

The Guide

AKC National Championships coming.

One of the largest dog shows in the U.S. will be at the Orange Convention Center. **Page 11.**



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Thursday, December 14, 2017

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WE BACK THE BLUE

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College's Poinciana campus celebrated

Valencia dedication ceremony delayed due to hurricane

By Rachel Christian
Staff Writer

The dedication ceremony for Valencia's new Poinciana campus was on Monday, less than a week before the fall semester comes to a close.

The ribbon-cutting event was about three months behind schedule. The official gathering of educational and community leaders was postponed from Sept. 15 to Dec. 11 due to Hurricane Irma, which struck Central Florida on Sept. 10.

The new campus is an effort between local and state officials to improve college graduation rates in Poinciana, which have been historically lower there than in other parts of Osceola County. "When the building was under construction, I was frequently

asked, 'Why is Valencia building a campus in Poinciana? No one in Poinciana goes to college,' said Kathleen Plinske, president of Valencia's Lake Nona, Osceola and Poinciana campuses. "That is precisely why we worked so hard to build a campus in Poinciana."

The new \$27 million campus is on Pleasant Hill Road, just east of the Polk County border. Instead of going to the Kissimmee campus, students will be able to earn their associate of arts degrees with the option to transfer to a four-year institution.

The 19-acre Poinciana Valencia campus consists of two buildings. The main hall features 12 classrooms, computer and science labs, a teaching kitchen for the culinary program, a third-floor library, a tutoring center and a cafeteria with outdoor seating. The



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO /MARTIN MADDOCK

State and local officials, along with Valencia's President Kathleen Plinske and the president and vice president of the Poinciana campus' Student Government Association, lend a hand with the ribbon cutting officially opening the new Valencia College Poinciana campus on Monday morning.

second building, the Center for Accelerated Training, will house continuing language courses in English and Spanish and short-term

training programs like construction, welding and others.

See **Valencia**, Page 3.

AROUND TOWN

Christmas spirit



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/ROB HERBERT

A cheering squad from the Bellalago Charter Academy marches up Broadway during the city of Kissimmee Festival of Lights Christmas parade on Saturday. For more photos, see page 23.

Historical Society to County Commission: Help protect Pioneer Village from crime

By Rachel Christian
Staff Writer

It may take a village to protect a village – Pioneer Village in Kissimmee to be exact.

The collection of preserved and replicated buildings near Shingle Creek has been vandalized five times this year. The most recent incident in November caused over \$2,000 in damage that included broken doors and bullet holes.

No one has been arrested in connection with the crime.

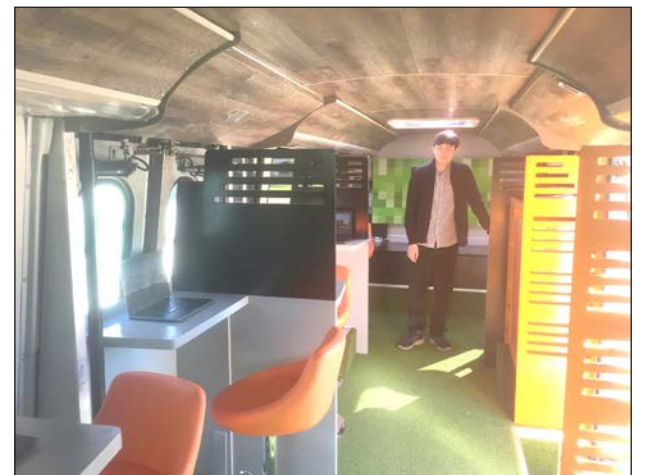
Osceola County Historical Society President Donna Hart went before the Osceola County Commission Monday to ask for help.

"We are doing what we can to step up security with the money we have," Hart said. "But this is a problem we don't foresee getting better anytime soon."

Hart described incidents of loitering, trespassing, graffiti, property damage and other acts of criminal mischief taking place at Pioneer Village and the nearby

See **Village**, Page 5.

Homework Bus rolls out in Kissimmee



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Homework Bus is equipped with Dell laptops, high speed Internet and eight student work stations.

By Rachel Christian
Staff Writer

Help with homework has now gone mobile for kids and teens living in Kissimmee motels.

On Sunday, the Homework Bus rolled out its pilot debut at the Star, Motel along the U.S. Highway 192 corridor. The renovated shuttle bus is equipped with Dell laptops, high speed Internet and eight student work stations.

The Homework Bus is the brainchild of Jake Allen, a 19 year-old Celebration resident. Allen said he was motivated to launch the mobile study spot after witnessing what disadvantaged teens residing in motels do to complete their assignments.

"On my way home at night, I would see them studying in their cars with the lights on, just so they could get some peace and quiet while they worked," said Allen, who moved from Northern Ireland with his family about three years ago. "I wanted them to have a safe, easily accessible place where they could study in peace."

Allen said he came up with the Homework Bus concept about a year ago. He was inspired by mobile learning buses he had seen during a trip to China, and said the idea of portable education seemed ideal for students with limited resources and transportation.

See **Bus**, Page 3.

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Mapp takes plea deal for life in prison

By Brian McBride
Editor

An Orlando woman, who faced the death penalty after being accused of an Osceola County murder, took a plea deal to spend life in prison on Friday.

Emerita Mapp, 34, of Orlando, was charged with the first-degree murder of 20-year-old Zachary Ganoë and the attempted murder of Andrew Bickford.

For the first time since taking office in January, Orange-Osceola State Attorney Aramis Ayala was seeking the death penalty. Mapp was accused of stabbing a man to death at a Kissimmee hotel in April.

Ganoë was found dead inside a room at the Days Inn on Polynesian Boulevard in Kissimmee the morning of April 11. Outside the room, deputies found Bickford bleeding on the ground. The surviving victim was taken to the Osceola Regional Medical Center.

Mapp pleaded no contest to the charges.



Mapp

"The prosecutor felt it was in the best interest of justice to honor the offer, which was relayed prior to the 45 day deadline, of life in prison. As a result of this plea, Emerita Mapp will ultimately die in prison and the family of the victims will not have to endure the long and difficult process associated with a death penalty trial. We believe our goal of justice has been met," Ayala said in a prepared statement.

According to the arrest affidavit, Bickford and Ganoë checked into the Days Inn around 3 a.m. April 11. Bickford told authorities that when he returned after leaving to get

breakfast later that morning; a black female later identified as Mapp immediately met him at the door.

Records state that Mapp allegedly ordered Bickford to get on the ground near Ganoë, who Bickford said was laying motionless covered in blood. Mapp allegedly cut Bickford's neck with a knife as she went through his pockets, stealing his wallet and cell phone, records state.

Ayala filed a notice to seek the death penalty in the case in November. This follows a several month legal battle between the state attorney and Gov. Rick Scott.

Scott took 29 murder cases away from Ayala's office earlier this year after she refused to pursue the death penalty for any of them, and Ayala sued to get the cases back. But the Florida Supreme Court ruled in favor of Scott's decision 5-2.

Ayala then created a special death penalty review panel to assess all homicide

See **Mapp**, Page 5.

POLICE NEWS

Kissimmee man killed in Neptune Road crash

A Kissimmee resident was killed on Neptune Road early Monday morning after he drove into the path of another vehicle.

Alexis Acevedo, 33, of Kissimmee, was stopped in a 2013 Ford SUV, facing southbound on Stroupe Road at the intersection of Neptune Road. Acevedo then attempted to turn left onto eastbound Neptune Road, when he drove into the path of a 2005 Ford pickup truck, driven by Anthony Taromino, 24, of St. Cloud.

The front of the truck hit the left side of the SUV. Acevedo was taken to Osceola Regional Medical Center where he was pronounced dead.

The crash remains under investigation.

Kissimmee driver killed in Mercedes wreck

A Kissimmee driver was killed on Sunday after he failed to obey a stop sign and hit a tree, causing the vehicle to burst into flames, authorities said.

Gregory Dobbins, 65, was traveling southbound in a 1999 Mercedes E430 on Ham Brown Road, approaching the intersection of Reaves Road at about 12:05 a.m.

For an unknown reason, Dobbins failed to obey a stop sign and continued through the intersection and off the roadway, a Florida Highway Patrol report stated. The vehicle collided with a traffic control sign and then hit a tree and burst into flames. Dobbins was pronounced dead on scene. The crash remains under investigation.

SUV hits tractor trailer, one dead

A Port Richey man was killed in Osceola County on Dec. 7 after the vehicle he was driving hit and slid under a tractor-trailer.

According to a Florida Highway Patrol report, Jessanuel Schwendeman, 35, was driving a 1997 Chevy SUV westbound on State Road 60 at about 8:30 p.m. A tractor-trailer driven by Jean Ntwali, of Arizona, had just left a gas station and attempted to make a left turn onto southbound S.R. 60. As the tractor-trailer entered the roadway, Schwendeman failed to slow down for it and the SUV collided with the left side, the report stated.

The front of the SUV became lodged under the tractor-trailer due to the impact, killing Schwendeman.

His passenger, 33-year-old Kristen Schwendeman, was taken to a hospital with minor injuries.

Ntwali was not injured. The crash remains under investigation.

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Dr. Adkins performs virtually all aspects of adult cardiac surgery to include: CABG (bypass), valve repair/replacement, and repair of aortic aneurysms. He has also been appointed Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Heart and Vascular Institute.

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POINCIANA

Florida Basketball Association to present Fan Fest 2017

The Florida Basketball Association (FBA) presents Fan Fest 2017 on Sunday, Dec. 17, from noon to 7 p.m. This event will be at the Mary Jane Arrington Gym and Aquatic Center, 625 Country Club Drive.

This is an introduction of the FBA to Poinciana. In 2018, the Poinciana Pride basketball team will become a part of the community. Meet the organization, which has made this possible. Enjoy a fun-filled day of activities, food trucks, pictures with Santa, bounce house, face painting and more.

Come out and meet the latest addition to Poinciana.

► In this season of giving, there are many opportunities in Poinciana and the Greater Poinciana Area to donate and help others have a happy holiday.

The Mary Jane Arrington Gym and Aquatic Center, 625 Country Club Drive, will be full of activities this Saturday. The Florida Flight Annual Toy Drive features a charity basketball game—please bring a toy to donate. Florida Flight will host Team Grinchmas. The game time is at 4 p.m.

Operation Toy Soldier is a nationwide not-for-profit group that helps children locally. Through this program, children of both active and non-active military receive toys for Christmas.

You can help Operation Toy Soldier by making a donation. New toys can be dropped off at any Osceola Memory Gardens location, including the one closest to Poinciana—3175 Pleasant Hill Road. For more information call Osceola Memory Gardens, 407-931-4811.

Bellalago Academy is participating in “The Happy Holidays Project.” The school will be collecting gently used clothing (jackets, pants, shoes, T-shirts) and toys. All donations will go to the Coalition of the Homeless of Central Florida. Donation boxes are located in both cafeterias, the school’s front office, and in the media center. Items will be collected until Dec. 20.

The Bellalago Academy’s National Junior Honor

Society, along with sixth grade advanced reading is running a canned food drive. Collection dates through Dec. 15. Items most needed are canned tuna, chicken or salmon, peanut butter, meals in a can (soup, stew, and chili), canned vegetables, canned fruit, olive or canola oil, canned food with pop-top lids, cereals, granola bars, nuts, and dried fruit. Students are also collecting the following personal products: toothpaste, toothbrushes, bar and liquid soap, laundry detergent, and deodorant. To donate items, contact Kimberly Taylor, Bellalago Academy at 407-933-1690. Bellalago Academy is located at 3651 Pleasant Hill Road.

Discovery Intermediate’s Student Council will be hosting a canned goods drive through Dec. 19. Students will be collecting non-perishable items for the Osceola Food Angels. The goal is for students to bring in five items. In return, they will receive a “Dress-Down Day” wristband.

To read the entire column, go to www.aroundosceola.com.

VALENCIA

Continued from Page 1

More than 1,100 students were enrolled at the campus when classes began Aug. 28.

Discussions about opening a Valencia campus in Poinciana began around 2010. The goal was to make college more accessible to the largely Hispanic unincorporated settlement by providing a campus with nearby public transportation, like Lynx buses and a new SunRail station expected to open this summer.

Student Government Association Vice President Kistie Dieudonne said enrolling in the Poinciana campus is making it possible for her to pursue a career in nursing.

“I missed a year of school due to an inaccessibility to a college,” Dieudonne said during the dedication presentation. “So this college is really groundbreaking for me. Even if I don’t know you

personally, thank you so much for this campus.”

Local government officials also reflected on the progress of the campus at Monday’s event.

“The idea that we could work as a community and create a college out of thin air within an eight-year period is a pretty amazing thing,” said Osceola County Commissioner Brandon Arrington. “It is truly a collaborative effort that has allowed us to be here today.”

BUS

Continued from Page 1

“That way we could bring the education right to them,” he said.

In September, Allen came across the perfect vehicle. He spotted the mid-size shuttle bus on Craigslist, and after inspecting it, he knew it had found his vehicle.

“The owner was trying to possibly sell it as a party bus, so the inside seats were already taken out and gutted,” Allen explained. “It also fit our price range, which was great.”

Allen worked alongside his two brothers, Reese and Carter, to fundraise money and secure private investors in the months leading up to the important purchase. The teenager said his investors matched any money he raised. The Homework Bus also gained support from Dell and Verizon, who contributed laptops and high speed Internet at a discounted rate.

The young man said he hasn’t contacted the Osceola County School District about his idea, but said he isn’t opposed to working with the district in the future.

On Dec. 10, the Homework Bus premiered at its first motel. About 40 children and their parents came to check it out, and the program’s first group of students utilized the vehicle’s free work space and Wi-Fi.

“We are extremely excited about the response,” Allen said. “There are definitely some bugs that still need to be worked out, but this first day was a great learning experience.”

Participating students were asked to complete a brief survey at the end. Many of the students, especially younger ones, said they wished tutoring would be available on the bus, too. Allen said he

hadn’t considered providing homework help on the Homework Bus, but noted that several retired teachers have already volunteered to help out in the future.

According to School District of Osceola County officials, more than 850 students live in motels in Osceola County. With only eight work stations on the Homework Bus, Allen said he hopes to expand the project in the future. After the holiday, the special bus will begin making weekly appearances at different Kissimmee motels on Sunday evenings.

Allen said he wants to prove to investors that the Homework Bus model can work, so that donors will contribute to expanding the project in the future.

“It seems to be fulfilling a need in the community,” Allen said. “Now we just need to see if it works and find ways to improve it.”



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GUEST EDITORIAL

Together for the holidays

By Gabriela Murza

The holidays are usually a time for families and friends to catch up and celebrate traditions, food, and fellowship.

For some, the holidays are an exciting opportunity to see everyone, enjoy some great food, and continue important traditions. For others, it may be a time of stress. Perhaps someone experienced a life-changing event that impacted their mental, physical, or financial health.

During this time of year, we often try to take on more than we can sometimes handle, and may not ask for help because "we have always done XYZ". If we have older parents who we don't see on a regular basis, coming home for the holidays can be a shock when we see that our parents have slowed down and aren't able to do the same things as before.

Keeping things in perspective, changing traditions, and asking for help are generally helpful in decreasing stress, but also try these practical tips that may help make this time of year enjoyable for everyone.

Continue your routine as best as possible. Don't stop exercising, eating well, or staying on a regular sleep schedule just because it's the holidays. If you volunteered



for specific tasks, write down a plan ahead of time and include your regular routine in that plan.

Eat healthy and stay hydrated. You know you have some gatherings coming up, and you know that some delicious food will be at these gatherings. By all means, enjoy them! However, enjoy them in smaller portions and include fruits, veggies, and other healthy choices too. Don't forget to drink water throughout the day as well.

Make holiday planning a family affair. Traditions can be modified to become new traditions. If you or a family member, especially an aging parent, traditionally hosts a party, prepares certain dishes, or decorates their house, offer to do it this year

and/or get the kids involved. This is a great way for younger kids to learn about their family's traditions and to provide their input.

Set a limit on number or price of gifts. For those going through a change in employment, change in income, or on a fixed income, expectations during the holidays can present challenges when it comes to buying gifts. Set a limit early and stick to it.

Slow down and include breaks. If you're out and about shopping with your family or friends, take breaks during the day; sit down, enjoy some coffee or tea, grab food, people watch, etc.

Stay involved. This may be a hard time for some family members and friends, but they may not express it to you. Sometimes people just want to be alone for a bit to recharge, but if you notice that it keeps happening often, try speaking to them. They may want to share, but don't know how to start the conversation.

Try one or all of these tips, and see if it helps in making the holiday time more manageable and less stressful. Happy holidays!

Gabriela Murza is an extension agent in the UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County Family and Consumer Sciences department.



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School District only one in state recognized for AP scores

The Osceola School District is the only school district in Florida and one of only 447 school districts in the U.S. and Canada being honored by the College Board with placement on the eighth Annual AP District Honor Roll.

To be included on the Honor Roll, the Osceola School District had to, since 2015, increase the number of students participating in Advanced Placement courses while also increasing or maintaining the percentage of students earning AP Exam scores of 3 or higher. Reaching these goals shows that this district is successfully identifying motivated, academically

prepared students who are ready for AP.

National data from 2017 show that among American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students with a high degree of readiness for AP, only about half are participating.

“The Osceola School District is committed to expanding the availability of AP courses among prepared and motivated students of all backgrounds,” said Osceola School District Superintendent Debra Pace.

Trevor Packer, head of AP and Instruction for College Board, said

“Congratulations to all the educators and administrators in this district who have worked to clear a path for more students of all backgrounds to participate and succeed in AP. These educators and administrators are fostering a culture in their schools and classrooms that allows students to face new challenges and build the confidence to succeed.”

Helping more students learn at a higher level and earn higher AP scores is an objective of all members of the AP community, from AP teachers to district and school administrators to college professors. Many districts

are experimenting with initiatives and strategies to see how they can expand access and improve student performance at the same time. In 2017, more than 4,000 colleges and universities around the world received AP scores for college credit, advanced placement, or both, and/or consideration in the admissions process. Inclusion in the 8th Annual AP District Honor Roll is based on a review of three years of AP data, from 2015 to 2017, looking across 38 AP Exams, including world language and culture.

MAPP

Continued from Page 2

cases assigned to her office and determine the ones in which attorneys believe the death penalty should be sought.

Prosecutors were expected to argue that they should be allowed

to seek the death penalty against Mapp, even though they missed the deadline in the case. The notice to seek the death penalty had to be filed within 45 days of Mapp's arraignment.



VILLAGE

Continued from Page 1

park since 2012. Photos of the Shingle Creek Bridge covered in graffiti and gang symbols were presented to the commissioners, along with pictures of transients napping along bike trails and in overgrown swaths of protected native grass.

Hart said \$5,300 was raised by the Historical Society through a GoFundMe.com campaign. The money paid for last month's repairs, and the remaining funds will go toward purchasing additional security cameras for the historical structures.

One of the most frequently targeted

buildings, the Lanier House, sits on the outskirts of Pioneer Village and is visible from the Shingle Creek bridge. Hart believes that installing a 24-hour security camera near the bridge would make it easier for law enforcement to identify and arrest criminals committing the crimes. Hart said the bridge is not on Historical Society property, so it would fall to the city or county to find a solution.

“Right now there is a telephone people can use to report suspicious activity, but

the camera is only activated after someone picks up the phone,” Hart said. “We don't think that's enough.”

Other safety measures discussed during the presentation included installing motion-activated lights around the property and hiring a security officer to monitor Pioneer Village overnight. Later, it was mentioned that a caretaker from Ralph Chisolm Park in St. Cloud might be re-allocated to the historical property in the future to assist with this.

To read the entire article, go to www.aroundosceola.com.

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Now I'm able to use a walker, and I'm confident I'll be walking again on my own pretty soon.” — Liza

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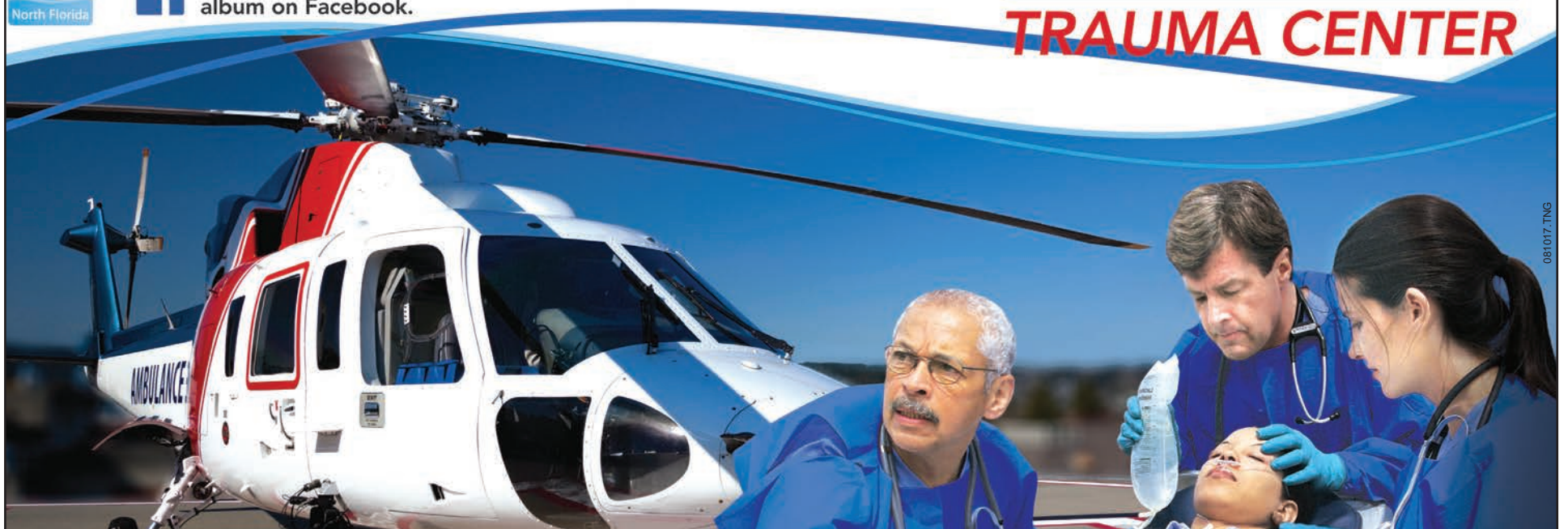
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There are two main types of identity theft: “Existing account fraud” or “account takeover fraud” occurs when a thief acquires your credit or debit card information and purchases products and services using either the actual card or the account number and expiration date.

“New account fraud” or “application fraud” occurs when a thief uses your SSN and other identifying information to open new accounts in your name.

In most cases, the victim will not be required to pay any part of the loss. But debit card users, while generally covered for losses, must follow a procedure that could take some time. For instance, when a CenterState bank customer experiences fraud on their consumer debit card, they must report the fraud within 60 days of the disputed charge appearing on their statement. Once the fraud is reported, the cardholder will receive provisional credit within ten days as the claim is being investigated. Whatever type of fraud it is, an identity theft event can be traumatic. How do crooks get the information to commit the fraud?

Protect Yourself

Here are some ways to minimize

your risk of becoming a victim of identity theft:

1. Reduce the number of debit and credit cards you carry and do not carry your Social Security card around.
2. Never give out your SSN, credit or debit card number or other personal information over the phone, by mail, or on the Internet unless you have a trusted business relationship with the company and you have initiated the call.
3. Protect your Social Security number (SSN). Release it only when absolutely necessary.
4. When shopping online, do business with companies that provide transaction security protection, and that have strong privacy and security policies.
5. Review your credit report periodically. Check to make sure that all the information contained in it is correct, and be on the lookout for any fraudulent activity. Go to: <http://www.annualcreditreport.com>

For More Information:

For more information on how to keep your personal information safe, as well ways to protect yourself from various privacy related scams, go to <http://www.idtheftcenter.org/>.



Brett Barnhardt
Community President
Osceola, Orange, and
Seminole Counties
CenterState Bank



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OSCEOLA
NEWS-GAZETTE

— LEGAL —

Protecting your Assets

When you think about homestead exemption, most people immediately think of the \$25,000 property tax exemption. That's because many people are unaware of a valuable form of asset protection granted under Florida's Constitutional homestead exemption. The Florida Constitution, Article X, Section 4, exempts homestead property “from forced sale under process of any court”. This means the proper homestead designation can also keep your property out of hands of creditors.

What qualifies for homestead exemption?

The designation of homestead is granted to a person's primary residence, including condominiums, townhomes, and mobile homes. If the property is located within a municipality (i.e. within city limits) up to one-half acre, plus the improvement, shall be exempt homestead. If the property is located outside of a municipality then up to 160 acres of land, along with the improvements, shall be exempt homestead.

How does homestead exemption work?

If a large (court) judgment is entered against you, it can attach to property that you own in the county, and the creditor can force that property to be sold in order to satisfy the judgment. Fortunately creditors

cannot force sell your homestead property. You may be wondering how the creditor or the Court determine whether your property is homestead? You can sign an affidavit stating that property is your homestead property,² which is recorded with the Clerk of the Courts. However, there is no formal requirement that this affidavit be filed.

Is this different than homestead property tax exemption?

With homestead property tax exemption, an application has to be filed with the Osceola County Property Appraiser's Office. All Florida residents are eligible to apply for a \$25,000 homestead property tax exemption if they have legal or equitable title to the property and maintain it as their primary residence beginning on January 1st of the application year.³ Constitutional homestead exemption was created to prevent people from losing the homes they live in to creditors and allows homestead property to be transferred to your spouse and/or children free from creditor claims upon your death. If you have questions about Florida homestead exemption, an experienced attorney can help you protect your assets.

¹See Article X, Section 4, of the Florida Constitution.
²See Florida Statute § 222.01 and 222.02
³Visit the Osceola County Property Appraiser's website <https://ira.property-appraiser.org/homestead/WebForm1.aspx> for more information.



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— FLOORING —

The Shocking Misconceptions of Carpet

When most people think of carpet, they think of apartments or cheap, hard to maintain carpet. Well that's kind of true, unfortunately apartments put inexpensive carpet into their units, because renters generally do not treat their carpet/apartments with pride. So cleaning is usually not top priority.

Treat it well and it will last....

There is so much more to carpet, it's a product that is truly incredible. It's a soft fiber, not much unlike a towel or blanket, but think what would happen if you put a towel on your floors and you walked all over it every day. You walk into your house, don't take your shoes off and walk all across it. Every so often you run your vacuum over it and you expect it to stay clean and not show wear and tear for years. Well after a week or two your towel would be garbage, but you do this every day and your carpet is still looking good after all that abuse and more. Now just imagine you actually buy a medium or high quality carpet. Add a nice cushion and take your shoes off in the entry, your carpet could last for a lifetime. Have it professionally steam cleaned at least once a year and the longevity of your carpet just got a boost.

