

The Guide

Celebrate with a cookie at Epcot

Holiday cookies are one of the big hits at the theme park's Festival of the Holidays.



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OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE

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50 CENTS

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Thursday, December 21, 2017

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Scholarship aims to honor fallen officers

By Charlie Reed
For the News-Gazette

Osceola County's most notable tragedy this year came when Sgt. Sam Howard and Officer Matthew Baxter were killed in the line of duty, not far from Kissimmee Police Department headquarters. The Aug. 18 shooting shook the entire community. Residents from throughout Osceola contributed to a bereavement fund for the fallen officers. Downtown Kissimmee businesses organized a fundraiser just days after the incident to help the effort. Tributes to the officers came in the form of everything from candlelight vigils in front of KPD to memorial T-shirts, bumper stickers and flags. Now, as the new year approaches, KPD and the Valencia College Foundation have teamed up to honor Howard and Baxter with a scholarship named in their memory. The We Dare to Care foundation, a 501C-3 nonprofit established by members of the St. Cloud

Police Department, is also helping coordinate the event. It will be Friday, March 16, at Royal St. Cloud Golf Links in a four-person scramble tournament. Entry fees start at \$75 and can be arranged through KPD Officer Mark Morris or We Dare to Care. The details on who would be eligible for the scholarship were still being determined, authorities said. Morris and those helping spearhead the event said Howard and Baxter would have loved the idea of giving back and helping people help themselves through education. Valencia's Criminal Justice Institute is one of the most recognized and respected training centers in the state and it's also where many Central Florida law enforcement officers attend the police academy. Howard and Baxter were not only known as stellar cops but also loving fathers and active members of the community. Thousands attended services for the officers, including most of the KPD staff, which was relieved by



Officer Matthew Baxter



Sgt. Sam Howard

officers and staff from the Osceola County Sheriff's Office. The shooting and funeral garnered national news coverage. Speaking at the memorial, KPD Chief Jeff O'Dell urged the community to stay involved and connected. "We've got to figure out a way to sustain the momentum and the sense of community that we've had," O'Dell said at the August service. The life-and-death situations

that law enforcement officers face everyday came into sharp focus after Howard and Baxter were killed during what started as a routine stop. The shooter, a military veteran with a record of mental illness, was arrested shortly after the incident. Photographs of Howard and Baxter now hang in the Chambers Park Community Center in the See **Scholarship**, Page 3.

AROUND TOWN

Presenting special gifts



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/MARTIN MADDOCK

Students from the Osceola County School for the Arts came together to collect food for distribution for families in need within the school district. Boxes were filled with non-perishable items to include proteins, starches and vegetables and were decorated for the holidays. The Kissimmee Kiwanis Club and Kissimmee Rotary Club also delivered \$15 gift cards for each box that could be redeemed at Publix grocery stores. Nikki Sloan, National Junior Honor Society sponsor (front row right), gets ready to distribute the boxes, which will be picked up by those families who were pre-selected.

Law enforcement increases for holiday weekend

By Rachel Christian
Staff Writer

An estimated 107.3 million Americans are expected to travel by planes, trains and automobiles this weekend, and Central Florida law enforcement has already amped up its efforts in response. The Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) launched its "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" campaign Monday, and will continue its focus on impaired driving throughout the state until New Year's Day. "Impaired driving continues to be a priority for law enforcement in the state," said FHP Director Gene Spaulding. "In an

effort to get drunk and drugged drivers off Florida roads, FHP troopers will aggressively enforce impaired driving laws." The Kissimmee Police Department issued its own special message reminding motorists to drive sober this holiday season. A picture posted to the KPD Twitter account Tuesday displayed several officers in Santa hats outside the station accompanied by the caption, "They know when you've been drinking, they know when you're 0.8." "The Kissimmee Police Department is encouraging everyone to celebrate the holidays responsibly," said KPD Public Information Officer Stacie Miller. "The See **Weekend**, Page 5.

First Puerto Rican grocery store chain opens in Kissimmee



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/MARTIN MADDOCK

Willer's Supermarket opened earlier this month at 1344 E. Vine St.

By Charlie Reed
For the News-Gazette

With one of the state's largest Puerto Rican enclaves right here in Kissimmee, it's no surprise the opening of Willer's Supermarket has excited those familiar with the island grocery chain. And with influx of Puerto Ricans coming from the island since it was devastated by Hurricane Maria, Willer's is also providing a bit of home for storm weary transplants. Owner Willer Vélez, who already has three grocery stores on the island, opened his latest stateside location earlier this month at 1344 E. Vine St. in the Mill Creek Mall.

The Dec. 3 grand opening was lauded by Puerto Ricans and other residents – both Hispanic and non-Hispanic – who enjoy comidas puertorriqueña. Willer's not only specializes in foods manufactured in Puerto Rico but also on hard-to-find artisanal items, from morcillo, a type of blood sausage, to handcrafted decorations typical in island homes. Many American grocery chains like Publix and Winn Dixie offer Puerto Rican specialties and other foods popular in the Caribbean and Central and South America. But Velez has said his market will specialize in those sometimes hard- See **Store**, Page 5.

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CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES
(Sunday, December 24)
5:00 p.m.; 7:00 p.m.; 9:00 p.m.

Trinity will not have a service on Saturday night, December 23rd, nor Sunday morning December 24th.
Our services for the New Year's Eve weekend will be held at 5pm on Saturday night and 10:30 am on Sunday morning.

Join Us As We Celebrate The Birth of Christ!

Residents respond to Sound off Osceola

The *News-Gazette* recently asked residents in our Sound Off Osceola poll: “With concerns to the rapid growth in Osceola County, do you think the moratorium the county commissioners recently passed will have an impact on slowing growth?”

Residents made their opinions heard, according to the number of responses received. And a majority of the responses did not think it would have an impact. Some of the opinions were:

- “Because they are only concerned with making money. Until it affects

themselves or their family is when they will actually listen.”

- “The commissioners should have stopped this 27 years ago. I have been here 27 years and it gets worse all the time.”
- “Because our commissioners always find a reason to make exceptions.”
- “So much development is already approved and in progress, the moratorium will serve only to allow the developers to catch up. As a long time resident, I have seen this all before and what is so frightening is that no one seems to have learned from past errors.”

- “Way too many developments and permits already approved. By the time the moratorium expires, the new developments looking to come online won't stand a chance for customers because the competition has been stymied. This is nothing more than fleecing the residents.”
- “The moratorium needs to last much longer to slow growth, Osceola County is out of control. I've been here since 1991 and it has gotten much, much worse.”
- “I think it's too little too late. I've lived here for 35 years and I am disappointed in (the) change in lifestyle here now. Too crowded. Building all over. Too much traffic. Beautiful natural areas going, going gone. Too many housing and apartment developments going up.”

Some residents, however, did think it would have an impact. Some of the comments were:

- “Any moratorium to slow growth will be good for Osceola County. Having seen what over building can do to a community it needs to slow down. Why would Osceola County want to turn into Orange County?”
- “But it (moratorium) needs to be extended. Maybe the developers should pay for the new roads. The traffic is awful and the roads are in desperate need or repair.”
- “I hope so. But that is a temporary fix.”

The current poll question being asked is: “How much in rent or mortgage payments per month would you consider affordable housing?” Make your opinion known by answering the poll in the Viewpoint section or online at www.aroundosceola.com.

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APV offers holiday camp

By Lisa Concepcion
Poinciana Writer

Winter Break for students is the time for them to celebrate the holidays while re-charging for the remainder of the school year.

Parents, on the other hand, may not be able to take a break from work obligations. Enter the

Association of Poinciana Villages (APV) and Orlando Premier Music Instruction (OPMI) Holiday Camp.

Holiday Camp runs from Wednesday, Dec. 27, to Friday, Dec. 29. Cost is \$65 per child. The camp starts again on Tuesday, Jan. 2, to Friday, Jan. 5. Cost is \$100 per child. There are

See **Poinciana**, Page 6.

DASHING THROUGH THE TOLLS...

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Marisara Cintrón, MD
Pediatra • IMA - BVL

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OSCEOLA BUSINESS

► LYNX operating on Christmas, New Year's Day

LYNX will be operating a holiday schedule on Christmas and New Year's Day. If a bus or NeighborLink service runs on Sunday, it will offer the same schedule on the holiday. LYNX will resume its regular scheduled hours on Dec. 26 and Jan. 2. ACCESS LYNX will operate regularly scheduled service. Customers with subscriptions who will not be traveling on Christmas or New Year's Day are encouraged to call 407-423-8747 to cancel their trip for the day to avoid receiving unnecessary no-shows. Also, the Customer Service window, Call Center, and Lost and Found will be closed on Christmas and New Year's Day. For more information, visit: <http://www.golynx.com/contact-us.stml> or <http://www.golynx.com/news-events/christmas-and-new-years-day-holiday-schedule.stml>.

► SRS real estate partners brokers Oviedo Point purchase

SRS Real Estate Partners has brokered the purchase of Oviedo Point, in Oviedo. The center is located at 1000 W. Mitchell Hammock Road, near the southeast corner of Mitchell Hammock Road and West Broadway Street (West State Road 426). Oviedo Point is a 16,000 square-foot, multi-tenant strip center on two-acres of land and currently 100 percent leased. Businesses there include Orange Theory Fitness, 1000 Degrees Neapolitan Pizzeria, Mission BBQ, i Fix Your i Smart Device Repair and CareSpot Urgent Care. "We are pleased to facilitate the purchase of such an in demand shopping center," said Alex Bisbee, associate in SRS Real Estate Partners' Orlando office. "Oviedo Point is a quality asset that will be a profitable addition to our client's real estate portfolio." Alex Bisbee and Blake Hunter of SRS Real Estate Partners represented the buyer in the transaction.

► Allstate agency owners across Florida earn \$17,000 grant to fight domestic violence

Allstate agency owners from across Florida recently came together to secure a \$17,000 Allstate Foundation Helping Hands grant to benefit the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The grant will support the nonprofit organization's mission to empower women and children to create a violence-free world.

The Allstate volunteers earned \$17,000 for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence by collecting much-needed items during a domestic violence nonprofit supply drive throughout November in various cities across Florida including Boynton Beach, Daytona Beach, Deltona, Fort Lauderdale, Haines City, Jacksonville, Jupiter, Orange Park, Pompano Beach, Port Orange, Port Saint Lucie, St. Augustine and Weston. The following domestic violence nonprofits benefitted from the supply drive donations:

Domestic Abuse Council of Volusia County, Harbor House of Central Florida, Hubbard House, Peaceful Paths, Peace River Center, Quigley House, SafeSpace and Women in Distress of Broward County.

The participating Allstate volunteers are among thousands of agency owners and financial specialists around the country working to strengthen communities by volunteering their time to support the causes they care about most.

"As small business owners and community leaders, Allstate agency owners see firsthand the opportunities and challenges facing the communities we serve," said Jacksonville Allstate agency owner Jolita Ray, who also supports the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Changing Lives program. "Giving back is core to who we are, which is why we're proud to volunteer and raise funds to improve the lives of people in the state of Florida."

The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence is one of thousands of organizations this year to receive Allstate Foundation Helping Hands grants secured by agency owners and financial specialists on behalf of the nonprofits where they volunteer. The grants support organizations addressing domestic violence, youth empowerment, disaster preparedness, hunger and other causes.

The Allstate Foundation Helping Hands grants are one example of The Allstate Foundation's legacy of service and giving for communities and nonprofits across the U.S.:

- Since The Allstate Foundation was founded in 1952, it has contributed over \$400 million to support community nonprofits.
- In 2016, The Allstate Foundation contributed more than \$25 million to communities across the U.S.
- Each October, domestic violence nonprofits across the country participate in the Purple Purse Challenge to raise funds for financial empowerment programs for domestic violence survivors. This year, more than 220 domestic violence nonprofits participated. Along with the Allstate Foundation grants awarded, more than \$4.18 million was raised during the Purple Purse Challenge. To learn more and donate, visit PurplePurse.com.

► Gas prices are lowest since August

The December discounts keep flowing at the pump. Gas prices have declined for five consecutive weeks, as refineries produce more gasoline than is being consumed. This helped prices return to levels not seen since Aug. 30, when gas prices surged in response to Hurricane Harvey's impact on Gulf Coast refineries.

"Gulf Coast refineries have completely recovered from the effects of Hurricane Harvey, and are now flooding the market with fuel in anticipation of strong demand during the year-end holidays," said Mark Jenkins, spokesman, AAA - The Auto Club Group. "AAA forecasts a record-setting 97.4 million Americans will take a road trip during the final 10 days of the year. However, the strong supply of gasoline should help stave-off any gas price hikes that would otherwise be caused by such a surge in demand."

Gas prices for the year-end holidays should be on par with - if not lower than - last year, according to an AAA press release. The state average is falling at a rate of one cent per day. If that trend continues, pump prices would drop another 8 cents before Christmas Day.

Florida gas prices averaged \$2.38 on Sunday - the lowest since Aug. 30. The state average declined 3 cents during the past week. Florida gas prices are 13 cents less than a month ago, and 6 cents more than this time last year.

SCHOLARSHIP

Continued from Page 1

neighborhood not far from where the two officers were killed. The center is a voluntary pre-K site and place where kids from the area go for meals, after-school tutoring and fun.

It's where KPD officers spend time doing youth outreach and perhaps where one of the future scholarship recipients will come from.

"We are thankful and humbled that the

community continues to keep the memories of our heroes top of mind. This scholarship is a fitting tribute to Sam and Matthew," said KPD spokesperson Stacie Miller.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

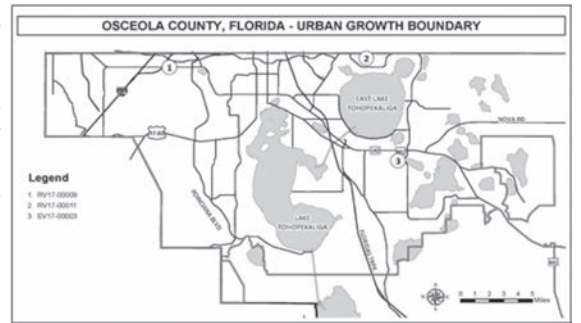
Notice is hereby given that Public Hearings will be held by the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners beginning at 5:30 P.M. or as soon thereafter as practical, on **January 8 2018**, in the Osceola County Administration Building, Commission Chambers, 4th Floor, 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, Florida, 34741 to consider the following.

1. RV17-00009: Consideration of a petition by Old Town Kissimmee, LTD, for a road vacation and to adopt Resolution No. 18-003R, to vacate a portion of Tract "C" County Road as shown in the plat of Florida Plaza, as filed and recorded in Plat Book 4, Pages 76 & 77 of the Public Records of Osceola County, Florida and located in Section 9, Township 25 South, Range 28 East.
2. RV17-00011: Consideration of a petition by Wilfredo Molina and Carmen M. Cruz, for a road vacation and to adopt Resolution No. 18-004R, to vacate a portion the Dawn Avenue right-of-way as shown in the plat of Silver Lake Estates Unit 2, as filed and recorded in Plat Book 13, Page 41 of the Public Records of Osceola County, Florida, and located in Section 2, Township 25 South, Range 30 East.
3. EV17-00003: Consideration of a petition by Shane and Jennifer LaTour, for an easement vacation and to adopt Resolution No. 18-002R, to vacate a portion of the unobstructed maintenance easement depicted on the plat of Hickory Hollow Unit 2 recorded in Plat Book 5, Page(s) 142 & 143 of the Public Records of Osceola County, Florida, and located in Section 7, Township 26 South, Range 31 East.

Materials relating to the above may be examined in the offices of the Osceola County Community Development, 1 Courthouse Square, Suite 1400, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., weekdays except holidays. Written comments may be submitted to the Community Development Department/Development Review Office at the above address.

For questions regarding these requests please contact the Osceola County Community Development Department/ Development Review at 407-742-0200; fax number at 407-742-0205 or email at notice@osceola.org. Interested parties may appear at the public hearing and be heard with respect to these items.

Any person requiring special accommodations at the public meeting because of a disability or physical impairment should contact the Office of the Clerk of the Board 407-742-2100, at 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, prior to the meeting. Complete details of all Board of County Commissioners meetings are posted at www.osceola.org



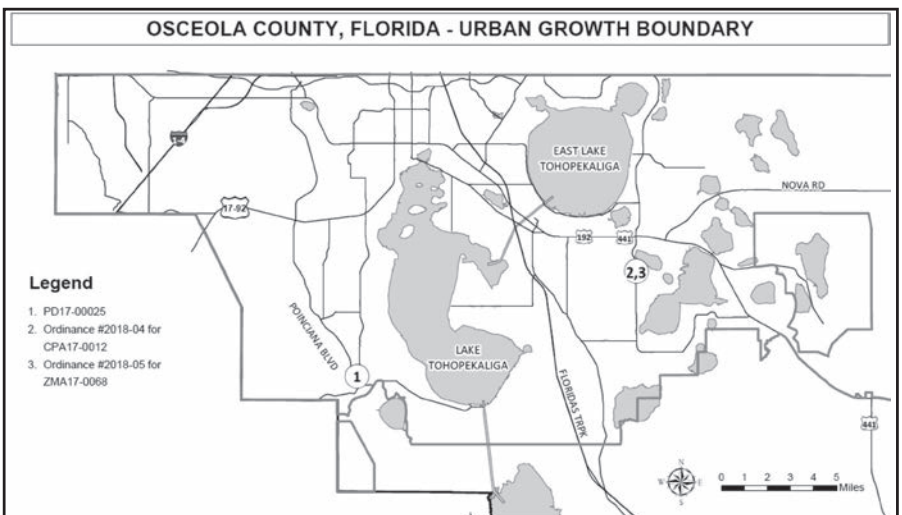
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that Public Hearings will be held by the Osceola County Planning Commission beginning at 6:00 P.M., or as soon thereafter as practical, on **January 4, 2018**, and by the Board of County Commissioners beginning at 5:30 P.M. or as soon thereafter as practical, on **January 8, 2018**, in the Osceola County Administration Building, Commission Chambers, 4th Floor, 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, Florida, 34741 to consider the following:

1. Approval of PD17-00025: Approval to Amend PD05-00005 (The Pointe) to Incorporate the Previously Approved PD06-00054, Resulting in an Increase of 1.5 Acres for a total of 39.12 Acres of Commercial Area with no Increase in Commercial Square Footage. The Property is Generally Located West of Pleasant Hill Road, Approximately 2000 feet North of the Intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Poinciana Boulevard. Alan Charron, Real Property Specialists Inc (Applicant & Owner) Commission District: 3

2. Adoption of Ordinance #2018-04 for CPA17-0012: An Ordinance of the Board of County Commissioners of Osceola County, Florida, adopting a small-scale comprehensive plan amendment, CPA17-0012, EQUITAS Management Group (Applicant) and Fred H. Cumbie, Jr., as surviving trustee of the Credit Shelter Trust under the Fred H. Cumbie Revocable Trust (Owner), to change the Future Land Use designation from Low Density Residential (LDR) to Commercial (COM) on certain real property generally located south of Nolte Road, west of Hickory Tree Road, and east of Old Hickory Tree Road and Clark Road, comprised of approximately 1.76 acres, more or less; amending the Future Land Use Map of the Future Land Use Element of the Osceola County Comprehensive Plan; providing for correction of scrivener's errors; providing for severability; providing for conflict; and providing for an effective date. Commission District: 5

3. Adoption of Ordinance #2018-05 for ZMA17-0068: An Ordinance of the Board of County Commissioners of Osceola County, Florida, changing the zoning designation from Agricultural Development and Conservation (AC) to Commercial Neighborhood (CN), on certain real property generally located south of Nolte Road, west of Hickory Tree Road, and east of Old Hickory Tree Road and Clark Road, and comprised of approximately 1.76 acres, more or less; amending the official zoning map; providing for correction of scrivener's errors; providing for severability; providing for conflict; and providing for an effective date. EQUITAS Management Group (Applicant) and Fred H. Cumbie, Jr., as surviving trustee of the Credit Shelter Trust under the Fred H. Cumbie Revocable Trust (Owner). Commission District: 5



Materials relating to the above may be examined in the offices of the Osceola County Community Development, 1 Courthouse Square, Suite 1100, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., weekdays except holidays. Written comments may be submitted to the Community Development Department at the above address.

For questions regarding these requests please contact the Osceola County Community Development Department at 407-742-0200; fax number at 407-742-0206 or email at notice@osceola.org. Interested parties may appear at the public hearing and be heard with respect to these items.

Any person requiring special accommodations at the public meeting because of a disability or physical impairment should contact the Office of the Clerk of the Board 407-742-2100, at 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee, Florida 34741, prior to the meeting. Complete details of all Board of County Commissioners meetings are posted at <http://www.osceola.org/about-osceola-county/county-meetings/>

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1/22/17.TNG

VIEWPOINT

OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE

Year 126- No. 118

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(USPS Number 513540)

(ISSN 1060-1244) Published each Thursday and Saturday for \$52 per year by Sun Publications of Florida. All rights reserved. Periodicals postage paid at Kissimmee, FL

Postmaster: Send address changes to:
Osceola News-Gazette
108 Church St., Kissimmee, FL 34741

The Osceola News-Gazette is published by Sun Publications of Florida, a division of Lakeway Publishers of Florida, Inc. Phone 407-846-7600. Fax 407-846-8516. Email at news@osceolanewsgazette.com. The Osceola News-Gazette is available online at: www.aroundsosceola.com.

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Taxing what hurts us

To the Editor:

With the annual tax filing date just around the corner, pundits are searching for ways to make our tax code fairer and more reflective of our social incentives and burdens.

In this regard, there is a growing interest in a tax on meat, eggs, and dairy products designed to curb the self-destructive health impacts of their consumption and to effectively compensate society for the associated devastating environmental impacts.

The concept is hardly radical. We already pay similar taxes on tobacco and alcohol products. A number of states have or are considering imposing taxes on soft drinks and other junk foods.

Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's decision to ban supersized sugary sodas has resurrected the age-old debate over the role of the state in protecting the public health. In recent years, this debate involved bicycle helmets, car seat belts, tobacco, trans fats, saturated fats in meat and dairy products, and sugar (or more aptly, high-fructose corn syrup). Public subsidies for tobacco, meat and dairy, and corn production added fuel to the debate.

I would argue that society has a right to regulate activities that impose a heavy burden on the public treasury. National medical costs of dealing with our obesity epidemic, associated with consumption of meat, dairy, and sugars, are estimated at \$190 billion. Eliminating subsidies for these products, as well as judicious taxation to reduce their use and recoup public costs,

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

should be supported by health advocates and fiscal conservatives alike.

Benjamin Franklin claimed that "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

Ironically, death can be deferred substantially by taxing products that make us sick.

The revenue would reimburse the Medicare and Medicaid programs for treating victims of heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and other chronic killer diseases that have been linked conclusively with consumption of animal products. It would pay for restoration of waterways and wildlife habitats that have been devastated by production of these items.

Tony Wells
Kissimmee

was Poinciana High School, which was 12 miles away. That makes it impossible for any student to walk to school. Forcing them to either ride the bus or for parents to drop them off. This creates obvious congestion on our already crowded roads. Even 17 years later, the closest high school is still six and a half miles away. These are distances that you only hear in the stories old folks tell. All we are missing is 6 feet of snow and having to walk up hills both ways.

We desperately need some common sense zoning. That seems to be something that simply isn't as common as it should be in this county. We need schools that are surrounded by homes. They need to be in the middle of communities and not on the side of major roads surrounded by pasture. Our children should be able to safely walk to and from school. This will not only help with traffic congestion but has the potential to save both the county and individuals a lot of money in transportation costs.

Marcos Diego Marrero
Chair
Libertarian Party of Osceola County

Bus driver shortage a real problem

To the Editor:

It's incredible that we are consistently having to worry whether the children living in our county will be making it to school every morning.

