

Life!

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026 SECTION B



SHUTTERSTOCK

Chocolate Easter Egg cupcakes are a colorful and sweet addition to your holiday menu.

Creative cupcakes to complete your Easter feast

FEATURE IMPACT

Once the Easter baskets are put away and the main course is cleared from the kitchen, you can liven up the dessert table or send guests off with a thoughtful treat thanks to these Chocolate Easter Egg Cupcakes. Moist cake, creamy frosting and chocolate-coated candies combine for a seasonal sweet that's sure to impress.

To find more dessert ideas that satisfy chocolate lovers - and all your loved ones - visit Culinary.net.

Chocolate Easter Egg Cupcakes

Recipe adapted from *A Classic Twist*

Prep time: 30 minutes

Cook time: 15 minutes

Cupcakes:

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1/3 cup cocoa powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 egg, at room temperature

1/2 cup buttermilk, at room temperature

1/2 cup hot water

1/4 cup vegetable oil

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Frosting:

Please see **BAKE** | 2B

Insurer responds to North Carolina's doula demands

By Zamone Perez

NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

A major health insurance company is moving to expand coverage to include a doula offering for employer-sponsored health plans as more expectant mothers seek out non-medical support through pregnancy.

UnitedHealthcare expanded coverage to include doulas, which serve as advocates for pregnant women and focus on both guiding new parents and addressing the needs of the newborn. The announcement comes as more women seek out doulas for their pregnancy journeys. The International Doula Institute finds that the demand for doula services grew by 8% in 2025.

Dr. Lisa Saul, chief medical director of women's health for UnitedHealthcare, said doula services give people access to non-clinical support that's crucial during the postpartum period.

"Having a person that has gotten to know you throughout your pregnancy and can identify when certain things might seem to be a little bit off can often help us to detect when someone is struggling prior to the usual timeframe," she said.

The expansion to doula coverage comes as North Carolina grapples with a high maternal mortality rate compared with other states. According to the

Please see **INSURER** | 2B

« RIDES »

Far from its humble beginnings, Toyota's 2026 Prius is a state of the art hybrid

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Toyota's Prius has come a long way from its boxy slow-poke roots.

It's now a sleek, more-fun-to-drive vehicle with curb appeal.

The 2026 Prius is part of the fifth generation Prius which debuted in 2023. The only difference from last year's car is the addition of a Night Shade package. My test car came with that package, and it was also a plug-in hybrid.

All Prius models are hybrids and can achieve up to 50 miles per gallon for in-city mileage. A plug-in hybrid allows you to drive up to 40 miles without using gas. If you are using

the car for around town jaunts you may not use gasoline for a long stretch if you charge the thing daily. That's impressive for something that gets wonderful gas mileage anyway.

There is a lot more to be impressed about this Prius. I absolutely love the color. Toyota calls it Karashi, which may stand for golden yellow. If not, that's the color I'd say it is. The interior is black vinyl with grey stitching, and it looks high tech. Some have complained the steering wheel gets in the way of the gauge cluster, but I didn't find it bothersome.

The touch screen was upgraded to the larger version which was easy to

read and very intuitive. Wireless Apple CarPlay worked without a hitch.

The front seats are very comfortable, offering enough bolstering for a variety of builds to be comfortable. The rear seats are fine but the car's slippery shape doesn't allow for a lot of head or leg room for tall people. There is room behind the seats to store stuff in the hatch area. This expands once the back seats are folded. There is 20.3 cubic feet of space with the seats up.

The Prius has a total engine output of 220 horsepower. There is a 2.0-liter gasoline powered four-cylinder engine along with a battery powered hybrid en-



TOYOTA

Toyota's Prius is still a hybrid vehicle that delivers great mileage, but it now has more sophisticated looks and ride quality.

gine and a third for the electric all-wheel-drive.

The transmission is continuously variable, and the suspension is four-wheel independent with a multi-link setup in the rear.

I don't like CVT, but that setup seems to be efficient and the choice of a lot of auto makers. The Prius is done justice with this transmission because it helps the vehicle get about

52 mpg in the city and 49 mpg all around. That's not news for a Prius but anyone who owned previous versions know these cars were fairly slow. This

Please see **FAR** | 3B



TAYLOR ADAMS

Taylor Adams, a Charlotte native and UNC Charlotte graduate, is North Carolina's representative at the Cherry Blossom Program in Washington, D.C. Caption

Representing NC on Cherry Blossom stage

Charlottean Taylor Adams to participate in national showcase

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte native Taylor Adams is representing North Carolina in the Cherry Blossom Program.

The initiative, which is connected to the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C., selects one delegate from each state to participate in a week of educational and professional opportunities April 4-11. Repre-

sentatives are selected by their state society through an application process based on community involvement, leadership qualities and academic accomplishments.

Adams is one of the few Black representatives from North Carolina in recent years and taking the opportunity to bring her Charlotte roots to Washington.

"I think it's really important for us to hone in on where we come

from and what really makes North Carolina, North Carolina," she said.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the 1912 gift of 3,000 cherry trees from Tokyo, Japan, Mayor Yukio Ozaki to the city of Washington as a gesture of friendship between the countries. On March 27, 1912, First Lady Helen Taft and Vis-

Please see **CHARLOTTEAN** | 2B

From garden to plate, grow more tomatoes

By Melinda Myers

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Enjoy the fresh-from-the-garden flavor of homegrown tomatoes. Grow one or more in a container, a dedicated vegetable garden or plant them with flowers in garden beds.

