



TIME BLINDNESS OR JUST PLAIN RUDE?
Don't be late to this social media debate
LIFE • 1C

TIMES LEADER

118 YEARS STRONG

Tuesday, January 6, 2026
BREAKING NEWS AT [TIMESLEADER.COM](https://www.timesleader.com)
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania • \$1.50



Five Luzerne County Council members took the oath of office in the courthouse Monday evening. From left, new members Steve Coslett, Denise Williams, Dawn Simmons, and Chris Belles and re-elected incumbent John Lombardo.

Jennifer Learn-Andes | Times Leader

LUZERNE COUNTY

Jimmy Sabatino selected as council chairman

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
jandes@timesleader.com

Democratic Luzerne County Councilman Jimmy Sabatino was named the new council chair Monday night in the first official action of the reorganized 11-member legislative body that now has a Democratic majority.

Councilwoman Brittany Stephenson, also a Democrat, was named vice chair. Four new council members were seated following a Monday evening swearing-in ceremony in the courthouse rotunda: Democrats Chris Belles, Steve Coslett, Dawn Simmons, and Denise Williams.

See COUNCIL | 2A

PLAINS TOWNSHIP

Man pleads guilty to general criminal homicide

By Ed Lewis
elewis@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Video footage showed Louis Weihbrecht accelerated his Chevrolet Silverado that struck and dragged Mark Reginald Svadeba to his death outside an auto-repair garage on North Main Street, Plains Township, in September 2024.



Weihbrecht

Luzerne County Assistant District Attorney James L. McMonagle is arguing the act was intentional, while Weihbrecht's attorney, John B. Pike, is advocating it was an accident. Weihbrecht, 57, pled guilty to a general criminal homicide charge but opted to have Judge Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr. decide the degree of criminal homicide — first-degree murder, third-degree murder, voluntary manslaughter, or involuntary manslaughter.

After reviewing and accepting Weihbrecht's plea agreement, Sklarosky opened the court to testimony on Weihbrecht's "state of mind" before, during, and after Svadeba, 47, was struck and killed on Sept. 13, 2024.

See HOMICIDE | 2A



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

District Magistrate David Barilla swears in the first female mayor of Forty Fort's history, Mary Ann Bottaro, on Monday.

First female mayor takes office in Forty Fort

By Tony Callaio
For Times Leader

FORTY FORT — History was made in Forty Fort when Mary Ann Bottaro was sworn in Monday evening as the first female mayor in the borough's history.

Another piece of history was recorded when three of Bottaro's running mates from Forty Fort United took their places on the council, making a female majority.

Bottaro, 53, along with Amanda Gallagher, 46, Tori Carey, 36, and Sara Michaels, 53, ran on the 2025 ticket as Forty Fort United, sweeping all four positions. Bottaro and Michaels are educators, Carey works in the insurance industry, and Gallagher is employed as a sales trainer. All women

are natives of Forty Fort.

"I want to thank everyone at this table for the support. I get to work with everybody, and I look forward to opening up the scope and to expand on everything we know and take it and move it forward," Bottaro said in her opening speech as mayor. "There was an enormous amount of support for this campaign and for the love of Forty Fort and taking it forward."

See OFFICE | 2A

LUZERNE COUNTY

Tim McGinley sworn in as controller



Jennifer Learn-Andes | Times Leader

Tim McGinley takes the oath of office as Luzerne County's new controller on Monday. County Court of Common Pleas President Judge Stefanie J. Salavantis administers the oath, and McGinley's daughter, Erin, holds the Bible.

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
jandes@timesleader.com

Tim McGinley officially became Luzerne County Controller during a Monday ceremony in the courthouse rotunda.

The Kingston Democrat was elected Nov. 4 over Republican incumbent Walter Griffith. McGinley is already a familiar figure in county government because he served a dozen years on County Council, or three elected terms, from the 2012 start of the home rule structure until the end of 2023.

After taking the oath of office, McGinley told attendees he wants to "take a very professional approach in everything

we do."

The controller receives \$64,999 annually to be the independent watchdog over county fiscal and management activities.

McGinley said he understands the watchdog role.

"But I think you can do that position as a very professional person," McGinley said.

Pointing to his 12 years on council, McGinley said he is convinced working together is "much more effective."

He said he is willing to help every division, department, and employee "do the best job" possible, with a goal of making Luzerne County the finest in the state.

See CONTROLLER | 2A

Issue 2026-006



JOIN THE CONVERSATION



What's your take on the latest news? Go to www.facebook.com/timesleader to share your thoughts.

A NEWS

Local: 3A
Nation/World: 10A
Health/Science: 11A
Opinion: 7A
Weather: 12A

OBITUARIES

Casper, Grace
Crouse, Lois
Davis, Wilnette
Gashi, David

Harris, Mildred
Jacobs, Nancy
Klose, Joseph
Kreig, Nancy
Luvender, William

Swithers, Darlene
Suda, Donald
Tinner, Thomas
5A

Office

From page 1A

According to Bottaro, the idea of running as a team with Gallagher, Carey, and Michaels happened two years ago after former Mayor Brian Thomas decided not to run for re-election. “Brian said he’s not running and there will be council seats available and we said, ‘why not us,’” Bottaro said. “We’ve all grown up here, we all know the area, and my father owned his business (Sal’s Pizza) for 40 years, and I’ve been teaching at Dana Street (Wyoming Valley West) for 30 years, and, again, we thought, ‘why not us?” Bottaro was unanimously selected to run for mayor by her running mates. As mayor, Bottaro said

she would like to pick up the baton from Thomas and run with it. “We just want to keep going forward; Forty Fort keeps getting better and better,” Bottaro said. “Mayor Thomas really steered this in a certain direction, and we just want to keep going forward.” Gallagher said she would like council meetings to be broadcast online and create a newsletter so those without computers can know what’s going on in the borough. “I want to be transparent with what we do on council,” she said. Michaels said she enjoys doing public relations for the borough. “I think it’s important that we get the message, a unified message out,” Michaels said. “We want to make sure the information that is being shared is accurate.”

Carey said she would like to ensure landlords are held accountable. “People chose Forty Fort to move here. These landlords should be accountable. We want to make sure this is a great place to live,” she said. “Seeing us come together, our constituents were really impressed. We called ourselves the Fab Four,” Michaels said. “Forty Fort is in the 21st Century.” Bottaro said she is thrilled to be the first female mayor of Forty Fort. “At first, the thought was overwhelming, and second of all, why not, look what I’ve just shown kids. I do that every day at work, I absolutely love teaching, and this month I’m Teacher of the Month at Magic 93,” Bottaro said. “The history teacher made history today.”



The Forty Fort United candidates took the oath of office on Monday evening. Left to right: Councilwoman Sara Michaels; Mayor Mary Ann Bottaro; Councilwoman, Tori Carey; and Councilwoman Amanda Gallagher.



The reorganized Luzerne County Council was seated together for the first time Monday evening with four new members.

Council

From page 1A

Incumbent John Lombardo, a Republican, also won another four-year term in the Nov. 4 general election and took the oath of office in the group event. Lombardo previously served as council chair. Sabatino, Stephenson, and the other remaining members have two years left in their terms: Democrats Joanna Bryn Smith and Patty Krushnowski and Republicans Harry Haas and LeeAnn McDermott. All eight Democrats supported the appointment of Sabatino as chair, while the three Republicans voted to retain Lombardo as chair. The vote on a vice chair was split, with Krushnowski nominating Stephenson and Bryn Smith recommending Belles. A majority of six chose Stephenson: Krushnowski, Coslett, Simmons, Williams, Sabatino, and Stephenson herself. The four supporting Belles, in addition to his

own vote, were Haas, Lombardo, McDermott, and Bryn Smith. The chair presides over meetings, prepares meeting agendas, serves as a ceremonial head, and selects which council members serve on council committees. Sabatino, a Butler Township resident who owns and operates two area Vesuvio’s restaurant locations with his siblings, said he was humbled by the leadership appointment and will work in a bipartisan way to the best of his abilities. “I look forward to showing what this council can do,” Sabatino said. After the meeting, he said he will advocate for a focus on economic and business development, government transparency and outreach, and infrastructure investment. “This is about clearing obstacles, making smart investments, and delivering results people can see in their daily lives,” Sabatino said. A Plymouth Township resident, Stephenson is an academic specialist for the nonprofit Educational Opportunity Centers of Pennsylvania. “I am blessed and privileged to continue serving Luzerne County. We are open for business,” Stephenson said after the meeting. During the swearing-in ceremony, Lombardo said he was inspired by the bipartisanship demonstrated when Tim McGinley, a Democrat, took the oath of office earlier in the day. He said both Democrats and Republicans attended and applauded McGinley. Lombardo said he ended up developing a strong working relationship with McGinley when McGinley previously served as the lone Democrat on the council. He urged his colleagues to work together to solve problems instead of dwelling on party affiliations. County Manager Romilda Crocamo congratulated the five members sworn in Monday and said she respects them all and commends their commitment to serving the county. Crocamo said she trusts they have a “shared purpose” and wants to “keep the momentum going.”

Controller

From page 1A

County Court of Common Pleas President Judge Stefanie J. Salavantis administered the oath of office to McGinley and said she was “thrilled” and honored to perform the task. Salavantis said she and McGinley were both new to county government in 2012 because she also took office that year as the county’s elected District Attorney. The president judge said she respected and worked well with McGinley because he was always willing to sit down and discuss matters to deter-

mine the best way to proceed for the county. “We did that working together — a Republican and a Democrat working together,” Salavantis said. Salavantis said she was surprised McGinley was willing to seek a return to county elected office. “We are lucky that he decided to step up again and run for controller,” Salavantis said. McGinley’s son, Michael, made welcoming remarks during the ceremony and referenced the chaos nationally. “What people want is calm. They want order. They want transparency, and they want someone with a steady hand,” he said. “Dad definitely has all of that.”

Prior to public office, McGinley had worked as the administration director at the nonprofit Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO) for a decade and was employed in public education for 30 years. Under home rule, the controller must have “unrestricted access” to records and the authority to conduct financial, performance, and compliance audits of any county department and the county’s authorities, boards, and commissions. Griffith, of Kingston Township, has said he will still actively attend county government meetings and speak out regarding concerns.



Michael McGinley speaks before his father, Tim, takes the oath of office as Luzerne County’s new controller on Monday. Seated in the front row, from left, are McGinley, county Court of Common Pleas Judge Mark Bufalino, and county Court of Common Pleas President Judge Stefanie J. Salavantis. In the rear, from left, are: McGinley’s daughter, Erin; his wife, Mary; and Msgr. David L. Tressler, who gave the invocation.

TIMES LEADER

(USPS 499710) • Publishes 365 Days a Year

90 E. Market St., Wilkes-Barre, PA, 18701

Periodical postage paid at Wilkes-Barre, PA

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Times Leader, 90 E. Market St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

Office Hours: Mon.-Fri. 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Closed Sat. & Sun.

Main Number: 570.829.7100

Classified Advertising: 570.829.7130

Newsroom: 570.829.7242

Obituaries: 570.991.6119

MISSSED PAPER? CALL: 570-829-5000

SUBSCRIPTION TERMS

All 7-day home delivered subscriptions include 4 days delivery of the printed product directly to the home and 3 days delivery of the digital edition directly to any laptop, personal computer, phone or tablet. All subscriptions, regardless of term are NON-REFUNDABLE but can be cancelled at any time. No credit is given for vacation periods of any length but the subscription value of that period can be donated to the Newspaper-In-Education (NIE) Program.

SPECIAL EDITIONS

All home delivered subscriptions include delivery of one SPECIAL EDITION, THANKSGIVING DAY at a price of \$4.00, which offsets printing and delivery costs for this SPECIAL EDITION. Subscribers can OPT OUT of this SPECIAL EDITION by calling customer service at (570) 829-5000 at least 7 days in advance of the publication day. If the subscriber elects to not OPT OUT, the cost of the subscription will not change but the length of the term will be adjusted.

PRICING

All future prices are subject to change at any time without notice.

CONTACT THE TIMES LEADER

Kerry Miscavage Publisher 570-704-3953 kmiscavage@timesleader.com	Jake Higgins Executive Editor 570-991-6393 jhiggins@timesleader.com	Diane McGee Advertising Director 570-704-3955 dmcgee@timesleader.com	Liz Baumeister News Editor 570-704-3989 lbaumeister@timesleader.com
---	---	--	---

Homicide

From page 1A

Weihbrecht and Svadeba were involved in a dispute over Tommarra Purta, 45, whom they both dated. Svadeba was in the parking lot of the auto-repair garage to meet his friend and owner, Louis Giomboni, to use a new welding machine when Weihbrecht showed up in his truck. Giomboni testified he was finishing a vehicle repair when Weihbrecht arrived and heard a loud argument with Svadeba, who stood in front of Weihbrecht’s truck. Giomboni said he heard the truck’s engine rev several times when the vehicle ran over Svadeba, who was dragged onto North Main Street, and ran over again when Weihbrecht went into reverse and fled the scene. “I heard the engine rev and the wheels squeal, and he just hit (Svadeba),” Giomboni testified. Giomboni said Weihbrecht went “full-throttle” when Svadeba was struck. Michael Moser, a Pennsylvania State Police trooper and an expert in

accident reconstruction and collision, testified tire marks left on the pavement were “acceleration marks,” indicating the driver quickly accelerated at a high speed. Purta testified she dated Svadeba “off-and-on” for years and began a relationship with Weihbrecht when she started working at his tavern, Dragon Fly, on South Main Street in Wilkes-Barre. Purta said she was with Weihbrecht at the tavern but left as she planned to clean upholstery in an apartment behind Giomboni’s garage. When she arrived at the garage, Giomboni told her what had happened. When the incident happened, Wilkes-Barre City police Det. James Fisher was patrolling the area near King’s College and heard the 911 broadcast that Weihbrecht was wanted for questioning by Plains Township police. Fisher said he called Weihbrecht as he has known him for 20 years. Fisher said Weihbrecht returned his message, but Weihbrecht wanted to see a priest before surrendering, which he did in the Kirby Park parking lot on

Sept. 14, 2024. Fisher said Weihbrecht repeatedly said it was an accident and he only intended to strike Svadeba’s Harley Davidson motorcycle. McMonagle played the video footage of Weihbrecht arriving at the garage, which showed Svadeba standing in front of the truck, waving his arms. After a few seconds, Svadeba was struck on the front driver’s side and was dragged onto North Main Street, video footage showed. Pike is advocating that the incident was an accident. To illustrate his position, Pike said if Weihbrecht wanted to kill Svadeba, he could have used a hammer, a machete, or a knife that were found in his truck. If Weihbrecht is convicted of first-degree murder, he faces life in prison without parole. A third-degree murder conviction carries a sentence of up to 40 years, while a voluntary manslaughter and involuntary manslaughter convictions carry 20 and 5 years in prison, respectively. Testimony before Sklarosky continues Tuesday.

Overnight detour due to partial closure of Route 11

Staff Report

There will be an overnight closure of a portion of Route 11 (North Main Street) in Pittston from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. Tuesday to perform test drilling for underground utility locations, according to PennDOT. Traffic will be detoured onto Kennedy Boulevard, then back onto Main Street during the overnight closure. When encountering a work zone, officials advise motorists to drive the posted speed limit, turn on headlights, pay close attention to signs and flaggers, and avoid

all distractions. In high-traffic locations, motorists are encouraged to use both lanes of travel to the merge point and take turns merging into the open lane. Motorists can check conditions on major roadways by visiting www.511PA.com. Information about infrastructure in District 4, including completed work and significant projects, is available at pennidot.pa.gov/D4Re-sults. Find PennDOT's planned and active construction projects at www.projects.pennidot.gov.

WILKES-BARRE

Council elects chairperson, vice chair

By Margaret Roarty
mroarty@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Jessica McClay will lead Wilkes-Barre City Council this year as chairperson, while Mike Belusko will serve as vice chair. The two were sworn in Monday at council's annual reorganizational meeting, held in city council chambers on the fourth floor of City Hall. McClay, a Democrat, served as vice chair in 2025, which was her first year on council after winning a four-year term in the November 2024 election. McClay represents District E and is a lifelong resident of the North End section of Wilkes-Barre. McClay takes over for Councilmember Tony Brooks. Prior to taking her

seat on council, McClay served as a volunteer on the city's Planning and Fire/Civil Service Commission, as well as the Traffic Committee. Belusko, a Democrat, who won a third four-year term in 2024, takes over for McClay, who held the position of vice chair last year. Belusko served as vice chair in the past. Belusko also represents the city on the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority Board of Directors. Also at the meeting, council approved the holiday schedule for 2026 as well as the upcoming meeting dates. The first work session of 2026 will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday in city council chambers on the fourth floor of City Hall.



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader
Wilkes-Barre Mayor George C. Brown sits behind council during Monday's reorganizational meeting.

Blasting warning issued for Hanover Twp.

Staff Report

Construction crews plan to blast on the site of the future Amazon warehouse off Dziak Drive in Hanover Township this week, according to an announcement from the Nanticoke City Fire Department. Blasting will occur from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, officials with the fire department said in a Facebook post Monday afternoon. "It would be recom-

mended that you take a video of walls, ceilings, and foundations prior to this event," officials with the department said. [Amazon purchased the 125-acre site](#) in Hanover Township on Sept. 26, 2025, for its planned 250,000-square-foot facility for \$24.75 million, according to Luzerne County records. The facility will service a 50-mile radius with an estimated 800 to 900 delivery vehicles operating out of the site, according to [previous reporting](#).



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader
District Magistrate Alexandra Kokura Kravitz, left, swears in City of Pittston incumbents, left to right: Mayor Michael Lombardo and council members MaryPat Melvin Scarantino and Kenneth Bangs, on Monday at the city council chambers.

Pittston newly-elected officials sworn in



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader
Newly elected councilman Anthony 'Tony' Guariglia is sworn in by District Magistrate Alex Kokura Kravitz Monday at the city council chambers. Guariglia is filling the unexpired four-year term of the late Danny Argo.

By Tony Callaio
For Times Leader

PITTSTON — The City of Pittston held a swearing-in ceremony for three incumbents, along with a new incoming councilman and city treasurer, on Monday at the city council chambers.

Michael Lombardo was sworn in for his fifth term as mayor, along with incumbents Kenneth Bangs and MaryPat Melvin Scarantino to the council. Anthony "Tony" Guariglia was elected to a two-year term to complete the unexpired four-year term



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader
Rosemary Frati, right, is sworn in as City of Pittston treasurer by District Magistrate Alexandra Kokura Kravitz Monday at the city council chambers. Frati will be fulfilling the last two years of the late Chris Latona's term.

of the late Danny Argo on the council. Rosemary Frati was sworn in as the city treasurer for the next two years to fulfill the four-year term of the late Chris Latona. "It was a difficult 2025 losing two icons in Danny (Argo) and Chris (Latona), who both served the city for decades," Lombardo said. "Tony and Rosemary have difficult shoes to fill, but I'm confident they will both do an excellent job moving forward."

WILKES-BARRE TWP.

Residents question council on potential warehouse project

2026 chairperson, vice chair chosen

By Margaret Roarty
mroarty@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — Public comment at Wilkes-Barre Township's annual reorganizational meeting Monday was dominated by the potential extension of a tax break previously given to Blue Cup Ventures LLC for the warehousing and distribution center it intends to construct along Interstate 81. Because Monday was the first meeting of 2026, where, traditionally, council is reorganized and a new president and vice president are selected, voting on the tax break will likely take place at the Jan. 26 or Feb. 2 meeting, according to council attorney John Rodgers. Residents who would like to comment on the potential extension can check the township's Facebook page in the coming weeks, where meeting agendas are listed. Residents can also visit the municipal build-



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader
Wilkes-Barre Township Councilmember Michael Sromovski takes the oath of office at Monday's reorganizational meeting.

ing, as agendas are also posted to the front door. If there is a vote on the extension, it will be listed on the agenda. The audience for Monday's meeting was packed with residents, some of whom voiced ongoing concerns over the development of Blue Cup's distribution center. Some felt it was unfair that residents were going to see a tax increase of 2.75 mills to 4.50 mills in



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader
Newly elected vice chairperson John Jablowski presides over Monday's meeting in Gerald Shinal's absence.

PENNSYLVANIA ROUNDUP

Data: Pa. ranks among top for new business survival

By Bill O'Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

New data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that Pennsylvania ranks among the top states in the nation for five-year new business survival, underscoring the strength and resilience of the Commonwealth's economy under Gov. Josh Shapiro's leadership, officials said.

According to the latest federal data, 56% of businesses started in Pennsylvania remain open after five years — the third highest percentage nationwide.

The national average business survival rate is 51.6%, meaning nearly half of new businesses across the country fail within their first five years.

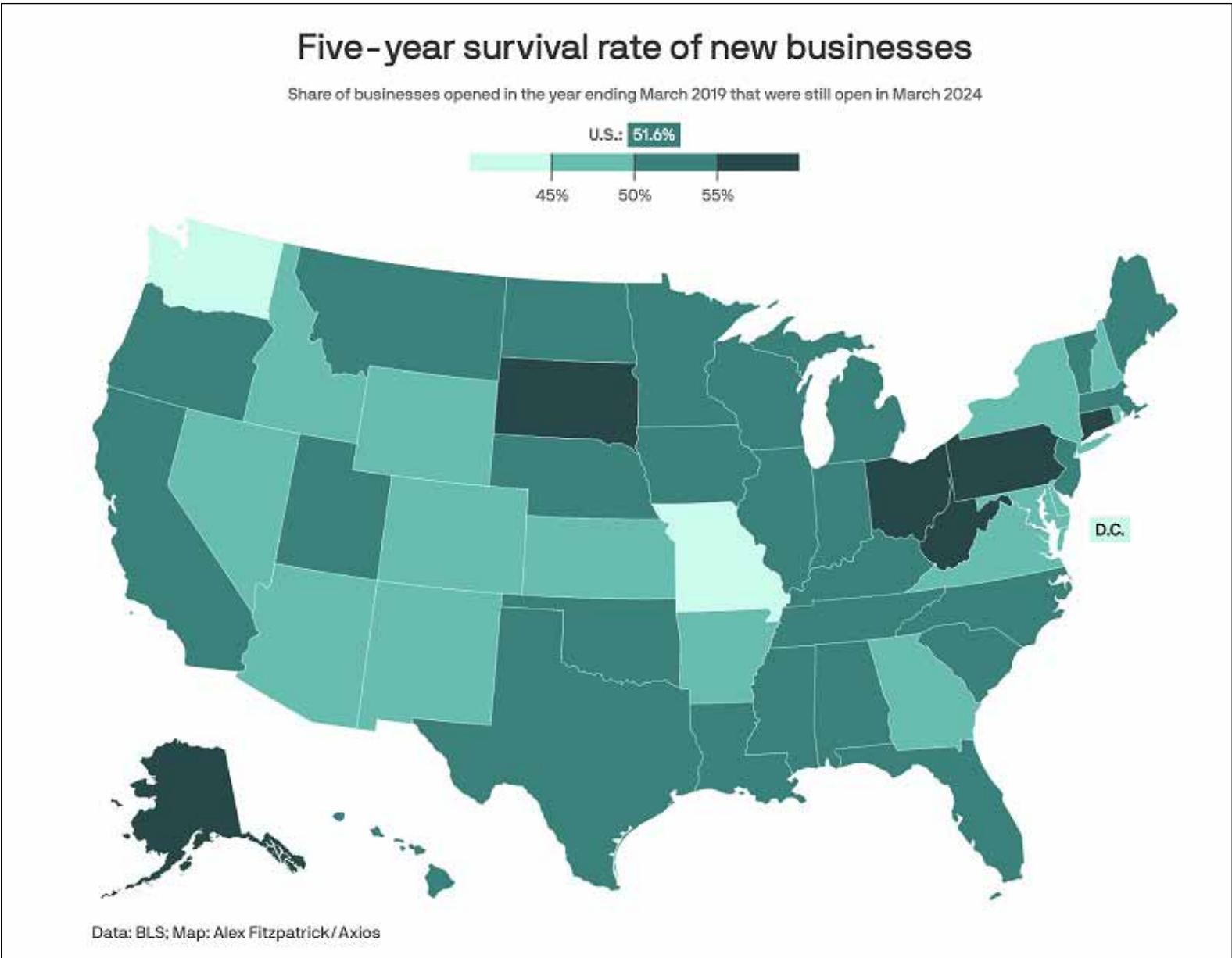
"Pennsylvania isn't just attracting new businesses — we're creating an environment where they can succeed," Shapiro said. "From cutting red tape and streamlining permitting to investing in site development, main streets, and our workforce, my Administration is focused on making Pennsylvania the best place to start and grow a business."

The data tracks businesses that opened in the year ending March 2019 and were still operating as of March 2024. This period encompasses the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing inflationary pressures.

Research from the Center for American Entrepreneurship shows that businesses started in the Commonwealth are more likely to endure — a sign of long-term economic stability rather than short-term growth alone.

The findings come as Pennsylvania continues to earn national recognition for its economic performance. A recent analysis by Moody's Analytics Chief Economist Mark Zandi found that Pennsylvania is the only state in the Northeast with a growing economy.

Since taking office, Shapiro and his Administration have secured over \$35 billion in private-sector investment, creating more than 18,000 jobs across the Commonwealth, and cut taxes seven times for families,



seniors, and small businesses.

PA getting national recognition

From day one, the Shapiro Administration has made economic competitiveness and government efficiency top priorities — launching Pennsylvania's first comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in nearly two decades, cutting permit and licensing backlogs, and investing hundreds of millions of dollars to prepare shovel-ready sites, strengthen Main Streets, and support small businesses statewide.

Additionally:

- Area Development ranked Pennsylvania among the top 20 "Best States for Business" — the only Northeast state to make the list — and placed the Commonwealth in the top 10 for "Site Readiness Programs."

- Site Selection Magazine has named Pennsylvania one of the top business climates in the nation. The Commonwealth is 11th in the 2025 Business Climate Rankings, up seven spots from last year.

Treasurer announces expanded PA ABLE eligibility

Pennsylvania Treasurer Stacy Garrity this week

announced that expanded eligibility for the PA ABLE — Achieving a Better Life Experience



Garrity

— savings program is officially in effect. As of Jan. 1, Pennsylvanians whose qualifying disability began before the age of 46 are eligible to open a PA ABLE account. Previously, eligibility was limited to individuals whose disability began before the age of 26.

This change, made possible by the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, opens the door for an estimated six million additional Americans — including approximately one million veterans — to benefit from ABLE savings accounts nationwide.

"This marks a major step toward financial independence and security for our friends and neighbors with disabilities," Garrity said. "With this eligibility expansion now in place, more Pennsylvanians can save for their future without risking critical benefits. PA ABLE is about opportunity, dignity, and increasing independence, and I'm thrilled more Pennsylvanians will be able to enjoy the benefits

of this life-changing program."

PA ABLE accounts enable Pennsylvanians with disabilities and their families to save tax-free, without affecting eligibility for essential benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Earnings grow tax-free, and withdrawals for qualified disability-related expenses are exempt from state and federal taxes.

The contribution limit for PA ABLE accounts is \$20,000, and Pennsylvania residents can deduct up to \$19,000 per year in PA ABLE contributions from their state income taxes. PA ABLE assets are also exempt from the Pennsylvania inheritance tax.

Since opening its first accounts in 2017 — following the passage of legislation championed by Sen. Lisa Baker, R-Lehman Township — PA ABLE has grown to become the fifth largest ABLE program in the nation, with more than 11,500 accounts and over \$185 million saved.

"PA ABLE accounts have already made a meaningful difference in the lives of so many Pennsylvanians," Garrity said. "I encourage everyone to explore how this financial tool can provide security and stability for themselves or their loved ones."

Since taking office, Treasurer Garrity has reduced PA ABLE account fees six times. She was a strong advocate for the ABLE Age Adjustment Act and the inaugural chair of the ABLE Savings Plans Network, which works to strengthen ABLE programs on a national level.

To learn about program eligibility and how to start

saving with PA ABLE, visit paable.gov, email info@paable.gov, or call 855-529-2253.

HHS to close loophole

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through its Administration for Children and Families, is rescinding a series of child care rules from the Biden era that required states to pay providers before verifying attendance and before care was delivered.

The change will roll back provisions in the 2024 Child Care and Development Fund rule that weakened oversight and increased the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse in federally-funded state child care — including programs now under investigation in Minnesota.

"Congress appropriated this funding to support working families and ensure children have safe places to grow and learn," said Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. "Loopholes and fraud diverted that money to bad actors instead. Today, we are correcting that failure and returning these funds to the working families they were meant to serve."

The Biden-era rules required states to base payments on enrollment rather than verified attendance, pay child care providers in advance of services, and favor guaranteed contract slots with providers over parent-directed vouchers.

Under HHS's rule changes:

- Attendance-based billing will be restored. States may require payment based on verified attendance rather than enrollment alone.

- Upfront payments will no longer be required. States may again pay providers after care is delivered.

- Voucher flexibility will return. States are no longer steered toward contracts over parent-directed vouchers, restoring parental choice.

"Paying providers upfront based on paper enrollment instead of actual attendance invites abuse," said Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O'Neill. "In Minnesota, we've seen credible and widespread allegations of fraudulent daycare providers who were not caring for children at all. The reforms we are enacting will make fraud harder to perpetrate."

"When controls are not in place, bad actors can bill for children who aren't there," said Assistant Secretary for Family Support Alex Adams. "Families and taxpayers deserve proof that services are being delivered to children. These rule changes emphasize the critical role federal investments in child care play for the American workforce."

The Biden-era rule changes are subject to a 30-day public comment period.

HHS continues to strengthen oversight of child care programs nationwide.

Since the tip line launched on Dec. 30, 2025, the Administration for Children and Families has received over 245 reports of potential fraud.

Fuel Your Body.

Improve Your Health.

CATALYST

NUTRITION & TRAINING

WE ACCEPT HEALTH INSURANCE!

MEET WITH A REGISTERED DIETITIAN TODAY!

888-862-0803 | Pierce St. Kingston

BEST of the BEST

2024

2025

Northeast Window, Inc.

WINDOWS, SIDING AND ROOFING

NEPA'S Quality Remodeling Contractor Since 1987

Over 8,000 Customers In NEPA

- Owens Corning Preferred Contractor
- Certainteed Five Star Contractor
- OKNA Windows Premier Dealer
- Licensed & Insured

Free Estimates • No Cost or Obligations

Wind • Hail • Storm • Insurance Claims Accepted

570-654-4220

Financing options available. 10 windows for \$92.00 a month

Restrictions Apply

SWITHERS

Darlene Swithers, 66, of Exeter, and formerly of Mountain Top, died Dec. 30, 2025. A memorial service will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday from George A. Strish Inc. Funeral Home, 105 N. Main St., Ashley. Family and friends may call from 5 p.m. to service time.

CASPER

Grace Casper 93, formerly of Scranton died Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10 a.m. Friday in Holy Family Parish, Bennett Street, Luzerne. Family and friends may call from 9 a.m. to service time. To leave condolences or view the full obituary, visit lehmangregoryfuneral.com.

KREIG

Nancy C. (Grochal) Kreig, a longtime Moosic resident, died Dec. 30, 2025. Funeral services will be private with arrangements entrusted to Thomas P. Kearney Funeral Home Inc., 517 N. Main St., Old Forge.

JACOBS

Funeral services for Mrs. Nancy D. Jacobs, 92, of Kingston, will be at 10 a.m. Thursday from John V. Morris Family Funeral Home Inc., 625 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre. Visitation will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday. Condolences can be shared at www.JohnVMorrisFuneralHome.com.

COMING FUNERALS

EDWARDS — Thomas: Celebration of life, 9 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday, LCBC Church, Hazle Township. Visitation, 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Harman Funeral Homes & Crematory Inc. (East), Drums.

EDWARDS — Gary: Funeral, 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, Louis V. Ciuccio Funeral Home, 145 Moosic Road, Old Forge. Mass: 10 a.m., Nativity of Our Lord Parish, 127 Stephenson St., Duryea. Visitation, 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, funeral home.

FALCK — Joanne: Mass, 10 a.m. Saturday, Our Lady of Hope Church, Wilkes-Barre. Visitation, 9:30 a.m. to service time.

KORDEK — Joseph: Mass, 11 a.m. Thursday, Our Lady of Hope Parish, Wilkes-Barre. Visitation, 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, George A. Strish Inc. Funeral Home, Ashley.

KOREY — Samuel: Mass, 10 a.m. Wednesday, St. Anthony and St. George Maronite Church, Wilkes-Barre.

KOVACH — Mass, 10 a.m. Saturday, Exaltation of the Holy Cross Church, Hanover Township. Viewing, 8:30 a.m. to service time.

MANCINI — Ann

FOR INFORMATION ON PLACING AN IN MEMORIAM AD, CONTACT LINDA BYRNES AT 570-704-3975 OR LBYRNES@TIMESLEADER.COM

OBITUARY POLICY

- The Times Leader publishes limited obituaries for free.
- Paid obituaries may include full history and photo.
- Please send obituaries as a word document or regular email and photos in jpg format.
- Obituaries for children age 12 or younger are free of charge.
- Private parties must include funeral home, cremation place, or death certificate information.
- Send information to obits@timesleader.com or fax to our new number, **570-300-1886**.
- An obituary clerk will confirm receipt to sender via email or phone.
- If you don't receive a confirmation, please call **570-991-6119**.
- **Deadline:** 7:30 p.m. for next day publication.

GASHI

David J. Gashi, 82, of Exeter Twp., died Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, at his home. Funeral arrangements are pending from Bednarski Funeral Home, Wyoming.

KLOSE

Joseph Klose, 79, formerly of Ashley, died Friday, Jan. 2, 2026, at Birchwood Nursing Home, Nanticoke. Private services will be held from S.J. Grontkowski Funeral Home, 530 W. Main St., Plymouth.

TINNER

Thomas L. Tinner, 78, of Plymouth, died Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026. Funeral and military services will be held at 10 a.m. Friday from S.J. Grontkowski Funeral Home, 530 W. Main St., Plymouth. Family and friends may call from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday at S.J. Grontkowski Funeral Home, Plymouth.

HARRIS

Mildred E. Harris, 108, of Wilkes-Barre, died Friday, Jan. 2, 2026. Funeral services will be held at noon Friday from Daniel J. Hughes Funeral & Cremation Service, 617 Carey Ave., Wilkes-Barre. A visitation will be held from 11 a.m. to service time.

SUDA

Donald Suda, of Plymouth, died Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025. Private funeral services will be held at the convenience of the family. Arrangements are by Kielty-Moran Funeral Home, Plymouth.

Marie: Viewing, 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Howell-Lussi Funeral Home Inc., West Pittston. Blessing service, 10 a.m. Wednesday, funeral home.

MASSARO — Edythe: Funeral, 10:15 a.m. Wednesday, Thomas P. Kearney Funeral Home Inc., Old Forge. Mass, 11 a.m. Mass, Ss. Anthony and Rocco Parish, Dunmore. Visitation, 9:30 to 10:15 a.m.