Why Carpet?

Carpet can be stylish, fashionable and eye catching. Nowadays you can find many stylish designs, colors, patterns, textures made from Wool, Nylons, Polyesters, Olefins, and Sisals. If you truly want to find a carpet that is right for you, consult someone in the flooring business. There are so many advantages of Carpet, it feels soft, and is easier on your joints than any other flooring product, and when was the last time you tried curling up in front of your fireplace on your tile or hard wood flooring. At minimum you would like to have a soft carpet for comfort, add a great carpet cushion and now you can snuggle. Carpet also has great insulating and sound dampening qualities. Just imagine a movie theater with hard surface floors, the acoustics would be unbearable. Media carpet is available for residential and commercial use in so many movie theater themed prints. So, if you are looking for the thickest Shag or a Classic Elegant Print in updated colors come visit us at Modern Floorz & Shutters. Our products range from entry level to truly exceptional. We offer professional installation, custom made Rugs & Runners. Call us today for your free estimate 407 870 2727, we will be excited to hear from you!



Rita Irvin
Owner
Modern Floorz & Shutters



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OSCEOLA
NEWS-GAZETTE

— WATER AUTHORITY —

Enjoy the holidays; don't flush that

The holidays are here and everyone is visiting and everyone is cooking. Wherever you may be Toho Water Authority wants to remind everyone about what should never be disposed of down the drain or toilet.

Prevent clogged pipes

Cooking grease coats sewer pipes similar to the way that fatty foods clog human arteries. The grease clings to the inside of the pipes, eventually causing complete blockage. Pouring fats, oils and grease down the drain is wreaking havoc on our sewer systems and treatment facilities.

Increasingly sewer pipes have to be cleaned to remove all this buildup to prevent sewer overflows and ensure our systems are working at optimum levels. Place your old fat, oil and grease in a container and place them in the trash.

No wipes please

The only things that should be disposed of down the drain or toilet are water, soap and toilet paper. Wipes are a big no-no.

Wipes, even the ones that say 'flushable', shouldn't be flushed down the toilet. They get tangled up in the machinery that moves the sewage back to the treatment plants. They also get themselves stuck to any grease found in the sewers. This can lead to sewage backing up onto streets and inside people's homes. Having a sewage back

up occur in your home can be messy and costly.

To avoid this from happening during the holidays and on any other day here's a list of items that should not be disposed of down the drain or toilet.

Don't flush these:

- wet wipes (even the 'flushable' ones)
- hygiene or feminine products
- kitchen towels, tissues or cloths
- diapers
- dental floss or whitening strips
- kitty litter
- condoms
- medicines or vitamins
- hair
- bandages or cotton swabs
- oils, fats, grease or lard
- dairy products or sauces
- food scraps or baking goods

Remember the only things that should be disposed of down the drain or toilet are water, soap and toilet paper. This will ensure a happy sewer and happy families everywhere.

If you have any questions, please contact our customer service call center at 407-944-5000 or send an email to customerservice@tohowater.com.



SPORTS



County wrestling preview. page 8.

Local & National Sports • Sports Commentary

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 OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE SPORTS EDITOR
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ALL-COUNTY BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

Montalvo wraps career with state run

► Bulldog committed to run track at Stetson

By Ken Jackson
 Sports Editor

Tristen Montalvo had visions of ending his four-year cross country career at St. Cloud with a big result at or near the front of the pack at the Class 4A state meet in Tallahassee.

After times in the district and regional races that made a top-five finish in Tallahassee within reach, the Bulldog senior never found a rhythm, eventually finishing 21st in a time of 16:20.

He said he felt like he could run with the eventual winner, Sarasota's Ben Hartvigsen, after finishing less than 10 seconds behind him at regionals.

It just wasn't his morning, he said.

"I'm not sure, I felt strange at the start, it just felt like an abnormal run. At the end of the first mile there's a hill you have to be prepared for, and I got tired during it. It was really unfortunate."

What made the day better — a lot better — was that the Bulldogs

team qualified for state right along with him, the first time they'd done that in his career. The St. Cloud girls team also went to state, the first time both Bulldogs teams qualified since 2010.

Montalvo, the leader of that team, is the Osceola News-Gazette Male Runner of the Year for the second year in a row.

"Having the whole team there was an awesome experience, but knowing how hard the team had worked, it wasn't a surprise we qualified," he said. "I'm glad the team qualified because it made the state meet more comfortable. I've qualified before on my own, and every other race you're getting warmed up and hyped with your team, but when you're there alone it's different. This whole year was great."

He was able to get rid of the memory of state when he ran in the Foot Locker South Region meet in Charlotte, N.C. Against some of the best high school runners of the Southeast, he finished in 16:08.

"It was a good race to end on, I wasn't disappointed, it was better than state," he said.

Montalvo said he goal was to run races in under 16 minutes. He nearly got there at a pre-state championship event early in the season over the Apalachee State Park course, finishing in 16:01, his season best.

"I had people counting down seconds as I was about to finish," he said. "I'm hearing them count and realized I wasn't going to make it."

St. Cloud's Kevin Harkema, who's coached Montalvo through his Bulldog career in cross country and track, said he had a great year but just a bad time to have a bad race against his standards in Tallahassee.

"He is the hardest working athlete that I have coached and that is saying a lot because I have had some really good workers," Harkema said. "He is a great leader for the younger runners and helps them to learn his work ethic. It has been an honor to have been part of his career."



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/DONALD LAMB

St. Cloud cross country runner Tristen Montalvo ended his four-year Bulldog career with conference and district championships and a 21st place finish at the Class 4A state meet.

The two will work together again for one more season, the track season, where Montalvo will try to reach the 4A state meet in the 3,200 meters (two miles) and on the Bulldog 4x800 relay team. Montalvo said he's excited to have Harkema push him toward that goal.

"He's an awesome coach, he's done so much for all of us," Montalvo said.

The running career won't end when track season ends. Montalvo said he's verbally committed to attend Stetson, and run the 3,200 meters for the Hatters in DeLand, 90 minutes from home.

"They have a great business program, I'll get to run track, and I'll be able to live at school but come home when I want to."

All-County boys cross country

Runner of the Year: *Tristen Montalvo (SCHS)*

All-county team: *St. Cloud: Zach Cloud, John-Anthony Hernandez, Alex Miranda, James Rice. Celebration: Alejandro Uriostegui. Harmony: Nicholas Morrison, Jack Stevens, Bradley Justeson.*

Harmony girls, Celebration boys on pace to defend OBC soccer titles



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/ROB HERBERT

Harmony Longhorns midfielder Autumn Horn (21) tangles with St. Cloud defender Gabriela Labrador for the ball in Harmony's 2-0 win Friday in Orange Belt Conference play. The Longhorns have outscored opponents this season as they work toward returning to the Class 5A regional playoffs.

By Ken Jackson
 Sports Editor

The Harmony girls soccer team took a major step Friday toward defending their Orange Belt Conference title and continuing a streak that would reach nine in a row.

Lindsay Larisa and Carlie Rucks punched in first-half goals, and the swarming Longhorn defense made them stand up in the second half for a 2-0 victory over rival St. Cloud at Longhorn Field.

The Longhorns (7-0-2 overall, 5-0 in District 5A-9, 4-0 in OBC) took solid leads in the OBC race and the one to be the top seed in the district tournament in four weeks, with the Bulldogs (7-2, 4-1, 4-1) a strong second.

The match served as a benefit to raise money for the Vega family, victims of a terrible fire that consumed its home on Oct. 18; their 11-year-old son James perished in the blaze. All ticket and concession revenue (food was donated by the St. Cloud Rotary) were donated to the family, and players from both sides walked out for a pre-game ceremony with students

from Lakeview Elementary — many James' classmates, and Harmony Community School.

HHS Coach Scott Marlega said the game raised over \$3,000 for the family.

"We had a big crowd, we were doing some things we don't normally do and playing a rival who's tough as nails, it took us a while to get calmed down," he said. "After the first water break we got the nerves down and connected some passes together and capitalized on those chances."

In the 25th minute, Larisa fired a laser into the lower left corner of the net from the top of the penalty area. Ten minutes later, Rucks fired one from nearly 25 yards out into the top right corner.

"I think we got excited at halftime that we were up and was frustrated that we may have gotten complacent instead of maybe putting it away," Marlega said. "Credit to Coach (Shawn) Beck and St. Cloud, I took him I expect to see them again in the district finals."

Offensively, the Longhorns don't feature a breakout, go-to scorer.

An impressive 15 different Harmony players have scored goals this season, Yeni Calles and Autumn Horn with eight apiece and Larisa now with seven, but nine players have at least three. Sophomore midfielder Jenna Butcofski has 10 assists to go with four scores.

"We don't have that natural goal scorer, we spread it out and have someone different step up every game, that's probably what makes us so strong," Marlega said. "When we're playing well we're spreading the ball around."

Harmony has outscored opponents 50-2, thanks to lockdown defense and sophomore goalie Angie Santos, who Marlega said is "playing like a beast."

"Sometimes she's our saving grace, saving our behinds a little more than she should have to," he said. "The defense is doing a lot of hard work keeping the ball away from her."

St. Cloud played Osceola Tuesday to try to lock up no worse than second in the OBC. Coach Shawn Beck said both teams played hard Friday, and his team would

See **Soccer**, Page 9

WRESTLING PREVIEW

County squads look to send wrestlers to state

By Rick Pedone
For the News-Gazette

The 2017-18 wrestling season breaks new ground with the introduction of a duals format championship series that will hold its state tournament at Osceola High Jan. 19-20. Osceola County also plays host to the traditional state bracket championship tournament March 2-3 at Heritage Park.

So, will Osceola County be represented at the two state tournaments?

Almost certainly. Osceola High, a regular top five finisher at the state bracket tournament, will be one of the most powerful teams in the Class 3A duals series, and a growing Harmony program could be a factor in Class 2A although perennial powerhouse Brandon County teams Osceola, St. Cloud, Gateway and Celebration compete in 3A District 5. Harmony, Liberty and Poinciana are in 2A-6. That new duals

championship tweaked the season schedule this year, forcing the Orange Belt Conference championship to be held last week, in the second week of the regular season. Osceola topped Harmony and St. Cloud (see Saturday's News-Gazette for in-depth results).

Osceola

The Kowboys, under Coach Jim Bird, have won eight district titles in a row, three successive regional titles and 11 of the past 12 Orange Belt Conference crowns. They also claimed the 2009 Class 3A state championship. The Kowboys also have a returning state champion in junior Malyke Hines (126). Osceola has boasted at least one individual state winner each season since 2007.

But, Bird said that his Kowboys may need to do some growing up. Only six Kowboys have varsity experience. One of those is Poinciana transfer Esau Balzime (113), a state runner-up. Also back are Josue Calderon (120), Boris Espinosa (285), Jhamal Williams (182) and Wilberto Alvarez (170).

"We are going to be young and lack varsity experience," Bird said. "Our goal is to get better throughout the season. We do have some young guys from our (Attack Wrestling) club ready to contribute."

Bird expects several athletes from Osceola's strong girls program to compete for boys varsity spots, he said.

Freshmen Jaekus Hines and Ethan Fuller fill the 106-pound slot. Zayveon Mitchell competes at 113.

Abnalis Yambo and Victor Vega are at 132 while Kaylen Martinez and Kevin Sanchez compete at 138. Chase Fuller (145), Quinn Sheets (152), Ana Luciano (152), Nolin Eaddy (160) and Dwayne McGee (160) fill the middleweight classes.

Julian Dotson (195), Eoney Banton (220), Nate Castillo (220) and heavyweights Cody Carter, Jordan Redmond, Dion Bergen and Alvin Rosado round out the roster.

Bird said Osceola's girls squad will be powerful with Haylie Castro, Melissa Figueroa, Alyssa Sluder, Lauren Nobles, Madison Duncan and Shantizia Ortiz

joining Martinez, Yambo and Luciano. Several softball players may also join the wrestling team.

"They could be unstoppable," he said.

Harmony

Coach Vic Lorenzano officially takes over the Longhorns program this season after supervising as an assistant last season.

The Longhorns won the district championship last season and return state qualifier Carter Harris at 285 pounds, a conference champion last week.

"He had a great summer and is ready to go fight for the state championship," Lorenzano said.

Also back are district champions Avrey Hamm (195) and Josh Hall (138).

Lorenzano sees big upside in wrestlers such as Fletcher Small (132), Dhvonya Hill (145), Jordan Spoonhour (152), Gavin Whaley (170) and Tim Davis (220).

Lorenzano is looking forward to seeing talents such as Owen Wetzel (113/120), Sean Johnson (113), Dean Miller (113) and Marshall Smith (160) continue to develop their skills.

Like Osceola, the Longhorns may have female wrestlers on the boys varsity squad as Carla Barharona and Melonie Thoermer compete at 106.


Lorenzano said veteran Jeremy Galarza should return in January.

The Longhorns coach took several of his wrestlers to the Bruce Baumgartner Heavyweight Training Camp and the Iowa Intensive Training Camp over the summer as he seeks to elevate the program to elite status. His St. Cloud team won the 2002 Class 3A championship.

"The guys are working very hard and battling well. We have some solid veterans mixed in with some young new guys that are scrappy," Lorenzano said. "I like our work ethic and see huge opportunities for growth and improvement if the guys will just buy in all the way. Success takes time, hard work, and sacrifice. It is a worthy lesson in any endeavor that they pursue as they grow older and mature. We're chipping away at it and I see a bright future for these guys."

See Wrestling, Page 9

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WRESTLING

Continued from Page 8.

Celebration

The new Storm wrestling coach is no stranger – Athletic Director Rick Tribit will coach the team.

Since he is a Hall of Famer and has previous head coaching stops at four schools, most recently at St. Cloud, you can't argue his qualifications.

Tribit, the longtime assistant at Osceola High who played a key role in the team's 2009 state championship, was instrumental in bringing the state tournament to Osceola County.

The Storm struggled last season, but Tribit is happy to have 24 wrestlers in the program, including six returning state qualifiers – Caleb Cooper (106), Cole Peraza (113), Elijah Sankitts (126), Ario Montezeri (132), Will Huyke (152) and Alfonso Serrano (182).

He called his team "very, very young.

"Hopefully, we will stay healthy and continue to get better as the year progresses," he said. "The kids are working hard and are enthusiastic; gonna be fun watching them grow."

The Storm will host four matches this season, including the District 3A-5 Duals on Wednesday.

St. Cloud

Coach Jon Smorin, who coached several state champions at Gateway, takes over the Bulldogs program this season. Also on the coaching roster is former Bulldogs head coach Eric Scrivens.

"We have a pretty young team with a lot of newbies, but that is a very good thing for our program," Smorin said.

Moises Rivera, Fidel Lara and Bryce Bakken, who all made their weight

finals at OBC on Friday, are senior leaders for the team, said Smorin, while Justin McGinley and Christian Rangel return for their junior campaigns. Janiel Cuevas wrestled for an OBC title at 132 pounds last week, and Valdemar Guerra won at 170.

Smorin said a talented group of freshmen and sophomores will develop their skills this season.

"We are very excited of the direction of the program," he said.

Gateway

Coach Travis Hill begins his second season with the Panthers. His top wrestlers include Angel Espada, Noah Bryant, Justin Chamorro, Kyjuan Allen, Timothy Usilton, Christian Coto, Michael Hidalgo, Klayton Willis, Isaiah Simmons, Kevin Robinson and Dylan Sanchez.

Liberty

The Chargers compete under Coach Emil Wells and compete in 2A District 6. His wrestlers include Will Valach at 106 pounds, Manuel Rentas (120), Jonathan Figueroa (the OBC champ at 138), Ty Moody (152) and Isaiah Metellus (160).

Poinciana

The Eagles, competing in 2A District 6, are coached by Allen Ferguson. His wrestlers include Ethan Estrada (132), Andrew Neville (138), Jose Ramos (152), Michael Alicea (170), Alfredo Trejos (third at 182 at OBCs), Connor Beeken (195), Norris Andrew (220) and Brendan Ortega (third at 285 at OBCs).

Sports Editor Ken Jackson contributed to this story.

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SOCCER

Continued from Page 7.

use it as a measuring stick to improve the rest of the year.

"These are games that can go either way and that's what it's about," he said. "We've got tremendous young talent on both sides in this one."

Harmony can lock up the OBC title with wins tonight at Osceola and Tuesday at Poinciana. The Longhorns will be tested after New Year's prior to the postseason in a tournament at Winter Park where they'll see the host Wildcats and other Orange County powers Boone, Apopka and Dr. Phillips.

In boys soccer, the defending OBC champs Celebration has put a hammer lock on a repeat. An 8-0 win over Liberty on Monday moved the Storm to 4-0 in conference play; they played Harmony on Wednesday. Coach Chad Boudreaux's team is also 5-0 in District 5A-9 play (7-0-1 overall) with a game against George Jenkins on Friday.

Hopefully, we will be able to keep playing as a team. If we do, we could do something special," Boudreaux said, noting the

fast start hasn't been as easy as the results look. "(Wins over) Osceola, Gateway, and Ridge Community all came down to the final 10 minutes. In those games we scored goals within a few minutes of each other to put them away in those final minutes."

The injury bug has bitten the team; Boudreaux has called up four junior varsity players in the last two weeks just to keep a full team.

"They stepped up to the varsity, and fit right in. They all had some playing time and were able to contribute to some huge wins that were needed to get us where we are," he said. "This has actually helped our team become closer together and buy into the next man up mentality."

The Storm has quite the scoring punch, with Inti Antunez (13 goals), Matheus Machado (8) and Luis Mora (7 in only five games). The defensive end, anchored by backs Sam Thompson and Diego Martinez and goalie Alex Buttery, has helped Celebration outscore opponents 39-7.

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For tee times, tickets and other information, go to www.pncfather-sonchallenge.com.

▶ Orlando Solar Bears hockey

The Orlando Solar Bears, the ECHL affiliate of the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs and AHL's Toronto Marlies, will return home from a 10-game road trip to face the Norfolk Admirals on Dec. 20-21 and 23rd, all at 7 p.m. at the Amway Center.

LIFESTYLES

▶ CONTACT
BRIAN MCBRIDE EDITOR
 EMAIL BMCBRIDE@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM

Story behind Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer



Adults and children alike are familiar with the tale of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” As the lyrics of the song illustrate: Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer had a very shiny nose / And if you ever saw it, you would even say it glows.

Popularized by the song written by Johnny Marks and sung by Gene Autry, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer dates back to 1939. A copywriter named Robert L. May created the story of the misfit reindeer in 1939 when working for Montgomery Ward. The retail giant was producing marketing holiday coloring books for children and wanted to come up with a clever character.

Although Rudolph is now beloved, May's original ideas included Rollo and Reginald. Also, Rudolph's famed red nose almost didn't come to be. Because a red nose at the time was viewed as a sign of alcoholism, Montgomery Ward was hesitant to be on board with the bulbous, red snoot. A blue nose was considered, but later changed. In its first year of publication, Montgomery Ward had distributed 2.4 million copies of Rudolph's story.

The catchy tune came thereafter, followed by a cartoon short in 1948. In 1964, the stop-motion animated television special further propelled Rudolph to celebrity and became the most recognizable Rudolph adaptation.

Today, Rudolph is known across the globe as the reindeer responsible for navigating Santa's sleigh through tricky weather on Christmas Eve. He continues to be loved by many, young and old.



Holiday songs with storied pasts

The holiday season is not complete without music. Holiday hits play in shopping malls, and families often trim the tree to their favorite albums.

Even if Elvis' “Blue Christmas” or Johnny Mathis' “Do You Hear What I Hear” reign supreme in your household, it can be interesting to learn about some of the other songs made famous this time of year.

Modern classics

Classic carols may be the first Christmas songs that come to mind. However, less than a quarter century ago a pop singer managed to contribute to the holiday music pantheon. Mariah Carey's “All I Want for Christmas is You,” released in 1994, is considered to be the most popular modern Christmas standard. With global sales exceeding 16 million copies, the song is one of Carey's biggest hits.

Sad Origins

“Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,” with its warning to children to be nice since Santa is keeping tabs on kids' behavior, has helped children tow the line for decades. Songwriter James “Haven” Gillespie was asked to pen the tune during one of the darker times in his life. Gillespie was jobless and poor and his brother had just passed away — hardly inspiration for a Christmas tune. However, after thinking about the memories he shared with his brother, Gillespie was able to pull together an upbeat and catchy classic, changing his life for the good.



Bestseller

Even though “Silent Night” is the most recorded Christmas song in history, another tune holds the title of the best-selling holiday standard of all time. “White Christmas” was written in 1942 and reminisces about an old-fashioned Christmas celebration. The version recorded by Bing Crosby has estimated sales in excess of 100 million copies worldwide, according to “The Guinness Book of World Records.” There are various accounts as to when and where Irving Berlin wrote the song. Some state he did so at a hotel in Hollywood, while others

say it was the Arizona Biltmore. Wherever Berlin happened to be when writing the tune, there's no doubt he was pining for the quintessential white Christmas.

The song was written for the 1942 movie “Holiday Inn,” starring Crosby and Fred Astaire. It became an instant classic and remains Crosby's best-selling recording. Some of the most recent versions of the song have been recorded by Pentatonix, Sara McLachlan and Laura Pusini.

Christmas songs remain near and dear to people's hearts, and a few of these beloved songs have interesting back stories.

Set your sing-a-long party apart

Christmas carols became part of holiday celebrations roughly 200 years ago. Initially gaining popularity in England before becoming holiday traditions in the Americas, carols are part and parcel of modern holiday celebrations.

One popular holiday party theme is a sing-a-long. Although door-to-door caroling has long been a holiday staple, celebrants can enjoy staying in and singing as well. To make your sing-a-long party unique, include some of these ideas in the celebration.

Rent or borrow karaoke equipment

Increase the performance factor by securing a karaoke machine. Many are preprogrammed with holiday standards. Various karaoke services exist online as well. For a small fee you can sign up for an account and access lyrics and music that can be streamed over a computer or any device with an Internet connection.

Pair picture drawing with singing

Combine singing sessions with a game of “guess the picture.” Guests select a holiday title out of a basket and then have to draw their interpretation so others can guess what song is being drawn. Afterward, everyone joins in to sing the tune.

Provide bound carol books

Give each guest a custom-designed book of Christmas carols, complete with sheet music or just lyrics that they can use



to follow along while joining in singing. Afterwards, this book can be a take-home present and memento.

Book live accompaniment

Singing along to live music can be a treat. Find someone who is proficient on the piano, guitar or another musical instrument that will come and guide the musical interludes. Guests will gather around and offer their own voices. If the goal is to hire an accompanist, note that the holiday season can be a busy time for performers, so book early.

Highlight a singing virtuoso

Chances are there is someone in your group of friends or family who is adept at singing. Ask this person if he or she would be willing to perform a special solo.

Set the mood

Dim overhead lights and sing by candlelight or by the twinkling lights of a Christmas tree. Guests may feel less inhibited if they aren't on full display.

Holiday songs are intertwined with the magic of Christmastime. A sing-a-long party can be the ideal way to gather friends

Home for the holidays

Christmas carols and festive songs help make the holidays complete by setting the mood for the festivities to come. Songs resonate differently with people during the holiday season. For example, some celebrants find certain holiday tunes or lyrics especially poignant. Those who might be missing home or planning on visiting friends and relatives who live far

away during the holiday season often find the words to “(There's No Place Like) Home for the Holidays,” are an accurate portrayal of the sentiments of holiday traveling. Composed by Robert Allen, with lyrics by Al Stillman, “(There's No Place Like) Home for the Holidays” was published in 1954. The best-known recordings of the song are by Perry Como, who recorded it

twice — once in 1954 and then again in 1959 with a different musical arrangement. The first version reached #8 on the Billboard magazine chart in the United States. The Carpenters recorded another popular version of the song for their 1984 album, “An Old-Fashioned Christmas.” Nora Jones and Cyndi Lauper also recorded a duet version of the song in 2011.

THE GUIDE

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT AROUND OSCEOLA COUNTY & CENTRAL FLORIDA

SPOTLIGHT WEEKLY PICKS

THURSDAY, DEC. 14



MECUM AUCTIONS, the world's largest collector-car auction company, returns to Kissimmee and Osceola Heritage Park, Jan. 5-14. This year's event will feature more than 3,000 cars. Visit www.mecum.com for information/tickets

FRIDAY, DEC. 15



THE 12 BARS OF CHRISTMAS PUB CRAWL, a fun drinking event to help needy families around the holidays, will be held in downtown Orlando Dec. 15-16. Go to eventbrite.com for information.

SATURDAY, DEC. 16



GREEN MEADOWS FARM hosts the Jingle Bell Express event with lights, Santa and more. Go to Eventbrite.com for tickets, priced at \$10 for the 6 p.m. event.

SUNDAY, DEC. 17



OSCEOLA CRAFTERS GUILD presents the Holiday Craft Fair, through Dec. 17, at Osceola Arts. The event features handmade holiday items by local artisans. Go to <http://www.osceolaarts.org/exhibits.html> for more information.

ONLINE
Visit www.aroundosceola.com for the latest news.

IT'S REINING DOGS AKC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS



One of the largest dog shows ever held in the United States will be at the Orange County Convention Center this weekend, with the return of the AKC National Championships. More than 4,800 canines will compete for the title of National Champion.

By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

Who let the dogs out? All 5,000 of them. When the AKC National Championships presented by Royal Canin comes to the Orange County Convention Center, Dec. 16 and 17, more than 4,800 canines will be competing for the title of National Champion.

This year's show, which includes many other events, will be largest dog show ever held in the United States since the AKC 1984 Centennial event.

In addition to the National Championship, other weekend events will include the inaugural AKC Royal Canin National All-Breed Puppy and Junior Stakes, AKC Agility Invitation, the AKC Obedience Classic, AKC National Owner-Handler Series Finals, NADD/AKC Diving Dogs Championship and the junior events. Overall, this year's show will top 8,600 entries.

"The AKC National Championship presented by Royal Canin is a must-attend event," said Dennis Sprung, AKC President and Show Chairman. "With more than 1,000,000 square feet of event space, top canine athletes competing in a wide variety of dog sports, tons of vendors selling unique dog-themed items in time for the holidays, more than 160 AKC Meet the Breeds booths and more, this unique experience is truly a canine extravaganza."

