

Life!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026 SECTION B

Showcase of Black veterans in US military

By Herbert L. White

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Charlotte's ninth annual African American Heritage Festival celebrates military service.

The festival, themed "Red, White, and Black," is Feb. 28 at Charlotte Museum of History from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is free. The showcase explores the legacy, service and contributions of Black Americans in the military from the revolution against England to the present. The theme is in alignment with the nation's 250th anniversary with reflections on patriotism, sacrifice and Black Americans' role in fighting for their country.

"This year's African American Heritage Festival invites our community to honor the courage, resilience and lasting contributions of African Americans who have served our country," museum President & CEO Terri White said in a statement. "As we approach the nation's 250th anniversary, 'Red, White, Blue, and Black' encourages meaningful reflection on our history while celebrating the individuals whose service helped move our country forward."

The festival includes educational programming, performances, speakers, interactive experiences and community engagement for all ages. Local artists, vendors and community organizations will have tables on campus.

The festival includes:

- Keynote address from Jocelyn Mitnaul Mallette, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

- The panel discussion "Marching Home: Housing, Hostility & Hope" which includes "Lost Soldiers" podcast co-hosts Che Abdullah and Tom Hanchett; Reuben "Rock" Flax, a Vietnam War veteran and three-time Purple Heart recipient who is a com-

Please see **FESTIVAL** | 2B

NC Medicaid leaders seek new funding strategy as work rules loom

By Jaymie Baxley

NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH NEWS

The clock is ticking for lawmakers in North Carolina — the only state in the nation without an approved budget — to settle on a plan to cover rising administrative costs for Medicaid.

That was the key takeaway from a presentation that Melanie Bush, assistant secretary for NC Medicaid, gave earlier this month to members of the state legislature's oversight committee that examines what's happening with the entitlement program.

If action is not taken soon, Bush warned lawmakers, the state could struggle to meet deadlines tied to new federal eligibility and enrollment requirements for the program, which covers about 3 million of North Carolina's 11.2 million residents.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2027, many Medicaid participants must prove they are working, volunteering or attending school for at least 80 hours a month in order to maintain benefits. The change is part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act signed last summer by President Donald Trump, a sweeping federal law that reduces Medicaid spending by close to \$900 billion over the course of a decade, in part by tightening eligibility rules and increasing oversight of enrollment.

In addition to work requirements, the law requires states to conduct eligibility redeterminations more frequently. It also introduces stricter limits on retroactive Medicaid coverage, a mechanism used commonly by hospitals to help cover the costs for uninsured patients.

Please see **NC MEDICAID** | 2B

A plant for every room in your home

By Melinda Myers

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Add a bit of greenery to your home's decor with a few new plants.

Match the plants to your style and the growing conditions in each room to create the desired results.

Consider the time you have and want to invest in caring for plants when selecting and placing them throughout your home. If you prefer to give your plants lots of attention and are attentive to watering, add a few challenging plants and those that like consistently moist soil.

If you are busy or prefer a more hands-off approach, look for drought-tolerant plants that thrive with minimal care. Check

plant tags and reliable resources for information on the light, water and care needed before purchasing your plants.

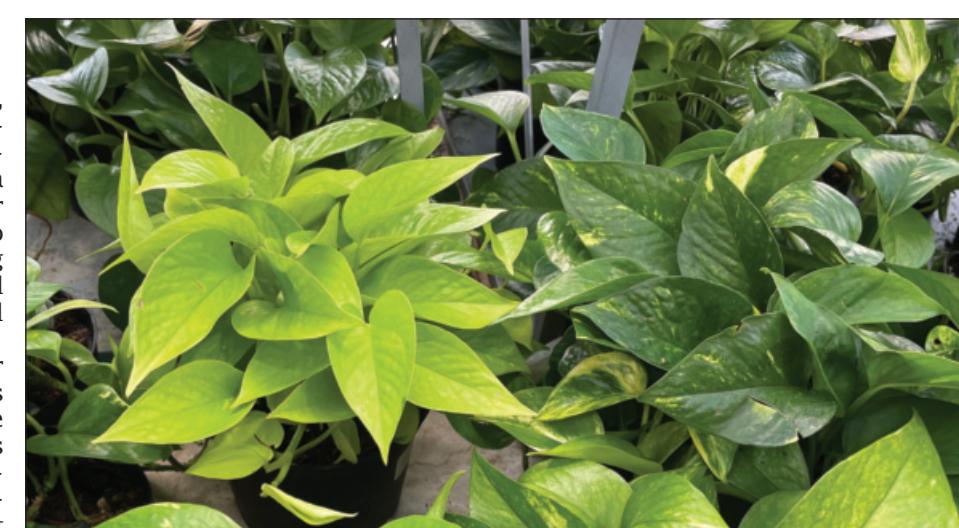
Start with one room and once satisfied with the results, move to the next. Dividing any project into smaller parts will be easier on your budget and schedule and often results in greater success.

Focus on the room where you spend the most time or feel it needs a greenery boost. Perhaps it's your living room, family room or a reading nook. Use large floor plants to create a focal point, provide height and balance in the room and brighten bare walls. Fiddle leaf and weeping figs, rubber plants, dragon

tree (Dracaena marginata), and palms are a few popular plants often sold as indoor trees. Set them on a plant caddy to protect your floors and make it easier to move them for cleaning and maintenance. Add some decorative artificial lights if needed.

Add some welcome color to any room. Neon pothos with its bright chartreuse leaves, crotos with its multicolored leaves, dracaenas with striped variegation and Raven ZZ plant with its purple-black foliage are just a few to consider. Incorporate a few low-maintenance flowering plants like anthuriums, bromeliads and moth orchids.