Purchase transplants from a local garden center if not starting plants from seed at home. Check the tags and select varieties suited to how they will be used. Grow bite-sized cherry, plum or cocktail tomatoes to use in salads, on relish trays, and for snacking. Include a few paste tomatoes, like Romas, with meatier fruit for making sauces and soups. Don't forget about slicers, like Big Beef, Beefsteak and Better Boy, to enjoy on sandwiches, grilled, or on their own.

Prepare plants that will be moved from under lights indoors or a sunny greenhouse to the growing conditions in the garden. Start the hardening off process one to two weeks prior to planting outdoors. Stop fertilizing the plants and move them outdoors to a shaded location. Each day, increase the amount of direct sun the plants receive. Be sure to cover or move the plants indoors whenever there is a danger of frost.

Once hardened off and the soil is prepared, it's time to plant. Carefully slide the plant out of the container. Gently loosen the roots of pot-bound transplants to encourage them to grow into the surrounding soil. Remove any flowers or small fruit, allowing the plant to focus its energy on developing a robust root system and a more productive plant.



ALL AMERICA SELECTIONS

Big Beef tomato has remained one of the most popular red tomatoes in North America with its 8-to-12-ounce fruit.

Please see **FROM** | 2B

Charlottean represents NC at Cherry Blossom

Continued from page 1B

countess Chinda, wife of the Japanese ambassador, planted the first two trees on the north bank of the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park.

In 1915, the U.S. reciprocated with flowering dogwood trees - North Carolina's official flower - as a gift to Japan.

Although the Cherry Blossom Program is not a pageant, the weeklong event concludes with a delegate crowned Cherry Blossom Queen through the traditional spinning of a wheel.

The program takes place across Washington, with past events held at venues like the National Press Club.

Adams is a graduate of UNC Charlotte and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She is an administrative assistant in the Charlotte office of U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, where

she helps with constituent services and office operations. They are not related.

Taylor Adams said growing up her parents instilled in her the importance of community and service from a young age. She is involved with the Young Black Leadership Alliance and volunteers at the nonprofit Common Heart.

Adams' family's ties to the Charlotte's Brooklyn neighborhood inspired her to educate others about knowing their history, especially in a city that continues to grow and change.

"We need to really stand for not getting rid of historic landmarks and preserving the history of where our city started from," she said. "It's nice that it's growing, but I think it's important for us to always look back at where we come from and never forget that."

Bake creative cupcakes to complete your Easter feast

Continued from page 1B

3 sticks unsalted butter, softened and cubed

3 cups powdered sugar, sifted

2-3 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 pinch salt

2-3 drops brown food coloring

egg-shaped chocolate-coated candies

To make cupcakes: Pre-heat oven to 350 F. Line 12-cup muffin tin with cupcake liners.

In bowl of electric mixer, sift flour, sugar, cocoa

powder, baking soda, baking powder and salt.

In medium bowl, whisk egg, buttermilk, water, vegetable oil and vanilla extract.

Mix dry ingredients on low speed 1 minute. Add wet ingredients. Mix 2 minutes on medium speed and scrape sides and bottom of bowl. Mix 1 minute on medium speed.

Divide evenly among cupcake liners.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out almost clean.

Cool cupcakes on wire rack.

To make frosting: Using paddle attachment of electric mixer, whip butter 8 minutes on medium speed until pale and creamy. Add powdered sugar, milk, vanilla extract and salt; mix on low speed 1 minute. Increase speed to medium and mix 6 minutes until frosting is light, creamy and fluffy. Add food coloring and whip 1 minute.

Pipe frosting onto cupcakes and top with egg-shaped chocolate-coated candies.

From garden to plate, grow more tomatoes

Continued from page 1B

Plant tall, leggy plants deeper to encourage roots to develop along the buried stem. Dig a trench, remove the lower leaves and set the plant on its side in the trench. Carefully bend the stem upright, then cover the portion in the trench with soil and water.

Set stakes and towers in place at the time of planting to avoid root damage. Training tomatoes keeps the fruit off the ground, reducing insect and disease problems. That means more fruit to harvest and enjoy.

Train tomato plants on to stakes for an earlier, but smaller harvest than those grown in cages. Grow plants with less effort in sturdy towers or cages. There will be more tomatoes to pick, but a bit later with this method. Plants left sprawled on the ground yield the largest harvest, but many fruits are lost to disease, insects and gardeners' feet.

Shorten the time to harvest and help manage weeds with the help of floating row cover, clear plastic or cloches. Use these to cover the properly prepared planting space a week or two before planting. Once the soil is warm, lightly cultivate the soil to kill any weeds that have sprouted. Do not dig deep, which brings more weed seeds to the surface to begin growing. Use row covers or cloches to protect plants from early season cold temperatures and frost.

Further shorten the time to harvest by planting early ripening varieties, like Early Girl, Fourth of July, and Fantastic. Check the catalog description or plant tags for the number of days between planting and harvest. Growing these or other early ripening varieties means you'll be enjoying fresh tomatoes sooner.

Always water plants thoroughly when the top few inches of soil are crumbly and moist. Avoid overhead watering which increases the risk of disease. Instead, apply water directly to the soil surface, using a watering wand, soaker hose or drip irrigation. Extend the time between watering and increase success with mulch. Spread a two-inch layer of shredded leaves, weed-free straw, or evergreen needles over the surface around plants. This will conserve water, suppress weeds, and improve the soil as the mulch decomposes.

With proper planting and care there will be a bounty of tasty, garden-fresh tomatoes to harvest and enjoy.