MONKO — Edward: Mass, 10 a.m. Saturday, St. Nicholas-St. Mary Parish, Wilkes-Barre. Visitation, 9 a.m. to service time.

OCHMAN — Paul Sr.: Viewing, 4 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Wroblewski Funeral Home Inc., Forty Fort. Mass, 10 a.m. Thursday, St. Ignatius Loyola Church, Kingston.

PECAITIS — Peter: Blessing service and rite of committal, 10 a.m. Wednesday, Holy Trinity Cemetery Chapel, Sheatown. Visitation, 9:30 a.m. to service time.

SOKOLOVICH — Marie: Viewing, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Corcoran Funeral Home, Plains Township. Funeral, 11 a.m., Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Wilkes-Barre.

William F. Luvender, 75, of Tunkhannock, passed into eternal life Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, at the Hospice of the Sacred Heart, Dunmore.

Born in Pittston, he was the son of the late William R. and Stella Novobilski Luvender.

William was a 1968 graduate of Pittston Area High School and went on to earn his Bachelor of Science degree from Wilkes University.

He had been employed by the Pa. Department of Agriculture as a food inspector and was very proud to work for the Pa. Dept. of Agriculture. He was an avid reader who held a deep appreciation of local history, state and national parks, and creating; whether that was making maple syrup kielasi, copper jewelry or Polish Christmas cookies.

Lois Wysocki Crouse, 67, of Athens, passed away suddenly on Dec. 29, 2025.

Lois was born March 8, 1958, to John and Shirley Wysocki in Kingston, Pennsylvania, and was raised in the Heights section of Wilkes-Barre. A proud graduate of GAR High School, Class of 1976, Lois went on to pursue her calling in nursing at the Robert Packer School of Nursing, graduating in 1979.

In 1980, Lois married Robert Crouse, and together they moved to Richmond, Virginia, where they had their daughter Allyson. Lois worked for nine years at Chippenham Hospital. During that time, she forged lifelong friendships that she cherished deeply. In 1989, Lois and Allyson returned to Pennsylvania and settled in Athens, where she began what would become a remarkable 35-year career

Wilnette “GiGi” Davis, 86, of Edwardsville, passed away peacefully Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025, at home. Born Oct. 15, 1939, in Richmond, Virginia, she was the daughter of the late Evelyn Greene. She later moved to Newark, New Jersey, where she raised three children and worked for the state of New York Office of Mental

By Mark Scoloro
The Associated Press

Four people hurt when an explosion ripped through a Pennsylvania nursing home two weeks ago sued the facility and a natural gas utility on Monday, claiming their negligence was to blame.

Two workers at Bristol Health & Rehab Center LLC, a resident of the suburban Philadelphia facility and a contractor who happened to be there when the blast occurred on Dec. 23 filed the lawsuit. The defendants include PECO Energy Company, which provided natural gas to the complex, its parent company Exelon Corp., and Saber Healthcare Holdings LLC of Beachwood, Ohio.

The lawsuit filed in Philadelphia court claims the defendants “were aware of a gas leak in the building and failed to take the steps necessary to evacuate the building, fix the leak and protect the residents, workers and others that were exposed to the horrific blast.”

Zach Shamberg, Saber Healthcare Group chief of government affairs, said in

WILLIAM F. LUVENDER



He loved to both watch and coach sports and spent years participating in scouting with his children.

During his retirement years, he traveled with his wife and enjoyed annual family vacations to Cape May, New Jersey. He loved spending time with his grandchildren and was an especially good joke teller. Warm and personable, he always had a story to share.

Above all else, Will was

dedicated to his family. He was straightforward, hard-working, and supportive. A no-nonsense kind of guy, he led by quiet example. He loved his wife, Suzanne, the home and family they created together, and encouraged his children in everything. The type of man you could count on, he was strong, confident, and well-respected.

A man of integrity and kindness, he stood up for what was right and rooted for the underdog. He valued tradition and never forgot where he came from.

Surviving are his wife of 47 years, the former Suzanne Musto; and children, Sarah Luvender-Newman and her husband, Marcus Newman, Wyoming; Katherine Luvender, Tunkhannock; and William Luvender,

Tunkhannock; and grandchildren, Elijah and Joy Newman.

Relatives and friends are invited to a visitation from 4 to 6 p.m. Friday at Gubbiotti Funeral Home LLC, 1030 Wyoming Ave., Exeter.

Funeral will be held at 9:30 a.m. Saturday from the funeral home, followed by a Mass of Christian burial at 10 a.m. in Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, 215 Lackawanna Ave., Dupont, with the Rev. Father Thomas J. Petro, pastor, as celebrant.

Interment will be in the parish cemetery.

To send the family an expression of sympathy or a condolence, visit www.gubbiottifh.com.

Memorial donations may be made to the Hospice of the Sacred Heart, 30 E.D. Preate Drive, Suite 108, Moosic, Pa. 18507.

LOIS WYSOCKI CROUSE



in Robert Packer Hospital. She served with compassion and dedication on Six North West and later in endocrinology, retiring after decades of caring for others with skill, kindness, and grace.

In retirement, Lois embraced life with the same enthusiasm she brought to her work. She loved traveling with her sister and close friends, exploring South America, the Panama Canal, Iceland, Norway, Belgium, and Amsterdam. Always high-spirited, Lois lived life to

the fullest and found joy in new experiences, laughter, and connection.

Lois was deeply devoted to her community. She volunteered at the local food pantry, sang with the Valley Chorus, and was an active member of the Athens United Methodist Church. Above all else, she treasured time spent with her family — especially visiting her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, and sharing countless moments with her beloved sister Linda. Outside of her daughter and grandchildren, there was no one Lois loved more dearly than her sister, who was also her lifelong best friend.

Lois is survived by her daughter, Allyson, and her husband, Michael Chamberlain; her cherished grandchildren, Mason and Gracelyn; her sister and best friend, Linda; her beloved brother-in-

WILNETTE “GIGI” DAVIS

and Developmental Disabilities. She moved to NEPA to be closer to her family after retirement.

GiGi was an active member of Mt Zion Baptist Church in Wilkes-Barre, where she served as an usher for many years. GiGi lived her life to the fullest and was instantly loved by everyone she met. A beloved mother, grand-

mother, and friend, GiGi will be deeply missed.

She was preceded in death by her son, Terrance Davis; brother, Charles Greene; and three great-grandchildren.

She is survived by her daughters, Shaqon Davis and Kitisha Davis; grandchildren, Kalile Davis and wife, Jessie; Tasia Moore; Henry Moore III; and

law, Richard Taubar; her nephews, Rich Taubar; and Michael Taubar and wife, Katie; and her great-nieces and great-nephews, all of whom she loved deeply.

She was a friend to all and could often be found visiting those she cared about. The size of her smile was only outdone by the size of her heart.

Lois was preceded in death by her parents, John and Shirley Wysocki, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

A memorial service celebrating Lois will be held at the Athens United Methodist Church, 118 S. Main St., Athens, at 11 a.m. Thursday. The family is being cared for by Lowery-Urban Funeral Home and Cremation Services Inc., Athens.

Those wishing to sign the guestbook or send condolences may do so by visiting www.loweryfuneralhome.com.

Davasha Charles; and four great-grandchildren.

A funeral service will take place at 11 a.m. Saturday in Mount Zion Baptist Church, Hill Street, Wilkes-Barre. Family and friends may call at the church from 10 a.m. to service time. A burial will be at the convenience of the family. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the family.



AP File Photo

Investigators work around Bristol Health & Rehab Center and surrounding rubble after a gas explosion the day prior Dec. 24, 2025, in Bristol.

an email Monday that the company is cooperating with the ongoing investigation and does not comment on litigation.

PECO communications director Greg Smore said in an email that as a party to an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board, the company was not permitted to comment. The gas utility has previously said the cause is under investigation and it's not known whether PECO's equipment or natural gas were involved.

The explosion killed a resident and a worker and injured 20 other people. Officials have not said what caused it, but a PECO crew had been there to investigate a reported gas leak.

The lawsuit claims the

gas leak “had been festering for days” and the gas odor came from the boiler room.

“Defendants’ decision not to immediately initiate evacuation procedures under these circumstances was reckless and outrageous given the population within the building, with many of the residents hav-



Celebrating The Life Of A Loved One

**BIRTHDAYS, DEATH ANNIVERSARIES,
OR THANK YOU NOTICES**

**VISIT TIMESLEADER.COM AND CLICK ON OBITUARIES
TO CREATE YOUR OWN IN MEMORIAM NOTICES.**

THEIR VIEW

Trump administration has not made a case for Venezuela; Congress should act

The Seattle Times

In September, when the U.S. military began blowing up [boats the administration said was carrying drugs in the Caribbean Sea](#) with no investigation or convictions, public discomfort was immediate, and criticism sharp. Many military and political leaders alleged a war crime after an especially disturbing, deadly attack on survivors of a first strike.

Yet, the Trump administration was unmoved: This was about keeping drugs from U.S. shores. Meanwhile, other elected leaders surmised the military pressure was brought to gain access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves. Interestingly, in his news conference on Saturday after the U.S. strike on Venezuela, President Donald Trump spoke clearly about oil and how the industry would be rebuilt.

From the start of this slow-rolling U.S. interference in another sovereign nation's governance, the administration has shamelessly exercised deflection and obfuscation and told outright lies. Now, Trump said the U.S. will "run" Venezuela for an unspecified amount of time.

Just last month, Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted to the media that regime change was not the goal of U.S. military operations, echoing a statement he had made to key members of Congress. Yet, that seems exactly what has happened.

In an escalation as breathtaking as the rising death toll — at least 115 as of Wednesday — and as ships massed, U.S. Delta Force soldiers arrested President Nicolás Maduro and his wife in their Caracas bedroom early Saturday morning and brought them to the U.S., where they faced federal charges of narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy and illegal weapons counts.

Is the world — and Venezuela — a better place without Maduro in power? There is a strong case for that. Yet the president has not made that case to lawmakers. Trump's impulsive decision-making disappointingly demonstrates that he desires the kind of authoritarian power of the leaders he endeavors to overthrow. This is the candidate, remember, who wanted to end wars, not start them.

The key variable now is Congress. Both houses are under a Republican leadership that more often falls in line than stands up to the president.

"Republican leaders should not just shrug their shoulders and let the president bomb whoever he wants on hardly more than a whim — they must join Democrats in pressing for serious accountability and insisting that the use of military force be authorized by Congress," U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said in a statement.

It's what could happen after this display of power that especially troubles U.S. Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee. The implications are immediate and far-reaching.

"What is the U.S. interest here?" Smith asked in an interview. "The U.S. might get the oil, but should the U.S. dictate to other countries how to use their resources?"

Trump administration officials are expected to brief key members of Congress midweek, Smith said.

If they don't make a strong case to Congress members and the public, lawmakers should act to limit the administration's actions in Venezuela.

The Seattle Times editorial board: members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Ryan Blethen, Melissa Davis, Josh Farley, Alex Fryer, Claudia Rowe, Carlton Winfrey, Frank A. Blethen (emeritus) and William K. Blethen (emeritus).

©2026 The Seattle Times. Visit [seattletimes.com](#). Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.



THEIR VIEW

Faith and compassion can see us through 2026

We say good-bye to what was a tough year for most of us — tariffs, property taxes, high costs for basic goods, loss of loved ones and an unpredictable business environment. Some small businesses did not make it. We welcome the new year with anticipation and hope knowing that this year will be better than the last. As a sharecropper from Louisiana, I know faith can see us through any hardship. Faith is trust in God even though you cannot see or trace him.

I remember as a business owner, waking up one morning to find that my company was \$76 million in debt. I did not know how the business was going to make it, and I could not cut my way to a balanced budget. It was a feeling that many people experience who have more bills than money. I surrendered all to God and continued to praise him in that difficult season. I kept the faith and trusted God, and he delivered on time.

The Bible reminds us in Romans 5:3-4, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." Therefore, no matter how dark your situation may look, don't give up. Keep reminding yourself that this suffering will make you stronger.

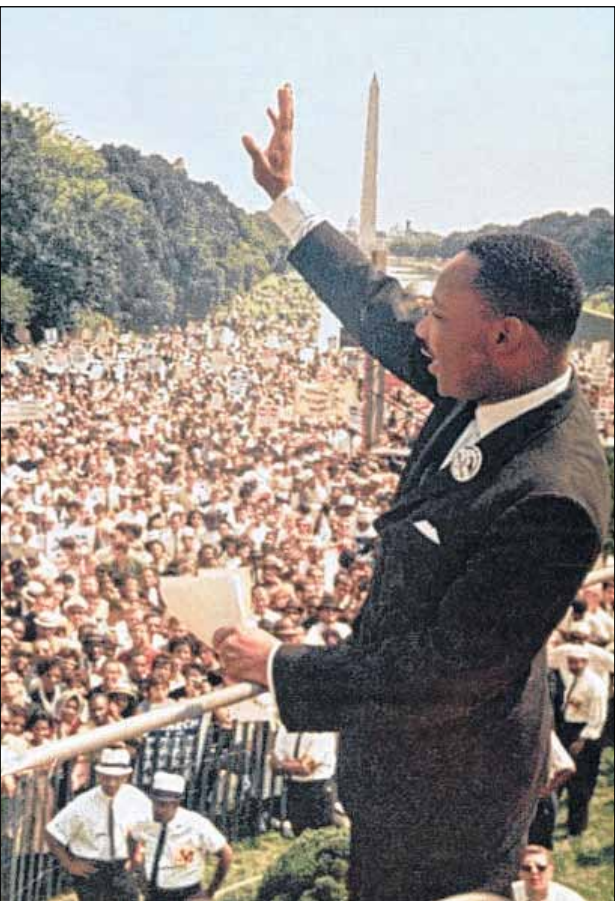
Some people believe that money and wealth will make them powerful and happy. There are many millionaires and billionaires whose wealth could not save them from death. It is misleading to believe that being wealthy can make someone happier. With every level of success, there are new enemies and challenges. All the money in the world cannot buy love or joy. As long as God wakes us up each morning, we have another opportunity to fulfill our purpose. Where there is life — hope abounds.

I did not go to school much as a child, but we had faith, hope and love that a brighter day was coming. Our neighbors were kind. The people had compassion for each other. The Latin roots of the word "compassion" mean "to suffer together." It is a feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering. It is compassionate to feed the hungry; clothe the naked; provide shelter to the homeless; visit the sick; give water to the thirsty; teach the illiterate; provide jobs for the jobless; serve as a caregiver for a loved one; and visit those in prison.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., referring to the parable of the good Samaritan, said that the first question the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But the good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?" A little compassion can save lives.

This year, we need to spread more love. The Bible declares in I Corinthians 13, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I

Willie Wilson
Chicago Tribune



Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his 'I Have a Dream' speech in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." It is a clarion call to "agape" — unconditional love that is superior to spiritual gifts. While faith and hope are vital, love endures forever.

King accurately noted: "Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God." The power of love is transformative. It conquers all hate and evil. Love is the very essence of Jesus Christ, and that causes leaders to put people over political parties and self-interests.

Leaders should prioritize love and not war. Elected leaders should invest in people and not nuclear weapons. We need to promote education and peace, not nuclear annihilation.

America is at a crossroads; we have been divided across race, ethnicity, gender and political party for too long. A divided nation cannot stand. A divided people cannot stand.

It can no longer be Republican against Democrat, citizens against police, white versus Black, and rich versus poor. We must achieve the original vision of our country — to be a place where all people can be free to pursue life, liberty and happiness truly — one nation under God.

Willie Wilson is a business owner, philanthropist and former Chicago mayoral candidate.

©2026 Chicago Tribune. Visit at [chicagotribune.com](#). Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

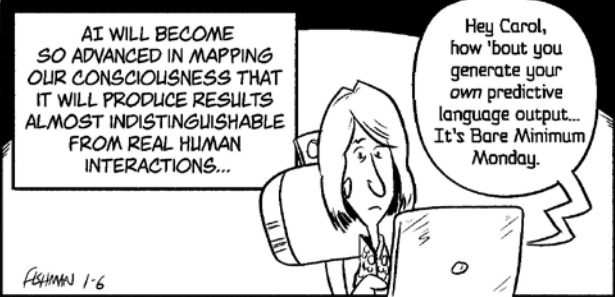
DOONESBURY: CLASSIC '80s



By Garry Trudeau



MALLARD FILLMORE



By Bruce Tinsley

Former Sheetz leader dies at 77



Stephen G. Sheetz

Staff Report

ALTOONA — Sheetz on Monday announced the passing of its former president, CEO, and chairman of the board, Stephen G. Sheetz, who died Sunday night at the age of 77.

Born Jan. 7, 1948, in Altoona, Steve graduated from Altoona High School in 1965. At just 12 years old, Steve began working part-time for Sheetz Kwik Shopper, the company his brother Bob founded in 1952.

After earning his degree from Penn State University in 1969,

Steve became supervisor and director of operations for all four Sheetz locations in operation. He later worked alongside Bob to grow the company to 100 store locations by 1983.

Following Bob’s retirement, Steve served as president and CEO of Sheetz from 1984 to 1995, guiding the company through a period of significant growth. He also served as chairman of Sheetz’s board of directors from 1995 to 2013, before transitioning to Chairman of CLI Transport in 2013. In 2020, he retired as an official Sheetz execu-

tive, while continuing to serve as the chairman of the family committee.

Steve played an instrumental role in guiding members of the Sheetz family into the business, helping them apply their skills and talents to support the company’s continued success.

“Above all, Uncle Steve was the center of our family,” said Sheetz President/CEO Travis Sheetz. “We are so deeply grateful for his leadership, vision, and steadfast commitment to our employees, customers, and communities.”

“Steve’s guidance shaped nearly every

aspect of our family business,” said Joe Sheetz, chairman of the Sheetz board of directors. “He was a mentor for every leader who has followed him and his vision, wisdom, and entrepreneurial spirit will be missed deeply by everyone at Sheetz.”

Steve Sheetz had a lifelong commitment to philanthropy, supporting numerous community and educational causes across the Altoona area and central Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Nancy, founded the Sheetz Fellows Program, which provides mentorship, financial support,

and special programming to Penn State Altoona students with the potential to lead and serve in their communities and beyond. They also established the Sheetz Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence, located in downtown Altoona. In recognition of their contributions, the couple was named Philanthropists of the Year by Penn State University in 2010.

Steve is survived by his wife, Nancy, their two daughters, Megan Sheetz (Trevor Price) and Nicole Sheetz Frith (Brint Frith), and seven grandchildren.

Elections

From page 6A

“Voters have repeatedly trusted the Republicans in the majority of the State Senate, who have a proven record of delivering results for Pennsylvanians,” Michael Straw, a spokesperson for the caucus’ campaign arm, said in an email. “We are prepared to run on our record of protecting taxpayer dollars, keeping costs low, and making communities safe in 2026 to defend and grow our majority.”

Control of the upper chamber will likely be decided by races in Lancaster County, the Lehigh Valley, the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh suburbs, and the Poconos.

All 203 districts in the state House will be on the ballot, and races in the Lehigh Valley, Northeast Pennsylvania, and [western coal country](#) are again expected to be competitive.

“With the House split this closely, every race matters,” state Rep. Jamie Barton, R-Schuylkill, chair of the caucus’ election efforts, told Spotlight PA. He said the GOP would prioritize “getting more money back to Pennsylvania taxpayers,” “commonsense energy policies,” and

“getting every child a high-quality education.”

“We are ready to run and win in every region of the commonwealth because voters continue to respond positively to our commonsense values,” he said.

Madeline Zann, executive director of state House Democrats’ campaign arm, said in an email that the committee is seeing momentum in candidate recruitment, “which is up from the previous two cycles — so we look forward to being competitive across the commonwealth.”

The Trump effect

Republicans are aware of a potential enthusiasm gap.

James Julius is a tech entrepreneur and Republican state House candidate who plans to run for a seat outside of Pittsburgh. He ran in 2024 when Trump was on the ballot but came up 16 percentage points short against a longtime Democratic incumbent. Support was much stronger for Trump, who lost the district by just under 4 percentage points, according to Department of State data.

With the incumbent now retiring, the seat is open, which means it should be easier to flip. Still, getting Trump’s voters to turn out without his name leading

the ticket is “going to be one of the biggest challenges,” Julius told Spotlight PA.

“He’s not going to be on the ballot for Republicans, but Donald Trump is always on the ballot for Democrats,” he said.

The swingy nature of Pennsylvania’s politics is also affecting how some Democratic candidates think about their policy priorities.

Democrat Kofi Osei, a Montgomery County township commissioner running to flip a key state Senate district, wants to prioritize giving more power to local governments to help address pressing issues facing their constituents.

That includes giving local officials more taxing authority to fund public transit or ensuring state education funding still flows even without a budget deal.

Democrats, Osei told Spotlight PA, “rarely have a trifecta.”

“We have to set up these Democratic areas to be successful, even with [a] hostile state government.”

BEFORE YOU GO... If you learned something from this article, pay it forward and contribute to Spotlight PA at [spotlightpa.org/donate](#). Spotlight PA is funded by [foundations and readers like you](#) who are committed to accountability journalism that gets results.



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader

Council attorney John Rodgers speaks during Monday’s meeting.

Project

From page 3A

2026, representing a [63% hike](#), while the developer may get a tax break.

The blighted-property tax break for the Bluecup project would provide 65% tax forgiveness on new construction for a decade, which would begin when construction is completed.

Bluecup has estimated taxing bodies will collectively receive \$840,000 annually during the tax break period. After that,

it projected the taxing bodies will receive a combined \$2 million in tax revenue annually, according to previous Times Leader reporting.

The Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) program approved for Blue Cup expires in April, Rodgers said.

The tax break was initially approved in 2022 by all three taxing bodies — the township, county, and Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

All three would have to approve the extension for

it to go into effect.

2026 chairperson, vice chair chosen

Also at the meeting, Gerald Shinal was once again chosen as chairperson. Shinal was absent from the meeting due to a medical issue and will be sworn in at a later date.

Councilmember John Jablowski was chosen as vice chair, taking over for Michael Sromovski.

Sromovski, who won another term following November’s municipal election, was sworn in during the meeting.



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader

Members of council conduct Monday’s meeting, while residents sit in the audience.



Margaret Roarty | Times Leader

Mayor Carl Kuren addresses residents during Monday’s meeting.

Nominate your favorite local businesses and professionals

in Times Leader Media Group’s
13th annual Readers’ Choice Awards,
called Best of the Best 2026!

Nominations are open now through January 16

BEST
of the
BEST
—2026—
TIMES LEADER MEDIA GROUP

**For More Information call 570-704-3955
or email dmcgee@timesleader.com**

FURTHER REVIEW

OUR FOUR FREEDOMS

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

In his State of the Union address on Jan. 6, 1941 — 85 years ago — President Franklin D. Roosevelt shook the nation out of its complacency by outlining four freedoms enjoyed by Americans that should be spread around the globe.

The occasion was Roosevelt's opening address to the 77th Congress on Jan. 6, 1941. Europe was in turmoil but most Americans wanted no part of the growing Second World War.

The freedoms didn't appear in FDR's address until the fourth draft. Aide Samuel Rosenman recounted, "he dictated the words so slowly that on the yellow pad I had on my lap, I was able to take them down myself in longhand."

FDR's address came to be called "the Four Freedoms speech" and was regarded as "a new Magna Carta of democracy." It later became the cornerstone of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Two years later, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms also became a rallying point for selling war bonds. Famed illustrator Norman Rockwell of the Saturday Evening Post — a popular weekly magazine of the day — painted each of FDR's freedoms.



Rockwell

As he did for much of his work, Rockwell used friends and neighbors around his studio in Arlington, Vermont, as models. The paintings accompanied thoughtful articles about each of the freedoms Roosevelt had listed.

A traveling exhibit featuring the original canvases helped raise more than \$132 million — \$2.34 billion in today's dollars.

1. FREEDOM OF SPEECH

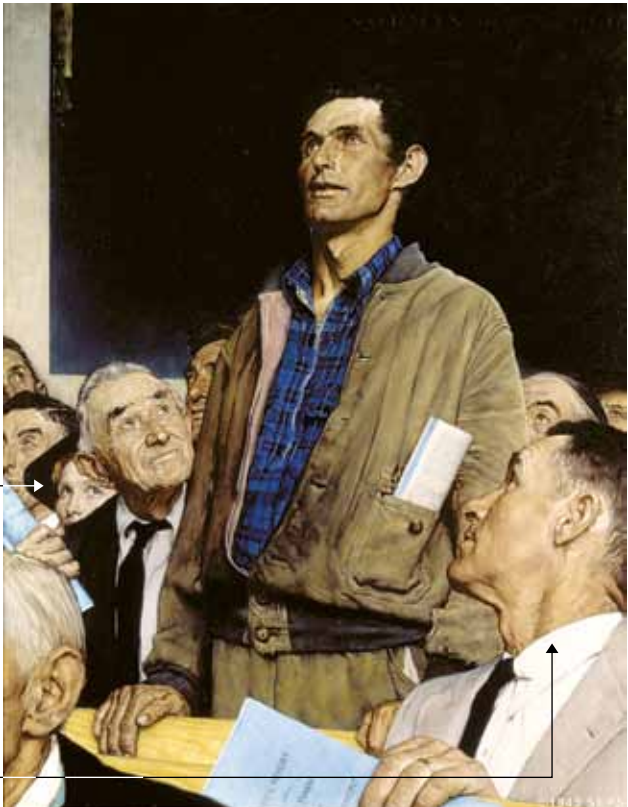
WHAT FDR SAID: "The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world."

PUBLISHED FEB. 20, 1943

It took four tries for Rockwell to find the composition and angle he liked. Rockwell's neighbor, Carl Hess, played the part of the lone dissenter. Hess' father — or, at least, his ear — is at the bottom left.

The model peeking at left, Rose Hoyt, holds a rosary in the next painting.

Norman Rockwell's friend and neighbor Jim Martin appears in all four paintings.

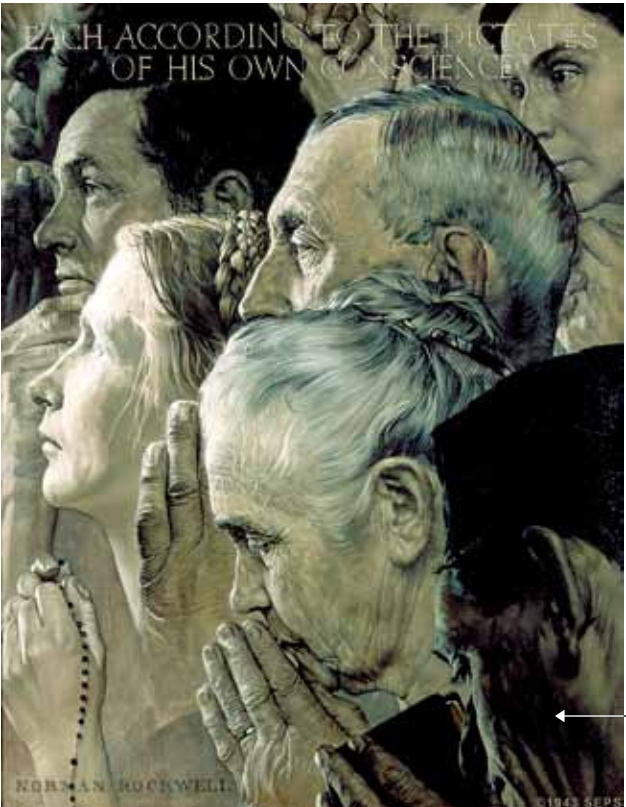


2. FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

WHAT FDR SAID: "The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way — everywhere in the world."

PUBLISHED FEB. 27, 1943

Rockwell originally painted a diverse group of men waiting for haircuts but didn't feel the result matched the tone he was aiming for. Rockwell spent two months reworking the concept from the ground up. "I depended on the hands alone to convey about half of the message I wish to put over," Rockwell said later.



Jim Martin

3. FREEDOM FROM WANT

WHAT FDR SAID: "The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants — everywhere in the world."

PUBLISHED MARCH 6, 1943

The most famous of the Four Freedoms paintings, Rockwell said he painted his actual Thanksgiving dinner. "Our cook cooked it, I painted it and we ate it," Rockwell later said. "That was one of the few times I've ever eaten the model."

Rockwell's wife, Mary

Rockwell's mother, Nancy

Jim Martin



4. FREEDOM FROM FEAR

WHAT FDR SAID: "The fourth is freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor — anywhere in the world."

PUBLISHED MARCH 13, 1943

The only of the four not created specifically for this project. Rockwell painted this to illustrate the Battle of Britain: Note the newspaper headline, which the Bennington (Vermont) Banner mocked up and printed as a special front for use as a prop. The Saturday Evening Post didn't use the painting, so Rockwell recycled it here.



Jim Martin

Sources: The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum, Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, the National WWII Museum, the American Presidency Project of UC Santa Barbara, the Carnegie Council, the Canton Repository, the New York Times, Politico, Everything Explained Today, History.com

NORMAN ROCKWELL PAINTINGS, COPYRIGHT CURTIS PUBLISHING CO., ARE FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Maduro: ‘I was captured’

Venezuelan president pleads not guilty

By Michael R. Sisak, Larry Neumeister and Eric Tucker
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A defiant [Nicolás Maduro](#) declared himself “the president of my country” as he protested his capture and pleaded not guilty Monday to federal drug trafficking charges that the Trump administration used to justify removing him from power in Venezuela.

“I was captured,” Maduro said in Spanish as translated by a courtroom interpreter before being cut off by the judge. Asked later for his plea to the charges, he stated: “I am innocent. I am not guilty. I am a decent man, the constitutional president of my country.”

Maduro’s court appearance in Manhattan, his first since he and his wife, Cilia Flores, were [seized from their Caracas home](#) Saturday in a stunning middle-of-the-night military operation, kicked off the U.S. government’s most consequential prosecution in decades of a foreign head of state. She also pleaded not guilty.

The criminal case is unfolding against a broader diplomatic backdrop of an audacious U.S.-engineered regime change that President Donald Trump has said will enable his administration [to “run” the South American country](#).

Maduro, 63, was brought to court under heavy security early Monday — flown by helicopter to Manhattan from Brooklyn, where he is jailed, and then driven

to the courthouse in an armored vehicle. He and Flores were led into court just before noon. Both were in leg shackles and jail-issued garb, and both put on headsets to hear the English-language proceeding as it was translated into Spanish.

As Maduro left the courtroom, a man in the audience denounced him as an “illegitimate” president.

A legal fight begins

As a criminal defendant in the U.S. legal system, Maduro will have the same rights as any other person charged with a crime in the country — including the right to jury trial. But, given the circumstances of his arrest and the geopolitical stakes at play, he’ll also be nearly — but not quite — unique.

That was made clear from the outset as Maduro, who took copious notes throughout the proceedings and wished Happy New Year to reporters as he entered the courtroom, repeatedly pressed his case that he had been unlawfully abducted.

“I am here kidnapped since Jan. 3, Saturday,” Maduro said, standing and leaning his tall frame toward a tabletop microphone. “I was captured at my home in Caracas.”

U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein, a 92-year-old jurist who was appointed to the federal bench in 1998 by Bill Clinton, interrupted him, saying: “There will be a time and place to go into all of this.” Hellerstein added that Maduro’s law-



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, left, and his wife, Cilia Flores, second from right, appear in Manhattan federal court with their defense attorneys Mark Donnelly, second from left, and Andres Sanchez Monday in New York.

yer could do so later.

“At this point in time, I only want to know one thing: Are you Nicolás Maduro Moros?”

“I am Nicolás Maduro Moros,” the defendant responded.

Maduro’s lawyer, Barry Pollack, said he expects to contest the legality of his “military abduction.”

Pollack, a prominent Washington lawyer whose clients have [included WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange](#), said Maduro is “head of a sovereign state and is entitled to the privileges and immunities that go with that office.”

Panamanian strongman [Manuel Noriega](#) unsuccessfully [tried the same immunity defense](#) after the U.S. captured him in a similar military invasion in 1990. But the U.S. doesn’t recognize Maduro as Venezuela’s legitimate head of state — particularly after [a much-disputed 2024 reelection](#).

Flores, who identified herself to the judge as “first lady of the Republic of Venezuela,” had bandages on her forehead and right temple. Her lawyer, Mark Donnelly, said she suffered “significant injuries” during her capture.

[A 25-page indictment](#)

accuses Maduro and others of working with drug cartels to facilitate the shipment of [thousands of tons of cocaine](#) into the U.S. They could face life in prison if convicted.

Among other things, the indictment accuses Maduro and his wife of ordering kidnappings, beatings and murders of those who owed them drug money or undermined their drug trafficking operation. That included the killing of a local drug boss in Caracas, the indictment said.

Outside the courthouse, police separated those protesting the U.S. military action from pro-intervention demonstrators. Inside the courtroom, as the proceeding wrapped up and Maduro prepared to leave, 33-year-old Pedro Rojas stood up and began speaking forcefully at him in Spanish.

Rojas said later that he had been imprisoned by the Venezuelan regime. As deputy U.S. marshals led Maduro from the courtroom, the deposed leader looked directly at the man and shot back in Spanish: “I am a kidnapped president. I am a prisoner of war.”

IN SUMMARY

Trump’s talk evokes return to American imperialism

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump hasn’t minced words about the larger message he’s trying to send the world with the U.S. military raid to capture Nicolás Maduro. “American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again,” Trump declared shortly after the deposed Venezuelan leader and his wife were spirited away to the United States to face federal drug trafficking charges. In the days since the audacious raid, the president and his team have only doubled down on this notion. It’s the kind of tough talk not heard since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when American presidents deployed the military for territorial and resource conquests.

At least 35 people killed in Iran’s protests

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Activists say the death toll in violence surrounding protests in Iran has risen to at least 35. The figure came from the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which said more than 1,200 people have been detained in the protests, which have been ongoing for more than a week. It said 29 protesters, four children and two members of Iran’s security forces have been killed. The group, which relies on an activist network inside of Iran for its reporting, has been accurate in past unrest. The semiofficial Fars news agency, believed close to Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, says some 250 police officers and 45 members of the Guard’s all-volunteer Basij force

have been hurt.

Walz drops bid for Minnesota governor

ST PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz is ending his bid for a third term amid President Donald Trump’s relentless focus on a fraud investigation into child care programs in the state and its Somali community. Less than four months after announcing his reelection campaign, Walz said Monday the negative attention and Republican attacks make it too hard to serve full time as governor and be a candidate for another term. A person close to Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar says she’s considering running for governor. Around a dozen Republicans already are in the race. Walz helped enact a sweeping liberal agenda in Minnesota despite a closely divided legislature.

Jury seated in trial for ex-officer in Uvalde shooting

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas — A Texas judge has seated a jury in the trial of a former school police officer who was part of the hesitant law enforcement response to the Uvalde school shooting in 2022. Former Uvalde schools officer Adrian Gonzales is charged with failing to protect children during the attack after authorities waited more than an hour to confront the gunman. Jury selection in the trial began Monday. Gonzales is one of two law enforcement officers charged in the attack that killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary. The officer’s attorney has said Gonzales tried to save children that day.