The bus driver shortage in the county has created a real problem. We are halfway through the school year and there is still a large group that is unable to make it to class on time. This isn't the fault of drivers, unions, or parents. This is due to lack of planning by the Osceola County School Board and Osceola County. This county has been building schools in such hard to reach places for years. Seventeen years ago, when I first moved down, the closest high school



SOUND OFF OSCEOLA

We want to hear from you!

How much in rent or mortgage payments per month would you consider affordable housing?

Choose one

Rent/Non-Vacation

- \$750 or less
- \$750 to \$1,000
- \$1,000 to \$1,200
- \$1,200 to \$1,500
- \$1,500 to \$1,750
- \$1,750 to \$2,000
- \$2,000+

Mortgage

- \$750 or less
- \$750 to \$1,000
- \$1,000 to \$1,200
- \$1,200 to \$1,500
- \$1,500 to \$1,750
- \$1,750 to \$2,000
- \$2,000+

Comments?

Zip Code: _____ Email: _____

Would you like to speak with us in further detail? May we contact you?

- Yes No

Please return this survey to our office or mail your comments to:

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RESIDENTS OF UNINCORPORATED OSCEOLA COUNTY



THE SOLID WASTE DEPARTMENT WILL OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING CURBSIDE COLLECTION SCHEDULE FOR THE UPCOMING HOLIDAY:

On Monday, December 25, 2017 (Christmas Day) The administrative offices and the Bass Road Recycle center are closed. **There will be no curbside collection services on this day. However, a make up day is scheduled for Saturday, December 23rd.**

On Monday, January 1, 2018 (New Years Day) The administrative offices and the Bass Road Recycle Center are closed. **There will be no curbside collection services on this day. However, a make up day is scheduled for Saturday, December 30, 2017.**

*Curbside collection will run as normally scheduled on Christmas Eve and New Years Eve.

RESIDENTES DEL CONDADO DE OSCEOLA NO INCORPORADO

EL DEPARTAMENTO DE DESPERDICIOS SOLIDOS OBSERVARÁ EL SIGUIENTE HORARIO DE RECOGIDO DE DESPERDICIOS Y RECICLAJE PARA LA SEMANA FESTIVA:

El lunes, 25 de diciembre de 2017 (Día de Navidad) - Las oficinas administrativas y el Centro de Reciclaje de Bass Road estarán cerradas. **No habrá servicios de recogida de desperdicios o reciclaje. Los servicios para estos hogares se llevarán acabo el sábado, 23 de Diciembre.**

El lunes, 1 de Enero de 2018 (Día de año nuevo) Las oficinas administrativas y el Centro de Reciclaje de Bass Road estarán cerrados. **No habrá servicios de recogida de desperdicios o reciclaje. Los servicios para estos hogares se llevarán acabo el sábado, 30 de diciembre, 2017.**

*Servicios de recogida no seran interumpidos Vispera de Navidad o Vispera de Año Nuevo.

WISHING YOU A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Osceola County Solid Waste Department
407-742-7750

122117.TNG

POLICE NEWS

Motorcyclist killed on Florida's Turnpike

A Vero Beach resident was killed on Florida's Turnpike on Monday in Osceola County after he lost control of the motorcycle he was driving.

According to the Florida Highway Patrol, the 55-year-old victim, who has not yet been identified pending notification of next of kin, was traveling northbound on a 2011 Honda motorcycle on the turnpike at about 8:25 a.m.

For an unknown reason, he traveled into the median and struck a guardrail, a patrol report stated. The motorcycle overturned, ejecting the man. He was pronounced dead on scene.

Kissimmee police searching for rape suspect

Kissimmee detectives are asking for the public's help to identify a sexual battery suspect.

On Sunday, the suspect sexually battered the female victim in the parking lot between Kmart, 2211 W. Vine St. and Jason's Asian Market, 2201 W. Vine St.

The suspect was described as a Hispanic male approximately 5 feet 7 inches tall, 130 to 160 pounds and between the ages of 25 and 30. The suspect did not have an accent. He has a goatee and long black frizzy hair pulled back into a ponytail

with a fade on the sides., police officials said. He was wearing a red shirt that had white lettering on the front and jeans that had a combination of dark blue and light blue colors.

Anyone with information about the suspect is urged to contact the Kissimmee Police Department's Major Crimes Unit at 407-846-3333, by email at seeitsayit@kissimmee.org<mailto:seeitsayit@kissimmee.org.

STORE

Continued from Page 1

to-find items such as Café Lareño, Cameo cookies and Export Sodas crackers.

There's also a bakery with fresh bread, desserts and other sweets from the tropics and a hot deli for well-priced take-out style food. The store will

WEEKEND

Continued from Page 1

department will not be increasing patrols, but will be concentrating on impaired drivers."

The FHP released several tips for motorists to ensure that they "arrive alive" this weekend.

► Drive sober. Legal age adults should celebrate responsibly and plan ahead by finding a safe way home every time – designate a driver or call a ride service.

► Observe and obey all speed limits. Speed limits may change through different types of roadways, so be sure to adjust speed accordingly. In Florida, the limit will never be over 70 mph.

► Buckle up. Florida law requires all drivers - all front seat passengers and all passengers under the age of 18 - to wear seat belts or the appropriate child restraints.

► Focus on driving. Texting, talking on the phone, eating and adjusting the stereo are all examples of things that can take attention off the road.

All uniformed FHP personnel, including those normally assigned to administrative duties, will be patrolling interstates and other major state roads. FHP Auxiliary troopers will also volunteer to augment the FHP during the holiday period.

FHP officers will be assisting individuals who break down or who need other assistance while traveling.

Motorists should call *FHP (*347) if they see an impaired or aggressive driver, or to request roadside assistance.

This weekend marks the highest year-end travel volume on record, a 3.1 percent increase over last year, according to AAA.

It is the ninth consecutive year of rising year-end holiday travel.

AAA also estimates that over 5.5 million Floridians will travel 50 miles or more (3.3 percent or 180,000 more people than last year).

soon offer live music on weekends.

Much of Willer's produce is also sourced directly from the island, still reeling from the hurricane and struggling to rebuild. Power, water and supplies are still in short supply.

Willer's has a prime market in Osceola, and

ones that's growing. It claims to be the first Puerto Rican grocery store to come to town, but the county is rife with grocery stores, bakeries, take-out joints and sit-down restaurants offering Puerto Rican fare.

The growing Puerto Rican population in Osceola County is driving new business and industry

partnerships. Mayor Jose Alvarez is leading the efforts by the city of Kissimmee to forge new ties with Puerto Rico's business and government leaders.

The Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration has one of two of its field offices outside Washington D.C. in Kissimmee. The other is in New York.

For more information visit www.aroundosceola.com

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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

Continued from Page 2

discounts available for siblings. Camp hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (extended day is until 6 p.m.).

and crafts, sports and recreation, music and dancing, cooking segments and team building. OPMI is the same organization

that has run APV's summer camp for the past two years. Holiday Camp will be held at the Association of Poinciana Villages Fitness

Center, 397 Marigold Ave. For more information, email OPIMI@opmiopmtlessons.com.

Children in grades K to 5 can take part in a fun STRAM project at the Poinciana Branch Library on Thursday, Dec. 21, from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Simply Science these youngsters to push up their sleeves and prepare to investigate many things around them.

Seniors are invited to flex their creative muscle every Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon at the Poinciana Branch Library. Acrylic Painting for Seniors is a fun, instructive class. All supplies are included except the canvas. Class size is limited to 10. Stop by the library to register.

Curious Creations on Saturday, Dec. 23, explores and develops the creative side for children and families. A wide range of art activities will be offered for every age group including visual

arts, music, dance and performing arts. Attendees will get the chance to explore and develop new and existing skills, gain an appreciation for the arts and cultivate imagination. This month get ready to board The Polar Express with Curious Creations. The program runs from 2 to 3 p.m.

The Super Saturday Cinema will show on Saturday, Dec. 23, from 3:30 to 5 p.m.

This movie is based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg.

When a doubting young boy takes a train ride to the North Pole, he embarks on a journey of self-discovery that shows him that the wonder of life never fades for those who believe.

Chair Yoga for seniors is on Wednesdays from 10

to 11 a.m. Improve strength and flexibility through a gentle combination of seated and standing poses. Includes breath exercises and hand, neck, shoulder, arms and hand work.

Crafty crew will meet at the Poinciana Branch Library Wednesday, Dec. 27, from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

This group is for those who love to knit, crochet, crossstitch, quilt, scrapbook or any other portable craft. All ages and skill levels are welcome.

The library will be closed Dec. 24, 25, 31 and Jan. 1. All library programs are free and open to the public. The Poinciana Branch Library is located at 101 N. Doverplum Ave.

LISA CONCEPCION Poinciana Writer



If you have any Poinciana news or information that you would like to share call Lisa Concepcion at 407-846-7122 or email news@osceolanewsgazette.

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SPORTS



Morgan earns POY honors. page 9.

Local & National Sports • Sports Commentary

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OHS still undefeated; big tests await

By Ken Jackson
 Sports Editor

If Osceola, the reigning Class 9A state boys basketball champion, is going to conquer the state again this year, it makes some sense to conquer the county first.

The Kowboys, who also won the Orange Belt Conference last year, took a commanding lead in the OBC standings Friday with a 62-42 win over Poinciana. The win moved Osceola to 7-0 (4-0 in OBC) and are now winners of 37 of their last 30 games going back to the start of last season.

The Eagles won the Class 5A state title in 2016, but with a roster and coaching staff that looks very different were 3-5 going into a Tuesday matchup with Celebration.

The Kowboys unleashed a swarming defense on Poinciana, forcing 22 turnovers, and moved the ball effectively with 11 assists on their 21 field goals.

Still, Nate Alexander and Richard Victor, the OHS and PHS coaches respectively, met after the game to commiserate about how far from great their teams' efforts were.

"Our guys played hard, they didn't sleep on Poinciana, but they're trying to do a lot," Alexander said. "We can work to get better shots. We've got a ways to go."

Victor, who's team only has one player left from that 5A title team, said he's been working to build a new Eagle mentality, attitude and culture.

"We need to combine our athleticism and discipline and add some patience," he said. "We've been teaching, and the team is trying to execute. It will come in small steps. We saw some of it (Friday), holding a state championship contender to 62 points. "We're getting close. Nobody ever won any championship in November or December."

The Kowboys set a tone defensively in the first quarter against Poinciana, forcing nine turnovers and taking a 16-7 lead that stretched to 33-17 at the half on the shooting of Jadhkiss Soto and Isaiah Palermo. The Eagles clawed back in the third quarter, as Jamari Key scored seven of his 10 points, to make it 39-30 heading to the final quarter, but that's when OHS point guard Josh

Marte (game-high 15 points, five assists) and center Omar Payne (12) hooked up. The duo scored 16 points in the final eight minutes to put another OBC victory away.

Palermo (10) and Soto (11, with five steals) also scored in double digits.

OHS played Gateway on Tuesday night, and will face Liberty on Jan. 29.

As it often does during the holidays, Osceola's schedule gets interesting during the winter break. The Kowboys play in an exhibition game of the City of Palms Classic in Fort Myers today at 5:15 p.m. against Miami Central, then return for a District 9A-7 at George Jenkins Friday. After Christmas, they travel to The Battle at The Villages where they open against Pickerington Central (Ohio) Wednesday at The Villages High School at 5:30. The tournament continues Dec. 29-30.

Poinciana will host The Rivals Classic Shootout, a 16-team invitational tournament beginning Dec. 28.

Gateway went into Tuesday's game with Osceola, a battle for

See **Hoops**, Page 9.



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/MARTIN MADDOCK

Osceola High center Omar Payne, shown dunking the basketball in a recent game against Harmony, scored 12 points in Monday's 62-42 Orange Belt Conference victory over Poinciana.

ALL-COUNTY GOLF TEAMS

Success came quickly for Ling

By Ken Jackson
 Sports Editor

At the start of her freshman year three years ago, St. Cloud High's Taylor Ling went looking for a sport to play that would get her outdoors and be a change of pace from her years of competitive dancing.

Her father lived on a golf course, so it seemed self-explanatory.

"We went out to the driving range, I started swinging a club and hitting balls, and I thought, 'Yeah, I can do this.'"

Three years later, she does "this" better than any high-school female in the county.

In her junior year on the golf course, Ling won the Orange Belt Conference individual award — helping lead the Bulldogs to the team victory as well — and helped guide St. Cloud into the regional playoff round. There she shot her best round ever and narrowly missed a spot in the Class 3A state tournament in a playoff.

After all that, why would the Osceola News-Gazette Girls Golfer of the Year want to go back inside to her dance troupe?

Oh, she still does that, too.

Ling's daily schedule during the week reads like a one-person drill squad: eat,

school, golf, dance, sleep, repeat. It's by design.

"I'm young, I can handle it," she said.

She's done a better job of handling the traps and hazards on the golf courses, especially of late. Ling shot a career-best round of 78 in the Class 3A Region 6 tournament at Royal St. Cloud Golf Club, when she needed a solid finish to break 80 for the first time — and got it. The only downer on the day was that the Bulldogs did not qualify as a team and she finished in a tie for the last individual transfer spot to the 3A state tournament

See **Ling**, Page 8

All-County boys golf

Players of the Year: Kevin Carr, Evan Taylor, Conlan Micher, Carson Sampl (HHS)

All-county team: Harmony: Brock Barber. St. Cloud: Noah Endicott, Jacob Johnson. Celebration: Sam Cundiff, Nick Morgan.

Longhorns featured true team effort on path to state tourney

By Ken Jackson
 Sports Editor

The Harmony boys golf team, in its 13 prior seasons, had never qualified for the state tournament as a team. Some years it was because of a lack of talent, others because of being in a stacked region, and sometimes it was not reaching its potential in the regional qualifying tournament.

That changed in October, when the Longhorns, behind the contributions of Evan Taylor, Carson Sampl, Conlan Micher, Kevin Carr and Brock Barber all had solid days on the course. The Longhorns finished second, just seven shots back of seemingly-unbeatable Vero Beach, in the Region 6 tournament, where two teams qualified.

Under those pressure-packed conditions, every Longhorn broke 80. That the five golfers did well came as absolutely

no surprise to first-year Coach Mark Bhabha, who watched the same thing happen the entire regular season and in their Orange Belt Conference team championship and runner-up finish in the District 3A-16 tournament.

"I knew when I came in June that we had a very good group of golfers," he said. "They came close last year, and we have several seniors who knew that this was their last chance."

That he never knew which of his players would be the low Longhorn at any given match or tournament until the scores were posted meant that he, nor anyone else, could attribute Harmony's uncharted success this year to one player. The top nine-hole stroke averages ranged from 37 to 41.

For that reason, seniors Carr and Sampl, junior Micher and sophomore Taylor share this year's honor of Osceola News-

Gazette Boys Golfer of the Year.

While the season ended on kind of a down note — the Longhorns didn't play to their expectations in the state tournament at Mission Inn, finishing 14th in the 16-team field — it had highlights worth waiting for, as Carr noted.

"The opportunity this year was amazing, something I'll always remember," he said. "It may be it was more special because it was my senior year. It was easier for a team like us because anyone could be the top player instead of having to rely on one guy to bring in the lowest score."

Sampl said the team went into the state tournament "playing really well."

"At the regionals every one of us grinded hard," he said. "This team was interesting, we just had to go out and play our game and expect good things."

See **Longhorns**, Page 9



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/MARTIN MADDOCK

St. Cloud High junior Taylor Ling won the Orange Belt Conference girls individual title with an 86 at Royal St. Cloud Golf Club. She led the Bulldogs in the district tournament and shot a career-best round of 78 in the Region 6 tournament, good enough to get into a playoff for the final spot in the Class 3A state tournament.

LING

Continued from Page 7.

"All I could think of was that it was a good day," she said. "A few days later I thought about where I had bad holes and maybe could have saved shots that would have gotten me to state."

That round followed an 86 that won her the OBC

title and a 90 that led St. Cloud in the District 3A-16 tournament and helped the Bulldogs qualify for the regionals. All three were at Royal St. Cloud.

That's not bad for a girl playing the game three whole years. But there's many more of those years

to come, and she hopes the near future of her golf career includes college.

"I want to get a scholarship," she said. "It's a serious thing for me now, I've started playing more competitive events on junior tours. Plus, I love the outdoors. I love dance, too,

but it keeps you inside for hours upon hours."

Ling, who calls her driving her strength, said she's working on chipping and short game to make up strokes she's been losing. Jim Endicott, the Bulldogs' golf coach and Director of Instruction at

Royal St. Cloud, said her improvement over the last calendar year has been impressive.

"From the district tournament her sophomore year to the regional tournament this year, she's dropped 20 strokes," he said. "She's now in the 40s regularly (for nine holes) because she's working hard at it now. I can see her regularly in the 70s (for 18)

pretty soon. She's a leader, a hard worker, and she supports her teammates and I can see they feed off of that."

Those are traits that will serve her well if she can find her way onto a college team in two years.

"If I get to play in college, I'll be able to look back and say, 'I've only been playing for five years. It's crazy, but I did that.'"

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All-County girls golf

Golfer of the Year:
Taylor Ling (SCHS)

All-county team:
Harmony: Caitlyn Greiner,
 Morgan Wolf. **St. Cloud:** Allison Hilton,
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Pride's Morgan takes title again

Orlando Pride forward Alex Morgan has been honored as the 2017 Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) Female Player of the Year.

She becomes the first player — male or female — to earn the honor three times.

Morgan is a back-to-back winner, taking the honor in 2016, and won for the first time in 2013.

Morgan appeared in 13 matches for the Pride

during the 2017 campaign, ranking second on the team with nine goals, fifth best in the league. Morgan scored in each of the Pride five matches in the month of August, leading to her being named NWSL Player of the Month. The Cal product also added four assists on the year and helped lead the Pride to the team's first-ever playoff appearance.

On the international stage, Morgan finished the year with seven goals in seven straight matches for the U.S. Women's National

Team, ending the year with the team lead in goals.

Prior to joining the Pride in July, Morgan opened the year with French side Olympique Lyonnais where she helped the team claim the treble - winning the French league, the French Cup and the Champions League title. Over all appearances, Morgan totaled 12 goals.

Winners for the 2017 CONCACAF awards were selected in an in an equally-weighted vote among Member Association

women's and men's national team coaches/captains, media members and fans. Winners were announced on Sunday night during the Premios Univision Deportes.

The winners in nine additional categories for the annual CONCACAF Awards, including the Male and Female Best XI's, will be announced on Tuesday, December 19, 2017, via CONCACAF.com.

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HOOPS

Continued from Page 7.

first place in District 9A-7, at 6-2 after a 65-60 win over Haines City in 9A-7 play on Friday.

The **Heritage Christian** boys and girls teams will play in an eight-team tournament at Brookside Christian in Thomasville, Ga., beginning on

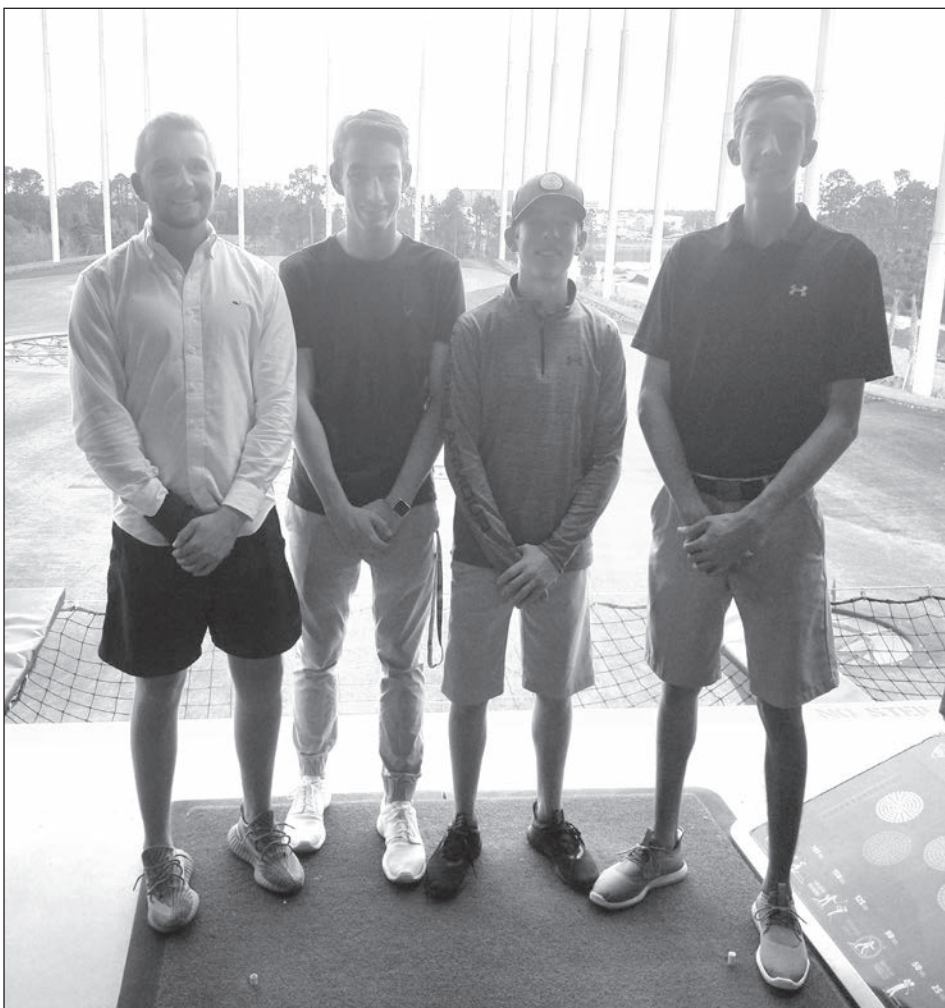
Wednesday. The Eagles boys team is 11-1 and are 6-0 in the Florida Christian Conference after a 62-24 win over Wade Christian.

Head Coach Jim Estrella lauded his team, which has only played together for two months now.

"We only have one returning player in A.J. Bass, it's all kids from our JV program and those new to the school," he said. "They haven't jelled yet, we've won most of our games on athleticism. This trip is like a camp, it will be good for us."

LONGHORNS

Continued from Page 7.



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/KEN JACKSON

Harmony's boys golf team qualified for the the state tournament for the first time in school history. For their efforts, four of them earned county Co-Player of the Year honors. Pictured above (from left) are Carson Sampl, Conlan Micher, All-County honoree Brock Barber and Kevin Carr. Not pictured: Evan Taylor.

Micher echoed that confidence level going into the all-important regional tournament.

"We felt so good going in, that we knew the course (Royal St. Cloud) well and that we could do it and beat Jupiter and Viera, who were tough teams," he said.

Taylor said, after the team had one of its best days ever on a windy day, the waiting was the hardest part.

"We sat for two hours waiting for Jupiter's last two players to come in," he said. "If either shot 75 or better, we'd be out."

Theories abound on the below-average state tourney performance. Taylor chalked it up to nerves from the time they rolled

in for their practice round; others gave props to an El Campeon course that was like asphalt painted green.

"That was one of the toughest courses we've played, with hilly and fast greens," Carr said.

"It was just a lack of experience for us playing at that level," said Micher, one of two from this group to return next year. "If you give us a mulligan, we'd be better prepared before we even left town."

"For me I started thinking about next year the day after states ended. I'm already looking forward to winning OBCs next year and what it will take from new players we have to do it."

Taylor, a sophomore,

looks forward to being a team leader next year.

"I'm really looking forward to helping our younger players improve," he said.

Bhabha said his players wanted him to participate in their success.

"They wanted me to play with them, we had a great rapport. I've enjoyed every bit of the season, the four and a half months went by fast," he said. "We had some ups and downs like any team is going to have; if we shot what we did at regionals over two days at states, we would have won. But we were united when we needed to be, like in the regionals. It was one 'we' instead of four or five 'me's'."