If you spend a lot of time

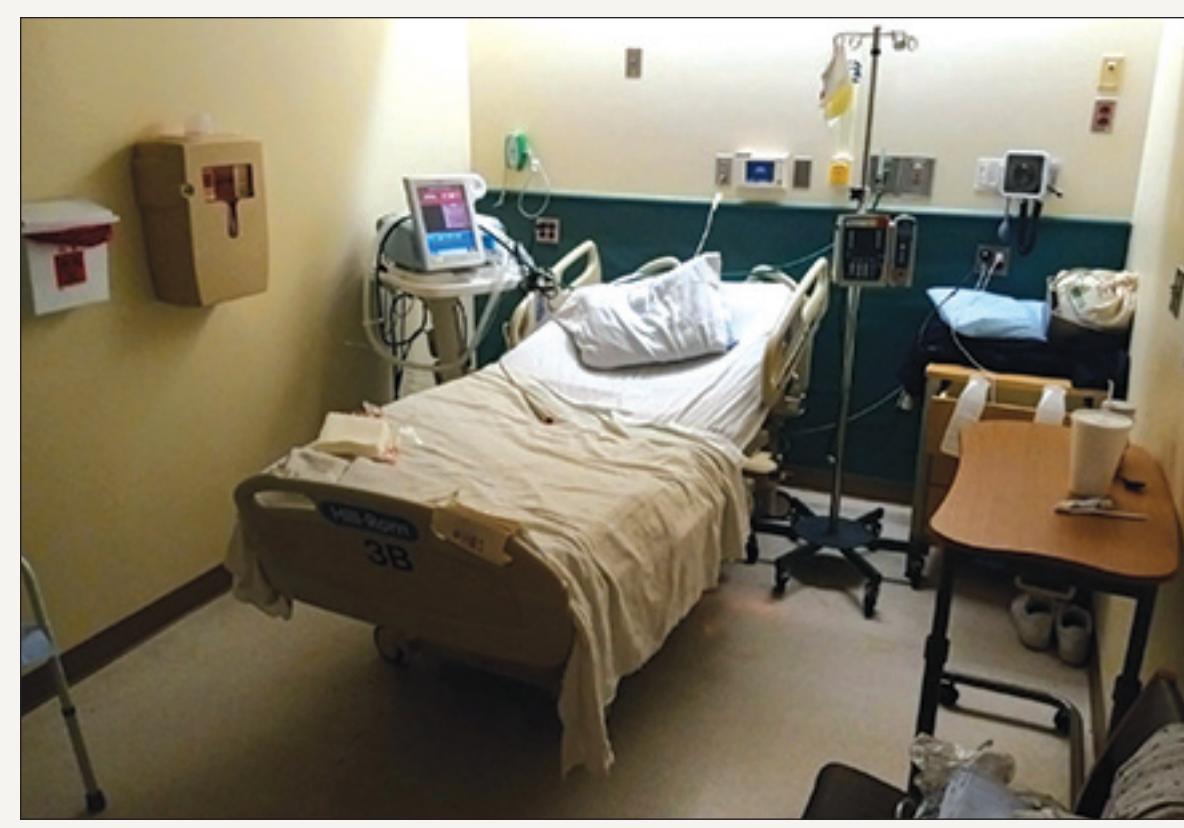


Neon pothos with their bright leaves add color to any space.

cooking, washing dishes and cleaning up, your kitchen may be your priority. A windowsill herb garden provides fresh herbs to

include in your favorite recipes. Their fragrance, when given a pet, makes clean up a bit more tolerable. Create a sense of calm and promote a good night's sleep with greenery. The beauty, oxygen and boost

Please see **CREATE** | 2B



DAVID SADDLER VIA CREATIVE COMMONS

More people are checking in at hospital emergency rooms from complications connected to cannabis use.

When happens when the high ends in NC hospital

Emergency rooms across the state report cannabis-related cases

By Daniel Larham Jr.

CHARLOTTE LEDGER

Medical providers in Charlotte and across the state say more patients are landing in emergency rooms with problems stemming from cannabis use.

A lot of them are young patients complaining of nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Those are symptoms of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome, a serious disorder brought on by long-term, habitual cannabis use.

CHS is something that doctors now see cases of every week, particularly in young men. It has become so common that the World Health Organization officially recognized it last year, and it received a diagnostic code so health experts can track it.

CHS has become a topic of increasing concern as states legalize marijuana. Although marijuana is still illegal in North Carolina, in-

toxicating THC products are widely sold in gas stations and convenience stores under a federal loophole. Social media has dubbed CHS's most volatile symptom "scromiting" — a combination of screaming and vomiting.

While the hemp industry braces for the closure of that loophole, written into the federal spending extension that passed in November, several states have already implemented their own laws to regulate, or even ban, hemp-derived THC products. In October, 39 state and territory attorneys general signed a formal letter to Congress to clarify the federal definition of hemp, citing specifically its marketing towards and accessibility to children.

According to a study of emergency room visits published last year, CHS cases among those aged 18-35 rose 406% nationwide between 2016 and 2022.

Joshua Ring, an emergency medicine physician at Duke Regional Hospital in Durham, says the number of cannabis-related illnesses in his emergency department before and after the pandemic has been night and day.

Ring described patients experiencing CHS as particularly miserable, even compared to typical ER visitors, as they are frequently in severe pain and vomiting uncontrollably.

"People will come in either on an ambulance or drive into the emergency department by themselves, in what appears to be the worst possibly imagined pain that somebody can be in," he said.

Treatment typically includes anti-nausea medications, hot baths and showers, and pain-relieving creams. But the only cure is to stop cannabis use.

Christopher Griggs, an assistant

Please see **EMERGENCY** | 2B

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Ralph Bunch, Middle East peace broker

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Ralph Johnson Bunche (1904-1971) won the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for building a truce between Israel and Arab states.

After earning undergraduate and master's degrees at UCLA in 1928, Bunche spent six years alternated between teaching at Howard University and working toward a doctorate at Harvard. The Rosenwald Fellowship, which he held in 1932-1933, enabled him to conduct research in Africa for a dissertation comparing French rule in Togo and Dahomey.

Bunche completed his dissertation in 1934 with such distinction that he was awarded the Toppan Prize for outstanding research in social studies. From 1936-38, on a Social Science Research Council fellowship, he did postdoctoral research in anthropology at Northwestern University, the London School of Economics, and Capetown University in

South Africa.

Bunche's fame arises from his service to the U.S. government and United Nations. In 1946, UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie borrowed Bunche from the State Department and placed him in charge of the Department of Trusteeship of the UN to handle problems of peoples who had not yet attained self-government.

From 1947-49, Bunche worked on the most important assignment of his career - the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. He was appointed assistant to the UN Special Committee on Palestine, then principal secretary of the UN Palestine Commission, which was responsible for carrying out the partition approved by the UN General Assembly.