— Associated Press

Many use UN meeting to critique Venezuela intervention

By Farnoush Amiri and Jennifer Peltz
The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Both allies and adversaries of the United States on Monday used an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council to voice opposition to the [audacious U.S. military operation](#) in Venezuela that captured [leader Nicolás Maduro](#).

Before the U.N.’s most powerful body, countries critiqued — if sometimes obliquely — President Donald Trump’s intervention in the South American country and his recent comments signaling the [possibility of expanding military action](#) to countries like Colombia and Mexico over drug trafficking accusations. The Republican president also has reupped his threat to take over the [Danish territory of Greenland](#) for the sake of U.S. security interests.

Denmark, which has jurisdiction over the mineral-rich island, carefully denounced U.S. prospects for taking over Greenland without mentioning its NATO ally by name.

“The inviolability of borders is not up for negotiation,” said Christina Markus Lassen, Danish

ambassador to the U.N.

She also defended Venezuela’s sovereignty, saying “no state should seek to influence political outcomes in Venezuela through the use of threat of force or through other means inconsistent with international law.”

US allies push back on Venezuela

While French President Emmanuel Macron recently endorsed Maduro’s capture, its U.N. envoy was slightly more critical Monday, saying any violations of international law by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, which include the U.S., erodes “the very foundation of the international order.”

“The military operation that has led to the capture of Maduro runs counter to the principle of peace dispute resolution and runs counter to the principle of non-use of force,” said Jay Dharmadhikari, deputy French ambassador to the U.N.

U.S. envoy Mike Waltz defended the operation in Venezuela as a justified and “surgical law enforcement operation,” calling out the 15-member council for criticizing the targeting of Maduro.

“If the United Nations in this body confers legitimacy on an illegitimate narcoterrorist with the same treatment in this charter of a democratically elected president or head of state, what kind of organization is this?” said Waltz, who is Trump’s former national security adviser.

Maduro’s 2024 reelection was [widely disputed](#).

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement that he is “deeply concerned that rules of international law have not been respected with regard to the 3 January military action.” He said the “grave” action by the U.S. could set a precedent for how future relations between nations unfold.

Venezuela calls on the UN to take action

Even with the strong support for Venezuela’s sovereignty, its envoy called on the U.N. to go beyond veiled comments and condemnation. Ambassador Samuel Moncada urged the Security Council to demand that Washington release Maduro and his wife.

“If the kidnapping of a head of state, the bombing of a sovereign country and the open threat of further armed action are tolerated

or downplayed, the message sent to the world is a devastating one: namely that the law is optional, and that force is the true arbiter of international relations,” Moncada said.

He warned that other countries can’t afford to look away: “Accepting such a logic would mean to open the door to a deeply unstable world.”

Neighboring Colombia described the raid as reminiscent of “the worst interference in our area in the past.”

“Democracy cannot be defended or promoted through violence and coercion, and it cannot be superseded, either, by economic interests,” Ambassador Leonor Zalabata said.

China and Russia are expectedly critical

The biggest critics of U.S. foreign policy, China and Russia, which are also permanent members of the Security Council, called for the U.N. body to unite in rejecting America turning back to an “era of lawlessness.”

Maduro, like his predecessor, [forged a close relationship with Russia](#), while China was the [main destination for most Venezuelan oil](#).

“We cannot allow the



People listen as Venezuela’s U.N. Ambassador Samuel Moncada speaks during a meeting of the Security Council Monday at U.N. headquarters.

United States to proclaim itself as some kind of a supreme judge, which alone bears the right to invade any country, to label culprits, to hand down and to enforce punishments irrespective of notions of international law, sovereignty and nonintervention,” Russian ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said.

His own country’s [2022 invasion of Ukraine](#) has drawn widespread [condemnation within the U.N.](#) and from the U.S., although the Trump administration is engaging with Russia in hopes of brokering an end to the fighting.

The U.S. seized [Maduro and his wife](#) early Saturday from their home on a military base and put them aboard a U.S. warship to face prosecution in New

York in a Justice Department indictment accusing them of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy. Maduro declared his innocence during his [first appearance in a Manhattan courthouse](#) Monday.

His stunning removal came after months of the U.S. amassing a military presence off Venezuela’s coast and [blowing up alleged drug trafficking boats](#). Trump has insisted that the U.S. would run Venezuela at least temporarily and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, however, says the U.S. would [enforce an oil quarantine](#) that was already in place on sanctioned tankers and use that [leverage to press policy changes](#) in Venezuela.

Unpacking changes to child vaccine recommendations

By Lauran Neergaard
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials made broad changes to childhood vaccine recommendations Monday, alarming pediatricians and other medical experts who say they will sow confusion and undermine children's health.

The overhaul is effective immediately, meaning that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will now recommend that all children get vaccinated against 11 diseases, down from 18 a year ago.

The changes comes as U.S. vaccination rates have been slipping and the share of children with exemptions has reached an all-time high, according to federal data. At the same time, rates of diseases that can be protected against with vaccines, such as measles and whooping cough, are rising.

Here's what to know about the changes:

What has changed?

Once broadly recommended, the federal government now only recommends protection against these diseases for certain children at high risk or based on individual doctor advice in what's called "shared decision-making."

- Flu
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Meningococcal disease
- Rotavirus
- RSV
- COVID-19, a change made in 2025

What is the same?

The following vaccines were left on the recommended-for-all list:

- Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)
- Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis or whooping cough (DTaP)
- Polio
- Chickenpox
- Human papillomavirus, or HPV. But in a surprise, the guidance reduces the number of recommended vaccine doses against HPV from two or three shots to just one.
- Hib, or Haemophilus influenzae type B, bacteria that despite the name isn't related to flu
- PCV or pneumococcal conjugate vaccine

Why change?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the overhaul was in response to a request from President Donald Trump in December. Trump asked the agency to review how peer nations approach vaccine recommendations and consider revising U.S. guidance accordingly.

HHS said its comparison to 20 peer nations found that the U.S. was an "outlier" in both the number of vaccinations and the number of doses it recommended to all children. Officials

with the agency framed the change as a way to increase public trust by recommending only the most important vaccinations for children to receive.

However, many European countries recommend some of the vaccines the U.S. removed from its list.

What do doctors, pediatricians say?

The nation's large doctors' groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, say they will continue to recommend the vaccines that the Trump administration has now demoted. They said there was no new science that warranted the changes, including no signs that the former U.S. vaccine schedule harmed children.

Dr. Sean O'Leary of the AAP said the changes could increase child illness and death from preventable disease. He voiced special concern that the U.S. would no longer recommend flu vaccine for children, just as the flu season is becoming severe and after last winter's particularly harsh season.

The pediatricians' group has issued its own child vaccine recommendations. Also, states, not the federal government, have the authority to require vaccinations for schoolchildren. While CDC requirements often influence those state regulations, some states have begun creating their own alliances to counter the Trump administration's guidance on vaccines.

What will change for families?

It's not yet clear. Because of the countering recommendations from pediatricians, doctor visits may not change. However, medical specialists say when the U.S. government doesn't explicitly recommend a shot, it will raise questions among parents, leading to more difficult conversations at the doctor's office.

If the changes mean fewer children are vaccinated, outbreaks that have historically been prevented by high vaccination rates could spread more widely, leading to more disease and more missed school and work.

Will insurance continue to cover vaccines?

The Trump administration said coverage will continue for families that still want the shots. Health insurers generally find vaccination a good deal, as shots are cheaper than hospitalizations, and many had previously said they'd planned to cover what was recommended last year through 2026.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for all content.



A North Atlantic right whale feeds on the surface of Cape Cod bay off the coast of Plymouth, Mass., on March 28, 2018.

AP File Photo

Possible extinction

Good season of births may not be enough for right whales

By Patrick Whittle
The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — One of the world's rarest whale species is having more babies this year than in some recent seasons, but experts say many more young are needed to help stave off the possibility of extinction.

The North Atlantic right whale's population numbers an estimated 384 animals and is slowly rising after several years of decline. The whales have gained more than 7% of their 2020 population, according to scientists who study them.

The whales give birth off the southeastern United States every winter before migrating north to feed.

Researchers have identified 15 calves this winter, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Monday.

That number is higher than two of the last three winters, but the species needs "approximately 50 or more calves per year for many years" to stop its decline and allow for recovery, NOAA said in a statement. The whales are vulnerable to collisions with large ships and entanglement in commercial fishing gear.

This year's number is encouraging, but the species remains in peril without stronger laws to protect against those threats, said Gib Brogan, senior campaign director with environmental group

Oceana. The federal government is in the midst of a moratorium on federal rules designed to protect right whales until 2028, and commercial fishing groups have pushed for a proposal to extend that pause for even longer.

There is still time left for more baby whales to be born this winter, but 50 is not a reasonable expectation because of a lack of reproductive females in the population, Brogan said.

"We're not going to be able to calve ourselves to recovery," Brogan said. "We also need to be doing more to tackle the two primary causes of right whale deaths, being entanglement in fishing gear and being hit by boats."

The whales have fared better than last winter, when they gave birth to only 11 calves, according to NOAA data. The whales have reached 20 calves only twice since 2010, and they gave birth to no calves in a disastrous 2018 season. The whales are less likely to reproduce when they have suffered injuries or are underfired, scientists have said.

The whales were hunted to the brink of extinction during the era of commercial whaling and have been federally protected for decades. They remain in a crisis at the moment because there have been more deaths than births in the population in the past decade, NOAA said in its statement.

Flu season surges in the US over holidays

By Mike Stobbe
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. flu infections surged over the holidays, and health officials are calling it a severe season that is likely to get worse.

New government data posted Monday — for flu activity through the week of Christmas — showed that by some measures this season is already surpassing the flu epidemic of last winter, one of the harshest in recent history.

The data was released the same day that the Trump administration said it will no longer recommend flu shots and some other types of vaccines for all children.

Forty-five states were reporting high or very high flu activity during the week of Christmas, up from 30 states the week before.

The higher numbers appear to be driven by the type of flu that's been spreading, public health experts say.

One type of flu virus, called A H3N2, historically has caused the most hospitalizations and deaths in older people. So far this season, that's the type most frequently reported. Even more concerning, more than 90% of the H3N2 infections analyzed were a

new version — known as the subclade K variant — that differs from the strain in this year's flu shots.

Flu seasons often don't peak until January or February, so it's too early to know how big a problem that mismatch will be.

"The fact that we've seen steady increases over the last several weeks without much of a decline or even a flattening would suggest to me that we've got the peak ahead of us," said Dr. Robert Hopkins, medical director of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

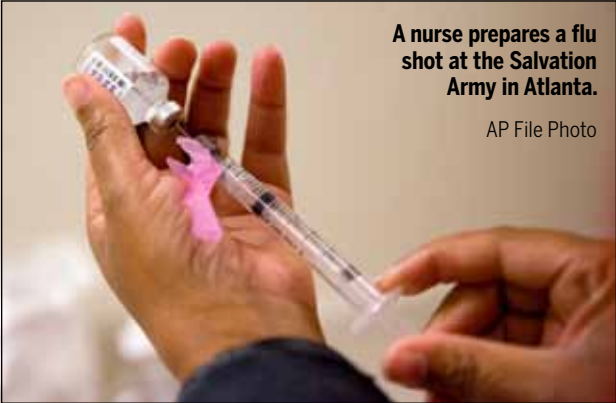
The second bad flu season in a row

Last flu season was bad, with the overall flu hospitalization rate the highest since the H1N1 flu pandemic 15 years ago. Child flu deaths reached 288, the worst recorded for regular U.S. flu season.

Nine pediatric flu deaths have been reported so far this season. For children, the percentage of emergency department visits due to flu has already surpassed the highest mark seen during the 2024-2025 season.

Hopkins said H3N2 typically hits older adults hardest, and rising rates among children and young adults suggest a severe flu season across all age groups.

Another ominous sign:



A nurse prepares a flu shot at the Salvation Army in Atlanta.

AP File Photo

The percentage of doctor's office and medical clinic visits that were due to flu-like illness also was higher late last month than at any point during the previous flu season.

Deaths and hospitalizations have not reached last year's levels, but those are lagging indicators, Hopkins noted.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates at least 11 million illnesses, 120,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths from flu have already occurred this season.

US will stop collecting Medicaid data

Hopkins voiced concern about a federal notice posted last week that said government Medicaid programs, which pay for medical services for low-income families, will no longer have to report on immunization rates.

CDC survey data suggests that U.S. flu vaccination rates are about the same as last year. But the Medicaid data — for flu as well as measles and other bugs — is a more comprehensive look at children

who are at higher risk for many diseases, he said.

Federal health officials framed the move as part of an effort to distance how Medicaid doctors are rated and paid from how often they provided childhood vaccinations.

"Government bureaucracies should never coerce doctors or families into accepting vaccines or penalize physicians for respecting patient choice," wrote Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who was a leading voice in the anti-vaccine community before President Donald Trump put him in charge of federal health agencies.

"That practice ends now," Kennedy wrote on social media last week.

But Hopkins said the move will "eliminate a major source of data" that allows communities to assess efforts to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases.

"This is a disastrous plan," he added.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for all content.



IN MEMORY
Joseph J. Soprano Jr.
Times Leader
executive editor
Penn State graduate
1988



**More
coaching
news**
NFL • 5B

Raiders fire Carroll, seeking new coach for third straight year

By Mark Anderson
AP Sports Writer

HENDERSON, Nev. — The Las Vegas Raiders fired Pete Carroll on Monday after just one year, meaning they will enter their third consecutive season with a new coach in charge.

Carroll expressed high hopes upon taking over, saying he was used to double-digit victories and expected the same in Las Vegas. But the Raiders went 3-14, going on a 10-game losing streak before finishing with a 14-12 victory over Kansas City on Sunday.

“I want to make it

extremely clear, too, that I bear a ton of responsibility for the outcome of this season and our record,” general manager John Spytek said. “This isn’t on any one person, and really I don’t want anyone to think anyone deserves more responsibility than me on that. It’s something I’m very aware of. I think about it all the time, and I’m determined to get it right. The accountability should start and stop with me, and that needs to be said.”

Now the question is where the Raiders head next under the direction of owner Mark Davis, minority owner Tom

Brady and Spytek. Davis said in a statement that Spytek would work with Brady to find the next coach.

“Together, they will guide football decisions with a shared focus on leadership, culture, and alignment with the organization’s long-term vision and goals,” Davis said.

The Raiders own the first pick in this year’s draft and are projected to have the third-most cap space at more than \$100 million, according to overthecap.com.

“We have a massive

See CARROLL | 5B



John Locher | AP Photo

Las Vegas Raiders head coach Pete Carroll speaks during a news conference following an NFL football game against the Kansas City Chiefs Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Las Vegas.



Fred Adams | For Times Leader

Hazleton Area point guard Kaitlyn Bindas sets for a 3-point shot in the first quarter.

Hazleton Area holds off Crestwood

By John Erzar
jerzar@timesleader.com

WRIGHT TWP. — Had the Crestwood Comets played in the first half like they did in the second half, perhaps the outcome would have been different Monday night.

That first half was when Hazleton Area

did too much damage to allow a recovery.

Hazleton Area took a 17-point lead at half-time and then held off a comeback attempt by Crestwood for a 63-53 win in a Wyoming Valley Conference Division 1 girls basketball game.

A capacity crowd watched Hazleton Area (3-0 Div. 1, 10-1 overall)

hand Crestwood (3-1, 12-1) its first loss.

Hazleton Area led 34-17 at halftime as Kaitlyn Bindas scored 17 of her game-high 24 points and Sophia Benyo grabbed half of her game-high 18 rebounds. The Cougars also forced 10 second-quarter turnovers with its frantic pace.

“We forced them into that,” Hazleton Area coach Joe Gavio said. “They’re not used to doing that, but they showed they can do that. We got a little sloppy there a little bit, but we made plays when we had to. Make plays, that’s what we ask for.”

See HAZLETON | 3B

Ski mountaineering ready to make Olympics debut

By Pat Graham
AP Sports Writer

The Milan Cortina Winter Olympics will debut a new sport next month: Ski mountaineering, which combines uphill sprinting (on boots and on skis) and downhill skiing. Although the sport on the global stage is relatively new, it does have roots dating to the late 19th century. Back-country winter sports have grown in popularity and there is anecdotal evidence that they saw a surge in participation during the pandemic.

Something to know about skimo: It’s fast, with sprint races lasting about 3 minutes. Ski mountaineering will have men’s and women’s sprint events along with a mixed relay.

The race works like this: The racers sprint uphill with skins on the bottom of their skis. A skin is a strip of material that allows for traction going uphill. They then run a section in boots before putting their skis back on to traverse another uphill section. Once at the top, they take the skins off and race downhill. In the men’s and women’s sprint-event format, there will be a qualifying round where 18 racers qualify over three heats. The top three athletes in each heat advance to the semifinals along with three others based on time. In the semifinal rounds, two advance along with two

more “lucky losers,” which sets up the race for medals. The mixed relay consists of one female and one male racer from each country. Each will complete two ascents and descents. The female athlete begins, then tags her male teammate for the switch. The team that completes all four laps first wins gold.

The current ski mountaineering sprint champions are Swiss racer Marianne Fattton and Spain’s Oriol Cardona Coll. Another favorite is France’s Emily Harrop, who won the test event at the venue last winter ahead of Fattton. Coll won the men’s event ahead of Swiss racers Jon Kistler and Arno Lietha. In the mixed relay event, Coll partnered with Ana Alonso Rodriguez for the win. Harrop and Thibault Anselmet were second. Rodriguez said in October she was hit by a car while cycling, tearing knee ligaments, hoping to heal in time. The U.S. earned an Olympic spot in the mixed relay thanks to a World Cup victory from Anna Gibson and Cam Smith.

The races will be staged in Bormio at the Stelvio Ski Center, with the men’s and women’s sprint events taking place on Feb. 19. The mixed relay competition takes place two days later.

The medal winners will be the first in their sport at the Olympics.

Strong ground games propel Indiana, Oregon to CFP semis



Indiana running back Roman Hemby (1) scores a rushing touchdown during the second half of the Rose Bowl College Football Playoff quarterfinal game against Alabama Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026, in Pasadena, Calif.

By Michael Marot
AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS — Fernando Mendoza spent all season stealing headlines and collecting awards.

Indiana running backs Roman Hemby and Kaelon Black were content doing the dirty work in the shadows of their Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback, propelling the top-ranked Hoosiers into college football’s version of the Final Four.

Now, less than a week after dominating Alabama on the ground, the Hoosiers dynamic duo hopes to replicate that performance against No.

5 Oregon in Friday night’s Peach Bowl.

“You see the guys we have up front, they work really hard and they make my job and Kaelon’s job really easy,” Hemby said Monday. “We just try to outphysical our opponents. We really want to make it a four-quarter fight to where we kind of impose our will and, at some point in the game, we feel like we could potentially break the defense or make that play that helps us win.”

The surprise, to some, has been just how much the Football Bowl Sub-division’s third-highest scoring offense, 41.6 points per game, actually

has relied on the running game.

While Mendoza and the passing attack certainly have driven this season’s narrative, Indiana’s ground game sometimes went unnoticed.

The Hoosiers rush for 220.7 yards per game — 10th nationally and No. 1 among the teams still fighting for a national championship. They’ve topped the 300-yard mark six times and had two more with more than 200 including the 215 it logged in last week’s 38-3 rout over No. 9 Alabama.

It’s also a big reason the undefeated Hoosiers

See CFP | 3B

LATEST LINE

NFL				
Saturday				
FAVORITE	OPEN	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
LA Rams	10½	10½	(46½)	at CAROLINA
at CHICAGO	1½	1	(46)	Green Bay

Sunday				
FAVORITE	OPEN	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Buffalo	1½	1½	(51½)	at JACKSONVILLE
at PHILADELPHIA	3½	3½	(45½)	San Francisco
at NEW ENGLAND	3½	3½	(46)	LA Chargers

Monday				
FAVORITE	OPEN	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Houston	3	3½	(39½)	at PITTSBURGH

College Football				
Thursday				
Fiesta Bowl				

Glendale, Ariz.

FAVORITE	OPEN	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Miami (FL)	3	3	(52)	Ole Miss

Friday				
Peach Bowl				
Atlanta				

FAVORITE	OPEN	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Indiana	4	3½	(46½)	Oregon

NBA				
Tuesday				

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
at INDIANA	OFF	(OFF)	Cleveland
at WASHINGTON	OFF	(OFF)	Orlando
at MEMPHIS	OFF	(OFF)	San Antonio
at NEW ORLEANS	OFF	(OFF)	LA Lakers
at MINNESOTA	OFF	(OFF)	Miami
at SACRAMENTO	OFF	(OFF)	Dallas

COLLEGE BASKETBALL			
Tuesday			
FAVORITE	LINE	UNDERDOG	
at OHIO	3½	UMass	

LOCAL SCHEDULE

Tuesday, Jan. 6
H.S. BOYS BASKETBALL
(7:15 p.m. unless noted)

Crestwood at Hazelton Area
Hanover Area at Holy Redeemer
Lake-Lehman at Wyoming Area
MMI Prep at Berwick
Tunkhannock at Wyoming Seminary, 6 p.m.
Wilkes-Barre Area at Pittston Area
Wyoming Valley West at Nanticoke Area
H.S. GIRLS BASKETBALL
Dallas at Lake-Lehman, 7 p.m.
H.S. BOYS AND GIRLS SWIMMING
Wyoming Seminary at Wyoming Area, 4 p.m.
Dallas at Wyoming Valley West, 4:30 p.m.
Pittston Area at Lake-Lehman, 4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 7
H.S. BOYS BASKETBALL
Williamsport at Holy Redeemer, 7:15 p.m.
H.S. WRESTLING
(7 p.m.)

Wyoming Area at Berwick
Hanover Area at Dallas
Lake-Lehman at Tunkhannock
Nanticoke Area at Crestwood
Hazelton Area at Pittston Area
Wilkes-Barre Area at Wyoming Valley West

H.S. BOYS AND GIRLS SWIMMING
Nanticoke Area at Holy Redeemer, 4:30 p.m.
Hazelton Area at Tunkhannock, 4:30 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 8
H.S. GIRLS BASKETBALL
(7:15 p.m.)

Berwick at Crestwood
Hanover Area at Wyoming Area
Hazelton Area at Dallas
Lake-Lehman at Nanticoke Area
MMI Prep at Tunkhannock
Wilkes-Barre Area at Wyoming Valley West
Wyoming Seminary at Holy Redeemer

Friday, Jan. 9
AHL
Penguins at Charlotte, 7 p.m.
H.S. BOYS BASKETBALL
(7:15 p.m.)

Berwick at Lake-Lehman
Crestwood at Nanticoke Area
Dallas at Hazelton Area
Holy Redeemer at Wyoming Seminary
Tunkhannock at MMI Prep
Wyoming Area at Hanover Area
Wyoming Valley West at Wilkes-Barre Area

H.S. BOYS AND GIRLS SWIMMING
Wyoming Valley West at Holy Redeemer, 4:30 p.m.
Wilkes-Barre Area at Tunkhannock, 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 10
AHL
Penguins at Charlotte, 6 p.m.
H.S. BOYS BASKETBALL
MMI Prep at Lourdes Regional, 2:30 p.m.

H.S. GIRLS BASKETBALL
Crestwood at East Stroudsburg North, 1:30 p.m.
Elk Lake at Tunkhannock, 1:15 p.m.
Hazelton Area at Coatesville, 1:30 p.m.
MMI Prep at Columbia-Montour Vo-Tech, 3 p.m.
Notre Dame East Stroudsburg at Hanover Area, 1:15 p.m.
Susquehanna at Wyoming Seminary, 2:30 p.m.

H.S. WRESTLING
Crestwood at Big Red Duals, Souderton HS
Lake-Lehman, Pittston Area at Richard "Chooch" Chulada Duals, Honesdale HS
H.S. BOYS AND GIRLS SWIMMING
Ernie Shartle Diving Invitational, Tunkhannock HS

SPORTS ON TV

Tuesday, Jan. 6
COLLEGE BASKETBALL
(MEN'S)

6 p.m.
CBSSN — UMass at Ohio
7 p.m.
ACCN — Syracuse at Georgia Tech
ESPN — Duke at Louisville
ESPN2 — Cincinnati at West Virginia
ESPN2 — South Carolina at LSU
FS1 — Michigan at Penn St.
PEACOCK — St. John's at Butler
SECN — Georgia at Florida
8 p.m.
BTN — Iowa at Minnesota
CBSSN — George Washington at Dayton
TRUTV — Georgetown at DePaul
9 p.m.
ACCN — NC State at Boston College
ESPN — TCU at Kansas
ESPN2 — Texas at Tennessee
FS1 — Texas Tech at Houston
PEACOCK — UCLA at Wisconsin
SECN — Texas A&M at Auburn
10 p.m.
CBSSN — UNLV at Wyoming
11 p.m.
FS1 — San Diego St. at Nevada
COLLEGE BASKETBALL
(WOMEN'S)
10 p.m.
BTN — Oregon at Southern Cal
GOLF

at MIAMI (OH)	12½	Western Michigan
Duke	1½	at LOUISVILLE
St. John's	3½	at BUTLER
Michigan	24½	at PENN STATE
at WEST VIRGINIA	3½	Cincinnati

at FLORIDA	7½	Georgia
at LSU	7	South Carolina
at BALL STATE	1½	Eastern Michigan
at KENT STATE	1½	Bowling Green
Syracuse	3½	at GEORGIA TECH

Iowa	6½	at MINNESOTA
at DAYTON	3½	George Washington
at OKLAHOMA STATE	3½	UCF
Toledo	6½	at NORTHERN ILLINOIS

at DEPAUL	2½	Georgetown
Lindenwood	1½	at SIU-EDWARDSVILLE
at KANSAS	7½	TCU
at WISCONSIN	2½	UCLA

at HOUSTON	6½	Texas Tech
at COLORADO STATE	2½	New Mexico
at AUBURN	6½	Texas A&M
NC State	11½	at BOSTON COLLEGE

at TENNESSEE	10½	Texas
at WYOMING	3½	UNLV
at NEVADA	1½	San Diego State

NHL			
Tuesday			
FAVORITE	LINE	UNDERDOG	LINE
at BUFFALO	-187	Vancouver	+155
Colorado	-125	at TAMPA BAY	+105
at PHILADELPHIA	-154	Anaheim	+129
at CAROLINA	-132	Dallas	+110
Florida	-126	at TORONTO	+106

New Jersey	-120	at N.Y. ISLANDERS	+100
Vegas	-113	at WINNIPEG	-107
at EDMONTON	-172	Nashville	+144
Columbus	-125	at SAN JOSE	+105
Boston	-126	at SEATTLE	+106

For the latest odds, go to BetMGM Sportsbook

assignment. Sent G Remi Poirier to Texas (AHL).

SAN JOSE SHARKS — Recalled F Patrick Giles from San Jose (AHL). Placed D John Klingberg on injured reserve.
TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Sent F Maxim Groshev to Syracuse (AHL).
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Recalled D Marshall Rifai from Toronto (AHL). Placed F William Nylander on injured reserve.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer
MINNESOTA UNITED — Acquired an international roster spot from Toronto FC in exchange for \$300,000 in general allocation money.
NEW YORK RED BULLS — Mutually terminated the contract of D Alexander Hack.
SPORTING KANSAS CITY — Named Raphael Wicky head coach and signed him to a two-and-a-half-year contract.

CFB

College Football Bowl Glance	
All Times Eastern	
Dec. 13	
Celebration Bowl	
Atlanta	
SC State 40, Prairie View A&M 38, 4 OT	
LA Bowl	
Inglewood, Calif.	
Washington 38, Boise State 10	
Dec. 16	
Salute to Veterans Bowl	
Montgomery, Ala.	
Jacksonville State 17, Troy 13	
Dec. 17	
Cure Bowl	
Orlando, Fla.	
Old Dominion 24, South Florida 10	
68 Ventures Bowl	
Mobile, Ala.	
Delaware 20, Louisiana-Lafayette 13	
Dec. 18	
Xbox Bowl	
Frisco, Texas	
Arkansas State 34, Missouri State 28	
Dec. 19	
Myrtle Beach Bowl	
Conway, S.C.	
Western Michigan 41, Kennesaw State 6	
Gasparilla Bowl	
Tampa, Fla.	
NC State 31L, Memphis 7	
College Football Playoff	
First Round	
No. 11 Alabama 34, No. 8 Oklahoma 24	
Dec. 20	
College Football Playoff	
First Round	
No. 10 Miami (Fla.) 10, at No. 7 Texas A&M 3	
No. 6 Mississippi 41, No. 17 Tulane 10	
No. 5 Oregon 51, No. 19 James Madison 34	
Dec. 22	
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl	
Boise, Idaho	
Washington St. 34, Utah St. 21	
Dec. 23	
Boca Raton Bowl	
Boca Raton, Fla.	
Louisville 27, Toledo 20	
New Orleans Bowl	
New Orleans	
Western Kentucky 27, Southern Miss. 16	
Frisco Bowl	
Frisco, Texas	
Ohio 17, UNLV 10	
Dec. 24	
Hawai'i Bowl	
Honolulu	
Hawaii 35, Cal 31	
Dec. 26	
GameAbove Sports Bowl	
Detroit, Mich.	
Northwestern 34, Cent. Michigan 7	
Rate Bowl	
Phoenix	
Minnesota 20, New Mexico 17, OT	
First Responder Bowl	
Dallas, Texas	
UTSA 57, FIU 20	
Dec. 27	
Military Bowl	
Annapolis, Md.	
East Carolina 23, No. 24 Georgia Tech 21	
Pinstripe Bowl	
Bronx, N.Y.	
Penn St. 22, Clemson 10	
Fenway Bowl	
Boston	
Army 41, UConn 16	
Pop-Tarts Bowl	
Orlando, Fla.	
No. 12 BYU 25, No. 24 Georgia Tech 21	
Arizona Bowl	
Tucson, Ariz.	
Fresno St. 18, Miami (OH) 3	
New Mexico Bowl	
Albuquerque	
No. 23 North Texas 49, San Diego St. 47	
Gator Bowl	
Jacksonville, Fla.	
No. 20 Virginia 13, No. 25 Missouri 7	
Texas Bowl	
Houston 38, LSU 35	
Dec. 29	
Birmingham Bowl	
Birmingham, Ala.	
Georgia Southern 29, Appalachian State 10	
Dec. 30	
Independence Bowl	
Shreveport, La.	
Louisiana Tech 23, Coastal Carolina 14	
Music City Bowl	
Nashville, Tenn.	
Illinois 30, Tennessee 28	

Alamo Bowl

San Antonio
TCU 30, No. 16 Southern Cal 27, OT

Dec. 31

ReliaQuest Bowl

Tampa, Fla.
No. 23 Iowa 34, No. 13 Vanderbilt 27

Sun Bowl

El Paso, Texas
Duke 42, Arizona St. 39

Citrus Bowl

Orlando, Fla.
No. 14 Texas 41, No. 18 Michigan 27

Las Vegas Bowl

Las Vegas
No. 15 Utah 44, Nebraska 22

College Football Playoff

Quarterfinal

At Cotton Bowl, Arlington, Texas
No. 10 Miami 24, No. 3 Ohio St. 14

Jan. 1

College Football Playoff

Quarterfinal

Orange Bowl, Miami Gardens, Fla.

No. 5 Oregon 23, No. 4 Texas Tech 0

Rose Bowl, Pasadena, Calif.

Indiana 38, No. 9 Alabama 3

Sugar Bowl, New Orleans

Mississippi 39, Georgia 34

Jan. 2

Armed Forces Bowl

Fort Worth, Texas
Texas St. 41, Rice 10

Liberty Bowl

Memphis, Tenn.
No. 22 Navy 35 Cincinnati 13

Duke's Mayo Bowl

Charlotte, N.C.
Wake Forest 43, Mississippi St. 29

Holiday Bowl

San Diego, Calif.
SMU 24, No. 21 Arizona 19

Jan. 8

College Football Playoff

Semifinal

Fiesta Bowl, Glendale, Ariz.
No. 6 Mississippi vs. No. 10 Miami, 7:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Jan. 9

College Football Playoff

Semifinal

Peach Bowl, Atlanta
No. 1 Indiana vs. No. 5 Oregon, 7:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Jan. 19

College Football Playoff

National Championship

Miami
Semifinal winners, 7:30 p.m. (ESPN)

NBA

NBA Glance				
All Times EST				
EASTERN CONFERENCE				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	23	12	.657	—
Boston	22	12	.647	½
Toronto	21	15	.583	2½
Philadelphia	19	14	.576	3
Brooklyn	11	22	.333	11

Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	20	16	.556	—
Miami	20	16	.556	—
Atlanta	17	20	.459	3½
Charlotte	12	23	.343	7½
Washington	9	25	.265	10

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	26	9	.743	—
Cleveland	20	17	.541	7
Chicago	17	18	.486	9
Milwaukee	16	20	.444	10½
Indiana	6	30	.167	20½

WESTERN CONFERENCE				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	25	10	.714	—
Houston	21	11	.656	2½
Memphis	15	20	.429	10
Dallas	13	23	.361	12½
New Orleans	8	29	.216	18

Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	30	6	.833	—
Denver	23	12	.657	6½
Minnesota	23	13	.639	7
Portland	16	20	.444	14
Utah	12	22	.353	17

Valley West girls hold off Berwick for first division win

Times Leader

Sanai Williams led a trio of Wyoming Valley West scorers in double figures with 18 points, and the Spartans held on down the stretch to capture their first Division 1 win with a 51-47 victory over Berwick in a Wyoming Valley Conference girls basketball game on Monday night.

Valley West led by 16 points heading to the final quarter, and managed to fend off a furious Berwick comeback to pick up the win.

Aniyah Davis chipped in 12 points and Gabbi Novitski finished with 10 points for the Spartans.

Abby Calarco led the Bulldogs with 19 points and was the main catalyst for Berwick's fourth-quarter comeback, scoring 15 points in the final quarter. Grace Robbins added 10 points.

Nanticoke Area 65, MMI Prep 12

Kate Reed led all scorers with 22 points as Nanticoke Area improved to 4-0 in Division 2 with a win over MMI Prep.

Nevaeh Baran added 13 points for the Trojans, who

scored 53 of their 65 points in the first half to put the game away early.

Georgia Washko had four points to lead the Preppers.

Lake-Lehman 59, Wyoming Area 21

Kinley Purdy dropped a game-high 22 points to lead the Black Knights to a win over Wyoming Area.

Olivia Oliver added 12 points and Kathryn Morgan finished with 11 points for Lake-Lehman.

Londyn Sobeck had 12 points to pace Wyoming Area, knocking down three three-pointers.

Wyoming Seminary 55, Tunkhannock 26

Ella Stambaugh drained six three-pointers and scored 32 points to carry Wyoming Seminary past Tunkhannock.

Maya Gross added 10 points for the Blue Knights in the win.

Elizabeth Moore was the high scorer for Tunkhannock with nine points.

Pittston Area 54, Wilkes-Barre Area 32

The Patriots took the lead early and never relinquished it, picking up their first division

victory of the season.

Bella Dessoye had 20 points to lead Pittston Area. Leah Drozdzinski added 11 points.