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1883

Holiday Sanitation Schedule

Monday - December 25:

Monday's routes will be ran on Wednesday, December 27

Tuesday - December 26:

Routes will be collected as normal. Office will be closed.

New Year's Day - Monday, January 1

Monday's routes will be ran on Wednesday, January 3

DISPOSAL OF LIVE CHRISTMAS TREES:

If able, please cut up the tree and place it in the green container. If not, please set it out on your regularly scheduled bulk day.

**For more information call the
City of Kissimmee at 407-518-2507**

NOTICE OF IMPOSITION OF FIRE RESCUE IMPACT FEE RATES

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of County Commissioners of Osceola County, Florida, on December 11, 2017, in regular session, at a properly noticed Public Hearing, adopted Osceola County Ordinance 2017-96, authorizing the imposition of impact fees to fund capital improvements and additions to the Osceola County Fire Rescue System necessitated by future growth. The Osceola County Fire Rescue Impact Fee rates to be imposed were established pursuant to Resolution No. 17-176R and shall be imposed upon all Capital Facilities Impact Construction occurring within the unincorporated area of Osceola County and within the municipal boundaries of any municipality that has consented to the imposition of such fees. The Fire Rescue Impact Fee rates to be imposed commencing April 1, 2018 for each Land Use Category are as follows:

Land Use Type	Unit	Fee
Single-Family Detached	Dwelling	\$391.00
Multi-Family	Dwelling	\$484.00
Hotel/Motel	1,000 sq. ft.	\$284.00
Retail/Commercial	1,000 sq. ft.	\$543.00
Restaurant/Bar	1,000 sq. ft.	\$2,623.00
Office	1,000 sq. ft.	\$267.00
Industrial/Warehouse	1,000 sq. ft.	\$43.00
Church	1,000 sq. ft.	\$474.00
School/College	1,000 sq. ft.	\$338.00
Hospital/Clinic	1,000 sq. ft.	\$1,088.00
Nursing Home/Group Living	1,000 sq. ft.	\$473.00
Government/Public	1,000 sq. ft.	\$206.00
Agriculture	1,000 sq. ft.	\$217.00

Fire Rescue Impact Fee rates adopted by the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners through the adoption of Ordinance 2017-96 and Resolution 17-176R shall be imposed upon all Capital Facilities Impact Construction for which a building permit is applied for and issued on or after April 1, 2018 and shall be collected prior to issuance of a Building Permit for such construction.

DATED THIS 21st day of December, 2017.

LIFESTYLES

Everyday Living • Fitness • Trends • Tips • Hobbies

CONTACT
BRIAN MCBRIDE EDITOR
 EMAIL BMCBRIDE@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM

A quick, delicious holiday dessert



The holiday season is synonymous with many things, including delicious foods. While Christmas geese will be found on many a table this holiday season, baked goods and desserts are what many people look forward to this time of year.

Holiday hosts with a lot on their plates might not have the time to prepare homemade baked goods for their guests. Thankfully, the following recipe for "Chocolate-Strawberry Pie" from Addie Gundry's "No-Bake Desserts" (St. Martin's Press) can be prepared in just 15 minutes, all without turning on the oven.

Chocolate-Strawberry Pie

Yields 1 pie

1 pint fresh strawberries, washed, trimmed and halved
 1 store-bought (or homemade) chocolate cookie pie crust
 2/3 cup sugar
 1/4 cup cornstarch
 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
 1/4 teaspoon minced crystallized ginger
 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 Pinch of kosher or sea salt
 6 large egg yolks
 2 1/2 cups half-and-half
 6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
 1/2 tablespoon rum extract
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 Additional strawberries for garnish (optional)

1. Place the strawberry halves in a single layer in the bottom of the pie crust.

2. In a medium saucepan, whisk together the sugar, cornstarch, cocoa powder, ginger, nutmeg, and salt over medium heat.

3. Whisk in the egg yolks to create a thick paste. Gradually whisk in the half-and-half until the mixture thickens, about five minutes. Bring to a boil and cook for 1 minute. Remove from the heat.

4. Add the chocolate and whisk until combined. Add the rum and vanilla extracts. Cool the mixture for four minutes.

5. Pour the filling over the strawberries and up to the top of the crust. Chill the pie for two hours or until set.

6. Garnish with additional strawberries, if desired.



5 ways to make guests comfortable



The time between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day marks one of the busiest periods of the year for long-distance travel. The United States Department of Transportation says that come Thanksgiving, the number of long-distance trips (50-plus miles away) increases by 54 percent, and around Christmas that number rises by 23 percent over the remainder of the year. Those travelers ultimately need a place to rest their heads, and many stay with family and friends.

Entertaining during the holiday season involves accounting for guests' comfort, and that often means hosts must put their visitors' needs over their own. Consider these ways to help guests feel welcome whether they stay for a few hours or a few days.

1. Cater to specific dietary needs. One of the ways to treat guests kindly is by being aware of any special dietary needs they may have when it comes to preparing holiday meals or other foods during their visits. Some

guests may require low-sodium diets, while others may be monitoring their blood-sugar levels and must dine accordingly. Vegetarians and vegans limit the foods they eat, while others may avoid foods based on religious preferences. Offer a variety of foods and try to cater to guests' needs as much as possible. When in doubt, consult with the guest so he or she feels welcome and does not go hungry.

2. Make sleeping spaces as private as possible. Not everyone has a separate guest room for overnight stays, but try to make sleeping areas as private as you can when visitors spend the night. Use privacy screens or set guests up in a family room that's away from the center of activity. Hosts may want to give up their own rooms for the comfort of guests.

3. Offer storage space. One way to make guests feel comfortable is to give them their own storage space. This can include space in a closet, a couple of drawers to stow their

belongings, or hangers in the entryway for coats and other winter attire. Not only will this keep things more organized, it can provide guests with comfort.

4. Include guests when preparing for entertaining. Many guests like to feel involved, and by including them in meal preparation, decorating or shopping, you can help them feel included and appreciated.

5. Keep snacks and other creature comforts readily accessible. Guests may feel sheepish scavenging through cabinets or drawers looking for items. Make things easy to find by leaving items out on counters or indicating where items can be found. For example, if you know a guest enjoys an evening cup of tea and some cookies, leave out the cookies, tea bags and kettle so that he or she can indulge when the urge comes.

Guests are a large part of the holiday season. Help them feel comfortable whenever they visit your home.

Be prepared for unexpected company

The latter part of the year is full of social engagements with family and friends. Pew Research Center says 92 percent of all Americans plan to celebrate Christmas as a holiday, with 69 percent using it as an opportunity to spend time with family and friends.

While many social occasions surrounding Christmas are anticipated for months in advance, unexpected pop-ins are also the norm this time of year. Rather than being caught off guard, individuals can take steps to prepare for unexpected guests.

► Have food available. Even if guests pop in for a little while, it's nice to be able to offer them something to eat. Keep cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, pretzels, and other snacks on hand. Make-ahead, crowd-friendly foods can be prepared and frozen. Casseroles, pasta dishes and stews are hearty and can serve in a pinch when unexpected visitors arrive. Simply take out to defrost and heat up. Keep cookies in airtight tins and purchase a premade frozen pie to serve, if necessary. In a pinch, you can always order out, but over time the cost of having food delivered can add up.

► Keep the bar stocked. Toasting to a happy holiday season is the norm during this time of year. Toasting requires hosts have some spirits on hand. Stock the bar with a few staples, such as red and white wine, vodka, rum, whiskey, and mixers. Also, you may just want to create a signature or seasonal cocktail that can be



served when guests arrive, such as a spiced punch or a holiday eggnog.

► Cue the playlist. Put together a playlist of favorite holiday music that will provide the ideal ambiance should guests ring your doorbell. Thanks to services like Spotify, Amazon Music and Pandora, holiday music that fills a home with the sweet sounds of the season is now always accessible.

► Keep things neat. Set aside a closet or space that can serve as a catch-all where errant items can quickly be stored should guests arrive. Gather loose toys, books or stray papers in a basket and then stash the

basket in the closet until guests depart. Routinely empty the dishwasher so dirty dishes left in the sink can be quickly loaded before guests arrive.

► Create an aromatic atmosphere. Scented candles that evoke the aromas of the season can refresh stale indoor air. Butter cookie-, apple pie- and cinnamon-scented candles can make it seem like you just finished some holiday baking.

Guests tend to drop by on a moment's notice come the holidays. Preparing for the unexpected can make such visits more enjoyable.

THE GUIDE

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT AROUND OSCEOLA COUNTY & CENTRAL FLORIDA

SPOTLIGHT WEEKLY PICKS

THURSDAY, DEC. 21



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. 22



CHRISTMAS MUSIC FESTIVAL, an outdoor electronic music festival being held Friday and Saturday in downtown Orlando at Universal Orlando Park. Tickets are \$17 to \$65 and are available at www.eventbrite.com.

SATURDAY, DEC. 23



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.

MONDAY, DEC. 25



LIGHT UP UCF, a free admission holiday event, continues at the university. Events include an evening movie, ice skating, and a light show. Weekend hours are 5 p.m. to midnight

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

CELEBRATE WITH A COOKIE IT'S HOLIDAY TIME AT EPCOT



NEWS-GAZETTE PHOTO/PETER COVINO

Holiday cookies are one of the big hits this season at Epcot's Festival of the Holidays. The event happens throughout the Disney theme park with shows and cuisine from around the world.

By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

There's a cookie for every mood this holiday season at Epcot.

It's all happening at the Cookie Nook, the sweetest new spot at Epcot, open at the Festive Center and only for the holidays.

The center was designed as a good meeting and resting place for everyone going to this year's Festival of the Holidays at the Disney theme park.

But it's the cookies that have become an unexpected hit.

Disney officials thought the cookies might be a good idea.

"But we sold 10,000 cookies in the first week," said Dave Kesting, general manager for Epcot Festivals.

And these are big cookies. One cookie is most definitely a dessert.

The Cookie Nook features nine different cookies, with enticing flavors like Warm Apple Fritter (with cinnamon ice cream and warm caramel sauce); Snowflake Sugar Cookie; Snickerdoodle; Double-Chocolate Peppermint; Gingersnap (with cream cheese icing and cranberry jam); Sachertorte (chocolate cake with apricot jam and dark chocolate); Decorated Gingerbread Cookie; Holiday Tree Sugar Cookie; and Chocolate Chunk Cookie.

Man and woman do not live on cookies alone so to wash down the sweet delectables,

the Cookie Nook offers several beers including Brew Hub Pumpkin Spice Dunkelweiss; Playalinda Brewing Company Sparkling Christmas Coffee Blonde; Central 28 Beer Company Joy from the World Holiday Dubble as well as beer flights and white and white specialty wines.

There also is hot cocoa with crème de menthe and a non-alcoholic version.

Pricing for cookies ranges from \$3.50 to \$4.75. Mixing and sharing several different cookies together is a good option for a group or family.

The Festive Center is also a good place to let the kids (and even the adults) settle down for awhile and make a free holiday ornament, while watching an endless streaming of Disney classic holiday animated shorts on a big screen.

You might want to spend the whole morning at the Festive Center, but then you would miss out on everything else going on at Epcot during the Festival of the Holidays.

Last year, Epcot officials took some first steps into upgrading the international food offerings at the event. In 2017, the Festival of the Holidays has now become a taste of the holidays for everyone with culinary traditions from around the globe.

There are about a dozen kitchens featured for the event this year, with dishes typically enjoyed at holiday time in places like Mexico, China and Japan.

Here is just a small sampling of what you will find. (Note: Of course, all food and drink items require a separate purchase)

Bavaria Holiday Kitchen at Germany — Cheese Fondue, served in a bread bowl with fresh baby vegetables and marble potatoes.

Yukon Holiday Kitchen at Canada — Seared Salmon, with Crown Maple Syrup whiskey glaze, parsnip silk, apple chutney and hazelnut croquant. Also at the Yukon Kitchen, Traditional French Canadian Tourtiere, with Canadian ketchup.

American Holiday Table — Slow roasted turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes, green beans and cranberry sauce.

Feast of Three Kings — Roasted Pork with smashed yucca and pickled green bananas.

Other stops include the Hokaido Kitchen with Buckwheat Soba Noodle with spinach in hot soup with shrimp tempura or chicken; Alsace Holiday Kitchen — French cuisine including Smoked Salmon Napolen in a dill brioche and turkey breast stuffed with mushrooms and chestnuts with sweet potato puree.

Las Posadas Holiday Kitchen — Tostada de Tinga, crispy corn tortilla smothered with Black Beans, topped with chipotle chicken and garnished with Crema Mexicana, Queso Fresco, avocado and tomatillo sauce; Tamal de Chilorio, slow-roasted pork shoulder, marinated in Ancho paste and stuffed in a corn Masa.

All of the kitchens are offering a good selection of seasonal beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic.

Elsewhere throughout Epcot, are various ways the holidays are celebrated throughout the world.

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In 2018, welcome the girls to Boy Scouts!

The Boy Scouts of America announced in October that in 2018 it will allow girls into the Cub Scout program. The organization will also deliver a scouting program for older girls that will enable them to advance and earn the highest rank of Eagle Scout.

So, locally in Osceola District, Starting Saturday, Jan. 6, packs that are ready will be accepting females.

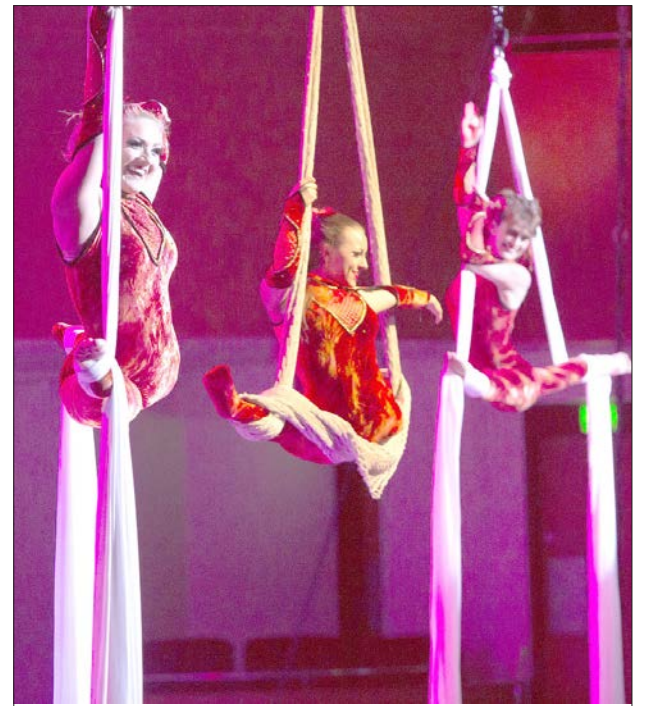
To get started, simply complete a youth application and submit it, along with the \$24 annual registration fee, to your unit's leadership. They will guide you step-by-step through the process. Haven't yet found a unit, or need contact information? You can find a unit via a web page at beascout.org: <https://beascout.org/BeAScoutMap.aspx>

There are seven units between Shingle Creek United Methodist Church in Kissimmee and St. Cloud First United Methodist Church on the U.S. Highway 192 corridor.



Girls will be admitted into the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts beginning in 2018.

CIRQUE BELIEVE AT OHP, DEC. 23



By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

Osceola Heritage Park presents Cirque Musica Believe, Saturday, Dec. 23.

The holiday spectacular comes to the Silver Spurs Arena at 7:30 p.m.

A perfect holiday show, Cirque Musica Holiday Believe is a celebration of the holidays as Cirque Musica performs feats of strength, skill and grace, performed to holiday music favorites with a live symphony. This is a whole new version of the popular Cirque show.

With concert and a visual experience, audiences journey into a world of high-flying adventure with amazing acrobats, aerialists, hijinks and holiday cheer. The show blends the spellbinding grace and daredevil athleticism of today's greatest circus performers with the sensory majesty of the greatest holiday music of all time.

Osceola Heritage Park also is offering a dinner option before the show. The holiday dinner will be served on premises before the show at 5:30 p.m. Cost of dinner is \$30 per person. For more information and a look at the menu go to www.ohpark.com.

Tickets for the show itself can be purchased at Ticketmaster.com and at the OHP box office.

Cirque Musica Believe also has holiday stops that include Tampa at the Amalie Arena, Dec. 22.

Noe Espana, Cirque show director, a fifth generation heir to an incredible variety of circus talent and history, with family roots in both Europe and North America and has performed at events ranging from The Sydney Opera House, Madison Square Garden with Ringling Brothers Circus USA and Japan, Six Flags Parks in the USA, Championship Auto Shows, and the State Farm Insurance National Convention to the Annual Gala of the Fight for Children Foundation, which featured a musical performance by Stevie Wonder.

The show also features the musical talents of Brie Cassil, a singer, actress, and composer based out of New York City. She has been seen in many productions such as Beauty and the Beast (Belle), Urinetown (Little Sally), RENT (Mimi), as well as the bound for Broadway musical Chix 6 (Blast).



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LA NOUBA WILL BE REPLACED BY NEW SHOW

By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

The curtain closes for the last time at Cirque du Soleil La Nouba at Disney Springs, Dec. 31, but Disney and Cirque announced this week a brand new show will be coming to the theater in the near future.

Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group and Walt Disney Parks and Resorts announce the renewal of their long-lasting relationship with the creation of a brand-new show to premiere at Disney Springs. The new show will have its roots in Disney's deep history of animated films.

The two entertainment companies first teamed up to bring La Nouba to the stage in 1998. Twenty years later, Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group and

Walt Disney Parks and Resorts are working together on the new project.

The new show created by Cirque du Soleil in collaboration with Disney will draw its inspiration from Disney's heritage of animation. It will celebrate Disney's legacy of storytelling in Cirque du Soleil's signature way, with a tribute to the one-of-a-kind craftsmanship that makes Disney so extraordinary, according to Disney and Cirque du Soleil.

"This long-standing relationship is built on mutual esteem and the success achieved by our two creative businesses throughout the past two decades with La Nouba," said Tiffany Rende, Senior Vice President, Corporate Alliances and Operating Participants, The Walt Disney Corporation.

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By Peter Covino
A&E Editor

There's lots of beer.
And wings.
More than 30 flat screen TVs.
And wings.
A friendly, female staff to take your order.
And wings.
It must be Hooters.
The popular wings and beer restaurant opened its newest location this week, No. 200, near The Loop (1201 W. Osceola Parkway) in Kissimmee.



If you have not been in a Hooters lately, this is Hooters version 2017.

The new 7,400-square foot restaurant is certainly more like a sports bar than some of the original restaurants, with wider-aisles, larger TVs and more.

The varieties of beer on tap and in the bottle also is keeping up with the times as well.

In addition to the usual Coors, Miller and Budweiser products on tap, Hooters serves up Goose Island IPA, Magic Hat 9 Pale, Samuel Adams, Crooked Can and Funky Buddha, just to mention a few.

The bottle selection also includes domestic favorites, local craft beers and imports.

Note: All draft selections are available by the glass, half-pitcher and pitcher. The menu shows the place of origin, alcohol content as well as style of each beer. Craft beers are priced at about \$6 a glass, domestics about \$4.25, imports about \$6.

On the food menu side, of course there are wings served dozens of ways. But there also are fresh entrée salads, a lineup of hand-formed burgers, seafood dishes, fan-favorite fried pickles.

As for those wings, they are served both traditional and boneless chicken wings. The latest wing menu is, Hooters Smoked Wings. They are marinated overnight with a sweet and spicy dry rub before being hickory smoked in-house fresh each day. Guests can choose from one of three new dry rubs – Texas BBQ, Caribbean Jerk or Garlic Habanero – or have their wings tossed in their favorite of Hooters 17 sauces. The Smoked Wings have only half the calories of traditional buffalo style wings.

“Opening our 200th corporate-owned location and the 51st Hooters in the Sunshine State is a major milestone for the Hooters family,” said Mark Whittle, chief development officer, Hooters of America. “It speaks to the continued

growth and expansion our business is experiencing both here and abroad, and is a testament to our iconic brand's ongoing success.”

The Hooters of East Kissimmee location incorporates the latest design features that deliver the familiar, fun-loving persona of the Hooters brand plus new additions, like a centrally located bar featuring 32 draught beers and a wide array of cocktails and craft beers, to comfortable seating options.

“Hooters of East Kissimmee is a dream come true for every sports fan, and is an ideal choice for just about any occasion that calls for great food and fun,” said Whittle. “We invite local residents and visitors to come on in and enjoy our world-famous original and smoked chicken wings served up with unrivalled hometown Hooters Girl hospitality.”

The timing is perfect for the college football and NFL playoffs, leading up to the Super Bowl.

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OBITUARY NOTICES

- Santa De Los Santos, 58, of Kissimmee, passed away December 14, 2017. Porta Coeli Funeral Home is handling the arrangements.
- Danny Edgar Haynes, 66, of St. Cloud, passed away December 17, 2017. Osceola Memory Gardens, St. Cloud, is handling the arrangements.
- Jose A. Rodriguez, 73, of Kissimmee, passed away December 17, 2017. Funeraria Y Crematorio Porta Coeli, Kissimmee. 407-846-2804.



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 THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR A SUBMISSION.

Weekly and Monthly Events

Tickets for the 17th annual Dinner on the Avenue in Winter Park go on sale Jan. 8. The April 14 event always sells out quickly. Guests gather up their neighbors and friends to dine under the stars on Park Avenue. Only the table, linens and chairs are provided. Diners get creative with the table set up and bring their own potluck or have it catered. The cost is \$125 for a table of eight. For more information regarding this unique dining experience, visit cityofwinterpark.org/dinner or call 407-643-1613.



WHAT The 17th annual Dinner on the Avenue
WHERE Winter Park
WHEN April 14
COST \$125 for a table of eight
INFORMATION cityofwinterpark.org/dinner | 407-643-1613

DAILY 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.

THURSDAY 01-04

HENRY ROLLINS

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$29.50-\$174.50; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

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

BETTYE LAVETTE

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$29.50-\$39.50; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

SATURDAY 01-06

COMEDY CLUB

Groucho's Comedy Club presents JB Ball of Comedy Central, MTV and Sirius Radio, at 8:30 p.m. General admission is \$15 to the club, located in the Club 52 VIP Room, 1100 N. Wickham Rd., Melbourne.

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.

THE ZOMBIES

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$49.50-\$150; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

SATURDAY 01-13



DARK SKY

The Harmony Dark Sky Festival and Star Party event returns to Bok Tower Gardens. See celestial objects through telescopes, hear guest speakers and more. The festival is included in general admission and is free to members. Speakers begin at 4 p.m. and the gate closes at 9:30 p.m.

MONDAY 01-15

THE MENDELSSOHN

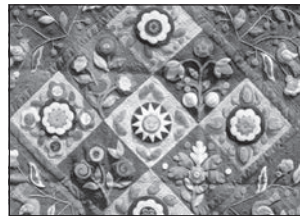
Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra Presents Focus Series: An Evening with the Mendelssohns. The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$18-\$54; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

WEDNESDAY 01-17

KAIA KATER

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; \$22; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

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, QUILTFFEST.COM



CANDY CHANG

Artist Candy Chang will be at Rollins College. As part of the Winter Park Institute Speaker Series, the world-renowned artist and urban designer will present "Before I Die: A Participatory Art Installation," at 7:30 p.m. at Tiedtke Concert Hall in Keen Music Building.

FRIDAY 01-19

ILUMINATE

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$28.50-\$45; WWW.PLAZALIVE.COM

FRIDAY 01-26

DANCE COMPANY

Valencia College's resident dance company, Valencia Dance Theatre, along with the Dr. Phillips High School Dance Magnet Program and professional modern company Yow Dance, will present 3 in Motion, a performance of modern dance on Valencia's East Campus at 8 p.m. General admission tickets are \$12. Tickets may be purchased online at VALENCIACOLLEGE.EDU/ARTS, use the code "VALENCIAWEB" for a \$2 discount on each ticket.