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 radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

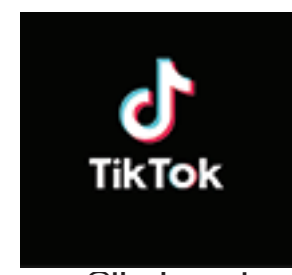
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Insurer responds to rising doula demands in North Carolina

Continued from page 1B

Commonwealth Fund, North Carolina reported more than 50 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 births, one of the highest rates of mortality in the country.

But as doula coverage becomes a greater focus for insurance companies, some doulas question whether they'll be able to recruit and retain doulas in their network. Aida Al-

garin, owner of Central Carolina Doulas, said she worries that low payouts and red tape that she finds in Medicaid-covered doula care may cross over and hinder insurance providers from recruiting doulas into their networks.

"The success of insurance companies offering doula services is dependent on recruiting doulas - and the kind of doulas that their clients want," she

said. "That has to make the incentive package and the program appealing for doulas."

A report by the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission found doulas expressed concerns about Medicaid enrollment because of reimbursement levels and administrative burdens to being an in-network provider.

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »



NASA

Mae Jemison, the first Black woman astronaut, flew aboard the space shuttle Endeavour in 1992.

Far out: Mae Jemison, the first Black woman to go into space

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Mae Jemison made history as the first Black woman to travel in space.

Jemison's mission aboard the space shuttle Endeavour in 1992 broke barriers and inspired generations of individuals, especially women and people of color, to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Jemison was born on Oct. 17, 1956, in Decatur, Alabama and raised in Chicago. She was the youngest to three children born to Charlie Jemison and Dorothy Green. Her mother was an elementary school teacher, and her father was a maintenance supervisor.

In 1973, Jemison graduated Morgan Park High School when she was 16 years old and immediately enrolled at Stanford University in California, where she earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineer-

ing in 1977. Jemison applied her knowledge and academic excellence to medical school and to becoming a physician.

Jemison applied to NASA's astronaut program in 1985 following Sally Ride becoming the first U.S. astronaut in 1983. Jemison's application was put on hold when NASA stopped taking applications after the 1986 space shuttle Challenger explosion. Jemison reapplied in 1987 and was selected as one of 15 candidates from a pool of more than 2,000 applicants.

Jemison is an advocate for STEM education by dedicating her post-astronaut career to promoting science literacy and encouraging young people to pursue careers in science-related disciplines. She founded the Jemison Group, a technology consulting firm that explores and develops advanced technologies for everyday life.

The Charlotte Post presents

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Counselor reflects on Black maternal health

By Jennifer Porter Gore

SAN DIEGO VOICE AND VIEWPOINT

In 2024, the number of U.S. mothers who died as a result of pregnancy or childbirth dropped compared to 2023. But while slightly fewer Black mothers died that year, they still had three times the mortality rate of white women.

South Carolina's rates of maternal deaths outpaced even the national rates. In fact, the state's overall rate of maternal deaths between 2019 and 2023 was higher than all but eight states and the District of Columbia.

Last month healthcare leaders, birth workers, and community members gathered to honor the legacy of Charleston native Dr. Janell Green Smith, a nurse-midwife and doctor of nursing practice who died in January from childbirth complications. She had participated in more than 300 births and specialized in helping Black women give birth safely.

Her death shocked the community and her colleagues who are determined to address concerns about Black maternal health. The event also covered the importance of protecting mental health during grief and of men's role in solving the maternal health crisis.

As a therapist and father, Lawrence Lovell, a licensed professional counselor and founder of Breakthrough Solutions, discussed ways the event's attendees could process their grief over Green Smith's death. He also shared ways male partners can advocate for women's maternal health during pregnancy and childbirth.

Lovell spoke not just as a therapist but also as a father whose own family had briefly crossed paths with Green Smith. The event, he said, emerged organically from a moment of collective mourning.

Despite the grief, "it was still, like, a really beautiful event, a much-needed event, and it almost felt like we were all giving each other a collective family hug," says Lovell.

His connection to Green Smith, Lovell says, was brief but meaningful during his wife's pregnancy with their second child. Green Smith was practicing at the same birthing center where they had their child. She began practicing in Greenville a short time later. Even that short connection carried significance for Lovell, given the small number of Black maternal health professionals.

Lovell did not initially plan to become a mental health practitioner; he chose the career path after graduating from college, when someone suggested he consider psychology. His interest deepened when he noticed how few Black men work in mental health.

"Being Black man and playing football in college, there weren't a lot of people that look like me talking about mental health," says Lovell. "[I wanted] to give people that look like me an opportunity to work with someone that looks like them."

Working with new and expecting parents

Lovell often counsels couples preparing for parenthood by, helping partners understand what a successful pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum recovery look like. That often means helping women manage postpartum depression.

As a man, Lovell says, it's "humbling" that a woman "just trusts me enough to work with me through their pregnancy or their postpartum recovery."

In his work, Lovell has noticed how few men understand pregnancy before they experience it with their partner. Because early pregnancy symptoms are often invisible, he says, men may underestimate how much support a mom-to-be actually needs.

"Sometimes they may not realize they don't know much about pregnancy and what to expect in those three trimesters," Lovell says. "I tell a lot of the men that just because you can't see [she's pregnant] doesn't mean that she won't appreciate your intense support in that first trimester."

Education about pregnancy and postpartum recovery, he says, can change how men support their partners.

Teaching advocacy in the delivery room

Another major focus of Lovell's counseling is preparing men to advocate for mothers during labor.

"Helping men understand what pregnancy looks like: what delivery is going to look like, and what are the realistic expectations that I should have of myself in postpartum," he says.

Lovell encourages partners to be honest about their expectations for what will happen during delivery. He helps them prepare for the big day by discussing the birth plan and knowing how to quickly recognize problems. Clear communication, he says, prevents misunderstandings.

