardashian, Kendall Jenner and Kylie Jenner, may have started out as a copycat. But it became an unexpected billion-dollar empire that turned the clan at its center into industry titans who've left an indelible imprint on contemporary pop culture and reshaped the celebrity economy. The series has since spawned more than a dozen spinoffs, ancillary business ventures and countless gossip-site clicks, fueled by romantic drama, public missteps and now a controversial run for California governor by Caitlyn Jenner.

Whether you consider this polarizing crew purveyors of a new kind of pop culture savvy or the poster family for the perils of fast fame in the 21st century, there's no denying that the Kardashians exemplify the ascent of reality TV in American life. And now, after nearly 14 years and 20 seasons, the Kardashian-Jenners are turning off the cameras at E! Not that they'd ever totally ditch the cameras: Shortly after announcing the end of their flagship program, members of the Kardashian-Jenner family signed a multiyear deal with Disney to star in and executive produce a new reality series for Hulu.

The Los Angeles Times recently spoke with Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner, matriarch and business mastermind, as well as series producers and E!'s former president about how the network's longest-running reality series came to be.

Los Angeles Times: Hot off the success of "American Idol," Ryan Seacrest signed a deal with E! in 2006 to host the channel's red-carpet awards coverage and produce a series through his Ryan Seacrest Productions shingle.

Seacrest (executive producer): It was something that my mentor, Merv Griffin, said to me. "Hey, if you're ever in a position to trade your services with a production component, you should really think about that." So, using his blueprint, that's what we did. And around the time, the only family docu-



ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/TNS

From left: Khloe Kardashian, Bruce (now Caitlyn) Jenner, Kimberly Kardashian, Kris Jenner and Kourtney Kardashian arrive at the 2007 premiere of "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" in Los Angeles.

'A light bulb just went off'

Kim and Kris of 'Keeping up with the Kardashians,' as well as their producers and E!'s ex president, discuss the reality series' beginning

eries that was on the air was "The Osbournes" and I was truly obsessed. I really thought that that was such new and different and groundbreaking television. It's something that I hadn't seen before. And at the same time, it felt like E! would be the right place to find some great family docuseries. We wanted it to be very funny. We wanted it to be chaotic, but also at the same time comforting. It would have heart and it would have humor. But what is that? And who is that?

Farnaz Farjam (executive producer, Bunim Murray Productions): There was a programming hole [at E!]. There was supposed to be a series with Lindsay Lohan during a time slot, and then Lindsay got a DUI [the actress was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence and drug possession in July 2007 and pleaded guilty to misdemeanor cocaine use and driving under the influence the following month] and pulled out last minute. So they had to fill this hole within, like, I think it was like eight weeks from the day I came on.

Deena Katz (casting director and family friend of the Kardashian-Jenners): My husband and I were really good family friends with Kris and [Caitlyn]. We have a daughter who is kind of between Kendall and Kylie's ages. I put [Caitlyn] on a show years ago called "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!" down in Australia. And that's how we all became really close. We used to go to their

home for dinner a lot. And we were there once on a Sunday night and I remember saying to them — well, and Kris had been batting around the idea of a show. I do remember saying to them, "You really should. There should be a show." I kept saying it should be a "Sunday Night at the Jenners" kind of thing. You never knew who was gonna show up. Was it going to be some rapper or Kathie Lee Gifford; they had the most eclectic group of friends. And as crazy as you thought they were even back then, at the core of it, they are a family who loves each other. And I was doing some consulting or something back in the day with Ryan Seacrest. And I told them they needed to talk with Ryan.

Kris Jenner (star, executive producer): So many people have said to me for years and years: "You should really have your own reality show, because your life is so crazy." My girlfriend Kathie Lee Gifford used to always tell me, "You're really our reality show. People don't even know what's happening here." And that was when the big kids were babies. It's always been something that people were throwing around. And then when Deena came over, I think a light bulb just went off for both of us.

Kim Kardashian (star, executive producer): Kourtney had already done a show called "Filthy Rich: Cattle Drive" and our stepdad did "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!" And then they were going to do a show called "I'm a Rich Kid ...

Get Me Out of Here," and it was gonna be like celebrities' kids doing the jungle thing. And I was going to do that, but then the show got canceled. And so my mom knew that I really wanted to do a reality show. Since "The Real World" came out, I was always really into reality TV. We'd had this conversation. And so even though I had a job, and I was working at my dad's office, she knew that was something I was into. So it was more like me and her kind of into it. And then, once it was a family show, that was what made sense. And that's what seemed to get our attention.

Kris, Caitlyn, Kourtney, Kim and Khloe met with production and network executives over summer 2007.

Eliot Goldberg (senior vice president of production and development at Ryan Seacrest Productions): It's the meeting that changed the world. I don't mean that to make it more important. At the time, it wasn't. Now, I do believe in my heart, I'm not sure the world would be the same if we hadn't had that meeting. Kris, Kim, Khloe, Kourtney and [Caitlyn] came in for a meeting in our conference room. My expectations were fairly in check, because I just didn't have any idea that they were going to be marketable, or what this was. And we got a lot of pitches. We had a lot of people wanting to do reality. So the meeting is the five of them in our conference room and they proceed to basically play out the show in the meeting, what the

show would become. Normally, you would think, "They're putting this on; this is an act," but you could see they were just being themselves, talking like they do to each other, giving their mom grief, [Caitlyn] in the corner, kind of rolling [her] eyes and looking at me and talking about sports. I'm not thinking, at this point, that we even have a show or whatever to get on the air. I'm just thinking, "Let's develop something with them, put them on tape. Let's shoot them." So we had to go to E! and get them to fund what became the sizzle reel presentation.

Seacrest: We threw this tape together for, I think we asked E! for \$12,000. It was nothing to make this tape.

Goldberg: One of the most prophetic words that have ever been uttered to me in my life were said to me by Kris. We were wrapping up the meeting, she pulls me aside and she says, "Eliot, it was so great to meet you and I'm so excited to do this show with you and Ryan, and it'll be fantastic. And let me just tell you something: I want you to know that if you do this show with us, s— happens to us. S— always happens to us. And if we do this show, I promise you s— will happen."

Jenner: Kourtney was a little hesitant. She was like, "Wait, what are we doing? Let me just wrap my head around it." But everybody else was so enthusiastic. I went into that meeting with a lot of confidence and anticipation that it was really going to happen. And I just really felt like that was the move for us as a family.

Lisa Berger (then executive vice president of original programming and series development at E!): A lot of people did not know them as a whole, so that was definitely a question mark: Are they "big enough" to carry a show? And frankly, as an executive, you sort of look for the archetypes. "Girls Next Door" was a little "Three's Company," and I thought this family, when we were sitting there, were that modern take on "The Brady Bunch."

Kardashian: I just remember it happening so fast. And we really didn't know what was going on. But it was fun. Once the show got picked up, we kind of as a family made a pact that we were always going to just be ourselves. We had a really good relationship with Bunim Murray from the start and they said, "Listen, we'll let you guys see the episodes ahead of time. And if there's anything you really didn't want in there, you can edit it out." And we always felt that trust, even though that wasn't a real part of our contract with E! We always trusted that they would honor that. And they did. I think that allowed us to open up even more and to be more comfortable.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Peacock

Left to right: Lucie Shorthouse, Faith Omole, Anjana Vasan, Juliette Motamed and Sarah Kameela Impey are Muslim teens forming a band in the miniseries "We Are Lady Parts."

Mixing hardcore with hijabs

'We Are Lady Parts,' a new comedy about an all-female Muslim band, aims to break boundaries without alienating viewers

By LORRAINE ALI
Los Angeles Times

Anarchy in the U.K. takes on a whole new meaning with the arrival of "We Are Lady Parts," Peacock's punk-rock comedy about an all-female Muslim band that bangs out songs like "Ain't No One Gonna Honor Kill My Sister But Me" and "Voldemort Under My Headscarf." They have the chops and attitude — now all they need is a lead guitarist, a fan or two, and a gig that's not in the back of an uncle's halal butcher shop.

"Almost Famous"? Not even close, and that's what makes this hilarious, six-part British series, written, directed and produced by Nida Manzoor ("Doctor Who"), so deliciously subversive. The underdog tale, which premiered June 3, is a hilarious hybrid of pummeling punk rockisms, immigrant insider humor and 21st century feminism. It's everything you never expected to see in a show about Muslims ... or in a series about a struggling garage band. Fans of Netflix's "Never Have I Ever," which returns in July, will find inspiration and deep humor in this new bunch of female misfits as they mix hardcore with hijabs. So haram, yet so right.

Rock 'n' roll tropes are fresh again when viewed through the lens of total outsiders — brown and Black Muslim girls raised on the outskirts of London. They are pitted by white liberals, resented by white nationalists and entirely absent in conversations about the next great white hope for rock. But when united by their love of music and their need to rage, they defy expectations

and odds, forging their own path atop a mountain of almighty noise.

"We Are Lady Parts" focuses on Amina Hussein (Anjana Vasan), a nerdy, modest microbiology Ph.D. student and self-taught guitarist whose goal is finding a husband. But while teaching songs to underprivileged youth, the guitar virtuoso is discovered by the fledgling group Lady Parts. Amina is reluctantly recruited into the band despite

(Juliette Motamed) has a short fuse, which doesn't help in her job as an Uber driver. Bassist Bisma (Faith Omole) is an earth mother fueled by furious, riot girl feminism. She authors the cartoon strip "Period (Apocalypse Vag)." And she's raising her daughter and husband at the same time. Manager Momtaz (Lucie Shorthouse) curses like Sid Vicious and vapes like Post Malone, but from behind her niqab face cover. If

Taboos be damned in this comedy created by and starring Muslim, South Asian, Black and Arab women. They've been the butt of smear campaigns and bigoted jokes for so long, they've earned the right to satirize that ignorance in their music.

her square tendency to wear muted pastels and puke from stage fright. How will she maintain a modest Muslim girl's life and rip it up in a punk band? The fun is watching her try.

The girls in the band all have their own trials, none of which, refreshingly, has to do with strict Muslim parents or religious edicts. Lead singer Saira (Sarah Kameela Impey) growls like a banshee into the mike and violently chops meat during her day job as a butcher. She fears nothing, it seems, until her boyfriend proposes a long-term, committed relationship. Drummer Ayesha

only she could book Lady Parts that golden, breakthrough gig.

Breaking boundaries without alienating viewers is the challenge, and "We Are Lady Parts" succeeds with the volume cranked to 11. The irreverent comedy started out as a short, part of a Channel 4 initiative in Britain to introduce new talent — Michaela Coel's "Chewing Gum," the precursor to HBO's "I May Destroy You," was another show that arose out of the enterprise. The longer "Lady Parts" series has already received praise in the U.K., but is America ready for it?

The Muslim characters of "We Are Lady Parts" come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, which sounds basic but is a seismic shift given the slanted depictions of veiled women that have proliferated on television since "I Dream of Jeannie." Hollywood's version of the Muslim woman is a grieving victim of war, wailing in a pile of rubble while her jihadi husband casually uses their children as human shields. Bisma, Saira, Ayesha and every other character in the new British series offer an alternative point of view. For example, Amina's mother is not forcing her to marry. Mum is a laid-back type who wants her uptight daughter to go out and experience life, to loosen up before tying the knot.

The women of Lady Parts may wail, but it's into a mike, shouting lyrics that weaponize tabloidy notions about women and Islam. Taboos be damned in this comedy created by and starring Muslim, South Asian, Black and Arab women. They've been the butt of smear campaigns and bigoted jokes for so long, they've earned the right to satirize that ignorance in their music.

Like "Never Have I Ever," the series is a major leap for television. Both shows feature South Asian nerds as their leads, moving them from the punchline to the main story and giving them the freedom to have messy emotions. They're angry, goofy, horny and grieving. The return of Netflix's surprise hit and the anticipation surrounding the arrival of "We Are Lady Parts" marks a milestone summer for underrepresented women of various cultures and faiths.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Not just a sport for little girls

Jump-rope experts, aficionados say the workout offers myriad health benefits, requires little to get started

By PAM MOORE

Special to The Washington Post

If you think jumping rope is for “girls in their skirts, jumping on a playground,” Alysia Mattson suggests you reconsider.

“It’s way more of a badass sport than that,” said the 28-year-old Seattle jump-rope maven. When she was without access to the gym and sick of Zoom workouts during shutdowns in April 2020, she bought one of the few pieces of fitness equipment that hadn’t sold out — a jump-rope.

Since then, Mattson has found camaraderie in the on-line jump-rope community, which she said has seen its numbers “skyrocket” since the pandemic started. In an email, Erica Brandelius, public relations representative for the San Diego jump-rope manufacturer Rx Smart Gear, said pandemic jump-rope sales increased by 30% compared with that of prior year. Tim Haft, the Manhattan-based founder of Punk Rope, said its jump-rope sales grew by 145% during the same time period.

German jump-rope expert and coach Mira Waterkotte also attests to the sport’s recent growth. As she shifted from live events to virtual lessons, she started with one class at the beginning of the pandemic. Because of increasing demand, she now teaches three classes, drawing students from all over the world. She credits jump-roping’s rising popularity to its affordability and convenience. Waterkotte says that starting requires just two things: a rope and some curiosity.

Benefits

Not only can you jump nearly anywhere without investing more than \$20 in a rope, the workout offers myriad health benefits. In addition to helping you improve your speed, coordination and agility, “it’s the best cardio you could ask for,” said Nick Woodard, 14-time world-champion jump-roper and co-owner of Learnin’ the Ropes in Bowling Green, Ky.

According to Rachel Jablow, a Chicago-based jump-rope instructor and owner of Get Roped, jumping builds bone density and prevents osteoporosis.

It also supports your mind, especially as you delve into more complicated choreography.

“As you get more into it, you can be very creative,” Woodard said.

The moves require deep concentration. Jablow called it a “moving meditation,” adding, “If you’re not present, you’re going to trip.”

Proponents say the risk of injury is less than with running, another sport that saw a pandemic boost. According to Haft, who is both a jump-rope instructor and a USA Track and Field-certified coach, the force of the required movements is distributed through your joints differently. “We don’t see very many injuries in jump-roping, unless the person’s form is really bad,” Haft said.

As long as you’re not jumping too high, jump-roping is easier on your body than it seems. “If you do it correctly,” Jablow said, “it’s really low-impact.”

Rope selection

A quick Google search for jump-ropes yields tens of thousands of results. Here’s a primer to help you decide which type to buy:

■ A beaded rope, such as BuyJumpRope.net’s Signature

Beaded Rope (\$9.99). Heavier than other ropes, they consist of a cord with segmented, plastic, tube-shaped beads. Their additional weight offers more feedback, i.e. information about where the rope is in space, which is especially helpful for beginners, who are still working on rope control.

■ A cable rope, such as the Rogue Fitness Speed Rope (\$18). Commonly seen in CrossFit, a cable rope is made up of a piece of wire between two handles. The lightest ropes available, they’re designed for jumpers who are focused on double-unders (swinging the rope under your feet twice per jump).

■ A licorice or PVC rope, such as the EliteSRS Flex Freestyle (\$11.99). These are lighter than beaded ropes but heavier than wire ropes and easier to manipulate. Jablow said they’re ideal if you plan to make jump-roping a habit, particularly if you see yourself trying tricks.