YONDER MOUNTAIN STRING BAND

The Plaza Live, 425 N. Bumby Ave., Orlando; 8 p.m.; \$22.50-\$39.50; WWW.PLAZALIVE.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

SATURDAY 04-28

PAINT OUT

Save the date for the Winter Park Paint Out Garden Party. This year's event will be held at the Polasek Museum. For more information go to WINTERPARKPAINTOUT.ORG

SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF (Orlando Shakes) has announced that Lin-Manuel Miranda's and Quiara Alegria Hudes' Tony Award-winning musical, In the Heights will open their 30th Season. Tickets for In the Heights will go on sale June 2018. For more information call (407) 447-1700 ext. 1, or visit in person at the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center (812 E. Rollins St.).

SPRING BREAK CAMP

Registration is open for Camp LOL, a sketch comedy camp for kids at Osceola Arts is now open. Cost of the camp is \$125 for the week and will be held Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a final showcase on Friday at 3 p.m. Call 407-846-6257 for more information.

ONGOING

ST. CLOUD LINE DANCE CLUB

All levels of line dance are taught. St. Cloud Community Center, 101 17th St.; Mondays 2-5 p.m., Thursdays 5:30-9 p.m.; \$2 donation 407-957-7738 or 407-908-5976.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Osceola Council on Aging is actively recruiting volunteers for Meals on Wheels, but has other volunteer opportunities available. For more information call Marie Blackford at 407-933-9532.

RETIRED EDUCATORS/REAO

Composed of people who are retired from the field of education from anywhere in the country. All are welcome. Meetings are held at 11 a.m. on the second Friday of the month, September through May, at the Barney Veal Senior Center, 700 Generation Point, Kissimmee. Each month, there is a luncheon, \$10 per person with a business meeting following. Money raised goes toward a scholarship for local graduates. Usually a program is presented about a topic of interest. Contact ginger40@earthlink.net information and/or to RSVP for the next meeting.

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 through Dec. 29. Admission is free. For more information on museum events go to MORSEMUSEUM.COM

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.

SOUTHEAST MUSEUM

The Southeast Museum of Photography will be closed for winter break through Jan. 9. Visit the museum website for details on upcoming events for 2018.

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. For more information, call 407-644-4200.

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

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Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF (Orlando Shakes) has announced that Lin-Manuel Miranda's and Quiara Alegria Hudes' Tony Award-winning musical, In the Heights will open their 30th Season. Tickets for In the Heights will go on sale June 2018. For more information call (407) 447-1700 ext. 1, or visit in person at the John and Rita Lowndes Shakespeare Center (812 E. Rollins St.).

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.

BRAIN FOOD

CONTACT
BRIAN MCBRIDE EDITOR
EMAIL: BMCBRIDE@OSCEOLANEWSGAZETTE.COM

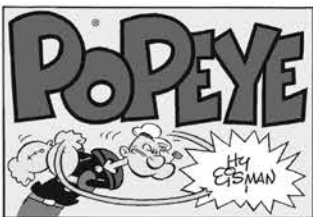
Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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!

Sneer
PRIMES

Twist
GLEAN

Edge
FINGER

Avoid
REGION

TODAY'S WORD

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

CryptoQuip

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

Clue: Y equals I

PEWA OILKYGYAT YZ CLAZIR ZW
BIYGI ZSI RLF, L VOIBSCLZIO VYBS
EOWDEZKF TWZ PE LAR UOYIR

"ULO E RYID!"

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LAFF - A - DAY



Answers: 1. "I don't really want a new stove, I just like to play in the box!"

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				52				53			

ACROSS

1 Muse's instrument
5 Renders speechless
9 Obtain
12 Billions of years
13 Future stallion
14 Multipurpose truck
15 Avocado dip
17 Top card
18 Singles
19 Gordon and Ginsburg
21 Mad
24 It begins at 40
25 Toe woe
26 Zigzagged on skis
30 Eggs
31 Actress Witherspoon
32 Past
33 Clothing
35 Story line
36 "— She Sweet?"
37 Instant
38 From then on
40 Icelandic epic
42 Industrious insect
43 Port city of Ecuador
48 Eisenhower
49 Being, to Brutus
50 — Major

DOWN

1 Lower limb
2 Thee
3 Genetic letters
4 Accompany to a party
5 Pinnacle
6 Courts
7 Right angle
8 Germ-free
9 Central American nation

10 Leave an impression
11 Golf gadgets
16 Whatever number
20 Aliens' craft
21 Enthusiastic, plus
22 PBS science show
23 Insure
24 Glasgow girl
26 Transmitted
27 Allow
28 Hollywood clashers
29 "... — protest too much"
31 Went back on an agreement

34 Karaoke need, for short
35 Award for a dentist?
37 Med. approval org.
38 Take to the seas
39 Black
40 Simple
41 Coloring agents
44 Can. neighbor
45 Web address
46 Doctrine
47 — Vegas

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Trivia test

- by Fifi Rodriguez
- MONEY:** What was the common currency in Portugal prior to the euro?
 - MOVIES:** What 1990s horror movie featured Henry Winkler as the principal of Woodsboro High School?
 - THEATER:** What musical included the characters of Maria Rainer and Captain Georg von Trapp?
 - ANATOMY:** What are the names of the arteries that supply blood to the head and neck?
 - MEASUREMENTS:** What does an isobar represent on a map?
 - LANGUAGE:** What word represents the letter R in the NATO Phonetic Alphabet?
 - GEOGRAPHY:** What is the significance of the 38th parallel north?
 - FAMOUS QUOTES:** What 20th-century politician once said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts"?
 - GENERAL KNOWLEDGE:** Where does the Oberammergau passion play take place every 10 years?
 - ASTRONOMY:** What is the only constellation of the Zodiac representing an inanimate object?

Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

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. Escudo
2. "Scream"
3. "The Sound of Music"
4. Caroid
5. Atmospheric pressure
6. Romeo
7. It forms the border between North and South Korea
8. Daniel Patrick Moynihan
9. Germany
10. Libra (the scales)

Answers

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SCRAMBLERS

Today's Word

1. Sinner; 2. Angle; 3. Finger; 4. Ignore

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SENIORS ENJOY THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS



The Osceola Council on Aging held its Senior Santa party on Friday. Seniors throughout the county were seen enjoying the spirit of the holidays by shaking it up on the dance floor, enjoying conversation with friends along with a great lunch and plenty of homemade cookies to go around. Top row: Over 400 seniors attended this year's festivities. Yesenia Martinez greets new arrivals at the door. Second row: Santa and Mrs. Claus make an appearance for photos and to talk with guests. Volunteer Itsamar Cartegena smiles while watching all the fun. Third row: Ronnie Desano, originally from Minneapolis, is all decked out. Volunteer Johnathan Merjuste dances with the ladies after making his Meals on Wheels deliveries. Mike Merjuste came from Las Vegas to visit his brother and decided to volunteer for the event as well.

News-Gazette Photos by Martin Maddock



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OSCEOLA NEWS-GAZETTE Triple E

Section E

December 21, 2017

Supreme Savor

New Supreme Court cookbook dishes up history, recipes

WASHINGTON (AP) — At Christmastime, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor would send her colleagues gift-wrapped packages of homemade beef jerky from her family's cattle ranch in Arizona. Her colleague Ruth Bader Ginsburg pronounced it "very spicy."

Now, home chefs can try making their own, with guidance from O'Connor's supplier, her brother. His jerky-making instructions, minus the family's secret sauce, are part of a new book on the Supreme Court's food traditions. "Table for 9: Supreme Court Food Traditions & Recipes," out this month, is part history book, part cookbook. It includes more than three dozen recipes associated with justices and their families.

"Food in good company has sustained Supreme Court Justices through the ages," Ginsburg writes in the book's forward.

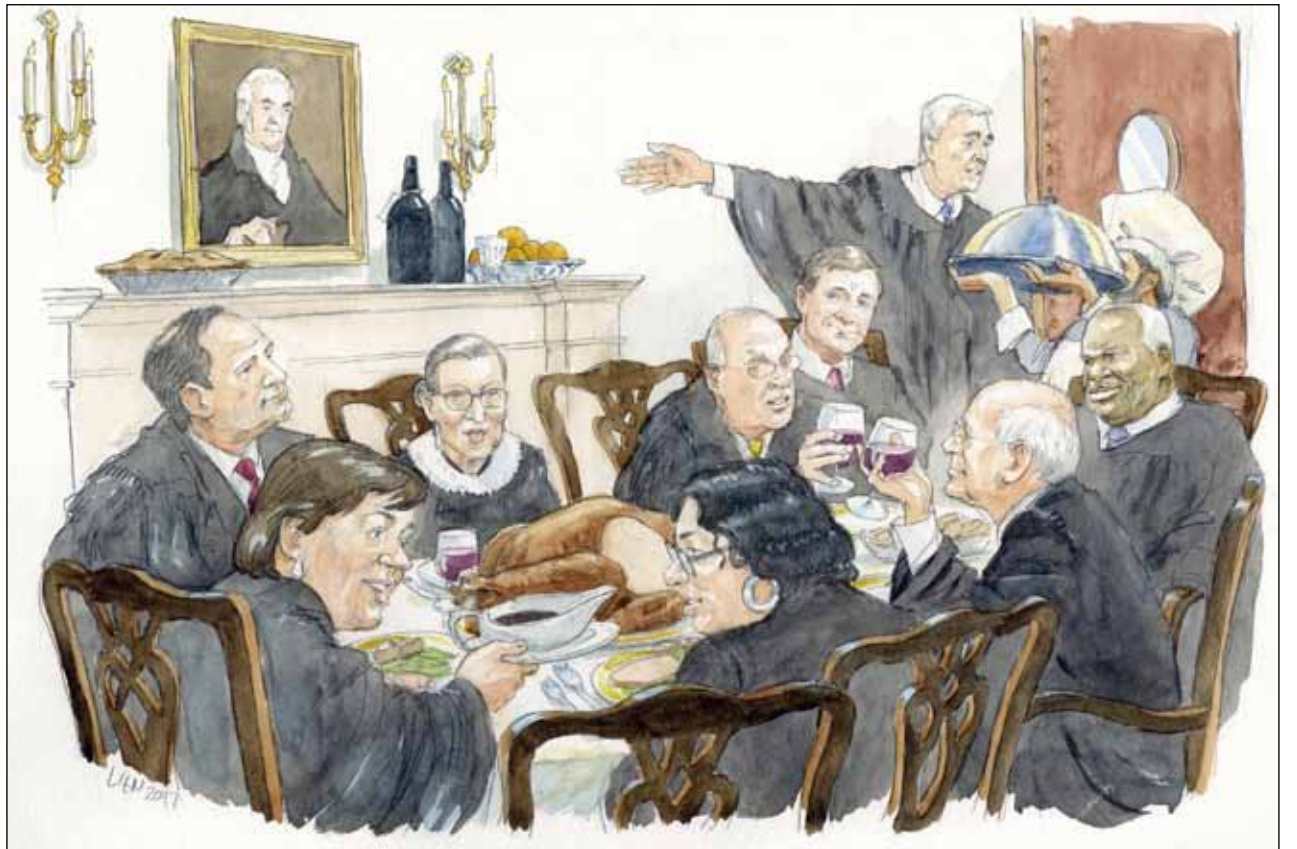
Food is a way the court's nine justices connect. There are welcome dinners for new justices and retirement dinners for those who are departing. O'Connor, the court's first female justice, revived a tradition of the justices regularly eating lunch together. And when a

justice has a birthday, there is wine, a toast and the singing of "Happy Birthday," a tradition begun by Chief Justice Warren Burger, who led the court in the 1970s and '80s.

Clare Cushman, the book's author, says her offering is in part a response to visitors asking at the Supreme Court's gift shop whether the court had a cookbook. The White House visitor center's gift shop has several books on food and entertaining, and some tourists expected the court would too, said Cushman, the Supreme Court Historical Society's director of publications. So, for a decade, when Cushman came across a recipe or a food anecdote with a link to a justice, she'd put it in a folder.

"The more I researched the more I realized that this was a really substantial topic and that it wasn't going to be fluffy or ridiculous to ask these extremely distinguished judges questions like: What are your favorite foods and what do you eat for lunch?" Cushman said.

Cushman said that to research the book she, with help from Supreme Court curator Catherine Fitts, contacted 35 families of justices to ask for recipes and fam-



This illustration provided by Art Lien via the Supreme Court Historical Society from "Table for 9: Supreme Court Food Traditions & Recipes" shows the Supreme Court justices eating together, which they do regularly.

ily food stories. The results include instructions for the pineapple and coconut cake Chief Justice William Rehnquist's wife baked annually for his birthday. Maureen Scalia, the wife of the late Justice Antonin Scalia, the first Italian-American to serve on the court, contributed a pasta sauce recipe.

Louise Gorsuch, the English-born wife of Justice Neil Gorsuch, shared her marmalade recipe. Gorsuch, the court's newest member, by tradition serves on the committee that oversees the court's public cafeteria.

Readers also learn about the justices' food habits. The first chief justice, John Jay, liked oysters for break-

fast. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. brought his lunch in a tin ammunition box. And Justice John Paul Stevens' regular lunch was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with the crusts cut off.

Some of the photos accompanying the text have never been published before. There are pictures of justices eating together and pictures of birthday cakes served to the justices. There's a picture of justices preparing to eat a 28-pound salmon that Justice Stephen Breyer caught in Alaska and of Sonia Sotomayor serving homemade Chinese food long before she became a justice.

"For me, eating is sacred.

You should not waste a meal, and so it can be simple and healthy but it has to be tasty," Sotomayor said during a 2016 event on the Supreme Court's food traditions at the National Museum of American History, an event that helped spur the book's creation.

The book has stories from the court's early history, too. It describes how in the early 1800s, the justices lived and ate together at a boarding house. Justice Joseph Story reported they drank wine, but only when it was raining. If he looked out the window and the sun was shining, he was sometimes told "it must be raining somewhere."

In the late 1800s, when

arguments were scheduled from noon to 4 p.m. with no break for lunch, the justices would step away individually or in pairs to eat at small tables behind the bench, the rattle of their knives and forks audible to spectators.

The book is not the first associated with food and the Supreme Court. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's husband, Martin Ginsburg was a talented chef. After his death in 2011, a book of his recipes, called "Chef Supreme," was compiled as a tribute.

Now, both books are available online through the Supreme Court Historical Society's website and at the court's gift shop.

Pair carrots with the warmth of harissa for a bright dish

BY MELISSA D'ARABIAN

Associated Press

I first tasted harissa when I was 19, and I traveled on a lone adventure to Tunisia after spending a semester abroad in France. I browsed the open markets, with their appealing drapery white cotton clothing - I wore billowy pants from that trip for years to follow.

I was particularly drawn to the fragrant spice section of the market, which beckoned me over with its unfamiliar, dazzling aromas. I bought as many small pouches of mystery spices that my student budget could afford. My favorite was harissa, a mix of chilies and warm spices like coriander, cumin and paprika.

Thirty years later, harissa is fairly easy to find in the U.S., either in a well-stocked neighborhood supermarket or online. If you like spicy food at all, it's a worthy purchase. It's available in both paste and dry powdered form, and once it's on your shelf, you'll find



This Dec. 11, 2017 photo shows a North African carrot and chickpea salad in Bethesda, Md. This dish is from a recipe by Melissa d'Arabian.

hundreds of uses for harissa - mix it into hummus or yogurt for a quick dip, add a spoonful to stews to deepen the flavor, rub meat for grilling, brush it on roasted

or sauteed vegetables, or

even on buttered toast for a tasty garlic-bread-like indulgence. Another idea: Add harissa to salad dressings to add an international

flair.

Today's recipe for North African Carrot and Chickpea Salad pairs lightly sweet carrots with the warmth of harissa, and the

result is balanced and not overly spicy, although feel free to add more or less according to your tastes.

Chickpeas add heft and protein, so you could turn this side dish into a vegetarian main, and herbs keep the dish bright and fresh. Purchasing the carrots pre-shredded is an excellent weekday timesaver. But even if you start with whole carrots, the entire dish can be thrown together in mere minutes.

NORTH AFRICAN CARROT AND CHICKPEA SALAD

Servings: 8
Start to finish: 15 minutes

Salad:
3 cups shredded carrots
1 1/4 cup cooked chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed and drained if canned, about 1 can
1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped
1/4 cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
2 green onions, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped

almonds

Dressing:
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons lemon juice or lime juice
1 tablespoon water
1 teaspoon lemon or lime zest

1 teaspoon powdered harissa (or 1 tablespoon harissa paste), or to taste (If you can't find it, substitute a mixture of smoked or sweet paprika, cayenne, cumin, coriander and granulated garlic.)

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons olive oil
Place all the salad ingredients in a salad bowl. In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard, lemon or lime juice and zest, water, harissa and salt until well-blended. Slowly whisk in the olive oil until blended. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to coat. Serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 97 calories; 45 calories from fat; 5 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 170 mg sodium; 11 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 3 g protein.

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Plenty of almonds is how to dress up crackers and a spread

By The Culinary Institute of America

For many of us, the new year is a time to make a fresh start. We're wiping the slate clean with a renewed sense of optimism for the year ahead, and we're trying to eat healthier foods, which means you won't find a macaroni and cheese recipe at the end of this article.

When it comes to reformulating our eating habits, it's a little bit easier to menu-plan breakfast, lunch and dinner. The real struggle, both in preparation and will power, comes when we start thinking about that mid-afternoon snack.

No matter the time, the reason, or the season, the best kind of snack to fill you up (and keep you that way) is one that is filled with protein. Nuts are especially handy as a snack food, because they are protein-rich, portable, and give us a daily dose of heart-healthy unsaturated fatty acids.

The downside to nuts is that they can get, dare we say it, a little bit boring. We can toast them, give them a light sprinkle of salt, and, well, that's about it before we start heading into border territories of healthy snacking. Raise your hand if you've ever tried to pass off a toffee-coated cashew as a heart-healthy snack.

If you're fed up with your 3 p.m. handful of almonds and find yourself eyeballing the office's snack machine, this Almond and Flax Crackers with Smoked Almond Spread recipe from The Culinary Institute of America is very much what you need. We made it a little fancy (more on that later), but at its core, this is "cheese" and crackers.

The crackers only have five ingredients, and they are vegan and gluten-free. They're spread on a baking sheet and dehydrated in your oven (so, low and slow baking), which means no fussy rolling and cutting. You'll love the bold flavor from a heavy dose of coriander seed, but you can mix and match any of your favorite seasonings, like fennel seed, curry blends, or even Korean-style chili paste.

The same is true for the almond spread we've made for a topper. This version relies on the flavor of smoked almonds, and substituting plain almonds would make it pret-

ty bland. That is, of course, unless you add roasted garlic, fresh herbs, citrus zest, or horseradish. You can even add a sprinkle of nutritional yeast, which is a deactivated yeast product that has a cheesy flavor.

Of course, you can spread these crackers with virtually anything. They're perfect for your favorite hummus and butters, or alongside leftover roasted chicken and fresh fruits and veggies.

And they aren't just for office or after-school snacks. We piped the almond spread on the top of the crackers and garnished with some of our favorite microgreens and edible flowers. Not only do they add a flavor you just can't get from potato chips, but they make for a beautiful presentation at a brunch or cocktail party. Now that's how

you dress up a snack.

ALMOND AND FLAX CRACKERS WITH SMOKED ALMOND SPREAD

Servings: 12
Start to finish: Active time: 25 minutes. Cooking time as much as 15 hours.

- 1 cup almonds
- 1 cup smoked almonds
- 1/2 cup golden flax seeds
- 2 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 2 tablespoons tamari or soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon agave nectar
- 1 1/4 cup water, or as needed, divided use
- Kosher salt, as needed
- Micro herbs and edible flowers, as needed for garnish

In two covered containers, cover the almonds with water and soak overnight. Drain and reserve separately.

Preheat the oven to 170 F (see note). In a blender or food processor, combine about half of the flax seeds and the coriander, and pulse to grind finely. Add the drained plain almonds, remaining flax seeds, tamari, agave nectar, and 1 cup of the water, and blend until a smooth paste forms.

Line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat. Spread the almond mixture into an even layer, all the way to the edge of the pan. Use the back of a knife to score the paste into your desired shape.

Place in the oven to dehydrate until dry and crisp, about 7 hours. (Time will depend on the size of

your pan. An 18-by-13-inch pan will take about 7 hours.)

Meanwhile, in a clean blender combine the smoked almonds with the remaining 1/4 cup water, and blend until smooth. Season with salt, to taste.

Spread or pipe the almond spread on each cracker and top with micro herbs and edible flowers before serving.

Chef's Note: If your oven won't go to 170 F, set it to the lowest possible temperature, and check the crackers frequently, since they will cook faster.

Nutrition information per serving: 167 calories; 126 calories from fat; 14 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 249 mg sodium; 8 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 2 g sugar; 6 g protein.



This Dec. 12, 2017 photo provided by The Culinary Institute of America shows almond and flax crackers with a smoked almond spread in Hyde Park, N.Y. AP

Serve Spanish-style crispy potatoes for New Year's

BY SARA MOULTON
Associated Press

The classic New Year's libation is champagne, but what to eat is a matter of broader choice. This year why not make it a tapas party — a feast of various little bites? And, if indeed that's how you choose to roll, one of those dishes should be these crispy baked potatoes with a garlicky red pepper

mayo sauce.

Spanish Style Crispy Potatoes with Garlicky Red Pepper Sauce is a streamlined take on a Spanish classic called patatas bravas — deep-fried chunks of potato with a spicy tomato sauce and/or aioli — sort of like the Spanish equivalent of french fries. But given that most folks aren't keen on firing up a big vat of boiling oil, I've engineered

a baked version. It's not quite as crispy as the fried, but it comes close.

How to make crispy potatoes without frying? Here are a few tricks: First, partially cook the potato slices in simmering water with a bit of baking soda, which makes the exteriors of the potatoes slightly mushy and releases their starch and sugar. Then toss the hot potatoes in a bowl with

oil and salt, which encourages a starchy film to accumulate on the potatoes' exterior. When the potatoes are roasted, all of that starch and sugar on the outside helps to form a crispy brown crust.

As for the lip-smacking sauce — a mix of pureed red peppers, smoky paprika and garlic mayo — you can drizzle it on top of the potatoes or set it on the side as a dip. This dish of crispy potatoes and spicy dip pairs very nicely with bubbly wine or dry sherry, if you're in the mood to salute the dish's Spanish DNA. However, there's no reason to reserve this recipe for a special occasion like New Year's. It will make a very satisfying side dish whenever you serve it.

Kosher salt

For the sauce:

- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup chopped roasted red pepper
- 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- Pinch of cayenne

Prepare the potatoes: Preheat the oven to 450 F. Adjust an oven rack to the lowest position. In a Dutch oven or large saucepan combine the potatoes and baking soda with enough cold water to cover by 1 inch. Bring to boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until the exterior part of the slices has softened but the centers are still slightly firm when pricked with a knife, about 5 minutes.

While the potatoes are simmering, place a rimmed sheet pan on the bottom rack of the oven to heat up. Drain the potatoes and return them to the saucepan. Cook over medium heat a few minutes, shaking the pan until there is no excess water on the surface of the potatoes. Transfer them to large bowl. Drizzle with 2

tablespoons of the oil and 1/2 teaspoon salt; toss well to combine. Drizzle with another 1 tablespoon oil and continue to toss until coated with a starchy paste.

Carefully remove the sheet pan from the oven and pour the remaining tablespoon of oil onto it, tilting the pan to coat the bottom. Add the potatoes and spread them out in one layer (the end pieces should be placed skin side up). Bake until the bottoms are golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes, rotating the pan after 10 minutes. Flip the potatoes and brown them on the second side, 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle with salt to taste.

Make the sauce: In a blender puree the peppers. Add the remaining ingredients and blend, scraping down the sides several times, until smooth.