Events in the one million square feet of canine-centric space during the National Championship week of December 12-17, 2017 include the:

- AKC Junior Showmanship Finals
- AKC Junior Agility Competition
- AKC Juniors Obedience & Rally Classic
- AKC National Owner-Handler Series Finals
- AKC Meet the Breeds
- Specialty Shows, Group Shows and the FSS/Miscellaneous Open Show
- Orlando cluster, consisting of the Space Coast Kennel Club of Palm Bay, the Brevard Kennel Club, the Central Florida Kennel Club and Orlando Dog Training Club

2017 Highlights:

Judges: Judge Mr. Roger R. Hartinger of Cincinnati, Ohio will select the AKC National Championship Best in Show (BIS) winner. The owner(s) of the BIS winner will receive \$50,000. Mrs. Paula Hartinger of Cincinnati, Ohio will judge Best Bred-by-Exhibitor in Show from over 1079 Bred-by-Exhibitor entries (dogs being shown by their owner/breeder). Best Bred-By Exhibitor in Show will receive \$15,000. Best in Stakes at the inaugural AKC/Royal Canin National All-Breed Puppy and Junior Stakes will be judged by an elite panel of three All Breed Judges: Mrs. Paula Hartinger, Mr. Roger R. Hartinger and Dr. Steve Keating. These esteemed judges will determine the winner

from 1229 entries to be crowned the AKC Royal Canin National All-Breed (Puppy/Junior) of the Year.

Viewing Coverage: The AKC National Championship evening competition will be streamed live beginning at 5 p.m. each night on www.akc.org and live. royalcanin.com. The Bred-By Exhibitor groups, Junior Showmanship Finals, Best Miscellaneous, agility and obedience will be taped and available on demand at www.akc.org. The Agility final will be streamed live on www.akc.org.

AKC National Owner-Handled Series Finals: The AKC NOHS Finals Best in Show competition will be judged by Patricia W. Laurans of Newtown, Conn. on Saturday, Dec. 16. This invitation-only competition is open to the top ten ranked dogs in the AKC National Owner-Handled Series in each breed/variety from the 2017 qualifying year and drew an entry of 705 dogs. The NOHS Group Finals will be taped and available on demand at www.akc.org.

Doggies by the numbers

All 190 AKC recognized breeds are entered to compete. The largest entries include 138 Golden Retrievers; 125 Dachshunds; 108 Australian Shepherds; 98 French Bulldogs; 96 Labrador Retrievers; 72 Rhodesian Ridgebacks; 71 Manchester Terriers; 67 Poodles; 63 Chihuahuas, 62 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and 60 Rottweilers.

See **AKC**, Page 13.

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Book, Music and Lyrics by **Leslie Briscusse**
Directed by **Frank Siano**

It's in the books. The cleanup at Osceola Heritage Park is over, but the memories will last for all time.

The Central Florida Scouting Jamboree, held Dec. 1-3, attracted thousands of scouts from a seven-county area, and they showed off what they do best. One unit barbecued meats. Others showed off their knowledge of nature, science, fitness and citizenship at military, first responder and academic programs shown off in a litany of zones.

Competition is healthy, and Scouts competed in playing video games in the Gametrack studio, shooting Airsoft rifles (for the Boy Scouts), completing obstacle courses like those found on TV shows Wipeout! and American Ninja Warrior and building fighting robots a la the Battlebots TV series. Scouts were also treated to great food and music.

It lived up to the slogan of the event: "Unparalleled Experiences."



Above: Scouts got to meet members of the Osceola County Sheriff's Office up close and hear about law enforcement work at the Central Florida Scouting Jamboree.



Left: Scouts were treated to a lumberjacking show, sponsor by Stiehl.



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JUANES IN CONCERT, 2018



By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

One of Latin rock's leading global ambassador and the most-awarded solo artist in Latin Grammy history, Juanes, 2018 North American Amarte Tour with Latin alternative's new leading female artist, Mon Laferte. The tour, produced by Live will be coming to the Amway Center, April 20. Special guest for the show is Calonco.

Tickets are on sale now for the North America tour for Tickets: \$36.95, \$56.95, \$76.95, \$96.95 at \$126.95, via Ticketmaster

The tour announcement follows closely behind recent Latin Grammy wins for both artists. Juanes' critically-praised, and chart-topping, "Mis Planes Son Amarte," (Latin music's first major visual album) received two new awards this year,

increasing the Colombian superstar's career tally to a staggering 25 combined Grammy & Latin Grammy awards. With a rare five-star Rolling Stone review and pick as "one of the best albums of 2017," "Mis Planes Son Amarte" also recently earned a 2018 Grammy nomination for Best Latin Pop Album. Hailed by Time magazine as "one of the 100 most-influential people in the world," and The New York Times described him as, "Latin America's soulful poet," Juanes has built a distinctive sound that fuses his love of rock and pop, with multi-layered songwriting, and a deep reverence for the traditional folk and other indigenous rhythms of the continent. With eight multi-platinum albums to his credit, Juanes has earned 11 number one Billboard singles, and holds multiple chart records.

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KISSING RECORD SET AT GAYLORD PALMS RESORT

After hundreds of lips puckered up beneath the glow of a six-story Christmas tree, Gaylord Palms Resort broke the Guinness World Records title for the timeless tradition of kissing under mistletoe. During the "Kiss-Story in the Making" event, 448 couples set a new Guinness World Records title for Most couples kissing under mistletoe (single location), bringing this festive, romantic record to smoochably-appropriate KISSimmee, on Dec. 7.

Under the watchful eyes of Guinness World Records adjudicator Michael Empric, the hundreds of couples were asked to lock lips for a solid 10 seconds under individual fresh sprigs of mistletoe in order to claim the title. With 448 couples successfully breaking the title, Gaylord Palms more than doubled the previous record of 215 couples.

"These couples helped to make history during this unforgettable attempt at the Guinness World Records title for Most couples kissing under mistletoe at Gaylord Palms Resort," said Empric. "Congratulations and welcome to the Guinness World Records family."

Kiss-Story in the Making was planned to add extra festive excitement to Christmas at Gaylord Palms, the resort's annual holiday celebration that includes themed attractions, live entertainment and more.

"For 15 Christmases, Gaylord Palms has welcomed guests from around the world to make memories with us," said Johann Krieger, General Manager of Gaylord Palms. "This year, with a theme



throughout our resort celebrating 'Christmas Around the World,' we are truly thrilled that this we've claimed a Guinness World Records title for such a special holiday tradition."

The title attempt was sponsored by Experience Kissimmee, the area's travel and tourism authority.

"We are honored and excited to be a part of this memorable experience," said DT Minich, President/CEO of Experience Kissimmee. "There's no better place to set a kissing Guinness Records title than right here in Kissimmee, Florida!"

Marilyn at Ripley's

They believed they embodied one of America's original Hollywood bombshells. On Saturday, one was crowned by Ripley's Believe It or Not! as the 2017 Marilyn Monroe Look-Alike Winner.

Ripley's Believe It or Not! hosted the contest to correspond with the special Marilyn Monroe exhibit, which showcases the rhinestone-encrusted gown she wore to serenade President John F. Kennedy at his birthday celebration in 1962. Ripley's Believe It or Not! set a new Guinness World Record for the most expensive dress sold at auction when they acquired the dress from Julien's Auctions for a staggering \$4.8 million.

Nine contestants felt they had what it took to look like Marilyn, walk like Marilyn, talk like Marilyn and sing like Marilyn. But in the end, only one was deemed supreme. Bebe Caliberr walks away with \$500 cash, lifetime passes to Ripley Entertainment attractions, \$100 worth of Ripley's merchandise and a two-night stay in Clearwater Beach.

GREEK COOKING SHOW ON PBS

By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

What's cooking? Something really good if you are looking for something more exotic than your standard meat and potatoes.

My Greek Table with Diane Kochilas is the latest offering on PBS, and it is a fun and even educational experience for cooks, chefs and anyone who likes to hang out in the kitchen.

The series features Kochilas, an award-winning cookbook author and television personality. She is also known as one of the world's foremost authorities on Greek cuisine.

She certainly knows her way around the kitchen, but Kochilas doesn't stay there as she takes viewers out into the Greek countryside exploring the cultural side of Greek cuisine. My Greek Table is almost as much

a travelogue as it is about cooking. The cameras are rolling in places like Crete, Santorini, Ikaria, Lesvos, Thessaly, Athen, Macedonia and the Peloponnese.

For example, when Kochilas uses that Greek staple, the olive in a dish, she not only cooks with it, but goes out to the grove and helps harvest.

On the cooking side, she explores the breadth and variety of Greek cuisine.

AKC

Continued from Page 11

Other Dog Numbers

705 dogs are entered in the AKC National Owner-Handled Series Finals; 162 juniors, ages 9-17, who have met high academic standards and qualification criteria based on year-round competition, will compete in Junior Showmanship. More than 630 dogs will compete in the North American Diving Dogs/AKC National Championship.

Event ticket (beginning 8 a.m.) includes access to: Conformation Breed and Group judging, Obedience and Agility Competitions, AKC Meet the Breeds,

NADD/AKC Diving Dogs, Kiddie Fun Zone and Vendors.

Group Judging in the Arena - doors open at 4:30 p.m. At 5 p.m., Evening Group Competitions and presentations for the breeds judged on that day. (limited seating available on a "First Come-First Serve Basis", based on capacity control).

General seating in two sections available on a "First Come-First Serve Basis", based on capacity control.

Each ticket is valid for the date printed on it. No Exchanges or refunds. Children ages 12

and under admitted free. Active Military free. Must have Valid Military ID - present to ticket sellers at any entrance. If there are questions or concerns regarding handicap seating, contact Michael Canalizo at: MLC@AKC.ORG

Due to the crowds, and for the safety of all dogs, only invited animals that are participating in the events are permitted.

General admission seating is \$10. For more information/tickets go to <https://secure.interactiveticketing.com/1.20/3f083a/#/select>.

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OBITUARIES

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MYERS - James (Jim) Earl Myers, age 90, and a long-time resident of Kissimmee, FL passed away at his home in Newtown, PA on the evening of November 9th, while surrounded by family.



Jim was born on October 18, 1927 to father; James Earl Myers Sr. and mother; Lucy Mae Walden Myers in Cincinnati, OH.

He was a graduate of Miami (Ohio) University,

served in the U.S. Navy in World War II, and eventually worked as a Sales Manager for 3M for almost 37 years. After retirement, Jim volunteered extensively at the elementary schools where his wife taught, earning the Volunteer of the Year Award. Jim had a wonderful sense of humor, loved cooking, and was extremely generous with anything he could offer.

Jim is survived by his wife of 51 years, Jane Peelle Myers; brother, Walden (and Sue) Myers; children, James D. (and Christine) Myers, Mindy (and Brendan) Smith,

and Blair (and Merna Ty) Myers, Cindy (and Henry) Brown; grandchildren, Jake and Nick Myers, Julian and James Ty-Myers, and Jayden Brown.

He was predeceased by sister, Betty Stout and daughter, Paula Harter.

A memorial service will be held on Wednesday, December 28th, at Osceola Memory Gardens in St. Cloud, FL. Visitation will be from 4 to 6 p.m. and followed by a short service.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to a veteran's group or JDRE.

RUMSEY - Jay Marvin Rumsey, 92, passed away on December 3, 2017 at his home in St. Cloud.



He is survived by his loving wife of 73 years, Augusta Rumsey; one son, two daughters, and many grandchildren and great-

grandchildren. A Memorial Gathering will be held from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m., December 16, 2017 at Fisk Funeral Home,

1107 Massachusetts Avenue, St. Cloud, FL with Military Honors at 3:30 p.m.

Online condolences can be given at fiskfh.com

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Dr. Neil Sandhu, M.D.
Dermatology - New Jersey Medical School
Neil Sandhu, MD, is a Board-Certified Dermatologist (ABD). Dr. Sandhu served as Chief Resident at UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School. His training puts him at the cutting-edge in cosmetic dermatology and skin cancer surgery. Dr. Sandhu is also trained in cosmetic procedures including BOTOX and filler injections, chemical peels, and photorejuvenation. Dr. Sandhu attended the University of Wisconsin, where he graduated Summa Cum Laude before going on to attend the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine & Public Health, where he again graduated at the top of his class. Dr. Sandhu has authored multiple scientific articles, including one focusing on the use of laser procedures in dermatology. He is a member of the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, American Academy of Dermatology, and the American Society of Mohs Surgery.

Please call for appointments and hours of operation for our new location. **Se habla Español!**

THE DAILY PLANNER

CONTACT
BRIAN MCBRIDE EDITOR
 EMAIL BMCBRIDE@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM
 THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR A SUBMISSION.

Weekly and Monthly Events

All-aboard! The Great Christmas Light Adventure Jingle Bell Express Train is boarding at Green Meadows Petting Farm, Saturday, Dec. 16. This is an evening event, from 6 to 8 p.m., and the train will ride by themed holiday displays like Christmas Under the Sea, Country Christmas, Christmas Luau and more. End the evening with a free picture of Santa and make crafts with the elves. Admission to the train event is \$10. For other dates and more information, go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-great-christmas-light-adventure-and-jingle-bell-express-train-tickets-39786161480?aff=es2> for tickets.



WHAT The Great Christmas Light Adventure Jingle Bell Express Train
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INFORMATION [eventbrite.com/e/the-great-christmas-light-adventure-and-jingle-bell-express-train-tickets-39786161480?aff=es2](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-great-christmas-light-adventure-and-jingle-bell-express-train-tickets-39786161480?aff=es2)

DAILY THURSDAY 12-14

THE OSCEOLA HIGH SCHOOL WINTER CHORUS CONCERT
 7 p.m. Dec. 14 and 15 at 7 p.m. at the school, 420 S. Thacker Ave., Kissimmee. Tickets are \$5.

HOLIDAYS AT THE MORSE
 The Morse Museum in Winter Park presents Holidays at the Morse, special holiday themed music events from 5 to 8 p.m., Fridays Nov. 24-Dec. 29. Admission is free. For more information on museum events go to MORSEMUSEUM.COM

SCROOGE THE MUSICAL
 The musical version of the Charles Dickens classic at Osceola Arts continues through Dec. 17. Adult tickets are \$22, senior and student rates available. For more information go to OSCEOLAARTS.ORG

BELLES & BEAUS
 The Belles & Beaus Dance Club has a ballroom dance every Wednesday at the Marks Street Senior Center, 99 E. Marks Street, Orlando starting at 7 p.m. Music is by Soft Touch and admission is \$5. Singles and couples welcome. The special Christmas dance will be held Dec. 20. For more information, call 407-644-4200.

FRIDAY 12-15

THE JUST OK HOLIDAY PARTY
 The News Junkie presents The Just OK Holiday Party at Hard Rock Live Orlando, 6050 Universal Boulevard, Orlando, from 9 p.m. to midnight. It's a freak-show themed event with stage performances, musical acts, amazing feats, and other interactive experiences, all with The News Junkie crew. Featuring a performance by Grandson. For tickets, go to HARDROCK.COM

HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR SHOW
 Featuring the Golden Girls Dance Team and guest artists from Glenda's Dance Center will be in the St. Cloud High School auditorium Dec. 15 and 16 at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are: advance sale - \$5 for adults; \$2 for kids under 12. For the day of show, all seats are \$10. The Golden Girls Dance team are the Rockettes of St. Cloud.

SATURDAY 12-16



BREAKFAST WITH SANTA
 The city of Kissimmee will host Breakfast with Santa at Chambers Park Community Center, 2380 N. Smith St., from 10 a.m. until noon. It is a free event.

AAU GYMNASTICS FALL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS Dec. 16-17. The 2017 AAU Gymnastics Florida State Meet is for gymnasts level 1-5. Tickets sold at the door. For more information, please visit OHPARK.COM

CHRISTMAS CANTATA
 A Christmas Cantata, called "Let There Be Christmas," by Joseph M. Martin, will be presented by the Chancel and Cantata Choirs and orchestra, and will be directed by Scott Weyrauch Dec. 16 at 7 p.m. and Dec. 17 at 3 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 101 W. Dakin Ave., Kissimmee. It's free and open to everyone. For more information, call 407-847-3700

TRANS-SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA
 The orchestra's acclaimed holiday show returns to the Amway Center, at 3 and 8 p.m. This year's show is Ghosts of Christmas Eve. Ticket prices are \$45 to \$75. Buy tickets at amwaycenter.com, Chase Box Office at Amway Center, Ticketmaster retail locations, charge-by-phone at 800.745.3000 or at TICKETMASTER.COM

CANINE EXTRAVAGANZA
 The nation's largest celebration of dogs, returns to Orange County Convention Center, Dec. 16-17. The big show includes the North American Diving Dogs competition, the family Fun Zone, doggy demonstrations and vendors at the Doggie Boutique. For tickets and a schedule of events visit AKC.ORG or CANINEEXTRAVAGANZA.COM

REGGAETON OLD SCHOOL
 Osceola Heritage Park presents Reggaeton Old School at the Silver Spurs Arena at 8:30 p.m. Featuring Alberto Stylee, Rey Pirin, Maicol Superstar, MC Ceja, Polaco and MORE! Tickets start at \$23 by phone 800-745-3000, at the Silver Spurs Arena Box Office and at TICKETMASTER.COM

SUNDAY 12-17

36TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR
 There will be jewelry, food, woodwork, wreaths, small Christmas trees, ornaments and more. From Nov. 16 to Dec. 17 at Osceola Arts, 2411 E. U.S. Highway 192, Kissimmee. The dates and times are Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 4:40 p.m.

TUESDAY 12-19

NEPTUNE ORCHESTRA WINTER CONCERT
 The Neptune Middle School orchestra will have its winter concert Tuesday, Dec. 19th at 7 p.m. in the St. Cloud High School auditorium

THURSDAY 12-21

CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS
 The RP Funding Center (formerly the Lakeland Center) presents A Charlie Brown Christmas Live!, featuring the entire Peanuts gang as they uncover the true meaning of Christmas. Tickets are on sale now and priced at \$42 and \$31 (other fees may apply) and are available by visiting the RP Funding Center Box Office, toll-free 888-397-0100, and online at RPFUNDINGCENTER.COM

SATURDAY 12-23

CIRQUE MUSICA HOLIDAY PRESENTS BELIEVE
 An all-new concert experience, is a fun-filled family holiday event featuring the cast of Cirque Musica together with all-time favorite holiday songs performed by a live orchestra. For more information and tickets, visit OHPARK.COM

SUNDAY 12-31

ROCKIN' THE CLOUD
 Rockin' the Cloud New Years Eve and Cloud Drop Event is a free, block-party concert, where we will rock in the New Year in downtown St. Cloud. Activities are set to begin at 6 p.m. through 1 a.m. with the Cloud Drop at midnight (similar to the ball drop).

NYE PARTY 2017
 NYE Party 2017 featuring Switch will be at the House of Blues Orlando, 1490 Buena Vista Drive, Dec. 31 starting at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$22.75.

MONDAY 01-01

CARILLON CONCERT
 Ring in the New Year with a carillon concert at Bok Tower. The concert is included with regular admission to the Lake Wales sanctuary.

FRIDAY 01-05

MECUM AUTO AUCTION
 The world's largest collector-car auction returns to Kissimmee and Osceola Heritage Park, Jan. 5-14. The park's 60-acres will showcase more than 3000 cars. For more information about tickets, consignment, purchase and more, go to MECUM.COM

TUESDAY 01-09

SHAKIRA IN ORLANDO
 Amway Center. Tickets are on sale now and available through Ticketmaster

WEDNESDAY 01-10

LEARN ABOUT THE TORAH
 Learn about the prayer book at Bagels, Lox and Torah at the Hampton Inn, at 10 a.m. Call 407 222-6393, to RSVP.

THURSDAY 01-18

WORLD QUILT SHOW
 Featuring the World Quilt Competition and The Florida Quilt Competition, comes to the Orange County Convention Center, Jan. 18-20. In addition to the quilts, the show includes the Merchants Mall featuring everything quilters need in the way of supplies and material, as well as workshops and lectures. Pre-registration and other information is available on the show's website, QUILTFEST.COM

SATURDAY 02-03



ADAM ANT
 The concert originally scheduled for September, but postponed because of the hurricane, has been rescheduled in downtown Orlando at the Beacham Theater. Tickets are on sale now. This is the Anthems — The Singles Tour. For more information go to ADAM-ANT.COM

TAKE NOTE
 Osceola has announced the debut of a new musical group, Take Note, debuting in the fall. It will be a group of professionally trained, talented vocalists who will represent Osceola Arts at various events in Central Florida. If you would like more information about Take Note, contact Justin Gregory at 407-437-8778 or email at JGregory@osceolaarts.com.

RODEO TICKETS
 Tickets for the RAM National Circuit Finals Rodeo coming to Osceola Heritage Park April 5-8, 2018 are now on sale. Tickets start at \$20 for adults and \$12.50 for kids and can be purchased at the Silver Spurs Arena Box Office, by phone 800.745.3000, and at TICKETMASTER.COM

ONGOING

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY/FOL
 Osceola County has several Friends of the Library groups, each meeting in a branch of the Osceola library System. Check the Osceola Library System website. Membership is \$5 per year. Check the library website. All meetings are open to the public and new members are always welcome. Funds raised from book sales are used for promoting literacy through library programs. Contact ginger40@earthlink.net for times, dates and events.

CANASTA CLUB
 Do you like to play cards? The Canasta Club meets at the St. Cloud Senior Center each month on the second and fourth Tuesday. The time is 1 to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call Laura Bowerman at 321-895-5201.

SILVER CLOUDS CHORUS
 The Silver Cloud Chorus meets every Tuesday, 9:30 a.m. at the St. Cloud Civic Center and is open to anyone who likes to sing. The repertoire includes both secular and religious songs. It is not an absolute requirement to read music; the only requirement is to enjoy group singing. The chorus performs two concerts per year, one at Christmas and one in the Spring. For more information, contact Holly, (207) 432-9364, or Peg, (407) 892-6777.

DIVORCECARE FOR KIDS
 DivorceCare for Kids (DC4K) is program for children (ages 5-12) of families experiencing divorce and separation will meet at Poinciana Christian Church, 3181 Pleasant Hill Road, Kissimmee, on Wednesdays, 6:30 to 8 p.m. It begins Jan. 3. DC4K is a hands-on interactive kid friendly support system that presents skills to assist children in maneuvering through the difficult places of divorce or separation. For more information, call 407-870-9700 or visit DCKISSIMMEE.COM

DIVORCECARE
 DivorceCare divorce recovery seminar and support group meets at Poinciana Christian Church in Kissimmee every Wednesday from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Child care is provided through the fifth grade. The church is located at 3181 Pleasant Hill Road. It runs from Jan. 3 to March. DivorceCare features nationally recognized experts on divorce and recovery topics. Seminar sessions include "Facing My Anger," "Facing My Loneliness," "New Relationships," "KidCare" and "Forgiveness." For more information, call 407-870-9700 or visit DCKISSIMMEE.COM

Editor's note: Due to space constraints, the News-Gazette cannot guarantee that all events submitted will be published in the Daily Planner in every Thursday and Saturday edition.

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How To • Reviews • Buyers Guide

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Manufacturer Photo

2018 CHEVY

TRAVERSE

Updated for Family and Friends



Manufacturer Photo



Manufacturer Photo

Chevrolet introduces the all-new 2018 Traverse wrapped in bold and refined styling. The completely redesigned Traverse offers technologies to help keep passengers comfortable and connected.

By Sue Mead
Motor Matters

My family couldn't make the trip with me to Traverse City, Mich., so I made one of my best friends an "honorary family" member to test-drive the 2018 Traverse, designed to carry families and oodles of gear.

Laurie was thrilled to travel with me to this picturesque area located on the shores of Lake Michigan to try out the completely redesigned 2018 Chevy Traverse.

The Traverse seats up to eight with best-in-class maximum cargo space and has an enhanced roster of standard convenience, storage, and comfort features — like built-in connectivity and wireless charging, which was perfect for Laurie and me, since we are always "on-the-job" with professional work demands, plus each of us like to keep in touch with our grown children when traveling. USB ports are in every row as well.

The updated Traverse is a charming meld of crossover, SUV, and minivan/wagon styling that can tow up to 5,000 pounds. The new version starts at \$30,875, including destination, with a lineup that offers more choices: L, LS, LT, and Premier trims can be ordered in the all-new sporty RS edition, a race-inspired Redline, or top-of-the-line High Country.

We chose an AWD Traverse painted in Iridescent Pearl Tricoat, with the Redline package that comes on the Premier trim; it features black wheels with distinct red hash marks, black nameplates with a red outline, blacked-out grilles, and black Chevrolet bowtie logos. Its dual skylscape sunroof provided extra illumination into our seven-seater.

We were impressed with Traverse's long and impressive list of uplevel features and smart technologies. Some of our favorites included the Enhanced Smart Slide seat that provides easy access to the third row, even with an empty forward-facing child seat in place using the LATCH system; Teen Driver technology; USB ports in all three rows; 12-volt power outlet; heated, power-adjustable outside mirrors; and capless fuel fill.

We had luggage for nearly a week's worth of travel on the road, so we made note of the crossover's best-in-class max cargo volume of 98.2-cubic feet, the 3.2-cu.-ft. of hidden underfloor cargo storage, the "truck-sized" center console, along with the 23 storage spots onboard for passengers in all three rows. A clever feature is the hidden storage behind the articulating radio screen.

Our Traverse was powered by a 3.6-liter V-6 that produces 310 horsepower and 366 lb.-ft. of torque; it's matched to a nine-speed

automatic transmission. An upgraded 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder is also available that delivers 255 hp and 295 lb.-ft. Fuel economy is rated at 18/27 mpg for the V-6, while turbo-four is slightly better.

During our 700-mile-long drive, we found ample power and great driving manners, with an average fuel economy of 25 mpg. We appreciated the quiet cabin with active noise cancellation, the humidity sensor that detects moisture and diverts air to the windshield to help prevent fogging, and a cadre of the latest safety features, including a surround-view camera, lane keeping and lane departure warning, front pedestrian braking, and forward collision alert with low- and high-speed braking, among other technologies.

Of note is Chevrolet's Rear Seat Reminder feature that can be life-saving and is standard on all trim levels; it reminds the driver to check the back seat for children and as well as goods. Connectivity includes standard support for Apple CarPlay and Android Auto; Chevrolet MyLink infotainment systems provide a number of ways to keep passengers connected.

On our favorites list were the Surround Vision cameras that provide a bird's-eye view of the Traverse to help make reversing, parking, or trailering easier; the new, hands-free power liftgate that projects a Chevrolet bowtie emblem on the ground; as well as the heated and ventilated leather-trimmed front seats, heated second-row outboard seats, and heated steering wheel.

SPECIFICATIONS: 2018 CHEVROLET TRAVERSE PREMIER

VEHICLE TYPE
7/8-passenger AWD midsize SUV

BASE PRICE
\$30,895 (as tested: \$48,295)

ENGINE TYPE
24-valve V-6

DISPLACEMENT
3.6-liter

HORSEPOWER (net)
310 at 6800 rpm

TORQUE (lb.-ft.)
266 at 2800 rpm

TRANSMISSION
9-speed automatic

OVERALL LENGTH
204.3 in.

TURNING CIRCLE (curb-to-curb)
39 ft.

CURB WEIGHT
4,362 lbs.