In 1948 when the plan was scrapped and fighting between Arabs and Israelis intensified, the UN appointed Count Folke Bernadotte as mediator and Bunche his chief aide. On



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY
Ralph Bunche won the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize, making him the first Black American to do so.

Sept. 17, 1948, Bernadotte was assassinated, and Bunche was named acting UN mediator on Palestine.

After 11 months of ceaseless negotiating, Bunche obtained signatures on armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab States, which earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.

From 1955-67, Bunche was UN undersecretary for special political affairs and

in 1968 was appointed undersecretary general. During these years he took on special assignments.

When war erupted in the Congo in 1960, Dag Hammarskjöld, then secretary-general of the UN, appointed Bunche as his special representative to oversee the UN commitments there. He assumed similar duties in Cyprus, Kashmir, and Yemen.



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Please see **CREATE** | 2B

Emergency rooms report more pot-related visits

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professor of emergency medicine and medical director of EM pain and addiction quality improvement at Atrium Health, says he has been seeing CHS cases for quite some time. He analyzed Atrium Health emergency room visits in Greater Charlotte in 2025 and found more than 765 instances of cannabis-related issues, based on diagnostic codes.

But, Griggs said, he thinks there were probably even more CHS encounters than that, as cannabis use might not have been reported in every case.

"There's a lot of stigma around all substance-use disorders, so patients aren't always forthcoming with information about their substance use," he continued.

Griggs added that much of medical research suggests that social isolation during the pandemic brought about increases in substance abuse across the board, with factors like increased anxiety and depression, driving people toward not just using cannabis, but alcohol and other illicit substances.

While CHS symptoms tend to last 24-48 hours, they can restart as soon as a patient ingests cannabinoids again. The only way to stop CHS entirely is to stop using the substance itself.

The biggest risk associated with CHS is dehydration. Ring says that the condition causes some patients to vomit upwards of 30 times in one day. While uncommon, deaths have been attributed to dehydration brought on by CHS as far back as 2016.

Concerns about mental health

CHS isn't the only marijuana-related problem sending patients to the hospital.

According to the North Carolina Childhood Fatality Task Force, the rate of emergency department visits for cannabis ingestion among those 17 and under has risen 600% since 2019.

North Carolina saw 1,424 ED visits for cannabis consumption among those ages 0-24 in 2025, according to data from NC DETECT, the state's syndromic surveillance system. Visits from those ages 15-24 made up over a quarter of the state's total of 3,542.

Ring says that he's also observed an uptick in cases of acute psychosis related to cannabis use, where patients — who are, again, oftentimes young men — come in confused, afraid or even violent, episodes that can put strain on an emergency department's resources.

More generally, Griggs said, substance use can have far-reaching cognitive effects on the mind, which doesn't stop developing until the age of 25.

"The cannabis that people were using when I was in high school or even going to college is tremendously different from the cannabis products that are out there right now," said David Goldston, a clinical psychologist at Duke University.

While some research has shown that cannabis use has remained relatively flat among adolescents nationwide, higher potency products that are available now could explain the increase in physical and mental illness related to cannabis use.

Goldston, who is also the director of the Duke Center for Adolescent and Young Adult Substance Use Treatment, says that he has also seen more problems stemming from the usage of marijuana and products like hemp-derived cannabinoids. Many of the people he sees are experiencing co-occurring mental health issues like depression, anxiety, ADHD and trauma, which habitual cannabis use may exacerbate.

Today's weed products like edibles and vape pens are far more potent than a traditional smokable flower. Goldston said that with increased potency comes an increased risk of dependency — and in turn, an increased likelihood of withdrawal symptoms, which can vary person by person.

High-concentration options are exactly what younger people opt for, says Tobi Gilbert, clinical neuropsychologist and police crisis counselor for Jacksonville, North Carolina's police department, adding they prefer the instant gratification and quicker highs that vapes deliver as opposed to

the less accessible joints, bongs and bowls.

She has seen firsthand the kinds of mental health episodes that can come from youth cannabis use. In one case, she was called to a local school for a student who had smoked an entire THC vape pen. The student could barely walk or speak, and was acting belligerent towards school staff and family. "And I've seen that, I can't even tell you how many times," she said.

Vapes in particular have become a concern as questions have arisen about what they actually contain. Much like nicotine vapes, toxic metals have been found in THC vapes, especially in unregulated products. There's also been increasing concern about vapes containing other drugs. In another case described by Gilbert, two students at a local school had overdosed after using a vape containing fentanyl.

Citing prohibition, Gilbert doesn't necessarily believe that the anticipated ban on hemp is likely to stop adolescents from getting hold of cannabis substances, as a black market will always exist. Likely, she said, it would make it more difficult for children and teens to access it.

Gilbert believes that resources both for schools and police in dealing with students' substance abuse are lacking, both in education and treatment options.

At least one school district in the Charlotte region, Cabarrus County Schools, has decided to invest resources into the issue of student substance abuse with training for educators and programs for students, said Gordon Palmer, assistant superintendent of high schools at Cabarrus County Schools, in an email to The Ledger.

The school system's Positive Alternatives to Student Suspension (PASS) program provides targeted education for students found in possession of prohibited substances, including Delta 8 and Delta 9. It also has a Recovery High School Program — with parents' permission, it offers students an environment designed to support recovery from addiction and substance abuse while allowing them to continue their education.

A regulatory answer?

While nationwide solutions to hemp and cannabis regulation have not been uniform, North Carolina elected officials are considering what other states have done in determining what to do about an industry that has been more or less unregulated in the state since the passage of the 2018 farm bill.

Last year, Gov. Josh Stein formed the North Carolina Advisory Council on Cannabis, tasked with recommending a comprehensive approach to regulate cannabis sales and create a safe, legal market for adults that protects children.

A recent Consumer Safety and Youth Protection Subcommittee meeting of that advisory council provided insight into what North Carolina's cannabis industry may look like in the future.

The recommendations of the subcommittee were similar to those of the state's Child Fatality Task Force.

Both groups urge the state to prevent the sale of hemp intoxicants to those under 21 and create regulations on how these products are packaged and advertised, such as child-safe packaging with appropriate warnings.

The subcommittee also discussed in depth the need for regulatory testing of products sold in North Carolina, and whether that should be conducted by a state body or by private enterprises.