To serve: Transfer the potatoes to a bowl and drizzle with the sauce, or serve the sauce on the side.

Nutrition information per serving: 232 calories; 113 calories from fat; 13 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 3 mg cholesterol; 494 mg sodium; 27 g carbohydrates; 2 g fiber; 1 g sugar; 3 g protein.



This Nov. 30, 2017 photo shows Spanish-style crispy potatoes in New York. AP

SPANISH STYLE CRISPY POTATOES WITH GARLICKY RED PEPPER SAUCE

Start to finish: 1 hour 45 minutes (35 active)
Servings: 6

- For the potatoes:
- 2 pounds medium Yukon gold potatoes, sliced crosswise 1/2-inch thick
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 4 tablespoons olive oil

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A look at some winners and losers under the GOP tax plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Count President Donald Trump among the personal winners in the \$1.5 trillion tax package that Republicans in the House passed early Wednesday morning and the Senate is expected to approve later in the day. It's not only a political score for Trump but likely a windfall for his real estate empire, too.

Oil drillers would also benefit. So would multi-millionaire and billionaire owners of sports teams. Companies would enjoy a bounty from permanently lower tax rates. Lawyers and accountants will profit from the advice suddenly needed to guide clients through the tax plan.

The bill creates plenty of losers, too. An estimated 13 million Americans are projected to lose health insurance. Commuters will no longer receive a perk that has saved them money. Some residents of high-tax states like New York, New Jersey and California will pay more in taxes.

And more than half of American households could face tax hikes in coming years. That's because their new tax breaks are set to expire after 2025. And their taxes could creep up because the IRS has been directed to use a less generous gauge of inflation in adjusting tax brackets.

Republican lawmakers have sold their far-reaching legislation as benefiting everyone in the long run because, they argue, it will speed up economic growth. But most economists say that any boost in growth would be modest in the long term. And most argue that at least some of the tax benefits will be undermined by the much higher budget deficits that help pay for them.

Among the tax plan's winners:

THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION

At least temporarily, companies with profits that double as the owner's personal income would enjoy a substantial tax break. Consider the Trump Organization. It consists of about 500 such "pass-through" entities, according to the president's lawyers. Rather than pay the top rate of nearly 40 percent, Trump would likely be taxed on these profits at closer to 30 percent.

The final bill also appears to specifically benefit the real estate sector, the bedrock of the Trump family's



Vice President Mike Pence strides through the Capitol to the House Chamber to watch the passage of the Republican tax bill, in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017.

wealth, with benefits extended to pass-throughs that own buildings but don't pay wages to workers.

The president's family didn't receive every possible benefit. The estate tax on inheritances, for example, will stay in place, though it will apply only to the portion of a family's estate that exceeds \$11 million — twice the previous level — at least through 2025. And the alternative minimum tax, which is intended to prevent the wealthy from exploiting loopholes to avoid taxes, would stay in place as well, though its higher thresholds would also be temporary.

ENERGY DRILLERS

It's no longer off limits to drill in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and natural gas. President Barack Obama had sought to protect the 19.6-million acres, a home for polar bears, caribou, migratory birds and other wildlife. But under the Republicans' tax plan, fossil fuel companies could tap into oil and gas reserves. Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and other Republicans insist that drilling can be done safely with new technology while ensuring a steady energy supply for West Coast refineries.

SPORTS TEAMS

Major sports teams will still be able to build and renovate their stadiums with tax-exempt municipal bonds. The House version of the tax bill had initially scrapped access to this form of debt by sports teams, a provision that drew objections from the NFL. But the final bill retains it.

Such tax-advantaged public financing should make it easier to have the Oakland Raiders, for example, move to Las Vegas and play in a new \$1.9 billion dome. Forbes estimates the Raiders, owned by Mark Davis, to be worth \$2.4 billion.

MAJOR CORPORATIONS

The tax rate for most companies would drop to 21 percent from 35 percent. This is a permanent rate cut, which, along with a shift to a lower rate on some foreign earnings, could help boost corporate profits. Not surprisingly, the stock market has soared in part over anticipation of these lower corporate taxes. The Standard & Poor's 500 stock index has jumped nearly 24 percent since Trump's election last year.

TAX LAWYERS

Rather than close loopholes, the tax bill appears to create more of them. Tax lawyers and accountants will likely be besieged by clients looking for professional guidance in restructuring companies and incomes to avoid taxes. In fact, tax experts and lawyers who reviewed a prior version of the tax bill outlined a slew of loopholes in a 35-page report in which it warned that the bill would "allow new tax games and planning opportunities for well-advised taxpayers."

At the same time, many individuals and groups are likely to be on the losing end of the tax legislation. Among them:

THE UNINSURED

The tax bill removes a penalty that was charged to people without health insurance as required by Obama's 2010 health insurance law as a way to hold costs down for everyone. By eliminating this mandate, the tax bill will likely deprive 13 million people of insurance, according to estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

The repeal of the health insurance mandate will help preserve revenue to pay for the tax cuts. The government would no longer have to subsidize as many low-

income people receiving insurance. This change would generate \$314.1 billion over 10 years, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

COMMUTERS

It could get more expensive to ride the subway or park your car near work. Employers would no longer be able to deduct from their taxes the cost of providing parking or transit passes worth up to \$255 a month to workers. Bicycle commuters would also lose their benefit from companies.

Technically, companies could still offer this benefit. But under the tax bill, they will lose the financial incentive to do so. Such a change could have the effect of reducing ridership on public transit and possibly increase costs for riders on rail and bus systems.

HOMEOWNER IN HIGH-TAX STATES

The bill imposes a \$10,000 cap on taxpayers who deduct their state, local and property taxes — and the cap isn't adjusted for inflation. Currently, there is no limit on how much in state and local taxes you can deduct. Some Republican lawmakers in such high-tax states such as California and New York voted against the

bill because their constituents' taxes could increase as a result of the provision, but the measure still passed.

TAXPAYERS AFTER 2025

Most Americans would receive tax cuts initially. But the lower rates and a host of other benefits would expire after 2025. This effectively sets up an \$83 billion tax hike for many millions of Americans in 2027. More than half of taxpayers would pay more in taxes that year, according to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center.

What's more, people's taxes could continue to creep up because the plan will adjust the tax brackets at a less generous measure of inflation than it formerly did. The slower indexing for inflation amounts to a \$400 billion tax hike between 2028 and 2037 that would help finance the lower corporate rates, Lily Batchelder, a New York University law professor and former Obama White House adviser, observed on Twitter.

Congress could decide years from now to extend the lower tax rates. But doing so would increase the deficit far more than the \$1.5 trillion now being estimated by Congress' Joint Committee on Taxation.

Trump, GOP plan White House celebration as tax bill OK nears

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jubilant Republican lawmakers laid plans to join President Donald Trump at the White House for a victory celebration Wednesday as Congress moved one roll call away from approving the GOP's paramount priority, the most thorough reshaping of the country's tax system since the 1980s.

"Workers benefit. Wages go up. More jobs occur," House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said Wednesday on NBC's "Today," describing what Republicans say will flow from a \$1.5 trillion mea-

sure that affects everyone's taxes but is dominated by breaks for business and higher earners. Democrats call the legislation a boon to the rich that leaves middle-class and working Americans behind.

The Senate used a post-midnight vote to approve the measure on a party-line 51-48 tally. Protesters interrupted with chants of, "Kill the bill, don't kill us" and Vice President Mike Pence repeatedly called for order. Upon passage, Republicans cheered, with Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin among them.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., insisted Americans would respond positively to the tax bill.

"If we can't sell this to the American people, we ought to go into another line of work," he said.

Trump planned a White House news conference and a ceremony with GOP lawmakers Wednesday after final congressional approval.

In an eleventh-hour hiccup Tuesday, the Senate parliamentarian found that three minor provisions violated Senate rules, forcing law-

makers to strip them out.

Republicans had rammed the bill through the House 227-203 on Tuesday with all voting Democrats in opposition. Because of the language the Senate removed, the House had to revisit the measure Wednesday because each chamber must approve identical legislation before it can be signed into law.

House Speaker Ryan, who has worked years toward the goal of revamping the tax code, gleefully pounded the gavel on Tuesday's House vote. GOP House members roared and applauded as

they passed a package that will touch every American taxpayer and every corner of the U.S. economy, providing steep tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy, and more modest help for middle- and low-income families.

Despite Republican talk of spending discipline, the bill is projected to push the huge national debt ever higher.

Ryan said Wednesday the GOP is willing to risk running up deficits with the aim of getting a higher annual economic growth rate.

Trump is aching for a big political victory after 11

months of legislative failures and nonstarters. The president tweeted his congratulations to GOP leaders and to "all great House Republicans who voted in favor of cutting your taxes!"

Congressional Republicans, who faltered badly in trying to dismantle Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, see passage of the tax bill as crucial to proving to Americans they can govern — and imperative for holding onto House and Senate majorities in next year's mid-term elections.

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Released prison chef, given 2nd chance, opens new restaurant

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (AP) — Candido Ortiz beamed as he stood in front of his new restaurant, the bright yellow-and-red awning providing a splash of light on an otherwise drab stretch of sidewalk between a tattoo parlor and a liquor store where bulletproof glass protects the merchandise.

After more than 26 years in prison, life has come full circle for Ortiz, who was arrested for selling drugs in the late 1980s and was sentenced to more than 49 years. A year ago, President Barack Obama granted Ortiz clemency, along with other nonviolent drug offenders sentenced to lengthy terms.

On Tuesday, Ortiz, a former prison chef, welcomed a gaggle of reporters and well-wishers to El Sabor Del Cafe, where he hopes to write his next chapter as a free man.

"I never was a bad man," Ortiz said. "I was trying to make money, and I went about it the wrong way. I was punished by society, but I don't feel angry about what happened to me because I was in prison for doing the wrong thing. But I'm different now. I'm a changed man."

Ortiz received a congratulatory letter from Obama this week praising him for "using your extraordinary talents to give back to your community."

After his release, Ortiz received a huge assist from the New Jersey Reentry Corporation, a group spearheaded by Democratic former Gov. Jim Mc-



Chef Candido Ortiz, center, prepares to cut the ceremonial red ribbon opening his restaurant, El Sabor Del Cafe, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017 in Jersey City, N.J.

Greevey that helps released inmates navigate addiction treatment, employment training, health care and housing.

Ortiz, 56, was a head chef in several federal prisons and became accustomed to overseeing the feeding of thousands of inmates. After his release,

he got a job right away as a short-order cook in Jersey City. The Reentry Corporation then helped him raise \$25,000 in loans and grants to open his own restaurant.

"With this one act, President Obama began the transformation of Candido's life," McGreevey said. "Candido has been trans-

formed from a ward of the state, at a cost of \$55,000 per year, to a taxpayer."

The restaurant will serve standard American fare such as chicken wings, wraps, salads and pasta along with a buffet featuring Latin American items such as costillita de cerdo (pork ribs), bacalao (salted

cod) and carne guisada (beef stew).

Ortiz said his hope remained intact even when he was staring at nearly five decades in prison.

"I never thought my life was over," he said. "I knew I had a long time, but I knew God was going to put his hand on me."

He thanked the Reentry Corporation for its role.

"I'm here today," he said, "because I want to share with the people around here and let them see what the right way of living can do for you."

Amtrak didn't wait for system that could've prevented wreck

The rush to launch service on a new, faster Amtrak route near Seattle came at a deadly cost: none of the critical speed-control technology that could have prevented a derailment was active before the train set off on its maiden voyage.

Work to install the sophisticated, GPS-based technology known as positive train control isn't expected to be completed until next spring on the newly opened 15-mile (24-kilometer) span where the train derailed, according to Sound Transit, the public agency that owns the tracks.

The rest of the project was "under a very aggressive schedule," according to documents posted on Sound Transit's website. The terms and conditions for funding the \$180.7 million project, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, required track, signal and other infrastructure work be completed by June 30, the documents said. Even a one-month delay would "significantly impact the project."

The train in Monday's crash was going 80 mph (129 kph) in a 30 mph (48 kph) zone when it raced off the rails as they curved toward a bridge, hurtling train cars onto a highway below, investigators said. Three people were killed, and dozens were injured. Federal investigators say they are looking into whether the engineer was distracted.

A positive train control system could have detected the speeding and automati-

cally applied the brakes to stop the train, said Najmedin Meshkati, a University of Southern California professor who has studied the technology for three decades.

"It is another layer of safety," he said.

Amtrak and the Washington Department of Transportation started publicizing the switch to the new route in October. Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson said that "no one wants PTC more than me" but would not directly answer questions about why it is taking so long to get the speed-control technology up and running across the board.

"I'm a huge believer in positive train control," he said at a news conference Tuesday evening. "It just makes so much scientific sense."

Anderson said the company's safety culture can continue to improve and said the crash should be seen as a "wake-up call."

"It's not acceptable that we're involved in these types of accidents," he said.

Railroads are under government orders to install positive train control by the end of 2018 after the industry lobbied Congress to extend earlier deadlines, citing complexity and cost.

Union Pacific, the nation's largest freight carrier, said it was spending about \$2.9 billion on the technology. Industry groups estimate railroads will spend a total of about \$10 billion to install and implement the systems.

Monday's wreck is just the latest example of a deadly



Workers stand atop a damaged railroad bridge at the scene of an Amtrak train crash onto Interstate 5 a day earlier Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017, in DuPont, Wash.

crash that experts say could have been prevented if the technology were in place to slow down the train when engineers go too fast, get distracted or fall ill.

U.S. investigators have listed a lack of such a system as a contributing factor in at least 25 crashes over the last 20 years, including two in the last four years where a train approached sharp curves at more than double the speed limit.

A Metro-North train crashed in New York City in 2013, killing four people, when an engineer with sleep apnea dozed off. An Amtrak train crashed in Philadelphia in 2015, killing eight people, when investigators say the

engineer was distracted by radio traffic and lost his bearings.

Positive train control was installed on 23 percent of the nation's passenger route miles and 37 percent of freight route miles as of July, the last time the Federal Railroad Administration updated its online tracker for the technology.

It is activated on the tracks Amtrak owns along the Northeast Corridor, from Boston to Washington, D.C., and on Amtrak's Michigan line. Many of its locomotives are equipped for positive train control.

Throughout the rest of the country, Amtrak operates on track owned by freight car-

riers and other entities that have made varying progress on installing the technology.

It's a work in progress on the route where the train derailed Monday. Sensors have been installed, but the system needs to be synchronized, tested and certified before it goes online, Sound Transit spokeswoman Rachelle Cunningham said.

The new route was designed to speed up service by removing passenger trains from a route along Puget Sound that's bogged down by curves, single-track tunnels and freight traffic.

The National Transportation Safety Board first recommended the use of "automatic train control" in 1970,

a year after two Penn Central commuter trains collided, killing four and injuring 43.

The railroad industry was opposed for decades until a Metrolink commuter train collided head-on with a freight train near Los Angeles in 2008. Investigators said the train's engineer was texting and ran a stop signal, killing 25 people.

"It's a good fail-safe for human error," said Fran Kelly, assistant general manager for SEPTA, the Philadelphia-area commuter railroad that was an early adopter of positive train control. "It's using the best technologies available to complement what the human engineer is doing - the human element of it."

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EU takes historical step threatening Poland with sanctions

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — The European Union's executive arm triggered proceedings against Poland on Wednesday over Warsaw's contentious overhaul of the justice system, a move that could lead to unprecedented sanctions as Brussels struggles to keep the recalcitrant member state on a democratic path.

The decision to trigger what is known as Article 7 comes in reaction to several laws that the right-wing Law and Justice party has enacted during its two years in power that give it greater control over the justice system.

Though the step was historic — no EU state has ever been censured in this way — for now it is largely symbolic as it involves a warning and mostly reflects the escalating tensions between Poland's populist government and its EU partners.

The final step in the process would involve sanctions, including the loss by Poland of its voting rights in the Council. This step, however, is considered unlikely to happen because it requires unanimity of EU countries, and Hungary's government has vowed to block any such move.

Either way, the developments reflect a dramatic historical reversal for Poland, birthplace of an anti-communist movement in the 1980s that inspired people across Eastern Europe and a country long praised as a model of democratic transition.

"We are doing this for Poland, for Polish citizens," so they can rely on a fully in-

dependent judiciary in their nation, EU Commissioner Frans Timmermans said in announcing the decision.

Timmermans said the decision was taken with a "heavy heart" but had become unavoidable because Poland's authorities could not be persuaded to abandon laws that have been condemned not only by the EU but also by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, the continent's top human rights body.

Two of the laws — one on the Constitutional Tribunal and another one giving the justice minister power to name the presidents of all ordinary courts — have already taken effect. Two others regulating the Supreme Court and a body that appoints judges, the National Council of the Judiciary, were recently passed by parliament and still await the signature of the president.

Poland's government, which has defiantly gone forward with an overhaul of its court system despite two years of warnings from the EU, took the decision in its stride.

Zbigniew Ziobro, who is both justice minister and prosecutor general as part of the changes, which have hugely strengthened his powers, said he received the news with "calm" and said Poland's government "must continue the reforms."

He insisted the provisions were drawn from the justice systems of Western EU members.



Poland's Supreme Court, a top court that is an element in Poland's conflict over its rule of law standards with the European Union's leaders, photographed in Warsaw, Poland, Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017.

The ruling party, led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, has long said its changes were needed to reform a corrupt and inefficient judicial system led by a "caste of judges" who it says are not accountable to anyone.

The Commission must now submit a request to the EU member states to declare "a clear risk of serious breach of the rule of law" in Poland. That is essentially a warning, or in EU lingo, a "preventative" measure, that will require that acceptance of 22

EU countries.

The procedure carries a number of risks. While it is unlikely to prevent the judicial overhaul, the escalating tensions threaten to increase anti-EU feeling in one of the EU member states with the highest support for the bloc, at more than 80 percent in most polls.

Even some of the government's staunchest critics have opposed the step, fearing it will create a sense among some Poles — particularly those who do not understand

the complexities of the judicial laws — that they are being targeted unfairly by the EU.

Ryszard Czarnecki, a member of Law and Justice and the vice-president of the European Parliament, called the step an "anti-Polish" move that is really meant to punish Poland for not taking migrants in a mandatory EU resettlement plan.

As expected, Hungary came to Poland's defense.

Zsolt Semjen, the deputy prime minister, described

the EU decision as "unprecedented and astounding" and reiterated the intention of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to block any sanctions.

"The decision seriously damages Poland's sovereignty," Semjen told state news wire MTL. "It is unacceptable that Brussels is putting pressure on sovereign member states and arbitrarily punishing democratically elected governments."

Vast undercount of Mosul dead: 9,000 civilians dead

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — The price Mosul's residents paid in blood to see their city freed was between 9,000 and 11,000 dead, a civilian casualty rate nearly 10 times higher than what has been previously reported. The number killed in the 9-month battle to liberate the city from the Islamic State marauders has not been acknowledged by the U.S.-led coalition, the Iraqi government or the self-styled caliphate.

But Mosul's gravediggers, its morgue workers and the volunteers who retrieve bodies from the city's rubble are keeping count.

Iraqi or coalition forces are responsible for at least 3,200 civilian deaths from airstrikes, artillery fire or mortar rounds between October 2016 and the fall of the Islamic State group in July 2017, according to an Associated Press investigation that cross-referenced independent databases from non-governmental organizations.

Most of those victims are simply described as "crushed" in health ministry reports.

The coalition, which says it lacks the resources to send investigators into Mosul, acknowledges responsibility for only 326 of the deaths.

"It was the biggest assault on a city in a couple of generations, all told. And thousands died," said Chris Woods, head of Airwars, an independent organization that documents air and artillery strikes in Iraq and Syria and shared its database with the AP.

"There doesn't seem to

be any disagreement about that, except from the federal government and the coalition. And understanding how those civilians died, and obviously ISIS played a big part in that as well, could help save a lot of lives the next time something like this has to happen. And the disinterest in any sort of investigation is very disheartening," Woods said, using an alternative acronym for IS.

In addition to the Airwars database, the AP analyzed information from Amnesty International, Iraq Body Count and a United Nations report. AP also obtained a list of 9,606 names of people killed during the operation from Mosul's morgue. Hundreds of dead civilians are believed to still be buried in the rubble.

Of the nearly 10,000 deaths the AP found, around a third of the casualties died in bombardments by the U.S.-led coalition or Iraqi forces, the AP analysis found. Another third of the dead were killed in the Islamic State group's final frenzy of violence. And it could not be determined which side was responsible for the deaths of the remainder, who were covering in neighborhoods battered by airstrikes, IS explosives and mortar rounds from all sides.

But the morgue total would be many times higher than official tolls. Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi told the AP that 1,260 civilians were killed in the fighting. The U.S.-led coalition has not offered an overall figure. The coalition relies on drone footage, video

from cameras mounted on weapons systems and pilot observations. Its investigators have neither visited the morgue or requested its data.

What is clear from the tallies is that as coalition and Iraqi government forces increased their pace, civilians were dying in ever higher numbers at the hands of their liberators: from 20 the week the operation began in mid-October 2016 to 303 in a single week at the end of June 2017, according to the AP tally.

Abdel-Hafiz Mohammed, who kept his job as undertaker throughout the militants' rule, has carved approximately 2,000 headstones for the al-Jadidah graveyard alone since October 2016, the month the battle began.

After the city fell to IS in 2014, undertakers like him handled the victims of beheadings and stonings; there were men accused of homosexuality who had been flung from rooftops. But once the operation to free the city started, the scope of Mohammed's work changed yet again.

"Now I carve stones for entire families," Mohammed said, gesturing to a stack of four headstones, all bearing the same name. "It's a single family, all killed in an airstrike," he said.

DYING AT HOME, ON THE FRONT

Mosul was home to more than a million civilians before the fight to retake it from IS. Fearing a massive humanitarian crisis, the Iraqi government dropped leaflets

or had soldiers tell families to stay put as the final battle loomed in late 2016.

Thousands were trapped as the front line enveloped densely populated neighborhoods.

Blast injuries, gunshot wounds and shrapnel wounds killed thousands as the Mosul operation ground westward, according to morgue documents.

When Iraqi forces became bogged down in late December, the Pentagon adjusted the rules regarding the use of airpower, allowing airstrikes to be called in by more ground commanders with less chain-of-command oversight.

At the same time, Islamic State fighters took thousands of civilians with them in their retreat west. They packed hundreds of families into schools and government buildings, sometimes shunting civilians through tunnels from one fighting position to another.

They expected the tactic would dissuade airstrikes and artillery. They were wrong.

As the fight punched into western Mosul, the morgue logs filled with civilians increasingly killed by being "blown to pieces."

By early March, Iraqi officials and the U.S.-led coalition could see that civilian deaths were spiking, but held the course. The result, in Mosul and later in the group's Syrian stronghold of Raqqa, was a city left in ruins by the battle to save it.

Most of the civilians killed in west Mosul died under the weight of collapsed build-

ings, hit by airstrikes, mortars, artillery shells or IS-laid explosives. The morgue provided lists of names of civilians and place of death. Names often included entire families.

The coalition has defended its operational choices, saying it was Islamic State that put civilians in danger as it clung to power.

"It is simply irresponsible to focus criticism on inadvertent casualties caused by the Coalition's war to defeat ISIS," Col. Thomas Veale, a coalition spokesman, told the AP in response to questions about civilian deaths.

"Without the Coalition's air and ground campaign against ISIS, there would have inevitably been additional years, if not decades of suffering and needless death and mutilation in Syria and Iraq at the hands of terrorists who lack any ethical or moral standards," he added.

Civilian deaths in the second half of the battle reflected the looser rules of engagement for airstrikes and the sheer numbers of trapped residents. From Oct. 17 to Feb. 19, the AP tally found at least 576 deaths by coalition or Iraqi munitions.

From Feb. 19 — when the fight crossed the Tigris River — to mid-July, there were nearly 2,400 civilian deaths. That total is in addition to the 326 confirmed by the coalition in the city. The U.S. and Australia are the only two coalition countries to acknowledge civilian deaths, although France had fighter jets and artillery and the UK also carried out airstrikes.