■ A smart rope, such as the Tangram Smart Jump Rope Rookie (\$39.95). Pricier than traditional ropes, they connect to your smartphone or watch and provide data including calories burned, number of jumps and workout time. Woodard said they’re great for those who are motivated by metrics. Jablow, however, said she has yet to try one with the same quality as the less expensive, conventional ropes she prefers.

To find the right length, stand on the middle of the rope with your feet about hip-width apart. Grasping a handle in each hand, with your upper arms at your sides, bend your elbows as fully as possible. For beginners, Woodard said, the handles should come up to your armpits.

The workout

Beginners should focus on developing the coordination and endurance to jump for five to 10 minutes without tripping, said Chloe Woo, a certified personal trainer at Dogpound’s Los Angeles location. As a general rule, start with sessions no longer than 10 minutes (including time spent catching your breath and tripping).

Woodard recommends jumping two to three times per

week at first and increasing your duration by no more than 10% every week or two. Your first few workouts could be as simple as setting your timer for five minutes and alternating 20 seconds of jumping with 20 seconds of rest. Woodard said you could also consider inserting two-minute bouts of jump-roping in between sets of resistance-training workouts.

As your skills advance, Woo suggests experimenting with your footwork to keep it interesting. “Maybe it’s just hopping on one foot or doing a little tap with your feet.”

Other moves you can try include lateral jumps, backward jumps and crisscross rope rotations, Woodard said. Although he acknowledges it can be frustrating to learn the techniques, it’s also more engaging.

“You can jump 50 times, or you can jump 150 times trying a couple of tricks,” he said. “But you won’t really know that you jumped that much, because you’re having fun doing it.”

Do’s and don’ts

Safety: Starting slowly is crucial to avoiding injuries. “You always want to feel like you probably could have done more,” said Meghan Wieser, an Ellicott City, Md., doctor of physical therapy and strength coach.

Good form also helps. Jablow advised keeping your upper arms “glued to your rib cage,” bending your elbows to about 45 degrees and letting most of the movement come from your wrists. Meanwhile, land on and jump from what she calls the “sweet spot,” the back of the balls of your feet.

“Stay light on your feet. Jump no more than an inch off the ground,” she said. If your form is good, you should feel as if you’re barely jumping.

According to Wieser, common jump-roping injuries include calf strain and plantar fasciitis, both of which stem from calf overuse.

“We don’t give enough credit to how much [jumping] goes through the calf muscle complex,” she said. To prevent these issues, she suggests performing exercises that build calf strength and resilience, such as calf raises and farmer’s carries (i.e. walking while holding weights in each hand).

Shoes: Look for shoes with good arch support and cushioning. Beware of running shoes, which often have more padding at the heel, Jablow said. Instead, choose a cross-trainer that has cushioning at the forefoot to absorb the impact as you land.

Surface: For safety and optimum comfort, find a surface that’s level and firm — but not too hard. According to Haft, a rubberized track is ideal and a wooden basketball court with some give is second best. Otherwise, he suggests asphalt (not concrete — too rigid).

And always avoid grass. “The grass is going to add some resistance to the rope as it spins under your feet,” Haft said. At best, it will make rookie jumpers trip and experienced jumpers slow down. At worst, you could sprain an ankle.

If you’re inside, Haft suggests a carpeted surface (as long as it’s not plush or thick-pile) or hardwood flooring with a grippy mat.

If you don’t have access to a good surface, Jablow suggests purchasing a jump-rope mat. They are lightweight and portable, and you can set one down on any flat surface and jump with adequate shock absorption.



WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

Video calls can make life easier for long-distance caregivers by allowing them to remotely check in with their loved ones to make sure they are taking care of themselves and remembering to take their medication daily.

Not too far away to help

AARP expert offers tips for being a better long-distance caregiver

By LIZ WESTON
NerdWallet

Long pandemic lockdowns forced many older adults to become comfortable with video calls to stay connected with family. That in turn means that long-distance caregivers have a better way to see how their loved ones are faring.

“You can’t tell on the phone that they’re wearing the same clothes every day, or they’re not bathing because they’re afraid they’ll fall in the shower,” says Amy Goyer, AARP’s national family and caregiving expert and the author of “Juggling Life, Work, and Caregiving.”

More than 1 in 10 caregivers look after family or friends from a distance, which can make the task much more difficult and expensive. A 2016 AARP survey found that caregivers in general incur an average of about \$7,000 a year in out-of-pocket expenses. Long-distance caregivers — those who live at least an hour away from the care recipient — incur about \$12,000 on average, according to the survey.

Long-distance caregivers are more likely than local caregivers to hire help, take unpaid time off work and pay for travel, Goyer says.

Yet many distant caregivers worry they’re not doing enough and that a preventable crisis will develop because they weren’t on hand to spot the red flags.

“As caregivers, guilt is our constant companion,” Goyer says. “When you’re a long-distance caregiver, it’s even more so.”

AARP has numerous resources for caregivers, including a “Prepare to Care” planning guide and a financial workbook for estimating and tracking costs. Goyer, who cared for her grandparents, parents and a sister from afar, suggests the following ideas to make long-distance caregiving more effective and manageable.

Assemble a team

If you can’t physically check in on your loved one regularly, enlist others who can, Goyer says. Those could include family members or friends who live closer, or even a friendly neighbor to whom you can give your contact information.

If you have siblings, they can pitch in even if they’re long-distance too, Goyer says. They can make daily check-in calls or handle tasks such as paying bills, making medical appointments and dealing with insurance companies.

If you have the means, consider hiring a geriatric care manager, also known as an aging life care professional, to help you evaluate your loved one’s caregiving needs, hire home health aides if necessary and step in if there’s a crisis. These professionals, who are often nurses or social workers, typically charge \$75 to \$200 an hour. An initial assessment may cost a few hundred dollars, but then the manager can be tapped as needed.

“If my parents had to go to the hospital or some emergency happened, there had to be somebody right away who could deal with it,” Goyer says.

Embrace technology

Video calling isn’t the only technology that can make life easier for long-distance caregivers. Medical alert systems can allow a loved one to summon aid, and some have fall detection technology that works even if the person isn’t wearing a special device. Smart pill dispensers manage medications, and some can let caregivers know if doses aren’t taken.

Smart home systems can also help. A smart door lock, for example, can allow you to grant access to someone such as a friend, a health aide or a paramedic from afar. A smart thermostat can help you ensure a comfortable temperature, while a smart home security system can let you know if your loved one has left the house. Goyer used security cameras to keep an eye on her dad “whether I was going outside to take out the trash or 2,000 miles away.”

Maximize available resources

Your loved one may be eligible for public benefits that could help with caregiving tasks or costs. Start your search at [Benefits.gov](https://www.benefits.gov). Resources for older Americans can also be found through the Eldercare Locator online at eldercare.acl.gov.

The person you’re caring for may have other resources that can be tapped, such as long-term care insurance, savings or home equity. Talking about money can be difficult, but not doing so can be disastrous, Goyer says. She eventually filed for bankruptcy protection because of the credit card debt she incurred while caregiving.

If she had it to do again, Goyer says she would consult with a financial adviser to better plan for the costs ahead.

“My biggest advice is to realize that this could go on a long time and can have an impact on your own personal finances,” she says.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



New remote opportunities offer hope for milspouses

It’s no surprise that the highest rate of unemployment in U.S. history was during the Great Depression, when rates jumped to 24.9% in 1933, four years after the infamous Black Thursday stock market crash caused total economic collapse and led to widespread poverty. But what would surprise most Americans is that military spouses have faced Depression-era levels of unemployment for decades.

Prior to COVID-19, when U.S. unemployment rates dropped to modern lows of 3.5%, military wives’ unemployment rate was stuck at 25% due to frequent moves, deployments, career interruptions, child care issues and occupational licensing requirements.

Federal and state governments have tried to help, with programs for re-licensure reimbursement, DOD scholarships and business owner residency rules through legislation and programs. But military spouse unemployment rates didn’t budge despite these comprehensive programs.

“Congress has authorized several initiatives to support military spouse education, employment and career development ... though relatively little is known about their effectiveness. Considering that the unemployment rate among military spouses has remained persistently high for the last two decades, the National Military Spouse Network suspects these initiatives are not having the impact they were designed to have,” stated a 2021 white paper addressing the seemingly unyielding military spouse unemployment issue.

Generally, education and qualifications are not an issue for military spouses, 45% of whom have bachelor’s or advanced academic degrees, compared to 33% of their civilian counterparts. However, about 35% of military spouses have careers that require professional licensing specific to each state. In a 2012 survey of spouses who had PCSed, only 11% got a new occupational license after the move. (As a licensed attorney, I know this all too well.)

A bigger problem is military spouse underemployment, which mostly affects the 93% of female military spouses. Two-thirds of working military wives report that their employment does meet their qualifications, education or occupational goals. Active duty military spouses generally earn 38% less than their equally-qualified civilian counterparts.

To make matters worse, during the pandemic, when America’s unemployment rates peaked at 14.8% in April 2020, data suggested that military spouse unemployment hovered a staggering 20 percentage points higher than the general population, putting rates somewhere between 30 to 35% for milspouses. During the pandemic, employed military spouses were either losing their jobs or were leaving their jobs to care for children during shutdowns.

“All of these factors impact military financial readiness by decreasing family earnings over time, diminishing opportunities for career advancement, decreasing their ability to save for emergencies, retirement, and their ability to amass long-term wealth,” concluded one study.

With more than a third of military spouses now unemployed and two-thirds of working military spouses underemployed, is there a solution that might bridge this massive income gap for military families? Maybe.

The number of people teleworking from home skyrocketed from only 7% before the pandemic to more than 60% today, with many companies planning to continue remote work programs. Also, the Army has begun providing coworking spaces for military spouses on some bases. Some postulate that these trends will finally nudge military spouse unemployment numbers off of their high perch by offering portable work opportunities that lessen child care issues and reduce career interruptions. While remote work does not solve the occupational licensure problem, there is also a recent push for states to enter compact agreements to recognize other state occupational licenses.

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

GAME OVER

BY ADAM WAGNER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

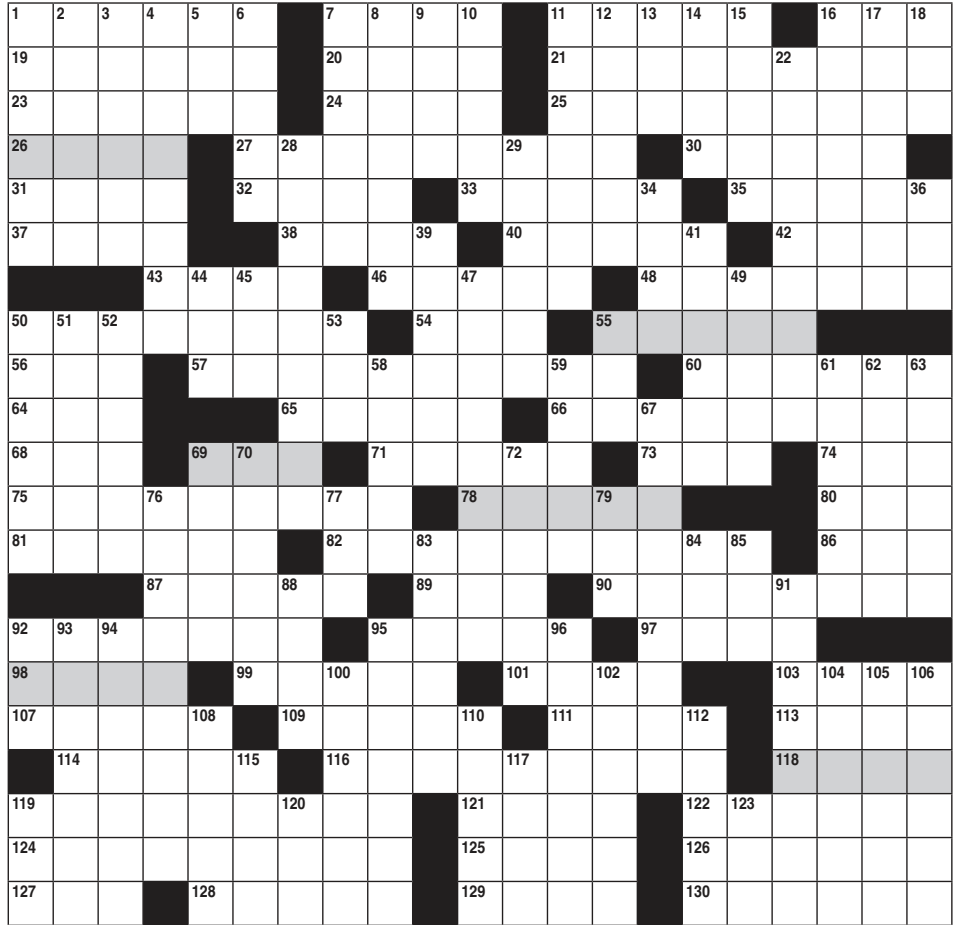
Adam Wagner, of Oakland, Calif., is a senior copywriter for an ad agency in San Francisco. He says his real No. 1 job, though, as of about two months ago, is being a first-time dad. Adam solves the Times crossword aloud every night with his son cuddled next to him — “so I imagine he’s one of the few people alive who can claim that he literally has a lifelong New York Times crossword solving streak.” — W.S.