A state-run laboratory would require significant investment, as nothing the state currently operates would be able to match the scale of the industry. But concerns about bad actors, as have been found in other states, have spurred some to shy away from private testing laboratories.

And it's not just THC concentration that experts are concerned about. As with tobacco, contamination is a risk as well. Recalls on commercially available marijuana have been issued in states like Colorado and California for things like unsafe level pesticides and other contaminants.

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Create green space with a plant for every room

Continued from page 1B

in humidity plants provide is also beneficial. Consider adding a few trailing plants grown in hanging baskets or displayed on shelves. The cascading foliage provides a bit of screening and softens hard surfaces for a cozier look.

Take advantage of the humidity in the bathroom and enjoy a splash of greenery when stepping out of the shower or tub. Try some ferns, air plants, prayer plants and other tropical plants that benefit from this environment.

Don't overlook your home office. Research found looking at and tending plants can help increase focus and creativity.

Don't let fungus gnats ruin the calm you are trying to create. They feed on organic matter in the soil, usually don't harm your plants, but are annoying as they flit into your face and gather at the windows and your computer screen. Manage them with naturally occurring soil bacteria, Bacillus

thuringiensis israelensis (Bti), found in Summit Mosquito Bits (SummitResponsibleSolutions.com). The bacteria will kill the fungus gnat larvae in the soil but is safe for people and pets. Follow the label directions and repeat as needed.

Evaluate your home's décor and do a bit of research before you start shopping. Like any home project, planning can help save time and increase success.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition and Small Space Gardening. She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" streaming courses and the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and was commissioned by Summit for her expertise to write this article. Myers' website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

Doctors see AI scribes in more positive light. Hiccups persist.

By Michelle Andrews

KFF HEALTH NEWS

When Jeannine Urban went in for a checkup in November, she had her doctor's full attention.

Instead of typing on her computer keyboard during the exam, Urban's primary care physician at the Penn Internal Medicine practice in Media, Pennsylvania, had an ambient artificial intelligence scribe take notes. At the end of the 30-minute visit, Urban's doctor showed her the AI summary of the appointment, neatly organized into sections for her medical history, the physical exam findings, and an assessment and treatment plan for her rheumatoid arthritis and hot flashes, among other details.

The clinical note, which Urban could also review on the patient portal at home, was incredibly thorough, she said. It summarized all of her questions and concerns and the doctor's responses. The scribe "made sure we didn't miss anything," Urban said.

Ambient AI scribes are being hailed by physicians as a game changer that helps free them to focus on their patients rather than their computer keyboard. By releasing doctors from the onerous and time-consuming task of documenting what happens during every patient encounter, early studies show, AI scribes may help reduce physician burnout and after-hours "pajama time" catching up on work in the evening.

The potential of AI to transform every aspect of the health care system — from patient care to clinical efficiency to medical innovation — is an area of intense focus, including by the Trump administration.

Last January, President Donald Trump issued an executive order to remove barriers to American leadership in AI. Later in the year, a press release from the federal Department of Health and Human Services invited stakeholders to weigh in on how the department can accelerate the adoption of AI in health care.

Several startup vendors in recent years have introduced ambient AI scribe products that can be integrated into electronic health records. EHR market leader Epic is piloting its own AI scribe technology, which it expects to release widely early this year, according to Jackie Gerhart, a family medicine physician who is chief medical officer and vice president of clinical informatics at Epic.

Health tech experts estimate that a third of providers have access to ambient AI scribe technology. As adoption looks likely to grow rapidly over the next few years, many expect it to become more of a recruiting tool, a minimum requirement for incoming clinicians, who reports indicate are increasingly prioritizing work-life balance.

"It's part of keeping doctors happy," said Robert Wachter, a professor and the chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California-San Francisco, whose forthcoming book, *A Giant Leap*, explores how AI is transforming health care. "Health systems that initially might have done a hard-nosed return-on-investment calculation — many are softening on that and realizing that the cost of recruiting and retaining doctors is pretty high."

But many questions remain. Does the use of ambient AI scribes improve patient care and health outcomes? Will doctors use time they gain by employing an AI scribe to improve the quality of the time they spend with their patients or just boost the number of patients they see? To what extent will expanding the amount of detail available from a patient visit lead to bigger bills if the AI scribe is integrated with a coding app that optimizes provider charges?

For now, these questions remain mostly unanswered.

Urban said that the AI scribe didn't change her experience as a patient very much. Typically, after a patient gives ver-

bal permission, the AI scribe records the visit on a phone and organizes the conversation into the structure of a clinical note, filtering out small talk that isn't pertinent to the medical visit but incorporating relevant details about a family member's recent cancer diagnosis, for example. The scribe's note is often then integrated into the provider's EHR. The doctor later reviews the note and signs off on it.

Even though the visit may not feel very different to patients, some clinicians report that ambient AI scribes are changing patient encounters in unanticipated ways.

"Now, when I'm doing a physical exam, I have to say what I'm doing and what I'm finding out loud in order for the AI scribe to document it," said Dina Capalongo, Urban's primary care doctor. "People find that very interesting," she said.

When Capalongo places her stethoscope over the carotid artery under a patient's jaw, for example, she might say that she doesn't hear a "bruit," or vascular murmur, whose presence could indicate atherosclerosis. Patients have told her, "I never knew why a doctor would listen there," she said.

Saying things out loud for the AI scribe that would typically appear only in a clinical note can create its own set of challenges, particularly during sensitive physical exams. Doctors may feel it's important to adjust their conversation accordingly.

"Sometimes patients are anxious and scared and my saying things that they don't understand or they may worry about during an uncomfortable examination does not help the situation and honesty is insensitive to what the patient is going through," said Genevieve Melton-Meaux, a professor in the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery at the University of Minnesota, who is also chief health informatics and AI officer at Fairview Health Services in Minneapolis. "I'll keep that top of mind and make sure I record it" after the visit.

"How we have conversations with patients about these tools is really important, in particular for maintaining trust and ensuring accurate information," Melton-Meaux said.

Studies have found that, across a range of measures such as completeness, timeliness, and coherence, the notes created by ambient AI scribes are generally at least as good as, and sometimes better than, traditional documentation, said Kevin Johnson, a pediatrician who is vice president for applied informatics at the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

An ongoing concern is around AI "hallucinations," in which false, sometimes fabricated information appears in an AI output.