He regularly trains men to ask their partners detailed questions about their expectations during and after pregnancy. Advocacy in medical settings can be especially important and requires attention to details the mother may not be able to address.

"It's always important to fine-tune things and truly understand what helps your partner feel most supported," Lovell says. "Instead of guessing, you should ask."

Lovell recalls a moment during the birth of his first child when he had to take that role.

During the delivery, "I felt like something wasn't as sanitary as I'd like it to be," he says. "I asked, 'Hey, can you switch those out? Can you change your gloves?'"

Lovell has a succinct but powerful message he regularly shares with clients' families, and he shared it with attendees at last month's event.

"Just to believe women," he says. "I've worked with different couples, and sometimes I'm not really sure that there's enough empathy from the men."

That includes how women express pain.

"If a woman says, 'my pain is at a nine,' just because how you would express yourself at a nine is different than how she's expressing herself at [that level] doesn't mean you shouldn't believe her," he says.

Empathy, he says, can change outcomes far beyond the delivery room.

"We've got to believe women when they're talking about their experiences and their feelings and their pain," he says. "I think there's a lot that we can prevent if we empathize better."



SHUTTERSTOCK

Bedroom upgrades can be made with inexpensive lighting, bedding and offbeat hardware additions, often at cut-rate prices or do-it-yourself projects.

Budget-friendly bedroom upgrades that have impact

FEATURE IMPACT

Making changes to a bedroom doesn't have to break the bank.

Simple swaps, a little DIY and some inexpensive purchases can go a long way toward freshening up the place you lay your head.

Better bedding

If you can't remember the last time you bought a new comforter, it may be time to snag one. Think beyond the luxury home stores and check out discount home decor retailers and even thrift stores, where you can often find new, unopened bedding at a fraction of the cost. A fluffy throw blanket in a dynamic new color might be the perfect way to rejuvenate your bed.

Playful pillows

Few things spruce up a bedroom more than new throw pillows. Available in a myriad of sizes and shapes — from squares to rectangles to asymmetrical — there is no shortage of

ways to use these functional pieces to brighten up a space.

Uplifting light

Old-fashioned lamps, ancient wall sconces and dusty chandeliers can make a room feel stale. Scouring consignment stores and estate sales for new lighting can take a bedroom from dated to delightful without spending a ton of cash. If big box stores are more your thing, you can find budget lamps in unexpected departments; for example, try the back-to-school sections for dorm-friendly finds like twinkie lights and small bedside lamps. These little pops of light can both brighten and cozy up a room with minimal effort.

Punchy paint

Repainting a room is a doable DIY project, and it can make a huge difference in how a room looks and feels. Give yourself time to peruse the countless paint swatches at specialty paint

stores or home improvement stores. If you've always gravitated toward earthy tones, maybe opt for a color with a little more depth or saturation. If brighter hues are your thing, go a little darker. If you love the idea of painting but worry about buyer's remorse, start with an accent wall.

Heavenly hardware

Functional hardware like drawer pulls and door knobs can be replaced without much effort or money.

Secondhand stores, online marketplaces and even furniture boutiques can be a goldmine for offbeat and unique hardware. Be sure to think beyond your bedside, too. Wardrobe handles, closet rods, sconces, wall hooks and hinges can be swapped out easily and inexpensively.

Find more tips and guidance to give your bedroom a budget-friendly upgrade at eLivingtoday.com.

Resilient Black women turn job loss into new business ventures

By Tashi McQueen

AFRO-AMERICAN

In the aftermath of mass layoffs in 2025, many Black women are turning uncertainty into opportunity by launching businesses, strengthening professional networks and being innovative. Through resilience, creativity and community support, they are carving paths to stability and success in a shifting economy.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, in 2025, the employment rate for Black women decreased by 1.4 percentage points to 55.7%. The employment-to-population ratio for Black women with a bachelor's degree dropped 3.5 percentage points over the past year, a larger decline than any other education group, including those without a college degree.

"Black women are in professions that have been targeted," said Mary-Frances Winters, author of "Black Fatigue" and an equity, diversity and inclusion expert.

Winters noted that Black women disproportionately occupy diversity, inclusion, and equity, human resources, and government roles, which have been targeted and eliminated under the Trump administration.

Since the federal ban on diversity initiatives, many organizations have cut chief diversity officer positions and related inclusion programs, leaving Black women in these roles suddenly jobless or facing insecure employment. Winters, who still works in diversity, inclusion, and equity, said entrepreneurship has been a key solution.

"What we find that Black women do is that they leave and start their own businesses," she said.

According to the 2025 Wells Fargo Impact of Women-Owned Businesses report, Black women-owned businesses are a key engine of economic

growth in the U.S., overseeing 2 million businesses that employ more than 647,000 people.

Winters shed light on how some of these women are persevering.

"I live in Barbados part-time," she said. "Here, we have a group called the Black Pax Group, it's expats who are Black who have left England, the United States, Canada, and who are either semi-retired, taking a year off because they got a buyout from their organization or they are starting their own business."

Many of these businesses are in the wellness market, providing services to support Black women's well-being, while others are small consulting firms.

"Black women in general are fatigued," said Winters. "We are tired of having to continually defend and prove ourselves."

She also encouraged support for entrepreneurial Black women and highlighted the importance of community.

Winters emphasized that these challenges predate the administration's crack-down and are systemic.

"I could only stay in corporate for 10 years," she said. "The microaggressions, the discrimination that I faced...when people see a Black woman—the assumption is you're not as good, you're not as smart, and you have to be twice as good."

Winters added that this experience leads to burn-out.