Jaida Underwood led Wilkes-Barre Area with 14 points.

Central Columbia 61, Northwest 20

Quinlan Blake scored 21 points and Kayla Poust added 19 as Central Columbia defeated the Rangers.

Ali Miner, Ava Ruckle and Natalia Ninotti had six points apiece for Northwest.

H.S. BOYS SWIMMING

Berwick 76, Wilkes-Barre Area 62

Jayson Hess won the 100 free and 200 free as the Bulldogs held off Wilkes-Barre Area to pick up their first conference victory of the season.

Bilal Derac had two individual wins for Wilkes-Barre Area, finishing first in the 200 IM and 500 free.

H.S. GIRLS SWIMMING

Wilkes-Barre Area 85, Berwick 82

A win in the 400 free relay to cap off the night delivered the Wolfpack a win over Berwick that came right down to the wire, keeping Wilkes-Barre Area unbeaten in conference

meets in the process.

Rugayya Derac, Briana Medina, Kyara Pena and Nicole Castillo were the winning swimmers on the 400 free relay for Wilkes-Barre Area. The group also won the 200 free relay earlier in the meet.

H.S. Girls Basketball

Wyoming Valley West 51, Berwick 47

BERWICK (47) — Abby Calarco 6 2-4 19, Addy Zanoline 11-1 3, Grace Robbins 4 2-6 10, Carly Post 2 5-9, Addison Remley 0 0-0 0, Ashlyn Zakrewsky 2 0-0 6. **Totals 15 10-16 47.**

VALLEY WEST (51) — Gabbi Novitski 4 1-4 10, Ava Yancey 12-4 4, Makenna Collieran 1 0-0 3, Sam Eckert 0 0-0 0, Lily Kammerer 0 0-0 0, Jayla Campoverde 0 0-0 0, Rebecca Staniecki 2 1-2 5, Aniyah Davis 4 2-2 12, Sanai Williams 8 2-3 18. **Totals 20 8-15 51.**

Berwick 11 2 8 26 — 47

WWW 10 13 1414 — 51

Three-point goals: BER 7 (Calarco 5, Zakrewsky 2), WVW 3 (Davis 2, Novitski).

Nanticoke Area 65, MMI Prep 12

NANTICOKE AREA (65) — Kileigh Casey 0 0-0 0, Julianna Percival 1 0-0 3, Nevaeh Tolodzievski 1 0-0 2, Callie Welch 1 0-2 2, Natalie Atkins 4 0-0 8, Amiah Ceruti 1 0-0 3, Abby Lovallo 2 0-0 6, Kate Reed 9 1-1 22, Lexi Ball 0 0-0 0, Nevaeh Baran 5 1-2 13, Ella Alles 0 0-0 0, Haley Verazin 1 0-0 2, Jordyn Johnson 1 0-0 2, Molly Novak 0 0-0 0, Kacey Spencer 0 0-0 0. **Totals 27 2-5 65.**

MMI PREP (12) — Arushi Solgama 0 0-0 0, Cedrah Abdulrahman 0 0-0 0, Georgia Washko 2 0-0 4, Anna Drobnock 1 0-0 3, Bianca Serrano 0 0-0 0, Ellie Onufer 1 0-0 2, Keirsi Mooney 1 0-0 3, Sophie Schultz 0 0-0 0. **Totals 5 0-0 12.**

Nan. Area 25 28 7 5 — 65

MMI Prep 2 5 5 0 — 12

Three-point goals: NAN 9 (Reed 3, Lovallo 2, Baran 2, Percival, Ceruti), MMI 2 (Drobnock, Mooney).

Lake-Lehman 59, Wyoming Area 21

WYOMING AREA (21) — Sydney Ratchford 0 0-0 0, Briella DeLucca 1 0-0 2, Addison Gaylord 2 0-0 4, Lila Price 0 0-0 0, Kinley Park 0 1-4 1, Jaielyn Park 0 2-4 2, Abi Francis 0 0-0 0, Anna Kelleher 0 0-0 0, Londyn Sobeck 3 6-6 12. **Totals 6 9-14 21.**

LAKE-LEHMAN (59) — Asa Dorris 0 0-0 0, Sophia Tomasino 0 0-0 0, Delcia Biscotto 0 2-2 2, Stephanie Branham 0 0-0 0, Morgan Bresford 0 0-0 0,

Olivia Corcoran 0 0-0 0, Mackenzie Morreale 0 0-0 0, Brianna Wright 0 0-0 0, Kathryn Morgan 5 1-1 11, Sofia Sparacio 2 0-0 4, Eliana Kontra 1 0-0 2, Amanda Battin 1 3-3 6, Kinley Purdy 10 0-0 22, Olivia Oliver 5 1-1 12, Emily Birth 0 0-0 0. **Totals 24 7-7 59.**

Wyoming Area 5 9 2 5 — 21

Lake-Lehman 15 14 25 5 — 59

Three-point goals: WA 3 (Sobeck), LL 4 (Purdy 2, Battin, Oliver).

Wyoming Seminary 55, Tunkhannock 26

WYOMING SEMINARY (55) — Stella Ruiz 1 0-0 3, Natalina DeNaples 1 0-2 2, Dori Bartos 1 0-0 2, Kaeleen Dougherty 0 0-4 0, Ella Stambaugh 10 6-8 32, Ellie Kersey 3 0-0 6, Sydney Pane 0 0-0 0, Maya Gross 4 0-0 10, Kathryn Eidam 0 0-0 0. **Totals 21 6-14 55.**

TUNKHANNOCK (26) — Kyrni Newell 1 1-2 3, Aliyah Faux 1 0-0 2, Madelyn Bevan 1 0-0 2, Elizabeth Moore 2 5-7 9, Olivia Williams 1 0-0 3, Aubrey Price 0 0-0 0, Makenzie Gregory 1 0-0 2, Allison Kinney 0 0-0 0, Sarah Van Ness 2 0-0 5, Trinity King 0 0-0 0. **Totals 9 6-9 26.**

Wyo. Seminary 12 15 18 10 — 55

Tunkhannock 3 8 12 3 — 26

Three-point goals: SEM 9 (Stambaugh 6, Gross 2, Ruiz), TUN 2 (Williams, Van Ness).

Pittston Area 54, Wilkes-Barre Area 32

PITTSSTON AREA (54) — Julia Long 4 0-0 8, Leah Drozdzinski 4 2-6 11, Bella Dessoye 7 2-3 20, Giuliana Latona 2 1-2 6, Lili Hintze 4 0-2 9, Arianna McGarry 0 0-0 0. **Totals 21 5-13 54.**

WILKES-BARRE AREA (32) — Aaliyah Philbert 0 0-0 0, Kaitlyn Miller 1 0-0 2, Emily Barrouk 4 1-2 9, Jaida Underwood 5 4-5 14, Jianna Salinas 0 0-0 0, Jaydelyn Mora 2 0-0 6, Jaliah Daniels 0 1-2 1. **Totals 12 6-9 32.**

Pittston Area 13 16 13 12 — 54

Wilkes-Barre 7 10 12 3 — 32

Three-point goals: PA 7 (Dessoye 4, Drozdzinski, Latona, Hintze), WBA 2 (Mora 2).

Central Columbia 61, Northwest 20

C. COLUMBIA (61) — Jada Tucker 2 0-0 4, Jude Flick 3 0-1 6, Quinlan Blake 8 3-4 21, Abby Welkom 0 0-0 0, Hazel Hiller 1 0-0 2, Brianna Kishbaugh 0 0-0 0, Grace Prezioso 0 0-0 0, Kayla Poust 8 1-1 19, Lily Huber 4 1-2 9. **Totals 26 5-10 61.**

NORTHWEST (20) — Ashlyn Hermanofski 1 0-0 2, Ali Miner 1 3-4 6, Ava Ruckle 1 3-4 6, Ava Ruckle 2 0-0 6, Natalia Ninotti 2 0-0 6, Arhaya Williams 0 0-0 0, Hartley Crawford 0 0-0 0, Callie Moyer 0 0-0 0, Natalie Mullins 0 0-0 0, Auria Daniels 0 0-0 0, Jillian Bonham 0 0-0 0. **Totals 6 3-4 20.**

C. Columbia 16 18 20 7 — 61

Northwest 8 6 3 1 — 20

Three-point goals: CC 4 (Blake 2, Poust 2), NW 5 (Ruckle 2, Williams 2, Miner).

CFP

From page 1B

have the nation's top third-down conversion percentage at 56.5%. Perhaps more important — Indiana has only one fumble all season.

“It just comes from wanting to be better,” Black said, referring to the backfield’s internal motivation. “Being around a great group of guys, a great group of teammates, you just have the want to to be better in your life and also on the football field. And now that we’re in this position, we have no choice but to be better.”

Still, Hemby and Black

are hardly household names.

Hemby played four seasons at Maryland, averaging 4.9 yards per carry while rushing for 2,347 yards. This year, he’s at 5.2 yards and topped the 1,000-yard mark for the first time with an 8-yard game against the Crimson Tide. He earned a third team all-Big Ten selection from the media but not the coaches.

Black was solid, not spectacular, in four seasons at James Madison but blossomed after following coach Curt Cignetti to Bloomington. This season, he has 157 carries, 898 yards and eight TDs — all career bests with the top-seeded Hoosiers

(14-0). Yet he was left off the all-conference list.

The two backs already understand the challenge Oregon (13-1) poses. In their first meeting, Indiana ran 27 times for a paltry 111 yards or 3.0 yards per carry, their third-lowest single game average all season. And on tape, they think Oregon looks even better now.

So does linebacker Bryce Boettcher, who acknowledged having some mental mistakes in Round 1 but played a key role in Oregon’s 23-0 shut-out over No. 4 Texas Tech in the Orange Bowl.

On the other hand, the Ducks recognize how difficult it will be to replicate that effort especially with

Indiana’s secret weapon — Mendoza’s ability to buy time and scramble for first downs — and against an offensive line that has proven to be one of the nation’s best.

“They’re smart, fast and physical,” Boettcher said, describing Indiana’s linemen. “In the run game, they play physical and they do their job. They don’t have a lot of unblocked hats. I know in the screen game, they get out and they’re elite at kind of retracing and blocking for the receiver in the screen game, which was present in our last game.” Oregon’s offense looks remarkably similar to the Hoosiers.

While the Ducks rank

second in scoring among the final four teams, 38.0 points per game, and as Mendoza and Dante Moore continue their presumed competition to be the No. 1 NFL draft pick in April, Oregon enters Friday with the second-best ground game in the remaining field at 206.1 yards with Noah Whittington and Jordon Davison leading the way.

The Hoosiers had the upper hand in the 30-20 victory in October, holding the Ducks to 81 yards rushing, their lowest regular-season total, on 30 carries. Indiana knows the rematch could prove more difficult.

But for two offenses that have thrived through

the air with star quarterbacks and a deep stable of prominent receivers, the path to Miami and the Jan. 19 national championship will likely be determined on the ground.

“It’s one of those things where we had to keep working toward it to get where we want to be and, obviously, we’re still not where we want to be,” Hemby said when asked about the improvement in Indiana’s ground game this season. “I don’t know if we’ve changed people’s minds, we’re not really in the business of trying to do that. Hopefully we did. But at the end of the day if we’re winning games, we’ll take it however we can.”

Hazleton

From page 1B

Consecutive 3-pointers by Molly Temchatin and Bindas and a basket by Temchatin off a Benyo block allowed Hazleton Area to open its first double-digit lead, 30-13 midway through the second quarter.

Crestwood, though, forced a couple turnovers to start the third quarter, with Keira Dougherty and Jackie Gallagher converting them into layups. Dougherty had a huge quarter, scoring nine of her 19 points.

“We knew they were going to come out hard,” Bindas said. “We tried to keep our composure. Everybody just like stepped up and we kept our composure.”

The rebounding of Benyo and Alexis Reimold and Kayla Lagowy helped. The trio allowed several second-chance opportunities. Reimold finished with 14 points and was a rebound shy of

a double-double.

Crestwood moved within 61-51 with 3:11 left in the fourth quarter on a 3-pointer by Dougherty and a jumper by Gallagher. The Comets then missed two shots that would have cut the lead under 10 for the first time since early in the second quarter.

“It’s almost like a repeat of what happened last year in the WVC championship tournament,” Crestwood coach Mary Mushock-Namey said. “One bad quarter unfortunately cost us. And then when we get down early like that like the first-half deficit, we try to get it all back at once.”

Hazleton Area 63, Crestwood 53

HAZLETON AREA (63) — Mariah Marolo 3 1-4 9, Sophia Benyo 4 0-0 8, Kaitlyn Bindas 10 2-3 24, Kayla Lagowy 0 0-0 0, Alexis Reimold 5 4-4 14, Juliana Silva 0 0-0 0, Sofia Rodgers 0 0-0 0, Addison Fritz 0 0-0 0. **Totals 25 7-11 63.**

CRESTWOOD (53) — Cameron Vieney 0 0-0 0, Charlie Hiller 5 1-3 11, Jackie Gallagher 8 2-4 20, Jordan Andrews 1 0-0 3, Keira Dougherty 8 1-3 19, Addison Korpusik 0 0-0 0, Norah Sklarosky 0 0-0 0. **Totals 22 4-10 53.**

Hazleton Area 20 14 18 11 — 63

Crestwood 11 6 21 15 — 53

Three-point goals: HA 6 (Marolo 2, Bindas 2, Temchatin 2), CRE 5 (Gallagher 2, Andrews, Dougherty 2).



Fred Adams | For Times Leader
Hazleton Area's Kayla Lagowy pushes away Crestwood's Norah Sklarosky (25) going for a rebound in the second quarter.



Fred Adams | For Times Leader
Crestwood's Keira Dougherty and Hazleton Area's Sophia Benyo chase a loose ball in the first quarter.



Fred Adams | For Times Leader
Crestwood's Keira Dougherty (33) holds back Hazleton Area's Kayla Lagowy while bringing the ball up court in the first quarter.

DIVERSIFIED...

FOR ALL OF YOUR
REAL ESTATE NEEDS
RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL,
LEASING AND LAND

PROVIDING PROMPT,
PROFESSIONAL SERVICE
WITH ATTENTION TO DETAIL
FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS
JUDY RICE,
ASSOCIATE BROKER
GRI, ABR, CRS
LEWITH & FREEMAN
REAL ESTATE

O: (570) 288-9371
 D: (570) 714-9230
EMAIL: JUDYRICE@EPIX.NET

Steelers endured roller coaster season to reach playoffs

By Will Graves
AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin isn't into "what-ifs?" There's really no point.

Sure, the Pittsburgh Steelers coach could wring his hands over the impossibly thin line between victory and defeat, one his team received an up-close look at yet again in a riveting 26-24 win over Baltimore on Sunday night that clinched Pittsburgh's first AFC North title in five years.

Tomlin could ponder an alternate reality where Baltimore rookie kicker Tyler Loop drills the 44-yard game-winning field goal instead of having it drift right, a result that would have led to some serious soul-searching in Pittsburgh on Monday rather than the giddy anxiety associated with preparing for the playoffs.

Only he won't. Doing so would merely be a waste of energy and time, something the NFL's longest-tenured head coach learned to avoid long ago.

And if Loop's kick splits the uprights, the Ravens would be facing fifth-seeded Houston next Monday.

Only it didn't. So it's Baltimore — and not Pittsburgh — that got an early start on what could be an eventful offseason. And it's Pittsburgh — and not Baltimore — that enters the 14-team tournament with optimism that feels earned after surviving a chaotic fourth quarter that featured four lead changes, a sprinkling of vintage Aaron Rodgers and a dash of hope that its long postseason play-



Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin walks off the field after an NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens, Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Pittsburgh.

off victory drought may finally end. "It's going to give us some belief," Rodgers said.

And the Steelers think a little belief — along with the return of suspended wide receiver DK Metcalf — could go a long way to ending a six-game playoff skid that at times has felt like an anchor.

Odds makers aren't so sure, making the white-hot and fifth-seeded Texans (12-5) the early favorite even though Houston has never won a road playoff game in its 24-year history.

That's fine by Rodgers, who knows a thing or two about sneaking in the playoffs and going on a run. Fifteen years ago, Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers earned a playoff spot on the final day of the season, then won three straight road games to reach the Super Bowl, where they beat

Pittsburgh to earn the franchise's fourth Lombardi Trophy.

There's a long way to go between next Monday night and Super Bowl 60 in Santa Clara, California, on Sunday, Feb. 8.

Still, it beats the alternative.

"It's good to be part of the 14 (teams left), after so many years," Rodgers said. "(In Green Bay in) '22 we lost the last game to make the playoffs. (In) '23 I was out. (In) '24 we were terrible, so nice to be back in this position."

A position that was a mixture of effort, a dash of excellence and maybe — maybe — a little help from above.

Cameras caught a clergy member sprinkling a little holy water on the Acrisure Stadium turf about two hours before kickoff on Sunday. The clergy made a full lap around the field to make sure all the angles were covered, including the

end where Loop's very makeable kick fluttered wide.

Crediting the win to divine intervention would diminish what an undermanned Pittsburgh offense did over the game's last 32 minutes. (Besides, divine intervention is the "Immaculate Reception's" corner).

Not that it matters to longtime defensive tackle Cam Heyward.

"I'm not going to ask questions," he said. "The good Lord made a good decision tonight. I am thankful and we keep moving on."

And not looking back.

What's working

Giving the ball to Kenny Gainwell and Jaylen Warren and getting out of the way. The duo combined for 2,314 total yards during the regular season, including 173 against the Ravens. Gainwell was selected as the team's MVP last

week, a fitting selection for a largely anonymous offense that has found a way to be better than the sum of its parts during critical moments.

What needs help

Loop's miss bailed out a poor performance by the Pittsburgh secondary, which allowed a pair of long touchdown passes in the fourth quarter and then a 26-yard heave in the final seconds that put the Ravens in position to win. Houston's offense isn't quite as dynamic as Baltimore's, but considering how good the Texans' defense is, it doesn't have to be. The Steelers can ill afford the kind of breakdowns that nearly cost them a division title.

Stock up

Whenever Heyward's name comes up for Hall of Fame consideration five years after his retirement, whoever is present- ing his case should put

Sunday night's game on a loop. The 36-year-old was everywhere over the course of three-plus hours, finishing with seven tackles while being a general menace no matter where he lined up. That includes shoving younger brother Connor Heyward across the goal line for a 1-yard touchdown run in Pittsburgh's version of the "Brotherly Shove."

Stock down

Chris Boswell is the best kicker in franchise history. Still, the 11-year veteran has been shaky down the stretch. He missed key kicks in Detroit and Cleveland then flubbed his first extra point in nearly two years in the final minute on Sunday night.

Maybe it's not fair to expect Boswell to be perfect, but given how small Pittsburgh's margin for error is, he basically needs to be if the Steelers want to make their playoff appearance more than another token cameo.

Injuries

The Steelers somehow head into the postseason relatively healthy.

Key number

1991 — the previous time the Steelers lost a home game on "Monday Night Football," a streak they will carry into Houston's visit.

Next steps

Try to advance in the playoffs for the first time since beating Kansas City in the divisional round in 2016, which could quell the incessant "what about Mike Tomlin's future?" discourse for a good long while.

Eagles ready for 49ers after losing out on NFC's No. 2 seed

By Dan Gelston
AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Brandon Graham had just defended coach Nick Sirianni's decision to choose rest for his starters over playing them in a game that decided seeding — a loss to Washington that cost the Eagles the No. 2 seed in the NFC — when he was told San Francisco was on deck in the playoff opener.

"Oh? That's who we've got," Graham asked. "You know what? That's cool. We know we're going to have to see everybody, whoever we see."

In other words, at home or on the road, the defending Super Bowl champion Eagles are ready to play any team in any location.

Jalen Hurts, Saquon Barkley, A.J. Brown, Graham and most Eagles players are loaded with big-game experience — heck, Graham has two Super Bowl rings — and the Eagles are proven road warriors in both the regular season and the playoffs.

Yet, Sirianni's decision to play second-teamers not only backfired in the moment when the Eagles lost to the Commanders and Detroit beat Chicago, it's fair to wonder if the homemade bye week was really worth the gamble once the Eagles lost a shot at hosting at least two games in the playoffs.

"I have to do what I think's best for the football team moving forward, and that's what I did," Sirianni said.

It's down to one guar-



Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts warms up before an NFL football game against the Washington Commanders on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Philadelphia.

anteed home game for the Eagles, on Sunday against the 49ers. Survive that one, and the Eagles could face a divisional game in Chicago and an NFC title game in Seattle.

Think home field and seeding doesn't matter?

The Eagles won three home playoff games last season to reach the Super Bowl. Only five No. 3 seeds ever have played in a Super Bowl and none out of the NFC since Carolina in 2003.

The other fair question is this: How much tougher would a repeat title be had Hurts or Barkley or Cooper DeJean been lost to injury against Washington?

Consider this: The Bears were only a 1-point favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, as of Monday to win at home against the seventh-seeded Packers. So how much

is that home game for the Bears really worth?

The final answer won't be decided until the Eagles' season is over.

And if they do win the Super Bowl, well, it won't happen in Philadelphia anyway.

What's working

Brown and DeVonta Smith slogged through down stretches to each top 1,000 yards receiving.

Smith (team-high 1,008 yards receiving) and Brown (1,003) are the only wide receiver duo in franchise history to each produce 1,000-plus receiving yards in the same season (2022, 2023 and 2025).

What needs help

The Eagles could be in trouble if they need to rely on backups in the postseason.

Outside of running

back Tank Bigsby, the rest of the second-teamers failed to meet the moment and had poor games in the finale. Tanner McKee quieted the critics who wanted him to replace Hurts when the Eagles lost three straight games and cornerback Kelee Ringo was flagged for a late pass interference call that aided the Commanders' game-tying drive.

Is Nick Foles still available?

Stock up

The Eagles found a gem when they selected Jalyx Hunt in the third round of the 2024 draft. The edge rusher became the first player to lead the team in both sacks (6 1/2) and interceptions (3). Hunt was the second player in franchise history with 6-plus sacks and at least three picks in a

season (Seth Joyner 1991 and 1992). Hunt capped a monster second season with an interception and a fumble recovery against Washington.

Stock down

Kevin Patullo. The embattled offensive coordinator spent most of the season fending off criticism of his offense that led to statistical regression in Hurts and Barkley. Could it be that Hurts and Barkley and Brown all had coincidentally down seasons? After watching the Eagles' backups struggle to do much of anything against Washington's backups, Patullo again took the heat for calling plays that amounted to not much of anything, especially in the second half. One reason to play the starters was giving Patullo at least one more game to find some

chemistry, some rhythm with the players expected to lead a Super Bowl run. But all the Eagles found was one more reason to put their first-year coordinator's playbook under the microscope.

Injuries

Two-time All-Pro offensive lineman Lane Johnson could return for the first time since he suffered a foot injury in Week 11 against Detroit.

"You've got have your players available," Sirianni said.

Key number

Get the Eagles to the red zone, and they are tough to stop from scoring.

The Eagles finished this season with a league-leading 70.5% red zone TD efficiency, marking their best red zone offense since at least 2000 (previously 67.8% in 2022).

Next steps

There's plenty for each team to draw from in recent games in the rivalry.

Hurts had one of Philadelphia's four rushing touchdowns and Purdy was knocked out of the game with an elbow injury when the Eagles thumped the 49ers three years ago in the NFC championship game.

Purdy was healthy in the December 2023 rematch when he threw for 314 yards and four touchdowns in the 49ers' 42-19 win.

Both games were in Philadelphia.

Browns fire two-time Coach of the Year Stefanski after six seasons

By Joe Reedy
AP Sports Writer

BEREA, Ohio — Kevin Stefanski led the Cleveland Browns to two playoff appearances in his first four seasons as head coach.

However, with only eight wins the past two seasons, owners Jimmy and Dee Haslam will be making their sixth coaching hire since purchasing the franchise in 2012.

Stefanski was dismissed Monday morning after six seasons. The Browns won their final two games to finish 5-12, including a 20-18 victory over the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday.

“We’re capable of winning more than the games that we won, but we obviously didn’t. Things are going to change and have to change. We got to find a way to get this thing rolling,” cornerback Denzel Ward said.

The Haslams are not doing a total housecleaning, announcing that Andrew Berry will remain as general manager. Berry joined the Browns in 2019 and was named GM the following year. Stefanski and Berry signed multiyear contract extensions in June 2024.

“We all owe him a debt of gratitude and appreciation for a level of success that he brought the organization that really hadn’t been achieved since 2002,” Berry said. “Coming into this season, we were realistic that we were a team and a roster in transition. And ultimately, this decision is born from the fact that we ultimately felt like we did not see enough progress in areas that were controllable, independent of certain

game outcomes.”

The 43-year-old Stefanski, a two-time AP NFL Coach of the Year, went 46-58. He guided Cleveland to playoff berths in 2020 and 2023. The Browns’ 48-37 wild-card win over Pittsburgh in the 2020 season was the franchise’s first since 1994.

“I’d like to especially thank my coaching staff and the players who did everything that was ever asked of them. They fought through injury and adversity, while always putting the team first,” Stefanski said in a statement released through the Browns.

Stefanski is the sixth coach fired since the Haslams bought the franchise in 2012. The five coaches hired by the Haslams have a 73-139-1 regular-season record, the second-worst mark in the NFL. Stefanski was also the first Cleveland coach to last at least six seasons since Sam Rutigliano (1978 through the midway point of the 1984 season).

Jimmy Haslam indicated the decision had already been made before Stefanski met with ownership Monday morning.

“I think those decisions tend to be made over a period of time,” Haslam said during a news conference 45 minutes after the firing was announced. “I don’t think there was one breaking point. I think you’ve got to look at the body of work, and sometimes it’s just time for a change.”

QB dysfunction dooms Stefanski

Stefanski established a positive culture in a historically dysfunctional fran-



Jeff Dean | AP Photo

Cleveland Browns head coach Kevin Stefanski walks on the sideline during the second half of an NFL football game against the Cincinnati Bengals, Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026, in Cincinnati.

chise but was ultimately undone by the persistent issue that has troubled the Browns since 1999: the absence of a franchise quarterback.

During his tenure, Stefanski started 13 different quarterbacks, including seven over the past two seasons.

The Browns thought they had their quarterback in 2022 when they released Baker Mayfield and acquired Deshaun Watson from Houston for five draft picks, including three in the first round.

Instead, the trade for Watson has set the Browns back for years.

Watson has played in only 19 games. He has gone 9-10 as Cleveland’s starter with 19 touchdowns, 12 interceptions, and an 80.7 passer rating. He did not play this season while rehabbing from a torn Achilles tendon. Watson practiced for three weeks last month, but was not activated to the roster.

Watson played seven

games in 2023 before a season-ending shoulder injury in Week 10. The Browns brought in Joe Flacco, who went 4-1 as a starter and averaged more than 300 passing yards per game, helping Cleveland reach the playoffs for only the third time since 1999.

Jimmy Haslam said during the league meetings last March that the Browns “took a big swing and miss” with the Watson trade and that “we’ve got to dig ourselves out of that hole.”

Flacco returned to the Browns in the offseason and started four games before being traded to Cincinnati.

Stefanski was criticized for not giving rookie quarterback Shedeur Sanders first-team practice reps until he entered in the second half against Baltimore on Nov. 16.

Sanders started the final seven games, going 3-4. He faced growing pains, including a makeshift line and missing the leading

rusher and receiver for the last two games.

Whether Sanders convinced the Browns that he can start next season will be debated in the coming months. “I showed different pieces in different games to all add up to one complete quarterback. I feel like this was a good learning year for me,” Sanders said on Monday.

The Browns joined the 1968 Buffalo Bills as the only teams in the Super Bowl era to have rookies lead the team in passing, rushing, and receiving yards.

The next couple of months

The Browns have two first-round selections in April’s NFL draft — the sixth overall pick and one later in the round, depending on when the Jacksonville Jaguars are eliminated in the playoffs.

Cleveland finished fourth in the league in total defense, with Myles Garrett recording 23 sacks and setting a league single-

season record. However, the offense ranked 30th, averaging only 16.4 points per game, the league’s second-fewest.

Garrett said last Friday that he is not interested in another rebuilding process.

“I’m committed to winning, and as long as the organization is doing so and they’re committed to that same thing, then I’m all on board,” he said. “But if we’re thinking anything other than winning — tanking or rebuilding, that’s not me.”

Stefanski is expected to be a prime candidate for other openings throughout the league. A more immediate concern for the Browns is retaining defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz.

Schwartz has head coaching experience, leading the Detroit Lions from 2009 through 2013. Berry said he would consider Schwartz for the in-house opening.

Even though the Browns’ opening would seem to be geared toward someone with previous experience — such as Minnesota Vikings defensive coordinator Brian Flores or former Packers and Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy — Berry said there would be no preconceived notions going into this search.

“It’s not just leadership by position, but I’d say leadership more globally. Because when you hire a head coach, it’s someone who has to be able to lead your players, staff, and the organization through hardship and crisis,” Berry said. “We’ll be looking for something different than maybe some of the other openings have, based on where they are as a team.

Cardinals fire Gannon following dismal third season

By David Brandt
AP Sports Writer

TEMPE, Ariz. — Jonathan Gannon’s once-promising head coaching tenure with the Arizona Cardinals is done following a dismal third season that started with high expectations but quickly collapsed thanks to injuries, embarrassing gaffes and a long string of losses that became increasingly noncompetitive.

Now the franchise is preparing for a rebuild — again.

The Cardinals parted ways with Gannon on Monday, one day after a 37-20 loss to the Los Angeles Rams. It was the team’s ninth straight loss and 14th setback in 15 games.

“Jonathan is a very smart, motivated, enthusiastic, intelligent, awesome coach,” Cardinals owner Michael Bidwill said. “He made us better. But — as you all know — this is a league about wins and losses.

“The wins and losses speak for themselves.”

Now a new coaching staff gets the chance to rebuild a franchise that will have the No. 3 overall pick in April, but has been to the playoffs just once since 2016.

General manager Monti Ossenfort will return and take the lead in selecting a new coach.

The 43-year-old Gannon finished his tenure with a 15-36 record, including 3-14 this season. Gannon expressed optimism in recent weeks that he would return for a fourth season, but Bidwill had other ideas, opting to look for the franchise’s 13th head coach since moving to Arizona in 1988.

Ossenfort’s job status was also in question coming into Monday, but Bidwill decided coaching was the main problem, not roster construction. The general manager said that didn’t absolve him from taking some of the blame.

“We’re all accountable for where we are and that starts with me,” Ossenfort said. “We all have to look

in the mirror and figure out where we’ve gone wrong, what we can do better and how we proceed from here.”

Pro Bowl tight end Trey McBride was one of many Cardinals players who voiced support for Gannon, but it wasn’t enough to save his job. The 26-year-old McBride was one of the team’s few bright spots this season, catching 126 passes, which was an NFL record for a tight end.

“It’s a team game — there’s a lot of things that went wrong,” McBride said shortly before Gannon was fired. “You lose a couple close ones early and then just a little domino effect from there. Very frustrating season.”

Gannon’s dismissal is a development that seemed unlikely just a few months ago.

The Cardinals had an 8-9 record last year in his second season and the franchise appeared on the upswing. Two-time Pro Bowl quarterback Kyler Murray was in his prime

and Ossenfort spent much of the offseason upgrading the defense, adding veteran pieces like Josh Sweat, Dalvin Tomlinson and Calais Campbell.

Nothing went as planned.

Arizona actually won its first two games of the season, though that would prove to be the high point. The Cardinals lost the next five games by a combined 13 points, including three straight on last-second field goals.

As the losses piled high, so did the injuries. Starting running back James Conner missed most of the season with a foot injury while receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. — who was the No. 4 overall pick in 2024 — had an appendectomy and struggled with inconsistency even when healthy.

Murray hurt his foot in a Week 5 loss to the Titans and hasn’t played since, calling into question whether he’ll be the team’s quarterback in 2026 despite a \$230.5 million, five-year contract that

could run through 2028.

By Week 18, the Cardinals had 25 players on injured reserve or the non-football injury list, which was easily the most in the NFL.

Ossenfort shed little light on Murray’s future with the team on Monday.

“As it pertains to Kyler, Kyler’s under contract,” Ossenfort said. “Jacoby (Brissett) is under contract. Kedon Slovis is under contract. We just came off the last game of the year. Less than 24 hours ago, we just left the field. There will be a time and a place for those discussions.

“When you come off a season like we’ve had, all options are on the table.”

There were also some embarrassing moments that added to Gannon’s problems. Running back Emari Demercado dropped the football just short of a touchdown while celebrating too early against the Titans, which started a stunning collapse that saw a 21-9 lead turn into a 22-21 defeat.

Gannon was caught on camera angrily confronting Demercado, appearing to bump the running back as he swiped his arm downward. The Cardinals fined the coach \$100,000 for his actions.

Arizona was also called for a franchise-record 17 penalties in a 41-22 loss to the 49ers in Week 11. The Cardinals were 0-6 against NFC West opponents this season, losing the last four by a combined 88 points.

Gannon was hired in 2023 after two seasons as the defensive coordinator for the Philadelphia Eagles, who reached the Super Bowl during his final year before losing to the Chiefs.

Roughly three years later, the Cardinals are back on the hunt for a leader.

“None of us expected to be here today. We didn’t,” Ossenfort said. “It’s not just one thing. There’s a lot of things we have to get moving in the right direction and that process starts today.”

Carroll

From page 1B

opportunity in front of us this offseason to set this franchise on a course for success and provide the results that Raider Nation and the Las Vegas community deserves and expects,” Spytek said. “We intend to attack it full on. The work has already begun.”

Linebacker Devin White played with Brady at Tampa Bay, where Spytek was in the front office. All three were key parts of the Buccaneers’ Super Bowl

title in the 2020 season.

“I know Tom is a certified winner in the league, and John Spytek has a winning culture as far as being assistant GM in Tampa,” White said. “I feel like they brought in the right players and people there to be able to go win a Super Bowl. So, hopefully, (Spytek) will take what he learned there and apply it here.”

The club could seek an offensive-minded coach to work with a young quarterback should the Raiders draft Heisman Trophy winner Fernando Mendoza or Dante Moore with the first pick.

That formula worked well this season in Chicago with coach Ben Johnson and quarterback Caleb Williams and in Jacksonville with coach Liam Coen and QB Trevor Lawrence. Both teams are playoff bound after experiencing losing seasons the year before.

There is no one path to success, however. New England hired a defensive coach in Mike Vrabel, and he worked well with quarterback Drake Maye to helped the Patriots go from a 4-13 record to 14-3 and the No. 2 seed in the AFC playoffs.

“It’s definitely a win for

us, I guess you could say, to have the No. 1 pick,” defensive tackle Jonah Lauu said. “You can’t go wrong with that. Whether we use that pick or trade it for more picks, whatever it takes to help us out to win more, I’m all for it.”

Running back Ashton Jeanty, who set a Raiders rookie record this season with 1,321 yards from scrimmage, went through a coaching change at Boise State. The Broncos made an in-season change two years ago, promoting Spencer Danielson and winning back-to-back Mountain West Conference champi-

onships and appearing in last year’s College Football Playoff. “You have to be able to adapt for whoever is coming in the building,” Jeanty said. “Obviously, we changed who was running Boise State and got better, so I’m hoping it will be the same thing.”