Kaiser Permanente, an early adopter of ambient AI scribe technology, provides it to more than 25,000 doctors, advanced practice providers, and pharmacists systemwide. It has found hallucinations to be "quite rare," said Daniel Yang, an internist who is vice president of AI and emerging technologies at KP.

But they happen. An AI-scribe-generated note, for instance, might say that the doctor planned to refer someone to a neurologist or to follow up in two weeks. The problem? The doctor might not have said that.

"The technology is not perfect, and that's why physicians are reviewing it," Yang said. It's learning from regular physician visits as it goes, he said. That's why having a person check the work product is critical.

Still, even such a "human-in-the-loop" system is fraught, Wachter said. "Humans stink at maintaining vigilance over time," he said.

As the use of ambient AI scribes becomes routine, some clinicians worry that the technology will widen the divide between health care haves and have-nots.

Enjoy 'time tripping,' new memories in Myrtle Beach

BRANDPOINT

Do you get misty-eyed recalling favorite childhood vacations?

Remember watching the scenery roll by from the back seat with the windows down, feeling the warm sun on your back and sand between your toes? Remember savoring cool ice cream while the sounds of arcade games echoed around you and the sweet smell of funnel cakes mingled with the ocean breeze?

Memories like these have inspired the latest travel trend, "time tripping," where travelers seek to relive the magic of family vacations. There's no better place to create your own time-traveling experience than South Carolina's Grand Strand. Stretching across 60 miles of shoreline and 14 unique communities, including Myrtle Beach, this region holds a special place in the American vacation story.

If you love the idea of pairing familiar vacation touchstones with new attractions, you'll find it all at The Beach. Try these curated experiences combining the best of the past with fun new ways to enjoy your nostalgic getaway.

Gen Z: TikTok meets childhood throwbacks

This itinerary taps into Gen Z's love of content-worthy moments and playful nods to the early 2000s. After a visit to the beach, check out oversized sweets at the iconic candy store I Love Sugar, then explore the mall-style vibes at the outdoor shopping and dining hub The Market Common.

Ready for a little action?

The high-tech mini golf experience at PopStroke, backed by Tiger Woods, is well worth the visit. Then you can throw it back with skee-ball at the Fun Plaza Arcade, race bumper cars at The Track and make sure to catch a candy-colored sunset from the top of the SkyWheel.

End the evening enjoying modern live music and rooftop vibes at Tin Roof. You'll have an amazing time, with plenty of Instagrammable moments.

Millennials: Perfect remix of retro and modern

Get ready for a trip that embraces the "good old days" with grown-up upgrades. First snap some film-style beach photos along the Myrtle Beach Boardwalk, then satisfy your sweet tooth with bubble waffles and ice cream from The Dolly Llama.

After soaking in some sun and surf, enjoy dinner at The Hangout, a lively burger and seafood spot with dancing servers and throwback tunes. Then, unwind at the sleek new retro-inspired Voco the Shelby hotel, featuring modern oceanfront digs with a pool and view that can't be beat.

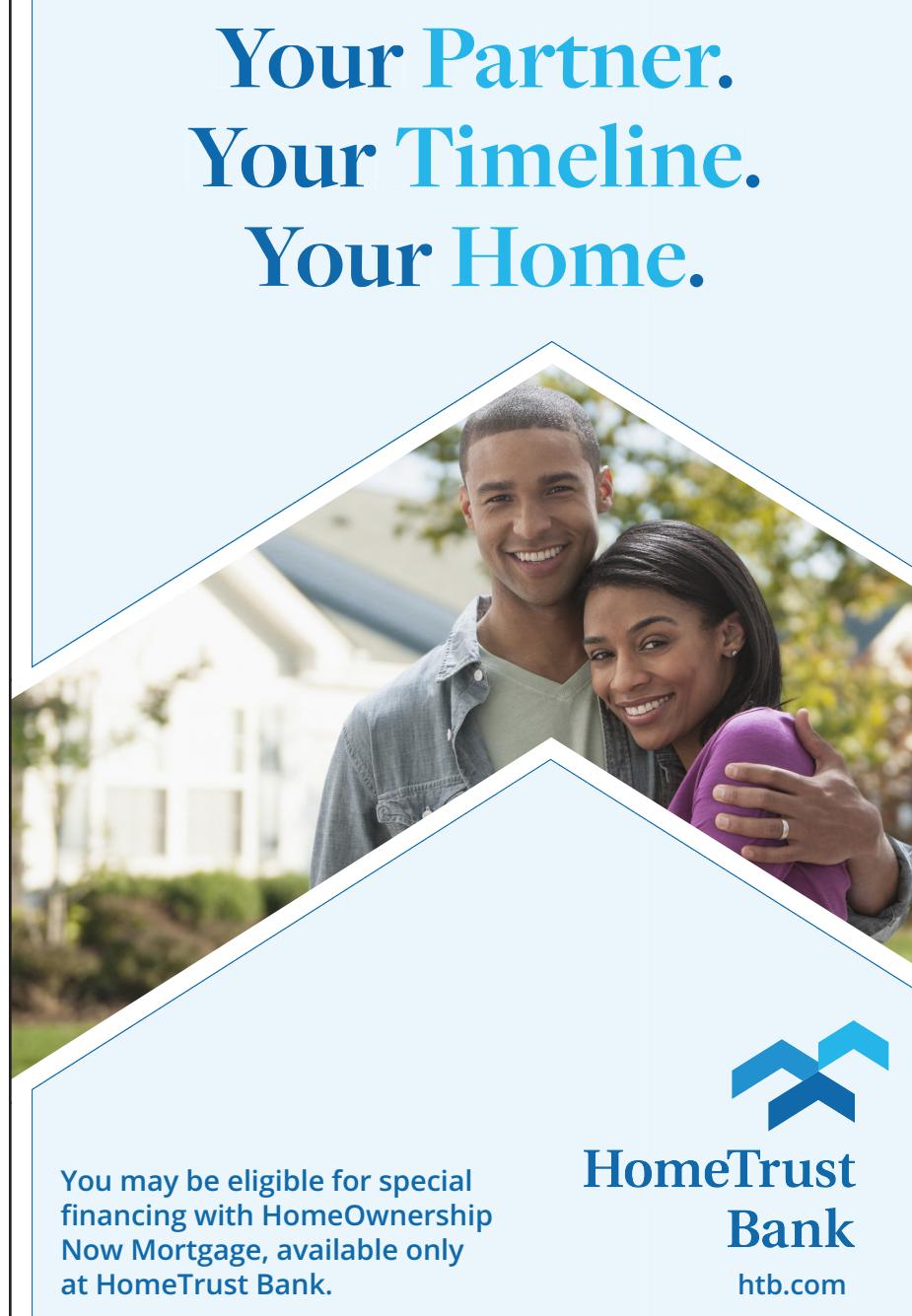
Another day may find you indulging in nostalgia with a scoop at Original Painter's Homemade Ice Cream, a local favorite since 1952, followed by classic car displays at Wheels of Yesteryear and a throwback live music performance at the Greg Rowles Legacy Theatre. Before heading home, stroll the famed Myrtle Beach Boardwalk for souvenirs and saltwater taffy, followed by a step back in time with classic Lowcountry flavors and pirate lore at Drunken Jack's.