"Black women are at the bottom when it comes to

salaries, getting promoted, being seen, being appreciated, being valued and recognized for their talent," she said.

"I know several of the women who did occupy chief diversity officer roles left on their own," Winters said, noting that some resigned because promoting inclusion in the current political environment became overwhelming. "Trump has the thing around it's about merit...what's the message there? That we aren't of merit?"

Denise Aguilar, a global marketing strategist, shared how she has turned layoffs into opportunities. Laid off in May 2025 after two years as global account director at Indigo Slate, she intensified her consulting practice, Denise Aguilar Consulting, and secured advisory roles with startups and the Latin Recording Academy Foundation. Aguilar, an Afrolatina with more than 15 years at Microsoft, Amazon and Vogue, said layoffs are difficult, but the real challenge is moving forward.

"I used to apply for 20 jobs a day because I needed to find a job immediately," she said. "I would go on Craigslist; I would knock on doors... and do everything in my power to land the next thing."

Aguilar credits her resilience to a strong support network of family, friends, and community. Her approach shows that even in uncertain times, determination, strategy, and support can turn setbacks into opportunities.

Far from humble beginnings, Toyota's 2026 Prius is a state of the art hybrid

Continued from page 1B

generation is so much quicker. It can get to 60 miles per hour in about 6.6 seconds. The last generation took more than 10 seconds.

This newfound power does not make this car fast, just faster. It is enough to give you confidence in passing and getting into the midst of traffic. The car also handles much better. You can maneuver urban traffic without a whole lot of planning.

The handling is also vastly improved. There is a sport setting that gives the car a bit more oomph to make the car feel a bit more engaging.

The Prius' ride quality has also improved. The suspension soaks up bumps nicely while providing a firm but comfortable ride. The lowered center of gravity helps keep the car feel grounded. It does not float or pitch about. Noise levels are acceptable for a car this small. It isn't quiet but it's also not overly loud. You can carry on a conversation at speeds of 70 mph.

The Nightshade version of the Prius comes with a great deal of equipment. Toyota's Safety Sense 3.0 that includes adaptive cruise, forward collision warning and automated lane change. ABS, automatic climate control, 19-inch wheels, Sirius/XM, heated seats, Black exterior trim, simulated carbon-fiber interior trim, wireless phone charging and keyless entry were also included.

My vehicle's options included a fixed glass roof.

You can get all those goodies for around \$37,900.

Pros:

- Improved power
 - Handsome good looks
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 - Adequate cargo area
 - Comfortable ride
 - Good handling
 - Great plug-in range
- Cons:
- Limited head room with glass roof
 - A little noisy on highway

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BIDS

NOTICE TO BIDDERS/ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Cabarrus County Schools (CCS) is accepting sealed bids for "Roof Replacement at Hickory Ridge Middle School" on **Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 10:00 am** Plans & Specifications are available by calling Beth Bobrek, Project Manager Project Manager, at the Facilities Management Department. The Plans & Specifications will also be available beginning **Thursday, April 2nd 2026** at www.cabarrus.k12.nc.us, go to "Departments", "Facilities Management", "Upcoming Projects, Bids and RFQ's".

Pre-Bid Conference Location, Date, and Time:

A site visit is scheduled for **April 8th at 1:30 pm**. Proper Legal ID will be required before being admitted to the school site. It is recommended that you bring only the staff that is required for your visit.

Bid Opening Location, Date and Time:

Sealed bids will be opened beginning at **10:00 am**, and read publicly at Cabarrus County Schools Facilities Management Department, 4425 Old Airport Road, Concord, NC on **May 12, 2026**. No bids will be accepted after **10:00 am** Cabarrus County Schools has the right to reject any or all bids.

Information related to this request for bids, including any addenda, will be posted to www.cabarrus.k12.nc.us, go to "Departments", "Facilities Management", "Upcoming Projects, Bids and RFQ's".

EMPLOYMENT

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LEGAL NOTICES

CATS Announces Public Hearing for Feedback on Fare Modernization Program

CATS will host a public hearing to collect public comments on the changes recommended by the Fare Modernization Program at the regularly scheduled Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) meeting on May 7, 2026. Members of the public can make verbal comments at the public hearing.

Details of the public hearing and how to participate are below.

- Time: 6 p.m.
- Date: May 7, 2026
- Location: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center, 600 E. 4th St., Room 267.
- The meeting will be live-streamed on the CATS YouTube channel.
- If you would like to sign up to speak during the public comment portion of the MTC meeting, please call 704-353-1794.

CATS does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, color or national origin. To request reasonable accommodation or translation (free of charge), please email telltransit@charlottenc.gov or call 704-336-7433 at least 72 hours prior to the public hearing meeting date.