Of the nearly 10,000

names listed by the morgue, around 4,200 were confirmed as civilian dead in the battle. The AP discarded names that were obviously those of Islamic State fighters, and casualties brought in from outside Mosul. Among the remaining 6,000 are likely some number of Islamic State extremists, but the morgue civilian toll tracks closely with numbers gathered during the battle itself by Airwars and others.

Neither toll includes thousands of people killed by Islamic State who are believed to be in mass graves in and around Mosul, including as many as 4,000 in the natural crevasse known as Khasfa.

Imad Ibrahim, a civil defense rescuer from west Mosul, survived the battle to retake the city and is now tasked with excavating the dead. He mostly works in the Old City, where on a recent day the streets still reeked of rotting flesh.

"Sometimes you can see the bodies, they're visible under the rubble, other times we dig for hours and suddenly find 15 to 30 all in one place. That's when you know they were sheltering, hiding from the airstrikes," Ibrahim said.

Behind him an excavator dug through jagged cement blocks, searching for the body of a woman who was hiding in her home when it was hit by an airstrike.

Ibrahim said he spent years waiting for liberation, but that the victory itself was hollow.

"Honestly, none of this was worth it."



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Blood test may help predict which breast cancers will recur

BY MARILYNN MARCHIONE

AP Chief Medical Writer

A blood test five years after breast cancer treatment helped identify some women who were more likely to relapse, long before a lump or other signs appeared, a preliminary study found.

It was the largest experiment so far to use these tests, called liquid biopsies, for breast cancer. Results suggest they someday may help reveal which women need longer preventive therapy and which ones can be spared it.

"It could be providing an early warning sign" for some women that cancer is returning, said Dr. Joseph Sparano of Montefiore Einstein Center for Cancer Care in New York.

On the other hand, "if you had a negative test, there was a 98 percent chance you would not have a recurrence in the next two years" and perhaps could skip further treatment, he said.

Sparano led the study and gave results Friday at the San Antonio Breast

Cancer Symposium.

The test — CellSearch, sold by Menarini-Silicon Biosystems — looks for stray cancer cells in the blood.

Breast cancer survivors may be tempted to rush out and get it, but doctors say it's too soon for that. Although it's been used for about a decade to monitor certain patients with advanced cancer during treatment, its value for helping to predict breast cancer relapse risk is not well established, and insurers won't pay the \$600 to \$900 tab.

The new study should spur more research on this right away, said Dr. Massimo Cristofanilli, a breast cancer specialist at Northwestern University in Chicago who has used these tests and consults for another company developing one.

"Clearly, to me, we have to do something" now that this study suggests a wider role for them, he said.

It involved 547 women in long-term follow-up from an earlier cancer drug study. Two-thirds of them had cancers fueled by es-

trogen, and in most cases it had spread to lymph nodes but not more widely.

All had surgery and chemotherapy followed by hormone-blocking medicines for five years. Guidelines now recommend considering hormone blockers for up to 10 years, but they have side effects and their benefit beyond five years is fairly small. So finding a way to tell who really needs that would be a big help.

Women in the study had a CellSearch test five years on average after their cancer was found and treated.

Among those with estrogen-fueled disease, 5 percent had cancer cells in the blood test, and they turned out to have a 22-fold higher risk of recurrence within roughly two years compared to women whose blood test was negative.

About 65 percent of women with hormone-positive disease and a positive blood test did not have a new breast cancer within two years, but that doesn't mean the blood test gave a false alarm, Sparano said.

"We haven't followed the patients long enough" — it



AP

In this Tuesday, April 28, 2015 file photo, a patient has her blood drawn for a liquid biopsy at a hospital in Philadelphia. A study released on Friday, Dec. 8, 2017 found that a blood test five years after breast cancer treatment helped identify women who were likely to relapse, long before a lump or other signs appeared.

could be that more tumors become evident with more time, he said.

The blood test seemed to do a good job of identifying which of these hormone-positive patients were at low risk of recurrence, suggesting that women who

test negative may be able to forgo an additional five years of hormone-blocking medicines.

The test did not predict recurrence risk in the rest of the women in the study, whose tumors were not fueled by estrogen. They

have a lower risk of recurrence after five years to start with.

The study was funded by the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, Susan G. Komen Foundation and the National Cancer Institute.

New CDC Director questioned about financial conflicts

NEW YORK (AP) — A U.S. Senator is criticizing the director of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for an apparent financial conflict of interest that the senator says may prevent the director from doing her job.

Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald became director of the Atlanta-based CDC in July, and was required to sell a range of stocks she owned, including beer and soda companies, the tobacco company Philip Morris International, and a number of health care companies such as vaccine manufacturers and health-care companies.

"I've done everything that they've requested, in a timely manner as they've requested," Fitzgerald said Monday in an interview with The Associated Press. "My financial people tell me we have now sold all the stocks."

But last week, Sen. Patty Murray wrote Fitzgerald saying she's concerned about unresolved financial holdings noted in Fitzgerald's ethics agreement with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CDC is part of HHS.

The agreement notes Fitzgerald is unable to divest from certain investments that could prevent her from talking about cancer and prescription drug monitoring programs, wrote Murray, a Democrat from Washington.

"I am concerned that you cannot perform the role of CDC Director while being largely recused from matters pertaining to cancer and opioids, two of the most pervasive and urgent health challenges we face as a country," wrote Murray, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee of Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, which oversees the CDC.

She called on Fitzgerald to release more information and to meet with the committee about the issue.

Public health leaders have noted Fitzgerald

ald has kept an unusually low profile since becoming CDC director. Fitzgerald says she's simply wanted time to learn about the agency, but also said she bowed out of an Oct. 5 Congressional hearing on opioids due to a financial conflict of interest.

Fitzgerald said her stock purchases had been handled by two financial management companies and that she hadn't been aware of particular holdings until they were raised to her by ethics compliance officials at HHS. She said her stock sales have been completed since the October hearing.

HHS and CDC officials did not provide a copy of Fitzgerald's ethics agreement to the AP, and did not respond to questions about Murray's concerns.

CDC, the nation's top public health agency, is the only federal agency headquartered outside of Washington, D.C. It has nearly 12,000 employees, and about three-quarters of them are based in the Atlanta area.

Fitzgerald, 71, was a long-time obstetrician-gynecologist in the Atlanta area, a former major in the U.S. Air Force, and campaigned twice, unsuccessfully, as a Republican candidate for Congress in the 1990s. She led Georgia's state health department for six years before being tapped for the CDC job.

People who've met with her say that in small groups or personal meetings she can be gregarious, and she was a prominent spokesperson on health issues in the past.

But since Fitzgerald took office, she has skipped important public health meetings and bowed out of at least one Congressional hearing. For months, she declined nearly all media interviews, and was absent from the kind of flu vaccination promotions that traditionally star CDC directors.

Fitzgerald said she was traveling or had other scheduling conflicts during many of those events.



AP

In this Oct. 16, 2014 file photo, Brenda Fitzgerald, Georgia Department of Public Health commissioner, left, and Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal respond to questions in Atlanta. Fitzgerald, the new director of the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has kept a low profile during her five months in office, due to conflicts of interest regarding her financial holdings.

US health officials to target high-risk alternative remedies

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health officials plan to crack down on a growing number of unproven alternative remedies, focusing on products containing dangerous ingredients that have occasionally been linked to serious injury and death.

The Food and Drug Administration on Monday issued a new proposal for regulating homeopathic medicines that have long been on the fringe of mainstream medicine. The agency plans to target products that pose the biggest safety risks, including those marketed for children or for serious diseases.

But under the government's framework, the vast majority of low-risk products would remain on the market. Popular homeopathic brands include Zicam Allergy Relief and Cold-Eeze.

Long regarded by scientists as a form of modern-day snake oil, homeopathic products are treated as drugs under law, but not supported by modern science. Most remedies contain heavily diluted drugs, vitamins and minerals.

"People may be putting their trust and money in therapies that bring little or no benefit in combating their ailments, or worse — in products that may cause serious and even irreparable harm," FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said Monday on a call with reporters.

Once a niche market, homeopathy products have grown into a \$3 billion industry, according to FDA figures.

Homeopathic products are similar to dietary supplements, in that the FDA does not review their safety or effectiveness before they are sold. But unlike supplements, homeopathic medicines can state that they are intended for specific medical symptoms and conditions, similar to drugs.

A handful of products in recent years have been subject to major safety problems, usually involving potentially toxic ingredients.

Last year, the FDA warned consumers about the risks of teething tablets marketed by Hyland's Homeopathic after they were tied to seizures and deaths in infants and children. FDA testing later confirmed the products contained high levels of belladonna, also called nightshade, a poisonous herb that has long been used at low dosages in homeopathic medicine. The products were recalled in April.

In 2009, the FDA ordered Zicam to stop marketing three products that contained zinc gluconate after more than 100 users reported losing their sense of smell. Other dangerous ingredients used in homeopathy products include nux vomica, which



AP

This June 16, 2009, file photo shows Zicam Cold Remedy nasal gel in Boston.

contains strychnine. Regulators have issued five warning letters this year to companies selling products with nightshade or nux vomica.

The FDA said its proposal also targets products that claim to treat serious diseases like cancer, or are administered via unconventional routes such as injection or eye drops. Regulators can issue warning letters, seize products or pursue criminal action against companies that disregard federal guidelines.

The agency will take comments on its proposal for 90 days before beginning to finalize the plan.

Consumer advocates said the FDA plan makes sense for products that are mostly harmless, but can be dangerous if manufacturers stray from traditional ingredients, dosing and manufacturing.

"I think the rules do a good job of going after the things that are most problematic," said Dr. Adriane Fugh-Berman, an associate professor at Georgetown University Medical Center.

The FDA hasn't updated its regulations for homeopathic medicine since 1988, when it essentially exempted the industry from basic production standards that are mandatory for traditional drugs, like listing ingredients on product labels.

Hundreds of homeopathic remedies today are sold alongside over-the-counter drugs like Tylenol and aspirin at pharmacies across the U.S. The National Institutes of Health has said there's little evidence that homeopathic medicine is effective for treating any specific condition.

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White House adviser says NKorea behind big ransomware attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration on Tuesday publicly blamed North Korea for a "careless and reckless" ransomware attack that infected hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide in May and crippled parts of Britain's National Health Service.

Homeland security adviser Tom Bossert told reporters at a White House briefing that North Korea was directly responsible for the WannaCry ransomware attack and that Pyongyang will be held accountable for it.

"This was a careless and reckless attack. It affected individuals, industry, governments and the consequences were beyond economic. The computers affected badly in the U.K. in their health care system put lives at risk, not just money," Bossert said.

Bossert said the administration's finding of responsibility is based on evidence and confirmed by other private companies and foreign governments, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Japan. He said Microsoft traced the attack to cyber affiliates of the North Korean government.

The findings come as the U.S. has sought to pressure Kim Jong Un's government to end the pariah nation's nuclear and missile programs.

"North Korea has acted especially badly, largely unchecked, for more than a decade ... its malicious behavior is growing more egregious. And stopping that malicious behavior starts with this step of accountability," he said.

Bossert said the Trump administration would continue to push Pyongyang to curb its ability to mount attacks and seek to partner with the private sector to prevent future attacks.

But he said Trump "has used just about every lever

you can use short of starving the North Korean people to death to change their behavior. So we don't have a lot of room left here to apply pressure to change their behavior. It's nevertheless important to call them out, let them know it's them and we know it's them."

Bossert said attributing the attack to North Korea would let them know "we're going to move to stop their behavior" and work with tech partners such as Microsoft and Facebook. "This is allowing us to call upon all likeminded and good, responsible companies to stop supporting North Korean hackers whether they're operating in North Korea or elsewhere," Bossert said.

The WannaCry attack struck more than 150 nations in May, locking up digital documents, databases and other files and demanding a ransom for their release.

It battered Britain's National Health Service, where the cyberattack froze computers at hospitals across the country, closing emergency rooms and bringing medical treatment to a halt. Government offices in Russia, Spain, and several other countries were disrupted, as were Asian universities, Germany's national railway and global companies such as automakers Nissan and Renault.

The WannaCry ransomware exploited a vulnerability in mostly older versions of Microsoft's Windows operating system. Affected computers had generally not been patched with security fixes that would have blocked the attack.

Security experts, however, traced the exploitation of that weakness back to the U.S. National Security Agency; it was part of a cache of stolen NSA cyberweapons publicly released by a group of hackers known as the Shadow Brokers.

Microsoft president Brad



White House Homeland Security Adviser Tom Bossert speaks during a briefing blaming North Korea for a ransomware attack that infected hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide in May and crippled parts of Britain's National Health Service, at the White House, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017, in Washington.

Smith likened the theft to "the U.S. military having some of its Tomahawk missiles stolen," and argued that intelligence agencies should disclose such vulnerabilities rather than hoarding them.

WannaCry came to a screeching halt thanks to enterprising work by a British hacker named Marcus Hutchins, who discovered that the malware's author had embedded a "kill switch" in the code. Hutchins was able to trip that switch, and the attack soon ended. In an unusual twist, Hutchins was arrested months later by the FBI during a visit to the U.S.; he pleaded not guilty and now awaits trial on charges he created unrelated forms of malware.

The United States and

South Korea have accused North Korea of launching a series of cyberattacks in recent years, though the North has dismissed the accusations.

A South Korean lawmaker in October said North Korean hackers stole highly classified military documents that include U.S.-South Korean wartime "decapitation strike" plans against the North Korean leadership. Seoul's Defense Ministry earlier said North Korea was likely behind the hacking of the Defense Integrated Data Center, which is the military data center where the information was kept, in September last year. But the Defense Ministry refused to confirm the nature of the information that was compromised.

South Korea also last

year accused North Korea of hacking the personal data of more than 10 million users of an online shopping site and dozens of email accounts used by government officials and journalists.

The United States in 2014 formally accused North Korea of hacking Sony Pictures Entertainment over the movie "The Interview," a satirical film about a plot to assassinate North Korea's leader.

South Korea said in 2015 that North Korea had a 6,000-member cyberarmy dedicated to disrupting the South's government and military. The figure was a sharp increase from a 2013 South Korean estimate of 3,000 such specialists.

Baik Tae-hyun, spokesman for South Korea's Unification Ministry, which

deals with matters related to North Korea, said Monday that the Seoul government was examining whether the North was behind hacking attacks on a cryptocurrency exchange in June. About \$7 million in digital money was stolen in the hacks, South Korean officials said.

There's speculation in the South that North Korean hackers are possibly targeting cryptocurrency like bitcoin to evade the heavy financial sanctions imposed over the country's nuclear weapons and missiles program.

"We are monitoring the bitcoin-related issue. We believe that North Korea is currently engaging in various activities to evade sanctions and earn foreign currency," Baik said.

GOP set to roll \$1.5T final tax bill through House, Senate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Their long-sought political goal within grasp, Republicans in Congress are set to catapult sweeping \$1.5 trillion tax legislation through the House, rolling over a dozen GOP defectors from high-tax states.

The Republicans' final drive to deliver the tax package to an eager President Donald Trump begins Tuesday with a vote in the House. Quickly following, a vote later in the day or on Wednesday in the Senate is expected to seal the deal. Both tallies likely will cling along party lines.

The Senate result was in doubt in recent weeks. Only on Friday did Republican leaders cement the needed support for the legislation, securing endorsements from wavering GOP senators Marco Rubio of Florida and Bob Corker of Tennessee. More holdout GOP senators—moderate Susan Collins of Maine and Mike Lee of Utah—came into the fold on Monday.

Now the biggest reshap-

ing of the U.S. tax code in three decades is on a clear path to passage and a presidential signing into law.

The complex legislation, hammered out in compromise, blends elements of separate House and Senate bills that were recently passed. It permanently slashes the tax rate for corporations from 35 percent to 21 percent and reduces levies on the wealthiest Americans, while making more modest tax reductions for most others. The tax cuts for individuals are temporary, expiring in 2026. It doubles the standard deduction used by about two-thirds of U.S. households, to \$24,000 for married couples, also ending in eight years.

The \$1,000-per-child tax credit doubles to \$2,000, with up to \$1,400 available in IRS refunds for families who owe little or no taxes. Parents would have to provide children's Social Security numbers to receive the child credit, a measure intended to deny the credit to people who are in the U.S. illegally.

Those who itemize lose

some deductions.

The legislation also repeals an important part of President Barack Obama's health care law — the requirement that all Americans carry health insurance or face a penalty — as the GOP looks to unravel a law it failed to repeal and replace this past summer.

The package represents the first major legislative achievement for the Republicans after nearly a full year in control of Congress and the White House. It is expected to add to the nation's \$20 trillion debt. The tax cuts are projected to add \$1.46 trillion over a decade. GOP lawmakers say they'd expect a future Congress to continue the tax cuts so they won't expire. If achieved, that would drive up deficits even further.

Democrats, who were excluded from the closed-door drafting sessions, have kept up a litany of criticism that the legislation favors big corporations and the wealthy, snubbing the middle class. Though several Democratic lawmakers took part in

the House-Senate conference that blended the two bills, none signed the final bill.

The bill would bring average initial tax cuts for Americans across all income lines, but by 2027, it would boost average levies for everyone earning up to \$75,000, which includes most taxpayers, Congress' nonpartisan tax analysts estimated Monday.

The Joint Committee on Taxation calculated that in 2019, people earning \$20,000 to \$50,000 would see tax cuts averaging 10 percent or more. Those making \$200,000 to \$1 million would see reductions averaging slightly less.

But by 2023, people making under \$30,000 would see tax increases, while those earning more would see their tax cuts get smaller.

And a separate new study by the Tax Policy Center, a private nonpartisan group, found that individual taxes would be reduced on average next year by \$1,600. But that ranged on average from

\$60 for people earning below \$25,000 to \$7,640 for those making above \$149,000. Those in the top 1 percent, earning over \$733,000, would see average tax cuts of \$51,140.

Rushing toward a vote and political triumph, Republican leaders brushed off the less-than-rosy projections. "That's just cherry-picking the numbers," Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, head of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, told reporters Monday. Looking ahead, he said, enthusiasm is growing for the tax bill and changes it will bring. "People are excited about a stronger economy and bigger paychecks," Brady said.

The disgruntled Republican lawmakers, from high-tax New York, New Jersey and California, receded into the background as the tax train rolled. Twelve of them voted against the House tax bill last month, which passed 227-205. They were protesting its new \$10,000 cap on the deduction that millions use in connec-

tion with state and local income, property and sales taxes. The cap remains in the final bill.

The deduction is especially vital to residents of high-tax states.

Several defectors reaffirmed their "No" votes for the final bill on Tuesday. Rep. Peter King conveyed what people in his Long Island, New York district were telling him about the tax bill: "Nothing good, especially from Republicans. ... It's certainly unpopular in my district," he said.

In the Senate, meanwhile, the new "Yes" votes clinched meant that all voting Republicans are expected to back the bill, enough for passage. The GOP's razor-thin edge in the Senate is 52-48. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., is at home battling brain cancer and is expected to miss the vote. The Republicans still can muster a simple majority of the 99 senators present. And in their back pocket, they've got Vice President Mike Pence ready to break a tie if needed.

Panthers sale sparks buzz in political, business circles

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The stunning news of the rare opportunity to purchase an NFL team has quickly garnered the attention of sports figures, business investors and politicians alike.

Amid reports of sexual and racial remarks made by Carolina Panthers owner and founder Jerry Richardson in the workplace, he has unexpectedly announced that he is selling the NFL franchise after this season ends.

It was a bombshell that rocked the Carolinas, and generated shockwaves inside and out of the organization. The team Monday promoted Tina Becker as COO and gave her full control of the day-to-day operations.

Becker said in a release that "these have been some of the most difficult days of my 19 years with the Panthers." She added that her immediate focus will be on corporate side of the organization, "while addressing the real concerns that have been raised in recent days."

Richardson, meanwhile, stepped away from daily responsibilities to focus on the sale of the team — which will come with a

multi-billion dollar price tag.

That's what is known, but Richardson's decision to walk away after nearly 25 years as owner has left more questions than answers about the franchise's future — most notably, who will buy it and will they keep the team in Charlotte.

Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles said she is committed to working to keep the team in Charlotte.

"The City of Charlotte values its long-running relationship with the Panthers after more than 22 seasons of NFL football," Lyles said in a statement to The Associated Press. "The Panthers are part of Charlotte's fabric. We've celebrated victories and anguished over defeats. We understand transitions are inevitable, and we look forward to working with current and future ownership."

The Panthers are tethered to Charlotte through the 2018 season because of an agreement on an \$87.5 stadium renovation between the city and the team in 2013. That renovation is nearly complete.

But a buyer could potentially purchase the team and

move it in 2019.

Former North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory, who was mayor of Charlotte when the Panthers settled into their new stadium, has seen both sides. He also was the mayor when the Hornets left town. He said another question might be about Bank of America stadium.

"Will (the new owners) ask for government subsidy to continue to improve the stadium, or, in fact, even build a new stadium, like what's happened in Atlanta and Dallas?" McCrory said. "That would be a tall order."

He said it will be a business decision — and the highest bidder will get the team, to possibly do with it as they chose.

"Unless the NFL steps in and says, 'No, you need to have a local ownership group,'" he said, "which I'd encourage them to do."

Panthers coach Ron Rivera was "a little taken aback" when Richardson informed him Sunday night of his decision to sell the team. But he too believes the Panthers should remain in Charlotte.

"This organization has been a source of pride and goodwill and I would like it to continue," Rivera said

Monday. "This is a great community with a very supportive fan base that has been out there for us. They have been here for me and this football team and I hope that somehow it is able to stay here."

The chance to purchase an NFL team has potential suitors coming out of the woodwork.

Rapper and actor Diddy indicated his interest in purchasing the Panthers on Twitter moments after Richardson's announcement.

Two-time NBA MVP Stephen Curry, a Charlotte native, chimed in with "I want in!"

NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick has also expressed interest.

Other businessmen with Charlotte connections could show interest as well.

Speedway Motorsports chairman Bruton Smith and his son, CEO Marcus Smith, have previously expressed interest in purchasing the Panthers should the opportunity arise.

And the Panthers are loaded with minority owners including real estate magnate "Smoky" Biswell, Family Dollar founder Leon Levine and members

of the Belk family. Developer Johnny Harris, who was instrumental in luring the Wells Fargo Championship — and later the PGA Championship — to Charlotte, could also decide to increase his ownership stake in the team.

Let's not forget Michael Jordan. The six-time NBA champion owns the Hornets. However, Jordan's interest level is unknown and his representative Estee Portnoy said she had no comment on the Panthers sale.

More names will surely emerge over the next several weeks, but they need to be ready to write a big check. Forbes Magazine recently estimated the Panthers worth at \$2.3 billion.

And those numbers could be low.

Forbes estimated the Buffalo Bills at a net worth of \$935 million in 2013, but the team wound up selling in 2014 for \$1.4 billion — nearly 50 percent higher than the estimate — according to magazine's website.

Before any sale can be finalized, it will need the approval of 24 of 32 NFL owners.

The Panthers have a lot to

offer potential suitors:

— They are on the cusp of reaching the playoffs for the fourth time in five seasons.

— They have sold out 225 of their 227 home games in team history, including 157 straight.

— They feature several recognizable stars including 2015 NFL MVP Cam Newton and 2013 Defensive Player of the Year Luke Kuechly.

Panthers tight end Ed Dickson said fans don't deserve to have a team ripped out from underneath them.

"It's growing, it's definitely been growing," Dickson said of the fan base. "We are striving to build something that Dallas has, and Pittsburgh has. We don't have that much history here. But one of the reasons I came here was to be a part of something special. When we do get to the top of the mountain and win a Super Bowl — then we have something to celebrate here" in the Carolinas.

At least in 2017 and 2018, after that, it's unclear where the party would be.