No matter your generation, rediscover the magic of Myrtle Beach, where classic vacation memories meet fresh, new experiences. Start planning your adventure today at VisitMyrtleBeach.com.

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PAGE 4B Thursday, February 12, 2022

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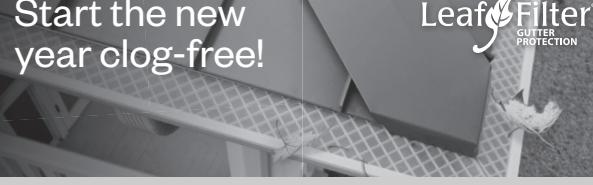
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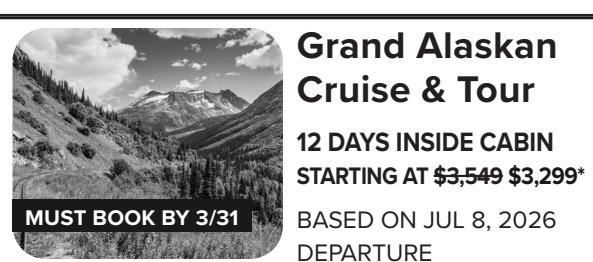
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HEALTHY LIVING

4 Smart Tips to Save Money and Stay Well This Season

(StatePoint) The beginning of the year is a natural time for a reset, especially when it comes to budgets and better-for-you habits. With cold and flu season still in full swing, it's also a time when many people start thinking about how to stay healthy without spending more than they planned.

With a few tips and tricks, staying healthy doesn't have to be expensive. Here's what you can do:

Shop ahead. Most people don't think about cold and flu products until they actually need them. Stocking up ahead of time can help ensure quick access to relief while making it easier to take advantage of savings. Using coupons, price-saving apps and shopping for store promotions can help bring down the cost of everyday health essentials.

Choose generic and save. Store brand over-the-counter (OTC) products offer a more affordable option for common needs, including pain relief and cough and cold care.

Perrigo, a leading provider of store brand OTC products, makes trusted alternatives to name brands across key self-care categories, including ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cough suppressants, decongestants and multi-symptom relief. These store brand OTC products contain the same active ingredients and meet the same FDA standards as national name brands, but at a lower cost.

As health care costs continue to rise, consumers can opt for these store brand OTC products to save money without compromising on quality.

Stay active. Staying active doesn't have to mean joining a luxury gym membership or having a complicated routine. Research published in the National Library of Medicine suggests that moderate amounts of exercise can help reduce stress and support immune function. Walking, running, free online workout classes or bodyweight exercises at home are all accessible ways to stay active throughout the season.

Adopt healthy habits. Small, everyday habits can also make a difference during cold and flu season. Washing your hands, staying hydrated and getting plenty of sleep are simple steps that support overall wellness and help reduce the risk of getting sick.

As consumers settle into their routines, combining smart shopping choices with healthy habits can help them feel prepared and more in control throughout cold and flu season.

To stock up on affordable store brand self-care and OTC products, stop by your local retailer.



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WIKIPEDIA

Lalah Hathaway takes the stage at Ovens Auditorium May 2 with October London.

4 legendary divas, one stage for Valentine's

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The latest events from stage, screen and exhibits across the Charlotte region:

Through Feb. 22

"Primary Trust," The Arts Factory, 1545 W Trade St.

Written by Eboni Booth and directed by Tiffany Bryant-Jackson, "Primary Trust" won the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Outer Critics Circle Outstanding New Off-Broadway play. The cast includes Miles Thompson (Kenneth), Marvin King (Bart), Tim Huffman (Clay/Sam) and Frandasia Williams (Corrina/Wally's waiter) making her Three Bone Theatre debut.

Thursday-Saturday shows start at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m.

Tickets: threebonetheatre.com

Feb. 13

 Chaka Khan, Patti LaBelle, Gladys Knight, and Stephanie Mills are extending their "The Queens! 4 Legends. 1 Stage" tour to Spectrum Center. The tour brings together four trailblazing R&B/pop giants for a celebration of legacy, sisterhood, and music.

Tickets: bpctickets.com.

Feb. 14

 Charlotte Symphony presents Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5, Belk Theater, 130 N. Tryon St.

As part of the CSO Spotlight Series, pianist and vocalist Gabriel Kahane joins the orchestra conducted by Kwame Ryan to perform "Pattern of the Rail," a song cycle inspired by Kahane's cross-country train journey through the United States during the 2016 presidential election.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 closes the program, tracing a journey from darkness to resolve, with sweeping melodies and dramatic power.

Program starts at 7:30 p.m. both days. Tickets \$40.39-\$145.68; available at tix.blumenthalarts.org.

Feb. 22

The Highland Neighborhood Association hosts a ribbon cutting ceremony and community celebration marking the opening of the Public Art Plaza at Erwin Center, 913 N. Pryor Street, Gastonia. The ribbon cutting is 3-5 p.m.

The Public Art Plaza includes a Walk of Fame Pathway composed of layered imagery that uplifts the history, culture, and lived experiences of Gastonia's African American Highland community. Through visual storytelling, the installation captures local history while celebrating the fusion of past and present.