Carroll, 74, was the NFL’s oldest head coach, and he came to Las Vegas with the intent of winning right away. He got his wish of bringing in quarterback Geno Smith, whom he coached in Seattle. Neither got the success they expected, with Smith throwing a league-high 17

interceptions as the losses piled up.

This wasn’t what Carroll was used to as a coach. He led the Seahawks to a Super Bowl title and Southern California to two national championships.

But now Carroll has been dismissed, just as Antonio Pierce was last year and Josh McDaniels midway through the 2023 season.

The Raiders have run through coaches since appearing in the Super Bowl in the 2002 season. They have made the playoffs just twice since then, losing both wild-card games.

Schoen set to return as Giants general manager

By Stephen Whyno
AP Sports Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Joe Schoen is returning as general manager of the New York Giants, owners John Mara and Steve Tisch announced Monday, giving the executive they hired four years ago another chance to turn around the beleaguered franchise.

The team is 22-45-1 since Schoen took over, making the playoffs in the first year at 9-7-1 and missing the following three. Assembling talent by drafting receiver Malik Nabers, running back Cam Skattebo, pass rusher Abdul Carter and, most importantly, potential franchise quarterback Jaxon Dart paved the way for Schoen to keep his job and oversee the search for the next coach.

“The 2025 season has been deeply disappointing, and the results on the field have not lived up to the standard this organization and our fans expect,” Mara and Tisch said in a statement. “As previously stated, Joe Schoen will remain our general manager and continue to lead our football operations and the search for our next head coach. Continuity and stability in the front office is important to our progress.”

Schoen pointed to the talent already on the roster as the reason he believes he was retained, despite letting Saquon Barkley leave for NFC East rival Philadelphia in free agency and making several high draft picks that did not pan out.

“Early on, I made mistakes,” Schoen said. “I’m fortunate to have great ownership here where you’re allowed to stub your toe and try to course-correct. Looking at where we’re going, where the build is, what the plan

is moving forward and seeing the vision through is why I think that’s the case.”

Dart said he has enjoyed making and building a relationship with Schoen, who has kept an open line of communication since trading up to draft him last year in the first round.

“There’s a lot of things to be excited for here,” Dart said. “We are going to take the right steps necessary to make sure that we’re in the best position for next year, and I have all the confidence in him.”

Mara and Tisch gave Schoen a vote of confidence in November when firing coach Brian Daboll midway through the regime’s fourth season in charge. The Giants were 2-8 at that time, then lost five of their final seven games under interim coach Mike Kafka to finish with a 4-13 record.

Kafka is getting an interview but is not expected to be seriously considered for the full-time job.

“It’s been a pleasure and an honor to be in this position and in this role,” Kafka said. “It’s a privilege, not a right, and I understand that. The one thing thing I can say is I gave it everything I had.”

Schoen has a big task ahead of him finding a coach who can turn things around and restore relevancy for an organization more than a decade removed from its last Super Bowl win.

Candidates are expected to include offensive gurus to develop Dart, like Seattle’s Clint Kubiak and Washington’s Kliff Kingsbury; experienced former NFL head coaches like Mike McCarthy and Vance Joseph; intriguing defensive coordinators such as Indianapolis’ Lou Anarumo, Green Bay’s



Joe Schoen, senior vice president and general manager of the New York Giants, speaks during an NFL football press conference, Dec. 2, 2025, in East Rutherford, N.J.

Jeff Haflay and the Los Angeles Rams’ Chris Shula — along with anyone who comes available during this cycle.

That includes Kevin Stefanski, who was fired by Cleveland on Monday, and Raheem Morris, who was let go by Atlanta in a full house-cleaning Sunday night.

“We’re going to cast a wide net,” Schoen said. “We are going to try to find — or we are going to find — the best leader for the franchise.”

Skattebo hopes to be back for training camp, if not sooner

Skattebo downplayed his broken right fibula and dislocated right ankle, saying the gruesome injury “wasn’t too bad” and didn’t feel that painful until after surgery Oct. 27. He spent eight weeks in a walking boot and called his recovery “on schedule.”

The fourth-round pick out of Arizona is targeting a return by July, if not spring workouts.

“Training camp’s obviously the goal,” Skattebo said. “That’s the long goal. Hopefully get back by OTAs, but if not there’s

no rush to it. Training camp’s for sure a goal.”

Malik Nabers doesn’t commit to being ready to play Week 1

Nabers tore the ACL in his right knee on Sept. 28 and had surgery to repair it and other damage a month later, one day after Skattebo’s operation. He said his recovery is “right on track” but he is “not really sure” about being ready to play in the season opener.

“If my body doesn’t feel right, then I’m not going to go out there,” Nabers said. “My target date is when my body feels able to be out there. I can continue to be who I am, and my body feels able to do the things that I was doing on the field.”

The 22-year-old walked with a cane Sunday at MetLife Stadium, which he said was a precaution to make sure the injury heals properly.

“I had a lot messed up in my knee, which I was told,” Nabers said. “Successfully healed, successfully operated on, but it’s going to take a little bit of time for everybody. My injury is different than somebody else’s. My body

reacts different.”

Russell Wilson tore a hamstring two days before playing at the Cowboys

Asked about playing next season, veteran QB Russell Wilson revealed he played Sept. 14 at Dallas after tearing a hamstring on the last play of practice two days earlier and did not tell team medical staff.

“Luckily it was the last play of practice, though, so nobody could know,” Wilson said. “I couldn’t tell anybody. I had to go play on it just because I knew the circumstances. I had to play on it, no matter what. I actually ended up going to the Dallas Mavericks’ facility training and just kept it quiet, just tried to get treatment on it and just knowing that I probably couldn’t run from the goal line to the 10-yard line if I wanted to, but I feel like, ‘I got to play this game.’”

Wilson was 31 of 40 for 450 yards and three touchdowns, ran three times for 23 yards and also threw a costly interception in overtime that contributed to a loss that dropped the Giants to 0-2. He never appeared on an

injury report and got one more start before getting demoted in favor of Dart.

Wan’Dale Robinson played through a broken rib to hit the 1,000-yard receiving mark

Wan’Dale Robinson made 11 catches for 113 yards in a 34-10 victory at Las Vegas on Dec. 28 to eclipse 1,000 in a season for the first time in his career, and he did so after breaking a rib in the first half.

“I was just trying to finish the game,” said Robinson, who missed the season finale because of the injury but expects to recover by February. “Once everything wore off, I knew it was a little bit worse than I expected.” Robinson, who turned 25 on Monday, is a pending free agent who said he’d take winning, coaching, money and other factors into account.

“I would love to stay, but business is business the way this league is,” Robinson said. “You never exactly what’s going to happen.”

Theo Johnson says he was healthy enough to attend a Knicks game but not play football

Tight end Theo Johnson caught some heat on social media for attending a Knicks game at Madison Square Garden after being ruled out of playing Sunday because of illness. Kafka explained that Johnson had an infection but not something like the flu or COVID-19 that could put others at risk.

“I don’t even know why it was discussed,” Johnson said, adding it was important to him to take his brother to his first NBA game to celebrate his Dec. 31 birthday. “I’m not playing, and I don’t know why it’s a big deal that I went to a basketball game.”

Three division champs, AFC’s No. 1 seed all decided on Sunday

By Rob Maaddi
AP Pro Football Writer

Aaron Rodgers and the Steelers sent Lamar Jackson and the Ravens home for the playoffs. The Panthers are NFC South champions for the first time in 10 years. The Broncos are the AFC’s No. 1 seed.

Rodgers threw a 26-yard touchdown pass to Calvin Austin III with 55 seconds left and Pittsburgh secured the AFC North title with a 26-24 victory when Baltimore’s Tyler Loop missed a 44-yard field goal wide right as time expired on Sunday night in the final game of the NFL’s regular season.

“It’s pretty emotional,” said Rodgers, who is heading to the playoffs for the first time since the 2021 season. “I’m thankful for these guys. ... It’s been an absolute blessing to be here.”

Carolina clinched its division title when the Falcons beat the Saints 19-17 on Sunday to eliminate the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Denver secured a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs with a 19-3 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers. Seattle earned the NFC’s No. 1 seed on Saturday night, defeating San Francisco 13-3.

The Jaguars won the AFC South with a 41-7 rout of Tennessee. Rookie



Carolina Panthers quarterback Bryce Young, right, hands off to running back Rico Dowdle (5) during the first half of an NFL football game Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, in Tampa, Fla

coach Liam Coen and Trevor Lawrence led the Jaguars to a major turnaround after going 4-13 in 2024.

Wild-card weekend will feature these matchups (all times EST):

- Los Angeles Rams (12-5) at Carolina Panthers (8-9), Saturday, 4:30 p.m.
- Green Bay Packers (9-6-1) at Chicago Bears (11-6), Saturday, 8 p.m.
- Buffalo Bills (12-5) at Jacksonville Jaguars (13-4), Sunday, 1 p.m.
- San Francisco 49ers (12-5) at Philadelphia Eagles (11-6), Sunday, 4:30 p.m.
- Los Angeles Chargers (11-6) at New England Patriots (14-3), Sunday, 8 p.m.
- Houston Texans (12-

5) at Pittsburgh Steelers (10-7), Monday, 8 p.m.

Led by second-year coach Dave Canales and third-year quarterback Bryce Young, the Panthers are making their first playoff appearance under owner David Tepper and first since 2017, when they lost a wild-card game two years after they went 15-1 and lost the Super Bowl.

“I’m so grateful to have one more opportunity to get back to work where we can get on the grass, go through the preparation and have our meetings,” Canales said Sunday. “Once we are in cleats and on that grass it’s like the next thing becomes clear, the focus of what we are doing. ... It’s like here we go, we

get one opportunity and let’s make this statement true: 1-0 with a chance to win a championship. How long can we keep that statement true?”

The Buccaneers (8-9) beat Carolina on Saturday to stay alive for an extra day but lost a three-team tiebreaker with the Falcons also finishing 8-9. Tampa Bay started 6-2 before losing seven of nine, failing to win its fifth straight division title.

While Sam Darnold and the Seahawks (14-3) earned a first-round bye, Brock Purdy, Christian McCaffrey and the injury-depleted 49ers missed an opportunity to play at home the rest of the way. Levi’s Stadium, which is San Francisco’s home

field, hosts the Super Bowl on Feb. 8.

AFC East

New England won its first division title since Tom Brady led the franchise to 11 straight from 2009-19. Buffalo’s run of five consecutive division crowns ended, and the Bills will go on the road in the playoffs.

AFC North

The Steelers won their first division title since 2020.

AFC South

Jacksonville won the division for the first time since 2022, when first-year coach Doug Pederson guided them to a 9-8 record and a wild-card playoff victory over the Chargers, overcoming a 27-0 deficit.

The Texans secured the No. 5 seed with a 38-30 victory over Indianapolis. Houston is in the playoffs for the third straight season under coach DeMeco Ryans and QB C.J. Stroud.

AFC West

The Broncos ended Kansas City’s nine-year run. Denver hasn’t been the No. 1 seed since Peyton Manning and a stifling defense beat Carolina in the Super Bowl 10 years ago.

The Chargers are in the playoffs for the second straight season under Jim Harbaugh.

NFC East

The defending Super Bowl champion Eagles became the first team to win this division in consecutive seasons in two decades. They missed a chance to be the No. 2 seed when they rested starters and lost 24-17 to Washington.

NFC North

The Bears clinched their first division championship since 2018. They lost 19-16 to Detroit but secured the No. 2 seed because the Eagles lost.

The Packers were locked into the No. 7 seed after Week 17.

NFC South

The Panthers backed into a division title but are ahead of schedule in their rebuilding process.

NFC West

The Seahawks earned the No. 1 seed for the fourth time in team history. They reached the Super Bowl the first three, winning once.

The Rams beat the Arizona Cardinals 37-20 to secure the No. 5 seed and a rematch at Carolina. The Panthers beat them 31-28 on Nov. 30.

After falling to secure a bye, the 49ers dropped to the No. 6 seed and will face Philadelphia in a rematch of the NFC championship game following the 2022 season.

Fiesta Bowl QBs take different paths to College Football Playoff

By John Marshall
AP Sports Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Miami’s Carson Beck is the prototypical power-program quarterback, a former four-star prospect with a massive NIL portfolio who knows what it’s like to play on the big stage.

Mississippi’s Trinidad Chambliss nearly gave up football, won a Division II national championship and has shined since being unexpectedly thrust into the spotlight.

Their paths will converge in the desert at Thursday’s Fiesta Bowl, with a spot in the national championship game on the line.

“Only four teams have the opportunity to go play this week,” Beck said. “I’m super grateful for that.”

Beck has been building toward this since starring as a high schooler in Jacksonville, Florida. The 6-foot-4, 225-pound pro-style passer won a national championship in 2022 — the Bulldogs’ second straight — as a backup to Stetson Bennett IV, learning as he went. Beck took those lessons onto the field, throwing for more than 7,000 yards and 52 touchdowns in the next two seasons while leading Georgia to 24 wins.

A knee injury kept Beck out of the Bulldogs’ College Football Playoff loss against Notre Dame in early 2025 and, after initially declaring for the NFL draft, he opted to transfer to Miami, a school with a potent offense and plenty of NIL cash to throw around.

He’s been a perfect fit. Poised and steady, Beck has thrown for

3,313 yards and 27 touchdowns on 74% passing with 10 interceptions. He led the Hurricanes (12-2, CFP No. 10 seed) to wins over Texas A&M and Ohio State in the playoffs and is 36-5 as a starter as he winds down his college career.

“He’s very experienced, he’s been successful everywhere he’s been,” Ole Miss coach Pete Golding said. “He’s always had his teams competing at a championship level and being in the playoffs.”

Chambliss’ career took a different trajectory. With no Division I offers out of high school, the quarterback from Grand Rapids, Michigan, opted to play at Ferris State, where he redshirted the first two seasons — the second due to respiratory issues. He considered transferring to a Division III school to give college basketball a try, but chose to give football one more shot.

Good decision. Chambliss led the Bulldogs to the Division II national championship in 2024, leading to offers from numerous Division I programs. He chose to play at Ole Miss, figuring he would be a backup but at least have the DI experience.

Chambliss’ fate changed when starter Austin Simmons went down with an ankle injury during the second game of the season. Chambliss took off and kept going, throwing for 353 yards against Arkansas in his first start and playing so well he kept the starting job once Simmons was healthy.

The dual-threat quarterback put pressure on defenses all season, rocketing passes into



Mississippi quarterback Trinidad Chambliss (6) celebrates after the Sugar Bowl NCAA college football playoff quarterfinal game against Georgia in New Orleans, Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026.

tight windows with his strong arm while extending plays with his legs.

Chambliss has thrown for 3,660 yards and 21 touchdowns with just three interceptions on 66% passing, adding 520 yards and eight more scores rushing. He led the Rebels (13-1, CFP No. 6 seed) to a win over Tulane in the CFP opening round and picked apart Georgia in the quarterfinals with 362 yards and two touchdowns in a 39-34 win. “He’s a limitless football player,” Miami coach Mario Cristobal said. “Certainly, you could see on the sideline and watching some of the stuff on TV, his leadership skills and the way people gravitate to him. He’s had a tremendous impact on the program and plenty of respect for him.”

So has Beck, setting up a showdown in the desert.



Miami quarterback Carson Beck works out prior to the Cotton Bowl College Football Playoff quarterfinal game against Ohio State Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025, in Arlington, Texas.

Miami’s defense has been airtight in run to CFP semis

By Tim Reynolds
AP Sports Writer

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — The biggest signing for Miami going into this season might not have been quarterback Carson Beck out of Georgia, wide receiver CJ Daniels out of LSU or defensive back Keionte Scott out of Auburn.

It might have been the guy they got from Minnesota.

Corey Hetherman — Miami’s defensive coordinator — was hired away from the Golden Gophers in January 2025 and given a simple yet enormous task: Fix a defense that was so porous last season that not even a 10-win team with a No. 1 draft pick like Cam Ward at quarterback and the top-ranked offense in the country was deemed worthy of a spot in the College Football Playoff.

The result: The Hurricanes are giving up their fewest points per game since 2001, which not coincidentally just happens to be their last national championship season. They’ve given up 9.7 points per game in their current six-game winning streak, plus an even-stingier 8.5 points per game in its two CFP wins over Texas A&M and Ohio State. And now comes another massive test for Miami (12-2), which will take on high-octane Mississippi (13-1) in a CFP semifinal at the Fiesta Bowl on Thursday



Ohio State quarterback Julian Sayin, center, is sacked by Miami defensive lineman Rueben Bain Jr., left, and defensive lineman Akheem Mesidor during the first half of the Cotton Bowl College Football Playoff quarterfinal game Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025, in Arlington, Texas.

night.

“He’s a guy that has no Miami ties,” Miami coach Mario Cristobal said of Hetherman. “But he quickly established himself as a very knowledgeable person with a very high care factor and a ridiculous amount of intensity.”

It all stems from an acronym that Hetherman brought with him to Miami: ESV. It stands for excitement, swarm, violence. That has been the base philosophy for everything that he’s installed at Miami over the last 12 months.

That sort of thinking, combined with a ton of talent, has been the perfect match. Defensive linemen Rueben Bain Jr. and Akheem Mesidor are generally considered to

be first-round draft candidates and have been one of the best 1-2 punches in college football, combining for 19 sacks.

“Those two are game-wreckers,” Beck said. “Even just having one of those guys would be a huge impact to any defense. But being able to have both of them has completely changed the course of this season and the way that our defense plays, right? ... Obviously, they’ve done a phenomenal job, along with the rest of the defense, this year of executing and playing a physical brand of ball, which is a lot of fun to watch.”

It’s far from just Bain and Mesidor leading the way. The secondary that was shelled last season has 16 interceptions this

year, 11 of them coming from either freshman Bryce Fitzgerald or transfer Jakobe Thomas. Scott, who Miami believes was snubbed from some major individual awards, had a game-changing interception for a touchdown in the win over Ohio State. Linebacker Mohamed Toure might have saved the season with a pass breakup near the goal line in the final moments of the win at Texas A&M. The cornerback play is vastly improved. Linebacker Wesley Bissainthe has made big play after big play.

And if all that isn’t enough, Hetherman’s staff includes none other than Hall of Famer Jason Taylor — the defensive line coach who has gone from Miami Dolphins

great to Miami Hurricanes great.

The numbers from 2024 to 2025 are simply staggering. Miami was 69th nationally in points allowed and 27th nationally in yards allowed per game last season; the Hurricanes are fourth in points allowed and 10th in yards allowed this season.

“We have done it differently here than I’ve done it everywhere else, as far as like where we install and do certain things on certain days,” Hetherman said. “And it’s worked out really well. And I think our guys are playing fast with the way we’re doing it right now.”

A loss at SMU on Nov. 1 dropped Miami to 6-2 and basically meant the Hurricanes had to win out to have any chance at making the 12-team CFP field. And in those six games, the Miami defense has more than done its job.

Among the highlights during this streak:

- Had seven sacks against Syracuse in a game where Miami led 38-3 before settling for a 38-10 win.

- Built a 41-0 lead over N.C. State, before surrendering a touchdown with 2:10 remaining with a slew of backups on the field. The Wolfpack came into that game No. 2 in the Atlantic Coast Conference’s offensive rankings and Thomas had a pair of first-quarter interceptions.

- Recorded five sacks at Virginia Tech in a 34-17 win, the most sacks allowed by the Hokies since — ironically — last season’s bowl loss to Minnesota, Hetherman’s last game with the Gophers.

- Held Pitt to seven points in the regular season finale, the Panthers’ lowest total in more than two years.

- Held Texas A&M to three points in the CFP first-round game in College Station, the Aggies’ lowest point total since 2014.

- Held Ohio State to 45 rushing yards in the CFP quarterfinal win, the Buckeyes’ lowest total on the ground since 2011.

Ole Miss has seen all that, of course. The Rebels have high praise.

“They got dudes,” Ole Miss quarterback Trinidad Chambliss said. “Their front seven, their defensive line, they got dudes up front. They’re physical, high motor defense.”

Those dudes are one win away from a spot in the CFP title game, which will be Jan. 19 on Miami’s home field at Hard Rock Stadium.

“Every person in that locker room is playing for each other,” Bissainthe said. “That’s what it looks like when we’re out there. No one is just playing for themselves. The brotherhood, I feel like it’s one of the most important things in a team’s culture. You’ve got to play for the person beside of you.”

Phillies hire Mattingly as bench coach, reuniting him with GM son

By Dan Gelston
AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Don Mattingly made up his mind that 2025 would be his last season in baseball. The 1985 AL MVP and former manager would retire after one final season as a bench coach in Toronto, without or without the World Series ring he's fruitlessly chased since his rookie season with the New York Yankees in 1983.

Mattingly reversed course during a year in which the Blue Jays won the AL pennant because of meaningful talks with his son.

No, not Preston Mattingly, the Phillies general manager who is now his dad's boss after Donnie Baseball signed a multi-year deal to serve under Rob Thomson as bench coach. Well, at least not entirely — father and son had plenty of conversations about role and responsibilities for the reigning NL East champion Phillies.

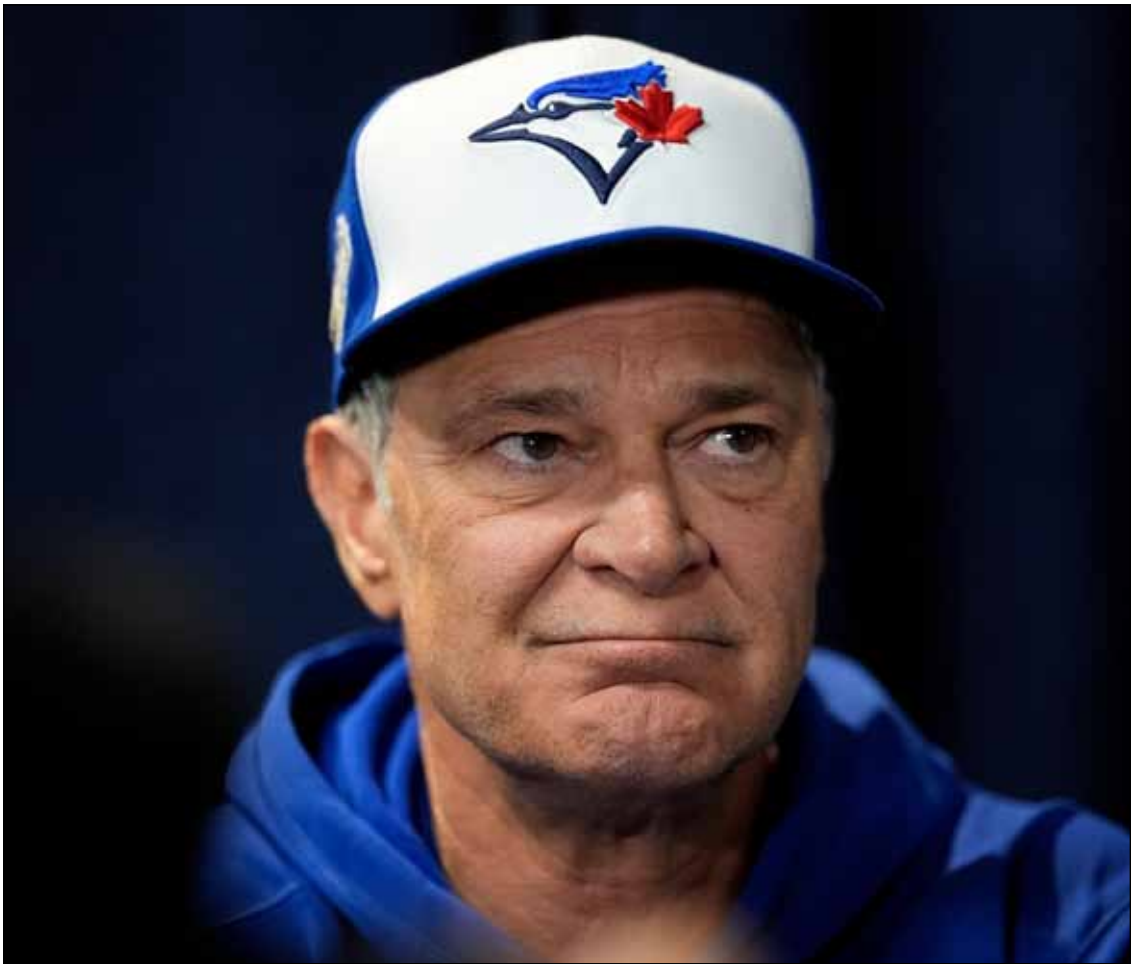
Give 11-year-old son Louis Mattingly the bulk of the credit for flipping dad's decision.

"(He) was kind of like, 'Dad, you can't stop. You've got to keep going,'" Mattingly said with a laugh. "I was like, oh, I don't know about this. But that kind of helped change it a little bit, because I do worry about him missing school and all that stuff that he does."

The 64-year-old Mattingly decided he had more to give the game after the Blue Jays lost the World Series in seven games to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Mattingly gets to chase that ring working for his son, his friend from their old Yankees days in Thomson and maybe even help Bryce Harper — an MVP and a first baseman like Mattingly — regain his elite form.

Mattingly, who will be spending his 23rd straight season as a major league manager and coach, left his role as Toronto's bench coach under manager John Schneider after the World Series.



Toronto Blue Jays bench coach Don Mattingly speaks during a World Series baseball media day, Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025, in Toronto.

"I felt like my mission going to Toronto was, in a sense, accomplished from the standpoint of just helping a young manager get started, who's really talented, a really good manager," Mattingly said. "I knew that part of my job was going to be finished."

Mattingly replaced Mike Calitri, who became the Phillies' major league field coordinator.

"I just think we're adding a great voice, a guy that's had a lot of experience doing this, great pedigree and we're adding really solid, solid guy to a great coaching staff," Thomson said.

Mattingly managed the Dodgers from 2011-15 and the Marlins from 2016-22. He was the 2020 NL Manager of the Year after he led the Marlins to their first playoff appearance since 2003.

He said he no longer had interest in managing again. "I don't think I have the

energy for that anymore," Mattingly said.

Mattingly played 14 seasons as a first baseman in the major leagues, all for the Yankees, from 1982-95. He was a six-time American League All-Star and the 1985 AL Most Valuable Player before retiring. Mattingly captained the Yankees in his final five seasons. He never reached the playoffs until 1995, when he hit .417 with a homer and six RBIs in the five-game Division Series loss to Seattle.

Mattingly's production had been diminished by back injuries since at least 1990, and he finished with a .307 career average, 222 homers and 1,099 RBIs. He received only six votes from the contemporary era committee and fell short again in December of making the Hall of Fame.

"I try not to let myself get optimistic," Mattingly said. "This year, I was a little optimistic. It seemed there was some sort of momentum. I told

myself I won't do that again."

Philadelphia won the NL East for the second straight season and were eliminated by the Dodgers in the NL Division Series. They've reached the playoffs four straight seasons under Thomson — reaching the World Series in 2022 — but have yet to win the franchise's first title since 2008.

The Mattinglys would like to end that streak together.

"To be able to do it with him," Mattingly said, "would be incredible."

Vogelbach returning to Brewers as hitting coach

Former Milwaukee Brewers player Daniel Vogelbach is returning to the organization as a hitting coach on manager Pat Murphy's staff.

Vogelbach, who was a designated hitter and first baseman for the Brewers from 2020-21, is one of four new faces on the Brewers coaching staff that was announced Monday by

president of baseball operations Matt Arnold. The other newcomers are first base coach Spencer Allen, hitting coach Guillermo Martinez and assistant pitching coach Juan Sandoval.

Eric Theisen, who had been a hitting coach last season, was promoted to lead hitting coach.

Al LeBoeuf was Milwaukee's lead hitting coach and Julio Borbón was first base coach last season. They're transitioning to roles focusing on player development and scouting.

Theisen is one of four returning coaches who will have a new role this year.

Jason Lane will no longer be Milwaukee's third base coach and has a new title as offense and strategy coordinator. The new third base coach is Matt Erickson, who also will continue to lead infield instruction as he enters his third year on staff.

Jim Henderson will shift from assistant pitching coach to pitching coordinator.

Coaches returning to the roles they had last year include field coordinator Néstor Corredor, pitching coach Chris Hook and bullpen coach Charlie Greene. Daniel de Mondesert will transition from assistant coach to game preparation specialist, while Christian Correa and Ty Duvall will be the Brewers' bullpen catchers.

Vogelbach, 33, began his coaching career last season as a special assistant for hitting with the Pittsburgh Pirates. His nine-year playing career included stints with Seattle (2016-20), Milwaukee, Pittsburgh (2022), the New York Mets (2022-23) and Toronto (2024).

Allen, who coached Northwestern from 2016-21, is in his fourth season with the Brewers. He was director of player development from 2024-25. Martinez spent last season as the hitting coach for Knoxville, the Chicago Cubs' Double-A affiliate. Sandoval was the Brewers' assistant coordinator of minor league pitching from 2024-25.

Japanese star Imai aims to win championship with Astros

By Kristie Rieken
AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Tatsuya Imai made his intentions clear with his first few words during an introductory news conference with the Houston Astros on Monday.

The Japanese right-hander smiled and before reading a prepared message in English from his phone.

"What's up H-town?" he said. "I am Tatsuya Imai and I'm ready to chase a world championship. Let's go, Houston."

The Astros and Imai agreed to a \$54 million, three-year contract last week, bolstering a rotation searching for reinforcements after ace Framber Valdez became a free agent and appears unlikely to return.

"We needed to beef up our rotation," general manager Dana Brown said. "And so, we felt like he was a fit. He's got the good stuff, really good delivery and we thought his stuff would play here at the major league level."

The 27-year-old Imai joins the Astros after going 10-5 with a 1.92 ERA last season for the Pacific League's Seibu Lions, striking out 178 in 163 2/3 innings. The three-time All-Star in Japan was 58-45 with a 3.15 ERA in eight seasons with Seibu. He has 907 career strikeouts in 963 2/3 innings.

Manager Joe Espada raved about the signing and said his brief chats with Imai so far had centered on one subject.

"You guys well know the



Tatsuya Imai, center, a right-handed pitcher from Japan, is introduced during a press conference in Houston, Monday, Jan. 5, 2026, after signing a contract with the Houston Astros. At left is Astros General Manager Dana Brown, and right is agent Scott Boras.

importance of starting pitching," Espada said. "You can never have enough pitching. One thing about my conversations with Imai has been ... how much he says the word champion. And I love that about him because he's a competitor. You could hear the grit and the toughness, and I'm just excited to have him on board and give him the ball and see him compete for us here."

Astros owner Jim Crane hopes the addition of Imai will be the first of many signings from Asia as the team makes a concerted effort to bring in

more players from continent. He said the Astros recently added people to in Tokyo, Taiwan and Seoul to facilitate that plan.

"We've got scouts over there and people assisting to identify talent over there now," he said. "We just made that adjustment in the summer. Probably didn't have much to do with this one, but it'll have a lot to do moving forward as we work on those markets and try to bring the great players here to Houston."

The signing of Imai is a boost to a team that missed the playoffs for the first time since

2016 in a season decimated by injuries.

Imai said he first thought about a move to the U.S. after meeting agent Scott Boras about five years ago.

"That's when I really began to seriously consider making my way over to the MLB," he said in Japanese through a translator. "It was definitely a moment where I told myself: 'hey, if I put in the work and if I trust myself, I really do have a chance at this.'"

Known as a fierce competitor, Imai was asked where he developed that mindset. He

said that as long as he can remember, he's always hated to lose.

"So ever since I started playing baseball back in elementary school, I always felt like I was a competitor and wanted to always come out on top, throw the ball the furthest, the fastest," he said. "That mentality stuck with me through throughout my career with the Seibu Lions, that mentality of must win and compete and do my best."

But that doesn't mean he doesn't have a lighter side.

"I like to have fun whether it's baseball or non-baseball," he said. "That includes interacting with fans and just having a good time with them as well and I have that feeling of wanting to give back to all those who have supported me. I'm here today because of all the support that I've received."

He showed off his playful side when asked if he'd connected with any of his new teammates yet. He said he received a direct message on Instagram on Monday morning from Josh Hader, Houston's closer, known for his 100 mph-plus fastball.

"Just basically welcoming me to the Houston Astros, and he also sent me his phone number saying: 'Hey, let me know if you ever need anything,'" Imai said. "And his messaging was very fast — 100 miles per hour it felt like — and I definitely wanted to reply back with a 100 mile per hour reply."

Arizona holds onto top spot over Michigan in AP poll

By Dave Skretta
AP Basketball Writer

Arizona held on to No. 1 by a single point over fast-closing Michigan in the AP Top 25 on Monday, making it one of the closest races for the top spot in the 78-year history of the men's college basketball poll.

The Wildcats received 32 of 61 first-place votes and had 1,494 points, while the Wolverines scooped up the other 29 first-place votes from the national media panel. The one-point difference kept the first poll of 2026 from becoming the second ever with a tie for No. 1; Oregon State and Virginia shared the top spot on Jan. 26, 1981.

Arizona has been on top for the last five polls, but the Wolverines have been able to make up ground, thanks in part to becoming the first team in the poll era to win three consecutive games against ranked opponents by at least 30 points apiece. Michigan was 20 points behind Arizona in the last poll.

"All glory is fleeting, as you guys have heard me say," Michigan coach Dusty May said after the most recent blowout, 96-66 over then-No. 24 USC, which also kept his team among the six unbeaten left in Division I men's hoops.

The Wolverines have not been No. 1 since Jan. 28, 2013, and that stint lasted just one week.

The top six remained unchanged Monday from the final poll of 2025: Arizona and Michigan were followed by undefeated Iowa State, UConn, Purdue and Duke, while Houston jumped Gonzaga and BYU and Nebraska rounded out the top 10.

The Huskers, who are riding a nation-best 18-game winning streak dating to last season and are off to the best start in school history, are in the top 10 for the first time since climbing to No. 9 on Feb. 28, 1966. Their



Arizona guard Brayden Burries passes during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game against Utah, Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026, in Salt Lake City.

latest win was a 58-56 slugfest with then-No. 9 Michigan State.

"Happy for Fred Hoi-berg. Not that many years ago, everybody was on his butt," Spartans coach Tom Izzo said afterward. "He did a hell of a job. Nebraska did a hell of a job. That was probably the best game — their biggest game — in 36 years. They responded."

Vanderbilt, another program with scant men's basketball success, remained right behind the Huskers at No. 11. That is the highest the unbeaten Commodores have been since they were No. 7 in the preseason poll for the 2011-12 season.

"SEC play comes at you fast, and now we know the difficulties of this league and what's ahead of us," Vanderbilt coach Mark Byington said after Saturday's win over South Carolina while looking ahead to Tuesday night's matchup with No. 13 Ala-

bama.