Airlines inch back to normal flow after Atlanta airport fire

ATLANTA (AP) — Delta Air Lines and other carriers that operate out of Atlanta's busy airport said they expected to be running normally Tuesday after a fire and blackout there forced the cancellation of over 1,500 flights days before the start of the Christmas rush.

A spokesman for Delta, by far the biggest airline at the world's busiest airport, said most of its delayed passengers had been booked on flights scheduled to leave Monday. Spokesman Michael Thomas said the airline should be "largely if not completely" back to normal by Tuesday, well before the huge travel weekend ahead of Christmas Day.

But passengers trying to catch Tuesday morning flights faced wait times of up to an hour just to get through the main security checkpoint in the domestic terminal, the airport's website showed around dawn.

No matter how fast Delta and other airlines move, it will take a few days to get the hundreds of thousands of grounded passengers to their final destinations, said Robert Mann, president of an airline consulting firm in Port Washington, New York. In rare cases, some passengers won't arrive until Thursday, he said.

"There are just so few seats available during a peak holiday week, that's just going to take a lot of flights with four or five seats apiece," Mann said.

The nation's air-travel system was snarled after the underground blaze knocked out electricity Sunday and crippled Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport for about 11 hours.

Southwest, the airport's second-largest airline, said Monday it was back on a normal schedule, but a spokesman could not say how long it would take to clear the backlog of stranded travelers.



Travelers pass under the flight board showing cancellations in the North terminal on Monday Dec. 18, 2017 at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta the day after a massive power outage brought operations to halt. AP

American Airlines, which is much smaller, said that it, too, booked many of its passengers on new flights but that some will have to wait until later in the week to fly.

The fire broke out Sunday afternoon next to equipment for a backup system, causing that to fail, too. Power wasn't fully restored until about midnight.

The control tower did not lose power because it has a separate electrical feed, and planes that were in the air and close to Atlanta when the blackout hit were allowed to land. Other incoming flights were diverted, and outgoing flights were halted.

Anthony Foxx, who was transportation secretary under President Barack Obama, was among many

travelers stuck for hours in a plane on the tarmac. He blasted airport officials, saying the problem was "compounded by confusion and poor communication."

"Total and abject failure here at ATL Airport today," he tweeted, adding that there was "no excuse for lack of workable redundant power source. NONE!"

Georgia Power CEO Paul Bowers issued an apology and blamed the fire on a failure in a switch gear. He said the utility is considering a change in the setup of the main and backup systems to prevent a similar blackout.

Around noon Monday, stranded travelers sat on the floor, charging cellphones at the electrical outlets. An Atlanta city employee in a

Santa hat gave out candy.

David and Lynn Carden, sitting in soft chairs in the airport's atrium, left London early Sunday for Key West, Florida, but were diverted to Cincinnati because of the blackout. Delta got them a hotel room and put them on a Monday flight to Atlanta. From there, they awaited an afternoon flight to Florida.

"Delta has been pretty good," David Carden said, counting themselves luckier than passengers who spent the night in an airport. "We don't always get this kind of customer service in the U.K."

College student Joe Ryan had planned to fly home to Chicago with his fiancée on Sunday on American after a four-day seminar in Atlanta. They spent Sunday night on

a carpeted floor outside an elevator at the airport. He initially was told it could be Tuesday before he would get a flight home, but later he said he was able to get on a Monday flight.

Delta canceled about 1,000 flights Sunday and 400 more on Monday, in many cases because the pilots and airplanes were in the wrong places. To help clear the backlog, it added flights and found seats for some of its customers on other airlines.

Last spring, Delta was crippled by a storm in the South, and it took the airline five days — and about 4,000 canceled flights — before it fully recovered.

Thomas, the Delta spokesman, said that since then, the airline has put

more flight crews on reserve and installed computer technology to quickly assemble properly rested crews.

Hartsfield-Jackson serves an average of 275,000 passengers a day. Nearly 2,500 planes arrive and depart each day.

Mann said the rebooking of passengers was probably complicated by the large number of inexperienced travelers this time of year.

"They're more elderly, they're more young people, they're more infrequent travelers," he said. "All these folks are going to require a lot of face time a lot of hand-holding."



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Saudis intercept Yemen rebel missile targeting royal palace

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Shiite rebels said it intercepted a missile fired over southern Riyadh on Tuesday, which the rebels said was targeting a "top leadership" meeting at the royal palace in the kingdom's capital, Riyadh.

It was the second time in as many months that a rebel projectile had reached as far inside the kingdom as Riyadh.

The Yemeni rebels, known as the Houthis, said they launched a ballistic missile to target Yamama Palace in Riyadh, where King Salman chairs weekly government meetings and receives dignitaries and heads of state from around the world.

The coalition statement, carried by Saudi state TV, said the missile was fired by the rebels, known as Houthis. State TV said no damage was caused by the intercepted missile. The coalition later said the missile launch proved the "continued involvement" of Iran in supporting the Houthis. It also repeated its claim that the rebels use "relief work outlets" to smuggle such missiles inside Yemen to target the kingdom.

Residents of Riyadh posted videos on social media showing a small cloud of smoke in the sky after hearing a loud explosion.

Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam tweeted that a ballistic "Volcano H-2" missile

was used in the attack. The rebels' military media said the missile targeted "an expanded meeting of the Saudi top leadership at Yamama palace in Riyadh."

In a televised address, rebel leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi said the range of missiles in the Houthi arsenal was being extended. "Our long hand will reach other places, God willing," he said.

"As long as you continue to target Sanaa we will strike Riyadh and Abu Dhabi," he said, referring to the seat of government of the United Arab Emirates, a key member of the coalition. Earlier this month, the Houthis claimed they fired a missile at an under-construction nuclear plant in the Emirates. The UAE

denied the claim.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, last week displayed what she said was "undeniable" evidence that Iran was supplying the Houthis with missiles. The U.S. has backed the Saudi-led coalition in its war in Yemen.

Iran rejected the allegations and has repeatedly denied arming the rebels. The Houthis say their missiles are produced in Yemen, which is awash with weapons.

On Nov. 4, the Houthis targeted Saudi Arabia's international airport in Riyadh, and Saudi Air Defense said it was intercepted. However, a New York Times analysis of photos and videos from the attack suggested air defenses may

have missed the projectile and that the warhead struck near its intended target.

Saudi Arabia has the U.S.-made Patriot surface-to-air anti-missile system, which President Donald Trump credited for bringing the Nov. 4 missile down.

In the almost three years that the Saudi-led coalition has waged war with Yemen's rebels, dozens of other missiles have been fired by the Houthis across the border into Saudi Arabia, reaching as far as some border towns. There have been casualties among local residents in those attacks.

The Saudi-led coalition has been at war with the Houthis since March 2015. The Houthis, who are allied

with Saudi Arabia's rival, Iran, have forced into exile the Saudi-backed and internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Despite a fierce air campaign against the Houthis, the rebels still control the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north along the border with Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month, the Houthis killed Yemen's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, after he broke off his alliance with them and appeared ready to switch sides.

Yemen's war has killed more than 10,000 civilians and driven millions to the brink of famine.

Following Trump's report, China urges US to accept its rise

BEIJING (AP) — The Chinese government on Tuesday criticized U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to label Beijing a strategic rival and called on Washington to "abandon a Cold War mentality" and accept China's rise.

Trump's decision reflects a "victory of hardliners" in his administration, the official Xinhua News Agency said. It warned U.S.-Chinese economic relations were likely to face "even more pressure and challenges."

"We urge the United States to stop deliberately distorting China's strategic intentions and abandon a Cold War mentality," said a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying. "Otherwise it will injure others and damage itself."

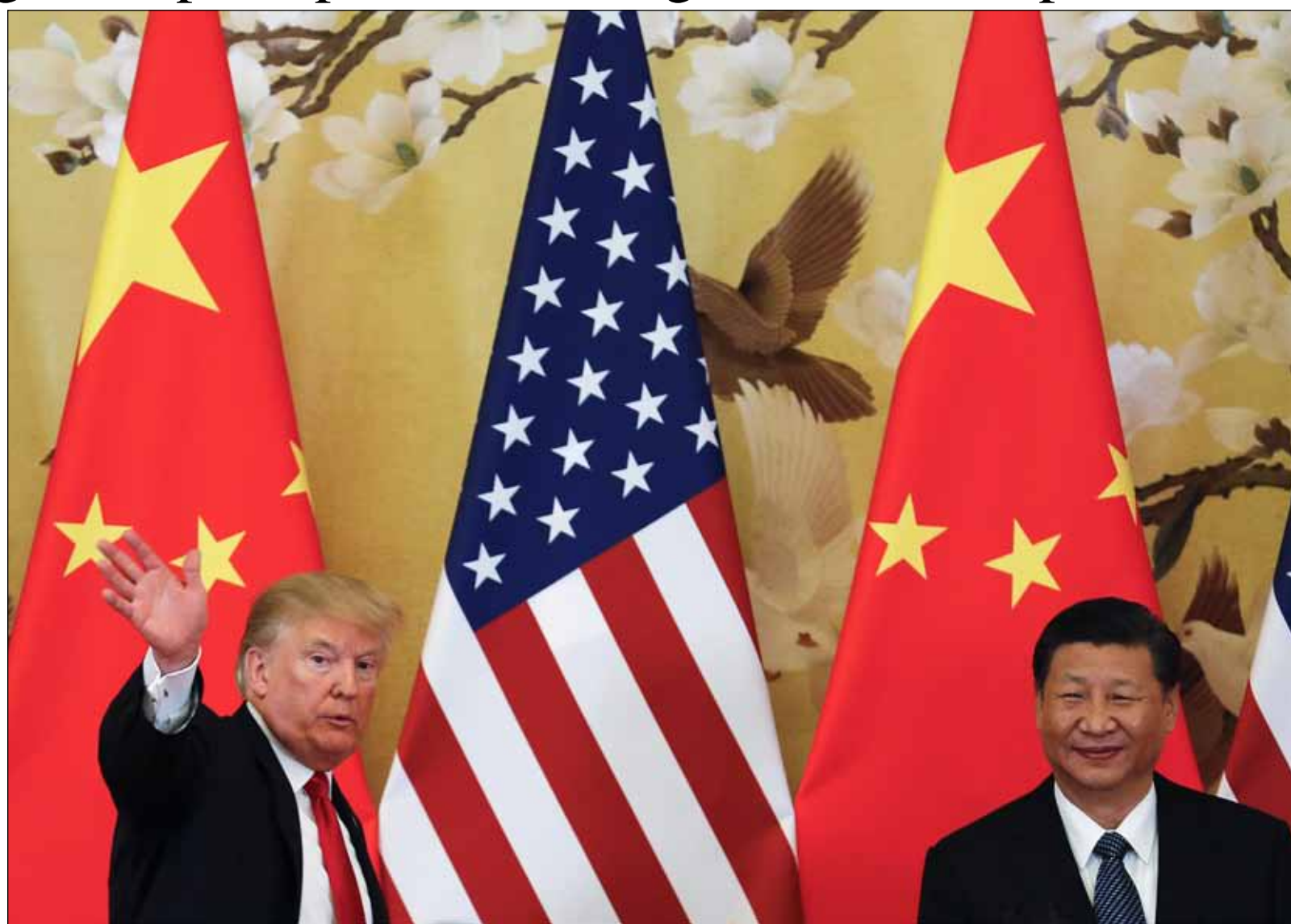
Trump's report Monday hit a series of sore spots for Beijing. It affirmed ties with Taiwan, the self-ruled island the mainland government claims as its territory, and pledged to "re-energize our alliances" with Southeast Asian governments, some of which have conflicts with China over claims to portions of the South China Sea.

The United States and China share one of the world's biggest trading relationships and cooperate in areas from clean energy to public health. But Beijing sees Washington as an obstacle to its ambitions to be East Asia's dominant power, and strains over Taiwan, trade, technology policy and the South China Sea are growing.

"It is selfish to put your national interest above other countries' interest and the mutual interest of the international community," said the Chinese Embassy in Washington in a statement.

"The Chinese side is willing to have peaceful coexistence with all countries," said the embassy statement. "The United States should also adapt and accept China's development."

U.S. officials are uneasy about Beijing's rising military spending — already the second-highest behind Washington. They see President Xi Jinping's "Belt and Road Initiative," a project to build railways



In this Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017, file photo, U.S. President Donald Trump waves next to Chinese President Xi Jinping after attending a joint press conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. China's main official news agency is warning U.S.-Chinese relations will face "more pressure and challenges" following President Donald Trump's decision to label Beijing a rival.

and other infrastructure across countries from Asia to Europe and Africa, as part of efforts to erode American influence and nurture a China-centered political structure.

Especially sensitive is Taiwan, the democratic island Beijing has declared a "core interest" over which it will go to war, if necessary.

Trump's report promises to "maintain our strong ties with Taiwan" and provide for its "legitimate defense needs."

China has taken a tougher stance toward Taiwan since last year's election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who has refused to endorse Beijing's contention that Taiwan is part of the Chinese nation. Chinese commentators speculate on the possible need for military steps to put pressure on Tsai.

After Trump signed a law this month that opened

the way for U.S. Navy ships to visit Taiwan, a Chinese diplomat quoted by state media said the mainland would attack the day that happened.

Trump's report doesn't change Washington's official stance but might aggravate tensions if Taiwanese who want formal independence see it as sign of U.S. support and "want to take advantage of it," said Xiong Zhiyong, a U.S. relations expert at China Foreign Affairs University.

"The Chinese government is also anxious," said Xiong. He said the Chinese diplomat's remark is a "warning out of real worry that something may happen unexpectedly."

Hua, the foreign ministry spokeswoman, urged Washington to stick to diplomatic commitments on how to handle Taiwan.

On Monday, Chinese warplanes flew around

Taiwan in what the military said was a test of their "ocean combat ability." Taiwan's defense ministry said Japan launched fighter planes to track the Chinese aircraft, but the Japanese government would not confirm that.

Trump's report promises to "re-energize our alliances" with governments including the Philippines and Vietnam, which have conflicting territorial claims with Beijing in the South China Sea. It also pledges to expand military cooperation with India, a country Beijing sees as a rival.

The report emphasized economic security and repeated complaints that China steals technology and uses "economic inducements" to persuade other governments to serve its strategic interests.

It proposes restricting visas to prevent intellectual property theft by

foreigners, particularly Chinese, who travel to the United States to study science, engineering, math and technology.

Foreign business groups in China report that companies are increasingly frustrated with market barriers and other restrictions they say violate Beijing's free-trade promises.

The report is another abrupt turn in Trump's stance toward Beijing, which has veered between blistering criticism on trade and currency and optimism about cooperation on North Korea and other problems.

"China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor," the report says.

In April, Trump announced that he was setting aside complaints about trade and currency

in hopes of winning Chinese cooperation on North Korea. U.S. officials resumed criticizing Beijing in July.

Trump switched back to friendly overtures during a visit to Beijing in November. He said the two sides could solve most of the world's problems if they cooperated.

The Global Times, a newspaper published by the ruling Communist Party, said the report "reflects Washington's reluctance to accept the reality of China's rise."

"It is impossible for the United States to restrain China," said the newspaper, known for its nationalistic tone. "As China continues to grow and its influence continues to spill over, this is the root cause of Washington's anxiety."

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Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger (7) takes his helmet off as he leaves the field after throwing an interception in the end zone to New England Patriots strong safety Duron Harmon as time runs out in an NFL football game, Sunday, in Pittsburgh.

Risky decision backfires as Steelers lose to Patriots

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Mike Tomlin didn't want to risk overtime. Neither did Ben Roethlisberger.

So with the clock ticking down and a chance to end years of torment by the New England Patriots just 7 yards away, Tomlin gave Roethlisberger permission to ad lib.

"We play and play to win," Tomlin said. "That's what we do."

So do the Patriots. The defending Super Bowl champions weren't fooled by Roethlisberger's fake spike, turning it into a game-sealing interception that sent the Steelers to a 27-24 loss. That cost Pittsburgh (11-3) the inside track for home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs.

Roethlisberger's lone mistake spoiled a near flawless day by the Pittsburgh offense that showcased how far the Steelers have come since getting blown out by the Patriots in the AFC championship game 11 months ago.

Even after star Antonio Brown exited in the second quarter with a left calf injury that left his status going forward uncertain, Pittsburgh kept rolling. The Steelers controlled the ball for 35 minutes, piled up 413 yards and seemed to have an answer every time the Patriots challenged.

Sure, it was closer. It still wasn't enough.

"I'm not into moral victories right now," Roethlisberger said. "We just got a game. It doesn't sit well. But the season is not over."

Roethlisberger's decision to throw came two snaps after the Steelers (11-3) thought they'd beaten the Patriots for the first time since 2011.

Tight end Jesse James caught a pass from Roethlisberger at the

Pittsburgh 1 and stretched his 6-foot-7 frame across the goal line for the apparent go-ahead touchdown. As the largest crowd to watch an NFL game at Heinz Field roared, referee Tony Corrente went under the hood to take a look. Upon review, officials overturned the score, ruling the pass incomplete because the ball did not "survive the ground."

"As he hit the ground, the ball began to roll and rotate and the ball hit the ground," Corrente said afterward. "That's the end of it at that point."

James was convinced he'd scored his fourth touchdown of the season. Instead, he struggled to put into words how the rules appeared to be at odds with his instincts.

"I had my knee down, turned up the field," he said. "Whether they consider that a football move or not, that's up for them to decide."

The Steelers weren't done. Roethlisberger found Darrius Heyward-Bey for a short gain when play resumed, but Heyward-Bey failed to get out of bounds. Roethlisberger hurried the Steelers to the line. Rather than spike it to stop the clock and set up a chip-shot field goal for Chris Boswell, who hasn't missed a kick at home all season, Roethlisberger nodded to wide receiver Eli Rogers.

At the snap Rogers ran a short crossing route a couple of yards deep in the end zone. Roethlisberger's pass caromed off Eric Rowe and into the hands of safety Duron Harmon.

"I think it was (Malcolm Butler) on me," Rogers said. "He just kind of grabbed me and changed how I was going to catch the ball. I thought it was a flag, but it's all good."

Roethlisberger initially said he was told to go for the win by offensive coordinator Todd Haley, then gave a more vague explanation when asked for specifics.

"Maybe they wanted a field goal," Roethlisberger said. "Maybe they wanted to tie it. Maybe that's on me. Maybe I should have just clocked it, whatever it is. We're not going to look back and second-guess anything or anybody."

They might be the only ones. The Steelers would have clinched at least a first-round bye with a victory and would have earned home-field advantage with a win over the final two weeks or a Jacksonville loss. Now Pittsburgh must find a way to recover from another gut punch at the hands of the Patriots, and do it with Brown's status uncertain.

The perennial Pro Bowler became the first player in NFL history to reach 100 catches in five straight seasons when he caught a 5-yard catch on Pittsburgh's second possession. His fringe MVP candidacy may have ended in the second quarter when his left leg got tangled up while he competed for a catch in the end zone. Brown couldn't put any weight on his left leg as he made his way off the field. He was taken to a hospital for further evaluation.

Though Rogers, Martavis Bryant and JuJu Smith-Schuster combined for 11 catches for 191 yards and two touchdowns, they're not Brown. Nobody is. And now they face the prospect of having to go on the road if they want a rematch with the Patriots in the postseason.

"We'll see them again," Rogers said. "The outcome will be different."

Two rules NFL could stand to change soon

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Pro Football Writer

Well, no one STILL seems to agree on what, exactly, should constitute a catch in the NFL — and that contributed to the Pittsburgh Steelers' loss to the New England Patriots in a key game for home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs.

It's also hard to find folks who like the provision that awards possession of the football to the team on defense after an offensive player fumbles it out of the end zone — and that (along with, yes, what appeared to be a folded index card used to determine whether there was a first down) helped the Dallas Cowboys beat the Oakland Raiders to keep their postseason hopes intact as Ezekiel Elliott prepares to return from a suspension.

Two of the most confounding pieces of the NFL rulebook took center stage at the end of key games Sunday, and the results could have a real impact on who ends up reaching the Super Bowl.

Maybe this offseason, the competition committee will, once and for all, alter the ways one — or even both — of these situations are handled. Until that happens, there will be questions and complaints.

Which, when you think about it, might be what the league wants: Such conversations mean attention.

New England clinched a record ninth consecutive division title with a 27-24 victory at Pittsburgh that came after Ben Roethlisberger's apparent 10-yard TD pass to Jesse James with 28 seconds left was erased because, as referee Tony Corrente, explained: "The receiver did not survive the ground."

As James twisted and lunged into the end zone at the play's finish, he extended the ball, which shifted in his hands. The call was called the way the NFL says it should be.

But CBS announcers Tony Romo and Jim Nantz were so unaware that was even an issue that they only were trying to figure out whether James might have been touched by a defender before the football crossed the goal line.

"There's no doubt it's going to hold up," Nantz declared.

Asked later how he felt about the eventual replay ruling, Steelers coach Mike Tomlin replied: "It's really irrelevant how I feel about it, to be honest with you. It's not going to change the outcome of the game. I'm not going to cry over spilled milk."

Both teams are 11-3; the Patriots' win puts them on a path to host a possible rematch in the conference championship game.

And there were so many other talking points afterward, including just how serious Steelers receiver Antonio Brown's left calf injury is; what went on with the last-minute decision-making by Roethlisberger, who compounded the damage done by the James call by faking a spike and then forcing a throw on a slant into the end zone that got intercepted with 5 seconds to go; and why Pittsburgh allowed New England tight end Rob Gronkowski to roam free with single-man coverage.

At night, Dallas' 20-17 victory at Oakland was sealed when Raiders QB David Carr lost his grip on the football while reaching for the end zone on a scramble from the 8. The ball crossed the goal line, then went out the side of the end zone — a turnover and a touchback.

Why not give the offense the ball where the player lost possession? Or back the offense up to the 25? Or come up with some other solution that doesn't reward the defense for having done absolutely nothing to prevent a score?

That wasn't the most bizarre moment of the game. Or even the entire NFL day. No, that was reserved for referee Gene Steratore's decision to try sliding what appeared to be an index card between the tip of the ball and the end of the chain when measuring for a first down. When he determined the card didn't fit, Steratore awarded a first down to Dallas (8-6), which wound up kicking the go-ahead field goal on that drive.

"That was interesting," Cowboys QB Dak Prescott said. "Him measuring with the paper."

RICHARDSON'S GONE

Hours after the NFL said it would take over the investigation into workplace misconduct by Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson — and after Sports Illustrated reported, citing unnamed sources, that confidential payouts had been made for sexual harassment and using a racial slur — he announced he will sell the team after the season. Among those immediately throwing their hats in the ring as possible buyers were musician/actor Diddy and two-time NBA MVP Steph Curry.

HELLO AND GOODBYE, A-ROD

Aaron Rodgers returned after missing two months with a broken collarbone and threw a career-high-tying three interceptions in the Green Bay Packers' 31-24 loss at Carolina. The Packers were all but eliminated from the playoffs; they haven't missed out since 2008.

BREAK UP THE JAGS

So bad for so, so long, the Jacksonville Jaguars earned their first postseason berth in a decade by easily beating the Houston Texans 45-7. QB Blake Bortles threw three TDs in the first half for the first time in his career.

WELCOME BACK, TEDDY TWO GLOVES

With an NFC North-clinching 34-7 win over the Cincinnati Bengals a foregone conclusion, the Minnesota Vikings gave Teddy Bridgewater his first game action since January 2016. And his first pass since tearing up his knee? Intercepted.

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Trump to unveil 'America First' national security strategy

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is outlining a new national security strategy that re-focuses the United States' relationship with the rest of the world, essentially implementing his "America First" mantra on a global scale.

It envisions nations in constant competition, reverses Obama-era warnings on climate change, and affirms that the United States will unilaterally defend its sovereignty, even if that means risking existing agreements with other countries that have dominated the United States' foreign policy since the Cold War.