ACROSS

- 1 Gilda of the original “S.N.L.” cast
- 7 They may need to be cut off
- 11 Ways of making ends meet?
- 16 Degree in design, for short
- 19 Cow’s-milk cheese that’s often grated
- 20 Sweet-16 org.
- 21 Honor named for a Greek goddess
- 23 Site of a lighthouse that was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- 24 “___ pass”
- 25 Where snow leopards and blue sheep roam
- 26 King of a nursery rhyme
- 27 Went to bat (for)
- 30 Test versions
- 31 Good fashion sense, in modern slang
- 32 Appear
- 33 Features of some indoor arenas
- 35 Theater-curtain material
- 37 Fired off, say
- 38 Grind
- 40 Money of the Philippines
- 42 Follow
- 43 One giving a khutbah sermon
- 46 Smaller alternative to a Quarter Pounder
- 48 Chicago team, in old “S.N.L.” sketches
- 50 Ski-lodge mugful
- 54 Fraternity letter
- 55 King of ancient Israel
- 56 Comic actress Gasteyer
- 57 Left, cutely
- 60 Great Lakes nation
- 64 Pickup line?
- 65 Like the columns of the Lincoln Memorial
- 66 Cures
- 68 “___ we good?”
- 69 King of ancient Egypt
- 71 Tattoo artist, so to speak
- 73 Org. with a complex code
- 74 “Happy Days” network
- 75 Beach Boys song set to the tune of Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen”
- 78 King of myth
- 80 4G letters
- 81 ___ pace
- 82 Not doing so hot
- 86 F-, e.g.
- 87 Discourage
- 89 Waze way: Abbr.
- 90 Piece of plastic with a gladiator pictured on it
- 92 Physics demonstration often done from the roof of a school
- 95 ___-Briggs Type Indicator (popular personality test)
- 97 “I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure,” e.g.
- 98 King of Shakespeare
- 99 “Keep Austin ___” (city slogan)
- 101 Annual presidential address, for short
- 103 Partner
- 107 “No worries”
- 109 “Bon appétit!”
- 111 Christ, to Bach
- 113 Place
- 114 Chimney channels
- 116 Warning on presents stashed in the closet
- 118 King of Skull Island
- 119 “Huddle up!”
- 121 Actress Elisabeth
- 122 When: Sp.
- 124 Early adolescent years, so to speak
- 125 Engage
- 126 Opposite of wind up
- 127 Infinitesimal
- 128 Toys with much assembly required
- 129 Travel-brochure listings
- 130 Named
- 8 Tabloid nickname for mother Nadya Suleman
- 9 Powder in the powder room
- 10 Course with greens
- 11 Machiavellian sort
- 12 Omits
- 13 Objective
- 14 Gateway city to Utah’s Arches National Park
- 15 Some after-Christmas announcements
- 16 Home to about one in five Californians
- 17 Long-running sitcom set in Seattle
- 18 Them’s the breaks!
- 22 Spent some time on YouTube, say
- 28 Nobel Peace Prize recipient who wrote “No Future Without Forgiveness”
- 29 Sought-after position
- 34 Pop
- 36 G.P.s, e.g.
- 39 City about 25 miles S.E. of Chicago, Ill.
- 41 ___-faire (social adeptness)
- 44 Level the playing field?
- 45 Put one past
- 47 One ending for a classic board game — another of which (when a player resigns) is represented visually six times in this puzzle
- 49 Tough spots
- 50 Bother incessantly
- 51 Scoring win after win
- 70 Remove from under the seat in front of you, say
- 72 Ducks known for their soft down feathers
- 76 Tinker (with)
- 77 Yes or no follower
- 79 “I’ve got it!”
- 83 Rob ___, British comedian and TV personality
- 84 Samosa tidbit
- 85 Part of an office phone no.
- 88 Tool for a duel
- 91 Sidewalk drawings
- 92 One of the Manning brothers
- 93 Disentangle oneself
- 94 Main source of energy?
- 95 Breakout 1993 single for Counting Crows
- 96 Stay awhile
- 100 Only color of the rainbow not seen on the L.G.B.T. pride flag
- 102 Portable dwellings
- 104 Richie with the No. 1 hit “All Night Long”
- 105 Borrower
- 106 Potato cultivar that was developed in Ontario, despite its name
- 108 Pelvic exercise
- 110 Nintendo dino
- 112 Like diamonds from a mine
- 115 Father
- 117 Weak, as a case
- 119 “Oh, and another thing . . .,” for short
- 120 Graffiti signature
- 123 College, to a Brit

DOWN

- 1 Some hip-hop collectibles
- 2 On dry land
- 3 Join a conference call, say
- 4 Quick to fall asleep, in a way
- 5 Sense of self
- 6 Día de San Valentín gifts
- 7 Tearfully complain



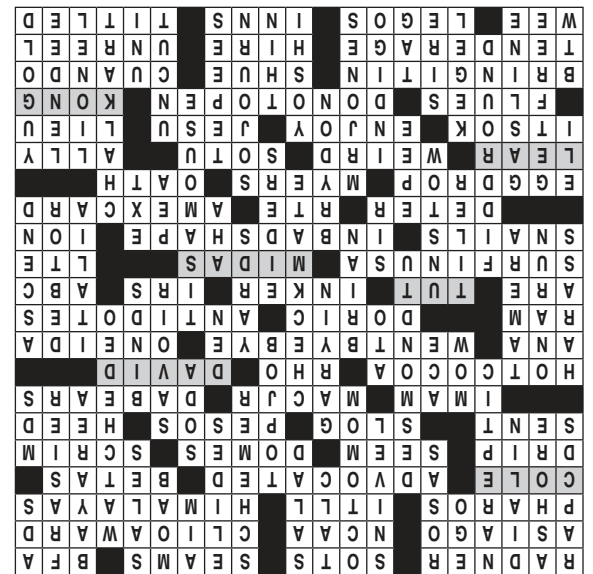
- 52 Mowry who starred alongside her twin Tia in the '90s sitcom “Sister, Sister”
- 53 ___ Z
- 55 Cubs’ place to play home games
- 58 Wilson who wrote the lyrics to 75-Across
- 59 Play areas
- 61 The “Bel Paese,” to locals
- 62 Borrower
- 63 Scale
- 67 Quintessentially cowardly
- 69 Mosaic maker
- 70 Remove from under the seat in front of you, say
- 72 Ducks known for their soft down feathers
- 76 Tinker (with)
- 77 Yes or no follower
- 79 “I’ve got it!”
- 83 Rob ___, British comedian and TV personality
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- 119 “Oh, and another thing . . .,” for short
- 120 Graffiti signature
- 123 College, to a Brit

GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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FACES



LIONSGATE

Aunt Bam (Cassi Davis, left) and Madea (Tyler Perry, right) in Tyler Perry's "Boo! A Madea Halloween."

She's baaack

Tyler Perry brings Madea out of retirement for another movie

BY ANGIE ORELLANA HERNANDEZ
Los Angeles Times

Boo! Here she comes again. Mourners of the "Madea" franchise can take off their black veils. Tyler Perry is rebooting it with a 12th installment, "A Madea Homecoming," for Netflix after saying goodbye to the iconic character in 2019.

Perry, who won an honorary Oscar for humanitarian work this year, said he planned to part ways with Madea at the premiere of the franchise's 11th film, "A Madea Family Funeral."

"I don't want to be her age playing her, so it was time to shut it down and move on," Perry told the *Hollywood Reporter* in 2019. "I've got some other things I want to do ... I'm going to do something different."

The Madea character has appeared in 11 plays, 11 movies, a handful of TV episodes and one animated feature called "Madea's Tough Love." Played by Perry, she is known for being a foul-mouthed, spunky grandmother.

The character, however, has been criticized, most notably by director Spike Lee, for its resemblance to minstrel shows that depicted racist stereotypes of Black people. Perry shot back at Lee in 2011, stating that the franchise was being unfairly maligned.

2019 also marked the end of Perry's contract with Lionsgate, the movie studio that has released the "Madea" movies since 2005. While at Lionsgate, the franchise grossed more than \$500 million.

"A Madea Homecoming" will premiere on Netflix, which has worked closely with Perry in the past. Perry's "A Fall From Grace" reached 39 million streams on Netflix, and the streaming giant is shooting another Perry-affiliated original titled "A Jazzman's Blues," starring Joshua Boone, Solea Pfeiffer, Amirah Vann and Austin Scott.

Perry will be the writer, director and executive producer of the movie. Perry and Michelle Sneed will be the executive producers on the project, with Will Areu and Mark Swinton joining them as producers. The movie will be filmed at Perry's studio in Atlanta.

Roku saves Kevin Hart's Quibi comedy, 'Die Hart'

Quibi was a massive failure of a streaming service that came and went last year in the blink of an eye during the pandemic.

Roku picked up Quibi's shows and the service has decided to give Kevin Hart's comedy "Die Hart," starring Hart and John Travolta, a second season.

The series was shot in metro Atlanta with season one finished just weeks before the pandemic began. It has not been said if Hart will shoot the second season there as well.

"Die Hart" features Hart playing a version of himself, wanting to become an action hero and joining a camp led by a wacky character named Ron Wilcox, played with abandon by Travolta. Hart also faces off against a rival student played by Nathalie Emmanuel.

When the show debuted May 20 on Roku, it did well enough that Roku quickly signed on for "Die Harter," a play off the original "Die Hard" series, which had a sequel named "Die Harder."

New archives preserves game show history

It's a jackpot for game show fans.

The Strong National Museum of Play on Wednesday announced the creation of the National Archives of Game Show History, to be stocked with scripts, props, set designs and other materials collected from game show performers, writers and executives.

The idea has found supporters in "Jeopardy" champion-turned-guest host Ken Jennings and Wink Martindale, who spent decades guiding contestants through "Gambit," "High Rollers," "Tic-Tac-Dough" and "Debt."

"I grew up watching game shows as a daily ritual," Jennings said in a news release from The Strong. "They've shaped who I am as a person, as well as our cultural landscape."

Christopher Bensch, vice president for collections at The Strong, said the game show archives were a natural fit for a museum that preserves the history of play.

Materials will be displayed at the museum and in traveling exhibitions, he said.

Prince Harry announces Germany Invictus Games

Prince Harry has announced the return of his Invictus Games, which supports the rehab and recovery of wounded veterans.

The Duke of Sussex wrote in an Instagram post Wednesday that the Invictus Games will take place in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 2023. The event — started by Harry in 2014 — is an athletic competition for wounded, sick, and injured veterans and armed forces members.

The Invictus Games were canceled in 2020 and 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The event will return in the Hague, Netherlands, from April 16-22 in 2022, before heading to Germany the following year.

Other news

■ The annual event long known as the Tribeca Film Festival has dropped "Film" from its name, as seen in a logo change that appears on its website. The 2021 edition of the **Tribeca Festival**, which opened Wednesday, features a diverse lineup of programming, including films, TV series, shorts, podcasts, live musical performances and more.

■ **Armie Hammer**, the "Call Me by Your Name" actor who has been under investigation by the LAPD's sex crimes division, has reportedly entered a rehab facility in Florida where he is addressing issues related to drugs, alcohol and sex. Hammer's career fell apart in early January after an Instagram account began publishing messages, allegedly from the actor, in which he detailed kinky sexual fantasies.

From wire reports

Underwood continues dominance at CMTs with win for 'Hallelujah'



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Carrie Underwood accepts the award for video of the year for "Hallelujah" Wednesday at the CMT Music Awards at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville.

Associated Press

Carrie Underwood has another reason to rejoice — she extended her record as the most decorated artist in the history of the CMT Music Awards, thanks to her song "Hallelujah."

The music video for the singer's hit, a collaboration with John Legend, was named video of the year at Wednesday's fan-voted show, which aired from Nashville.

Underwood, who now has 23 CMT Awards, thanked her die-hard fans while accepting the honor: "You're the reason we're all here doing what we do, doing what we love (and) making music videos."

Though Underwood owned part of the night, other female stars, some outside of country music, took over the awards show honoring the year's best country music videos.

Grammy-winning R&B star H.E.R. and fellow guitar slayer Chris Stapleton had the

night's best performance. They joined forces for a smoky, thrilling performance of "Hold On," coming off like a veteran duo.

The legendary Gladys Knight won over audience members during a performance of "Friendship Train" with Mickey Guyton. Part of the show felt dedicated to Black female voices thanks to the top-notch performances by Knight, H.E.R. and Guyton, who was nominated for two awards and presented the CMT Equal Play Award to Linda Martell, one of the pioneering Black acts in country music and the first Black woman to perform solo at the Grand Ole Opry.

Martell, 86, didn't attend the awards show but CMT aired photos of the icon holding her award and said she was watching the show from her home in South Carolina.

Lady A kicked off the show with Carly Pearce and Lindsay Ell, Ingrid Andress sang with pop singer-songwriter JP Saxe, while

Miranda Lambert performed with Jack Ingram and Jon Randall.

Hosts Kane Brown and Kelsea Ballerini also performed onstage and won awards.

Brown won male video of the year for "Worship You" and collaborative video of the year for "Famous Friends" with Chris Young. CMT performance of the year went to Ballerini and Halsey's "The Other Girl" from the 2020 CMT Music Awards.

Gabby Barrett, who was originally supposed to perform at the show but backed out, won female video of the year and the best family feature award went to Taylor Swift's "The Best Day (Taylor's Version)," which was re-released this year and featured home movies starring the pop star, her brother and parents.

Little Big Town's "Wine, Beer, Whiskey" won the night's first award — duo/group video of the year.



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246 YEARS STRONG



HAPPY 246TH BIRTHDAY, U.S. ARMY!

Dear Service Members, Retirees, Veterans and Military Family Members,

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service joins the Nation in celebrating the U.S. Army's 246th birthday.

Soldiers have put others' comfort and safety before their own, with many giving their last full measure of devotion.

One of these heroes was Father Emil Kapaun, a phenomenal Soldier and chaplain who gave his life for his fellow Soldiers during the Korean War. In 2013, Father Kapaun, the most decorated chaplain in American history, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism.

Today, Soldiers honor the legacy of heroes like Father Kapaun as they steadfastly serve during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Exchange thanks all Soldiers—past and present—who make life better for us all. Here's to the greatest land force in the world. The Exchange is honored to serve those who serve.

Soldier For Life!

Tom Shull
Director/CEO



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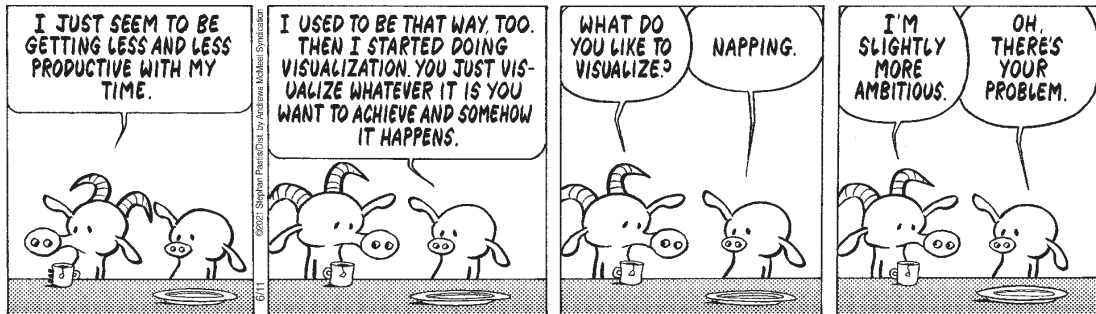
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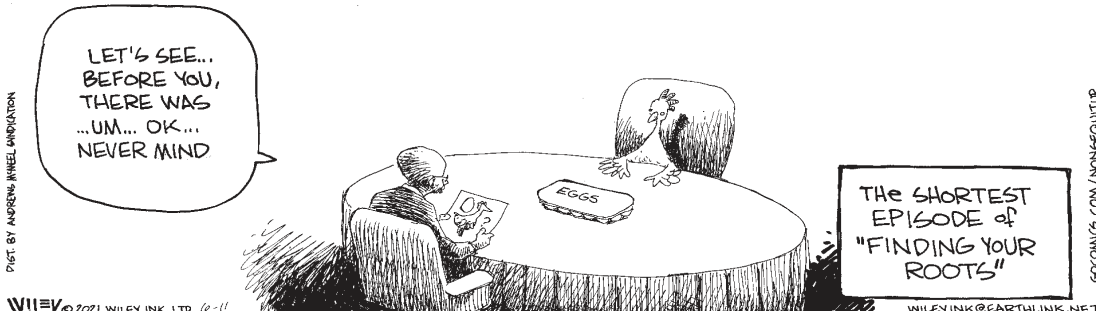
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