March 7

The eighth annual Queen City Blues Festival is at Ovens Auditorium at 7 p.m. The Southern soul and modern blues scene blend old-school storytelling with contemporary R&B, with performances by King George, Pokey Bear, Lenny Williams, West Love, Tonic Armani, Mike Clark Jr., E.J. Jones, Stephanie Luckett & the YP Band, and Henry Welch.

Tickets available at ticketmaster.com.

March 12

Leela James plays the Carolina The-

Please see BLUES-ROCK | 6B



BLACK VIOLIN

The Black Violin partnership between Kev Marcus (left) and Wil Baptiste extends to their youth as students at Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. They will perform Feb. 18 at Belk Theater.

Stereotype-defying Black Violin returns to Charlotte

Duo combines hip hop, classical and rock to create 'a crazy mix' onstage

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Black Violin breaks music stereotypes.

The duo's Full Circle Tour is coming to the Belk Theater on Feb. 18, at 7 p.m. Black Violin - Wil Baptiste and Kev Marcus - got their start in 2004 at Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where they shared classes. What began as hearing songs on the radio and playing them in class eventually led to national tours and Grammy nominations.

"We didn't think that we would make a career out of it," Baptiste said. "But that's kind of the way that it started and fast forward to today, we just took that same energy, just being ourselves and doing what feels right to us creatively."

The tour is a reflection on how Baptiste and Marcus have grown as artists and men.

"I think one distinctive difference, because of what the album is, we were approaching more of a storytelling, so we're going to take you guys on a journey of what 20 years of Black Violin sounded like," Baptiste said.

Baptiste adds Black Violin will bring that energy to Charlotte with songs from their new album that showcase how they've grown sonically.

"It's always very striking in person," he said. "Number one, it's kind of loud in here. And two, you don't

think of loudness as it relates to violin. It's a rock concert. It's a hip hop concert, but just instead of your typical instruments, you got violins, violas, you got a DJ, you got a drummer, you got a keyboardist, and that in itself, that's a crazy mix to be on stage."

Black Violin has blended classical music with hip-hop and other genres over five albums, creating a sound that pushes the norm.

"I think the instrument itself has been put in a box in a lot of ways. If you think of what a guitar is, you don't think of a guitar as one specific thing or one specific genre,"

We didn't think that we would make a career out of it. But that's kind of the way that it started and fast forward to today, we just took that same energy, just being ourselves and doing what feels right to us creatively.

 Black Violin co-founder
WIL BAPTISTE

Baptiste said, "so I think we've pushed against that probably most, this violin could be used for anything."

Being Black in the classical music world comes with stereotypes. Black Violin has been pushing back against the idea that someone must look a certain way to succeed in the space.

"I think when you see me as Black dude, 6-foot-2, walking and you see a case, I get this all the time, literally every single time I'm at the airport," Baptiste said. "People are never going to assume that it's a violin or a viola, they're going to say tuba, which does not look like a tuba case."

The Black Violin Foundation aims to break those stereotypes by providing technical training and the room for students to creatively explore. The foundation's mission is making sure students feel that they do belong and can be in a classical space unapologetically.

"We see Black Violin as something that is much bigger than two individuals," Baptiste said. "It's much bigger. We're very impactful to these kids, so we feel like we have a responsibility to inspire and uplift, and we don't take that lightly. It may take time. You find yourself within that instrument, it's amazing how you can transform, but also how you can approach not just music, but life in general."

Black voices come alive at Sundance film fest

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Black filmmakers, actors and films were an integral part of the 2026 Sundance Film Festival.

Now that the event is leaving Park City, Utah after 40-plus years, they were around to say farewell. In 2027 the fest is headed to Boulder, Colorado.

If I Go Will They Miss Me

2 stars

In the past, some portrayals of Black families living in low-income communities have been filled with stereotypes—especially regarding men.

These days astute filmmakers tackling that subject have depicted rounded characters and eschewed clichés. E.g., A.V. Rockwell's 2023 film One Thousand and One, which featured Teyana Taylor as a mother caught in life's urban struggles while parenting her young son, avoided demeaning clichés. The men around her had issues, but all were three-dimensional characters—void of demonizing depictions.

"If I Go Will They Miss Me" is a throwback. A bad one.

Writer/director Walter Thompson-Hernandez (Kites) sets his family drama of woe in working-class Watts, Los Angeles. Lozita's (Danielle Brooks) is blessed with her young son Anthony, Aka Lil Ant (Bodhi Dell). A model middle schooler whose creative head is always in the clouds.

Dreaming of Black boys floating in air and conjuring other mystical images, Fantasyland is his refuge, mythology his thing and Pegasus his hero.

Mom is less blessed with her husband Big Ant (J. Alphonse Nicholson, "They Cloned Tyrone"). Stints in prison, issues with drugs, playdates with other women and an overt animosity towards Lil Ant make him a thorn.

All on view is artistically and surreal-



SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

The soldiers of a special operations patrol unit during the Vietnam War are the subject of the documentary "Soul Patrol."

istically rendered. Like a visualist creating a fable and not a wise griot. The story never rises as high as Lil Ant's dreams. It's mired. Big Ant is an abusive, negative trope. An inner-city Black man as a devil. A creep. A one-dimensional character. A drag.

In one pivotal scene, Big Ant, in a fit of madness, sadistically rips up his son's treasured, fanciful artwork. When Lil Ant confronts him, the father smacks him. Ugh!

Viewers looking to Lozita for sanity will likely be disappointed when she misses this key chance to break the cycle of abuse. Whatever the character does later to protect her family is way too late. Patient audiences have already checked out. It's a big disappointment. Just like the script and the filmmaker's dated interpretation of Black fathers.

The winsomeness of the cinematography (Michael Fernandez), music (Malcolm Parson) and sets (production designer Maria Perez Ramirez) lingers. That's where any positive commendations should end.

Lady

2.5 stars

She's a road warrior. Driving a cab on the chaotic streets of Lagos, Nigeria. The job requires courage, and Lady (Jessica Gabriel's Ujah), a twenty-something, has that kind of gumption. She owns her van, supports herself and is a thriving female driver in a male-dominated occupation.

The setting, premise and engaging lead character are products of first-time feature filmmaker Olive Nwosu's great imagination. Her vision of city life

Please see BLACK | 6B

Black voices loud and clear at Sundance fest

Continued from page 5B
captures an urban hustle and bustle spirit.