The Republican president, who ran on a platform of "America First," will detail his plan Monday, one that if fully implemented could sharply alter U.S. international relationships. The plan, according to senior administration officials who offered a preview

Sunday, is to focus on four main themes: protecting the homeland; promoting American prosperity; demonstrating peace through strength; and advancing American influence in an ever-competitive world.

Trump's doctrine holds that nation states are in perpetual competition and that the U.S. must fight on all fronts to protect and defend its sovereignty from friend and foe alike. While the administration often says that "America First" does not mean "America Alone," the national security strategy to be presented by Trump will make clear that the United States will stand up for itself even if that means acting unilaterally or alienating others on issues like trade, climate change and immigration, according to people familiar with the strategy.

The last such strategy document, prepared by then-President Barack Obama in 2015, declared

climate change an "urgent and growing threat to our national security." A senior official said the Trump plan removes that determination — following the administration's threat to pull out of the Paris climate accord — but will mention the importance of environmental stewardship.

Despite the risk of potential isolation presented by Trump's strategy, its fundamentals are not a surprise. The Associated Press last week reviewed excerpts of a late draft of the roughly 70-page document and spoke to two people familiar with it. The draft emphasizes that U.S. economic security is national security and that economic security must be ensured with military might. And they said it would stress the U.S. is interested only in relationships with other countries, including alliances like NATO, that are fair and reciprocal.

Trump, according to the

senior officials, is also expected to discuss threats he'll deem as "rogue regimes," like North Korea. Others, like Russia and China, are deemed "revisionist powers," who aim to change the status quo — Moscow and its actions with Ukraine and Georgia, and Beijing in the South China Sea. Trump is also planning to renew his call for the member states in the United Nations and NATO to spend more on defense, saying that the United States will insist on its alliances being fair and reciprocal.

The senior officials said the document refers to China as a "strategic competitor," rather than the stronger accusation of "economic aggression" previewed last week by National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster.

Despite international challenges, the document cites emerging opportunities to advance American interests in the Middle East. "Some of our partners are

working together to reject radical ideologies and key leaders are calling for a rejection of Islamist extremism and violence," it says. "Encouraging political stability and sustainable prosperity would contribute to dampening the conditions that fuel sectarian grievances."

The strategy document asserts that "for generations the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been understood as the prime irritant preventing peace and prosperity in the region. Today, the threats from radical jihadist terrorist organizations and the threat from Iran are creating the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region's problems. States have increasingly found common interests with Israel in confronting common threats."

The criticism of Russia will come as a break from recent warm words between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The

leaders have spoken twice in four days, with Trump calling Putin to thank him for kind words about the U.S. stock market and Putin reaching out to Trump to thank the CIA for help in stopping a terror plot in St. Petersburg.

The strategy document will not make explicit reference to Russian attempts to meddle in the U.S. political system, but an official said it would highlight the importance of ensuring the resilience of U.S. democratic institutions.

The early draft of the strategy reviewed by the AP lamented that America had put itself at a disadvantage by entering into multinational agreements, such as those aimed at combating climate change, and introducing domestic policies to implement them.

The senior officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the plan before the president's remarks.

Sign-ups show health law's staying power in Trump era

WASHINGTON (AP) — A deadline burst of sign-ups after a tumultuous year for the Obama health law has revealed continued demand for the program's subsidized individual health plans. But the Affordable Care Act's troubles aren't over.

On the plus side for the overhaul, official numbers showed a sizable share of first-time customers, 36 percent, were among those rushing to finish HealthCare.gov applications in the run-up to Friday's enrollment deadline.

"People need health care, that is plain and simple," said Kevin Watkins of Florence, Alabama. A self-employed consultant helping small businesses sell online, Watkins re-enrolled for 2018. He'll pay under \$100 a month after subsidies.

Final national enrollment numbers aren't expected until next year because some states running their own insurance websites extended sign-ups to Jan. 31. States in charge of their own programs are striving to equal last year's enrollment.

Enrollment in the 39 states served by HealthCare.gov is expected to be lower, which could intensify criticism of the Trump administration's decision to cut the federal sign-up season in half. The administration has extended the deadline for some people to finish their health insurance: Callers to the HealthCare.gov service center on Saturday morning got a recorded message saying "don't worry" — if they had left their phone number before the deadline, they will get a return call and still can enroll for 2018.

Nationally, 12.2 million people had enrolled by the end of the Obama administration's final sign-up period. Under Trump, there could be 1 million to 2 million fewer sign-ups, said Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

Still, it was only a year ago that the health law seemed headed for oblivion as Donald Trump swept into the White House with a Republican-controlled Congress. Now its full repeal seems to be off the table.



The HealthCare.gov website is photographed in Washington on Dec. 15, 2017. A burst of sign-ups is punctuating the end of a tumultuous year for former President Barack Obama's health care law.

But the program for people who don't have job-based coverage faces the same old challenges of high premiums and declining insurer participation, along with some new ones.

One new challenge comes from the GOP tax bill, which repeals the law's requirement that people have health insurance or risk fines.

Parallel to that, the administration is preparing to issue rules facilitating the sale of lower-cost insurance plans that will deliver less than the law's "essential" benefits package.

Put the combination together and experts say it will draw healthy customers away from already shaky ACA insurance markets, raising premiums for those left behind and giving insurers new reasons to drop out.

The law's supporters were still upbeat as the shortened

open enrollment season in most states wound down.

"What we are seeing is that this insurance is meeting people's needs and it is affordable if you receive financial assistance," said Elizabeth Colvin of Foundation Communities, a nonprofit in Austin, Texas, that helps low-income people enroll. "So much of the story has been telling people that the ACA is not working. That's not the reality in central Texas."

It was Trump who most notably predicted a spectacular collapse for the law.

"It's imploding, and soon will explode, and it's not going to be pretty," he said this year.

After a repeal failed in Congress, Trump stopped payments to reimburse insurers for subsidizing co-payments and deductibles, thereby boosting premiums. His administration also cut

the federal open enrollment season in half, slashed the ad budget and pulled back money for counselors who help people sign up.

But as premiums increased, financial assistance also went up for those eligible. Under the law, their premiums are limited to a percentage of household income, so those who qualify for help are cushioned from premium spikes.

Instead, the full impact of rising premiums hit an estimated 8 million to 9 million people who buy individual health plans but aren't eligible for income-based assistance.

"I am at my wits' end," said Kris Case. "I would love to have health insurance, but it's like a luxury. Every year it's gotten more expensive."

The Denver-area resident, who's in her 50s and doesn't have coverage through her

job in client relations for a startup, says she's seen premiums as high as \$1,400 a month.

Ongoing turmoil will translate to demands for Congress to act. But with lawmakers divided by party and faction, it's not certain what can be done.

"Any thought of 'repeal and replace' is clearly gone," said health economist Gail Wilensky, who served in a previous GOP administration. Alabama voters' election of Democrat Doug Jones to the Senate underscores that, she said. "Undoing something that has been in place now for close to four years is not a practical way to resolve issues."

Pending legislation could have contradictory consequences.

Many experts believe the GOP tax bill's repeal of the insurance mandate will un-

dermine markets by giving healthy people an out.

But other measures would tend to stabilize insurance markets. One is a bipartisan Senate bill that would restore insurer subsidies cut by Trump. The other proposals would provide money to help insurers cover the care of high-cost patients.

Meanwhile, one of the most visible symbols of the health law seems to be doing just fine. Once prone to crash, the HealthCare.gov website has been humming along amid the crush of deadline week sign-ups, according to a performance analysis by the technology firm Catchpoint for The Associated Press.

"It's like an e-commerce website on Black Friday," said Catchpoint CEO Mehdi Daoudi.

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Lifesaver or distraction? Police split on anti-overdose drug

BATAVIA, Ohio (AP) — The sheriff of Clermont County firmly believes it's a call of duty for his deputies to carry a nasal spray that brings people back from the brink of death by drug overdose. Less than 50 miles away, his counterpart in Butler County is dead set against it, saying it subjects deputies to danger while making no lasting impact on the death toll.

The divide over naloxone, the popular overdose antidote, between nearby sheriffs in two hard-hit counties in one of the hardest-hit states for drug deaths shows just how elusive solutions are on the front lines of the U.S. opioid crisis.

Some police officials cite lack of resources for obtaining, maintaining and tracking supplies and for training in when and how to use it. They worry about taking on new duties they say are better suited for medical workers, divert them from fighting crime and can put them in danger. They get support from some citizens weary of people who overdose repeatedly.

Police who do carry it say that development of a nasal spray called Narcan makes naloxone simple to administer, that the \$75 two-dose kits are usually given to them by health departments or community organizations, that it's not a major burden to track and maintain supplies and that it's a natural extension of their mission to serve and protect.

"I just say from my personal experience that it is right thing to do," said Sheriff Steve Leahy, whose Clermont County begins in the eastern Cincinnati suburbs, then rolls across hilly fields into Appalachia. Leahy, part of the early wave of police advocates of naloxone, acknowledges he was more inclined to support it after seeing someone close to him struggle for years with heroin.

"Don't get me wrong," Leahy said. "It doesn't mean that we're going to get out of this by hugging everybody, but ... you know, no matter what their plight is and how they got to where they are, it's not for us as law enforcement to decide whether they live or die."

Butler Sheriff Richard Jones, whose county includes growing northern Cincinnati suburbs, older industrial cities and rural areas, also voices compassion. He lost a brother at a young age to alcoholism and drugs, he said, and he recounts cradling infants twitching from the effects of their mothers' drug use.

But people using drugs make choices, he said: "Knowing that they can die from it, but they still do it." (Addiction specialists and federal drug authorities say it's more complicated than that; repeated uses of a drug can result in brain changes and the disease of addiction.)

And, Jones said, people who overdose can be combative when they come to, he said; an officer bent over giving naloxone could get "a brick to the head."



In this Nov. 2, 2017, photo, Sgt. Eric Franz, Social Media Administrator for the Cincinnati police Department, grasps a collapsing man while responding to a possible overdose report at a gas station in downtown Cincinnati. AP

die."

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"It's not what we're supposed to do," said Jones, known for blunt talk on such issues as illegal immigration and Donald Trump's GOP presidential campaign. "We won't do it. Period."

A recent visit with Jones by Associated Press reporters came the morning after a man in Middletown revived by firefighters came back to consciousness in attack mode. He injured a firefighter and tried to bite and punch others.

Such instances are rare, authorities say. Quincy, Massachusetts, police pioneered naloxone seven years ago and have reversed nearly 800 overdoses without a single officer being injured, said Lt. Patrick Glynn.

And advocates for those battling addiction say it seems like a natural situation for police, whose very jobs call for facing sudden threats.

In a Butler County mobile home park where the sheriff's office has stepped up patrols after complaints of drug activity, Jones' position has strong support from Brandon O'Hair, 21. Snuggling his newborn daughter, he said he and nearly all his neighbors have had cars or homes broken into by people stealing to fund their heroin habits.

"That's not what they're supposed to do; they're supposed to enforce the law," O'Hair said of the sheriff's refusal to stock naloxone. "I think it's tough love. ... The rest of us shouldn't have to pay for it."

An AP survey of Ohio's 88 sheriffs found that at least 68, or a little more than three-fourths, equip deputies with naloxone. Of those, a half-dozen have begun within the past six months, and most others have less than two years' experience.

It's hard to say what effect naloxone is having on overdose death rates.

Accidental overdose deaths in at least 11 Ohio counties where sheriffs have used the antidote for more than two years went up last year. Butler's did, too, and is on track for another record toll this year. In Clermont, where sheriff's deputies carry naloxone, the death toll went down last year. Statewide, the overdose death toll soared 33 percent, to 4,050 people, in 2016.

Naloxone is also widely distributed to families and friends of people with addiction. Its availability to police and sheriffs dates back only a few years. And attempts to gauge its effectiveness are hindered by variables including geographical variation in drug potency.

Amy Parker, a native and resident of Butler County,

was saved twice by naloxone. She doesn't know whether it was police or paramedics who administered it when she overdosed on heroin in Indianapolis a few years ago. She eventually ended her drug use and now is a peer drug counselor, leading group meetings for those in rehabilitation.

The talk by the sheriff and residents of her county against police use of naloxone, she said, adds to the stigma of those battling drugs and to their reluctance to seek help. She bristled at the claim by Jones and others that naloxone enables; the saying among advocates, she says, is that the only thing naloxone "enables" is breathing.

"I don't care how many times it takes," Parker said. "As long as that person is alive, there is hope."

Facing misconduct investigation, Panthers owner selling team

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Facing a growing investigation that accuses him of sexual misconduct and using racist language at work, Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson announced Sunday that he will sell the NFL team after the season.

The team announced on Twitter that Richardson is selling the team, linking to a five-paragraph letter by the franchise's only owner.

"I believe it is time to turn the franchise over to new ownership," Richardson wrote, saying he wouldn't begin discussions until after the season. The Panthers, who lost in the Super Bowl two seasons ago, are in playoff position again.

"I hope everyone in the organization, both on and off the field, will be firmly focused on one mission: to play and win the Super Bowl," said Richardson, 81.

Richardson's letter did not directly address the investigation or allegations against him.

The NFL awarded Richardson, a former player with the Baltimore Colts, an expansion franchise in 1993, and he has been the team's only owner.

"There has been no greater mission or purpose in my life than to have brought an NFL franchise to Charlotte," Richardson wrote. "The obstacles back then were significant and some even questioned whether or community could or would support professional football. But I always knew that if given the chance the Carolina would rise to the occasion. And you have."

Richardson attended Sunday's win over the Green Bay Packers at Bank of America Stadium and was photographed sitting beside his wife Rosalind in his luxury box.

He did not speak to reporters.

The NFL had no comment on the upcoming sale of the Panthers.

"While I will no longer be the team owner, I will always

be the Panthers Number One fan," Richardson's letter said.

The Panthers are tied to Charlotte through June 2019.

The city of Charlotte and the Panthers reached agreement on improvements for the team's stadium in 2013. The plan called for the city to contribute about \$87 million for renovations to Bank of America Stadium in exchange for a six-year hard-tether to keep the Panthers in Charlotte.

The money is less than what the team was seeking for improvements of the stadium, which opened in 1996. Forbes estimates the Panthers worth at \$2.3 billion. The Buffalo Bills sold in 2014 for \$1.4 billion following the death of owner Ralph Wilson.

Richardson and his ownership group paid \$206 million in 1993 for an expansion team.

Richardson's announcement comes after a Sports Illustrated report Sunday that cited unnamed sources who

said Richardson made sexually suggestive comments to women and on at least one occasion directed a racial slur at an African-American Panthers scout. The report states that the settlements came with non-disclosure requirements forbidding the parties from discussing the details.

The NFL on Sunday said it has taken over the investigation of allegations of workplace misconduct. Panthers spokesman Steven Drummond said Sunday the team requested the league take over the investigation for "transparency reasons."

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones called the situation surrounding Richardson "very sad."

"I'm saddened by any of the stories of the things that might have incited this at this time," Jones said after Dallas' win at Oakland on Sunday night. "He took what he made in his short time in pro football and turned it into a great business and then used that to get the Carolina fran-

chise."

The Panthers began play in 1995 but have never delivered on Richardson's promise of winning a Super Bowl. They lost after the 2003 and 2015 seasons.

Panthers interim general manager Marty Hurney said he had never seen any evidence of Richardson displaying any sexual or racial misconduct in the workplace.

"If this (sale) happens I think it is a significant loss for the NFL," Hurney told The Associated Press. "I have the utmost respect for him as an owner. Our employees have the utmost respect for him. I came back because of the respect I have for him and for the organization he started and developed."

Panthers quarterback Cam Newton said after Sunday's win over Green Bay that Richardson has served as a father figure to him since his arrival in Carolina seven years ago.

"For me I hope things don't alter my thinking of Mr.

Richardson," Newton said. "But I do know that he has given me some things that I will forever be appreciative of."

Panthers coach Ron Rivera said after the game it is important to let the process play out.

"The only thing I can speak on is for what he has been to me as far as I'm concerned," Rivera said. "A lot of you know I had a house fire, and he was there for (my wife) Stephanie and I. He was tremendous in supporting us. My brother passed, and Mr. Richardson was there and helped me get to the funeral and back. I can't speak to anything other than that."

Richardson was hospitalized 2008, one month after receiving a pacemaker for heart problems. He underwent quadruple bypass surgery in 2002 and was placed on a donor waiting list for a new heart. He received the new heart on Feb. 1, 2009, and has not had any known setbacks since.

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Catalan economy feels the pinch amid bid to split from Spain

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Jittery businessmen in Catalonia, spooked by signs the recent tumult over the region's latest bid to secede from Spain is hurting the local economy, have put their investment plans on ice as they brace for the Catalan parliamentary election on Thursday.

Catalan retail sales and tourist arrivals are falling and unemployment is edging higher, recent figures show.

Investors and consumers react badly to uncertainty and conflict, and Catalonia's push to break away has brought Spain's worst institutional crisis in decades.

The Catalan regional government was removed from office by Spain's national government in late October after regional lawmakers passed a declaration of independence that Spanish authorities deemed illegal. That came after an Oct. 1 independence referendum in Catalonia which the Spanish Constitutional Court disallowed. Catalonia is currently being run by direct rule from Madrid.

The upcoming election looks like being a tight race between Catalans who support secession and those who prefer to remain in Spain.

A lot is at stake when polling stations open for 7.5 million voters in a region that accounts for 19 percent of Spain's gross domestic product. A triumph for pro-independence parties could unleash further social and political mayhem that would ripple unpredictably across Spain, which has the fourth-largest economy in the 19-country eurozone. Citing the uncertainty over Catalonia, Spain's central bank on Friday cut its growth forecasts for next year and 2019 to 2.4 percent and 2.1 percent respectively, shaving a percentage point off its previous predictions.

A recent survey of more than 100 company directors in the northeastern Spanish



AP
People buy items at a stall street in Barcelona, Spain, Monday, Dec. 18, 2017. Jittery businessmen in Catalonia have put their investment plans on ice as they brace for the region's parliamentary election on Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017.

region found that 46 percent of them have put their 2018 spending plans on hold while they await the election outcome.

They have reason to fear: Just over half of them said their company sales fell from September to November, by an average of 9.5 percent, making them wary of the future, according to a survey published last week by the economist Fernando Trias de Bes in collaboration with the ESADE Business School. The surveyed companies together employ

almost 158,000 people.

Just over 3,000 businesses have moved their official headquarters out of Catalonia in recent months, anxious they might no longer be covered by Spanish and European Union laws if Catalonia broke away. Those companies included Catalonia's top two banks, CaixaBank and Sabadell, and Planeta, the world's leading Spanish-language publisher.

Retail sales in Catalonia fell almost 4 percent in October compared with the same month last year. That was the

steepest drop in Spain, where nationally the fall was 0.1 percent, the national statistics agency INE said.

Tourist arrivals in Catalonia, including its popular capital Barcelona, that month were 4.7 percent down on 2016, according to the INE. It was the only one of Spain's 17 autonomous regions where numbers fell. Nationally, visitor numbers were 1.8 percent up.

Meanwhile, Catalonia this year witnessed its biggest November jump in unemployment in eight years,

though the increase was a relatively modest 7,400 people and the jobless rate also increased in nine other autonomous regions.

The economic slowdown has been the clearest and most immediate consequence of the Catalan independence push.

For Spain's conservative prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, the blame for it lies with those who are trying to upset the status quo.

"The Catalan economy is being choked by the independence drive," he said earlier

this month.

Ousted Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont, a fugitive who is in Belgium, argues that Catalonia hands over too much tax revenue to the national government and would be better off going it alone. He insisted in a recent newspaper interview that the Catalan economy is stable and noted that companies aren't moving their production out of the region.

Albania opposition protesters in clashes outside parliament

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Albanian police clashed with opposition supporters who tried to force their way into parliament to disrupt a vote on the appointment of an interim prosecutor general Monday.

Around 3,000 demonstrators, holding EU and U.S. flags and shouting anti-government slogans, gathered outside parliament to condemn the selection of a temporary prosecutor general which they say is unconstitutional.

Riot police pushed back the protesters after they broke through a first security cordon outside parliament. The demonstrators threw smoke bombs toward officers. Local media reported that several people have been injured.

Opposition lawmakers also threw smoke bombs inside parliament, but governing legislators managed to hold the vote and elect Arta Marku as acting chief prosecutor with 69 votes from the ruling Socialist party. Two lawmakers voted against the appointment

and two others abstained, while the opposition boycotted the vote.

Marku's brief swearing-in ceremony after the vote was held under a cloud of smoke as well.

"This is the beginning of the popular uprising," main opposition Democratic Party leader Lulzim Basha said before ending the protest but without explaining how it would continue.

Following a meeting with opposition counterparts, Basha said that in the first weeks of January they would hold a big protest and other nationwide protests "while we take the proper political steps at the parliament too."

Basha's predecessor in the post, Sali Berisha, who is also an Albanian ex-president and prime minister, mentioned "extermination of the lawmakers' mandates which means no lawmaker will be a lawmaker anymore." He didn't make clear, however, how would that be done and what it will mean in practice.

An interim prosecutor general is supported

by the European Union and the U.S., which have helped Albania draft judicial reforms. The reforms, needed for the country's bid to launch EU membership negotiations, have already started but a permanent commission to appoint a prosecutor general hasn't been created yet.

Judicial corruption has plagued post-communist Albania, hampering its democratic processes. A justice system reform approved last year, aiming to ensure that judges and prosecutors are independent from politics, and to root out bribery, has just started its vetting, checking judges' personal and professional backgrounds.

The opposition — made up of the center-right Democratic Party and the center-left Socialist Movement for Integration — claims the parliament is not entitled to elect an interim prosecutor general and should wait for the creation of the commission to do that.

Honduras president declared election winner; unrest persists

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — President Juan Orlando Hernandez has been declared the winner of Honduras' disputed election, but that did little to quell unrest from weeks of uncertainty as challenger Salvador Nasralla called for more protests Monday and the Organization of American States proposed a re-do of the vote.

The OAS, which sent election observers to the country, issued a statement saying it was impossible to determine the outcome with enough certainty due to irregularities including "deliberate human intrusions into the computer system, intentional elimination of digital traces," opened ballot boxes and "extreme statistical improbability regarding levels of participation within the same department," combined with the narrow vote differential.

"The only possible path for the winner to be the Honduran people is a new call for general elections. ... Respecting democratic values and citizens is the necessary road to safeguard society from death and violence," the OAS said.

"The Honduran people deserve an electoral exercise that offers democratic quality and guarantees. The electoral cycle that the (Supreme Electoral Tribunal) gave as concluded today has clearly not been that," it added.

Electoral tribunal president David Matamoros announced Sunday evening that Hernandez had won the Nov. 26 election, saying, "We have fulfilled our obligation (and) we wish for there to be peace in our country."

According to the court's official count, Hernandez won with 42.95 percent to 41.42 for Nasralla, who well before the announcement had challenged the result and said he would not recognize it.

There were reports of nighttime demonstrations on main boulevards in Tegucigalpa, the capital, and other cities, and Nasralla's party called for more protests Monday. At least 17 people have died in violent street clashes since the vote.

There was no immediate public comment by Hernandez, whose sister Hilda Hernandez, a Cabinet min-

ister, died Saturday in a helicopter crash.

Earlier in the day, Nasralla traveled to Washington to present what he called numerous examples of evidence of alleged fraud. He said he planned to meet with officials from the OAS, the U.S. State Department and human rights groups.

Interviewed by UneTV during a layover at the Miami airport, Nasralla called Hernandez's re-election illegitimate and said he would ask the OAS to invoke its democratic charter against Honduras.

"The declaration by the court is a mockery because it tramples the will of the people," Nasralla said. He added that he was "very optimistic" because "the people do not endorse fraud."

Former President Manuel Zelaya, a Nasralla ally, called for civil disobedience.

"May God take us having made our confessions because today the people will defend in the streets the victory that it obtained at the ballot box," Zelaya said.



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