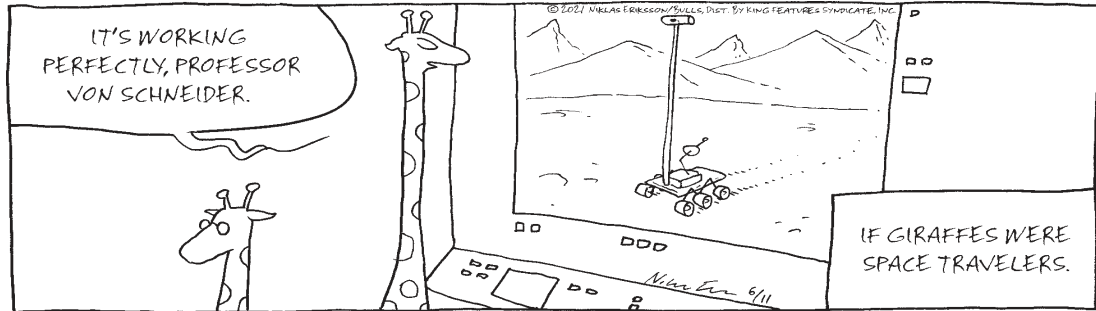
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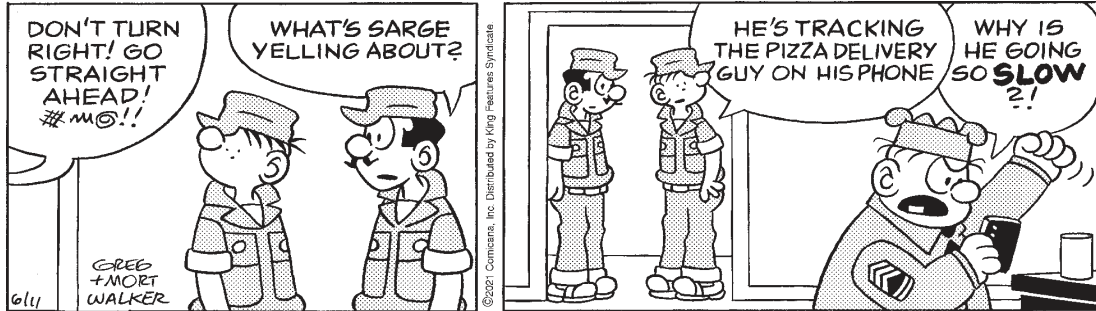
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
18							19	20				
			21				22			23	24	25
26	27	28				29				30		
31					32				33			
34				35					36			
37			38				39					
			40				41			42	43	44
45	46	47				48	49					
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

- ACROSS**
- 1 JFK regulator
 - 4 Couturier Christian
 - 8 Help a hood
 - 12 Alphabet starter
 - 13 Roundish do
 - 14 Like ganders
 - 15 Danger signs
 - 17 Cameo stone
 - 18 Bring to mind
 - 19 Ages and ages
 - 21 — de mer
 - 22 Bob Marley's music
 - 26 Arctic sheets
 - 29 Club —
 - 30 911 responder
 - 31 "Shane" star Alan
 - 32 Scepter
 - 33 Lake bird
 - 34 "Hail!"
 - 35 Society newbie
 - 36 Oktoberfest dance
 - 37 Did a valet's job
 - 39 That girl
 - 40 Attorney's profession
 - 41 Tertiary Period epoch
 - 45 Bean curd
 - 48 Type of light
 - 50 Homer's son
 - 51 Terse denial
 - 52 Predetermine
 - 53 N. Mex. neighbor
- DOWN**
- 1 Klinger portrayer
 - 2 "... sting like —"
 - 3 Outlet letters
 - 4 NFL city
 - 5 Patsy Cline's "— to Pieces"
 - 6 Assoc.
 - 7 Snow White's sister
 - 8 Surrounded by
 - 9 Prohibit
 - 10 TV Tarzan Ron
 - 11 Cowboy's nickname
 - 16 Notorious
 - 20 British ref. work
 - 23 Earth sci.
 - 24 Out of control
 - 25 Sicilian volcano
 - 26 Envelope part
 - 27 Volcanic flow
 - 28 River to the Baltic
 - 29 Wild bunch
 - 32 Merlot, for one
 - 33 Poet Federico Garcia —
 - 35 Narc's agcy.
 - 36 Illinois city
 - 38 Clumsy one
 - 39 Substantial
 - 42 Messes up
 - 43 Astronaut
 - 44 Jittery
 - 45 TV schedule abbr.
 - 46 Scull tool
 - 47 Thurs. follower
 - 49 Dijon denial

Answer to Previous Puzzle

C	A	P	P	B	A	L	M	P	I	T
A	C	A	I	O	G	E	I	D	O	
S	L	I	P	K	N	O	T	S	N	O
T	U	R	E	E	N	A	N	K	L	E
		R	N	M	U	S	E	S		
B	A	H	S	D	I	N	A	L	S	O
A	L	A		A	N	T	I	T	E	
D	I	L	L	R	E	O	S	P	U	D
		F	I	E	N	D	P	T		
V	I	S	T	A	S	A	R	O	N	G
A	T	L	S	L	I	P	C	O	V	E
L	E	I	E	I	R	E	P	U	R	E
E	M	P	L	E	A	D	S	M	O	G

6-11 CRYPTOQUIP

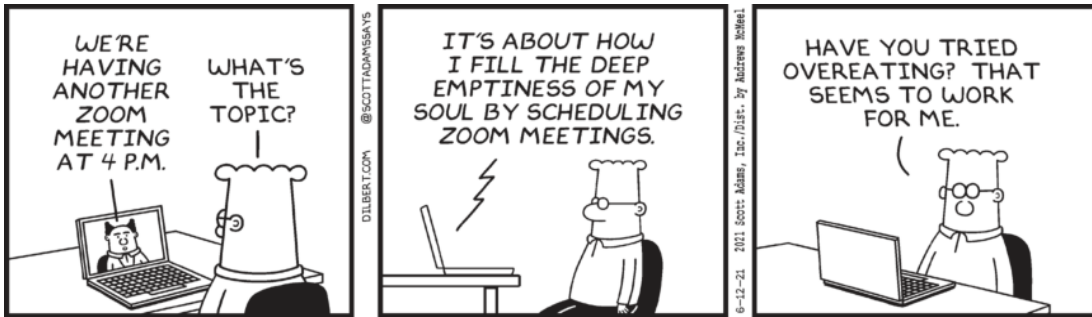
PFKZLTE AJC YLC CLEPF
 SFKYAKIFC BNTJF FLZTEQ
 SLKIFVLE, VBTVV AK PNFCCLK:
 ILPLKFEL LEC PNFFVF.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE TAXONOMIST IS AN EXPERT AT PLACING ANIMALS INTO APPLICABLE SUBGROUPS. HE'S A GENUS GENIUS.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals D

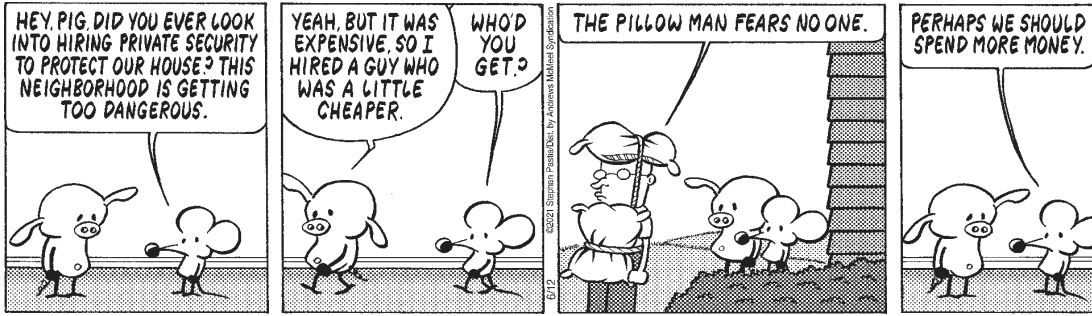
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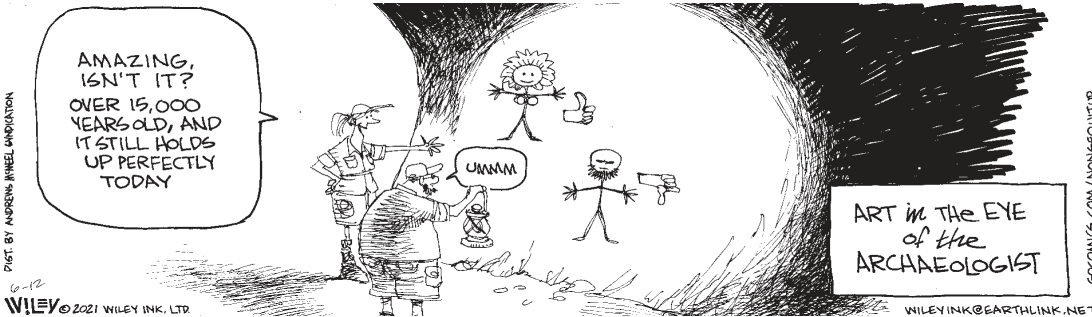
Dilbert



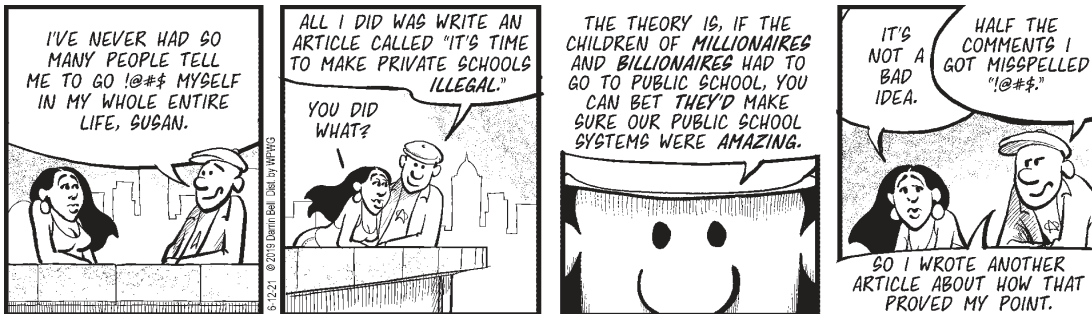
Pearls Before Swine



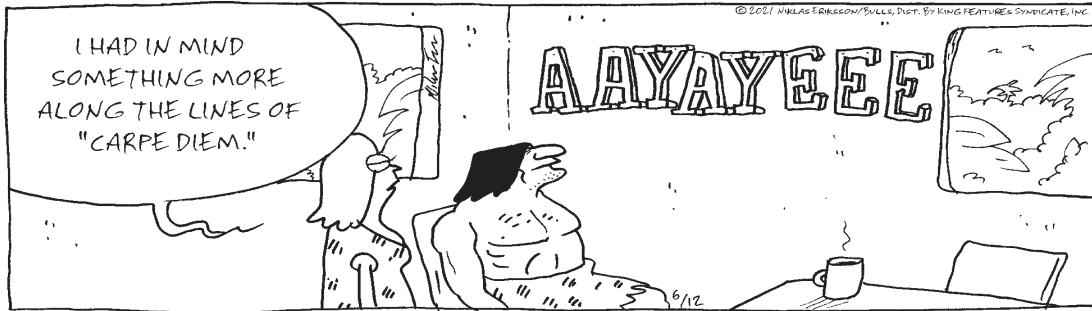
Non Sequitur



Candorville



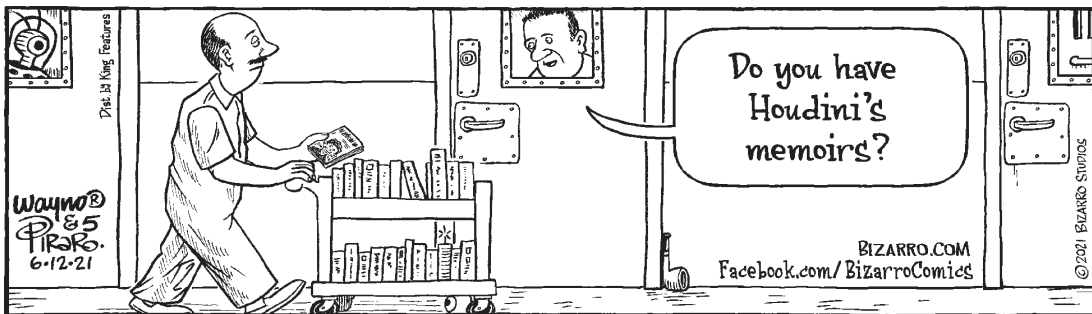
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11
12							13					
14							15					
16					17	18				19		
			20	21				22	23			
24	25	26		27			28		29		30	31
32			33				34					
35					36					37		
		38		39		40			41			
42	43			44	45				46	47	48	49
50			51				52	53				
54							55					
56							57					

ACROSS

- 1 Famous
- 6 Language of Egypt
- 12 "— Bovary"
- 13 "Serpico" star
- 14 Nearly perfect grade
- 15 Know-how
- 16 Quick look
- 17 Nile queen, informally
- 19 Speck
- 20 Rani's wrap
- 22 "Mayday!"
- 24 Compass dir.
- 27 Wee parasite
- 29 Healthy
- 32 1983 Tom Cruise film
- 35 Killer whale
- 36 Art Deco master
- 37 Flop
- 38 — glance
- 40 Bacterium
- 42 Recipe abbr.
- 44 "Mercy Mercy Me" singer Marvin
- 46 Miles away
- 50 Supervised
- 52 — Rouge (Paris cabaret)
- 54 Destroyed
- 55 Oak Ridge Boys hit song

DOWN

- 1 Christen
- 2 "Garfield" dog
- 3 Armored vehicles
- 4 Ostrich's kin
- 5 Characterize
- 6 Church section
- 7 "Parenthood" actress Sarah
- 8 Obamacare acronym
- 9 Tweety's meal
- 10 Division word
- 11 Price
- 12 Atlas page
- 18 Religious ritual
- 21 "Little Women" woman
- 23 Have
- 24 "No seats" sign
- 25 Army address
- 26 Adventure
- 28 Respected
- 30 Baton Rouge sch.
- 31 Leary's drug
- 33 Dennings of "2 Broke Girls"
- 34 Suffix with hotel
- 39 Representative
- 41 Purple shade
- 42 Ergo
- 43 Faxed
- 45 Citrus drinks
- 47 Move like a butterfly
- 48 Broadcasts
- 49 Genetic letters
- 51 Mafia boss
- 53 Flamenco cheer

Answer to Previous Puzzle

F	A	A		D	I	O	R		A	B	E	T			
A	B	C		A	F	R	O		M	A	L	E			
R	E	D		F	L	A	G	S		O	N	Y	X		
R	E	C		A	L	L		E	O	N					
				M	A	L		R	E	G	G	A	E		
F	L	O	E	S		M	E	D		E	M	T			
L	A	D	D		R	O	D		L	O	O	N			
A	V	E		D	E	B		P	O	L	K	A			
P	A	R	K	E	D			H	E	R					
				L	A	W		E	O	C	E	N	E		
T	O	F	U					I	N	F	R	A	R	E	D
B	A	R	T					N	O	T	I		R	I	G
A	R	I	Z					E	N	Y	A		S	L	Y

6-12

CRYPTOQUIP

QZEG GPZFH ZMW KTPE XIHPH
 ZEC VZXH VWHS WEDG SPE
 VPESH, GWI KWIDC'YP PEMZMPC
 NE CNQP SFZYPD.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CERTAIN OLD FAD DANCE PERFORMED WHILE EATING PARMESAN, SWISS OR CHEDDAR: MACARENA AND CHEESE.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals Y

STARS AND STRIPES.

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Ernie Gates

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stripes.com

Background check should precede every gun sale

BY SHANNON KLUG
AND NEIL HESTER

Special to Stars and Stripes

As veterans and gun owners, we are both quite comfortable with guns. So, when we met with fellow veterans early last year to discuss gun laws, we convened at a familiar place: a gun range.

A couple dozen veterans gathered at a state-run shooting facility outside Phoenix. Our colleague, a retired Army sergeant major, provided the firearms. We shot a Glock, a revolver, an AR-15 with a suppressor, and an AR-15 with a sniper scope and tripod. Before we dove deep on how to pass common-sense laws that will make the country safer, we spent some time with the very firearms we'd be discussing.