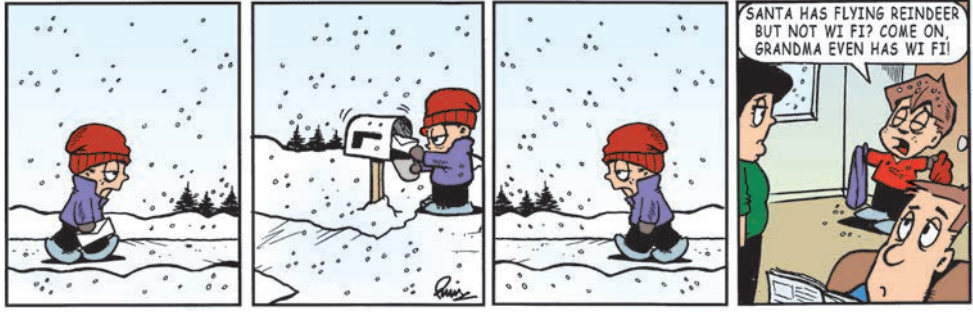
FUEL CAPACITY
21.7 gal.

EPA MILEAGE RATING
17 mpg city, 25 mpg highway

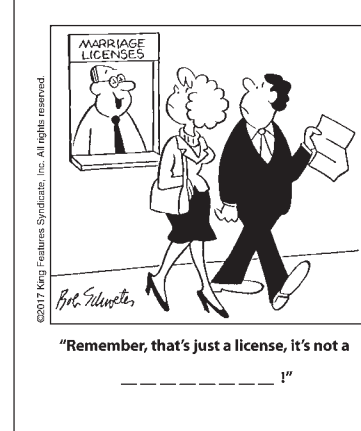
BRAIN FOOD

CONTACT
BRIAN MCBRIDE EDITOR
 EMAIL BMCBRIDE@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM

Amber Waves



The Spats



SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

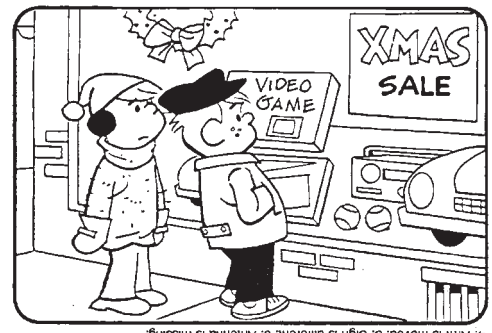
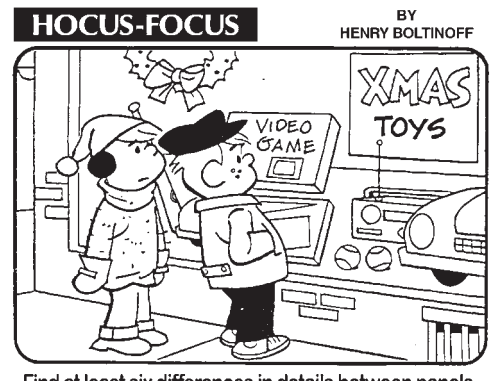
Active **LATER**

Shrink **WRITHE**

Carry **LAYER**

Mix **LEMING**

TODAY'S WORD



CryptoQuip
 Differences: 1. Tassel is shorter. 2. Curtains are missing. 3. Baseball bat is missing. 4. Arm is moved. 5. Sign is different. 6. Antenna is missing. 7. Cog nac. 8. Harry Truman. 9. Massachusetts. 10. Panama.

Comic strip about a young woman with the ability to change forms: "Little Morph'n' Annie".

CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: A equals T

BKUOB RAIQG DFKEA D ZKEMW
 SDOQ WOIT SOAC ACY DFOTOAZ
 AK BCDMWY QKIUR: "TOAATY UKIGCOM' DMMOY".

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LAFF - A - DAY



King 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		

ACROSS

- Piece of beef-cake?
- Chevy Equinox, for one
- Competent
- Stretch out
- Hoofbeat sound
- News correspondent
- Golf target
- Air safety org.
- Big drip?
- Get more magazines
- In the twinkling — eye
- Chopped
- One with an exciting social life
- "Absolutely" (out)
- Sand formations
- Homer's interjection
- Wasp's weapon
- Culture medium
- Jaromir of hockey
- Odds' opposites
- Fluffy dessert
- "Hail!"
- Mischievous tykes
- TV host Jerry
- Apportion
- Fact-checker, often
- Sore
- United Nations
- Lounge about
- Dueler's sword
- Supermarket stack
- Shaft of sunlight
- Former mates
- Birds' home
- Title holder
- Hints at
- Reddish
- horse
- "CSI" collections
- Day fractions (Abbr.)
- Dutch river
- Get back at
- Satanic
- Marceau's forte
- Portent
- Doing
- Operatic solo
- Drivel
- Joke
- Greek H
- Scarlet

DOWN

- "For — a Jolly Good Fellow"
- Last (Abbr.)
- Neither partner
- Stabbed
- Long story
- Salt Lake athlete

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Trivia test

by Fifi Rodriguez

- MEASUREMENTS:** How long is a cubit?
- MEDICAL:** What malady would you have if you suffered from "striae gravidarum"?
- TELEVISION:** What long-running soap opera is set in Genoa City?
- HISTORY:** What world peace group preceded the United Nations in the 20th century?
- MUSIC:** Where did the Beatles have their first concert in the United States in 1964?
- GEOGRAPHY:** What English city's Roman name was "Aeque Sulis"?
- LITERATURE:** Who was Don Quixote's sidekick in the 17th-century novel?
- GENERAL KNOWLEDGE:** What is the official residence of the Russian president?
- AD SLOGANS:** What company's advertising slogan proclaimed, "There are some things money can't buy"?
- THEATER:** What was the name of the family in the play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof"?

Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

	1		5						2
2		3		6					7
			6		8	3			
			9	1			4		8
4					5				3
	8					3			6
		4				2			6
8			7	1			9		
	5			4					7

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
 ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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Answers

1. Alert; 2. Wither; 3. Relay; 4. Mingle

WARRANTY
 Today's Word

King Crossword — Solution time: 21 mins.

Weekly SUDOKU — Answer

3	5	1	6	4	9	2	8	7
8	6	2	7	1	5	9	4	2
9	7	4	3	8	2	5	6	1
1	8	5	4	9	3	7	2	6
4	2	7	8	5	6	1	3	9
9	3	6	1	2	7	4	5	8
5	9	6	2	7	8	3	1	4
2	4	3	9	6	1	8	7	5
7	1	8	5	3	4	6	9	2

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CONTACT: GARY LUGO EMAIL LEGALADS@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM PHONE 407-846-7600

NOTICE UNDER FICTITIOUS NAME LAW Pursuant to Section 865.09 FLORIDA STATUTES
To Whom It May Concern: NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the undersigned, desiring to engage in business under the fictitious name of: **VINELAND LANDINGS APARTMENT HOMES** located at: 4480 Foothill Drive, in the County of Osceola, in the City of Kissimmee, Florida 34744, intends to register the said name with the Division of Corporations of the Florida Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida.

That the corporation interested in said business enterprise is as follows:

VINELAND LANDINGS PARTNERS, LTD.
DATED at Kissimmee, Osceola County, Florida, on this 7th day of December, 2017.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA. CIVIL DIVISION
Case No.: 2017-CA-1694 MF U.S. BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION AS LEGAL TITLE TRUSTEE FOR TRUMAN 2016 SC6 TITLE TRUST, Plaintiff,
vs.
THE UNKNOWN SPOUSES, HEIRS, DEVISEES, GRANTEES, CREDITORS, AND ALL OTHER PARTIES CLAIMING BY, THROUGH, UNDER OR AGAINST THE ESTATE OF JOSEPH R. BRENNER, A/K/A JOSEPH ROBERT BRENNER, DECEASED; et al, Defendant(s).

NOTICE OF ACTION
TO: THE UNKNOWN SPOUSES, HEIRS, DEVISEES, GRANTEES, CREDITORS, AND ALL OTHER PARTIES CLAIM-

ING BY, THROUGH, UNDER OR AGAINST THE ESTATE OF JOSEPH R. BRENNER, A/K/A JOSEPH ROBERT BRENNER, DECEASED.
RESIDENCES UNKNOWN

TO: BARBARA A. KARCZ, A/K/A BARBARA KARCZ
Last Known Address: 266 OLD MILL CIRCLE KISSIMMEE, FL 34746
Current Residence is Unknown

TO: DONNA BOLTON
Last Known Address: 266 OLD MILL CIRCLE KISSIMMEE, FL 34746
Current Residence is Unknown

YOU ARE NOTIFIED that an action to foreclose a mortgage on the following described property in Osceola County, Florida: **LOT 52, COUNTRY CREEK ESTATES PHASE ONE, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF, AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 7, PAGES 121 THROUGH 123, OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA.** has been filed against you and you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on **SHD Legal Group P.A.**, Plaintiff's attorneys, whose address is PO BOX 19519, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318, (954) 564-0071, answers@shdlegalgroup.com, on or before JANUARY 10, 2018, and file the original with the Clerk of this Court either before service on Plaintiff's attorneys or immediately thereafter; otherwise a default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint or petition.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact ADA Coordinator Armando Ramirez, Osceola County Clerk of Court, at 2600/Room 2602, 2 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, FL 34741, beginning at 11:00 AM on the 3rd day of JANUARY, 2018, the following described property

as set forth in said Final Judgment, to wit: **CONDOMINIUM PARCEL 36 CARIBBEAN VILLAS, A CONDOMINIUM, ACCORDING TO THE DECLARATION OF CONDOMINIUM RECORDED IN O. R. BOOK 619, PAGE 2, AND AMENDMENTS. THERETO, AND AS SHOWN IN CONDOMINIUM EXHIBIT BOOK 1, PAGES 83 THROUGH 87, ALL AMONG THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA, TOGETHER WITH AN UNDIVIDED INTEREST IN THE COMMON ELEMENTS ATTACHING THERETO ACCORDING TO THE FOREMENTIONED DECLARATION AND TOGETHER WITH NON-EXCLUSIVE RIGHT OF WAY EASEMENT AS CONTAINED IN O. R. BOOK 758, PAGE 1505, PUBLIC RECORDS OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA.**

Any person claiming an interest in the surplus from the sale, if any, other than the property owner as of the date of the lis pendens must file a claim within 60 days after the sale.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact the ADA Coordinator, Court Administration, Osceola County Courthouse, 2 Courthouse Square, Suite 6300, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, (407) 742-2417, at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.

DATED on this 30th day of November 2017.
BROCK & SCOTT, PLLC
Attorney for Plaintiff

1501 N.W. 49th Street, Suite 200, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309
Phone: (954) 618-6955 ext. 6177
Fax: (954) 618-6954
FLCourtDocs@brockand-scott.com
By: /s/ Jimmy K. Edwards
Jimmy K. Edwards, Esq.
Florida Bar No. 81855
File No. 13-F03275
December 7, 14, 2017

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA
General Jurisdiction Division
Case #: 2015-CA-000487 MF CITIMORTGAGE Inc., Plaintiff,
vs.
BRENDA T. MUZEKA and ROBERT A. MUZEKA, et al., Defendants.

NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to an Order dated September 19, 2017, entered in Case No. 2015-CA-000487 MF of the Circuit Court, of the Ninth Judicial Circuit, in and for Osceola County, Florida, wherein CITIMORTGAGE Inc., is the Plaintiff, and Brenda T. Muzeka; Robert A. Muzeka; Caribbean Villas Condominium Homeowners Association, Inc., are the Defendants, that Armando R. Ramirez, Osceola County Clerk of Court will sell to the highest and best bidder for cash at, Suite 2600/Room 2602, 2 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, FL 34741, beginning at 11:00 AM on the 3rd day of JANUARY, 2018, the following described property

2 Courthouse Square, Suite 2600/Room # 2602, Kissimmee, FL 34741, on JANUARY 10, 2018, at 11:00 A.M., EST the following described real property as set forth in said Final Judgment, to wit: **LOT 155, BELLALAGO-PHASE 4P, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 18, PAGES 26-29, OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA.**

ANY PERSON CLAIMING AN INTEREST IN THE SURPLUS FROM THE SALE, IF ANY, OTHER THAN THE PROPERTY OWNER AS OF THE DATE OF THE LIS PENDENS MUST FILE A CLAIM WITHIN 60 DAYS AFTER THE SALE.

IMPORTANT
If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact the ADA Coordinator, Court Administration, Osceola County Courthouse, 2 Courthouse Square, Suite 6300, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, (407) 742-2417, at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711 to reach the Telecommunications Relay Service.

DATED this 7th day of December 2017.
ALDRIDGE | PITE, LLP
Attorney for Plaintiff
1615 South Congress Avenue, Suite 200, Delray Beach, FL 33445
Telephone: (561) 392-6391
Facsimile: (561) 392-6965
By: /s/ Christopher T. Peck
FL Bar No. 88774
for SUSAN SPARKS
FBN #: 33626
Primary E-Mail:

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA
Case No.: 09-CA-11689 MF NATIONSTAR MORTGAGE LLC, Plaintiff,
vs.
DAVID JEFFREY; et al., Defendant(s).

NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE
Pursuant to CHAPTER 45 NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that sale will be made pursuant to an Order Resetting Sale entered on October 31, 2017, in Civil Case No. 09-CA-11689 MF, of the Circuit Court of the Ninth Judicial Circuit in and for Osceola County, Florida, wherein, NATIONSTAR MORTGAGE LLC, is the Plaintiff, and DAVID JEFFREY; AMBROZINE JEFFREY; BELLALAGO AND ISLES OF BELLALAGO COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION; ANY AND ALL UNKNOWN PARTIES CLAIMING BY, THROUGH, UNDER AND AGAINST THE HEREIN NAMED INDIVIDUAL DEFENDANT(S) WHO ARE NOT KNOWN TO BE DEAD OR ALIVE, WHETHER SAID UNKNOWN PARTIES MAY CLAIM AN INTEREST AS SPOUSES, HEIRS, DEVISEES, GRANTEES, OR OTHER CLAIMANT, are the Defendants. The Clerk of the Court, Armando Ramirez, will sell to the highest bidder for cash at

ServiceMail@aldridgepate.com
1190-1044B
December 14, 21, 2017

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA
Case No. 2016-CA-1271-MF OSCEOLA COUNTY, a political subdivision of the State of Florida, Plaintiff,
vs.
IE INVESTMENTS LLC, a Florida corporation, formerly known as IE LLC, a Florida corporation; MICHAEL WARD a/k/a MIKE BUSEY, as tenant in possession; TENANT # 2, as unknown tenant in possession; TENANT # 3, as unknown tenant in possession; TENANT # 4, as unknown tenant in possession, Defendant(s).

NOTICE OF SALE
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to a Summary Final Judgment of Foreclosure dated the 29th day of November, 2017 entered in Case Number: 2016-CA-001271-MF in the Circuit Court of the Ninth Judicial Circuit, in and for Osceola County, Florida, ARMANDO RAMIREZ, Clerk of the above-entitled Court, will sell to the highest and best bidder, or bidders, for cash, at the Osceola County Courthouse, 2 Courthouse Square, Suite 2600/Room # 2602, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, at 11:00 a.m. on the 25th day of JANUARY, 2018 the real and personal property described as follows and as set forth in said Summary Final Judgment of Foreclosure to-wit: **The first subject parcel is described as:**

SLIC PB B PG 28 LOT 8 SECTION 32, TOWNSHIP 26 SOUTH, RANGE 31

EAST
Tax Parcel No. 32-26-31-4950-0001-0080

The second subject parcel is described as:

SLIC PB B PG 27 LOT 1 LYING E OF HICKORY TREE RD SECTION 31, TOWNSHIP 26S, RANGE 31E

Tax Parcel No. 31-26-31-4950-0001-0010
Any person claiming an interest in the surplus from the sale, if any, other than the property owner as of the date of the lis pendens must file a claim within 60 days after the sale.

If you are a person with a disability, who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact ADA Coordinator Armando Ramirez, Osceola County Court Administration at 407-742-2417, Fax 407-835-5079 or at ctadm2@oscnjcc.org, Osceola County Courthouse, 2 Courthouse Square, Suite 6300, Kissimmee, Florida 34741 within 2 working days of this Notice of Sale; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.

Dated at Kissimmee, Florida on the 4th of December, 2017.

/s/ Frank M. Townsend
FRANK M. TOWNSEND
Florida Bar No. 0785911
Deputy County Attorney
Osceola County
Attorney's Office
1 Courthouse Square,
Suite 4700,
Kissimmee, Florida 34741
Telephone (407)742-2200
Facsimile (407)742-2217
Primary e-mail: Frank.Townsend@osceola.org
Secondary e-mail: County.Attorney@osceola.org
Attorney for Plaintiff
December 14, 21, 2017

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS PARADE 2018



The city of Kissimmee hosted their signature Festival of Lights Parade on Saturday night illuminating the historic streets of downtown Kissimmee. This year's parade theme was "Jingle Bell Rock". Top row: Greg Gahris, treasurer with Osceola County Education Association, donned a set of pointy ears to ride in this year's parade. Members of Kissimmee Utility Authority's maintenance crew that volunteered aid to restore power to the people of Puerto Rico, were honored with a place on the power company's float. Second row: Jennifer, one of Osceola High School's Marching Kowboys' elves, lights up Broadway with her smile. The Free and Accepted Masons of Florida Kissimmee Lodge 68 wave to the crowds. Bottom row: The national Glam More Us float carries teen Rebecca Rodgers (in white) up Broadway. Santa and Mrs. Claus make an appearance at the end of the parade.

News-Gazette Photos by Rob Herbert

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COOKING ON A DEADLINE

Try black lentil and butternut squash

Black lentils have so much drama to them, especially when they are paired with anything that is contrasting in color ... which is pretty much anything that isn't black as well.

If you prefer to cook the lentils in chicken or vegetable broth, you will have a more flavorful dish all around. If you use vegetarian broth and skip the anchovies, you will have a vegetarian dish, but if that's not of consequence to you and yours, do keep the anchovies, no matter what liquid you pick. They bring depth and umami and a something-something to the dressing.

BLACK LENTIL AND BUTTERNUT SQUASH WITH PROVENCAL VINAIGRETTE

Start to finish: 50 minutes
Serves 8

1 butternut squash
2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
2 cups black lentils
3 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 teaspoon Sriracha sauce or to taste
2 anchovies, rinsed and mashed to a paste with a fork
2 teaspoon minced fresh

thyme leaves

2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Fresh thyme sprigs to garnish (optional)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

Peel the butternut squash well (this often takes a couple of passes with a vegetable peeler to get to the bright orange flesh), then trim the top and bottom off. Cut the bottom bulb off the squash, then cut both the top part and the bottom part of the squash in half vertically. Use a large spoon to scoop out the seeds and stringy bits from the bottom bulb. Slice the squash into slices about two inches in each direction, and 1/4-inch thick.

Place the squash on a rimmed baking sheet and toss it with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and spread it out on the baking sheet so that it is mostly in a single layer. Roast the squash for about 20 minutes until tender, and perhaps slightly browned in a spot or two.

While the squash is roasting, add the lentils to the boiling water or broth. Return to a boil, then adjust the heat so that the liquid is at a simmer, and simmer uncovered for about 20 to 25 minutes until the lentils



This February 2017 photo shows black lentil and butternut squash in New York. This dish is from a recipe by Katie Workman. AP

are tender but not mushy.

While the squash and lentils are cooking, in a small container add the remaining tablespoon olive oil, rice vinegar, Sriracha, anchovy paste, thyme, Dijon mustard, and salt and pepper to

taste. Cover and shake to blend well.

When the lentils have finished cooking, spread them out on a plate or baking sheet and let them cool to warm or room temperature. Place them in a large bowl

with the squash, and drizzle the dressing over. Gently toss so they are well coated, and transfer to a serving platter. Garnish with the thyme sprigs if desired and serve warm or at room temperature.

Nutrition information per serving: 224 calories; 37 calories from fat; 4 g fat (0 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 1 mg cholesterol; 327 mg sodium; 39 g carbohydrate; 9 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 11 g protein.

Devouring Your Budget

Eating out is a sneaky money-sucker

If you were to guess how much you spend on eating out per month, chances are you'll miss the mark by a quite a bit.

In a recent study, I found that adults tend to underestimate how much they spend on eating out by more than twice what they're actually spending.

This is a significant chunk of cash. So why is there such a big gap between how much we think we spend and how much we actually spend? And how could it be bridged?

When 'mental accounting' doesn't add up

Self-control isn't easy, but one way that people try to control how much they spend is by using mental constraints – or rules of thumb – to prevent themselves from spending too much.

"Mental accounting," a concept first proposed by Nobel Laureate in Economics Dr. Richard Thaler, describes how we create a mental ledger for our various monthly budgets, whether it's food (eating out or buying groceries), transpor-

tation (walking or taking a cab) or entertainment (going to the theater or staying in to watch a movie).

Given the brain's enormous capabilities, you'd expect mental accounting to be pretty effective. Unfortunately, it's not always helpful in self-control.

It's difficult to resist the temptation to consume, particularly when we're enticed in so many ways. Think about holiday shopping: You're at the mall, you're hungry, you pass the food court – and catch a whiff of french fries. Sure, you have leftovers back home. But it's so quick and easy to buy a meal right then and there. A combination of environmental stimulation and a lack of self-control can cause people to act impulsively.

A problem most aren't aware of

In my study, I found evidence to show the limitations of mental accounting.

First I asked participants to esti-

mate their weekly budgets for eating out. Several days later, I asked them the same question. But during the interim, I also had them report, each day, whether they ate out or not, and how they felt about their financial well-being.

By having them make daily notes, it alerted to them to how often they were eating out. So when it came time to ask them, again, to estimate their weekly budget for eating out, the estimates were, on average, more than two times higher than their first estimate. The participants thought they knew how much they were spending on food away from the home, only to later increase their estimates.

My study also found that those who tended to eat out more overall had a bigger gap between their first and second reported budgets. In other words, the more they ate out, the more they underestimated how much they were spending on eating out.

Perhaps most surprisingly, many of the participants weren't

even aware that there was a big difference between their first and second budgets.

Regaining control

This phenomenon matters because around the world, people are eating out more than at any point in modern human history. According to most estimates, it constitutes as much (or more) than 45 percent of food expenditures in the United States.

More importantly, studies have shown that those earning less tend to spend a greater proportion of their disposable incomes on eating out. And while eating out doesn't necessarily need to be unhealthy, people often aren't aware what's in the prepared meals we're buying from restaurants, markets and cafeterias. Researchers are still studying the health consequences of eating out, but they do know that selecting a meal from a menu immediately limits food choices, which could lead to less healthy food decisions.

What to do?

Relying less on mental accounting is a good first step. Writing out a weekly or monthly food budget can reverse these trends. (There are also apps that can help with this.)

One way to get a snapshot of your eating out behavior is to track it over the course of a week or two. Make a note every time you eat out, documenting how much you spend, who you eat with and what you order. Understanding the patterns of your choices and behaviors will make lifestyle changes seem less daunting, and self-control more manageable.

The challenges of self-control aren't new, of course. The Greek philosopher Plato once said, "The first and best victory is to conquer self."

But in a culture that implores people to "let loose" and "live a little," self-control shouldn't be equated with self-punishment. I like to point to a maxim of celebrated chef Julia Child: "You must have discipline to have fun."

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Veggie-filled spring rolls offer the perfect holiday detox

If you are up to your eyeballs in eggnog, you're probably in desperate need of a detox. And by detox, we mean a truckload of fresh fruits and vegetables prepared as minimally as possible, because you have things to do! And we're not just talking any vegetables. We're talking super cruciferous vegetables, full of the good fuel that your body needs to rev up for the new year.

Though the term may be unfamiliar, cruciferous vegetables are not. Arugula, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, and radishes are among many vegetables in the cruciferous family, which are prized for their flavor, texture, and nutrients. Chef Katherine Polenz says, "Cruciferous vegetables are underutilized, but are so rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and nutrients. Dark leafy kale is high in minerals and proteins, and provides a great textural addition."

This Vegetable Spring Rolls recipe is packed full of these super-vegetables, which means it's also full of antioxidants; fiber; vitamins C, E, and K; and folate. We've added some creamy hummus and the ultra-flavorful dukkah spice blend.

An aromatic spice blend with Egyptian roots, dukkah is unique because it includes seeds and nuts, like hazelnuts, pistachios, and sesame seeds, which adds a welcome richness to vegetarian recipes. Dukkah is commonly used as a seasoning on traditional flatbreads, but once you try it, you'll be hard pressed to find something that couldn't use a sprinkle. It should be easy to find at your local grocery store or specialty market.

To pair with the spices, we've added some of our favorite crunchy cruciferous veggies, which also happen to be vibrant in flavor and color. Each vegetable, from the kohlrabi (kind of like radish/broccoli) to the watermelon radish, lends a new flavor and texture to the spring roll, so each bite is unique. The beauty of this recipe is that you can mix and match your favorite flavors, adding broccoli, shredded cabbage, or

even tofu.

We call for most of the vegetables to be julienned, which is a cut in the shape of a thin matchstick. This cut is perfect for a spring roll, because it's big enough to be crunchy, but thin enough to bite through. The best way to cut a julienne is to slice each vegetable about 1/8-inch thick, then cut those slices into matchsticks. A mandolin will do it twice as fast, if you have one.

Once you have your juliennes in order, it's time to give the kale a little extra attention. Kale is a needy vegetable though to be fair, it really does a lot of work for us, and we probably owe it a good massage from time to time. If you've ever declared, "Ugh, I hate kale," it's probably because it wasn't properly coaxed and coaxed into a good mood.

For sciency reasons (enzymes, compounds), kale benefits from a literal massage, where you take the leaves and rub them together until they soften. You will see a notable change in the appearance of the leaves, which will turn a more vibrant shade of green, and they will also be much softer and more tender. The kale will also be sweeter.

Serve these spring rolls as a light lunch, on a platter as a party snack, or alongside a nice veggie soup for a satisfying dinner. And if a raw, vegetarian spring roll is going a little too cold turkey, we'll look the other way if you want to add some grilled shrimp or chicken. Maybe just not that leftover prime rib.

VEGETABLE SPRING ROLLS

Servings: 12
Start to finish: 45 minutes

- 1 cup plain yogurt
- Zest and juice from 1 lemon
- Sea salt, to taste
- 6 to 8 leaves lacinato (or Tuscan) kale
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 12 spring roll wrappers
- 1 cup hummus



This Dec. 6, 2017 photo provided by The Culinary Institute of America shows vegetable spring rolls in Hyde Park, N.Y. This dish is from a recipe by the CIA.