Michigan State fell three spots to No. 12 following its loss to Nebraska, while the Crimson Tide were followed by Texas Tech and Arkansas in this week's poll. Illinois, North Carolina, Georgia, Iowa and Louisville rounded out the top 20, while Tennessee, Kansas, Virginia, SMU and UCF completed the initial top 25 of the new year.

The Knights, who opened Big 12 play by beating the Jayhawks, are ranked for the first time since March 4, 2019. "We're not just playing the opponent in front of us. We're trying to play to our standards," UCF coach Johnny Dawkins said. "I just want them to go out there and just follow their hearts, play for each other, and I thought they did that."

Iowa made the biggest move by climbing six spots to No. 19 following its win over UCLA on

Saturday, while Georgia jumped five spots to No. 18. Kansas and North Carolina, which lost to SMU on Saturday, each fell five spots but remained in the poll.

No. 24 SMU is ranked for the first time since finishing No. 11 in the final poll of the 2016-17 season. The Mustangs and UCF joined the Top 25 at the expense of USC and Florida, which lost 76-74 to Missouri on Saturday night. Villanova was the first team outside the Top 25, five points back of UCF. Also on the rise are Utah State and Miami (Ohio), which at 15-0 is the only unbeaten still outside the poll.

The Big 12 led the way with seven ranked teams, including four in the top 10, while the Big Ten had six in the Top 25 and three in the top 10. The ACC and SEC had five ranked teams apiece, and the West Coast and Big East each had one.

Kentucky, Vanderbilt jump into Top 10 of women's poll

Kentucky and Vanderbilt made major jumps in The Associated Press women's basketball Top 25 on Monday after four of the top 10 teams lost last week, causing a shakeup in the poll.

This was the first week since the end of November that a new school had entered the top 10 this season.

The first four remained unchanged with UConn still No. 1, receiving 28 first-place votes and No. 2 Texas getting the other four. South Carolina and UCLA followed while Oklahoma moved up to fifth, the Sooners' highest ranking since they were fourth in the final poll of 2009.

Kentucky and Vanderbilt each rose five spots to sixth and seventh, respectively, after each knocking off then-No. 5 LSU in consecutive games. The Wildcats edged LSU

80-78 on a last-second shot.

Vanderbilt has not been in the top 10 since it was seventh on March 12, 2007. Vandy's 65-61 win over LSU on Sunday was its first against a top five team in 17 years.

The Tigers, one of seven unbeaten teams to lose over the last week, plummeted to 12th.

Maryland fell one spot to eighth after losing to Illinois, its first defeat of the season. Michigan dropped two places to ninth after a loss at Washington, which re-entered the Top 25 at No. 23.

Louisville moved up three spots to 10th. TCU dropped to 13th after losing its first game of the season to Utah in overtime.

There are only four undefeated teams left: UConn, Texas, Vanderbilt and No. 17 Texas Tech.

Besides LSU, Maryland and TCU losing for the first time this season, No. 11 Iowa State, Arizona State, Alabama and Georgia also all suffered their first losses.

Notre Dame saw its run of 85 consecutive appearances in the Top 25 end after the Irish (10-4) lost to Georgia Tech and Duke last week. It was the third-longest active streak, trailing only UConn (615) and South Carolina (257). Notre Dame had been in the poll every week since Nov. 29, 2021.

Louisville's Jeff Walz and Miami's Tricia Cullop both earned their 500th career victories last week, doing so in back-to-back games against Virginia Tech.

Game of the week

No. 2 Texas at No. 12 LSU, Sunday. The Tigers will have a chance to rebound from the tough week with a game against the Longhorns. A victory would get LSU back in the SEC regular-season title race.

Shooting slump drags defending champs Florida out of Top 25

By Mark Long
AP Sports Writer

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Defending national champion Florida shot its way out of the AP Top 25.

The Gators dropped out of the men's college basketball poll Monday, two days after losing at Missouri to open Southeastern Conference play. It was Florida's fifth loss — one more than it had last season — and was the team's latest display of lackluster shooting and less-than-ideal playmaking.

The Gators (9-5, 0-1 SEC) failed to hit double-digit 3-pointers for the 12th time in 14 games and shot a paltry 26% from behind the arc in a 76-74 loss to the Tigers. Florida now ranks 354th in the country in 3-point percentage (28%) heading into Tuesday night's game against No. 18 Georgia (13-1, 1-0).

"Obviously, shooting has been our biggest issue and continues to be," coach Todd Golden said Monday. "When you shot-make, it covers up a lot of your deficiencies, and we have not been able to mask those warts so far this year."

It's been an ugly blemish. Air balls from guards and big men, and no



Florida guard Xaivian Lee (1) shoots over UConn forward Alex Karaban (11) during the second half of an NCAA basketball game, Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025, in New York.

clutch buckets like those Walter Clayton Jr., Alijah Martin and Will Richard made look so easy while carrying the Gators to the NCAA title in 2025.

Florida's starting backcourt, Boogie Fland from Arkansas and Xaivian Lee from Princeton, have been disappointing transfers. Although both have done some good things with the ball in

their hands, Fland is 12 of 60 (20%) from 3-point range and Lee is 24 of 90 (26.7%) from distance.

"We trust those dudes," leading scorer Thomas Haugh said. "Boogie had seven assists the other day and one turnover. Obviously, he didn't make shots, but he was still on the court making winning plays. He's going to knock down those shots. Xaiv-

ian is starting to hit some shots now here, too. Obviously, to win games you do need to make some shots like that."

Fland has missed 23 of his last 27 shots from behind the arc, including a 30-footer that would have won the game at Missouri.

"I don't think taking away freedom is necessarily the best way to

build confidence," Golden said. "I'm not going to say, 'Hey, don't take that shot.' If they're open shots, we want our guys to take them. That's where our program's at. "We're playing with pretty good purpose offensively, and we feel like he's capable and just hasn't been doing it."

Fland shot 36.4% on 3s as a freshman at Arkansas

last season before having surgery on his right thumb. He's yet to return to form and now could be shooting with shaky confidence.

Lee has been much better of late, hitting 11 of his last 26 from 3-point range after missing 51 of his first 64. Florida is hoping Fland can work through his slump, too.

"If he can lift that up and shoot the ball at a 33% clip from deep, we're going to be pretty dang good," Golden said. "I'm still confident in him. I know our staff is. I think the team is. But as we've said, you got to go do it. Once he does, hopefully it'll take some of the pressure off and he can just kind of take off from there."

Golden won't put much stock in falling from the Top 25. He points to Florida still being ranked 15th in KenPom analytics and losing five games — all away from home — by a combined 17 points.

"We're close," Golden said. "I don't think we're necessarily dealing with confidence issues in terms of, 'Are we a good team or are we not a good team?' We know we're a good team, but we got to go out and just finish one or two of these."

Deadly plane crash, burning home highlight NASCAR's offseason of heartbreak

By Jenna Fryer
AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The new year began with a celebration of life for Emma Biffle, the 14-year-old daughter of one of NASCAR's 75 greatest drivers who was among seven people killed when Greg Biffle's plane crashed just a week before Christmas.

The service Sunday was standing room only as the performing arts center in suburban Cornelius wasn't large enough to accommodate the turnout from the racing community and Davidson Day, the private school where many sent their children alongside Emma.

The heartbreaking memorial to a teenager lost in a tragic accident capped a month of sorrow for NASCAR with a new season just weeks away. The grieving isn't over, either, far from it.

It's not like the 2025 season ended on the highest note: Denny Hamlin was again denied his first Cup Series championship on a late sequence of events in the season finale that gave the title to Kyle Larson. When Larson was done with his post-race news conference, there was a toast in honor of Jon Edwards, a Hendrick Motorsports communications executive and mentor to many who died



Flowers are displayed at the NC Auto Racing Walk of Fame for Greg Biffle, Friday, Dec. 19, 2025, in Mooresville, N.C.

Matt Kelley | AP Photo

unexpectedly in April, a loss felt all season.

Then came December, usually the start of a quiet offseason in which teams and drivers and every member of the 38-week traveling circus unwinds. Instead, it opened with a bruising federal trial in which two race teams accused NASCAR of being a monopolistic bully; the Michael Jordan-led lawsuit included eight days of testimony that embarrassed NASCAR until the France family settled a day before Hall of Fame owners Rick Hendrick

and Roger Penske were due to testify. The landmark agreement will change the current revenue sharing model.

The relief was far too brief. Biffle's plane crashed Dec. 18 shortly after encountering an issue after takeoff from the nearby Statesville airport as the group tried to return for an emergency landing. Biffle was among those killed along with his wife, Cristina, five-year-old son, Ryder, and Emma, the only child from his first marriage.

In a letter written by

Nicole Biffle that she was too grief-stricken to read herself at her daughter's service, she agonized over her decision to allow Emma to fly that day knowing Emma wasn't feeling well. She had purchased tickets to Italy as a Christmas present for her daughter the night before the crash.

Ten days after that tragedy, on the 52nd wedding anniversary of Denny Hamlin's parents, the house he built to repay them for their years of sacrifice to get the future Hall of Famer to NASCAR's top level,

burned down. His father, Dennis, was killed. Mary Lou Hamlin was rushed to a hospital burn unit. Hamlin's childhood racing memorabilia was lost along with his father.

If there was any animosity from NASCAR toward Hamlin, a co-owner of the race team with Jordan that sued the series, it dissipated in a heartfelt statement from the sanctioning body.

"Dennis Hamlin instilled a love of racing in his son, and sacrificed greatly to develop Denny into a world-class talent in the sport," NASCAR

said. "We also continue to offer our thoughts and prayers to Denny's mother, Mary Lou, and hope for her full recovery."

The racing community is a quirky one, with hundreds of people living not just in and around Charlotte but feet away from one another in motorhome parking lots in infields around the country for three-fourths of the year. Relationships can sometimes be contentious and grudges held for years, even decades.

But it's also a community all too familiar with death and the dangers that come every weekend on the track. It is tight-knit and almost everyone looks out for each other or steps up in times of crisis and tragedy. There is a solemn pride in helping a fellow racing community member struggling with loss.

In times of tragedy, NASCAR rallies like no other community. And there is more sadness ahead before the racing resumes.

A public memorial will be held Jan. 16 for all seven people lost in the Biffle plane crash. It will be held at Bojangles Coliseum, a venue for Charlotte's minor league hockey team that can be configured to seat more than 10,000 people.

Knowing the NASCAR community, it will be packed.

Gauff clarifies comments on American tennis fans before United Cup loss

The Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Coco Gauff dropped a post on social media just before she started her United Cup singles match Monday, hoping to add context to her recent comments about American tennis fans.

The match didn't go well for the No. 4-ranked Gauff, who lost the first five games and struggled in a 6-1, 6-7 (3), 6-0 loss to No. 42 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in Perth.

It gave Spain a 1-0 lead over the defending champion U.S. team in the Group A contest. But then Taylor Fritz saved a match point on the way to winning the men's singles match and Gauff combined with Christian Harrison in the mixed doubles to clinch victory for the Americans.

"I'm going to clarify because people are dragging this out of context," Gauff said in the pre-match morning social media post, referring to the "worst" comment she made earlier at the tournament when comparing support for players from smaller countries with the kind of support American players receive on foreign soil.

"Those from smaller countries come with their colors and flags and it is clear on who they are supporting," Gauff said in her post. "I was just speaking from my perspective. I understand the financial aspect of things and know tennis is not accessible for everyone, it was more of a comment for those who are already attending and how I wish they were as passionate as those from other countries."

The 21-year-old Gauff, a two-time major winner, said her initial comments were in response to a question at a news conference.

"I was asked and it was simply an observation I noticed



Mahesh Kumar A. | AP Photo

Coco Gauff of the United States plays a forehand to Belinda Bencic of Switzerland during a women's singles match of the China Open tennis tournament, in Beijing, on Sept. 30, 2025.

about other countries vs. mine that is all," she said. "Nevertheless I am grateful for any support no matter how big or small it is."

In a clip of the news conference posted on X, Gauff said: "I feel like we're definitely in the tennis department the worst when it comes to that."

She added that at previous team events she'd noticed that players from other countries get more animated support from their fans than the American tennis players do, but attributed that to the U.S. sports fans having so many successful teams and athletes to support.

Gauff said there was always good support for the Americans from fans who travel to the Australian Open in Melbourne, "but I would like to see some more Americans if we make it to Sydney (United Cup finals) in Sydney than there were last year."

The U.S. team is 2-0 after wins over Spain and Argentina and has clinched a spot in the quarterfinals.

It was close call against Spain. Fritz, struggling with knee pain, produced a 7-6 (4), 3-6, 7-6 (6) win over No. 38 Jaume Munar. He missed two match points on Munar's serve in the 12th game of the third set and then saved one in the tiebreaker before sealing the win to level the contest.

Gauff and Harrison won the doubles 7-6 (5), 6-0 and finished the session signing autographs and posing for photographs with fans, including some waving the American flags.

At a later news conference Gauff was asked if the reaction to her comments on social media had put her off her game.

"No," she said. "And I don't think it was piling on. I was just trying to clarify what I meant. I wrote everything that I had to say on that."

Fritz supported Gauff, saying the reaction to his teammate's comments were an example of people wanting to "assume the absolute worst."

"I was here and I know exactly what she meant," Fritz said. "And she said nothing wrong."

Djokovic withdraws from Australian Open tune-up tournament

Novak Djokovic withdrew from the Australian Open tune-up tournament in Adelaide, saying Monday that he isn't prepared to return to competition ahead of the year's first Grand Slam event.

"To all my fans in Adelaide, unfortunately I'm not quite physically ready to compete in the Adelaide International next week," Djokovic posted

on social media. "It's personally very disappointing to me, as I have such great memories of winning the title there two years ago. I was really excited about returning as it truly felt like playing at home."

Djokovic, a 38-year-old with a men's-record 24 major singles championships, has not played an official match in nearly two full months. He defeated Lorenzo Musetti in the final of the Hellenic Championship in Athens on Nov. 8, then announced he would be pulling out of the ATP Finals for the second year in a row, citing a shoulder injury.

"My focus is now on my preparation for the Australian Open," Djokovic wrote Monday, "and I look forward to arriving in Melbourne soon and seeing all the tennis fans in Australia."

Main-draw play at Melbourne Park begins on Jan. 18.

Djokovic has won the hard-court major that opens the Grand Slam season a record 10 times in all, including most recently in 2023.

He exited in the semifinals each of the past two years, including being forced to stop playing after one set against Alexander Zverev in that round in 2025 because of a torn hamstring muscle.

Djokovic reached the semifinals at all four majors last season.

He begins this season ranked No. 4, trailing only Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner and Zverev.

The Adelaide withdrawal comes a day after Djokovic announced he would be cutting ties with the Professional Tennis Players Association, a group he co-founded that sued the sport's governing bodies last year in a bid to gain more money and influence for the sport's athletes.

Stopping nosebleeds can be simple

This time of year can lead to nose-bleeds, even for people who don't regularly have them.

The cold, dry air we breathe when we go outside can begin to irritate our nasal passages. The warm, dry air produced by our furnaces and heat-ers can further irritate the inside of our noses, which is why it's not uncommon to see some blood when you blow your nose on winter mornings.

The interior of the nose contains lots of tiny blood vessels called capillaries, which normally warm and moisten the air we breathe. Those blood vessels, the culprits in nosebleeds, are prone to irritation. When irritated, they can break, causing bleeding called epistaxis, which can come from one or both nostrils.

Dry air isn't the only thing that can lead to nosebleeds. In fact, they're quite common and can be caused by seasonal allergies, picking your nose, pregnancy, high blood pressure, nose inju-ries, a deviated septum, and colds and other upper respiratory infections.

Most nose bleeding is mild and will subside on its own. No matter the cause, nose bleeding is usually simple to stop. If you have a bloody nose, follow this advice:

Stay calm. Relax as much as possible and breathe through your mouth. Breathing through your nose can raise your blood pressure and poten-tially worsen bleeding.

Sit up and tilt your head forward. Too often, you've seen someone try to stop a nosebleed by tiling their head back. Tiling your head forward prevents blood from going down your throat and into your stomach, which can cause a stom-achache.

Pinch your nose by gently grabbing it above your nostrils. Using your thumb and forefinger, apply light pressure for 10 to 15 minutes. This will help slow or stop the



To Your Health Alfred Casale

bleeding. If you let go after 15 minutes, and the bleeding has not stopped, you may need to try other methods, like an ice pack. Apply a cold compress. Cold makes blood ves-sels constrict, which reduces blood flow and can slow or stop the bleeding. The compress can also reduce any pain and swelling. When applying cold, wrap the compress or ice pack in cloth before holding it against your nose. Don't apply cold directly to the skin.

If bleeding still has not stopped after 10 to 15 minutes, try a nasal spray. Decongestant nasal sprays work by constrict-ing blood vessels, which reduces or stops bleeding. Spray two or three times into the bleeding nostril.

If your bleeding per-sists despite trying these methods, dab petroleum jelly inside your nostril or use a hemostatic bandage designed to help blood clot more quickly.

If your bleeding is heavy and doesn't stop after 20 minutes, seek medical attention. This is especially important if the bleeding began after a head injury, the bleeding is making you lighthead-ed, you're vomiting, or you have chest pain.

If any of those symp-toms arise, get to an emergency room or call 911 right away.

You can take steps to prevent nosebleeds, especially this time of year. Stay hydrated, use a humidifier, avoid picking our nose and blowing it too hard, and apply petro-leum jelly to the lining of your nose if it's irritated.

If you have frequent nosebleeds, discuss it with your doctor. They can help you identify causes and prevent future bleeds.

Dr. Alfred Casale, a cardiothoracic surgeon, is chief medical officer for surgical services for Geisinger and chair of the Geisinger Heart and Vascular Institute. Readers may write to him via ae@timesleader.com.



Honeycutt Submitted Photo



Sharma Submitted Photo



de los Santos Submitted Photo



Miller Submitted Photo



Paige Submitted Photo



Fletcher Submitted Photo



Liu Submitted Photo



Damico Submitted Photo

Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing hosts readings

Wilkes University alumni, faculty, guests artists take part

The Maslow Family Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Wilkes University is host-ing evening readings in a variety of genres, featuring

alumni, faculty, and guest artists. These readings are free and open to the public and will take place dur-ing the program's winter residency, through Jan. 9. Readings will include poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, plays, screen-plays and more.

January 2026 Resi-dency Reading Schedule includes:

Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026, 6:30-7:30 p.m. in the Kirby Salon in Kirby Hall:

Faculty/Alumni Readings by Caroline Hayduk, John Roberts, Tasha Saint-Louis and Marisa de los Santos

Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2026, 4-5 p.m. in the Henry Student Center, 2nd Floor, Jean and Paul Adams Commons: Faculty Read-ings by Shanta Lee Hon-eycutt, Alexis Paige, and Nisha Sharma

Thursday, Jan. 8, 2026, 7-8 p.m. in the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center for the Performing Arts: Fac-

ulty Readings – Plays and Screenplays by Gregory Fletcher, Christine Renee Miller and Gabrielle D'Amico

Friday, Jan. 9, 2026, 7-8 p.m. in the Dorothy Dick-son Darte Center for the Performing Arts: Featured Readings by visiting writ-ers Khadijah Queen and Megha Majumdar, along with faculty mentors Ken Liu and Allison Saff; host-ed by Jessica Goudeau and Christine Renee Miller

Wright Community Health Centers to serve free soup and bread

Food to be available Jan. 19 in Scranton, Feb. 16 in W-B

The Wright Center invites community mem-bers to enjoy a warm, cozy, and free bowl of soup at its community health centers in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. The meals will be available on a first-come, first-served basis due to limited quantities.

The Wright Center for Community Health Scranton, 501 S. Washington Ave., will offer soup and bread donated by or pur-chased from area restau-rants on Monday, Jan. 19, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sponsors include state Senator Rosemary Brown's office, state Senator Marty

Flynn's office; state Rep-resentative Bridget M. Kosierowski's office, the Lackawanna County Sher-iff's Office, Caravia Fresh Foods, Pasquale's Pizzeria and Family Restaurant, the Sacco family, and others. Community officials will join The Wright Center's employees to serve the hot meal.

Additionally, The Wright Center's commu-nity health workers will be at the event to provide information about ser-vices, including help with temporary housing, utility assistance, transportation to medical appointments, health insurance, food, and clothing.

The Wright Center for Community Health Wilkes-Barre, 169 N. Penn-sylvania Ave., will host a

similar event with soup and bread donated by or purchased from area res-taurants on Monday, Feb. 16, from 11:30 to 2 p.m.

The Wright Center will also provide information about whole-person pri-mary and preventive care services, including pedi-

atric and geriatric services, as well as the Ryan White HIV Clinic.

"This is about more than soup – it's

about showing up for our communities," said Gerri McAndrew, director of development and relations for community outreach at The Wright Center. "While we offer a warm

meal, we're also helping people understand the high-quality, whole-person primary health services available to them at The Wright Center, no matter their circumstances."

The events are orga-nized by The Wright Center for Patient & Community Engagement, which helps many of the most under-resourced individuals and families in Northeast Pennsylvania, including those experi-encing food insecurity, homelessness, social iso-lation, poverty, or other hardships.

To learn more, visit TheWrightCenter.org/patient-and-community-engagement. For a full list of upcoming community events, visit TheWrightCenter.org/events.



McAndrew

If someone's always late, is it time blindness, or are they just being rude?



AP File Photo

Commuters walk along a corridor in the World Trade Center, Monday, Nov. 18, 2019 in New York.

By Albert Stumm The Associated Press

Even as a kid, Alice Lovatt was always getting in trouble for being late.

She was often embar-rassed after letting down friends for her tardiness, and she was routinely stressed about arriving at school on time.

"I just don't seem to have that clock that ticks by in my head," said Lovatt, a musician and group-home worker in Liver-pool, England.

It wasn't until she was diagnosed with ADHD at 22 that she learned she was experiencing a symptom sometimes called "time blindness."

Russell Barkley, a retired

clinical neuropsycholo-gist at the University of Massachusetts, is often credited with linking time impairment with people with ADHD or autism. In 1997, he called it "tempo-ral myopia."

But recently, time blind-ness has sparked a social media debate: Where is the line between a genuine condition and someone who is disorganized or just plain rude?

When arriving late means more

Time blindness is the inability to determine how long a task will take or conceptualize how much time has passed. It relates to executive function that occurs in the frontal lobes

of the brain, and it is a well-documented charac-teristic of many people with ADHD, said Stepha-nie Sarkis, a psychothera-pist in Tampa Bay, Florida.

"Anyone can have issues with running late, just with ADHD there's functional impairment," said Sarkis, author of "10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD." "It impacts family life and social life. It impacts work, money management, all areas of life."

Sarkis said if a person's chronic tardiness is "one star in the constellation of symptoms," then it could be evidence of a treat-able disorder. She cited research that stimulant

The New York Times
Crossword

Edited by Will Shortz

No. 1202

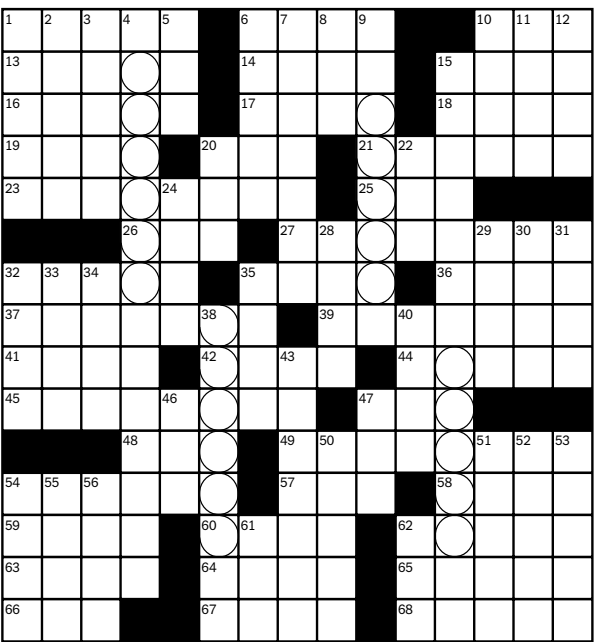
ACROSS

- 1 Posts on a battleship, say
6 Comic Idle of Monty Python
10 Sport with striking and grappling, for short
13 "Grrr!"
14 Pro ____ (fairly divided)
15 Ray of light
16 Cozy corners
17 Carpe ____ (seize the day: Lat.)
18 Breakfast brand originally known as Froffles
19 One of 14 in New York's Liberty Island
20 "Please help!"
21 Decadent dessert
23 Oscar-winning "GoodFellas" actor
25 British "facilities"
26 Number of U.S. states with a single-syllable name
- 27 The Hawks and the Pelicans, for two
32 Longtime home of Stephen Colbert
35 A million years, so to speak
36 Go on for-ev-er
37 Many a TikTok'er's music rendition
39 Deep down
41 "That being said ____," to a texter
42 Like most audiobooks before the rise of streaming
44 "We have the meats" sloganer
45 Herbal remedy in a cleanse
47 Blue Moon, for one
48 "If it be now, ____ not to come": Hamlet
49 Family-friendly film fare
54 The "O" of A.O.C.
57 Little devil
58 Scandinavian city that's home to a bunch of Munch

- 59 Fizzy drink
60 Weak, submissive person, in modern slang
62 Wing it onstage
63 Blast
64 "Superfruit" whose name has two diacritics
65 Carhop's article of footwear
66 Go (for)
67 Sweet person
68 Not nearly as cool

DOWN

- 1 Nicki ____, "Starships" rapper
2 Gas brand owned by BP
3 Dessert item usually eaten moments after it's made
4 Criticize unfairly
5 1960s antiwar grp.
6 Hospital staffer, for short
7 With 43-Down, seeking funding from investors ... or what you're doing in 4-, 9-, 15- and 38-Down?
8 Suffix with Manhattan or Brooklyn
9 Brought up the rear
10 Prefix that's bigger than kilo-
11 Bible figures invoked by O. Henry
12 Love of Spanish?
15 Grey Goose competitor
20 Chicago-to-Indianapolis dir.
22 Hairball hacker



PUZZLE BY JONATHAN BAUDE

- 24 Subject of the Tenth Commandment
28 Bit in a friendship bracelet
29 Many a Mideast native
30 1970s sitcom title character who "can turn the world on with her smile"
31 Superiors to cpls.
32 Oaf
33 What spicy food has
34 Lay eyes on
35 Clearasil target
38 "Huh, better than I expected"
40 Ring of light
43 See 7-Down
46 Top of the hour?
47 Electric guitarist's accessory
50 Communication system for almost two billion people
51 Belief system for almost two billion people
52 Top-tier
53 Not drunk
54 Dos cubed
55 Business that's owned and managed by its members
56 Frequently
61 Prefix with conscious
62 Communication syst. in which the letter Z is drawn with one's index finger

Online subscriptions: Today's puzzle and more than 7,000 past puzzles, nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year).
Read about and comment on each puzzle: nytimes.com/wordplay.

WHAT'S UP, NEPA?

GREATER WILKES-BARRE

Teen Movie Night, 5:30 p.m. Wednesday. Join in the Reading Room of the Osterhout Free Library, 71 S. Franklin St., Wilkes-Barre, to see the beloved '80s fantasy adventure "The Neverending Story." All ages welcome; rated PG. Snacks and drinks will be provided. Bring friends, settle in with popcorn, and prepare for flying luckdragons and heroic quests ... and, yes, the movie does eventually end.

Big Band Society Dinner Dance, Friday at East Mountain Holiday Inn, 600 Wildflower Drive, Wilkes-Barre. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., dinner is at 6 p.m., and dancing will take place from 7 to 10 p.m., to the music of DJ Kristina. The cost is \$40 for members and \$45 for non-members. There is a choice of beef tips, chicken Marsala, or tilapia stuffed with seafood. For information, call Mary Ann at 570-298-2616 or contact bigbandsocietynepa@gmail.com.

Eagle Watch expeditions, leaving from Nescopeck State Park, 1139 Honey Hole Road, Drums, for all-day excursions to eagle hotspots in Northeast Pennsylvania. Jan. 29 for "Women in the Wilds," and Feb. 3 and Feb. 5 for senior citizens. Space is limited, and registration is required. For information and to register, see events.dcnr.pa.gov. If you need an accommodation to participate, call 272-808-6189.

WYOMING VALLEY

Wyoming Valley Chapter of The Embroiderers' Guild of America public stitch-in from 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday at Barnes & Noble Bookstore in the Arena Hub Plaza in Wilkes-Barre Twp. The public is invited to bring something to stitch along or to stop by and see what the group is doing.

KINGSTON/WEST SIDE **COCU Grief Share** is meeting from 1 to 3 p.m. Wednesdays in the Church of Christ Uniting, 190 S. Sprague Ave., Kingston. It is a program that utilizes conversation and video presentations to support individuals grieving the loss of a loved one. Call Phyllis for information at 570-690-1342.

TUNKHANNOCK **40th anniversary screening of "Labyrinth,"** starring David

Bowie. The Dietrich Theater in downtown Tunkhannock will show the film on its big screen at 7 p.m. Thursday and at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$8.50. Directed by Jim Henson, "Labyrinth" tells the story of a 16-year-old girl, played by Jennifer Connelly, who is given 13 hours to solve a labyrinth and rescue her baby brother from the Goblin King. Tickets are available at the ticket booth or by calling 570-836-1022 ext. 3.

Winter Fest 2026 Preview Day, 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. Feb. 12. Do you want to get a better idea of what the Dietrich's Winter Fest 2026 movies are about? Join in for this pre-event for Winter Fest 2026 and screen all 21 movie trailers of the films featured in this festival. Admission is free, and concessions are available at a discounted rate. For information, call the Dietrich at 570-836-1022 ext. 3.

MOUNTAIN TOP

Mountain Top Social Club will resume meetings Feb. 10 and Feb. 24 at the American Legion, 1550 Henry Drive, Mountain Top. For club information, call Carol, vice-president, 570-868-5990. For trip information, call Dolores, trip coordinator, 1-732-690-9609. Membership in the club has been temporarily closed. Check back for information.

BACK MOUNTAIN

Bingo Night at Northmoreland Volunteer Fire Co., 1618 Demunds Road, Centermoreland, 6:30 p.m. Jan. 19. No reservation is needed for Monday Night Bingo. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.

A new Grief Share support group will begin at Cross Creek Community Church, 370 Carverton Road, Trucksville, 570-696-0399, on Jan. 14 and will meet every Wednesday, 1 to 3 p.m., through April 1. The support group is free and open to the public. Register at griefshare.org/findagroup.

Roast Beef Dinner at Northmoreland Volunteer Fire Co., 1618 Demunds Road, Centermoreland, next to Centermoreland Store, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Jan. 28. Eat in or take out. Dinner includes roast beef, real mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetables, and dessert. The February dinner will be on Feb. 28.

See WHAT'S UP | 6C



AP File Photo

Commuters ride the subway in New York on April 5, 2024.

Late

From page 1C

medication prescribed for other ADHD symptoms, such as inattention or restlessness, is also effective at treating time blindness. That's not to say, however, that everyone who is chronically late has ADHD — or a built-in excuse.

Consider the reason for being late

Jeffrey Meltzer, a therapist in Bradenton, Florida, counsels people who never show up on time to examine the core issue behind their lateness. Some people who hate small talk fear arriving early, which could point to anxiety as the underlying issue, Meltzer said. Others may feel they don't have much control over their lives, so they try to reclaim a few minutes from responsibilities. "It's the same psychology concept behind revenge bedtime procrasti-

nation," he said, referring to the urge one may have to stay up later to recoup personal time after a busy day.

In those cases, one tool is to create a small "coping card" to refer to regularly, he said. After determining a reason for chronic lateness, take an index card and write down a reframed thought about that reason and a consequence of being late.

For instance, on one side write, "Attending this meeting doesn't mean that I lose my freedom." On the other side, write: "Being late again will upset people at work."

Meltzer said the hardest reason to change the habit would be something that early-arrivers often attribute to late-comers — a sense of entitlement. People who feel their time is more important than others' time may give themselves permission to be late.

But Meltzer said those people would also exhibit entitlement in other areas,

such as parking in a spot designated for people with disabilities or tending to make a grand entrance at an event.

"Maybe they're 20, 30 minutes late, and it's like, 'Oh, look who is here,'" he said. "So it's a way to kind of get attention."

What to do about it

Whether a person has ADHD or not, they're still responsible for their actions, said Sarkis, who was also diagnosed as an adult and struggles with managing time.

The good news is that the same interventions that help people with ADHD can work for all late-arrivers.

Sarkis said using a smart watch to set alerts can help with knowing when you need to leave, although having analog clocks around also helps. Relying only on your phone to see the time creates more distractions.

She also suggested breaking tasks down into a checklist of smaller

parts and resisting the urge to cram too many activities into one day.

Lovatt has learned to give herself much more time than she thinks she needs. She also uses Forest, a time management app, and another app to lock herself out of other apps on her phone to help keep track of time while concentrating.

Particularly helpful has been making granular lists of how long things take. Getting out the door in the morning felt like it took 20 minutes until Lovatt listed every step from bed to door.

"Walk downstairs, one minute. Find shoes, one minute. And I had a list that was a whole page long of literally walking between rooms," she said.

She learned it instead took 45 minutes.

"It doesn't work, like, 100% of the time. But generally, I am a lot more reliable now."

Albert Stumm writes about food, travel and wellness. Find his work at <https://www.albertstumm.com>.

CONTACT US

Mary Therese Biebel,
A&E Reporter
570-991-6109
mbiebel@timesleader.com

COMMUNITY NEWS

Birthdays for children 16 and younger and announcements for weddings, anniversaries and engagements are published for free. All content is subject to editing for style and to fit space allotted in the Times Leader on any given day. All other community news submissions are subject to the editorial discretion of Times Leader staff, and the publishing date of any submission cannot be guaranteed.

For birthdays, include phone number, name, age and birthday, names and ages of siblings, parents, grandparents and towns of residents. For weddings, anniversaries and engagements, provide the names and hometowns of the individuals in the couple, the names and hometowns of the couple's parents, and some details about the ceremony; i.e., location, officiant, date to be wed.

Submissions can be emailed to ae@timesleader.com or sent to: Times Leader, 90 E. Market St., Wilkes-Barre, PA, 18701. Photos are not returned unless requested. Time-sensitive material should be received no later than two weeks prior to the event.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TOAFO

NLRIE

IDISGN

GIBREG

©2026 Tribune Content Agency, LLC
All Rights Reserved.

Get the free JUST JUMBLE app - Follow us on Facebook

Wow! I can't keep up with you. How do you do it?

I want to be like him at his age.

He's an inspiration.

Age is just a number. I choose to ignore it.