As veterans, we know what we're talking about when it comes to gun safety, and that's why we believe strongly that the U.S. Senate must pass life-saving bipartisan background check legislation — a policy backed by roughly 90% of Americans, including the vast majority of Republicans and gun owners.

We are both retired Air Force officers. We are both gun owners. We both live in red states, and we are both relatively politically conservative — one a registered Republican and one a registered Independent. Knowing this, the average American may assume that we are pro-gun, and that is true. We are pro-gun, and we are also pro-gun-safety.

The Senate could soon debate a bill that would strengthen the existing federal background check laws and close loopholes to keep more guns away from people who legally are barred from having them.

Currently, federal law requires a licensed gun dealer to conduct a background check through the FBI's database. This is a simple process that almost all gun owners have gone

through. Including paperwork, it can take as little as half an hour to complete, and it ensures that the buyer is not prohibited by federal or state law from owning a firearm. However, the law does not require this simple process to be completed by unlicensed sellers, including people who sell guns to strangers they meet online or at gun shows.

More than 20 states have passed gun background check laws that extend beyond the federal requirements. However, in states without additional measures, prohibited purchasers — those who would not pass a background check through the FBI — can find ways to acquire a gun without a background check. By purchasing the gun on the internet or at a gun show from a stranger who isn't a licensed dealer, a prohibited buyer can avoid the federal background check system. Under current law, a private online seller isn't required to conduct a background check.

As a result of our military experience, we believe wholeheartedly in the three pillars of military gun culture: training, safety and accountability. Moreover, we bear the moral responsibility of ensuring that we never place our guns into the hands of dangerous people. We didn't do it while serving in the military, and we won't do it as civilians.

At times, we have both lent our guns to friends or family to shoot at the range or use while hunting. We know who we are lending our guns to and that they are safe and responsible gun users. Neither of us has ever sold a gun to a stranger, partially because we are wary of the system of selling guns online to people we've never met.

We live in a digital age, where cars and houses and knickknacks are sold from person-to-person online. Naturally, so are guns. But if either of us was to transfer a firearm to a buyer we met online, we would ensure that the sale be finalized at a federally-licensed

firearm dealer, after the seller completes a background check.

Expanding the current federal background check law to cover stranger-to-stranger sales would give private online gun sellers peace of mind. It is a natural update to the law, especially if you consider that the current federal background check law was put in place in 1993, when the internet was in its infancy and Google hadn't even been invented.

Will the law stop all criminals from acquiring guns? Of course not. But it will make it much harder for prohibited purchasers to avoid background checks and it will reduce illegal gun trafficking.

Consider the law like a crosswalk across a busy street. Crosswalks don't prevent all pedestrian traffic deaths, but they make crossing the street easier to navigate and a lot safer. Whether I am the driver or the pedestrian, I appreciate the peace of mind the crosswalk provides.

Perhaps most importantly, Americans across party lines agree that no gun sale should take place without a background check. That means that every senator, regardless of state or party, serves a constituency that overwhelmingly supports this bill. Therefore, every senator has an obligation to act on behalf of his or her constituency and vote "Yes" on a background check bill that will save lives — that's how democracy works.

So, as veterans and gun owners, we ask each reader, regardless of political affiliation, to contact your senators and demand that they vote to strengthen our federal background check law to include online and stranger-to-stranger gun sales.

Shannon Klug is a retired Air Force colonel who lives in North Carolina. Neil Hester is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who lives in Oklahoma. Both are gun owners and gun safety advocates.

Army People Strategy should address pay disparity

BY EVE-LYNN GARDNER

Special to Stars and Stripes

Military salaries are the highest they have been in years, with servicemembers enjoying a standard of living commensurate with their civilian counterparts. During this past year's pandemic and alarming rise in unemployment rates, we in the military recognize how truly fortunate we are to have the type of job security many in the civilian sector do not share.

However, sergeants major, the Army's most senior NCO rank, have a pay scale that does not increase on par with their officer counterparts. Unlike the substantial pay increases that accompany promotion and the enormous increase in responsibilities from lieutenant colonel to colonel, and colonel to general officer, no such apparatus exists for sergeants major. Incredibly, a newly graduated SGM from the Army's Sergeant Major Academy earns the same basic salary as a SGM who works alongside a four-star general. While their respective salaries will reflect the number of years they have served, the salary itself does not increase as these NCOs take on more and more responsibility over the years.

That so many SGMs continue to serve, proudly, long after any financial incentive remains to do so demonstrates the selfless service that is the hallmark of our NCO corps.

Our SGMs are long overdue being paid their fair share in recognition of their vital role en-

suring the success of the Army in fulfilling its mission and maintaining our fighting force.

Now is the perfect time to remedy this issue, as the Army puts its "people first" initiative, the Army People Strategy, into full force by re-vamping its selections process for battalion and brigade commanders and command sergeants major. This refining of the Army's selection process of its senior leadership was implemented to guarantee that our best leaders are put into command responsibility positions to ensure that the health and welfare of our soldiers is always the top priority.

SGMs who are selected under this new program to serve as the senior NCO in a brigade should receive a pay increase commensurate with the expectations and responsibilities that come with this position. And when they are selected to serve as the SGM alongside a general officer, another pay increase needs to accompany their increased responsibilities, just as it does for officers. Doing so would help reinforce and incentivize the Army People Strategy, which seeks to recognize, develop and retain talent within the ranks.

We must push this issue forward and demand that it become part of our national conversation; we must not repeat the disappointment of 2017.

An attempt to increase the salaries for SGMs seemed to be gaining traction in 2017 when then-Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey floated the idea for the creation of two new enlisted ranks, E-10 and E-11, respectively, to

help address the pay disparity that exists between the enlisted and officer side of the aisle. His effort garnered substantial attention across social media and many SGMs and their spouses expressed hope that more economic parity was coming. Unfortunately, Dailey was unsuccessful as his idea generated little more than hopeful speculation and, four years later, seems to have all but disappeared from conversations within most military circles.

One reason proffered as to why this idea effectively "died on the vine" by those few SGMs willing to speak on record was that pay disparities are seen as "the way it has always been done," and accepted as such. If this is true, then shame on every one of us who serves.

If we allow ourselves to accept such an argument, our forces would still be segregated, openly gay and transgender people would be kicked out immediately, and women would not be allowed to serve in combat arms units.

That is not the Army any of us want to serve in — one that accepts inequitable treatment of one group or class of soldiers due to years of "tradition." Doing so is a repudiation of the Army People Strategy. Unfair traditions need to be left in the dustbin of history and replaced with fair ones. It is up to all of us to right this wrong and demand an increase in pay for senior SGMs. I cannot think of any better fulfillment of the Army People Strategy than this.

Eve-Lynn Gardner is a freelance writer and spouse of an Army officer.

SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE SPORTS

PRO SOCCER

MLS						
EASTERN CONFERENCE						
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
New England	5	1	2	17	11	7
Philadelphia	4	2	2	14	9	5
Orlando City	3	1	3	12	8	4
NYCFC	3	2	2	11	13	7
CF Montréal	3	3	2	11	10	9
Columbus	3	2	2	11	7	6
Nashville	2	0	5	11	9	6
Atlanta	2	1	4	10	9	7
New York	3	4	0	9	10	10
D.C. United	3	5	0	9	8	11
Inter Miami CF	2	4	2	8	8	13
Toronto FC	1	4	2	5	8	12
Chicago	1	5	1	4	4	11
Cincinnati	1	4	1	4	6	15

WESTERN CONFERENCE						
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Seattle	5	0	3	18	14	3
Sporting KC	5	2	1	16	15	10
LA Galaxy	5	2	0	15	11	11
Colorado	4	2	1	13	12	8
Houston	3	3	2	11	11	12
San Jose	3	5	0	9	11	12
Portland	3	4	0	9	9	11
Real Salt Lake	2	1	3	9	9	7
LAFC	2	3	2	8	8	9
Vancouver	2	4	1	7	6	9
Austin FC	2	4	1	7	5	8
Minnesota	2	4	1	7	6	11
FC Dallas	1	3	3	6	8	11

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday's game

Austin FC at Sporting Kansas City
Friday, June 18

Nashville at New York
Vancouver at Real Salt Lake
Saturday, June 19

Chicago at Columbus
Colorado at Cincinnati
Orlando City at Toronto FC
New England at New York City FC
Miami at D.C. United
Minnesota at FC Dallas
San Jose at Austin FC
Seattle at LA Galaxy
Sporting Kansas City at Portland
Houston at Los Angeles FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Orlando	3	0	2	11	7	4
Portland	3	2	0	9	11	4
Washington	2	1	2	8	5	5
Gotham FC	2	1	1	7	2	1
Houston	2	2	1	7	6	6
Chicago	2	2	1	7	4	7
North Carolina	1	2	1	4	6	3
Reign FC	1	2	1	4	2	3
Louisville	1	2	1	4	2	8
Kansas City	0	3	2	2	2	6

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, June 5

Chicago 1, North Carolina 0
Gotham FC 1, Reign FC 0
Portland 3, Louisville 0

Sunday, June 6

Orlando 1, Washington 1, tie
Houston 1, Kansas City 0

Saturday, June 19

Reign FC at North Carolina
Washington at Chicago

Sunday, June 20

Houston at Louisville
Kansas City at Portland
Gotham FC at Orlando

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

NCAA Division I World Series

At USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium
Oklahoma City
Double Elimination
Thursday, June 3
James Madison 4, Oklahoma 3, 8 innings
Oklahoma St. 3, Georgia 2
Alabama 5, Arizona 1
UCLA 4, Florida St. 0
Friday, June 4
James Madison 2, Oklahoma St. 1
Alabama 6, UCLA 0
Saturday, June 5
Oklahoma 8, Georgia 0
Florida St. 4, Arizona 3
Oklahoma 10, UCLA 3
Florida St. 4, Oklahoma St. 2
Sunday, June 6
Oklahoma 6, James Madison 3
Florida St. 2, No. 3 Alabama 0
James Madison vs. Oklahoma, ppd.
Florida St. vs. Alabama, ppd.
Monday
Oklahoma 7, James Madison 1
Florida St. 8, Alabama 5
Championship Series
Tuesday
Florida St. 8, Oklahoma 4
Wednesday
Oklahoma 6, Florida St. 2
Thursday
Florida St. vs. Oklahoma

TENNIS

French Open

Wednesday
At Stade Roland Garros
Paris
Purse: Euro 16,404,509
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Quarterfinals
Rafael Nadal (3), Spain, def. Diego Schwartzman (10), Argentina, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0.
Novak Djokovic (1), Serbia, def. Matteo Berrettini (9), Italy, 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 7-5.
Women's Singles
Quarterfinals
Barbora Krejickova, Czech Republic, def. Coco Gauff (24), United States, 7-6 (6), 6-3.
Maria Sakkari (17), Greece, def. Iga Swiatek (8), Poland, 6-4, 6-4.
Women's Doubles
Quarterfinals
Irina-Camelia Begu, Romania, and Nadia Podoroska, Argentina, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, and Shelby Rogers, United States, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.
Magda Linette, Poland, and Bernarda Pera, United States, def. Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, and Elena Rybakina, Kazakhstan, 7-5, 4-6, 6-2.

Nottingham Open

Wednesday
At Nottingham Tennis Centre
Nottingham, Great Britain
Purse: \$235,238
Surface: Grass
Women's Singles
Round of 32
Alison van Uytvanck (8), Belgium, def. Marina Melnikova, Russia, 6-1, 6-1.
Kristina Mladenovic (7), France, def. Kurumi Nara, Japan, 6-2, 5-7, 6-2.
Zhang Shuai (4), China, def. Arina Rodionova, Australia, 6-4, 6-3.
Cathy McNally, United States, def. Nao Hibino (12), Japan, 6-0, 6-3.
Katie Boulter, Britain, def. Marie Bouzkova (6), Czech Republic, 6-4, 6-3.
Lauren Davis (14), United States, def. Harriet Dart, Britain, 1-6, 6-3, 6-4.
Heather Watson (9), Britain, def. Tara Moore, Britain, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.
Women's Doubles
Round of 16
Ankita Raina, India, and Julia Wachaczyk, Germany, def. Samantha Murray Sharan and Naiktha Bains, Britain, 6-4, 2-6, 10-4.
Lyudmyla Kichenok, Ukraine, and Makoto Ninomiya (3), Japan, def. CoCo Vandeweghe and Christina McHale, United States, 7-5, 7-6 (1).

Emily Webley-Smith and Sarah Beth Grey, Britain, def. Katie Boulter and Jodie Anna Burrage, Britain, 2-6, 7-5, 10-3.
Storm Sanders, Australia, and Caroline Dolehide (2), United States, def. Alicja Rosolska, Poland, and Marie Bouzkova, Czech Republic, 7-6 (3), 6-4.
Quarterfinals
Johanna Konta, Britain, and Donna Vekic, Croatia, def. Sabrina Santamaria, United States, and Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove, Netherlands, 6-3, 6-1.

Croatia Open

Thursday
Bol, Croatia
Purse: Euro 92,742
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Quarterfinals
Jasmine Paolini (3), Italy, def. Kristina Kucova, Slovakia, 6-1, 6-1.
Women's Doubles
Quarterfinals
Ekaterine Gorgodze, Georgia, and Tereza Mihalikova, Slovakia, def. Anna-Karina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, and Katarina Zavatska, Ukraine, walkover.

Mercedes Cup

Wednesday
At Tennis Club Weissenhof
Stuttgart, Germany
Purse: Euro 543,210
Surface: Grass
Men's Singles
Round of 32
Sam Querrey, United States, def. Altug Celikbilek, Turkey, 6-4, 6-1.
Yannick Hanfmann, Germany, def. Jeremy Chardy, France, 6-4, 6-4.
Jordan Thompson, Australia, def. Guido Pella, Argentina, 6-3, 6-4.
James Duckworth, Australia, def. Adrian Mannarino (7), France, 6-3, 6-2.
Dominic Stephan Stricker, Switzerland, def. Radu Albot, Moldova, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5).
Peter Gajdosik, Germany, def. Ilya Ivashka, Belarus, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2.
Jurij Rodionov, Austria, def. Dominik Koepfer, Germany, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.
Feliciano Lopez, Spain, def. Alexei Popyrin, Australia, 6-4, 6-4.
Men's Doubles
Round of 16
Lukasz Kubot and Hubert Hurkacz, Poland, def. Oliver Marach, Austria, and Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, Pakistan, 6-3, 6-4.
Gonzalo Escobar, Ecuador, and Ariel Behar, Uruguay, def. Divij Sharan, India, and Nikoloz Basilashvili, Georgia, 6-4, 6-2.