- 1 kohlrabi, peeled and julienned
- 1 watermelon radish, peeled and julienned
- 2 tablespoons Egyptian dukkah spice blend, plus more as needed
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup cilantro or mint leaves
- 1 daikon radish, peeled and julienned
- 4 red radishes, julienned
- 3 small (or 1 medium) beets, peeled and julienned
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Toasted black sesame seeds

In a small bowl, combine the yogurt, lemon zest, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt. Stir to combine, then cover and refrigerate.

Trim the stems from the kale leaves and cut the leaves into 4-inch squares (you will need 12 total). Transfer the kale to a large resealable bag and add the olive oil and a pinch of salt. Seal the bag and gently massage the leaves to

tenderize the kale.

Fill a large shallow bowl with warm water. One at a time, dip the spring roll wrappers into the water and soak until just pliable, about 10 seconds. Remove from the water and lay on a clean work surface and blot the wrap to remove any excess water.

Starting at about 1 inch from the lower edge, place a square of the massaged kale, then spread about 1 tablespoon of hummus across the kale. Top with a thin layer of kohlrabi and watermelon radish. Sprinkle with about 1/2 teaspoon of dukkah, about 1 tablespoon of green onion, and about 1 tablespoon of herbs. Top with a layer of daikon, red radish, and beet, then season with additional dukkah or salt and pepper, to taste.

Dampen your fingertips. Carefully, but firmly, pull the lower edge of the wrap up and over the filling to start the roll. After the first full rotation, fold in each side

of the wrap to close in the ends and continue to roll closed, ending with the seam-side down.

Transfer the completed roll to a platter, and then continue to form 12 rolls. Do not stack the finished rolls, as they will stick together if touching. Cover the finished rolls with lightly oiled parchment paper and refrigerate until ready to serve.

To serve the spring rolls, use a very sharp knife to cut each roll in half. Drizzle with the reserved lemon yogurt sauce and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

Chef's Note: If kohlrabi or watermelon radishes are unavailable, substitute with an equal amount of prepared broccoli slaw mix, jicama, or chayote squash.

Nutrition information per serving: 193 calories; 57 calories from fat; 6 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 6 mg cholesterol; 399 mg sodium; 32g carbohydrate; 10 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 5 g protein.

Tradition important in Illinois woman's Christmas baking

CARTHAGE, Ill. (AP) — Tradition is one of the most important ingredients in Amy Graham's Christmas baking.

The Carthage woman enjoys passing down the recipes she learned to love as a child -- like rosette cookies always made by her mother -- to her nine great-nieces and nephews.

"It's like a little pancake batter cooked on a hot iron that is heated up in oil," she said. "The batter is not sweet at all, then you dust them with powdered sugar. That gives them a distinct flavor and a little more sweetness."

With the oldest great-niece a freshman in high school, Graham said it is time to share how to make the light, delicate cookies fried one at a time for less than a minute.

"The trick is to make sure the iron's hot before you dip it into the thin batter. Otherwise it won't stick," she said. "Dip it to a quarter-inch shy of the top of the iron. You can't dip the whole iron in; otherwise it won't come off."

Graham usually bakes with her two great-nieces and a great-nephew who live in Carthage, but the

holidays often bring in family members from Colorado, Mississippi and even London to create even more fun in the kitchen.

"Having your kitchen full of family and sharing makes you a better cook," Graham said. "If I have

three, four or five all helping me at once, we divide up the tasks so everybody gets a turn and everybody contributes to whatever we're making from the littlest one up to the oldest one."

It is hands-on for all ages -- and hands in the dough.

"You start with a spoon, of course, but as you add flour, it gets more and more difficult to stir. The best part is getting your hands in the dough and mashing it together," Graham said.

Other favorites in the kitchen are Nana's sugar cookies, another traditional cookie for any holiday.

"They have sour cream incorporated into the dough and come out soft and puffed up," Graham said.

Delicate fluffy pancakes are a favorite for holiday mornings, and lasagna made with hot sausage can feed a hungry crowd.

Graham learned to cook and bake from her mother



In this Nov. 13, 2017 photo, rosette cookies, are an important part of Amy Graham's Christmas traditions. The Carthage, Ill., woman enjoys passing down the recipes she learned to love as a child, like rosette cookies always made by her mother, to her nine great-nieces and nephews.

and her grandmothers, enjoying it so much that she had her own summer business during high school selling cookies, cakes and pies.

Previous generations baked weeks ahead of time

to be prepared for the holidays.

"I'm usually not that organized. I might be baking Christmas morning with some things," Graham said.

She will not change in-

gredients found in favorite vintage recipes, but she sometimes uses modern shortcuts in preparation.

"For the most part, baking tends to be a traditional follow the recipe. Don't try to change it," she

said. "Keep it true to its form because that's what makes those memories so fond. You remember how wonderful the taste was, so why mess with a good thing?"

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Tillerson says US open to possible talks with NKorea

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has softened America's stance on possible talks with North Korea, calling it "unrealistic" to expect the nuclear-armed country to come to the table ready to give up a weapons of mass destruction program that it invested so much in developing. Tillerson said his boss, President Donald Trump, endorses this position.

Tillerson's remarks Tuesday came two weeks after North Korea conducted a test with a missile that could potentially carry a nuclear warhead to the U.S. Eastern Seaboard — a milestone in its decades-long drive to pose an atomic threat to its American adversary that Trump has vowed to prevent, using military force if necessary.

"We are ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk. And we are ready to have the first meeting without preconditions," Tillerson said at the Atlantic Council think tank.

He said that the North would need to hold off on its weapons testing. This year, the North has conducted more than 20 ballistic missile launches and one nuclear test explosion, its most powerful yet.

"Let's just meet and we can talk about the weather if you want to. We can talk about whether it's a square table or a round table if that's what you are excited about," Tillerson said. "But can we at least sit down and see each other face to face and then we can begin to lay out a map, a road map, of what we might be willing to work towards."

Although Tillerson said the goal of U.S. policy remained denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, he added it was "not realistic to say we're only going to talk if you come to the table ready to give up your program. They've too much invested in it. The president is very realistic about that as well."

Baik Tae-hyun, spokesman of Seoul's Unification Ministry, said of Tillerson's comments that Seoul wishes for talks to "happen soon" if they contribute to the goal of finding a peaceful solution for



Secretary of State Rex Tillerson speaks at the 2017 Atlantic Council-Korea Foundation Forum in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2017.

the North Korean nuclear problem.

He said Washington and Seoul both maintain a firm stance that North Korea's nuclear weapons cannot be tolerated and should be completely discarded in a peaceful way.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement later Tuesday that: "The President's views on North Korea have not changed."

"North Korea is acting in an unsafe way not only toward Japan, China, and South Korea, but the entire world. North Korea's actions are not good for anyone and certainly not good for North Korea," she said.

In public, Trump has been less sanguine about the possibilities of diplomacy with Kim Jong Un's authoritarian government, which faces growing international isolation and sanctions as it pursues nuclear weapons in defiance of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions. In

October, Trump appeared to undercut Tillerson when he said he was "wasting his time" trying to negotiate with North Korea, just as Tillerson said the U.S. had backchannel communications with the North.

Trump, who has traded insults with Kim, kept up his tough talk on Tuesday. As he signed a \$700 billion defense authorization bill that includes additional spending on missile defense, he referred to North Korea as a "vile dictatorship."

"We're working very diligently on that — building up forces. We'll see how it all turns out. It's a very bad situation — a situation that should have been handled long ago by other administrations," Trump said.

Tillerson did not indicate that North Korea had signaled a new readiness to talk, but said that "they clearly understand that if we're going to talk, we've got to have a period of qui-

et" in weapons tests.

Tillerson stressed that the U.S. would not accept a nuclear-armed North Korea, as it flouts international norms and might spread weapons technology to non-state groups in ways that other nuclear powers have not.

In a rare admission of discussion of a highly sensitive topic, Tillerson said Washington has discussed with Beijing how North Korea's nuclear weapons might be secured in case of instability there.

"The most important thing to us would be securing those nuclear weapons that they have already developed and ensuring that nothing falls into the hands of people who we would not want to have it. We've had conversations with the Chinese about how that might be done," Tillerson said.

It appeared to be the first public recognition from an administration official that the U.S. has discussed

North Korean contingencies with China, which fought with the North against the U.S. in the 1950-53 Korean War. The Trump administration has held a series of high-level dialogues with Beijing this year, and U.S. and Chinese generals held rare talks in late November about how the two militaries might communicate in a crisis although U.S. officials said the dialogue wasn't centered on North Korea.

Tillerson said that the U.S. has assured China that in the event that American troops had to cross northward of the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas, it would retreat back south once stability returned.

"That is our commitment we made to them. Our only objective is to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, and that is all," Tillerson said.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said

Tillerson's proposal for direct talks with North Korea without preconditions was overdue and a welcome shift in position, but both sides needed to demonstrate restraint.

"For North Korea that means a halt to all nuclear and ballistic missile tests, and for the United States, refraining from military maneuvers and overflights that appear to be practice runs for an attack on the North," Kimball said. "If such restraint is not forthcoming, we can expect a further escalation of tensions and a growing risk of a catastrophic war."

Last week, the United States flew a B-1B supersonic bomber over South Korea as part of a massive combined aerial exercise involving more than 200 warplanes. North Korea says such drills are preparations for invasion.

Gillibrand got a fight she wants after Trump's fiery tweet

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand got a fight she wants after President Donald Trump lashed out at the New York Democrat in a provocative tweet that claimed she'd begged him for campaign contributions and would "do anything" for them.

Gillibrand, who's up for re-election next year and is considered a possible presidential contender in 2020, has been an outspoken voice in the national debate over how to confront sexual assault and harassment. She's argued that the rules in institutions from Congress to Hollywood to the U.S. military are set to benefit the powerful and the favored at the expense of the vulnerable.

Gillibrand and a chorus of Democrats declared

Trump's tweet to be sexually suggestive, an assertion the White House flatly rejected. Appearing Wednesday on NBC's "Today" show, Gillibrand was asked whether she'd misread the meaning of Trump's tweet. "No," she responded.

She said the tweet was "a sexual smear intended to silence me."

The fiery exchange with Trump could brighten the spotlight on Gillibrand's campaign to upend the dynamics and put power in the hands of the victims while simultaneously pushing the 51-year-old mother of two boys to the forefront of an unformed Democratic presidential field.

She's scathed icons in her own party along the way. Gillibrand was appointed

to Hillary Clinton's Senate seat, but she recently said Bill Clinton should have resigned the presidency for his improprieties. That led Clinton loyalists to criticize her as an ungrateful opportunist.

The back-and-forth between Trump and Gillibrand on Tuesday came as a wave of sexual misconduct allegations roils Capitol Hill, forcing several lawmakers out of office in just the last week alone. Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., said he would resign amid an ethics probe into accusations that he sexually harassed several women. Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Trent Franks, R-Ariz., also quit after misconduct accusations surfaced.

"I do think this is a reck-

oning. This is a watershed moment," Gillibrand said of the resignations in speaking to The Associated Press late last week. "Politicians should be held to the highest standards, not the lowest standards."

And she rejected the notion that she and other Democrats, by demanding Franken and Conyers step aside, are making a calculation they hope will pay off politically as Trump continues to fend off allegations of sexual misconduct lodged over the last year by more than a dozen women.

"That couldn't be more cynical and backward," said Gillibrand, who was one of the first Democrats to call for Franken to step down. "It has nothing to do with politics. This whole

debate is, 'Do we care about women?'"

Gillibrand served notice several years ago that combating sexual assault would be her issue. A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, she and other female lawmakers dressed down senior military leaders at a headline-making hearing, insisting sexual assault in the ranks has cost the services the trust and respect of the American people as well as the nation's men and women in uniform.

"Not every single commander necessarily wants women in the force. Not every single commander believes what a sexual assault is. Not every single commander can distinguish between a slap on the ass and a rape because they

merge all of these crimes together," Gillibrand told the uniformed men in 2013.

Four years later, Gillibrand added her voice to the growing number of male senators calling for Trump to resign in the face of multiple accusations of inappropriate sexual behavior. A day after her broadside, Trump singled her out.

The president tweeted: "Lightweight Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a total flunky for Chuck Schumer and someone who would come to my office 'begging' for campaign contributions not so long ago (and would do anything for them), is now in the ring fighting against Trump. Very disloyal to Bill & Crooked-USED!"

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A night of stars

Make-A-Wish sends 7 kids to meet Star Wars stars at premiere

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tyler Woodward was a Star Wars fan long before his cancer diagnosis. His whole life, really. The 17-year-old says he was born "right when all the prequels were coming out" and grew up having lightsaber fights with his two older brothers.

So after chemo took his hair last year, he knew what he wanted from the Make-A-Wish Foundation: A trip to "Star Wars: The Last Jedi" premiere.

A week ago, he learned his wish had been granted. And on Saturday, after flying out from Ohio, Tyler put on a blazer and his BB-8 tie for the film's world premiere in Los Angeles. He was one of seven teens with life-threatening illnesses to attend the star-studded premiere and elaborate after-party with Make-A-Wish. While the organization couldn't promise personal interactions with celebrities, the kids and their parents had a special spot on the red carpet where they could see the stars arrive.

"I've been telling people that like 50 percent of the reason I wished for this is just so I could meet Daisy Ridley," Tyler said before the premiere from beneath his floppy blond curls. But no matter what happened that night, he said, "I don't really see myself being disappointed."

Fourteen-year-old Olivia Sava, who, like Tyler, suffers from a form of leukemia, made a wish about "The Last Jedi" just after "The Force Awakens" came out in 2015. She said her dad got her into Star Wars when she was little.

"I'm most excited to see Daisy Ridley," said soft-spoken Olivia of Woodmere, New York, who wore a purse to the premiere that looked like the Death Star. "She's an amazing actress and I really want to meet her."

Established in 1980, the nonprofit Make-A-Wish Foundation aims to grant a wish to every child diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition. Disney, now the parent company of the Star Wars franchise, granted that very first wish: A trip to Disney-



In this Dec. 9, 2017 photo, "Star Wars: The Last Jedi" cast member Mark Hamill poses with, from left, Jacob Martin, Isaac Rochin, Olivia Sava, Shannon McNabb, Tyler Woodward, Chris Alegria and Max Gavenman at the premiere of the film at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The teens, who are facing life-threatening medical conditions, were among the special guests at the premiere as part of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

land. The company is now involved with almost half the wishes submitted each year, and is supporting the organization this month with a \$5 donation for every photo of Mickey Mouse ears shared on social media with the hashtag #ShareYourEars.

The Make-A-Wish group posed at "The Last Jedi" premiere wearing Star Wars-themed Mickey ears. The kids also bonded during their red carpet experience. When one boy sat down during all the excitement, one of the girls checked to see if he was feeling OK. When another boy was trembling too much to take a photo, the boy next to him helped steady his hands. And when the group spotted Ridley arriving on the red carpet, a buzz of collective excitement overcame them. "Daisy, I had cancer!" Tyler

playfully shouted to the actress from too far away. "I've had brain surgery!" added Chris Alegria, a gregarious 18-year-old from Pembroke Pines, Florida, whose head is scarred from having tumors removed. He wore his prom tuxedo to the premiere.

Both Tyler and Chris brought their moms along for the wish experience, which included a weekend in Hollywood and a trip to Universal Studios.

"My mom led me through this whole cancer fight," Chris said before the premiere. "Cancer sucks, to say the least, and I could always count on her... She would always comfort me. She's my best friend."

Tyler's mother, Karen Woodward, said she was just grateful to see her son so happy. "He's been through a lot

the last year-and-a-half, with the chemo and losing all his hair and missing school and all that, so this has really been a great event... just to be able to give him something that's exciting to look forward to and that he's going to remember forever," she said. "It's so much fun to watch the excitement in your child. I get a lot out of that."

The red carpet outside the Shrine Auditorium, where a giant Imperial Walker towered over guests, was crowded with stars. One by one — writer-director Rian Johnson, Andy Serkis, Laura Dern, Gwendoline Christie, Benicio del Toro, Laura Dern, John Boyega and Adam Driver — came over to meet the Make-A-Wish group. And Ridley, too.

"Hi. You're Daisy Ridley," Tyler said, mostly to himself, when the actress

approached. As she posed for a photo with Chris, Tyler fished a card from his mom's purse that had Ridley, or Rey's, face on it.

"Can you sign this?" he asked her.

"Sure," Ridley said. "How are you guys doing?" "Great now," Tyler said.

It took him a second to snap a selfie because he was shaking, which he acknowledged aloud.

"Is it weird if I ask for a hug?" he said.

Ridley happily obliged. Then Chris wanted a hug, too. Olivia was content with a handshake and a selfie.

Tyler was breathless and shaking as the actress walked away.

"I just hugged Daisy Ridley," he said. "That was Daisy Ridley."

"We just hugged her. I can't believe it," Chris said. "Daisy Ridley," Tyler

said.

After watching "The Last Jedi" alongside the cast, the group went to the after-party, which was modeled after a casino-like city in the Star Wars galaxy. Guests could play table games to win souvenir Star Wars pins and pose for photos with characters from the new film. And the Make-A-Wish kids could celebrate being among the first fans in the world to see the anticipated eighth chapter in the core Star Wars saga.

"I'm going to see it like hundreds of times before I'm dead, but it's up there in terms of being not only the best Star Wars movie, but the best movie I've ever seen," Tyler said. "Obviously, my experience is better than most, seeing the world premiere and getting to meet all the actors first, but it was amazing."

Would-be suicide bomber in New York City faces court hearing

NEW YORK (AP) — The man accused of carrying out a bomb attack in New York City's subway system was influenced by the sermons and writings of a radical Muslim preacher, Bangladeshi officials said Wednesday in the hours before the man was expected to have his first court appearance in the U.S.

Akayed Ullah, a Bangladeshi immigrant living in Brooklyn, had asked his wife in Bangladesh to read the writings and listen to the sermons of Mou-lana Jasimuddin Rahmani, the currently imprisoned leader of a banned group called Ansarullah Bangla Team, said Monirul Islam, a top official of Bangladesh's counterterrorism department.

The group has been linked to killings and attacks on secular academics and atheist bloggers in Bangladesh. Rahmani is serving time in prison for his involvement in the killings.

The wife was questioned in Bangladesh and told investigators that her husband discussed Rahman's writings with her during his last visit home, Islam said.

Ullah, 27, was expected to make his first court appearance Wednesday in New York, where he is in a hospital being treated for burns from a pipe bomb he strapped to his body and detonated in a pedestrian tunnel linking two busy subway stations.

Prosecutors in New York said that after his capture,

Ullah told interrogators he was on a mission to punish the U.S. for attacking the Islamic State group.

"His motivation," Acting U.S. Attorney Joon Kim said, "was not a mystery."

Investigators found bomb-making materials in his apartment. They said he carried out the attack after researching how to build a bomb a year ago and planned his mission for several weeks. The bomb was assembled in the past week using fragments of a metal pipe, a battery and a Christmas tree light bulb, along with the metal screws, authorities said.

The defendant "had apparently hoped to die in his own misguided rage, taking as many innocent

people as he could with him, but through incredible good fortune, his bomb did not seriously injure anyone other than himself," Kim said.

He was charged with providing material support to a terrorist group, use of a weapon of mass destruction and three bomb-related counts. He could get up to life in prison.

Relatives and police said Ullah last visited his wife and newborn son in Bangladesh in September, after which he returned to the United States.

Counterterrorism officials questioned the wife and her parents before releasing her Tuesday night, Islam said, adding that investigators were currently questioning his brother-in-law and also planned to

question any known close associates.

Ullah's wife, Jannatul Ferdous, told ABC News in a brief interview conducted through the closed door of her home in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that she had never heard her husband speak negatively of the U.S. She said when she spoke to him by phone the morning of the bombing, he gave no indication of what he planned to do.

With a tragedy averted and a growing certainty that he acted alone, attention turned to how best secure New York City's vast public transportation system and the daunting task of identifying those eager to do it harm.

The security "requires every single member of the public's help," said

New York Police Commissioner James O'Neill. "It requires their vigilance."

There also was political fallout, heightened by news that Ullah had taunted President Donald Trump on Facebook with a post that read, "Trump you failed to protect your nation."

In reaction to the bombing, the president demanded a tightening of immigration rules that allowed Ullah to enter the country in 2011 on a visa available to certain relatives of U.S. citizens. Less than two months ago, an Uzbek immigrant who came to the U.S. through a visa lottery was accused of killing eight people in New York by mowing them down with a truck along a bike path.





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EU negotiator says 'no turning back' on commitments

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said Wednesday there will be "no turning back" for Britain on commitments made during an initial divorce deal between the two, after his U.K. counterpart insisted it was merely a "statement of intent."

Barnier told legislators at the European Parliament that the negotiations so far have been "extremely complex and extraordinary" but insisted that he had made no concessions to the British side.

U.K. negotiator David Davis suggested over the weekend that the deal was less than cast in stone. But Barnier said "progress has been noted and recorded and is going to have to be translated into a legally binding withdrawal agreement" on the EU bill Britain faces, the maintenance of a transparent border between EU member Ireland and the U.K.'s Northern Ireland, and citizens' rights in each other's region.

The European Parlia-

ment's chief Brexit official, Guy Verhofstadt, said Davis was already backtracking after his statement Sunday, which riled officials in Brussels.

Verhofstadt said he and Davis had spoken by phone on Tuesday and that Davis "assured me it is absolutely not his intention, not the intention of the U.K. government, to backtrack on their commitments."

"The best way to secure this is that in the coming weeks we transpose all these commitments into the legal text of a withdrawal agreement," he said.

Most of the legislature had warm words for the performance of Barnier in running a tight ship during the talks and keeping the 27 remaining EU nations united in their stance.

EU leaders open a two-day summit on Thursday during which they are slated to agree that there has been "sufficient progress" for the talks to move to the second phase of future relations and trade, a subject

Britain wants to open as soon as possible.

Britain is due to leave the bloc in March 2019, but a Brexit deal will have to be agreed by the fall of 2018 to give national parliaments time to approve it.

European Union Council President Donald Tusk warned Tuesday that it would be a "furious race against time" to finish Brexit negotiations by autumn, saying only "moderate progress" has been achieved so far.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Theresa May was scrambling to stave off defeat on its key Brexit bill from lawmakers demanding a greater say over the decision.

The House of Commons is due to vote Wednesday on a motion insisting a deal with the EU require an Act of Parliament before it can take effect.

May's Conservative government lacks an overall majority, so it would only take a few Conservative rebels to join the opposition to deliver defeat.



AP
European Union chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier delivers his speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France, Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2017.

Brexit Secretary David Davis has written to Conservative lawmakers, promising the government will not implement a Brexit deal without Parliament's approval.

It's unclear whether the government has done

enough to avoid a defeat that would damage May's already precarious authority.

The vote comes as an amendment to the EU Withdrawal Bill, which is making its way through Parliament.

The bill forms the legal scaffolding for Brexit, converting some 12,000 EU laws into British statute on the day the U.K. leaves the bloc in March 2019. Without it, Britain could face a legal black hole the day after Brexit.

Under Putin, Russia increases clout in the Middle East

MOSCOW (AP) — When Russia launched a military campaign in Syria two years ago, President Vladimir Putin sought to save his ally from imminent collapse and break Russia's international isolation over a crisis in Ukraine.

He achieved that and more, emerging as a key stakeholder in the Middle East who has brokered deals with many of its key players — from Iran to Saudi Arabia to Turkey and Israel. It's a regional footprint that comes with a degree of clout that even the Soviet Union, which depended on a handful of Arab allies, couldn't dream of during the Cold War era.

And it was accomplished with limited resources and a lot of audacity.

"Vladimir Putin is determined to restore a greater role for Russia as a global power ... and the Middle East is really the main area where Russia has that potential, in part because the Soviet Union played that role in the Soviet period," said William Courtney, an adjunct senior fellow at RAND Corporation.

With just a few dozen jets and several thousand troops, Russia waded into Syria's war and stubbornly pressed its campaign despite international scorn and an outcry over resulting civilian casualties.

Russia's bold intervention in Syria came as the United States under President Barack Obama steered clear of military engagement and found itself in a series of acrimonious disputes with key allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia. Under the vastly inconsistent policies of Donald Trump, and in an era of an inward looking, America-first U.S. policy, Russia's maneuvers became all the more poignant on the global stage.

Putin's success in the region was on full display Monday, with the confident and upbeat leader moving between Syria, Egypt and Turkey in a whirlwind tour a week after announc-

ing he will seek re-election for another six-year term in March.

Speaking to Russian troops on the tarmac at Hmeimeem air base in Syria, Putin declared victory over the Islamic State group and Syrian rebels and announced he had ordered a scaling down of the Russian contingent in Syria. In Egypt, he signed a deal for the construction of a nuclear reactor on the country's Mediterranean coast and sought to strengthen his relationship with a key regional power that has in the past three years bought billions of dollars in Russian weapons. And in Turkey, a NATO member, the Russian leader appeared to be on the same page with strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan on key issues, including opposition to Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which sparked outrage across the region.

The Russian president was frequently derided for his penchant for a 19th century-style Realpolitik characterized by cynical political calculus. But Putin's approach paid off in Syria, where he managed to play on the conflicting interests of regional powers and strike deals with various players.

When Putin decided to intervene in Syria, President Bashar Assad was on the verge of collapse, his forces losing on all fronts. Within weeks, the Russian military had airlifted supplies needed to set up a base in Assad's heartland and launched an air campaign at the end of September 2015.

At first, observers were skeptical about Putin's Syria adventure given Russia's economic troubles and the overwhelming negative odds on the chaotic Syrian battlefield, where the Islamic State group, al-Qaida militants and a motley collection of rebels backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and others were routing Assad's shrinking military.

Many in the West and in Russia predicted Syria would turn into another Af-



AP
Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, escorts Russia's President Vladimir Putin, right, as he leaves their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, Monday, Dec. 11, 2017.

ghanistan — a botched Soviet intervention that led to massive losses and ended in a humiliating 1989 withdrawal after nearly a decade of fighting. Putin argued that Russia needed to intervene in Syria to fight a terror threat, but made it clear that he wasn't going to walk into a trap like the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Another reason for skepticism was the Russian military meltdown that followed the Soviet collapse. The army's vulnerabilities were highlighted by separatist wars in Chechnya and a brief 2008 war with Georgia, where the lack of modern communications and weapons, lack of coordination between various military branches and poor discipline were woefully apparent.

But the Syrian campaign suddenly saw a different Russian military — one armed with sophisticated precision weapons, well-trained, neatly-dressed and proud of its mission.

"Putin managed to explain

to the Russian people why Syria was important and not only did he explain it, he also showed them Syria wasn't going to be Afghanistan," Dmitry Trenin, director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, told The Associated Press.

The war saw the combat debut of an array of Russian weapons, including long-range cruise missiles that were fired from surface navy ships, submarines and bombers.

The display of Moscow's revamped arsenals also served another key goal — to show the U.S. and its NATO allies that Russia no longer exclusively relies on nuclear weapons. The new cruise missiles gave Putin a long-sought long-range precision cruise capability that only the U.S. had before.