Brett Baldeck
Communications Manager
Charlotte Area Transit System
Mobile (980) 214-0883 |
CATS Media Line (980) 722-0311
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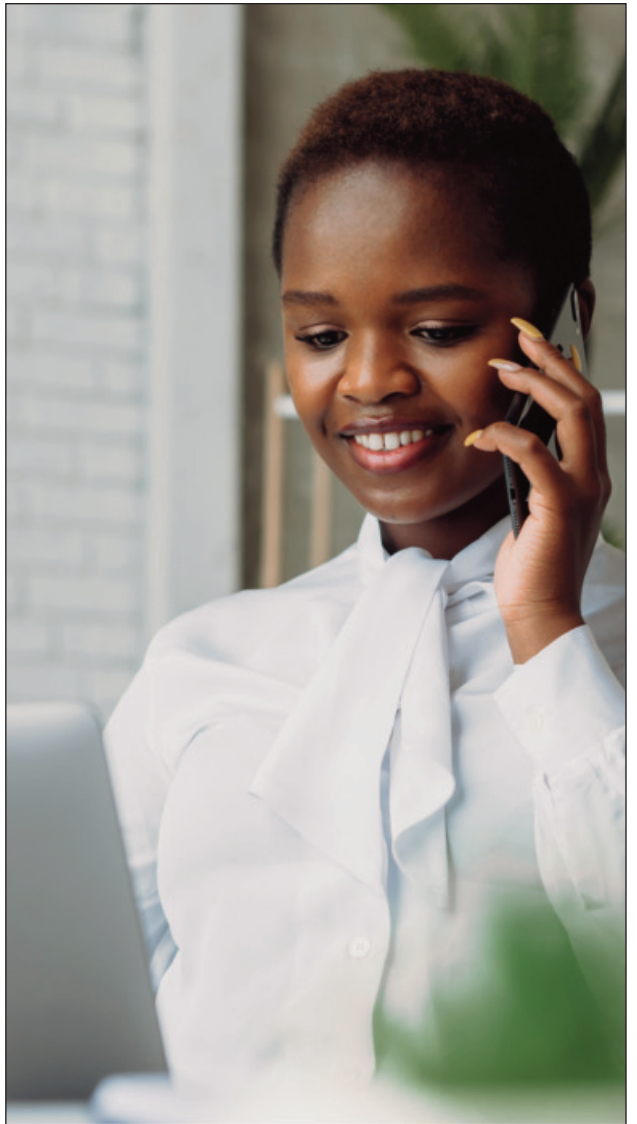
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« ON THE MARQUEE »

Moonchild at Knight Theater

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

The latest events and exhibits in Charlotte:

April 3

Keyboardist Nicolas Cole ("Blue Magic") takes the stage at Middle C Jazz, 300 S Brevard St. Tickets: middlec jazz.com.

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 are available at blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/moonchild-waves-tour

April 11

Two-time Grammy nominee Maysa ("Milestones") returns to Charlotte for a show at Middle C Jazz, 300 S Brevard St. Tickets: middlec jazz.com.

April 16-May 21

SouthPark After 5, a free evening entertainment series, returns over six Thursdays at Symphony Park at the corner of Barclay Downs Drive and Carnegie Boulevard, adjacent to SouthPark Mall.

Live music and free community events run from 5-9 p.m.

- April 16 - Coconut Groove Band with the Bald Brothers.

- April 23 - Bourbon Sons with Caroline & Omar.

- April 30 - Java Band with Rod Fiske.

- May 7 - On the Border Ultimate Eagles Tribute with Ryan & Woody and the United States Navy Band.

- May 14 - Landslide tribute to Fleet-

Please see GOT | 6B

Another PlayStation price hike

By Matt Ott

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The price of a PlayStation is going up by another \$100, the second time in less than a year that Sony has upped the price tag on its popular gaming console.

Citing "continued pressures in the global economic landscape," the Japanese company said that as of next Thursday, the PS5 will cost \$649.99 in the U.S. The price for its digital edition was also raised by \$100, to \$599.99. The PS5 Pro will cost \$899.99, a \$150 increase.

The company raised prices similarly for other regions, including the United Kingdom, Europe and Japan.

Global trade has been upended by U.S. tariffs imposed on all of the nation's trading partners and Sony bumped up the price for the PlayStation by \$50 just last August. The war in Iran, now its fourth week, has created a massive bottleneck of energy and manufacturing supplies, creating more price pressures for everyday goods, including electronics.

By the end of next week, the cost of a Sony PlayStation will be about 30% more than it was at this time last year.

"We know that price changes impact our community, and after careful evaluation, we found this was a necessary step to ensure we can continue delivering innovative, high-quality gaming experiences to players worldwide," Sony said in a blog post on its website.

Though Sony did not specifically cite it as a cause, Iran's attack last week on Qatar's natural gas export facility forced it to shut down, threatening supplies of helium, a key ingredient used to produce computer chips. Qatar supplies a third of the world's helium, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Qatar's state-owned gas company said last week the shutdown would slash helium exports by 14%. Lower supply means higher prices, especially if the war drags on for months or longer, analysts said.

While most people know of helium as the gas that makes party balloons float, it is also essential for manufacturing semiconductors used in computers and an array of other tech devices.

Last month, Sony reported that its profit in the October-December quarter surged 11% to 377.3 billion yen (\$2.4 billion), prompting the Japanese entertainment and electronics company to raise its full-year profit forecast to 1.13 trillion yen (\$7.2 billion).



KINGS OF THE QUEEN CITY

A scene from "Kings of the Queen City," a Charlotte-based reality program that explores how men navigate relationships and masculinity.

Reality show highlights Black and brown men

Charlotte-based 'Kings of the QC' dives into relationships, gender roles

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

A locally produced reality show explores life as a man in Charlotte.

"Kings of the Queen City" looks at the lives of men navigating life and reveals what made them share their experiences on screen, manhood and what it means to represent Black and brown people. The show follows eight men figuring out marriage, single life, mental health, fatherhood and friendship. The cast includes William Anderson, Petrick Barksdale, Jason Brown, Hassan Dekmak, Trevor Lewis, Ferney Mercado, Chris Word and Gabe Wright.

Producer Karla Anderson's vision for the show was to remove stereotypes and unhealthy narratives surrounding Black and brown men often seen in media.

"I really wanted to be the change I wanted to see in the world. I thought that the representations of Black and brown men, especially in the reality space, was lacking and not as nuanced," she said.

Anderson wanted to give viewers an inside look at what goes on in the minds of men, giving a different take on reality TV.