THE OLDEST WEIGHTLIFTER AT THE GYM WAS 80 YEARS OLD AND STILL ---

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: ENJOY THUMB BLEACH HAZARD
Answer: The tree-trimming service was hiring new employees in order to — BRANCH OUT

BLONDIE

By Dean Young and John Marshall



BEETLE BAILEY

By Mort, Greg and Brian Walker



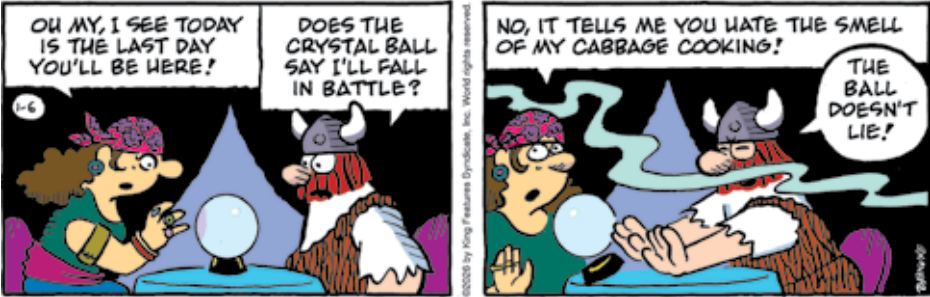
MACANUDO

By Liniers



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE

By Chris Browne



HI AND LOIS

Written By Brian & Greg Walker; Drawn By Chance Browne



THE BRILLIANT MIND OF EDISON LEE

By John Hambrock



ZITS

By Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman



RHYMES WITH ORANGE

By Hilary Price



Hank Ketcham's DENNIS THE MENACE



THE LOCKHORNS

By Bunny Hoest & John Reiner



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Nuisance
- 7 Miles off
- 11 "Foundation" author
- 12 Map region
- 13 Act as host
- 15 Kidney-related
- 16 Saloon staple
- 18 Calendar span
- 21 Copier problem
- 22 Trembled
- 24 PC key
- 25 Eat late
- 26 2016 Olympics host
- 27 Connects with
- 29 Musical number
- 30 Crystal gazer
- 31 Soup buys
- 32 Diamond unit
- 34 Surprise while questioning
- 40 Penn of "Milk"
- 41 Try hard
- 42 Cut drastically
- 43 Gave clues

DOWN

- 1 Bowler, e.g.
- 2 Tough wood
- 3 Polite address
- 4 Cookout treats
- 5 Inferior
- 6 Writer Hunter
- 7 Showy shrub
- 8 In favor of
- 9 Tiny worker
- 10 Spanish king
- 14 Settle a bill
- 16 Foundation
- 17 Game host
- 19 Soap Box Derby setting
- 20 Rider's straps
- 21 Airport sight
- 22 Status —
- 23 Beagle or boxer
- 25 Scarecrow fill
- 28 Minute part
- 29 Titan circles it
- 31 Prickly plants
- 33 Reckless org.
- 35 Spell
- 36 "Norma —"
- 37 Scoundrel
- 38 Complete
- 39 Complete

C	R	U	S	T		S	T	I	F	F
O	O	M	P	H		P	A	D	R	E
O	N	A	I	R		I	N	L	E	T
			N	E	O	N		E	T	A
P	L	A	C	E	B	O	S			
L	O	L	L		S	U	P	P	L	E
O	L	L	A	S		T	I	L	E	R
D	A	Y	S	P	A		N	E	A	R
			S	I	D	E	C	A	R	S
G	O	T		N	O	S				
A	D	O	B	O		S	C	R	A	P
S	E	R	I	F		A	L	I	B	I
P	R	O	O	F		Y	E	M	E	N

Yesterday's answer

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				

1-6

BABY BLUES

By Jerry Scott & Rick Kirkman



PARDON MY PLANET

By Vic Lee



CONCEPTIS SUDOKU

by Dave Green

King Classic Sudoku

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

Difficulty: ★★

1/6

Today's Solution

1/6									★★	Difficulty:
2	7	4	3	8	1	7	9	5	6	9
9	7	6	3	2	5	4	8	1		
8	5	1	4	9	6	2	3	7		
3	6	7	2	4	8	5	1	9		
4	2	5	1	6	9	8	7	3		
1	9	8	7	5	3	6	2	4		
6	8	9	5	3	1	7	4	2		
5	1	4	9	7	2	3	6	8		
7	3	2	6	8	4	1	9	5		



Having A Yard Sale?

Call your classified department to schedule your ad today!



This image released by Voracious shows a cheese ball recipe from the cookbook 'Deep Run Roots: Stories and Recipes from My Corner of the South' by Vivian Howard

Cheese balls are back

How to make this classic party dish cool again

By Vivian Howard
Voracious

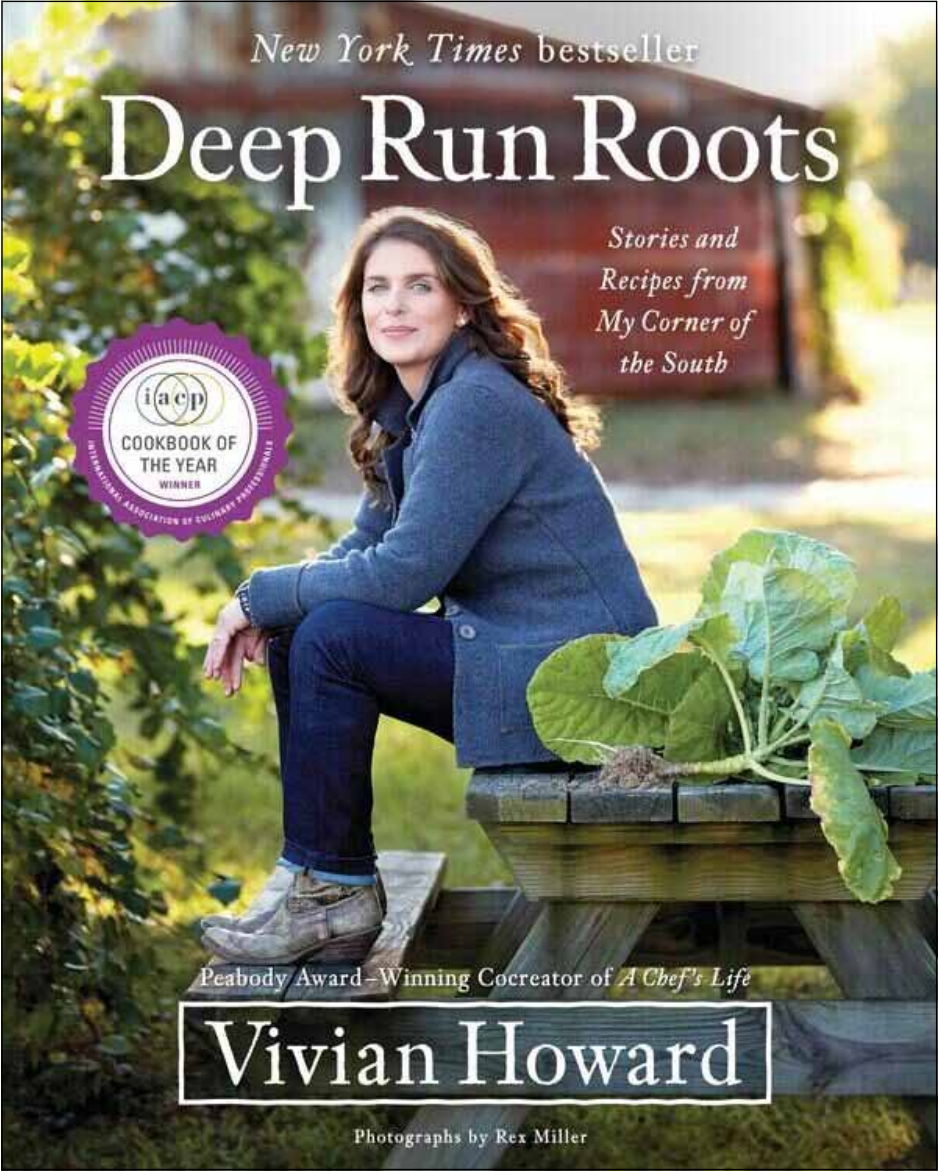
The cheese ball is a clich . I believe, however, that like the pig in a blanket and the baked potato, the cheese ball is so clich d it has actually become cool.

Socially acceptable or not, when this dish from my cookbook “Deep Run Roots” is put out at a party of any kind, people hover over it like it’s a crystal ball.

Once you get used to the idea of making a cheese ball, keep a few things in mind. Bring it out at least 30 minutes before you plan on serving it. This forethought will make it spreadable and allow the complexity of its flavor to come through. Also, consider doubling the recipe. A fully formed cheese ball freezes and travels nicely. And, last, keep your cracker choice simple. Sea salt or plain Jane is the way to go here, possibly everywhere.

Note: This recipe calls for dates. Please do not use pre-chopped dates from a bag. They are covered in

See CHEESE | 6C



This image released by Voracious shows ‘Deep Run Roots: Stories and Recipes from My Corner of the South’ by Vivian Howard.

Hints

From page 4C

I hadn’t paid much attention to your mom’s or your columns until recently. I’m 81 years old, and when I recently started asking the butcher questions, he looks at me like, “Have you been in the convent or prison that a woman your age doesn’t know these

things?” So, finding your column has indeed been “a find.” Thank you. — Patricia, via email

COOKIE LOVERS

Dear Heloise: We are cookie lovers and have several favorites that we buy regularly. I have three containers for them that are not see-through. I clip the picture of each one from the package and tape

it to the lid. No more opening every container to find the cookie you want! Love your hints that make life easier. Thank you, Heloise! — Sharon Smith, in Fairfield Township, Ohio

TWO SPRAYS ONLY

Dear Heloise: Gentlemen of all ages — years ago, while I was at a department store, I overheard a lady explain to

her teen-aged son, who was about to sample a cologne, that all he needed to do was to give two light sprays into the space in front of him and then to walk into the mist. This was very sound advice. — D.G., in Chino Hills, California

Send a money-saving or time-saving hint to Heloise@Heloise.com. I can’t answer your letter personally but will use the best hints received in my column.

Annie

From page 4C

relaxing while I clean, him being praised for “helping,” him asking me what’s for dinner like it’s a surprise that dinner happens every day. I don’t want to turn into a bitter person. I also don’t want to wake up at 60 and realize I spent decades being “fine” while feeling lonely.

How do you ask for real partnership without making it sound like a courtroom argument? And how do you know if this is just a stressful season, or a sign that something deeper is

missing? — Tired of Carrying It All

Dear Tired: You’re not too sensitive, and you’re not alone. A lot of marriages slowly slide into a pattern where one person becomes the “air traffic controller” of the whole family, and it’s exhausting in a way people don’t always see.

When your husband says, “Just tell me what you need,” he may think he’s being helpful. But what you’re asking for is not another task list. You’re asking for shared ownership, shared noticing, shared caring. That’s a different conversation.

Pick a calm moment and

be specific, without building a case. Try: “I don’t just need help. I need us to run this life together. I need you to notice what needs doing and take it on without being asked.” Then choose two or three concrete changes that would make you feel less alone, like owning the school calendar, handling dinner two nights a week from start to finish or being the point person for one child’s needs.

If he gets defensive, don’t soothe it away. Stay steady and kind. Tell him something like, “I’m bringing this up because I love you and I don’t want resentment to grow.”

And if you two can’t shift this on your own, a good couples counselor can translate before the distance hardens.

Ann Landers used to say the trouble with most of us is we’d rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism. Tell the truth kindly now, while there’s still plenty to save.

“Out of Bounds: Estrangement, Boundaries and the Search for Forgiveness” is out now! Annie Lane’s third anthology is for anyone who has lived with anger, estrangement or the deep ache of being wronged — because forgiveness isn’t for them. It’s for you. Visit <http://www.creatorspublishing.com> for more information. Follow Annie Lane on Instagram at @dearannieofficial. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

What’s the deal with ... banana water?

By Deborah Vankin
Los Angeles Times

If a can of coconut water and a banana smoothie had a baby, it might be banana water. The latest plant-based hydration beverage on the market is being touted as “the peel good beverage” that offers “a bunch of nutrients.” And it’s drumming up attention on social media.

“Boyfriend says it has aromatics of slightly overripe banana,” one Reddit user, [leemoon-grass, commented](#), adding, “It honestly isn’t that bad.”

“It smells like baby food,” [lsp2c](#) said on Instagram.

Not to be confused with banana water for plants, a DIY fertilizer made by soaking banana peels in water to extract nutrients, such as potassium and vitamin C, for your flora. Or homemade banana drinks, such as hot water [steeped with banana peels](#) and strained, or blended banana smoothies.

The new drink, sold in supermarkets, is being marketed as an alternative to sports drinks, a sort of coconut water 2.0.

But some have taken to social media with questions: “How do you think you juice a banana?!” [tybottofficial](#) asked on TikTok, while unpacking a box of organic banana water from Woodstock. “I wonder if they’re just in a factory, like, you know, really milking these bananas, I guess?” (He gave the drink a 7.5 out of 10.)

Both [Woodstock](#) and [Banagua](#), leading manufacturers of banana water, make their banana water in Thailand from organic “Thai golden” and “Thai cultivated” bananas, which are shorter and stubbier-looking than the standard yellow bananas sold in most American supermarkets and which have a slight pinkish tint. The fruit gets pinker in the processing and the drink has a pinkish hue.

If you’re a label ogler, the ingredient list will put you at ease. Banana water contains just one ingredient: bananas. There’s no significant water added to it. A banana is 80% water, Banagua co-founder Rob Smithson says, and the processing of the drink (an “enzymatic process”) separates the water from the pulp — the drink is slightly viscous but not pulpy.

Woodstock’s bananas are steamed and mashed with “proprietary enzymes” to release nutrients. “Think of it as liquefied bananas,” says Bruce Bruemmer, vice president of brand management at UNFI Brands+, Woodstock’s parent company.

The upshot? Both companies say their banana water is especially healthy, brimming with electrolytes like potassium, B6 and magnesium, as well as minerals and antioxidants such as vitamin A and C. The drink has no added sugar, and zero fat, sodium and cholesterol, though a 330ml can does have about 13 grams of carbohydrates, slightly less than Naked coconut water’s 14 grams in a container of the same size.

So how healthy is banana water, what does it taste like, and is it worth the hype? Here’s the deal.

Manufacturer’s claims: “Our banana water has 205 mg of magnesium — 50% of the daily value,” Smithson says of Banagua’s Original Banana, which went on the market in July 2025. “And it’s especially hydrating — probably 2-3 bananas per can, which you can bring anywhere and you don’t have to worry about moldy bananas. And just 50 calories — Naked’s coconut water has 60.”

Woodstock’s 500ml can of banana water, which went on the market in March 2024, has just 80 calories. “Our Woodstock Organic Banana Water stands out for its great taste and natural hydration,” Bruemmer says, “delivering 765mg of electrolytes — similar to many sports drinks — without any artificial colors, flavors or preservatives.”

Nutritionists’ take: “It’s probably a sequel to coconut water,” says [Dr. Thomas Sherman](#), a professor of pharmacology and physiology at Georgetown University Medical Center. “It would appeal to people who are worried about animal wellness and saturated fat in their milk drinks or who are worried about too high sugar — so this fits the bill. But I question its effectiveness — these types of beverages offer such trivial amounts of electrolytes compared to what’s already in our food. And it’s expensive.

Sherman says that, in the end, it comes down to the consumer’s intentions for choosing banana water.

“If you’re buying it because of the taste, and you want to support a plant-based beverage, and [because] it’s fairly low sugar, then fine,” he says. “But if you’re buying it because you’re interested in getting more potassium and magnesium and calcium with low sodium, then it’s silly because just *eat plants, eat food*, that’s going to supply hundreds of times more potassium and calcium and magnesium.”

See BANANA | 6C

Does your book club have problems?

Facilitators tackle ‘behavioral issues’

By Chris Hewitt
The Minnesota Star Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS — On occasion, what a book club needs most is for one person to tell another person to shut up.

That’s when a book club facilitator could help.

“When a club wants a facilitator, it’s usually because of [behavioral issues](#),” said Cindy Kalland, who lives in Eden Prairie and is a retired teacher. “It may just be that they’re missing something — that no one is doing the work — but I think the biggest thing that annoys people in book clubs is when there is a member who dominates too much.”

Kalland didn’t know book club facilitators were a thing until 2008, when she heard that a friend’s club — one that Oak Ridge Country Club in Hopkins had begun for its members — needed a new one. Facilitators generally participate in the selection of titles, do research to enrich the discussion, compile reviews, keep things moving along and, sometimes, urge a member to share less.

“I would pull someone aside and say, ‘Maybe just step back a bit and

let someone else talk’ or ‘I noticed you bristling a bit when someone said something. Maybe just watch that,’” said Kalland. “I tried to be nice. Teachers call them ‘hamburger compliments’: ‘You’re really smart. But would you mind watching out for this behavior? But I really appreciate what you add to the group.’ You put the hamburger between two compliments.”

Possibly, the monopolizer doesn’t realize they’re monopolizing.

“If someone is taking over the conversation, I do sometimes have to take over the microphone and say, ‘Now, let’s give someone else a chance,’” said Jeff Kamin, who founded [Books & Bars](#). Its 50 or more attendees meet at breweries in Minneapolis and St. Paul to chat about books while they wait for the foam on their beers to subside.

Alice Moody, who founded the Chicago-based Between the Covers, which leads book discussions among other bibliophilic activities, said she doesn’t run into that many people who won’t cede the floor. But, like comedians and hecklers, figuring out how to politely deal with those folks is part of the job.

“There are those times someone will say, ‘What are you talking about?

That didn’t happen,” said Moody, whose group also offers other services, including book suggestions and advice on starting a club. “That’s part of a facilitator’s role, to say, ‘Let’s give that person a break.’ I’m literally making sure everyone feels comfortable sharing their reactions.”

All three facilitators are essentially self-taught. Like Kalland, Moody is a former educator, whereas Kamin has experience in improv comedy and broadcasting. All three see research as the backbone of their work, since anyone can go online and get a bunch of discussion questions (although be warned; Kalland says those questions are often “dumb”).

Kalland isn’t facilitating right now — she used to moderate several clubs a month — but still has huge stacks of back-ground

materials on popular titles such as Brit Bennett’s “The Vanishing Half” and [Amor Towles’](#) “The Lincoln Highway.” She charged \$150 per meeting, a fee generally divided among the attendees. Kamin accepts tips, but Books & Bars is free. Moody charges \$400 for a 90-minute session.

Just as every reader has a unique take on a book, each facilitator has a different emphasis. Kalland urges groups to explore the differences between good and excellent writing. Moody says one of her strengths is making connections between different types of literature.

Kamin likes getting reluctant chatters to participate by using ice breakers related to the month’s book, such as “What’s the scariest book you ever read?” when

Books & Bars tackled [Grady Hendrix’s](#) horror novel “The Final Girl Support Group.”

He said the benefit of Books & Bars is similar to a more traditional club that meets in members’ homes. “One of my favorite things to hear, which I hear from a lot of people, is, ‘You know what? I never would have picked this on my own and I wasn’t sure of it but I’m glad this group challenges me to read outside my comfort zone,’” Kamin said.

All three agree that plenty of book clubs (like Kalland’s own) work just fine on their own, without need for a facilitator. But Moody says a few signs indicate when one could help.

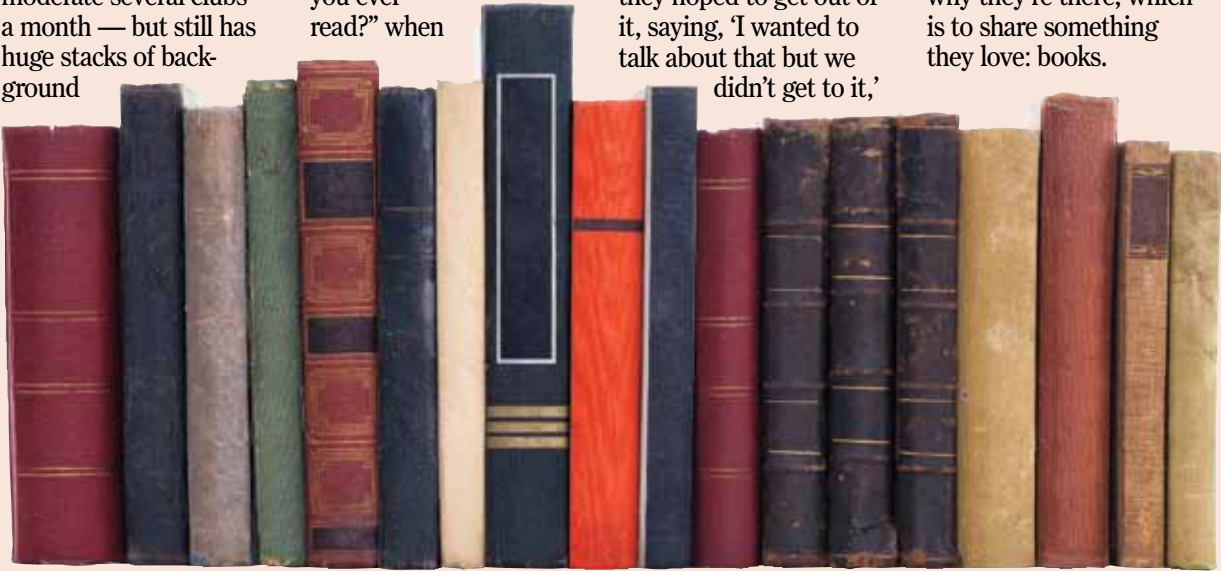
“When people aren’t getting out of it what they hoped to get out of it, saying, ‘I wanted to talk about that but we didn’t get to it,’

‘It seemed like we talked about everything’ but the book this month’ or ‘We always read the same books,’” Moody said. In those cases, she said an expert — someone who doesn’t know anyone in the group — will have ideas.

Those experts can profit from their own advice about not dominating, of course. Kamin said the best Books & Bars events are the ones where everyone else is talking so much that he barely hears his own voice.

“Just like when I was a teacher and wanted the kids to be engaged, I don’t want this to be ‘The Cindy Show,’” Kalland agreed.

With or without a facilitator, sometimes what readers in a club need is to remind themselves why they’re there, which is to share something they love: books.



What’s up

From page 2C

LACKAWANNA COUNTY

St. John’s Russian Orthodox Church, 706 Hill St., Mayfield, Liturgy of St. Basil the Great at 8 a.m. Tuesday, with great

complines and litiya and matins at 7 p.m. At 8:45 a.m. Wednesday, Nativity of Our Lord celebration of the hours, followed by Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 9 a.m. On Thursday, the Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos, Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m., followed by an open house in the church center. On Friday, the feast

of St. Stephen, 8 a.m. with Divine Liturgy. Car-rollers will visit homes of parishioners on Thursday, by request only. Call the church at 570-876-0730.

Trinity Lutheran Church Fun for Seniors Group, from Trinity Lutheran Church, 205 West Grove, Clarks Summit. The church continues to sponsor a weekly Fun

For Seniors Exercise for Balance and Strength class with Mindy, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., each Wednesday. For information, contact office@trinitylutherancs.com.

REUNIONS

Coughlin High School Class of 1959 will meet at 2 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 22, at Adelina’s Restaurant,

77 E. Market St., Wilkes-Barre, in Genetti’s Best Western. All classmates, spouses, and members of Coughlin High School, Classes of 1958 and 1960, are welcome. Call Fran at 570-261-4121 if you plan to attend.

Pittston Area High School Class of 1981 is planning a 45th anniversary reunion for June 6 at

Colarusso’s La Palazzo on Birney Avenue in Moosic, and the committee is trying to get in touch with classmates. If you have contact information for yourself or any other classmate, contact Kelly Gowran Steiner at 480-414-5671 or kellysteineraz@gmail.com. For information, see the Pittston Class of 1981 Facebook page.

Banana

From page 5C

Categorizing banana water as a sports drink is problematic, adds [Vanessa King](#), a registered dietitian nutritionist specializing in supplements.

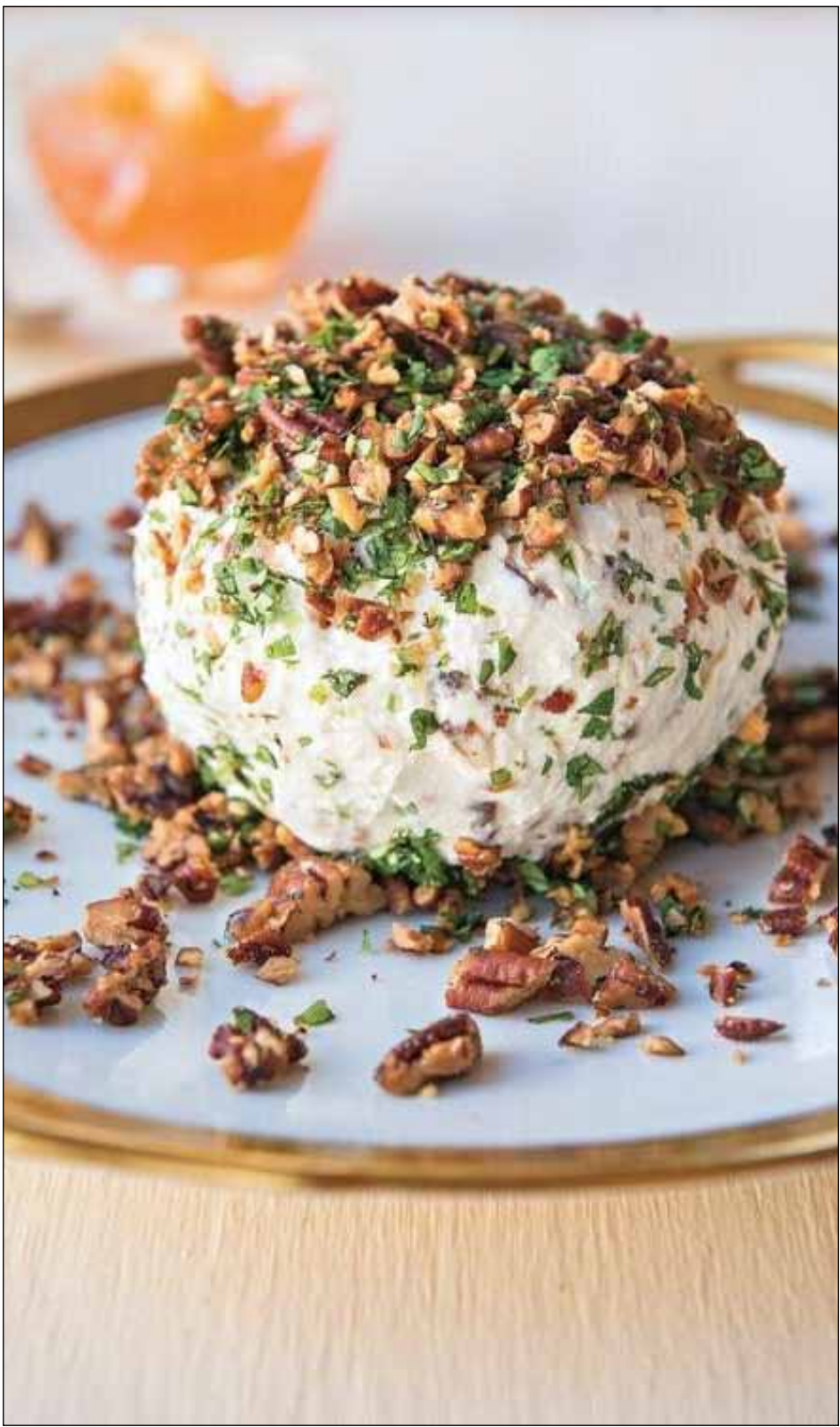
“Sports drinks replace electrolytes,” King says. “The problem with banana water is that while bananas are very high in potassium, the electrolyte that you predominantly lose when you exercise is sodium — and it doesn’t provide sodium. I would not choose it over a sports drink.”

King points out that “banana juice,” as she calls it, suffers from the same concerns as other juices: “It’s more concentrated sugar without the fiber you’d get from the fruit version.”

But any amount of potassium, magnesium, vitamin A and C — all key nutrients in banana water — is helpful, King says. “They’re all nutrients that are generally under-consumed by Americans. But bananas also have those nutrients!”

The taste: We found it sweet and tropical-tasting, slightly viscous but surprisingly refreshing. However, we didn’t go bananas for it.

Cost: Banagua’s Original Banana (330ml): \$3.49; Woodstock’s Organic Banana Water (500ml): \$2.99.



This image released by Voracious shows a cheese ball recipe from the cookbook ‘Deep Run Roots: Stories and Recipes from My Corner of the South’ by Vivian Howard

Cheese

From page 5C

sugar and taste like sweet cardboard. Use whole, dried dates and remove the pits.

Cheese ball

Makes 1 large cheese ball or 2 small ones

Ingredients

- ¼ cup high-quality blue cheese (I like Maytag)
- 1/3 cup (5 ½ tablespoons) unsalted butter
- ¼ cup fresh goat cheese
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons cream cheese
- ¼ cup chopped dates
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped scallions (both white and green parts work here)
- ½ teaspoon hot sauce
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup Salt-and-Butter-Roasted Pecans, (recipe below), roughly chopped (or plain, toasted pecans)
- 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley

SALT-AND-BUTTER-ROASTED PECANS

- 2 cups pecan halves or pieces
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided

Directions

Soften the cheese: Take the blue cheese, butter, goat cheese, and cream cheese out of the refrigerator to soften 30 minutes before making your cheese-ball mixture.

While the cheese softens, roast the pecans: Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Toss the pecans

thoroughly with the melted butter and ½ teaspoon of the salt. Spread them out in a single layer on a baking sheet and slide that sheet onto the middle rack of your oven. Roast the pecans for 11 minutes if using pecan halves and 10 minutes if you’re using pieces. Bring the slightly darkened and toasty-smelling pecans out of the oven and hit them with the remaining salt. Let them cool. Any extra pecans will keep for 2 weeks in an airtight container at room temperature.

Finish the cheese ball: In the bowl of a mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine all the ingredients except for the pecans and parsley. Paddle it up till homogenous. It will be loose and sticky and you’ll wonder how you’re ever going to form that mess into a ball. The answer is, you transfer the bowl to the refrigerator for 15 minutes or so. During that time the cheese mix will firm up enough for you to pat it into a sphere. Once it’s stiff enough to hold up, form the ball and roll that ball in the pecans, followed by parsley.

Vivian Howard is the chef and owner of the Chef and the Farmer restaurant in Kinston, North Carolina. The first woman since Julia Child to win a Peabody Award for a cooking program, she co-created and stars in the PBS series “A Chef’s Life.”

Excerpted from “Deep Run Roots” by Vivian Howard. Copyright 2016 by Vivian Howard. Photograph by Rex Miller. Used with permission of Voracious, an imprint of Little, Brown and Company, New York, NY. All rights reserved.



TIMES LEADER MEDIA GROUP

CLASSIFIEDS

TimesLeader.com/Classifieds

For assistance, please call or email

Allison @ 570-704-3978 | ashubilla@timesleader.com

Legal Notices / Notices To Creditors

PUBLIC NOTICES

**PUBLISH EVERY
WEDNESDAY
THURSDAY
FRIDAY
SUNDAY**

DEADLINES:
Wednesday, Thursday
and Friday is at
3 pm the day before

Sunday is 2pm on Friday

Any questions
Call Allison at
570-704-3978
or email
ashubilla@
timesleader.com

Help Wanted General

Division Head Infrastructure, Community, & Economic

See link below for KSA's
www.governmentjobs.com/careers/luzernecounty
The County of Luzerne is an
EEO/ADA Employer

Cemetery Plots

CHAPEL LAWN

Dallas Memorial Highway
Burial plot for double burial
Garden of the Cross
Lot#54A. Asking \$3,000
Save \$3,000
Call 570-332-8302

Commercial

EDWARDSVILLE

HUGE PRICE DROP!!
66-68 Plymouth St.
Large office building with
warehouse space, overhead
door, restrooms &
kitchenette. Several offices.
Large open floor space.
Many possibilities. Located
in R-1 Zone. Any buyers
should do their due
diligence and check with
zoning for approved uses.
MLS# 25-2856 **\$199,000**

James Crossin

570-650-6169

CROSSIN**REAL ESTATE****570-288-0770**

Houses For Sale

**Having trouble paying your
mortgage? Falling behind
on your payments?** You
may get mail from people
whom promise to foreclose
your foreclosure for a fee in
advance. **Report them to the
Federal Trade Commission**
the nation's consumer protection
agency. Call 1-877-FTC-
HELP or click on ftc.gov. A
message from the Times
Leader and FTC.

FORTY FORT



Location Counts! This
gorgeous home features a
modern eat-in kitchen,
spacious living room, dining
room, 3 good size
bedrooms, 2 full baths, mud-
laundry room, sitting porch,
cool central air &
comfortable gas heat. Pretty
tree lined street. FHA &
VA financing available.
\$216,900 MLS #25-5950
Call Jerry Busch Jr
570-288-2514
570-709-7798

**Gerald L.
BUSCH**
Real Estate
Inc.

Houses For Sale

Sell Your Home With
Jerry Busch Jr
*Local Expertise.
Proven Results.*



**Gerald L.
BUSCH**
Real Estate
Inc.

*Serving the Community
For Over 35 Years*

Jerrybuschrealestate.com

570-288-2514**570-709-7798**

*Selling Your Home?
CALL A PRO!*



Jim Crossin

570-650-6169

**570-288-0770**

Apartments /Townhouses

DALLAS MEADOWS APTS.

220 Lake Street
Housing for the elderly &
mobility impaired; all utilities
included. Federally subsid-
ized program. Extremely low
income persons encouraged
to apply. Income less than
\$16,450. 570-675-6936
TDD 800-654-5984
8 am-4 pm, Mon-Fri.
Equal Housing Opportunity
Handicap Accessible

GLEN LYON KEN POLLOCK APARTMENTS

41 Depot Street
Very Low, Low & Moderate
Income 62 Years of
Age or Older
Handicapped/Disabled
Regardless of Age
Rent Based on Income &
Rental Assistance Available
No Smoking
Rentals Include: Electric
Range & Refrigerator,
Off Street Parking,
Community Room, Coin
Operated Laundry, Elevator,
Video Surveillance.
*Applications Accepted
by Appointment*
570-736-6965
8:00 a.m. - 4 p.m.
TDD Only, 1-800-654-5984
Voice Only, 1-800-654-5988



Apartments /Townhouses

WASHINGTON SQUARE APARTMENTS

Senior Citizens
Housing in Downtown
Wilkes-Barre
Renting 1 Bedroom
Apartments.