Early in the campaign, Moscow found itself on the verge of a military conflict with Ankara after a Turkish fighter jet downed a Russian warplane on the Syrian border in November 2015.

But just a few months later, Putin mended ties with Turkey, offering President Recep Tayyip Erdogan strong support after a failed coup attempt. They struck a deal on Syria, setting up de-escalation zones that helped reduce fighting.

Russia also reached out to other key players — from Iran, which staunchly backed Assad, to the Saudis, the Qataris and others who supported the opposition. It also communicated with Israel to make sure the conflict didn't hurt their friendly relationship.

Russian military successes in Syria and its rapprochement with Turkey paved the way for another Putin diplomatic coup — a warming of ties with Saudi Arabia, Moscow's opponent since Cold War times when it armed Afghan fighters battling the Soviet invasion. In a first-ever visit by a Saudi monarch, King Salman visited Russia in October.



While declaring victory in Syria, Putin made it clear

Russia is there to stay. He plans to expand the air base and turn a crumbling Soviet-era naval supply facility in Syria's port of Tartus into a full-fledged navy base capable of hosting big ships.

Russia has also drafted a deal with Egypt to allow its warplanes to use bases there — a deployment unseen since the times when Egypt was a key Soviet ally in the Mideast before going to the U.S. side in the mid-1970s.

Courtney, the RAND analyst, said despite Putin's successes in the region, Russia will remain a limited great power that serves mainly as a military supplier because it lacks the resources and capability that the West has for nation building or reconstruction.

"The challenge for Putin is to turn the use of his military force and military weapons supplies in the Middle East to something that is a lasting success, and we don't yet see how Russia is going to get there," he said.

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'Take all their excuses away'

Hard cases in heroin fight

CHICAGO (AP) — The van was coming for Richard Rivera, but it was taking a long time. He waited inside the entrance of Saint Anthony Hospital where he had spent the past three days getting off heroin. His next stop: a sober-living facility.

As his addiction counselor, DeValle Williams, kept a silent watch, the 49-year-old Rivera griped about the people who found him a bed 22 miles away, complete with meals, job training and gym access.

"They couldn't find me a place closer?" he grumbled.

Would Rivera get in the van, Williams wondered. Or would he walk away?

Long before President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a national emergency and pledged to "overcome addiction in America," Williams was fighting in the trenches, where it's tough to tell victory from defeat. More than 64,000 died of drug overdoses last year in the U.S., most from opioids.

At 41, he's been a counselor for two decades, the last few years helping people with drug addiction. Now he runs a new program that works to get hospital patients struggling with opioids directly into treatment.

Similar programs, called "warm handoffs," have been shown by early research to decrease the chance of relapse. Funding comes from last year's 21st Century Cures Act, which sets aside \$1 billion to tackle the deadliest drug crisis in U.S. history. Illinois is spending \$2.4 million of its Cures Act money for warm-handoff programs at Saint Anthony and eight other hospitals.

All states got a slice in April and expect to get more next year. They must spend 80 percent on opioid addiction treatment and many are teaming up with hospitals

on new strategies, as opioid-related hospitalizations soar.

Williams and others on the front lines see the Cures money as a glint of hope, but they know addiction is a powerful adversary.

Those who seek help at Saint Anthony are hard cases. They come with arrest records, broken relationships and mental health problems. Open-air drug markets flourish mere blocks from the small Catholic hospital, a 119-year-old pillar of Chicago's working-class, gang-ravaged southwest side. As in other hospitals across the nation, doctors in the emergency room treat overdose after overdose — sometimes reviving drug users they've revived before.

Rivera arrived here on a Saturday sick from heroin withdrawal. He got hooked on heroin two years ago when a friend asked him to help sell it. "I started little by little," he recalled. "Three days later, I'm a junkie."

His public health insurance would cover three days in the hospital's new medical detox unit on the sixth floor. Rivera would receive methadone to ease his nausea, cramps and shaking legs. And he would meet with Williams.

"My job is to read people," Williams said.

Part of a three-person team, Williams sees any patient who will talk with him. He and his colleagues coach, listen and attempt to match people with addiction treatment in the community. They track patients after they leave the hospital, offering treatment to those who've said no in the past and following the progress of patients in recovery.

The work is challenging. Even as a team member found housing for Rivera, Williams studied bus routes and methadone centers so

he could arrange care for another patient who asked for treatment near her home so she could keep babysitting her 11-month-old grandchild. And then he took a call from downstairs: A middle-aged woman, a former patient, was in the hospital's clinic, tearfully begging for another chance. Williams went down to speak with her.

Minutes later, he worked the phones between bites of pizza in the cafeteria. This was tricky. The woman had burned bridges by walking out of treatment. Williams pounded the table as he talked to a treatment center that didn't want to see her again. "This is me groveling," he said. "This is me begging. I need that bed ... What do I have to do?"

He left messages. Some lines rang and rang.

Although Williams is embedded at Saint Anthony, he and his team work for a large nonprofit treatment provider, Gateway Foundation, one of several groups helping Illinois on the hospital project. Similar hospital-based programs are springing up in Florida, Georgia, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Vermont, also funded with the temporary Cures dollars.

"It's all about not giving up" on patients, Williams said. "Take all their excuses away."

The next day, in Room 636, Rivera put on jeans and a baseball jacket, getting ready to leave. First, he had to meet with Alexander Hannah, a case manager from an insurance company with a state contract to keep Medicaid costs down.

Rivera was just one of Hannah's caseload of 102 of the most expensive patients. He made calls to change Rivera's approved pharmacy to one within walking distance

of the facility where he would be living. He gave Rivera the name of the closest hospital, and told him that he should be able to find work nearby.

Hannah and Rivera exchanged a fist bump. It was time to head downstairs. The van was coming.

"I'm not feeling good today," Rivera said in the lobby. "I'm getting chest pains."

Williams watched as Rivera walked into the hospital emergency room instead of through the front door. Then he watched him slip away. Rivera would be seen hours later jaywalking across a busy street and disappearing into an alley. In the days to come, his cellphone went unanswered.

Williams was undeterred. "It's just part of the job," Williams said in the elevator as he headed back to the sixth floor, where four other heroin users were trying to change their lives.

"I used to go home and cry," Williams said. "I've spent many days crying, cursing and yelling."

He learned, though, not to judge progress by a single day. People with cold feet, people who relapse, sometimes return to treatment. Like the woman who showed up pleading for another chance — she was now in treatment.

Nobody knows the best way to measure success in the fight against addiction. The things that are easiest to count — new doctors trained, new patients entering care — aren't particularly good predictors of long-term abstinence or lasting recovery. This particular week, eight opioid-addicted patients were admitted to Saint Anthony; the team helped half of them start treatment.

Progress — and failures — will be reported to the state of Illinois and the federal government. Ultimately, Con-



In this Tuesday, Oct. 24, photo, Albert Nunley takes his methadone dose at the Saint Anthony Hospital medical detox unit in Chicago.

gress will decide whether to give more money to this and other efforts.

Thursday morning. The van was coming, this time for 58-year-old Albert Nunley.

Two days earlier, he told a counselor he'd been using heroin for nearly 40 years. The fentanyl now lacing the heroin on the streets was scaring him. A friend recently died of an overdose. His doctor kept telling him to quit. Above all, Nunley felt guilty around his grandchildren.

"I don't want to die from drugs," he said.

Heroin for him wasn't about getting high, but about fending off withdrawal sickness. "You got to snort two dime bags in the morning, two in the afternoon and two at night. Just to make yourself feel right," Nunley said.

Now he was heading to his

first appointment at a methadone clinic, treatment arranged by the warm hand-off team. He smoked a cigarette outside the hospital. He'd been dressed and ready since dawn.

"I'm going to walk that straight line," he declared as the van pulled up. He clutched a plastic bag containing an umbrella, pretzels and some paperwork as he got in.

"You got all your discharge paperwork?" Williams asked from the driver's seat.

"Yeah, I got all that."

Nunley had goals, small ones: "I done took my first step. Now I want to ... stay focused ... on doing the things I got to do. Going to AA meetings and things like that."

The van arrived at the treatment center. Williams and Nunley shook hands, and Nunley walked through the door.

Gene therapy shows promise against blood-clotting disease

Gene therapy has freed 10 men from nearly all symptoms of hemophilia for a year so far, in a study that fuels hopes that a one-time treatment can give long-lasting help and perhaps even cure the blood disease.

Hemophilia almost always strikes males and is caused by lack of a gene that makes a protein needed for blood to clot. Small cuts or bruises can be life-threatening, and many people need treatments once or more a week to prevent serious bleeding.

The therapy supplies the missing gene, using a virus that's been modified so it won't cause illness but ferries the DNA instructions to liver cells, which use them to make the clotting factor. The treatment is given through an IV.

In a study published Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine, all 10 men given the therapy now make clotting factor in the normal range. Bleeding episodes were reduced from about one a month before gene therapy to less than one a year. Nine of the 10 no longer need clotting factor treatments, and the 10th needs far fewer of them. There were no serious side effects.

Follow-up is still short — a year on average. Some cells with the new gene might not pass it on as they divide, so the benefits may wane over time, but they've lasted eight years in other tests in people and up to 12

years so far in dogs.

"The hope is that this would be a one-time treatment" to fix the problem, said the study leader, Dr. Lindsey George of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Spark Therapeutics, the Philadelphia-based company that makes the treatment, and Pfizer, which now is working with Spark on it, paid for the study, and some of the study leaders work for or have stock in Spark.

Dr. Matthew Porteus of Stanford University, who wrote a commentary in the journal, called the results "striking" and said, "I think we're definitely on the road" to a cure.

It feels like one to Canadians Jay and Bill Konduros, brothers who live an hour's drive outside Toronto who were in the study.

"It's pretty magical," said Jay Konduros, 53, who runs a bakery and was treated in June 2016.

"Life-changing," said Bill Konduros, 58, a machinist treated in March.

Before, even small amounts of exertion would cause tiny muscle tears and bleeding problems requiring clotting factor treatment.

"Even something as innocuous as reaching over your head to get something out of a closet, or reaching down to tie a shoe" could trigger trouble, Bill Konduros said.

Six years ago, he nearly lost his leg after a motorcycle crash tore open an artery; he spent nearly a



This Saturday, Dec. 2, 2017 photo provided by Jay Konduros, left, shows him and his brother, Bill, at Jay's home in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada. The brothers, who have hemophilia, were involved in a gene therapy study for their condition.

month in the hospital. Since the gene therapy, neither brother has needed clotting factor treatment.

The therapy is still experimental and its eventual cost is unknown, but clotting factor treatment costs about \$200,000 per patient per year, Porteus said.

Another gene therapy, from BioMarin Pharmaceutical for a different form of hemophilia, also showed promise in a different study. Thirteen patients have been treated and have had a big drop in bleeding episodes and clotting factor treatments, study leaders report.

One-year results will be given at an American Society of Hematology conference that starts Saturday.

Other companies are working on hemophilia treatments; Sangamo Therapeutics is testing traditional gene therapy and gene editing approaches.

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Dems divided on when to fight over fate of young immigrants

WASHINGTON (AP) — For Illinois Rep. Luis Guterrez, a passionate, liberal Democrat of Puerto Rican descent, there is no more important issue in the year-end budget showdown than protecting from deportation hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children — and who have only known America as their home.

The fate of these "Dreamers," as they are commonly known, is one of the trickiest issues to resolve as the White House and Congress seek to avert a Christmas government shutdown that nobody says they want. House Democrats, and their leader, Nancy Pelosi, insist that the Dreamers be dealt with as part of a broader package that combines unfinished legislative business, including military spending, disaster aid and low-cost health care for children.

"You want a bipartisan budget and you want my vote? Then make it an American budget, one that

includes a pathway to freedom for our Dreamers," Gutierrez said. "It's the right thing to do."

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer cares about Dreamers, too, but he isn't playing hardball over immigration. At the top of his list of political concerns are the re-election bids next year of 10 Senate Democrats running in states that President Donald Trump won in 2016. Many of them want nothing to do with shutting down the government over immigration.

"I understand the passion on that. I'm not in favor of voting to shut down the government," said Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, where Trump won almost 70 percent of the vote. "There are a lot of things I feel passionate about. But I'm not going to make 300 million people suffer because I can't get the process working the way it should."

House and Senate Democrats stand divided as leaders look to wrap up a

sweeping spending deal by Dec. 22 and avoid a debilitating shutdown.

At issue is Trump's decision to rescind Barack Obama's executive order creating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which gave protected status to about 800,000 young immigrants in the country illegally. In scrapping the DACA order, Trump gave Congress until March to come up with a legislative solution.

In September, the president told Pelosi and Schumer he would support the DREAM Act — Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors — which offers childhood immigrants a pathway to citizenship, as part of a broader immigration agreement.

But this fall, progress stalled. That led liberals such as Gutierrez to pressure leadership to use Democratic leverage — their votes are needed to pass legislation such as the budget or next year's increase in the government borrow-

ing — to ensure that Trump lives up to his promise.

Republicans want to separate immigration from the year-end agenda, in part to avoid the appearance of getting muscled by Democrats like Pelosi and in part to try to get a better deal.

"We are certainly willing to enter into those good-faith negotiations, but they do not belong in an end-of-the-year spending appropriations debate," said Texas Sen. John Cornyn, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate. "We do want to resolve this, but it's not going to be before the end of this year."

For her part, Pelosi won't commit to helping Republicans keep the government open unless the DACA issue is dealt with.

"We will not leave here without a DACA fix," she told reporters last week.

Indeed, just 14 Democrats joined House Republicans in voting for a two-week stopgap spending bill last week.

But in the Senate, the dynamic among Democrats

was wholly different, with Democrats voting for the stopgap measure by a 5-to-1 margin.

Aides to lawmakers in both parties say the DACA issue was discussed only briefly at a White House meeting between Trump and top congressional leaders.

"There was no disagreement that it should be done. The question was when, where, how and why, and those discussions are continuing," Schumer told reporters Friday. "We hope to get it done before the end of the year."

Schumer spokesman Matt House says Schumer is genuinely optimistic that Senate negotiations over a hybrid package blending the DREAM Act with additional border security measures are going well. House talks, meanwhile, appear stalled.

The differing perspectives, at their core, seem rooted in the different dynamics facing House and Senate Democrats.

Schumer's red-state Democrats must win re-election by appealing to independents, and they hope to win at least some crossover support from Republicans.

But many House Democrats represent congressional districts with large populations of minorities. Others represent solidly Democratic suburbs with constituencies that are sympathetic to immigrants. Their re-election bids are dependent on cementing the Democratic nomination from a primary electorate rather than winning independents or GOP crossover.

Pelosi faces her own constituency, too. With 31 members, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus represents 16 percent of the House Democratic Caucus — a base that Pelosi is loath to cross.

"It's her belief, of course, but it's the caucus she represents as well," said Nadeam Elshami, Pelosi's former chief of staff. "The caucus wants this."

Some glitches seen in deadline week for 'Obamacare' sign-ups

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer advocates reported some glitches Monday in the final days for "Obamacare" sign-ups, although the Trump administration largely seemed to be keeping its promise of a smooth enrollment experience.

In Illinois, some consumers who successfully completed an application for financial assistance through HealthCare.gov got a message saying they would likely be eligible to buy a health plan, "but none are available to you in your area."

That information was incorrect because every county in the nation currently has at least one health insurer offering plans under the Affordable Care Act for next year.

Friday is the last day to enroll for subsidized private coverage in 39 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov website. Consumer interest has remained brisk, even as the Trump administration cut the sign-up season in half, reducing it from roughly 90 days to 45 days.

Former President Barack Obama offered encouragement Monday for the closing push, posting on social media and joining a conference call with enrollment counselors.

On the call, Obama accused "Republicans in Washington" of trying to "sabotage" progress made reducing the number of uninsured. The American people "don't want a health care system that's sent into chaos just for partisan reasons," Obama said, according to a transcript provided by his office.

President Donald Trump came into office looking to dismantle his predecessor's health law, but it survived. Although the administration slashed the ad budget for sign-up season and scaled back grants for enrollment counselors, officials promised the HealthCare.gov website would work seamlessly this year. That promise will be tested in this week's crush.



In this May 18, 2017 file photo, the Healthcare.gov website is seen on a laptop computer, in Washington. The Trump administration came in looking to dismantle Barack Obama's health care law, but the Affordable Care Act survived.

Stephani Becker of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law in Chicago said the glitch in which consumers were told there were no plans was reported by counselors starting late last week, and again Monday. It also surfaced in other states besides Illinois, she said.

Trained counselors know enough about the program to question the accuracy of the message, but "the average consumer might just walk away," Becker said.

An administration official said the issue has been resolved, and HealthCare.gov is reaching out to the consumers affected to encourage them to complete their applications. However, Becker said advocates had gotten a similar response from the administration last week, and the problem continued.

For millions of consumers eligible to enroll time runs out on Dec. 15. Thursday and Friday are expected to be the heaviest days.

That could slow the HealthCare.gov website, and lead to long hold times at the federal call center. For most people, this is the last opportunity to secure coverage for 2018, or switch from an existing plan.

One exception: People living in hurricane-affected areas can get an extension to sign up by Dec. 31 by contacting the HealthCare.gov call center. That could make a difference in states such as Florida, Texas, and Georgia.

Enrollment fluctuates in the course of the year, but it's estimated that 9 million to 10 million people currently have coverage through the ACA's mar-

ketplaces. The markets cater to people who don't have access to a job-based plan, and participation is expected to dip somewhat next year.

In a twist, many people eligible for financial help may actually be able to pay lower premiums in 2018. Although list price premiums for the most popular plans went up sharply, so did taxpayer-provided subsidies that limit how much individuals actually have to pay. In many communities, barebones "bronze" plans are available for no monthly premium to those eligible for subsidies.

Deadline hour for enrollment will remain the same this year — midnight Pacific time. That means consumers on the East Coast will have until 3 a.m. on Saturday morning to enroll.

Although the Trump administration slashed the advertising budget, HealthCare.gov has been sending out targeted emails to people potentially eligible. Example: — "FINAL DEADLINE: Enroll in a 2018 health plan before December 15 or risk going without Marketplace coverage."

During the Obama years, officials allowed a grace period for consumers who started an application, but were unable to finish by the deadline. It's unclear if the Trump administration will allow such extensions, or whether it will strictly enforce the deadline hour. Previous extensions allowed hundreds of thousands of consumers to enroll.

Failure to provide extensions this year would be a mistake, said Andy Slavitt, who oversaw HealthCare.gov under Obama. "It really would not be fair to people, particularly if there are technology challenges with the last minute surge as there have been every year," Slavitt said. While Dec. 15 is the deadline for states served by HealthCare.gov, that's not the case everywhere. Most states that run their own health insurance websites are providing an extended period for consumers to enroll. In California and New York, for instance, the deadline remains the same as last year — Jan. 31. Other states have deadlines spanning from late December to mid-January.

Opioid crisis strains foster system as kids pried from homes

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The case arrives with all the routine of a traffic citation: A baby boy, just 4 days old and exposed to heroin in his mother's womb, is shuddering through withdrawal in intensive care, his fate now here in a shabby courthouse that hosts a parade of human misery.

The parents nod off as Judge Marilyn Moores explains the legal process, and tests arrive back showing both continue to use heroin. The judge briefly chastises, a grandmother sobs, and by the time the hearing is over, yet another child is left in the arms of strangers because of his parents' addiction.

There is little surprise in any of this, for it's become a persistent presence at Indianapolis' juvenile court. A Monday with a heroin-dependent newborn spills into a Tuesday in which a trembling mother admits breaking her 70-day clean streak with a four-day bender. A Wednesday with two children found in a car beside a mother passed out on pills fades into a Thursday with a teen who found both his mother and grandmother overdosed on heroin.

Across the U.S., soaring use of opioids has forced tens of thousands of children from their homes, creating a generation of kids abandoned by addicted parents, orphaned because of fatal overdoses or torn from fractured families by authorities fearful of leaving them in drug-addled chaos.

"This isn't a trickle. This isn't a wave. It's a tsunami," Moores said of a child welfare system grappling with an unprecedented crush of parental drug cases.

From her first full year on the bench in 2006 through last year, the number of filings for children in need of services more than tripled to 4,649 in Marion County, driven largely by cases involving opioids — a glimpse of a problem that has swept across communities of all sizes.

Behind each of those cases is a child subjected to the realities of life amid addiction: of barren fridges, unwelcome visitors and parents who couldn't be roused awake. Moores is still haunted by the story of a 2-year-old found alone at home with his father's corpse, a needle still poking from his arm. A neighbor was drawn in by the boy's relentless wails.

By Friday, the largest pile of cases on Moores' desk has reached a towering two feet, and she has plodded on in bureaucratic fights to get more judges, more court reporters and more mediators to deal with work in which the despair dwarfs the fleeting moments of hope.

"It seems like there's a whole generation of people disappearing," Moores said.

In Miami, a 10-year-old boy died after stray powder from the painkiller fentanyl found its way to his skin. In Philadelphia, a library once known for its after-school programs is now such a magnet for heroin users that the staff practices overdose drills. From New York to Kentucky, schools stock the overdose antidote naloxone in the nurse's office.

As opioids have thrived, children have suffered. And families are being torn apart, again and again.

New foster care cases in-



Judge Marilyn Moores works in her office, Monday, Sept. 18, 2017, in Indianapolis.

AP

volving parents who are using drugs have hit the highest point in more than three decades of record-keeping, accounting for 92,000 children entering the system in 2016, according to just-released data by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The crisis is so severe — with a 32 percent spike in drug-related cases from 2012 to 2016 — it reversed a trend that had the foster care system shrinking in size over the preceding decade. All told, about 274,000 children entered foster care in the U.S. last year. A total of 437,000 children were in the system as of Sept. 30, 2016.

Though substance abuse has long been an issue for child welfare officials, this is the most prolific wave of children affected by addiction since crack cocaine use surged in the 1980s, and experts said opioid-use is driving the increase.

Among the states with the biggest one-year increases in their foster care population were Georgia, West Virginia and Indiana.

"It's been an overburdening of our system," said Cindy Booth, executive director of Child Advocates of Marion County, which represents kids at the center of drug cases.

The Associated Press delved further into the troubling numbers, examining county-level foster care statistics obtained from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect through the end of 2015. The analysis showed counties with higher levels of opioid prescribing and opioid deaths also had higher shares of foster cases linked to drugs. Last year's county-level statistics are not yet available.

The data show that foster children of drug users are on average about three years younger than others in the system. Indeed, a wave of babies born to opioid-using mothers has led hospitals to add detox programs for pregnant women and save umbilical cords in case they need to pinpoint what drug an infant was exposed to. Volunteers are enlisted to cuddle heroin-dependent babies — often born premature and underweight with a

distinctive high-pitched cry and tremors in their arms and legs.

In Indiana, drug-related foster cases shot up more than sixfold between 2000 and 2015. Vanderburgh County, with a population of 179,000, had more children of drug users enter foster care than major cities including Seattle, Miami and Las Vegas. And here in Marion County, cases involving drugs went from about 20 percent of foster children in 2010 to 50 percent five years later.

Stephanie Shene, who started in 2003 as a case manager at the state Department of Child Services, recalled how use of heroin and other opioids went from a virtual non-issue to a constant part of her day. She and her colleagues became increasingly vigilant looking for shaking, fidgety parents or needle marks on their arms, behind ears and between fingers.

Her agency has added more than 1,200 workers in four years and its budget has increased from \$793 million to more than \$1 billion. Keeping up with the caseload remains a challenge, though, and turnover among case managers is high. Especially maddening is the huge number of parents who can't stay clean long enough to get their kids back or keep them.

Shene remembers one of her first cases, a mother whose four children were taken because of her morphine and heroin addiction. Just 10 months after getting clean and regaining custody, the woman not only had returned to drugs but had given birth to a heroin-dependent baby.

"Stuff like that is hard to look at," she said.

By the time Rachael Stark arrives at her office at 8:45 a.m., she has already been working for hours. At 2:30 a.m., it was a call seeking an emergency placement for a child. Around 4 a.m., a series of texts alerted her that an alarm went off at a foster home and police showed up. Since 8 a.m., she's been furiously tapping away at her phone, juggling 15 foster cases. Now she's splashed with coffee and running late for a 9 o'clock appointment

when a state DCS worker calls looking for a foster family for three siblings.

"I've got no one," she reports somberly.

For the past 13 years, Stark has managed cases for The Villages, the largest private foster care and adoption agency in Indiana, which contracts with the state to find children homes. All but a few of her cases involve drugs and of those that do, about half are opioid-related.

The Villages is receiving 30 to 40 percent more referrals than it had been accustomed to, creating a "crisis state," as the agency's president, Sharon Pierce, puts it. Foster parent training sessions, once held monthly, are now weekly; advertising to attract new families has been ramped up. It takes at least three months to recruit, screen and train foster parents, but as soon as they get their state license, the need for help is so great they often receive an immediate call.

"Five or 10 minutes later, that family will have two or three children placed in their home," Pierce said.

The Villages used to see about 60 percent of children return to their birth families. Today it's around half that. So the agency turns to successful foster parents to adopt. The problem is that limits the family's ability to take on another foster child, creating the need for even more foster homes.

"So then we jump back on the treadmill," Pierce said.

The agency has added a few employees, but it's largely up to case managers like Stark to cope with the surging workload. She crisscrosses farm-lined stretches of Grant County, about 90 miles northeast of Indianapolis, driving beside fields of corn and soybeans in the rush to make her next appointment. The county's drug-involved foster caseload grew from nine in 2000 to 48 in 2015.

Stark makes her first stop at the foster home of a 5-year-old girl who answers "hot fudge sundae ice cream" when asked what happens when she meets her therapist; the child's mother is in jail. The second home is a whirl of sailing plas-

tic cups, bouncing rubber balls and kids jumping on furniture, with six children, two of them foster placements, in perpetual motion. The foster mother, Megan Carender, hopes to adopt the children but is prepared if their stay is temporary: "No matter what, this was a place that they were loved and that they were taken care of."

It goes like this all day for Stark, a series of visits and a blur of calls and texts interrupted by sighs and talk of "imperfect solutions." "We just can't keep up," she said.

Her third stop of the day is emblematic of the cases inundating the system. Two sisters, 9 and 10, landed in foster care because their mother got hooked on painkillers. There was no family to turn to, with their grandmother also addicted. The girls now live on a farm where sheep, cattle and hogs are raised, and they sit in the bed of a pickup, fussing over a carton of fluffy day-old chicks their foster father, Justin Lovell, picked up for them. When he notes, matter-of-factly, it won't be long before the chicks reach a size fit only for "a freezer or a frying pan," the girls' jaws drop in comical unison.

"You're not going to fry them!" one cries.