"We often don't know what it's really like when it's a group of guys and we're not around," she said. "What do they talk about? What do they say about us? What do they say about dating, marriage? What are those things that you really want to

know how they feel? This show gives you that and then some."

The show is not about drama but about putting vulnerability and authenticity on screen to give a rounded perspective on manhood. For the cast, choosing to be part of the project was about representation and breaking down the walls of what vulnerability can look like in men going through different walks of life but sharing similar experiences.

"I decided to join because I think when I look around my network of friends and coworkers and golfers, I see a lot of men of success, a lot of men that are intentionally working hard to support their families, build careers, create identities, be pillars in the community," Word said. "I don't believe that the perception of Black or brown manhood has that positive energy, so I thought the show was a great opportunity to exhibit that in its authenticity as well, the good, the bad, sometimes the ugly of it."

The men identified with growing up struggling with patriarchal views on handing emotions, which they hope will help others by showing how it's OK to not only open up but work through it.

"We grow tough where it doesn't matter what is bothering us, we keep it to ourselves because that's the culture that we grow up in, you have to be tough and you're still

struggling with issues from your childhood," Lewis said. "It was something to help young men to deal with the issues that they're dealing with as they get older."

The cast also wants younger people to know that there are many different paths that lead to success and it looks different for everyone.

"We're able to have this platform to show more of the masses that you too can succeed," Mercado said. "You too can be a career-oriented individual."

Wright added: "I just want to make sure that I am presenting at least part of the story for my kids and their little knucklehead friends of what they can become and show them there are so many different ways that you can succeed. What you look like and what society portrays us as has no bearing on your success and it can't be a limiting factor."

The cast also share what the group dynamic has been since filming and how they have an appreciation for their friendships.

"We all respect each other," Lewis said. "If there's an issue there, we try to talk about it, get it out the room and fix it so that we can be a better man. I enjoy the friendship of these guys." Lewis said.

Updates on showtimes and the cast can be found on Instagram @thekingsoftheqc.

« MOVIE REVIEW »

'They Will Kill You' at best can only wound

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

They Will Kill You
2 stars

Two young sisters are stalked by their violent, abusive dad and they panic, asking "What if he finds us?"

If only they knew that he was the lesser threat.

Credit to writer/director Kirill Sokolov and co-writer Alex Litvak for creating an opening scene that's as tense and provocative as those in the best horror films. They establish two vulnerable protagonists audiences will empathize with. Then they stick them in a nightmare that never gets better. You're scared for them from the jump. It's what happens after the shocking setup that mars a smart creative strategy. Horror fans with low expectations may stay enthralled as mindless violence piles on. Others may feel shafted, if they even stick around.

Rain pours down at night like it's coming from an unceasing special effects machine. Two girls run like their lives depend on it. They retreat into a convenience store for refuge and sustenance. The older one hides the little one. They've been followed. Out of the darkness, a man the size of a football linebacker storms in. The kids run out of the store back into the downpour. One escapes. The other is caught. They're separated physically, not emotionally. A bond remains.

Years later, the older one, Asia (Zazie Beetz, "Atlanta"), has never gotten over their separation. She tracks her little sister Maria (Myha'la) to a weird Art Deco building, The Virgil, built in New York City in 1923. Her intention is to find sis and run away. Turns out the prime obstacle is the hotel/co-op's guests, who have demonic plans for the women who enter. Posing as a maid, Asia gains entry. But in seconds her life is in danger. As she showers in her new room, a blunt message appears on her fogged-up bathroom mirror: "They will kill you."

Within minutes, Beetz convinces viewers that Asia's love for her sister is stronger than any obstacle thrown in their paths. Knives, axes, punches, kicks. However, she can't convince viewers that, after she's been stabbed in the back with an ice pick and slashed by a sharp blade that separates her fingers and gouges her hand, these in-



WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Zazie Beetz in a scene from "They Will Kill You."

juries don't faze her. Humans bleed to death unless the bloodletting is stopped. They feel trauma and pain and deal with their injuries or die. None of that bothers her, yet she isn't superhuman or a superhero with untold strength. Yes, she learned to fight in prison, but that doesn't make anyone invincible. Credibility is a thorn that never goes away, even for a fright film that's obviously more bent on silly gore than plausible plot pieces.

If viewers can suspend disbelief, they may find some of the outrageous, ultraviolent action scenes grotesquely fascinating. They'll also be anchored by the bond between Asia and Maria, victims who need and merit some kind of victory. Asia fights gallantly against all odds. Decapitating, dismembering and killing antagonists.

But that becomes a tiresome mission, for the audience too, especially since those bastards just won't die. Wanting to see how her quest will end is just enough of a connection to keep some theatergoers in their seats or those streaming at home tuned in for the duration.

Kirill Sokolov is a deft enough director. Enough to make the action scenes pretty lively and the violence somewhat intriguing. Also, the pacing and rhythm of the combat sequences (editor Luke Doolan) is continuously stimulating and pumps up the footage

(cinematographer Isaac Bauman).

It's also hard to question the music that builds tension (composer Carlos Rafael Rivera, music supervisor Andrea von Foerster). Or the odd cartoonish clothes (costume designer Neil McClean), from the egg-yolk yellow and white maid's uniforms to the hausfrau dresses worn by Lily (Patricia Arquette), the hotel/co-op manager.

The biggest eyecore is the production design (Jeremy Reed). Initial shots of the convenience store ring true. All that goes on in The Virgil looks fake, like a hastily assembled set. Hallways, rooms and underground tunnels look more like an off-putting playhouse than a hotel. Like you're watching a game show. Not the kind of horror that chills you to the marrow or leaves you agast.