Features:
Air Conditioning, Heat, Wall
to Wall Carpeting, Reduced
Cable Costs, Security &
Laundry Facilities,
Smoke Free Building
Active Social
Organization.
Rental Assistance Available.
Call for Application
570-823-0127



STUDIO APARTMENTS Wilkes-Barre

•Elderly/Handicapped
• 62 and Older
• Utilities Included
• Stress Free Living
• Low Cable TV Cost
• \$700/Month

Martin D. Popky

B'nai B'rith

Apartments

570-825-8594

TTY 711

Houses For Rent

LARKSVILLE



Exclusive Rental Opportunity
Westside Development
Spacious bivelve home
designed for comfort and
style! Features Ultra
modern kitchen, formal
dining room, spacious living
room, 4 good size bed-
rooms, 3 full baths, cozy
family room with fireplace,
private deck overlooking an
amazing yard, private
driveway, one car garage for
convenience. \$2,950.00 per
month, utilities by the tenant,
online application.
Call Jerry Busch Jr
for more details.
570-288-2514
570-709-7798

**Gerald L.
BUSCH**
Real Estate
Inc.

WILKES-BARRE

3 bedrooms, 1 bath, large
living & dining rooms, big
eat-in kitchen. Washer/dryer
hook-up. Backyard.
\$1,450/month.
609-356-8416

Pets

Shepherds, Labs,
Goldens, Yorkies,
Dachshunds,
Shih Tzus and More
Hazleton 570-459-2784
Wilkes-Barre 570-762-9466

Shepherds, Labs,
Goldens, Yorkies,
Dachshunds,
Shih Tzus and More
Hazleton 570-459-2784
Wilkes-Barre 570-762-9466

Autos For Sale

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

FORD '17 FUSION
4 door, Electric blue metallic,
1 Owner, 114k miles.
Serviced & newly
inspected, \$8,795
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

Autos For Sale



**Celebrating Our
44th Year!**
**Over 75 Vehicles in Stock
Most Under 5,000
with Low Miles**
Freshly Serviced, State
Inspected & Warranted
Join Our Family of
Thousands of Satisfied
Customers!
(FINANCING AVAILABLE)
Vehicle History
Reports Available
Best Selection!
Best Quality!
Best Values!
View Our Inventory at
www.wyomingvalleyautos.com
197 West End Road
570-825-7577



FORD '19 FUSION Hybrid

Excellent condition, about 45
MPG average, most options,
sunroof, GPS navigation,
Bluetooth, power seats &
windows, heated wheel, etc.
only asking \$11,900.
Call Bob 570-406-0729



PLAINS, PA 1570-237-8888

**MOST CARS
\$3,000 - \$6,000
WITH WARRANTY -
FINANCING
AVAILABLE**

1302 N. River St.,
Plains, PA 18702
www.CarsCheap.net

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

**HONDA '09 CIVIC
EX SEDAN**
White, 1 Owner, 61,000
original miles.
Rare find. \$7,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

HYUNDAI '19 SONATA
4 door, Candy apple red
metallic, 1 Owner, 145k miles.
Serviced & newly
inspected, \$8,495
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

NISSAN '14 JUKE
Silver, AWD, 147k miles,
Super Clean \$4,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

**SUBARU '14
IMPREZA WAGON**
Light blue silver metallic, 130k
miles. Super Clean \$7,895
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

TOYOTA '05 COROLLA
128k miles, silver, tinted
windows. Super clean inside
& out, \$5,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

Trucks / SUVs / Vans

CHEVY '18 1500 SILVERADO LT

Crew Cab, White/black cloth,
108k miles, 5.3L engine,
4WD, factory alloy wheels,
Excellent condition, No rust,
original paint, great service
history **Warranty \$21,500.**

Maffei**Auto Sales****570-288-6227**

444 Market Street, Kingston

maffeiautosales.com

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

DODGE '02 RAM 3500
Extended Van. Every service
record from new. Great for
Lawn Care or Contractor.
Was \$5,995 Now \$3,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

FORD '02 EXPEDITION



**Eddie Baurer
Edition**

New battery, 3 row seating,
new inspection, MICHELIN
tires. Full maintenance
records. Asking \$5,300.
Call 570-287-1233

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

HONDA '08 ELEMENT
Super rare vehicle, rust
free undercarriage.
Like New \$5,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

**JEEP '14
WRANGLER SPORT**
2 door, 94k miles, new tires
& inspection.
Save Big, \$10,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

Partner Equipment Sales

1049 S Church St,
Hazleton PA
New Trucks Daily
Financing Available !
Huge Inventory Sale !!
**THIS WEEK
SPECIAL LISTING**
1992 Ford L8000
Dump Truck,
7.8 liter diesel, Manual
Trans., Box is only
3 yrs. old & no rust
Sale Price \$ 21,500
Call Today 570-436-6715



CENTRAL CITY MOTORS

319 W. MAIN STREET
PLYMOUTH, PA 18651
570-779-3890/570-829-5596

TOYOTA '05 RAV4
4 cylinder, 160k miles. Like
brand new inside & out,
\$5,995
**It's going to be a new
year & some how
Randy is still here.
SAVE BIG TODAY
We are making deals**

Want To Buy



**We Buy Junk
Cars!**

**We have a
Scrap Yard!
We Pay Cash!**

**LAMOREAUX
SCRAP YARD**
570-477-6680
2179 State Route 118
Sweet Valley, PA 18656

Financial Services

**"We can erase your bad
credit 100% guaranteed".**
Attorneys for the Federal
Trade Commission say
they've never seen a legiti-
mate credit repair operation.
No one can legally remove ac-
curate and timely information
from your credit report. It's a
process that starts with you
and involves time and a con-
scious effort to pay your
debts. Learn about managing
credit and debt at
ftc.gov/credit. A message
from the Times Leader and
the FTC.

Help Wanted General

Director of Communications

Infrastructure, Community,
& Economic
See link below for KSA's
www.governmentjobs.com/careers/luzernecounty
The County of Luzerne is an
EEO/ADA Employer

Wanted

WANTED!

PAYING CA\$H

Buying baseball, football, basketball,
hockey and non-sports cards.
Single sets, boxes & cases.
Wrestling memorabilia, comic books,
dealer buy outs.

Call 570-215-3556

Antiques & Collectibles

"I buy anything old LLC"

CALL I MIGHT BUY IT!

570-266-6113

Antiques & Collectibles

COTS: 4 Army Cots never used \$30 each or 4 for \$100. Motors Car repair manual 1960 edition \$20. Lead for making bullets approx. 36 lbs. melting pot and ladle included \$30. Call 570-333-4639

MARX SANTA ENG: Dummy Tin long, \$85. HO steam engine, 2 cars, tender, tracks, transformer, \$45. Candle sticks, small pair, sterling silver, \$44. Call 570-817-6674

Clothing

COAT: Mens Leather, size 42 with liner, great condition, \$ 30. Mens N3B Air Force Style Parka Down insulated real fur ruff on hood size 44 , Paid \$210 sell for \$75. Never worn. Call 570-333-4639

COAT: Mink coat, full length, black, large, mint condition, \$800. OBO. Upright walker, like new paid \$650. sacrifice \$350. Harvey's Lake. Call 570-639-7202

MEN'S JACKET: Reversible Ski Jacket Down Insulated Size Large worn twice excellent condition Paid \$110 sell for \$40. Call 570-333-4639

Computer Equip. & Software

COPIER/FAX MACHINE: FREE, Lexmark x364dn, used in good condition, includes instructions, must pick up, photo available. Call 570-479-8546

Furnaces & Heaters

STOVE: Harmon combination coal or wood stove, \$200. Call 570-868-8203

Jewelry

RING: Lady's Amethyst, 925 sterling, size 6, in case, \$65. Cuff bracelet with heart shape, sterling, in box, \$75. Betty Boop watch, in case, \$28. Call 570-817-6674

Miscellaneous

CREWNECK SWEATERS, 2 new men's size large \$15 each. Men's never worn parka, large, \$20. Vintage 1973 OEM stainless wire spoke wheel covers, 14" set of 4, like new. Dress up those old steelies. \$110. 570-868-6327 no texts

CLASSIFIED
FREE AD
POLICY

The Times Leader will advertise your used merchandise private party ad **FREE on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday (3 days), maximum 8 lines. ITEMS \$1,200 OR LESS**

Antiques & Collectibles, Building Materials, Clothing, Exercise Equipment, Furnaces & Heaters, Furniture & Accessories, Medical Equipment, Miscellaneous, Pools & Spas, Sporting Goods, Stereo/Electronics, etc.

Email:
classifieds@timesleader.com

Mail:
90 E. Market Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

All ad submissions must include:
Name, address & telephone number

Each item must be priced
Cannot exceed \$1,200.

NO PHONE CALLS
PLEASE
Pet ads accepted if free

SEWING MACHINE CASE: Portable, fits a standard size machine for protected transportation. On wheels, telescoping handle, black, nice & clean, \$25. Call 570-824-3310 or text 570-262-9370

STEEL TIP SHOES: with metatarsal guard, size 10-R new, paid \$139. sale \$40. FURNACE FILTERS: (6) 18 x 25 x 1, new, \$25 for all. Harvey's Lake. Call 570-639-2926

Sporting Goods

ICE DRILL: Jiffey model 30, 8" ice auger, \$100. Call 570-868-8203

Want To Buy

AA ANTIQUES
We Buy Estates

Old Toys, Vintage Christmas, & Halloween, Trains, Military, Mining, Watches, Jewelry, Coins, Old Knick-Knacks, Instruments, Advertising, Buying Anything Old.
570-954-4023

WANTED: 16MM films, color or black & white, sound or silent. Quantities are welcome. Call Phil at 570-929-1861



NEWSPAPERS HAVE YOUR BACK.

We are grateful for those who have our back in this important time. The list is long, but we want to thank our first responders and front-line workers.

Especially in critical times, **newspapers have your back.** COVID-19 is a national story that is impacting you at home and at work. Your local newspaper is keeping you informed with current events in your neighborhood and is bringing communities together in these challenging times.

From the actions your local government is taking, to lists of local stores that are delivering and tips on what to do while you're at home, your local newspaper is committed to bringing you the news you need, when you need it.

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

*Support your local newspaper.
Subscribe in print or online.*



TIMES LEADER
2018 LEGACY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Visit www.timesleader.com to
subscribe
or call 570-829-5000.

America's Newspapers is a national association supporting journalism and healthy newspapers in our local communities. Find out more at www.newspapers.org or follow us on Twitter @newspapersorg or on Facebook @americasnewspapers.



WILKESBARRE

SERVICES

For assistance, please call or email
Allison @ 570-704-3978 | ashubilla@timesleader.com

TIMES LEADER MEDIA GROUP

Automotive

\$ BUYING \$

USED & JUNK

CARS AND TRUCKS

570-574-1275

Awnings



Awnings
Aluminum - Patio Covers
Retractables
standardawning.com



Window Treatments
window film
heitint.com
570-824-3535

Auto Body Shop

Rick's Body Shop
INSURANCE ESTIMATES - COLLISION REPAIRS - FOREIGN & DOMESTIC - QUALITY CRAFTSMANSHIP



P: 570-823-2211
F: 570-824-0553
Ask for RICK or NICK

Fender Benders
Rear 105 West Saylor Avenue, Plains, PA 18702
www.RicksBodyShopPlains.com

Chimney Services



COZY HEARTH CHIMNEY

All Chimney Repairs
New Chimneys
Cleaning, Rebuilding,
Stainless Steel Lining,
Parging, Stucco, Caps, Etc.

Free Estimates
Licensed - Insured
570-840-0873

Chimney Services

CHIMNEY REPAIRS
SPRINGHILL CHIMNEY SERVICE
SAVE 10% NOW!
Senior Citizen Discount
Parge, Stucco, Caps
296 Main Street,
Dupont, PA
570-471-3742



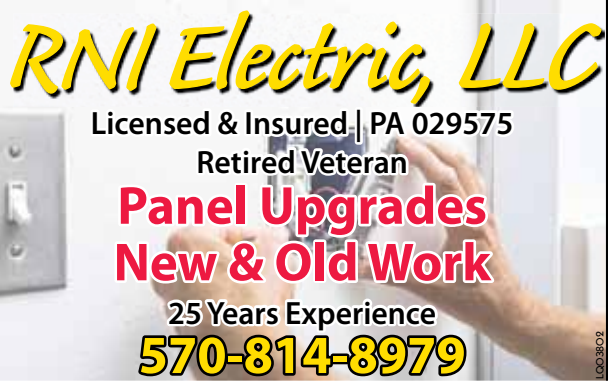
Construction & Building

Levandowski Overhead Doors
SALES • SERVICE
INSTALLATION • REPAIR
• Free In Home Estimates
• Affordable Rates
• Professional, Courteous,
Honest, & Dependable
• Locally Owned
27 years Experience
Fully Insured • HIC#065008
570-735-8551 or 570-606-7489



Electric

RNI Electric, LLC
Licensed & Insured | PA 029575
Retired Veteran
Panel Upgrades
New & Old Work
25 Years Experience
570-814-8979



Hauling & Trucking

All Kinds of Hauling & Junk Removal
We're Cheaper Than A Dumpster!
Estate Cleanout, Attics, Basements,
Yards, etc. Tree Shrub Removal
All Types of Demolition
Free Estimates | 24 Hour Service
Small & Large Jobs! PA# 051929
570-239-0484

Hauling & Trucking

AAA GENERAL HAULING & CLEANING
Cheaper Than A Dumpster
Cleaning Attics, Cellars,
Garages. Demolitions,
Roofing & Tree Removal
570-779-0918
570-542-5821
570-814-8299



Heating & Cooling



Carter's
Heating & Cooling

Locally owned. Licensed
HVAC Contractor proudly
servicing NEPA.

We service, repair, and install.

Call today for your
appointment 570-521-2425

Heating & Cooling



SALE • SERVICE
INSTALLATION
• Natural Gas &
Heating Oil Systems
• Air Conditioning
Units

24/7
EMERGENCY
SERVICE

**RESIDENTIAL
& COMMERCIAL
SERVICE**

FREE
NO HASSLE
ESTIMATES

775 Rutter Avenue • Kingston, PA
(570) 283-5950 • (570) 696-3831

Painting

Q1 PAINTING

Now offering
remodeling services!
Call us today for all your
painting and remodeling
needs.

Free estimates!
570.871.2288



Mobile Home Parts & Service

USA SALES & SERVICE CO.
A Supermaket of Mobile Home parts
24 HR. PLUMBING/HEATING
PA/HUD certified Manufactured Housing Installers
Complete Remodeling & Repair Services
Manufactured Housing Specialist
1-800-264-7796 / 570-655-4050
570-655-3906 FAX
1827 Route 315 Highway | Pittston, PA 18640

Roofing



ROOFING
SIDING &
GUTTERS

OVER 20 YEARS EXPERIENCE - LICENSED & INSURED
PROUDLY SERVING ALL OF WYOMING VALLEY
FINANCING AVAILABLE
HOMEOWNERS CALL FOR FREE ESTIMATE
570-690-7014

Roofing

E-TERN CONSTRUCTION
**Absolutely Free
Estimates**
• 30 Year Architectural Shingles
• Do Rip Off Or Over Top
• Vinyl Siding • Fully Insured
**Call 570-760-7725
or 570-341-7411**



Snow Plowing

SNOW PLOWING
Also selling unleaded gas \$2.98 ⁹/₁₀
Diesel gas \$3.75 ⁹/₁₀
Full service | Stop by & fill up
Vito & Gino's
949 Wyoming Ave.
Forty Fort, PA 18704
Parking Lots • Driveways
• Sidewalks • Salting • Snow blowing
570-574-1275



Don't Miss A Call

PLACE YOUR AD HERE

CALL ALLISON

570-704-3978

AT YOUR SERVICE

PRINTABLE PUZZLES

The New York Times Syndication Sales Corporation
620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018
For Information Email: syndicate-service@nytimes.com
For Release Tuesday, January 6, 2026

The New York Times Crossword

Edited by Will Shortz

No. 1202

ACROSS

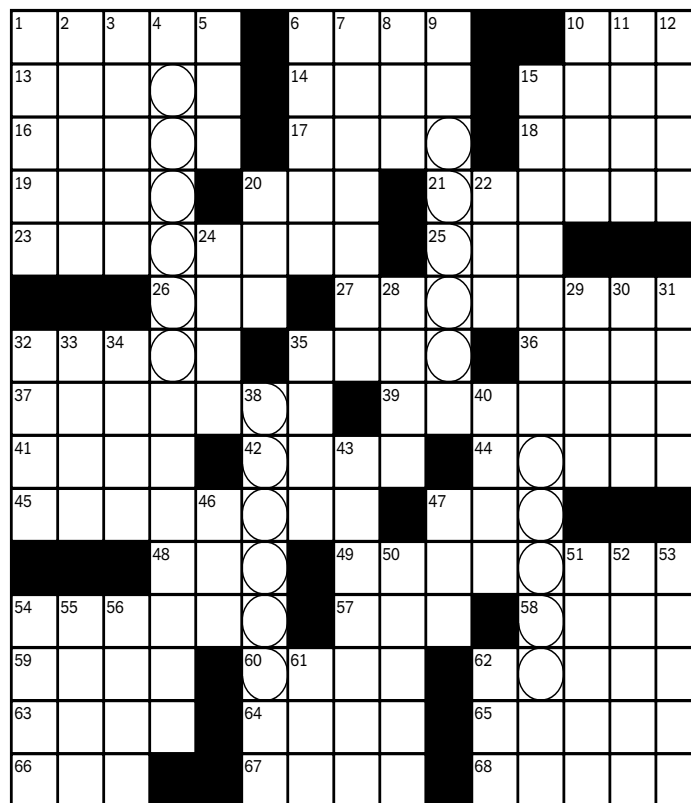
- 1 Posts on a battleship, say
6 Comic Idle of Monty Python
10 Sport with striking and grappling, for short
13 "Grrr!"
14 Pro ____ (fairly divided)
15 Ray of light
16 Cozy corners
17 Carpe ____ (seize the day: Lat.)
18 Breakfast brand originally known as Froffles
19 One of 14 in New York's Liberty Island
20 "Please help!"
21 Decadent dessert
23 Oscar-winning "GoodFellas" actor
25 British "facilities"
26 Number of U.S. states with a single-syllable name

- 27 The Hawks and the Pelicans, for two
32 Longtime home of Stephen Colbert
35 A million years, so to speak
36 Go on for-ev-er
37 Many a TikTok's music rendition
39 Deep down
41 "That being said ...," to a texter
42 Like most audiobooks before the rise of streaming
44 "We have the meats" sloganeer
45 Herbal remedy in a cleanse
47 Blue Moon, for one
48 "If it be now, ____ not to come": Hamlet
49 Family-friendly film fare
54 The "O" of A.O.C.
57 Little devil
58 Scandinavian city that's home to a bunch of Munch

- 59 Fizzy drink
60 Weak, submissive person, in modern slang
62 Wing it onstage
63 Blast
64 "Superfruit" whose name has two diacritics
65 Carhop's article of footwear
66 Go (for)
67 Sweet person
68 Not nearly as cool

DOWN

- 1 Nicki ____, "Starships" rapper
2 Gas brand owned by BP
3 Dessert item usually eaten moments after it's made
4 Criticize unfairly
5 1960s antiwar grp.
6 Hospital staffer, for short
7 With 43-Down, seeking funding from investors ... or what you're doing in 4-, 9-, 15- and 38-Down?
8 Suffix with Manhattan or Brooklyn
9 Brought up the rear
10 Prefix that's bigger than kilo-
11 Bible figures invoked by O. Henry
12 Love of Spanish?
15 Grey Goose competitor
20 Chicago-to-Indianapolis dir.
22 Hairball hacker



PUZZLE BY JONATHAN BAUDE

- 24 Subject of the Tenth Commandment
28 Bit in a friendship bracelet
29 Many a Mideast native
30 1970s sitcom title character who "can turn the world on with her smile"
31 Superiors to cpls.
32 Oaf
33 What spicy food has
34 Lay eyes on
35 Clearasil target
38 "Huh, better than I expected"
40 Ring of light
43 See 7-Down
46 Top of the hour?
47 Electric guitarist's accessory
50 Communication system for almost two billion people
51 Belief system for almost two billion people
52 Top-tier
53 Not drunk
54 Dos cubed
55 Business that's owned and managed by its members
56 Frequently
61 Prefix with conscious
62 Communication syst. in which the letter Z is drawn with one's index finger

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

M	E	M	O		L	E	A	P		M	E	N	D	S
A	C	A	I		A	L	S	O		A	V	A	I	L
C	H	I	L	L	P	I	L	L		G	A	U	G	E
H	O	N	D	A		T	A	K	E	I		R	I	P
		F	R	O	Z	E	N	A	C	C	O	U	N	T
P	E	R	U	S	E					O	A	R		
A	D	A	M		R	H	E	A		C	A	G	E	S
D	I	M		C	O	O	L	C	A	T		R	A	P
S	T	E	P	H		P	I	E	R		M	A	S	A
			E	A	T					T	R	A	C	E
P	O	L	A	R	O	P	P	O	S	I	T	E		
A	H	A		A	T	A	R	I		F	U	N	G	I
R	A	T	E	D		C	O	L	D	F	R	O	N	T
I	R	E	N	E		K	N	E	E		E	T	A	S
S	E	X	T	S		S	E	R	F		D	E	W	Y

Online subscriptions: Today's puzzle and more than 7,000 past puzzles, nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year).

Read about and comment on each puzzle: nytimes.com/wordplay.

PRINTABLE PUZZLES

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Nuisance
- 7 Miles off
- 11 "Foundation" author
- 12 Map region
- 13 Act as host
- 15 Kidney-related
- 16 Saloon staple
- 18 Calendar span
- 21 Copier problem
- 22 Trembled
- 24 PC key
- 25 Eat late
- 26 2016 Olympics host
- 27 Connects with
- 29 Musical number
- 30 Crystal gazer
- 31 Soup buys
- 32 Diamond unit
- 34 Surprise while questioning
- 40 Penn of "Milk"
- 41 Try hard
- 42 Cut drastically
- 43 Gave clues

DOWN

- 1 Bowler, e.g.
- 2 Tough wood
- 3 Polite address
- 4 Cookout treats
- 5 Inferior
- 6 Writer Hunter
- 7 Showy shrub
- 8 In favor of
- 9 Tiny worker
- 10 Spanish king
- 14 Settle a bill
- 16 Foundation
- 17 Game host
- 19 Soap Box Derby setting
- 20 Rider's straps
- 21 Airport sight
- 22 Status —
- 23 Beagle or boxer
- 25 Scarecrow fill
- 28 Minute part
- 29 Titan circles it
- 31 Prickly plants
- 33 Reckless
- 34 Screening org.
- 35 Spell
- 36 "Norma —"
- 37 Scoundrel
- 38 Compete
- 39 Complete

C	R	U	S	T		S	T	I	F	F
O	O	M	P	H		P	A	D	R	E
O	N	A	I	R		I	N	L	E	T
			N	E	O	N		E	T	A
P	L	A	C	E	B	O	S			
L	O	L	L		S	U	P	P	L	E
O	L	L	A	S		T	I	L	E	R
D	A	Y	S	P	A		N	E	A	R
			S	I	D	E	C	A	R	S
G	O	T		N	O	S	Y			
A	D	O	B	O		S	C	R	A	P
S	E	R	I	F		A	L	I	B	I
P	R	O	O	F		Y	E	M	E	N

Yesterday's answer

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				

ACROSS

- 1 Umps
- 5 Some printers
- 8 Criminal, to cops
- 12 Jai —
- 13 Sushi fish
- 14 During
- 15 Gold depository
- 17 Elizabethan collar
- 18 Succor
- 19 Coin flips
- 21 Brainy
- 24 "Auld Lang —"
- 25 Scene stealers
- 26 Jewelry container, often
- 30 Wagerers' site (Abbr.)
- 31 Maximum
- 32 Leading lady?
- 33 Chicago baseball team
- 35 Hammer part
- 36 Eternities
- 37 Oscar-winning director Frank
- 38 "Heaven forbid!"
- 41 "— Blue?"
- 42 "The Kite Runner" boy
- 43 "Transformers" actress
- 48 Arizona river
- 49 Blunder
- 50 Small combo
- 51 Envelope abbr.
- 52 Stephen of "Still Crazy"
- 53 Missile shelter
- 2 "Xanadu" band
- 3 Distant
- 4 Indian instruments
- 5 Royal flush, e.g.
- 6 Saigon soup
- 7 Famous route
- 8 3.26 light-years
- 9 Flightless birds
- 10 Teeming
- 11 Shareable PC files
- 16 DIY buy
- 20 "Step —!"
- 21 Broadway offering
- 22 Algebra or trig

DOWN

- 1 U.K. military fliers

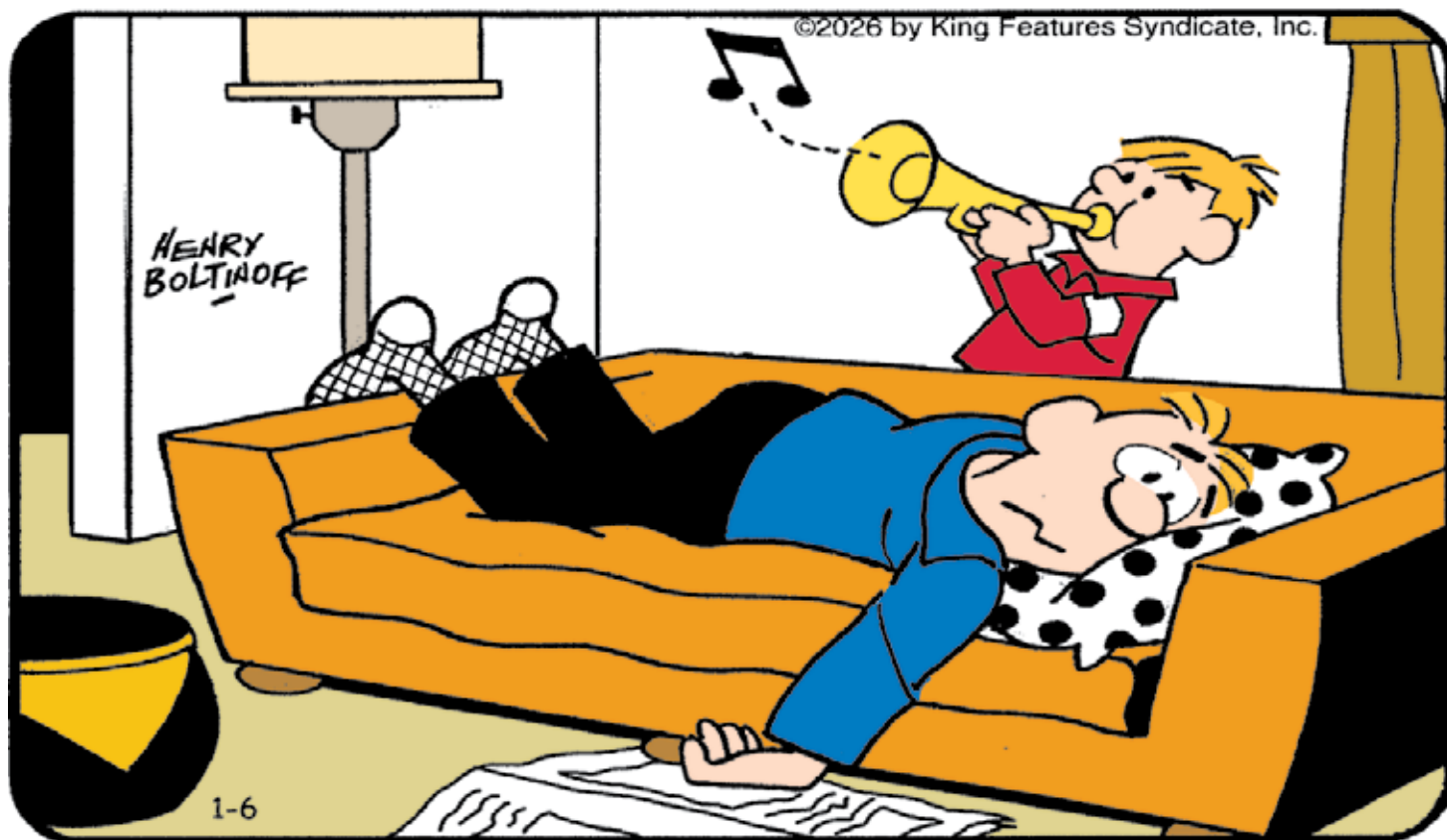
Solution time: 22 mins.

J	A	M		V	O	I	D	S		E	A	T
O	R	G		E	N	D	O	W		A	G	O
E	M	M	A	S	T	O	N	E		R	E	O
			T	S	A		H	A	S	T	E	N
C	L	E	V	E	R		O	T	O	H		
A	O	L		L	I	L		S	A	S	H	A
R	O	M	A		O	O	F	R	I	O	S	
A	S	S	A	M		P	I	E		G	O	P
			T	R	I	G		G	R	A	N	T
S	E	R	E	N	A		T	A	M			
A	V	E			E	V	E	R	S	I	N	C
L	E	E			R	E	N	E	E		I	O
T	N	T			S	L	O	E	S		B	Y

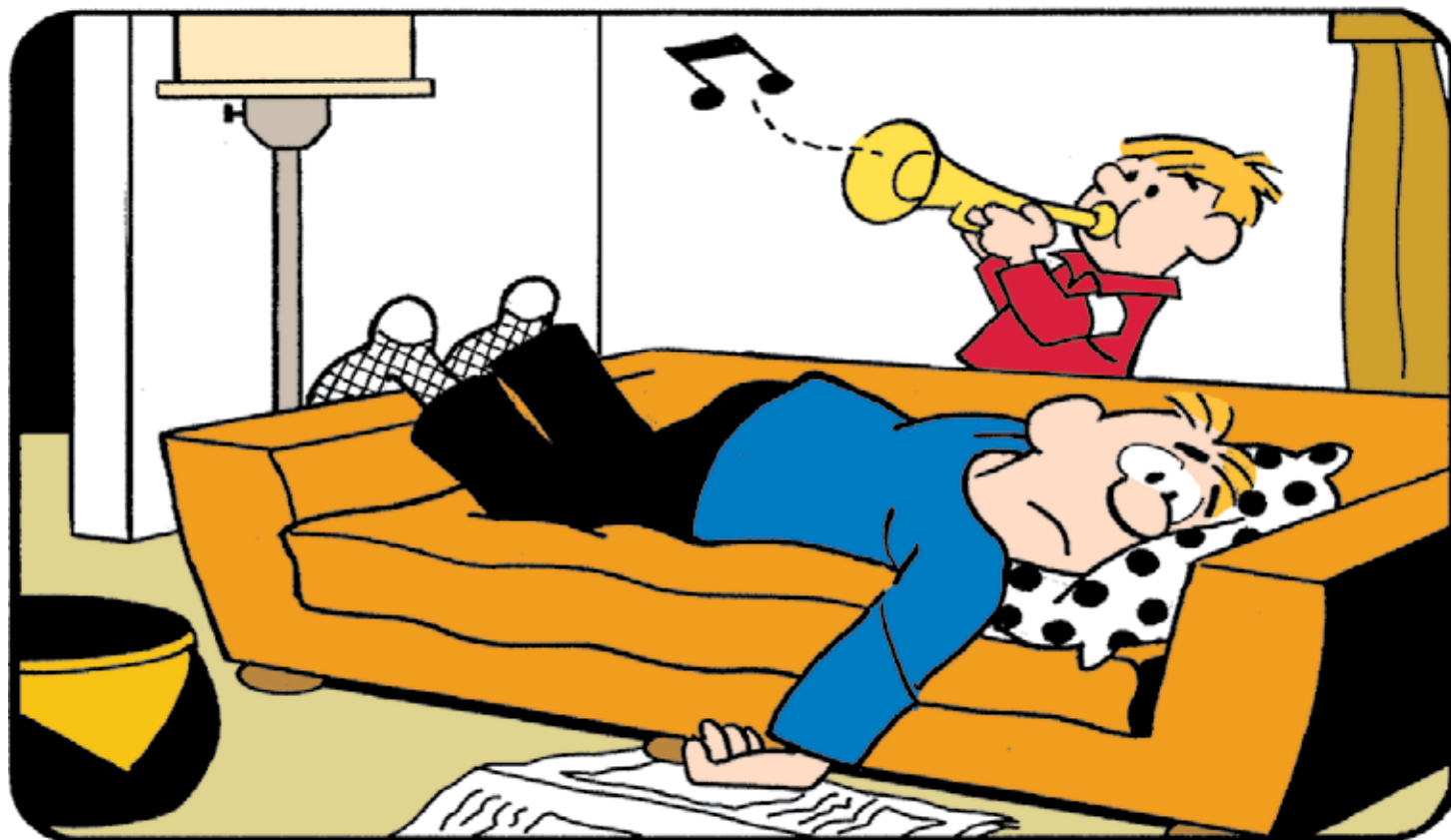
Yesterday's answer 1-6

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			

PRINTABLE PUZZLES



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Pant leg is longer. 2. Shirt is longer. 3. Lamp is moved. 4. Music note is moved. 5. Collar is missing. 6. Mouth is different.

PRINTABLE PUZZLES

WORD SLEUTH • NORTH —

V C Y V R O L H A E B X U R O
 L I E E B Y V S Q C N K H Y E
 B Y W T T R O L J G I E O B Y
 W U R P T K D N K I H R G D D
 B Z V X O A V S Q A K O E N M
 K I I R K E L G M S E C A M A
 Y W E O U S S P H H Q L P N A
 L A T L A N T I C K S J H F E
 C A N I L O R A C I R F A A Y
 X V A U N E E S R Q P A N M K
 J H M F E B C B Z E L O P Y X

Monday's unlisted clue: TORNADO

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

Tuesday's unlisted clue hint: A CONTINENT

Africa
 Atlantic
 Beach
 Carolina

Dakota
 Hampton
 Island
 Korea

Park
 Platte
 Pole
 Sea

Star
 Vietnam
 Yorkshire

©2026 King Features, Inc.

1/6

1-6

CRYPTOQUIP

U T X J X L M F T H Z C G L O G G W R
 P L Z C U D P A X B O G X B J Y U K G
 F Z E W U B O U Y , R J Z E H M F Z E
 B X H H U Y X A H Z Z K G L X D P ?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN I WOULD LIKE
 A BOOSTER TO HELP ME TIDY UP WITH A
 BROOM, I MIGHT TAKE MY SWEEPING PILLS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals C

King Classic Sudoku

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

Difficulty: ★★

1/6

©2026 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles,
 one letter to each square,
 to form four ordinary words.

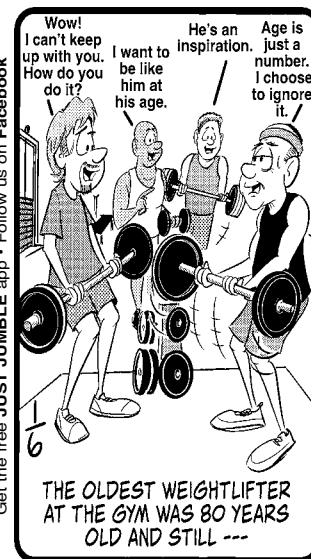
TOAFO
 □ □ □ □ □
 NLRIE
 □ □ □ □ □
 IDISGN
 □ □ □ □ □
 GIBREG
 □ □ □ □ □

©2026 Tribune Content Agency, LLC
 All Rights Reserved.

□ □ □ □ □

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



THE OLDEST WEIGHTLIFTER
 AT THE GYM WAS 80 YEARS
 OLD AND STILL ---

Now arrange the circled letters
 to form the surprise answer, as
 suggested by the above cartoon.

□ □ □ □ □

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: ENJOY THUMB BLEACH HAZARD
 Answer: The tree-trimming service was hiring new
 employees in order to — BRANCH OUT

PRINTABLE PUZZLES

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY, JAN. 6, 2026

SUPER QUIZ

North America Syndicate Inc.

1/6

©2026 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

NORTH —