Their birth mother has already had her parental rights rescinded, and the Lovells hope to adopt. One of the girls had been in four foster homes before arriving here, the other in three. Three siblings were placed elsewhere.

Lovell's wife, Kristen, laments the turmoil the sisters have been through — "so many stops and starts and bumps along the way" — and that "their whole world's changing, and it's changed so many times already." Her husband simply cannot fathom how someone could put drugs before family.

"They had their choice," he said, "and they didn't choose their children."

There is no simple assessment of the impact of all of this on kids. At one extreme, there are infants born healthy who wind up in safe and loving foster homes until their birth parents get clean. At the other are children whose parents'

addictions have led to their own, who find themselves hopping from foster family to foster family, or living in a group home or a strange town.

Fear and anxiety can amass, academic performance can plunge, feelings of abandonment can run rampant, and the ability to trust can be strained. Said Maria Cancian, a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor whose research focuses on foster care and the effects on children: "When people ask me, 'Is foster care good or bad?' the first thing I say is, 'Compared to what?'"

Back at juvenile court, the waiting room is brimming with people who may wait hours for their cases to be called. Babies screech. Toddlers whine. Adults emerge from courtrooms wet-eyed.

Moores, the plainspoken 62-year-old who leads this division, sees a familiar expression on the faces that pass through — not just parents, but case managers and attorneys and a parade of others who've seen their work overtaken by pills and powders. She saw the same blank eyes during a National Guard deployment to Afghanistan, as soldiers returned to base.

"They're war-weary," she said.

She counts herself among the battle-scarred, having presided over a court that took 1,270 children from their parents last year, more than triple a decade earlier. Cases roll in to courtrooms that once were classrooms, converted to accommodate snowballing need.

It is 11 p.m. on Friday now and Moores is home on her farm, clad in pajamas and awake in bed. Her phone goes off, a new crisis arrived. DCS has a boy who previously was removed from the home of his opioid-addicted mother, now needing to be taken out of the house of relatives. There are no foster families available, and the county's emergency shelters are full.

It won't be long before the details of the case recede from a memory crowded by a thousand others. Tonight, though, it weighs on her as she tries to drift to sleep.

Russian Olympic Committee expects 200 to compete in SKorea

MOSCOW (AP) — Despite Russia's ban from the upcoming Olympics, officials in the country still expect more than 200 of their athletes to compete at the Pyeongchang Games.

Under International Olympic Committee sanctions announced last week, all Russians must compete under the Olympic flag as "Olympic Athletes from Russia."

"Potentially more than 200 athletes are in a position to qualify," ROC president Alexander Zhukov said after the organization held a closed congress on Tuesday.

The decision to ban Russia came after the country was found to have run a so-

phisticated doping program at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. On Tuesday, the IOC disqualified the Russian women's hockey team because six players were implicated in doping offenses. That brings the total of Russians banned from Sochi to 31.

Zhukov said the Olympic committee unanimously voted for the athletes to compete despite the restrictions placed on the national team.

"The opinion of all taking part was united, and that was that our athletes need to go to South Korea, compete and win," Zhukov said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave his backing

last week.

The ROC will submit rosters of its preferred athletes to the IOC, which will then issue invitations to Russian competitors.

"I think the IOC will make sure that the strongest Russian athletes get the invitations, so that, for example, our hockey team consists of the best players," Zhukov said.

Russian athletes going to Pyeongchang still need to pass a screening from an IOC committee which will examine their history of drug testing.

Zhukov said Russia still denies operating a doping program at the 2014 Olympics and rejected any

suggestion he had made a deal with the IOC to avoid harsher sanctions.

"It's unacceptable to take away an athlete's right to represent his country. In my view, it breaks not only the Olympic charter, but human rights," Zhukov said. "So you really can't talk about a deal here."

"Obviously we consider this ruling unfair, but at the same time we're in the situation where we had to make a decision even though we consider this ruling unfair."

Individual athletes could still decide to skip the Olympics in protest, but the ROC said it has carried out a survey which didn't find any who intend to boycott.

The ROC's approval, however, doesn't mean Russia is abandoning legal challenges against the IOC sanctions, Zhukov said.

Twenty-five of the athletes banned from Sochi have filed appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. IOC rules bar Russians from Pyeongchang if they have previously served doping bans.

Russia will send a delegation to Switzerland on Friday to discuss details such as neutral uniforms and whether athletes can wear national colors.

Last week, the IOC ruled that Russia's suspension could be "partially or fully" lifted in time for the closing

ceremony on Feb. 25 if Russia complies with its rulings.

Russia national hockey team captain Ilya Kovalchuk said he didn't mind being known as an Olympic Athlete from Russia, competing without his country's flag.

"Well, we are athletes from Russia. Sure, they've taken the flag and the anthem away, but they haven't taken our honor, conscience, patriotism, love for the country," Kovalchuk said. "That's in your heart and no one can take it, so we should get out there and fight twice as hard."

Iceland closes gender gap but violence against women remains

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) — For nine years in a row, the World Economic Forum has ranked Iceland as having the world's smallest gender-equality gap, and for about as long gender studies professor Gyda Margret Petursdottir has been asked how the Nordic island nation became such a paradise for women.

Her reply: "It isn't."

Iceland has a female prime minister and some of the world's strongest laws on workplace equality and equal pay.

It also has one of Europe's highest per-capita levels of reported rapes, according to statistics agency Eurostat, although legal definitions differ from country to country, complicating comparisons.

A 2010 University of Iceland study found that 30 percent of Icelandic women aged 18 to 80 reported having been physically attacked by a man at least once, including 13 percent who reported suffering rape or attempted rape.

Icelanders are experiencing a stark realization: Equal representation does

not, by default, eliminate gender-based violence.

Petursdottir said the "myth" that Iceland's record on gender equality makes it a safe haven for women is a distraction from the steps needed to fight systematic abuse.

"Men need to find ways to change their ideas about masculinity," Petursdottir said. "That's the biggest challenge now."

The sexual misconduct allegations against powerful men in Hollywood, politics and beyond, and the "Me Too" campaign launched by women speaking out against abuse, have reached this volcanic island below the Arctic Circle.

Hundreds of women in Icelandic politics, entertainment and academia recently signed a pledge against sexual harassment and urged male colleagues to change their behavior.

More than 40 percent of lawmakers in Iceland's parliament, the Althingi, are women. Last month left-wing leader Katrin Jakobsdottir became prime minister in a coalition government — Iceland's sec-

ond female leader in the last decade.

Her appointment is another point on the Global Gender Gap index for a country regarded as a champion of gender equality.

The index measures life expectancy, educational opportunities, political representation, equal pay and other factors — but not gender-based violence.

Feminists argue that Iceland's star ranking masks continuing violence, harassment and everyday sexism — and that fixing the problem will need a transformation in the way men — and women — think and behave.

In a series of 137 anonymous accounts from women in politics recently published in local media, one female legislator illustrated everyday sexism with a story of a male opponent who complimented her looks right before she took the podium in an attempt to throw her off-topic.

Andres Ingi Jonsson, a lawmaker for the Left Green Movement, said the example shows how parliament, even more than other

workplaces, risks becoming a harmful environment for women, since disarming opponents is a key part of politics.

"The basic tools we use can be influenced by sexually degrading language, and we need to remove that from the toolbox," said Jonsson, who is among a group of male parliamentarians seeking to get men to become actively engaged in promoting gender equality.

The group successfully petitioned the speaker of parliament to host a workshop in February during which Iceland's 63 legislators have been invited to openly discuss sexual harassment in the workplace.

"It won't be an easy day," Jonsson said.

He is optimistic that everyone will attend, even though some will approach the workshop with a more open mind than others.

"We have to be ready to open our hearts a bit," Jonsson said.

Iceland may be far from perfect, but its politicians have taken gender equality seriously.

Icelandic law requires

private companies to have at least 40 percent women on their boards and offers men parental leave equal to women. Starting next year, the Equal Pay Law will audit companies to prove that they are paying men and women the same for comparable work.

There are indications of a change in social attitudes and an unwillingness to turn a blind eye toward sexual harassment.

Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, has a vibrant nightlife scene, and dozens of bars and clubs have tried to create a safer atmosphere by putting up posters urging guests to notify staff if they feel harassed.

Activist Helga Lind Mar said the scene has changed noticeably from a few years ago.

"We still have creeps," she said, sitting by Reykjavik's bar-and-restaurant-lined Laugavegur Street, famous for its long party nights. "But they are more afraid to be called out on their behavior."

And educators have started to think about how to raise a generation of non-

sexist adults.

At Reykjavik's Borgarholtsskoli high school, teacher Hanna Bjorg Vilhjaldsdottir oversees lively discussions in her Introduction to Gender Studies class.

The aim of the class is to get young adults to notice everyday discrimination, stereotyping and harmful messages, she said.

When Vilhjaldsdottir, a pioneer of the concept, pitched the idea to school administrators 10 years ago "they were extremely skeptical," she said. Now versions of the course are taught in 27 of Iceland's 33 high schools.

Student Tinna Karen Victorsdottir said the course has changed her perception of life more than any other class.

She said she often brings class discussions to her family's dinner table and shares course readings and videos with her parents. Over time, her parents have changed their behavior, too.

"My dad has taken on totally new house chores," she said. "I guess it inspired him to see me this eager."

Homeless in Rio skyrockets, creating tensions, violence

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — One night about a year ago, Leandro Mota Generoso was sleeping on a street in downtown Rio de Janeiro when he felt something jagged strike his face.

Somebody — he didn't see the person, but believes it was a resident in the neighborhood — had slashed his nose with broken glass from a vodka bottle. He awoke in a pool of blood.

"I can't sleep at night anymore," said Generoso, 23, who has been homeless since the grandfather who was raising him died five years ago. "To many people, we are rats, garbage or whatever thing."

"That is the reality, and now there are many more homeless in the streets," he added.

A year after Rio de Janeiro hosted the Olympic Games, a grinding economic crisis has led to an influx of thousands of homeless people, creating a climate of tension that city officials are scrambling to address.

Warm temperatures and

miles of beaches have long made Brazil's most famous city a place with a large street population. But city officials say it's more than tripled in the last few years, to an estimated 15,000 people.

While many U.S. cities have experienced sharp increases in people living outdoors thanks to rising housing prices amid a recovering economy, in Rio the driving factors have been fallout from Brazil's worst recession in decades and long-standing inequalities.

Today's homeless in Rio include thousands who came from other states for work before the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Rio Olympics and subsequently lost their jobs.

"Rio de Janeiro is facing the worst possible scenario when it comes to the homeless," said Pedro Fernandes, the city's secretary of social assistance and human rights. "We have never had such a large number in the streets."

Tensions have been steadily increasing, particularly in affluent and tour-

isty neighborhoods where residents and businesses are frustrated with the throngs of people sleeping on the streets. In August, a residential building in the iconic Copacabana neighborhood installed sprinklers below its awnings to rouse unwanted campers below. The city later forced the sprinklers to be removed.

People in several affluent neighborhoods post messages on community Facebook groups urging police to act and imploring neighbors not to feed the homeless.

In some cases, violence has erupted. Forty-year-old Fernanda Rodrigues dos Santos was fatally shot in the chest while sleeping in the street in Copacabana in October. Police say 24-year-old Rodrigo Gomes Rodrigues, a medical student who lives in the neighborhood, has confessed to the killing. Police say he and a friend argued earlier in the night with another homeless person, went to get a gun and returned looking for revenge.

"How many Fernandas are still in the streets?" said Wilham Rodrigues dos Santos, Fernanda's brother. "We can't accept that this aggression becomes normal."

Carla Beatriz Nunes Maia, from the Public Defender's office, has been leading visits to the homeless at night to get a sense of what they are facing. She says complaints about rough-handed tactics by police have given way to even more complaints about friction with residents in affluent neighborhoods.

"There is a repressive movement to keep people from helping the homeless," said Maia, referring to the calls on social media not to give food or money.

The city has launched an initiative to spruce up shelters and persuade more homeless people to use them. Many shun shelters because they often have strict rules and, by the city's own acknowledgement, have fallen into disrepair, with infestations of bugs and filthy bathrooms.

"You may go into a shelter healthy, but then how will you come out?" said Nancy Gouveia, a 49-year-old who has been on the streets three years.

When her marriage broke up, the former housewife with no work experience said she had nowhere to go but the street. While many people have helped her, she said she has also had water and diesel thrown on her. A man once tried to light her on fire while she slept.

"All of us on the street want to get off it. But how?" Gouveia said as she lay on a frayed cushion in front of a bank near the ocean in Copacabana.

Sitting on a chair next to Gouveia, Patricio Santos added there would be no change until the economy improves.

"We need jobs," said Santos, 34, who has been on the streets six months since losing his job as a telemarketer.

While some of the nearly 2,200 beds in shelters go empty each night, successfully persuading more homeless people to

use them could create its own problems, as there are vastly more potential users than space for them. Given that reality, the city is also working to help migrants return to their home states, and in some cases even other countries.

Despite the grim situation, there are signs of hope. Though growth is tepid, Brazil officially emerged from recession earlier this year. And city officials say some businesses are donating food and clothes as well as providing jobs for some homeless.

On a recent day, hundreds of homeless showed up at a park where the city offered services ranging from free haircuts to recovering documents and help with job searches.

One of those who showed up was Generoso, who wanted more information about a shelter where he might be able to stop worrying about being attacked again.

"I want to find a place to sleep," he said. "There is only misery on the streets."

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Firefighters protect coastal California towns as blaze rages

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Firefighters kept a wall of flames from descending mountains into coastal neighborhoods after a huge and destructive Southern California wildfire exploded in size, becoming the fifth largest in state history.

Tens of thousands remained under evacuation orders Monday as the fire churned west through foothill areas of Carpinteria and Montecito, seaside Santa Barbara County towns about 75 miles (120 kilometers) northwest of Los Angeles. Much of the fire's rapid new growth occurred on the eastern and northern fronts into unoccupied areas of Los Padres National Forest, where the state's fourth largest fire burned a decade ago.

The blaze, which had already destroyed more than 750 buildings, gutted six more in Carpinteria on Sunday, officials said. It's just 15 percent contained after charring nearly 360 square miles (930 square kilometers) of dry brush and timber.

"We're still anxious. I'm not frightened yet," Carpinteria resident Roberta Lehtinen told KABC-TV. "I don't think it's going to come roaring down unless the winds kick up."

Forecasters predicted that dry winds that fanned several fires across the region for a week would begin to lose their power Monday. Light gusts were pushing onshore, driving the flames back up hillsides and away from the communities, Santa Barba-

ra County Fire spokesman Mike Eliason said. But the possibility of "unpredictable" gusts would keep firefighters on edge for days, he said.

Santa Ana winds have long contributed to some of the region's most disastrous wildfires. They blow from the inland toward the Pacific Ocean, speeding up as they squeeze through mountain passes and canyons.

With the air thick with acrid smoke, even residents of areas not under evacuation orders took the opportunity to leave, fearing another shutdown of U.S. 101, a key coastal highway that was closed intermittently last week. Officials handed out masks to residents who stayed behind in Montecito, the wealthy hillside enclave that's home to celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Jeff Bridges and Drew Barrymore.

Smoke shrouded Rob Lowe's home and the actor wore a mask as he livestreamed his family leaving on Sunday.

"Praying for the people in my area," he said on Instagram. "Hope everybody's getting out safe like we are, and thanks for the prayers and thoughts. And good luck to the firefighters, we need you!"

Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres tweeted that neighbors were helping each other and their animals get to safety.

"I'm sending lots of love and gratitude to the fire department and sheriffs.



In this Sunday, Dec. 10, 2017 photo released by Santa Barbara County Fire Department, flames advance on homes off Shepard Mesa Road at 5:45 Sunday morning in Carpinteria, Calif.

Thank you all," she wrote.

Meanwhile, containment increased on other major blazes in Los Angeles, Riverside and San Diego counties. Resources from those fires were diverted to the Santa Barbara foothills to combat the stubborn and enormous fire that started Dec. 4.

Fires are not typical in Southern California this time of year but can break out when dry vegetation and too little rain combine

with the Santa Ana winds. Though the state emerged this spring from a yearslong drought, hardly any measurable rain has fallen in the region over the past six months.

"This is the new normal," Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown warned Saturday after surveying damage from the deadly Ventura fire. Brown and experts said climate change is making wildfires a year-round threat.

High fire risk is expected to last into January.

The small mountain town of Ojai experienced hazardous levels of smoke at times, and officials warned of unhealthy air for large swaths of the region. The South Coast Air Quality Management District urged residents to stay indoors if possible and avoid vigorous outdoor activities.

Despite the size and number of wildfires burning in the region, there has only

been one confirmed death: The death of a 70-year-old woman, who crashed her car on an evacuation route, is attributed to the fire in Santa Paula, a small city where the Thomas Fire began.

Most of last week's fires were in places that burned in the past, including one in the ritzy Los Angeles neighborhood of Bel-Air that burned six homes and another in the city's rugged foothills above the community of Sylmar and in Santa Paula.

Bitcoin futures soar amid frenzy over virtual currency

CHICAGO (AP) — Bitcoin's debut on a major U.S. exchange is a hit so far, with the price of the first-ever futures contract for the virtual currency rising 18 percent.

The futures contract that expires in January surged \$2,730 to \$18,190 Monday morning on the Chicago Board Options Exchange. Trading began Sunday, and the price rose as high as \$18,850, according to data from the CBOE.

The CBOE futures don't involve actual bitcoin. They allow investors to make bets on the future direction of bitcoin.

The first session of futures trading fit right in with the frenzy surrounding bitcoin. Traffic to the CBOE website was so heavy right after the start of trading that the site experienced outages. The exchange also halted trading twice Sunday to stem volatility. The exchange operator has rules in place to stop trading after price swings of 10 percent.

Another large futures exchange, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, will start trading its own futures on Dec. 18 but will use a composite of several bitcoin prices across a handful of exchanges.

The price of a bitcoin has soared since beginning the year below \$1,000, hitting a peak of more than \$16,858 Dec. 7 on the bitcoin exchange Coindesk. As of 10:15 a.m. CST, it was at \$16,510 on Coindesk.

Futures are a type of contract in which a buyer and a seller agree on a price for a particular item to be delivered on a certain date in the future, hence the name. Futures are available for nearly every type of security but are most famously used in commodities such as wheat, soy, gold, oil, cocoa and, as dramatized in the Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd movie "Trading Places," concentrated frozen orange juice.

The futures signal greater main-



This Friday, Dec. 8, 2017, photo shows the Chicago Board Options Exchange website announcing that bitcoin futures will start trading on the CBOE on Sunday evening, Dec. 10.

stream acceptance of bitcoin but also open up bitcoin to additional market forces. The futures will allow investors to bet that bitcoin's price will go down — a practice known as shorting — which had been very difficult to do.

There have been other attempts to bring bitcoin investing into the mainstream. Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss, twin brothers who own large amounts of bitcoin, tried to create an exchange-traded fund based on bitcoin, but federal regulators denied their application.

How much actual investor interest there will be in these bitcoin futures is still up in the air. Many larger Wall Street brokerages and clearinghouses, including Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase, are either not allowing customers to trade bitcoin futures or only allowing select clients to do so. Other brokerages are putting restrictions on the amount of margin a trader can use in bitcoin futures, or putting limits on the amount that can be purchased.

The digital currency has had more than its fair share of critics on Wall Street. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon has called bitcoin "a fraud."

Thomas Peterffy, chairman of the broker-dealer Interactive Brokers Group, expressed deep concerns about the trading of bitcoin futures last month, saying "there is no fundamental basis for valuation of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, and they may assume any price from one day to the next."

Peterffy noted that if bitcoin futures were trading at that time, under the CBOE's rules those futures likely would experience repeated trading halts because 10 percent or 20 percent moves in bitcoin prices have not been unusual in recent months.

Bitcoin is the world's most popular virtual currency. Such currencies are not tied to a bank or government and allow users to spend money anonymously. They are basically lines of computer code that are digitally signed each time they are traded.

A debate is raging on the merits of such currencies. Some say they serve merely to facilitate money laundering and illicit, anonymous payments. Others say they can be helpful methods of payment, such as in crisis situations where national currencies have collapsed.

Louisiana man admits using Trump's Social Security number

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A Louisiana private investigator pleaded guilty on Monday to misusing Donald Trump's Social Security number in repeated attempts to access the candidate's federal tax information during the presidential campaign.

Jordan Hamlett, 32, faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine following his guilty plea in federal court.

Authorities have said Hamlett failed in his attempts to get Trump's tax returns through a U.S. Department of Education financial aid website.

The Lafayette resident was indicted in November 2016 and had been scheduled to start this week, but the judge originally assigned to the case died on Saturday after a brief illness. U.S. District Court Judge John deGravelles has not yet scheduled Hamlett's sentencing hearing.

Defense attorney Michael Fiser had argued Hamlett didn't have any "intent to deceive" and simply tried "out of sheer curiosity" to discover whether Trump's tax information could be accessed through the government website.

Every president since Jimmy Carter has released tax returns in what has become an American tradition during presidential elections. Trump has refused to release his.

Federal agents confronted Hamlett two weeks before last November's election and questioned him in a Baton Rouge hotel lobby. At the time, the agents didn't know if Hamlett had been successful, and they feared a public release of Trump's tax returns could influence the election, according to a transcript of court testimony earlier this year.

Treasury Department Special Agent Samuel Johnson testified in March that Hamlett immediately took credit for his "genius idea" to seek Trump's tax returns from the financial aid website.

Johnson also said investigators asked Hamlett if he was familiar with Anonymous, an internet hacking group.

"At that time, Anonymous had been established as people that have released some of President Trump's personal identifying information and things of that nature," Johnson testified.

Federal prosecutors had asked to bar Hamlett's lawyer from presenting a trial defense that he was acting as a benevolent "white hat" hacker. Brady, a senior federal judge who died Saturday at a Baton Rouge hospital, ruled last month that Hamlett couldn't testify that he had a "good purpose" in attempting to test security flaws in the website.

Fiser said Hamlett had tried to call and notify the IRS about the flaws last September, on the same day he tried to electronically access Trump's tax records.

Fiser said Hamlett liked to test security systems for weaknesses in his spare time and would notify system administrators if he found a system vulnerable to a security breach. Hamlett once discovered a security flaw that allowed for public access to the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office's "raw" reports on open investigations and exposed personal information about police officers.

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Top EU economic powers warn US about tax plans

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's top five economies are warning the United States that its massive tax overhaul could violate some of its international obligations and risks having "a major distortive impact" on trade.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, the finance ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain wrote they had "significant concerns" about three tax initiatives in particular.

In the letter, seen by The Associated Press, the five wrote that "it is important that the U.S. government's rights over domestic tax policy be exercised in a way that adheres with international obligations to which it has signed-up."

EU nations have been warily eyeing President Trump's domestic tax proposals as they made their way through congress and have long expressed fears they might hurt world trade and EU companies in particular.

"The inclusion of certain less conventional international tax provisions could contravene the U.S.'s double taxation treaties and may risk having a major distortive impact on international trade," the five wrote.

They specifically targeted the so-called Base Erosion and Anti-abuse Tax (or BEAT) Senate bill. This measure aims to combat what is called base erosion and profit shifting, the practice by some multinationals to avoid tax by exploiting mismatches in countries' tax rules to artificially report their profits in countries with low or no taxes.

The finance ministers lauded the measure's aim to ensure companies pay their fair share in taxes to the U.S. But they said that under the current plans, the measures would also hurt genuine commercial deals. In the financial sector in particular, "the provision appears to have the potential of being extremely harmful for international banking and insurance business."

They said it "may lead to significant tax charges and may harmfully distort international financial markets."

The EU's 28 finance ministers had already expressed concern about the U.S. plans during a meeting last week, but now its five biggest economies have gone ahead with their own warning.

In Washington, Republicans are upbeat about finalizing the tax bill from the House and Senate versions for Trump's first major legislative accomplishment in nearly 11 months in office.

Trump has set a Christmas deadline for signing the bill into law, giving lawmakers named to a special conference committee two weeks to iron out major differences in the House and Senate versions of the legislation. The conference committee has scheduled its first formal meeting for Wednesday.



The British and EU flags flap in the wind outside EU headquarters in Brussels on Friday, Dec. 8, 2017. British Prime Minister Theresa May, met with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk early Friday morning following crucial overnight talks on the issue of the Irish border.

UK leader says there's new optimism in Brexit talks

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister Theresa May said Monday there is a new sense of optimism about negotiations over Britain's departure from the European Union, insisting that a preliminary deal has given fresh impetus to the talks.

She told the House of Commons that Britain will be able to leave the European Union "in a smooth and orderly way."

May updated lawmakers on the agreement reached Friday with the EU that covers the main divorce issues. Those include the rights of citizens affected by Brexit, Britain's financial obligations to the EU and how to keep open the border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland, an EU member.

Leaders of the other 27 EU members are expected to ratify the agreement later this week, allowing Brexit talks to move on to trade and security cooperation. May told Parliament the next phase would not be easy but that the atmospherics have improved.

"Of course, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed," May said in a statement. "But there is, I believe, a new sense of optimism now in the talks and I fully hope and expect that we will confirm the arrangements I have set out today in the European Council later this week."

She said the implementation period she seeks will be discussed in the next phase of the talks, and called for discussions to begin immediately.

But weekend comments by the official in charge of the talks have threatened to spoil May's triumphant moment. In an interview with the BBC on Sunday, Brexit chief David Davis suggested that last week's agreement was a "statement of intent" that wasn't legally binding.

The comments caused unease in Ireland, where leaders demanded provisions in the agreement to ensure Brexit won't restrict travel and trade between the Republic of Ireland and the U.K.'s Northern Ireland. Officials in both parts of the island say the border must remain open to protect the Irish peace process.

The Irish government branded Davis' comments "bizarre" and insisted that Britain must live up to the commitments it made last week.

Davis Monday tried to mitigate the fallout, insisting his words had been "completely twisted."

"What I actually said yesterday ... was we want to protect the peace process, want to protect Ireland from the impact of Brexit for them, and I said this was a statement of intent which was much more than just legally enforceable," Davis told LBC Radio.

"In the event that the withdrawal

agreement doesn't happen then we would still be seeking to maintain an invisible border between Northern Ireland and Ireland," he added. "I was making the point that it was much more than just in the treaty, it's what we want to do anyway."

The confusion prompted Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to question the government's competence.

"We respect the result of the referendum but due to this government's shambolic negotiations it's getting increasingly difficult to believe this is a government capable of negotiating a good deal for Britain," he said.

He pressed May for details about the "divorce bill" Britain will have to pay to leave the EU.

In Brussels, the Europeans were thinking about form as well as substance.

European Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas said that while the deal was not legally binding, it was regarded as a pact of honor.