Also, too many scenes are just poorly conceived. E.g., in a banquet room, Asia, with a fiery ax, sets the monsters and tables aflame. Somehow, the fires never jump around the room. They conveniently stay in their positions. Really?!

As the mayhem builds to an ending and the real Svengali is exposed, it's a major disappointment. A misjudgment. This is when all the creativity and ingenuity that was not evident in the first part of the film should emerge to save the day. Something to shock

Please see THEY | 6B

Got Soul Festival on the green at Mint Museum

Continued from page 5B
wood Mac with Square Roots.

· May 21 - Captain Mike & The Shipwrecked with Drew Nathan Duo.

April 18
Got Soul Festival, 2-8 p.m. on the green at The Mint Museum Randolph is an adults-only experience centered on music and giving.

Tickets to the showcase hosted by the South Charlotte Chapter of Jack and Jill of America start at \$100 and available at CLTGotSoul.com. Bring your own food and lawn chairs or choose a curated food and beverage experience.

The festival will benefit Freedom Within Walls, Do Greater Charlotte, and Families Forward, nonprofits that support children and families in need. There'll be performances by Grammy Award-winner Quinn (Blackstreet) with The Jukebox Band and the Harvey Cummings Project.

April 19
Benefit concert for Botswana featuring Maestro Henri Star Muhammad, 4:30 p.m., Trinity Episcopal School, 750 E Ninth St. The concert, which will be held at the Main Auditorium, is sponsored by chapel of Christ the King Episcopal Church to celebrate the ordination of the Botswana diocese's first women ministers. Botswana is the companion di-

ocese of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina.

Tickets are \$40 for the concert, \$75 for the concert and pre-concert artist meet-and-greet and reception. For ticket information, email Lois Johnson at ljohn202.lj@gmail.com or Anne Vani-Obey at asvobey@gmail.com.

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.

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

May 2
R&B performers October London and Lalah Hathaway take over Ovens Auditorium, 2900 E Independence Blvd. for a concert event celebrating love, soul and timeless music. Showtime is 8 p.m. Tickets at Ticketmaster.com.

May 5
The Robert Cray Band, 7:30 p.m. Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St.

The blues guitarist first picked up a guitar after seeing The Beatles on TV then after watching Jimi Hendrix perform in Seattle, determined his destiny would follow a similar path. Cray is one of American music's top artists of the last half century.

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

June 6
Grammy-nominated R&B singer 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.

'They Will Kill You' at best can barely wound

Continued from page 5B

skeptical viewers. But no. Those who've lasted this long get to the climax and all they see is porcine imagery. It's about as scary as a Hawaiian luau or a Christmas-dinner ham. Possibly these visuals were meant to be humorous. They aren't.

Amid the ruins, Beetz shows she's got acting chops and can throw a mean punch. She offers a full range of emotions (happy, sad, scared), but she's best at playing an angry badass. Myha'La is sweet and it's easy to see why someone would want to save her. For Oscar winner Arquette, she should wipe this film off her resume. Her Lily has an Irish brogue that's inconsistent at best. Heather Graham and Tom Felton have been better in other movies.

Paterson Joseph is cast as Lily's husband, and he's too passive a spouse to matter. Though he does spill his guts,

"This building is a temple to Satan. Each month we must pay with a human sacrifice." Also, oddly, most of the maids are women of color and the well-to-do antagonists are white. Not sure if this is an intentional slight or an oversight. But it's unsettling and makes you wonder if a Black filmmaker would make these same choices.

The tonal issues don't subside. What should be funny is just stupid. What could be scary is annoying. The performances are only as good as the material. In the end, a loving, sisterly bond isn't strong enough to counter all the shortcomings.

"What if he finds us?" That's still a better scenario than what's about to happen.

Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.



Charlotte native Romare Bearden's "La Primavera (study)," a watercolor on paper, is part of Charlotte attorney's T. Michael Todd's gift to Hampton University Museum.

Charlotte attorney T. Michael Todd gifts masters' artworks to Hampton University

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

Charlotte attorney T. Michael Todd has donated significant art from his private collection to Hampton University.

The historically Black college recently announced the gift valued at \$371,000 that will expand Hampton's holdings of African and African American art holdings. Todd, who has spent more than four decades building his collection of prominent artists like Jacob Lawrence, Charlotte native Romare Bearden, and Gastonia native John Biggers - all who have works at the Hampton University Museum's permanent galleries.



"The Hampton University Museum is not just a repository of art; it's a living testament to the resilience of Black artists and the power of storytelling through art," Vanessa Thaxton-Ward, director of the Hampton University Museum said in a statement. "Our collections and exhibitions remind the world that Black art isn't peripheral but central to the broader narrative of American history."

Todd's connection to Hampton University is familial: he is the uncle of alumni Guila Todd (Class of 1999) and attorney Melvin Todd (2004).

Todd, founder of the Law Offices of T. Michael Todd and a former District Court judge in Charlotte, has held numerous leadership roles, including President of the John S. Leary Association of Black Lawyers and vice chairman of the Fayetteville State University board of trustees. His collection has been exhibited across the East Coast, including the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture and Newark Museum of Art in New Jersey.

The Hampton University Museum, founded in 1868, is the nation's oldest African American museum and houses more than 9,000 objects, including the world's first collection of African American fine art.

"Alumni, community, and corporate support of Hampton University is essential," said Marc Newman, Hampton's chief advancement officer. "When you give back, you weave your financial footprint into the fabric of Hampton's future. Gifts of this magnitude and cultural significance are vital as we embark upon our ambitious capital campaign, ensuring that the Hampton legacy not only continues, but flourishes."

The Charlotte Post

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