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Connecticut	8	2	.800	—
New York	5	4	.556	2½
Atlanta	4	5	.444	3½
Washington	3	5	.375	4
Chicago	3	7	.300	5
Indiana	1	10	.091	7½

WESTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	8	2	.800	—
Las Vegas	7	3	.700	1
Los Angeles	4	3	.571	2½
Phoenix	5	4	.556	2½
Dallas	4	5	.444	3½
Minnesota	3	5	.375	4

Tuesday's games

Washington 85, Minnesota 81
Dallas 85, Phoenix 81

Wednesday's games

Seattle 95, Atlanta 71
Chicago 92, Indiana 76

Thursday's game

Los Angeles at Washington

Friday's games

Seattle at Atlanta
Dallas at Phoenix

Saturday's games

Chicago at Indiana
Los Angeles at Minnesota

GOLF

World rankings

Through June 6			
1. Dustin Johnson	USA	9.98	
2. Justin Thomas	USA	8.34	
3. Jon Rahm	ESP	8.21	
4. Bryson DeChambeau	USA	6.98	
5. Xander Schauffele	USA	6.81	
6. Collin Morikawa	USA	6.79	
7. Brooks Koepka	USA	6.16	
8. Rory McIlroy	NIR	5.97	
9. Patrick Reed	USA	5.94	
10. Tyrrell Hatton	ENG	5.80	
11. Webb Simpson	USA	5.45	
12. Viktor Hovland	NOR	5.44	
13. Tony Finau	USA	5.20	
14. Hideki Matsuyama	JPN	5.04	

15. Patrick Cantlay	USA	4.94	
16. Daniel Berger	USA	4.73	
17. Abraham Ancer	MEX	4.38	
18. Matthew Fitzpatrick	ENG	4.35	
19. Louis Oosthuizen	SAF	4.34	
20. Billy Horschel	USA	4.27	
21. Paul Casey	ENG	4.27	
22. Jason Kokrak	USA	4.22	
23. Jordan Spieth	USA	4.13	
24. Scottie Scheffler	USA	4.04	
25. Sungjae Im	KOR	3.89	
26. Harris English	USA	3.87	
27. Lee Westwood	ENG	3.74	
28. Cameron Smith	AUS	3.66	
29. Will Zalatoris	USA	3.49	
30. Joaquin Niemann	CHI	3.44	
31. Matthew Wolff	USA	3.41	

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball
American League
HOUSTON ASTROS — Placed RHP Joe Smith on the 10-day IL, retroactive to June 6. Recalled RHP Brandon Bielak from Sugar Land (Triple-A West).
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Optioned CF Edward Olivares to Omaha (Triple-A East). Recalled RHP Carlos Hernandez from Omaha.
MINNESOTA TWINS — Sent RHP Kenta Maeda to St. Paul (Triple-A East) on a rehab assignment. Placed OF Kyle Garlick on the 10-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Erik Manoah Jr. from West Virginia (Atlantic League). Recalled CF Gilberto Celestino from St. Paul (Triple-A East). Placed LF Kyle Carlick on the 10-day IL.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Activated LHP Reymin Guduan from the 10-day IL and designated him for assignment.
TEXAS RANGERS — Placed RHP Ian Kennedy on the 10-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Spencer Patton from Round Rock (Triple-A West).
National League
CINCINNATI REDS — Placed RHP Sonny Gray on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Art Warren from Louisville (Triple-A East). Agreed to terms with RHP Michael Mariot on a minor league contract.
COLORADO ROCKIES — Recalled 1B Connor Joe from Albuquerque (Triple-A West). Placed 1B Matt Adams on the 10-day IL.
LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Activated RHP Tony Gonsolin from the 60-day IL. Placed LF Yoshi Tsutsugo on the 10-day IL. Transferred LHP Scott Alexander from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL.
MIAMI MARLINS — Placed RF Garrett Cooper on the 10-day IL. Recalled 1B Lewin Diaz from Jacksonville (Triple-A East). Agreed to terms with LHP Eric Stout on a minor league contract.
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Sent SS Didi Gregorius to Lehigh Valley (Triple-A East) on a rehab assignment.
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Selected the contract of LHP Sammy Long. Activated RHP Jimmie Sherry from 10-day IL. Placed OF Alex Dickerson on the 10-day IL. Designated RHP Matt Wisler for assignment.

BASKETBALL

NBA — Fined Miami president Pat Riley \$25,000 for violating the league's anti-tampering rule during a June 4 radio interview regarding LeBron James.
NBA G LEAGUE IGNITE — Signed G Jaden Hardy.
FOOTBALL
National Football League
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed WR Rondale Moore to a four-year contract. Signed LB Zaven Collins.
ATLANTA FALCONS — Traded WR Julio Jones and 2023 sixth-round pick to Tennessee for a 2022 second and 2023 fourth-round pick.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Signed LB Micah Parsons.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed LB DeVondre Campbell. Released RB Mike Weber.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Waived LB Duke Ejiro for a failed physical designation.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Signed CB Bliid Wreh-Vilson.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed DE Jaelan Phillips to a four-year contract.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Waived QB Jamie Newman and WR Khalil Tate. Waived WR Trevon Grimes with an injury designation.

SOCCER

Major League Soccer
NEW YORK CITY FC — Acquired F Santiago Rodriguez on loan from Montevideo City (Uruguayan Primera Division).

COLLEGE

MEMPHIS — Announced Laird Veatch title revised to Vice P7 resident and Director of intercollegiate Athletics.
PROVIDENCE — Announced men's basketball G Matteus Case transferred from Penn.

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup points leaders

Through June 6

1. Denny Hamlin	664
2. Kyle Larson	617
3. Chase Elliott	591
4. William Byron	564
5. Joey Logano	548
6. Martin Truex Jr	527
7. Kyle Busch	520
8. Ryan Blaney	509
9. Kevin Harvick	483
10. Brad Keselowski	473
11. Alex Bowman	447
12. Austin Dillon	436
13. Tyler Reddick	398
14. Chris Buescher	391
15. Christopher Bell	364
16. Michael McDowell	355
17. Matt DiBenedetto	331
18. Kurt Busch	328
19. Ricky Stenhouse Jr	309
20. Ross Chastain	307
21. Bubba Wallace	298
22. Daniel Suarez	293
23. Ryan Newman	287
24. Ryan Prece	281
25. Erik Jones	272
26. Chase Briscoe	271

Congress: NCAA needs NIL law help

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

A federal law governing how college athletes can earn money off their fame and celebrity seems certain to pass — at some point.

There is no real debate among lawmakers on Capitol Hill about



Emmert

whether athletes should be permitted to monetize their name, image and likeness.

“There is broad consensus that Congress should pass a law that grants athletes NIL rights,” Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) said Wednesday during a hearing held by the Senate Commerce Committee.

But less than a month before NIL laws go into effect in several states, NCAA President Mark Emmert was back in Washington renewing his plea for help from Congress — help that is unlikely to come as soon as the NCAA would like.

For some lawmakers, federal regulation of college sports should not end with NIL and the time is right to tackle other issues — from long-term health care and educational opportunities for athletes to more uniform and enforceable safety standards.

“To race to just an NIL bill and not address these injustices is tragic,” Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), a former Stanford football player, said before Emmert and five other witnesses testified before the committee.

Wicker wants to take a different approach, calling for a “more focused bill on a faster timeline.”

Emmert said the NCAA plans to act on its proposed NIL legislation soon.

“Preferably by the end of the month,” Emmert said.

The Division I Council meets June 22-23 and could take action then, but only a federal law can preempt state laws in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and New Mexico that are set to go into effect July 1.

Earlier Wednesday, Connecticut became the 19th state to pass NIL legislation. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), who has sponsored with Booker the sweeping College Athlete Bill of Rights, said he would block any federal NIL bill that is less permissive than Connecticut's.

“We need to listen to the athletes,” Blumenthal said. “They are the ones who are all too frequently outnumbered in this conversation.”

FRENCH OPEN/WCWS

Djokovic, Nadal set for semis

By HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal know there's something special about the two of them meeting in the French Open semifinals — even if they'd prefer, of course, for it to happen a round later.

"Each time we face each other, there's that extra tension and expectations," the top-seeded Djokovic said. "Just vibes are different walking on the court with him."

The third-seeded Nadal's take?

"In some way," he said, "we are practicing, we are living the sport, for these moments."

Whatever the quality of play might be between Nadal and Djokovic in Paris on Friday — their semifinal will follow the one between No. 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece and No. 6 Alexander Zverev of Germany — the numbers associated with the matchup are overwhelming.

Start with the big picture: Nadal is two wins away from his 21st Grand Slam title, which would break the men's mark he currently shares with Roger Federer.

Djokovic is trying to get to No. 19, which would leave him just one behind his rivals.

Nadal is 105-2 at Roland Garros — Djokovic is responsible for one of those defeats, in the 2015 quarterfinals; Robin Soderling the other — and eyeing a 14th championship at the clay-court major.

Djokovic won La Coupe des Mousquetaires in 2016 and could join Rod Laver and Roy Emerson as the only men to win each of the four Grand Slam tournaments twice.

"It's not like any other match. Let's face it, it's the biggest challenge that you can have — playing on clay against Nadal on this court, in which he has had so much success in his career," Djokovic



Spain's Rafael Nadal, left, will face Serbia's Novak Djokovic in the semifinals of the French Open. Djokovic leads their head-to-head matchups 29-28, but Nadal leads 19-7 on clay.

said. "In the final stages of a Grand Slam, it doesn't get bigger than that."

It is their 58th showdown, more than between any other two men in the Open era, which dates to 1968; Djokovic leads 29-28.

Nadal is ahead 10-6 at the Slams, 7-1 at the French Open (including a straight-set victory in the 2020 final) and 19-7 on clay (including a win in last month's Italian Open final).

This one comes in the semifinals, rather than the final, because Nadal recently slid from No. 2 to No. 3 in the rankings. The tournament seedings strictly follow the rankings, so Nadal got no boost for his dominance at the place, and a random draw determined which half of the bracket he was placed in.

"It's going to be a special match," said 10th-seeded Diego Schwartzman, who lost to Nadal in the quarterfinals Wednesday but not before ending his 36-set winning streak in Paris. "Everyone wants to see that."

The women's final Saturday will be No. 31 seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova against unseeded Barbora Krejckikova. The last four women all were first-time major semifinalists.



PHOTOS BY MICHEL EULER/AP

Women's final set with two unknowns

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN
AND STEVEN WINE
Associated Press

PARIS — Tour veteran Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova of Russia advanced to her first Grand Slam final by beating unseeded Tamara Zidansek at the French Open on Thursday, 7-5, 6-3.

The 29-year-old Pavlyuchenkova, seeded 31st, is playing in her 52nd major tournament and her 14th French Open. She had been 0-6 in major quarterfinals before finally surmounting that hurdle on Tuesday and was steadier than the big-swinging Zidansek in their semifinal.

"I wanted this so much that right now I don't feel anything," Pavlyuchenkova said. "Tennis is such a mental sport. That's what is really hard about tennis."

Pavlyuchenkova will play Saturday against unseeded Barbora Krejckikova of the Czech Republic.

Down 5-3, 30-40 on her serve in the decider against 17th-seeded Maria Sakkari, Krejckikova hit a backhand winner at the net to stay alive in the match. She finally held and broke back in the next game to level at 5-5.

Krejckikova needed five match points to seal the win 7-5, 4-6, 9-7.

It was only the second time in the professional era that there were four first-time Grand Slam women semifinalists at a major tournament and the first time since the 1978 Australian Open.

Even so, the quality of play in the match between Pavlyuchenkova and Zidansek was mostly as good as the warm and cloudless weather. The 85th-ranked Zidansek, who this week became the first Slovenian woman to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal, was the better player for much of the first set, moving well and hitting the more aggressive groundstrokes.

But the consistent Pavlyuchenkova won the most important points, and Zidansek dumped consecutive shaky serves into the net to lose the set.

Pavlyuchenkova served well, and in the second set her groundstrokes carried more sting as she raced to a 4-1 lead. Her first sign of nerves came as she double-faulted twice, including on break point, to make it 4-3, but she broke back and easily served out the victory.

Pavlyuchenkova, who has won 12 tour titles, will climb back into Top 20 next week for first time since January 2018.

Sooners slug past Seminoles, force Game 3

By CLIFF BRUNT
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Jocelyn Alo knew her hit was gone as soon as she made contact.

Oklahoma's slugger blasted a go-ahead homer in the sixth inning, and the Sooners beat Florida State 6-2 on Wednesday night to force a decisive Game 3 for the Women's College World Series title.

It was Alo's 33rd home run of the season. The USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year added to her school record. But this one was different.

"I did know it was out," Alo said. "And I think the last time I circled the bases that quickly was probably my freshman year, my first-ever home run."

The final game was played Thursday afternoon. Oklahoma (55-4) is seeking its fifth national

championship. Florida State (49-12-1) is trying for its second title in four years.

Alo sent Kathryn Sandercock's 2-0 pitch over the right-center field fence, giving the Sooners a 3-2 lead. Her blast fired up the crowd of 12,115 mostly Sooners fans at USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium, which is about 25 miles from Oklahoma's campus.

The homer gave the Sooners the Division I single-season record for home runs with 159, breaking the mark Hawaii set in 2010.

Giselle Juarez pitched a complete game for Oklahoma. She gave up two runs in the first inning, then threw six shutout innings and allowed just two hits the rest of the way.

"My hitters came up to me and they were, like, 'We've got you, we have your back,'" Juarez said. "And I think for me, it was all

about keeping them in that game. They had my back. They're always going to have my back."

Juarez improved to 4-0 in the tournament and has surrendered just three earned runs in 24½ innings. Oklahoma coach Patty Gasso didn't say if Juarez would start Game 3.

"Everything is on the table right now," Gasso said. "You've got to do everything you can to find a way to win this. So whatever we have to do — and I know she'll do whatever she has to do as well."

Mackenzie Donihoo and Kinzie Hansen each added two hits for Oklahoma.

Sandercock, who had been dominant during the World Series, started and gave up four earned runs and seven hits in five innings for the Seminoles, who won the opener of the best-of-three final 8-4 on Tuesday.



SUE OGROCKI/AP

Oklahoma's Jana Johns celebrates hitting a home run during the third inning Wednesday in Oklahoma City.

NHL PLAYOFFS



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

The Boston Bruins' Matt Grzelcyk, left, reacts as the New York Islanders' Kyle Palmieri celebrates his goal during the second period of the Islanders' series-clinching 6-2 win Wednesday in Uniondale, N.Y.

Islanders take Bruins in 6 games, reach Cup semis

New York treats home fans with 6-2 defeat of Boston as Nelson scores twice

By VIN A. CHERWOOD
Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — The New York Islanders got another big second period and ran past the Boston Bruins for a return trip to the Stanley Cup semifinals.

Brock Nelson scored twice in New York's three-goal second, Semyon Varlamov stopped 23 shots and the Islanders beat the Bruins 6-2 in Game 6 on Wednesday night in a front of a raucous home crowd at Nassau Coliseum.

"It was awesome," Nelson said. "The place was rocking tonight. The fans were feeding us energy. The team played great. One of those nights (coach) Barry (Trotz) touched on after the game, you'll always remember moments like that. That was a big game, a big team effort from everybody."

Kyle Palmieri, Travis Zajac, Cal Clutterbuck and Ryan Pulock also scored to help New York set up a rematch with the defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning. Josh Bailey and Jean-Gabriel Pageau each had two assists.

"You need everyone going to beat a team like that," Bailey said. "I thought from Varly right on out, everyone in the lineup was contributing, playing the way we needed to play to get the win. Certainly happy to move on."

The Lightning beat the Islanders in six games in the bubble in Edmonton last year.