"We see the joint report of (EU Brexit negotiator) Michel Barnier and David Davis as a deal between gentlemen and it is the clear understanding that it is fully backed and endorsed by the U.K. government," he said. He noted that EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker agreed on that with May on Friday. "They shook hands."

Green cash, carbon tax: What to expect at Paris climate meet

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron is hosting an international summit Tuesday to mark the second anniversary of the Paris climate agreement, hoping to inject the pact with new energy after President Donald Trump announced the U.S. would withdraw from it.

The accord reached two years ago set goals for slowing the rate of climate change by reducing the emissions that contribute to melting Arctic ice, increasing sea levels and changing weather patterns across the globe.

While some critics have questioned whether the summit will accomplish more than drawing attention to France's media-savvy president, celebrities, corporations, environmental groups and others are preparing to make a string of announcements there.

The issues expected to come up at the event range from research to corporate pledges.

GREEN CASH

Poor countries are waiting to hear how the United Nations' goal of raising \$100 billion dollars for climate-related measures will be achieved by 2020.

The target was set in 2009, but commitments so far from rich nations only will cover about two-thirds of the fund.

The money is intended to help developing countries invest in green en-

ergy projects and avoid the path taken by wealthy countries decades earlier that saw massive growth in the use of fossil fuels.

Scientists say ending fossil fuel use, also known as 'decarbonization,' needs to happen worldwide by 2050, but poor countries only would be able to reach the goal with financial help.

Climate campaigner Mohamed Adow of the group Christian Aid says one important step would be for the World Bank, which is co-hosting Tuesday's meeting, to switch its investments from fossil fuels to renewable energy in developing countries.

CORPORATE COMMITMENT

Dozens of companies have signed a joint call for governments to maintain momentum on implementing the Paris accord and set long-term strategies for cutting carbon emissions.

The companies — including insurer Allianz, tire maker Michelin and consumer goods giant Unilever — said Monday they are committed to a greener economy that includes imposing levies on carbon emissions.

Allianz CEO Oliver Baete said in the statement that "business requires stable regulatory frameworks and an adequate price on carbon."

Financial institutions such as Allianz also want greater transparency on climate-related data to help them make sound investment decisions,

Baete said.

NEW RESEARCH

The Paris summit takes place while the American Geophysical Union is holding its fall meeting in New Orleans.

Scientists are expected to present new research on climate changes and ways to keep global temperatures from rising beyond 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F).

Separately, Microsoft says it will let researchers use its artificial intelligence technology to monitor and model the planet's climate.

The technology giant says its commitment — worth about \$10 million a year — could also help companies use vast amounts of data to reduce carbon emissions, by reducing waste, making power grids more efficient and improving weather predictions.

STAR SCIENTISTS

Macron has invited U.S.-based climate scientists to apply for generous grants and relocate to France, a direct response to Trump's rejection of the Paris accord.

The French president was announcing the first grant winners on Monday. Overall, the French government and research institutions plan to fund about 50 projects with 60 million euros (\$70 million)

Croat nationalists honor general convicted of war crimes

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Hundreds of people, including two government ministers, attended a commemoration ceremony Monday to honor a Croatian general who died after apparently taking poison at a United Nations tribunal that confirmed his war crimes conviction.

Bused in from other Croatian towns and from Bosnia, admirers of Slobodan Praljak filled the main concert hall in Zagreb, the capital. The gathering, organized by a Croatian generals' association, displayed the resurging nationalism in the European Union's newest member state.

Miroslav Tudjman, the son of Croatia's late president Franjo Tudjman, denounced the tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. Tudjman described Praljak as a "big man no one can match."

"Slobodan Praljak wouldn't live as a war criminal for a minute because he wasn't one," Tudjman told a clapping crowd. "His conviction is an insult for justice."

Praljak gulped what he said was poison after judges at the Yugoslav war crimes court confirmed his 20-year sentence in an appeals hearing last month. Despite medical attention, he died soon after.

Many in Croatia consider Praljak a hero despite his conviction for war crimes - including murder, persecution and inhumane treatment - against Muslims in Bosnia during the 1992-95 war. For days, Praljak's photo was on display at Zagreb's main square where people lit candles.

On Monday afternoon, members of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights group lit candles in downtown Zagreb for the victims of the Bosnian war, urging condemnation of the era's belligerent policies, and stating they do not sympathize with the war criminals.

Dutch authorities and the court have opened investigations into how Praljak, who had been in custody, obtained the substance.

Croatian officials have criticized the ruling against Praljak and five other former Bosnian Croat officials because it linked Croatia's wartime leadership with Bosnian Croat efforts to carve out a mini-state in Bosnia.

Tudjman, whose late father was named in the verdict as having been involved in the plot, described the ruling as "unjust" and "staged" as a result of anti-Croat bias by the Hague court.

Croatia has faced criticism internationally and from liberals at home for its heated reaction to The Hague ruling and Praljak's death, amid the surge in right-wing sentiments, including death threats against some liberal politicians.

Praljak was reportedly cremated last week in a private ceremony.

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Seahawks melt down in final seconds of 30-24 loss at Jaguars

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Seattle Seahawks defensive end Quinton Jefferson was jogging off the field when something whizzed by his head.

Jefferson stopped, pulled off his helmet and headed toward a rowdy section of fans.

Jefferson pushed aside security guards and started jawing with the spectators. Just when it looked like Jefferson was about to walk away for good, what looked like a cup of beer came flying out of the seats. That prompted Jefferson to rush toward the stands and start trying to climb up. He had to be restrained, pulled back by his shoulder pads, and escorted to the locker room.

It was an ugly ending to an exciting game.

The Jacksonville Jaguars felt what happened on the field was even worse.

The Jaguars (9-4) took exception to the way the Seahawks (8-5) handled the final snaps, two kneel-downs in the closing seconds of Jacksonville's 30-24 victory.

"There's no room in the game for that," tight end Mercedes Lewis said. "You see we're kneeling. You can get somebody hurt. We're out there trying to kneel. There are no timeouts. You guys can't stop the clock, so why try to hurt somebody?"

"We had 60 minutes to handle that. The last 30 seconds, while we're kneeling, you're going to spear somebody in the legs? That's not cool."

Seattle scored twice on long passes in the fourth quarter, with Russell Wilson finding Paul Richardson for 61 yards and then Tyler Lockett for 74 yards. The second one cut the lead to 30-24, and the Seahawks got one last chance to tie or take the lead. But



Seattle Seahawks defensive tackle Quinton Jefferson, center, tries to climb up in the stands after Jacksonville Jaguars fans threw objects at him in the closing moments of Sunday's game in Jacksonville, Fla.

Wilson misfired on a fourth-and-9 play near midfield.

Leonard Fournette iced the game with a 13-yard run on a third-and-11 play. Jacksonville tried to run out the clock from there, but the Seahawks wouldn't go quietly.

Defensive tackle Michael Bennett dived at center Brandon Linder's knees, setting off a near-melee. Sheldon Richardson was ejected for throwing a punch, and Fournette went after Bennett.

More pushing and shoving ensued after Bortles' next kneel-

down, and Jefferson was tossed.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll also got flagged for coming onto the field. Carroll walked into Seattle's huddle to settle down his players.

"We have to be more poised than that," Carroll said. "We didn't have a chance to get the ball back then, and I was trying to get our guys to not carry it any further. They were trying to fight to get the ball back, and there wasn't the chance to do it at that point. I was just trying to slow them down."

"I just tried to make a statement

to our guys so we didn't finish with any more garbage happening out there."

Carroll said Jefferson "just kind of lost it."

"Somebody poured a beer on his head walking out of the stadium or something," Carroll said. "I told him that's pro football. They pay to get in. They can do whatever they want, I guess, so that's what happened."

The game had a few chippy moments, with Seattle guard Germain Ifedi getting flagged

for taunting a referee following a holding call and tight end Jimmy Graham getting penalized for unnecessary roughness for a late hit out of bounds.

But the bigger exchanges happened with the game decided.

"Nobody likes to lose, but at the end of the day, this is our profession," Jaguars defensive tackle Malik Jackson said. "We have to start acting right and be professionals. That's twice now that teams have gone against us and wanted to act out. We're just socking them in the mouth and getting them a little upset. We're going to keep doing it. That doesn't bother us."

Jackson was referring to the Cincinnati-Jacksonville game early last month, in which Jaguars cornerback Jalen Ramsey and Bengals receiver A.J. Green were ejected for fighting. Green attacked Ramsey at the end of a play and threw him to the ground in a choke hold.

"It's a little bit of people aren't used to getting beat like that by the Jaguars," quarterback Blake Bortles said. "There is no reason to take anything from anybody. We just beat the crap out of you for 60 minutes."

"I think obviously you have to be smart and understand the situation and what is going on and not do anything stupid. I think this team definitely plays with a little bit of an edge."

Bennett and Jefferson declined comment, but Bennett ripped a reporter who attempted to ask Jefferson about the incident.

"He's not an animal," Bennett said. "He's a human being, so get out of here. How would you like it if one of your kids was playing sports and somebody poured beer on him?"

Mariota struggles in Titans' loss to Cardinals

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Marcus Mariota's answers were clipped, many one word. His facial expression changed minimally, a quick raise of the eyebrow or lip before giving an answer after his performance against the Arizona Cardinals.

The Tennessee Titans lost a game they should have won and their quarterback shouldered most of the blame.

"Frustration is an understatement," Mariota said following Tennessee's 12-7 loss to the Cardinals on Sunday. "Defense played lights out, special teams did their job, and I've been hurting our team. I've got to find ways to be better."

The Titans (8-5) entered tied with Jacksonville atop the AFC South after winning six of their previous seven games. All they had to do was beat the struggling Cardinals (6-7) to stay in the division lead, maybe move a game ahead if the Jaguars couldn't get past Seattle.

Tennessee couldn't get it done. Jacksonville beat the Seahawks to boot.

Not a great first trip to University of Phoenix Stadium.

"At the end of the day, we didn't play very well," Titans tight end Delanie Walker said. "Our defense held them to field goals and if you can't put points on the board, obviously you can't win game."

Mariota starred as a redshirt freshman for Oregon at the 2013 Fiesta Bowl his last trip to Glendale, leading the Ducks to a 35-17 victory over Kansas State. He was mostly ineffective against Arizona's defense, struggling with his aim and not nearly as mobile after tweaking his knee in the first quarter.

Tennessee's run game, which moved up to seventh in the NFL last week, was almost nonexistent, contributing 65 yards on 22 carries after a season-high 198 yards last week. The Titans finished with 204 total yards to fall a game back in the



Arizona Cardinals inside linebacker Haason Reddick (43) brings down Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota (8) during the second half of Sunday's game in Glendale, Ariz.

division.

"Defense played out of their mind the whole game," Titans coach Mike Mularkey said. "We had a chance to win the game because of our defense. Special teams wasn't good enough, and neither was our offense."

After a punt-filled first quarter, the Titans put together a nine-play, 50-yard scoring drive, capped by Derrick Henry's 6-yard TD run.

Tennessee's offense then went back to sputtering.

The Titans took a gamble in the third quarter, attempting a fake punt that appeared to work. Upon review, the officials changed the spot, leaving Tennessee short of a first down.

Arizona took over at the Titans' 35-yard line, setting up Phil Dawson's second field goal, from 23 yards to cut Tennessee's lead to 7-6.

"We should have got it and I thought we got it," Mularkey said. "I don't know how it got overturned. With all those bodies, I don't know how they saw it. I question that immensely, that overturn."

The Titans moved into Arizona's end of the field on its second drive of the third quarter, but a miscommunication with receiver Rishard Matthews turned into an interception by Tramon

Williams.

Mariota's second interception, with Tennessee trailing 9-7, was his fault.

Trying to squeeze a pass into Walker, he didn't see Josh Byner drop back into underneath coverage. Byner snared the ball and returned it 25 yards to Tennessee's 15, setting up Dawson's fourth field goal, a 35-yarder that put Arizona up 12-7.

"That's on me. I didn't see him under there," said Mariota, who threw for 159 yards on 16 of 31 passing.

The Titans got the ball back twice in the final 3:45, but were forced to punt once, and turned it over on downs.

Defensively, the Titans were effective pressuring Blaine Gabbert, sacking him eight times, even with outside linebacker Derrick Morgan injured. Tennessee was good in the red zone, holding the Cardinals to four field goals and a miss on another.

It wasn't good enough, thanks to the Titans' wobbling offense.

Now the Titans will remain in the desert to figure out what went wrong, practicing this week at Arizona State University to prepare for Sunday's game against San Francisco.

Panthers' D records 6 sacks, 3 takeaways to beat Vikings

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The Panthers were determined not to let quarterback Case Keenum get comfortable in the pocket.

They succeeded in that mission Sunday.

Carolina turned up the heat on the Vikings upstart quarterback, sacking Keenum six times and forcing two interceptions and a fumble to earn an important 31-24 victory that helped the Panthers pull even with the New Orleans at 9-4 in the NFC South. Keenum spent most of the day on the run or looking over his shoulder, never really sure where the next pass rusher was coming from.

"The guys up front did a great job with the game plan, mixing it up, throwing some blitzes in there to kind of keep them guessing," linebacker Thomas Davis said. "And we did a good job on the back end disguising it a little bit and giving our defensive line a chance to get to the quarterback. Give those guys a chance to get there and they're going to do well."

The Panthers also moved their cornerbacks up to the line of scrimmage.

"We wanted to be physical with them, get them up to press and move into it late, show one thing, do something different," coach Ron Rivera said.

It all led to what Keenum described as a frustrating day.

"I mean, they're really good," Keenum said of the Panthers sixth-ranked defense. "They did a really great job of stopping the run all day, and obviously disrupting the things pass game as well."

The Vikings were without starting center Pat Elflein and right tackle Mike Remmers to start the game, then lost left tackle Riley Reiff to a left ankle injury in the second half.

Reiff had his foot in a boot after the game.

"That's why we need players to come in and perform," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said.

The Panthers took full advantage, bringing relentless pressure against the Vikings, blitzing early and often to throw Keenum off his mark. On occasion, he would tuck the ball and run

for first downs. But more often than not, the Panthers forced him into taking a sack or throwing the ball away.

Mario Addison's strip sack led to a Carolina field goal.

Kawann Short had two sacks, Julius Peppers, Luke Kuechly and Kyle Love and Addison all had one. Both starting cornerbacks James Bradberry and Daryl Worley turned in their first interceptions of the season while safety Mike Adams recovered a fumble as seemingly everyone contributed on defense.

Keenum entered the game 8-2 as a starter this season and there was some talk of him being an MVP candidate.

But he wasn't happy with his own play after Sunday's game.

"I know that a lot of sacks are on me," Keenum said. "We got out of a few and made some good plays, but they got to the quarterback a few times. I have to look at film and see how I'm moving in the pocket and how I adjust, and maybe get the ball out a little quicker."

Carolina came into the game tied for fifth in the league in sacks.

The biggest came from Short after a change of possession late in the fourth quarter.

The Panthers, who hadn't trailed all game, led by 11 midway through the fourth quarter. But after giving up a 52-yard touchdown pass to Adam Thielen and a 2-point conversion that cut the lead to 34-31, Vikings safety Andrew Sendejo intercepted a tipped pass and returned the ball to the Carolina 6.

Just like that, the Vikings had a chance to steal the game.

But the Panthers responded by stuffing a run play, breaking up a pass in the end zone and with Short sacking Keenum for a 3-yard loss to force a field goal. Instead of taking the lead, the Vikings had to settle for a tie.

Carolina scored a touchdown on the next possession to secure the win.

"The mindset is something that we talk about all of the time," Davis said. "When we get in those sudden change situations, we have to hold teams to field goals and take the ball away. It's drilled into your head (by the coaching staff) — field goals and takeaways, field goals and takeaways."

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Start the clock for Trump, GOP in last push on taxes, budget

WASHINGTON (AP) — Start the countdown clock on a momentous two weeks for President Donald Trump and the GOP-run Congress.

Republicans are determined to deliver the first revamp of the nation's tax code in three decades and prove they can govern after their failure to dismantle Barack Obama's health care law this past summer. Voters who will decide which party holds the majority in next year's midterms elections are watching.

Republicans are negotiating with Democrats on the contentious issue of how much the government should spend on the military and domestic agencies to avert a holiday shutdown. An extension of the program that provides low-cost health care to more than 8 million children and aid to hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico, Texas and Florida need to be addressed. And further complicating the end-of-year talks is the fate of some 800,000 young immigrants here illegally.

Lawmakers are trying to get it all done by Dec. 22.

A look at the crowded agenda:

TAXES

Republicans are upbeat about finalizing a tax bill from the House and Senate versions for Trump's first major legislative accomplishment in nearly 11 months in office.

"I feel very confident we're going to get this done ... at the end of the day we're going to get this to the president's desk and he's going to sign it," House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said Sunday in an interview on Fox News Channel.

The House and Senate bills would cut taxes by about \$1.5 trillion over the next decade while adding billions to the \$20 trillion deficit. They combine steep tax cuts for corporations with more modest reductions for most individuals.

Republican leaders have struggled to placate GOP lawmakers from high-tax states like California, New York and New Jersey whose constituents would be hit hard by the elimination of the prized federal deduction for state and local taxes. Repeal of the deduction added up to \$1.3 trillion in revenue over a decade that could be used for deep tax cuts.

Lawmakers finally settled on a compromise in both bills — full repeal of the state and local deductions for income and sales taxes, but homeowners would be able to deduct up to \$10,000 in local property taxes.

And yet it's still not a done deal.



AP
President Donald Trump steps off Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Sunday, Dec. 10, 2017. Trump is returning from a trip to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla.

"There's a lot of conversation around the fact that in some of the blue states where the taxes are high, the property tax alone, they will not be able to use the \$10,000 possible deductions," Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., said on NBC's "Meet the Press with Chuck Todd" Sunday. "So allowing for income and property taxes, which would cost another \$100 billion by the way, to be options for folks in those states would be a better solution. And we're looking at ways to make that happen."

Just a few weeks ago, lawmakers were unyielding on their insistence that the corporate tax rate be slashed from 35 percent to 20 percent. Now, one way to finance the changes on state and local taxes would be to cut the corporate tax rate to 21 or 22 percent instead.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Republicans and Democrats are trying to work out a sweeping budget deal. They got a temporary reprieve from a partial government shutdown when they passed a stopgap, two-week bill last Thursday.

Republicans want a major boost in defense spending. Democrats want a similar increase for domestic agencies.

Congress also has to figure out how much disaster aid should be directed to Puerto Rico, Texas and Florida. The Trump administration requested \$44 billion last month, an amount lawmakers from hurricane-slammed regions say is insufficient. The latest request would bring the total appropriated for disaster relief this fall to close to \$100 billion — and the government still must calculate how much it will cost to

rebuild Puerto Rico's devastated housing stock and electric grid.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Fresh federal money for the Children's Health Insurance Program, known as CHIP, ran out on Oct. 1, a blow to the widely popular program that provides low-cost medical care to more than 8 million children. Some states have relied on unspent funds, while others that were running out of money got a short-term reprieve in the two-week spending bill.

Lawmakers hope to agree on a long-term budget solution for a program that's about \$14 billion a year.

IMMIGRATION

Democrats want to act now to protect young immigrants who came to the United States illegally as children, with demands that a solution is included in any year-end spending deal.

"We will not leave here without a DACA fix," said Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., referring to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

These young immigrants, often referred to as Dreamers, face deportation in a few months after Trump reversed administrative protections established by President Barack Obama.

Republicans say it can wait till next year and shouldn't bog down the broad budget agreement. However, House GOP leaders likely will require Democratic votes for the spending bill and they have to work out a deal with Pelosi.

Final push for Moore and Jones in Alabama Senate race

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Democrats see Tuesday's special Senate election as a chance to renounce a history littered with politicians whose race-baiting, bombast and other baggage have long soiled the state's reputation beyond its borders.

Many Republicans see the vote as chance to ratify their conservative values and protect President Donald Trump's agenda ahead of the 2018 midterm elections.

At the center are Republican Roy Moore, a former jurist twice removed as state chief justice and now accused of sexual misconduct with teenage girls decades ago, and Democrat Doug Jones, an erstwhile federal prosecutor best known for prosecuting two Ku Klux Klansmen responsible for killing four black girls in the 1963 bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church.

The winner will take the seat held previously by Trump's attorney general, Jeff Sessions. Republicans control the Senate with 52 seats.

And while Trump himself didn't campaign in the state after Moore was hit with allegations of sexual misconduct, the president recorded an audio message for robocalls that went to voters on Monday — underscoring the importance to Trump's agenda of keeping the seat in Republican hands.

The matchup mixes both Alabama's tortured history and the nation's current divisive, bitterly partisan politics, and it has made a spectacle of a Deep South state well acquainted with national scrutiny but not accustomed to competitive general elections.

"This is an election to tell the whole world what we stand for," Jones told supporters at one stop Sunday, adding that his campaign "is on the right side of history." At an earlier appearance, he declared Alabama is "at a crossroads" and that Moore, an unapologetic evangelical populist, tries only to "create conflict and division."

Jones, 63, stops short of explicitly comparing Moore to the four-term Gov. George Wallace, whose populism was rooted in segregation. But Jones alluded Sunday to that era of Alabama politics.

"Elect a responsible man to a responsible office," Jones said, repeating the campaign slogan of another Alabama governor, Albert Brewer, who nearly defeated Wallace in 1970 in a contest Alabama liberals and many moderates still lament as a lost opportunity.

Some of Jones' supporters put it even more bluntly. "I thought Alabama's image was pretty much at the bottom," said Pat Lawrence, a retired software engineer in Huntsville. A Moore win, Lawrence added, "will be a whole new bottom."

Those concerns extend even to some GOP quarters. Alabama's senior senator, Richard Shelby, confirmed Sunday that he did not vote for Moore, saying he wrote in another "distinguished" party figure he declined to

name. To win, Jones must both simultaneously energize the Democratic base and peel off Republicans who do not like Moore. Former President Barack Obama and former Vice President Joe Biden have recorded calls urging turnout in the heated race.

Yet for many Republicans, Moore is a paragon of traditional values. They reject accusations that he molested two teenage girls and pursued relationships with others decades ago. Moore denies the charges.

"Everyone has to vote their convictions," said Kevin Mims of Montgomery, as he held his Bible outside his Baptist church Sunday in Montgomery. "My conviction is he's the right man for the job."

Where Moore's critics see a state judge who defied federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court's decision legalizing same-sex marriage, Mims see a stalwart who stands "on the word of God." Other conservatives see an anti-establishment firebrand in the mold of Trump, who won Alabama by 28 percentage points.

Moore encourages that view with fundraising emails that urge backers to help him "defeat the elite," a swipe at both Democrats and the establishment Republicans who tried to deny him the GOP nomination earlier this year.

Ultimately, Republicans from Moore to Trump himself are betting on a simple bottom line: Most Alabama conservatives simply won't defect to a Democrat.

"If Alabama elects liberal Democrat Doug Jones, all of our progress will be stopped cold," Trump says in a robocall the Moore campaign plans to push out Monday.

The president also invokes a common fear among Republicans, calling Jones "a puppet of Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer," the Democratic House and Senate leaders in Washington, both of them reviled by conservative voters. "Roy Moore is the guy we need to pass our Make American Great Again agenda," the president insists.

Moore's baggage could make it difficult to draw conclusions about what the results might mean beyond Alabama, but both parties are watching closely.

Democrats need to flip 24 GOP-held seats to reclaim a House majority, and they're trying to dent the slim Republican advantage in the Senate and its dominance of statehouses around the country. In many of those races, they'll need the same thing Jones must get to win in Alabama: strong turnout among young and non-white voters, along with improved performance among suburban moderates.

A Jones victory would be hailed as a potential precursor, and Democrats have indicated they even a post-Alabama strategy even if Jones loses: They'll take Alabama's brand national, hammering Republicans as "the party of Donald Trump and Roy Moore."

Hyperactive Missouri Gov. Greitens touts his physical feats

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Rappelling into a bull-riding rodeo event, crawling through dirt in a SWAT obstacle course and entering a burning building with firefighters.

These could be action movie stunts by Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Hollywood star turned California governor.

But they were all done by another governor earning a reputation for public displays of physical prowess — Eric Greitens of Missouri.

The 43-year-old Greitens — the nation's second-youngest state executive — revels in the attention, posting videos of his action adventures on Facebook and even using them to help stay fit while keeping a demanding schedule.

In one feat of strength, Greitens visited an indoor rock climbing business and easily scaled two walls as media cameras rolled. Greitens was at the veteran-owned business to announce an initiative to eliminate all start-up business fees for veterans in Missouri. Other exploits include leading runs with military members, climbing 110 flights of stairs in memory of 9/11, and riding in a Missouri Highway Patrol car through a high-speed obstacle course.

"Look, this is fun. It's a good time," Greitens said after scaling the climbing

wall. "And I think it's important that people know we are fighting every day for the people of Missouri."

A novice to politics, Greitens has experience in real fights. He was a boxer in college and has a black belt in Taekwondo. A former Navy SEAL officer, he was once chlorine-gassed in a suicide bomb attack in Iraq. He returned to service three days later.

Greitens was elected in 2016 with no prior experience in public office. He typically wakes up between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. to run on local trails or do strength training at the Missouri State Highway Patrol gym, spokesman Parker Briden said. Shooting the photos and videos of the governor does not require a fulltime staffer and there is no cost to the state of Missouri, Briden said.

He's not the first elected official to earn a reputation for fitness. House Speaker Paul Ryan is a fan of high-intensity P90X workouts. And seven-time Mr. Olympia — Schwarzenegger — went every year to a bodybuilding competition. He called lawmakers "girlie men" when they didn't go along with him.

But Missouri State University communications expert Elizabeth Dudash-Buskirk said Greitens' use of social me-

dia to highlight his physical exploits is "unprecedented."

"He wants to be that picture that you think of when you think of a strong government, when you think of a strong military (and) when you think of a strong police force," she said.

Dudash-Buskirk said Greitens' self-branding as a veteran might also signal higher political aspirations from a governor who has long been pegged as highly ambitious. The Republican reserved the web address ericgreitensforpresident.com years ago.

The governor has gotten generally good reviews on Facebook for the stunts. In response to a video of Greitens rappelling into the bull-riding event, one user commented that "Missouri now officially has the coolest governor."

Springfield resident Conor Bruner, who voted for Greitens, said the videos show Greitens "being a man."

"They're all pencil pushers," said Bruner, referring to other elected officials. "He sort of changed the game."

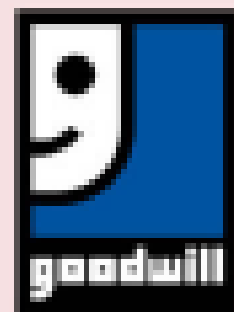
There are skeptics, too. Sharon Swon of Mexico, Missouri, asked why Greitens keeps trying to prove how "macho" he is.

"So he can do pushups," Swon said. "I'm not impressed."



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