The footage starts with a dirge-like slow jazz/blues score (composer Ollie Mayo), so reminiscent of early Spike Lee film soundtracks. Then the music shifts into tangy Afrobeats and a vibrancy takes hold. Saturated colors and perfectly shot cinematography (Alana Mejia Gonzalez) give the proceedings a dazzling quality as Nwosu spins her feminist tale. One that involves Lady, at the behest of her childhood friend Pinky (Amanda Oruh), becoming a chauffeur for sex workers. A sisterhood grows between the driver and her passengers. One that triggers traumatic moments from Lady's childhood that've left her afraid of sexual intimacy.

The cast of women are all treasures. Gregarious, funny, gossipy. All living in a rat race that pushes them to find work the best way they can. Filmgoers will want Lady to find love, drive off into the sunset and have a happily-ever-after ending. The overdramatic script has other ideas. Which is a pity. The setup, production elements and acting are far stronger than the final stages of the story. Easy to love the film's setup, direction, production elements, characters and vibe more than the story. Nonetheless, a nice peak at the seamy side of city life with a touch of social unrest in the background.

Soul Patrol

3 stars

It's a soldier's story.

Veterans in this poignant documentary recollect their past and examine the present while writer/director J.M. Harper archives it all. Home life, combat, the aftermath of the unpopular War in Vietnam.

Super 8 videos shot back in the '60s, other archival footage, present day interviews and compelling reenactments are the vital pieces in this carefully assembled puzzle (editors: Byron Leon, Niles Howard, Gabriela Tessitore). All elements are elevated by a musical soundtrack that embodies the times, with old soul music by James Brown to Jimmy Ruffin.

Back in the 1960s, when they were young, these men dealt with racism in the States, MLK's murder, RFK's assassination and civil rights issues. In Viet-

nam, bigoted commanding officers and fighting the Viet Cong added more pressure. And fighting and killing brown-skinned people, then returning to an indifferent and disrespectful America was the final insult.

Luckily, behind enemy lines they built a camaraderie as the first all-Black Special Operations Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol unit in Vietnam. It's a brotherhood that binds them today — even into their 80s. Talking through their PTSD, sharing anecdotes and admitting to struggles becomes therapeutic and healing—for those in the film and those who watch.

The unfairness of it all is duly noted: "We busted our asses to kill and got nothing for it!" "I relive that mission every single day of my life!" Logan Tripplett's astute cinematography doesn't miss a smile, tear or hug. The hallowed history of these unsung heroes has been preserved. First recorded by the patrols' own Ed Emanuel in his 2003 memoir Soul Patrol. Now sensitively chronicled by filmmaker J.M. Harper. Audiences can only think one thing, "Thank you all for your service."

Troublemaker: The Story Behind the Mandela Tapes

3 stars

Mere mortals may deserve one autobiographical film. Legends like the saintly Nelson Mandela merit more. Action film director Antoine Fuqua ("The Equalizer") and screenwriter Michael Mann use audio tapes, made while Mandela was writing his autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom," as the base for this unique documentary format.

Voiceovers, archival footage, old interviews and photos appear (editor Jake Pushinsky). Animation (Thabang Lehobye) augments the visuals as Mandela's persona is meticulously recreated. In his own voice and with the film crew's creative tools.

Intimate, public and reflective moments get lifted by a dramatic musical score (Marcelo Zarvos). Viewers step back in time like they're witnessing the social/political emergence of a biblical figure. Mandela's voice retraces his own journey. Birth to death. Freedom, to imprisonment, to freedom.

Back in the 1960s, when they were young, these men dealt with racism in the States, MLK's murder, RFK's assassination and civil rights issues. In Viet-

Blues-rock standout Robert Cray at the Carolina Theatre

Continued from page 5B

atre at 8 p.m. as part of the 2BHonest Tour.

James, who has released seven LP albums, channels some of the all-time R&B/soul greats with performances that are equal parts church and blues club. James has eight top-20 R&B radio singles, including a pair of No. 1 tracks on the Billboard charts. Her 2021 single "Complicated" topped the Billboard Adult R&B songs chart for three straight weeks.

Tickets are \$68-\$122 and available online at Ticketmaster.com.

March 20-21

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra presents "Encanto in Concert" at Belk Theater, 130 N Tryon St.. The Oscar-winning Walt Disney Studios movie tells the tale of the Madrigals, a family living in a magical house in the mountains of Colombia. Watch the entire feature-length film as the symphony performs the score live.

Tickets at tix.blumenthalarts.org.

April 7

Contemporary soul trio Moonchild plays Knight Theater at 7:30 p.m. as part of the Waves Tour.

The Los Angeles-based threesome of Amber Navran, Andris Mattson and Max Bryk combines neo-soul, jazz and electronic music into a genre-fluid sound.

Tickets start at \$52.77 and available at blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/moonchild-waves-tour

Through April 26

"In Pursuit of Home" at Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, Levine Center for the Arts, 551

South Tryon St.

Artist Mario Moore's exhibit encourages viewers to reflect on how the meaning of home is changing in modern America and the inequalities intertwined with its pursuit.

The exhibition explores the desire for homeownership in the United States, particularly among people in their 20s and 30s, and the barriers that make achieving it more challenging.

More information: ganttcenter.org/exhibitions/in-pursuit-of-home.

May 2

R&B icons October London and Lalah Hathaway take over Ovens Auditorium, 2900 E Independence Blvd. for a concert celebrating love, soul and timeless music. Showtime is 8 p.m. Tickets on sale at Ticketmaster.com.

May 5

The Robert Cray Band, 7:30 p.m. Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St.

The blues-rock standout first picked up a guitar after seeing The Beatles on TV then, having witnessed Jimi Hendrix perform in Seattle, determined his destiny would follow a similar path. Cray's developed into one of American music's top music artists over the last half century.

Tickets range from \$55-\$174 and available at ticketmaster.com.

June 6

Grammy-nominated R&B performer Ari Lennox brings her North American tour to Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre. The show is in support of her third studio album Vacancy.

Tickets available at livenation.com.

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Health Care Innovator

Yele Aluko M.D.

6-7 p.m.

SUGAR CREEK LIBRARY

4045 N. Tryon St. Unit A

Register to attend in person or virtually: <https://thecharlottepost.com/BHMLandL>



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