"We feel we have some unfinished business," Bailey said. "We'll enjoy tonight and we'll start getting

Scoreboard

Second round

Best-of-seven; x-if necessary
Tampa Bay 4, Carolina 1

Tampa Bay 2, Carolina 1
Tampa Bay 2, Carolina 1
Carolina 3, Tampa Bay 2, OT
Tampa Bay 6, Carolina 4
Tampa Bay 2, Carolina 0

N.Y. Islanders 4, Boston 2

Boston 5, N.Y. Islanders 2
N.Y. Islanders 4, Boston 3, OT
Boston 2, N.Y. Islanders 1, OT
N.Y. Islanders 4, Boston 1
N.Y. Islanders 5, Boston 4
Wednesday: N.Y. Islanders 6, Boston 2
Montreal 4, Winnipeg 0

Montreal 5, Winnipeg 3
Montreal 1, Winnipeg 0
Montreal 5, Winnipeg 1
Montreal 3, Winnipeg 2, OT

Vegas 3, Colorado 2

Colorado 7, Vegas 1
Colorado 3, Vegas 2, OT
Vegas 3, Colorado 2
Vegas 5, Colorado 1
Vegas 3, Colorado 2, OT
Thursday: at Vegas
x-Saturday: at Colorado

ready."

Brad Marchand scored twice for Boston, and Tuukka Rask made 23 saves. The Bruins, who reached the Stanley Cup Final two years ago, were eliminated in the second round for the second straight year.

"They're a good defensive team," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. "They manage pucks clearly better than us. We're not getting those free chances they get in terms of mismanaging pucks. They do play a good game that way, they don't beat themselves."

With the Bruins on the power play, Marchand got the puck in front of the net and put a backhand-er past Varlamov from the right

side at 5:38 of the third to cut Boston's deficit to 4-2. It was Marchand's fifth of the series and eighth of the postseason.

New York's stifling defense limited the Bruins to just five shots on goal in the third. With the minutes winding down on Boston's season, the Islanders hemmed the Bruins in their end of the ice, preventing them from pulling Rask for an extra skater until 1:25 left.

Clutterbuck scored an empty-netter with 59 seconds left to seal it, and Pulock added another 11 seconds later.

After outscoring Boston 8-3 in the middle periods of the first five games, New York had three more in the second — for the third time in the series.

Nelson stole the puck from Matt Grzelcyk, took off on breakaway and beat Rask into the top right corner at 5:20 to put the Islanders up 2-1. Bailey stole an outlet pass from Rask and fed Nelson streaking to net, and Nelson beat the goalie from the right side with 7:23 left in the second for his second of the night and sixth of the playoffs.

With the Bruins trailing 3-1 in the elimination game, Cassidy broke up his Perfection Line of David Pastrnak-Marchand-Bergeon.

The Islanders stretched the lead to 4-1 as Adam Pelech sent a shot from the left point that was stopped by Rask. However, Palmieri swooped in, took the rebound and put it in from the right side for his seventh of the postseason.

Officiating takes the center stage midway in playoffs

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Officiating has been on center stage midway through the NHL playoffs.

Star forward Connor McDavid didn't draw a single penalty when Edmonton got swept in the first round. Tampa Bay dominated a second-round series against Carolina thanks to a potent power play. And a war of words between coaches Barry Trotz and Bruce Cassidy spiced up an already hot Islanders-Bruins series that the Islanders won Wednesday in six games.

Calls made, and not made, and the ensuing results are tipping the balance of the postseason. The spotlight is on referees and linesmen for the impact they're having on the way to some team lifting the Stanley Cup.

"I don't work them," Trotz said Tuesday. "I respect them because I worked the referee situation (in practices) in the bubble last year and I got ran over. I tried to call penalties, I tried to call offsides, I got hit with pucks, I got knocked over — I got all that stuff. I've been in the league a long time: It's a hard job, and I have a lot of respect for those guys."

So much respect that he and Cassidy have mentioned officials a handful of times. Trotz said it was up to linesmen to keep Bruins center Patrice Bergeron from "cheating" on faceoffs. Cassidy quipped after Boston's Game 5 loss to New York: "They sell a narrative over there that it's more like the New York Saints, not the New York Islanders."

The comment cost him \$25,000 in a fine from the league for publicly criticizing officiating.

"Most of what I thought I said was more in reference to the Is-

landers, a little gamesmanship with Barry, his comments towards Bergy," Cassidy said. "I'm always going to protect my captain and kind of push back a little bit."

Islanders-Bruins wasn't the only series officiating has factored into. McDavid not earning a penalty call against Winnipeg in the first round became a hot-button issue: The likely MVP tied for the second-most penalties drawn during the regular season.

McDavid said going into the playoffs: "The hooking and the holding and the holdups and all that stuff are things that I've dealt with my whole life. It's nothing new."

After his Oilers were swept by the Jets, coach Dave Tippett wondered aloud, "How can that be that he doesn't draw a penalty every game that I watch?" Now he and McDavid are left watching the rest of the playoffs.

The Hurricanes are joining them based almost entirely on a parade to the penalty box that gave the Lightning power-play target practice all series. Tampa Bay scored seven times on 16 power plays.

"Their (power play) — there's just too much there," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said before his team lost in five games to Tampa Bay.

There's always a chance that a comment or two about officiating will have an impact.

Vegas coach Peter DeBoer tried to do his part to affect officiating in his team's series against Colorado. DeBoer said after Game 2 he "can't even blame the refs because they're fighting the embellishment of grabbing your face or falling down or dropping your stick every period."



JACK DEMPSEY/AP

Linesman Mark Shewchyk tries to break up a fight between Vegas Golden Knights right wing Mark Stone, left, and Colorado Avalanche right wing Joonas Donskoi in a playoff game Sunday.

OLYMPICS/COLLEGE BASEBALL



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

The Olympic rings are seen on the knob of Miami Marlins' Eddy Alvarez's bat during a game on Aug. 5, 2020. He could become only the third American to win medals at the summer and winter Games.

Familiar rings: Alvarez seeks medal in baseball

2014 Sochi Olympics U.S. speedskating silver medalist suiting up as infielder for American baseball team in Tokyo

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

Eddy Alvarez told his unusual story when he met his new U.S. baseball teammates last month in the old Los Angeles Dodgers clubhouse in Vero Beach, Florida.

"This feels like a little bit of a redemption trip for me, because there's the feeling of listening to someone else's national anthem when you were so close to winning," he said. "At the end of the day, standing on the Olympic podium on the top is what we're all really searching for here."

Seven years ago, Alvarez was part of a four-man short track speedskating team that fell 0.271 seconds short of Russia in the 5,000 meter relay and won a silver medal at the Sochi Olympics. Last weekend, the 31-year-old Miami Marlins minor league infielder helped the U.S. qualify for the Olympic baseball tournament.

"I never thought it was going to be possible because baseball was taken out of the Olympics," he said. "It just so happened that the stars aligned."

While for most sports the Olympics is a matchup of its best players, in baseball it is merely the best of the rest — as in, those not in the major leagues.

Alvarez made it to the major leagues last year with Miami following a coronavirus outbreak among the Marlins. He became the first non-baseball Olympian in the major leagues since Jim Thorpe with the New York Giants and Boston Braves from 1913-19, after he won gold medals in decathlon and modern pentathlon at the 1912 Stockholm Games.

A 5-foot-9 switch-hitter, Alvarez hit .189 (7-for-37) with one double and two RBIs during a calup from Aug. 6-19 and a one-game return on Sept. 6. Olympic rings on the knob of his bat were visible. That brief stretch in the majors earned him \$93,238



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Alvarez celebrates after placing second in the 5000 meter short track speedskating relay final during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

in big league pay — a huge increase from his weekly \$5,133 salary back in the minors this season.

Alvarez was batting .222 with one homer and five RBIs this season through May 23 at Triple-A Jacksonville before leaving for the Americas Olympic qualifying tournament. He appeared in 15 games with the Marlins during spring training.

"I think Eddy will get back to the big leagues. He's a kid that obviously has had to fight in his life for a lot of things and work hard," Marlins manager Don Mattingly said. "Everybody needs guys that could do all of things that he can do."

If he goes to the Olympics, he could become only the third American to earn medals at both the Winter and Summer Olympics, after Eddie Eagen in 1920 (gold in light heavyweight boxing) and 1932 (gold in four-man bobsled) and Lauryn Williams in 2004 (silver in 100 meter track), 2012 (gold in 400 relay, though she did not run in final) and 2014 (silver in two-woman bobsled).

Knack for clutch hits has Vols two wins from CWS

By TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

The Tennessee Volunteers have had quite a knack for coming through in the clutch, and because of those timely hits, they are two wins away from the program's first College World Series berth in 16 years.

The Volunteers (48-16) have won seven games in walk-off fashion, the latest coming on a grand slam in the bottom of the ninth to open regional play. Now the No. 3 overall national seed is in its first super regional since 2005 by coming through when it matters most.

Not bad for a program that hadn't had a walk-off home run since 2010.

"I wish I could coach it or go give a speech on it, probably make some money off that deal," Tennessee coach Tony Vitello said Wednesday. "But it's kind of been their little deal that they've created."

The Vols showed off that ability for the big hit in the third game of this season. Shortstop Liam Spence hit a grand slam in the 12th inning to help Tennessee cap a sweep on the road at Georgia Southern.

"That was the first moment where I was like, 'Let's not be good, let's be great because if you can do this, you can be great,'" Vitello said. "And then it's kind of spiraled into a deal where the whole group thinks they can get it done in a lot of different situations."

Centerfielder Drew Gilbert has two of the team's walk-off home runs, the last with the Vols trailing Wright State by three runs in the bottom of the ninth last week to prompt a big celebration at home

plate. He said that first walk-off helped Tennessee realize it is never out of a game.

"The game's not over until the third out in the ninth inning," Gilbert said. "We just tried to get the next guy up to the plate. We don't quit playing until the game's over. I think that's kind of where it stems from."

With the Vols down 7-5 to top-ranked Arkansas in the bottom of the ninth, Max Ferguson hit a three-run homer to right field for the 8-7 win. Jordan Beck had a three-run home run against ETSU in the bottom of the 10th on March 16.

Tennessee is hosting LSU (38-23) in the Super Regional starting Saturday night in Knoxville, Tenn. The Vols already have a pair of walk-off victories from the teams' series in March.

The second game in that series was suspended in the eighth by weather and completed Sunday. Gilbert tied it up with an RBI double with two outs in the ninth, then hit a solo home run in the 10th. Luc Lipscius drove in the winning run with an RBI single in the eighth inning of a seven-inning game in the series finale.

"We got walked-off twice in one day, which that sucked," LSU junior Drew Bianco said.

Vitello said every player believes he can deliver when a key hit is needed.

"Sometimes it's not very pretty. Sometimes it is," Vitello said. "Sometimes they they get overly excited when they do it, which I think they deserve the right to act that way if something goes well. But however it happens, you know, it's kind of been a find a way group."



CALVIN MATTHEIS/AP

Tennessee celebrates after defeating Wright State 9-8 with a grand slam in the ninth inning of a regional game Friday, June 4, in Knoxville, Tenn. The team has won seven games via walk-off hits.

MLB

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	39	24	.619	—
Boston	37	25	.597	1½
New York	33	29	.532	5½
Toronto	31	28	.525	6
Baltimore	22	39	.361	16
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	37	24	.607	—
Cleveland	32	27	.542	4
Kansas City	29	31	.483	7½
Detroit	25	36	.410	12
Minnesota	24	37	.393	13
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oakland	37	26	.587	—
Houston	35	26	.574	1
Seattle	31	32	.492	6
Los Angeles	30	32	.484	6½
Texas	24	39	.381	13
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	30	24	.556	—
Atlanta	29	30	.492	3½
Philadelphia	29	31	.483	4
Washington	25	33	.431	7
Miami	26	35	.426	7½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	35	27	.565	—
Milwaukee	34	27	.557	½
St. Louis	32	30	.516	3
Cincinnati	29	30	.492	4½
Pittsburgh	23	37	.383	11
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
San Francisco	38	23	.623	—
Los Angeles	36	25	.590	2
San Diego	37	27	.578	2½
Colorado	25	37	.403	13½
Arizona	20	43	.317	19

Wednesday's games
 Houston 8, Boston 3
 Seattle 9, Detroit 6, 11 innings
 N.Y. Yankees 9, Minnesota 6
 Toronto 6, Chicago White Sox 2
 L.A. Angels 6, Kansas City 1
 Texas 4, San Francisco 3, 11 innings
 Oakland 4, Arizona 0
 Chicago Cubs 3, San Diego 1
 N.Y. Mets 14, Baltimore 1
 Philadelphia 2, Atlanta 1
 Cincinnati 7, Milwaukee 3
 L.A. Dodgers 2, Pittsburgh 1
 Colorado 4, Miami 3
 St. Louis 8, Cleveland 2
 Washington 9, Tampa Bay 7, 11 innings

Thursday's games
 Seattle at Detroit
 Houston at Boston
 N.Y. Yankees at Minnesota
 Toronto at Chicago White Sox
 Kansas City at Oakland
 L.A. Dodgers at Pittsburgh
 Milwaukee at Cincinnati
 Atlanta at Philadelphia
 San Francisco at Washington
 Colorado at Miami

Friday's games
 Baltimore (Akin 0-0) at Tampa Bay (Yarborough 3-3)
 Chicago White Sox (Giolito 5-5) at Detroit (Skubal 3-7)
 Seattle (Dunn 1-2) at Cleveland (Civale 8-2)
 Toronto (Stripling 2-3) at Boston (Richards 4-4)
 Houston (Urquidy 4-3) at Minnesota (Shoemaker 2-7)
 Kansas City (Singer 3-5) at Oakland (Irvin 4-7)
 St. Louis (Oviedo 0-2) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 7-4)
 San Francisco (Gausman 7-0) at Washington (Ross 2-6)
 Atlanta (Morton 5-2) at Miami (Alcantara 3-5)
 Colorado (Freeland 0-1) at Cincinnati (Mahle 5-2)
 San Diego (Snell 2-2) at N.Y. Mets (deGrom 5-2)
 Pittsburgh (De Jong 0-0) at Milwaukee (Woodruff 4-2)
 L.A. Angels (Ohtani 2-1) at Arizona (Kelly 2-6)
 Texas (Foltynewicz 1-6) at L.A. Dodgers (Kershaw 7-5)

MLB calendar
July 11-13 — Amateur draft, Denver.
July 13 — All-Star Game, Denver.
Aug. 12 — New York Yankees vs. Chicago White Sox at Dyersville, Iowa.
Aug. 22 — Los Angeles Angels vs. Cleveland at Williamsport, Pa.
Sept. 8 — Hall of Fame induction, Cooperstown, N.Y.

Cole spins a win for Yankees

Pitcher gets back on track as controversy about grip aids swirls

By **DAVE CAMPBELL**
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Gerrit Cole put his familiar spin on a tenacious win. The New York Yankees usually find their groove in Minnesota, after all.

Cole got back on track with six sharp innings amid the hubbub around grip aids for pitchers, and Giancarlo Stanton hit two of New York's four home runs to fuel a 9-6 victory Wednesday night over the Twins.

"The outside chatter is the outside chatter, and as players we've just got to do our best and stay focused on our job," said Cole, who won for the first time in three starts. He allowed solo homers to Jorge Polanco and Miguel Sanó among five hits without a walk.

Polanco hit a two-run shot in a four-run ninth for Minnesota, but Cole and the Yankees were in control from the start.

"That's what an ace does," teammate Aaron Judge said. "Nothing really can faze that guy."

Judge and Miguel Andújar also took Twins starter Randy Dobnak (1-6) deep on a hot and humid night that had the ball jumping off the bat.

Cole (7-3) reserved two of his nine strikeouts for Josh Donaldson, who recently questioned whether the three-time All-Star right-hander and others have unfairly helped their cause with sticky substances on their fingers that cross the lines of even competition.

"He's a tough customer. I'm not worried



JIM MONE/AP

New York Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole delivers during the first inning of Wednesday's game against the Minnesota Twins in Minneapolis. Cole finished with nine strikeouts.

about his spin rate. I'm just watching him pitch. He's a good pitcher," Minnesota manager Rocco Baldelli said.

Said New York manager Aaron Boone: "He's an amazing pitcher and a tremendous competitor, and when all this dust settles and wherever the storyline goes, that ain't changing."

Dobnak, the former Uber-driving underdog who pitched in the playoffs at Yankee Stadium two years ago, surrendered career highs for runs (eight), homers (four) and walks (three) over 4½ innings. He gave up 11 hits.

Stanton had three of them on his way to the 34th multi-homer game of his career and second of the season.

He hit a three-run shot in the third inning and a two-run homer in the fifth, both following walks to Gleyber Torres.

This was also the 10th time in four years playing together, including the postseason, that Judge and Stanton both went deep in the same game. New York has won each of them.

Entering the series, the Yankees had lost 10 of 13 games and four in a row, but leave it to a visit to Target Field to get them going. They're 28-11 here all-time, including 3-0 in the playoffs. As the Twins fans are all too well aware, New York is 105-37, including 16-2 in the playoffs, against Minnesota over the last 20 seasons.

Alonso: MLB alters balls to hurt free agents

By **NOAH TRISTER**
Associated Press

BALTIMORE — New York Mets slugger Pete Alonso accused Major League Baseball of manipulating the baseballs to harm the earning potential for star free agents and players eligible for arbitration.

Alonso's comments came Wednesday before New York's game at Baltimore. He was responding to a question about the crackdown on sticky substances used by pitchers.

"I think that the biggest concern is that Major League Baseball manipulates the baseballs year in and year out depending on the free agency class — or guys being in an advanced part of their arbitration," Alonso said. "So I do think that's a big issue — the ball being different every single year. ... Maybe if the league didn't change the baseball, pitchers wouldn't need to use as much sticky stuff."

When asked a follow-up question about this, Alonso remained firm. His implication was that the balls are friendlier to hitters in a year when a number of top pitchers are about to hit free agency — and vice versa.



JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

New York Mets first baseman Pete Alonso accused Major League Baseball of manipulating the balls each season based upon which players are going to be eligible for free agency.

"That's a fact," he said. "Guys have talked about it, but I mean, in 2019, there was a huge class of free agent pitchers, and then that's, quote-unquote, the juiced balls. Then 2020, it was a strange year

with the COVID season, but now that we're back to playing like a regular season with a ton of short-stops or position players that are going to be paid a lot of money, high-caliber players, I mean yeah, it's not a coincidence."

The league did not comment on Alonso's charge.

MLB informed teams in February that it planned to slightly deaden the baseballs for the 2021 season following a yearslong surge in home runs. In 2019, 3.6% of plate appearances ended in a homer, a number that has dropped to 3.1% this year.

Alonso hit 53 home runs as a rookie in that 2019 season and 16 in 57 games last year. He homered in the first inning Wednesday, his 10th of the season.

After the 2019 season, Gerrit Cole landed a \$324 million, nine-year deal with the New York Yankees, still a record contract for a pitcher in terms of its total value.

As far as the original question was concerned, Alonso did not seem terribly concerned with what opposing pitchers might be putting on the ball.

"Whatever they want to use to help control the ball, let them use

it, because for me, I go in the box every single day, and I see guys throwing harder and harder every day, and I don't want 99 slipping out of someone's hand," Alonso said.

Cole found himself immersed in the controversy last week when Minnesota Twins third baseman Josh Donaldson casually brought the pitcher's name up in an interview session, correlating a drop in Cole's spin rate with an anticipated crackdown on the sticky stuff by MLB.

Cole sidestepped the accusation on Tuesday, and Donaldson elaborated on the matter Wednesday to clarify that he's concerned about many more opponents in the game than just Cole.

"With Gerrit Cole, he was the first guy to pitch since the suspensions happened and he's the first guy that you could see spin rates going down," Donaldson said. "There's been 12 or more guys already whose spin rates have magically dropped in the last week, so it's not just Gerrit Cole."

AP sports writers Dave Campbell in Minneapolis and Kyle Hightower in Boston contributed to this report.

NBA PLAYOFFS

Despite dominance of 76ers' Embiid, Hawks still confident

By CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Hawks return to Atlanta beaming with confidence in their Eastern Conference semifinal series against the Philadelphia 76ers despite their inability to slow down, much less stop, Joel Embiid.

The 76ers big man has scored 79 points in the first two games at Philadelphia to open the series, which is tied 1-1 heading into Friday's Game 3 in Atlanta — where the Hawks have won 13 consecutive games.

It's the longest active home winning streak in the NBA.

"I hope fans are ready to rock the house on Friday," Trae Young said after the 76ers' 118-102 win in Game 2 on Tuesday night.

Atlanta will need its fans — but it also knows it has to correct some issues on the court.

The Hawks expect better outside shooting from Young and his backcourt partner Bogdan Bogdanovic.

STATEMENT GAME

After finishing second to Denver's Nikola Jokic in MVP voting on Tuesday before Game 2, 7-foot 76ers center Joel Embiid, listed at 280 pounds, overpowered Atlanta center Clint Capela (6-10, 240) on his way to 40 points and 13 rebounds in the Sixers' 118-102 win.

SOURCE: Associated Press

And until they find a defensive combination to slow Embiid, Atlanta will have to do a better job of containing his teammates.

The challenge of containing Philadelphia's outside shooting grew Wednesday when the Hawks announced De'Andre Hunter will miss the rest of the postseason.

Hunter, the team's top perimeter defender, has been scheduled for surgery on his right knee in Los Angeles on Tuesday. He was held out the first two games due to soreness in the knee. After he had

swelling in the knee, Atlanta said tests found a new small tear of his lateral meniscus.

Hunter averaged 15 points in his second season but was limited by the knee injury to only 23 games.

Embiid recognizes the challenge that awaits the 76ers.

"The series is only 1-1," Embiid said. "There's nothing to really be happy about. We have to go over there and try to win both and take one of them at a time."

Embiid is playing with a cartilage tear in his right knee.

"I'm trying to do the best I can, limited movement and all," Embiid said.

If Embiid has been limited, it hasn't been obvious. He was active in Game 2, even extending his defensive presence to help disturb Young's outside shooting.

But Embiid can't do it alone. The Hawks proved that in their 128-124 Game 1 win, showing that even a 39-point performance by Embiid is not enough.



CURTIS COMPTON/AP

Hawks forward Danilo Gallinari and 76ers center Joel Embiid collide on Tuesday in Philadelphia. Embiid has scored 79 points in the first two games of the 76ers' Eastern Conference semifinal series with the Hawks, which is tied 1-1 heading into Friday's Game 3 in Atlanta.

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NBA PLAYOFFS

Paul leads Suns in rout of Nuggets

Phoenix up 2-0 with virtuoso effort from 36-year-old All-Star

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Chris Paul is a 36-year-old man who can still put together an NBA point guard's version of a virtuoso performance: Fifteen assists, no turnovers and it led to another blowout playoff victory for his rolling Phoenix Suns.

"I feel good," Paul said. "I feel really good."

Apparently so.

The ageless Paul added 17 points, Devin Booker had 18 points and 10 rebounds and Phoenix routed the Denver Nuggets 123-98 on Wednesday night to take a 2-0 lead in the Western Conference semifinals.

Deandre Ayton had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and Mikal Bridges added 16 points for the balanced Suns in their fifth straight victory.

Paul was particularly impressive and it appears his ailing right shoulder — which greatly limited his play against the Los Angeles Lakers in the first round — isn't much of a problem anymore. The 11-time All-Star had 21 points and 11 assists in Game 1.

Nikola Jokic had 24 points and 13 rebounds for Denver, a day after getting the NBA's Most Valuable Player award. But the Nuggets couldn't find anyone else to score consistently, leaving them reeling going back to Denver for Game 3 on Friday night.

"This was an embarrassing performance for myself all the way to the last player," Denver coach Michael Malone said. "We are walking out here with our heads held down and rightfully so. There was



MATT YORK/AP

Nuggets forward Will Barton, center, is swarmed by Suns guard Chris Paul, right, and forward Dario Saric during the first half of Game 2 of their second-round playoff series Wednesday in Phoenix. The Suns won 123-98 to take a 2-0 series lead.

a reason that their crowd was yelling 'Suns in four!' and they are calling for a sweep because if we play like this in Denver, this is going to be a really quick series."

Later, Malone added he felt the Nuggets "quit tonight, which is something that you never want to see."

Said Jokic: "They are playing

better than us. They are making shots, being more aggressive, finding the open man. It looks real bad out there. We need to change everything."

The Suns had a 10-point half-time lead and Jae Crowder added a pair of three-pointers early in the third to make it 60-43. Phoenix took an 86-67 advantage into the

fourth. The Suns led by 31 in the final quarter as they relentlessly pushed the ball even as the lead built.

"It's the NBA — crazy things can happen no matter how big of a lead you have," Suns forward Torrey Craig said.

Hurting Nuggets: Some of Denver's better players are dealing

with injuries, including forward Michael Porter Jr. (back) and guard Will Barton (hamstring). Both were listed on the injury report.

Porter started and played 27 minutes, finishing with 11 points and six rebounds but shot just 3-for-13. Barton played 16 minutes and had 10 points.

Scoreboard

Playoffs

CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS

(Best-of-seven)

x-if necessary

Eastern Conference

Brooklyn 2, Milwaukee 0

Brooklyn 115, Milwaukee 107

Brooklyn 125, Milwaukee 86

Thursday: at Milwaukee

Sunday: at Milwaukee

x-Tuesday: at Brooklyn

x-Thursday, June 17: at Milwaukee

x-Saturday, June 19: at Brooklyn

Atlanta 1, Philadelphia 1

Atlanta 128, Philadelphia, 124

Philadelphia 118, Atlanta 102

Friday: at Atlanta

Monday: at Atlanta

Wednesday, June 16: at Philadelphia

x-Friday, June 18: at Atlanta

x-Sunday, June 20: at Philadelphia

Western Conference

Phoenix 2, Denver 0

Phoenix 122, Denver 105

Wednesday: Phoenix 123, Denver 98

Friday: at Denver

Sunday: at Denver

x-Tuesday: at Phoenix

x-Thursday, June 17: at Denver

x-Sunday, June 20: at Phoenix

Utah 1, L.A. Clippers 0

Utah 112, L.A. Clippers 109

Thursday: at Utah

Saturday: at L.A. Clippers

Monday: at L.A. Clippers

x-Wednesday, June 16: at Utah

x-Friday, June 18: at L.A. Clippers

x-Sunday, June 20: at Utah

Splash: Class of 2018 making impact in playoffs

FROM PAGE 48

ries against New York that he punctuated with a theatrical bow at Madison Square Garden. "Winning feels good. It feels better."

Doncic leads — and will likely finish — as the playoff scoring leader this season, at 35.7 points per game. He's in line for a rookie extension this summer that will exceed \$200 million, and there's little doubt that the Mavericks will slide that piece of paper his way.

"He just plays with so much confidence, and his game is just so beyond his age," George said of Doncic. "He pretty much can pick up and read almost any defense. ... He's going to be great. He's got a big, huge future ahead of him."

Doncic is far from the only one in the class of 2018 that has a big,



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Dallas guard Luka Doncic had six games of 20 points or more during the Mavericks' seven-game first-round playoff series with the Los Angeles Clippers.

huge future — and some big, huge paychecks — awaiting him. Young is averaging 30.2 points entering Tuesday's game in Phila-

delphia. Ayton, in his first playoffs, is shooting 78% from the field, something nobody in NBA history with more than 50 shot attempts has done in their first trip to the postseason.

Suns guard Chris Paul has said all season that Ayton has all the tools — and no one would argue that now.

"It's great to see it coming together for him," Paul said.

Some of the class of 2018 are full-time starters in these playoffs, like Young for the Hawks, Ayton and Bridges for Phoenix, Porter Jr. in Denver. Others, like Brown with the Nets, got called upon to be a spot starter. And some have the closer role; Huerter, for example, has been on the floor for most of the fourth-quarter action for the Hawks in the

postseason, and his brilliant pass to John Collins late in Game 1 of the win in Philadelphia led to a clear-path foul that helped the Hawks seal the victory.

"I'm just trying to impact winning and that's any way I can right now in the playoffs," Huerter said.

And while Huerter doesn't deny that his 2018 draft class — he went 19th, while Ayton went No. 1, Young No. 3, Doncic No. 5 (Young and Doncic were traded for one another), Bridges went 10th and Brown was a steal at No. 42 — has signs of being special, he knows it'll take more than one good post-season run for the group to be anointed as great.

Ayton fully believes the 2018 takeover is coming.

"It's the new generation of the league," he said.

SPORTS



Something to cheer
Islanders eliminate Bruins in front of raucous home fans » **NHL playoffs, Page 43**

NBA PLAYOFFS

Class act

2018's draftees are making splash in 2021 postseason

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

Phoenix's Deandre Ayton had Guy Fieri leaping out of his courtside seat with a thundering dunk. Atlanta's Trae Young had Spike Lee leaving early in disappointment. Dallas' Luka Doncic impressed Paul George so much that the Clippers' veteran insisted on trading jerseys with the youngster.

They're all part of the NBA's draft class of 2018. And that group, so far, might be the class of these playoffs.

Doncic is gone, but plenty of others — Young, Ayton, Michael Porter Jr., Mikal Bridges, Kevin Huerter, Bruce Brown and more — from the group that got drafted three years ago — remain. And they've seemed right at home in this postseason, even though for many it's the first time on this big a stage.

"I think it's the best class in NBA history," Ayton, the Phoenix center who went No. 1 overall in that class three years ago, said after the Suns won their first-round series over the 2020 NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers. "That's how I feel. ... Guys like Luka, MPJ and Trae, it's been great to watch us young guys go at it. We're not backing down."

Quite the contrary. They're showing up. Entering Tuesday, those drafted in 2018 had combined for 21 games of at least 20 points in these playoffs. The only draft class with more so far in these playoffs was the 2011 group — which has 22, led by the likes of Kawhi Leonard, Kyrie Irving and Tobias Harris.

Doncic, whose Dallas Mavericks lost a seven-game series to the Los Angeles Clippers in Round 1, had six of those 20-point games. Young, whose Atlanta Hawks took a 1-0 series lead into Game 2 of the Eastern Conference semifinals against Philadelphia on Tuesday, also had six — in his first six playoff games.

"I'm not satisfied," Young said after Round 1, a se-

SEE SPLASH ON PAGE 47

"I think it's the best class in NBA history"

Deandre Ayton

No. 1 overall pick in the 2018 NBA Draft by the Phoenix Suns

INSIDE

Paul, Suns blow out Nuggets
Page 47



Members of the 2018 NBA Draft class, from top: The Atlanta Hawks' Trae Young; Phoenix Suns' Deandre Ayton; and the Denver Nuggets' Michael Porter Jr.

AP, TNS photos

Djokovic, Nadal set to meet in semifinal » French Open, Page 42

