

Life!

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026 SECTION B



MELINDA MYERS

Evergreens with interesting form and texture can serve as a focal point in garden beds.

Evergreen plant selection for landscape and year-round care

By Melinda Myers

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Screen unwanted views, buffer traffic and other noise, create privacy and add year-round beauty to the landscape with evergreens.

Combine them with deciduous trees and shrubs, perennials and annuals for multiple seasons of beauty. Plus, enjoy the seasonal changes as well as visiting pollinators and songbirds.

Use taller evergreens as a backdrop for flowering plants. Their green foliage provides a beautiful backdrop for flowers and fruit-laden plants, ornamental grasses, and fall color. Create a focal point or vertical interest in a garden bed or landscape with evergreens that feature interesting form or texture. Group several together to provide songbirds with shelter and a safe place to raise their young.

Don't let a lack of space deter the planting of evergreens. Dwarf varieties are perfect for smaller landscapes and planting beds. Combine these with other small-scale shrubs, perennials and groundcovers for additional seasonal interest.

As always, match evergreens to the growing conditions and climate. Make sure the plants selected are hardy and will thrive in the sunlight and moisture provided. Junipers are heat and drought tolerant and animals tend to leave them be. Hemlock is one of the few evergreens that tolerates the shade and is available in a variety of sizes and shapes. Give these and other evergreens planted in an exposed location a bit of shelter from winter winds and sun. Arborvitae, yews, false cedar (*Chamaecyparis*)

Please see **EVERGREEN** | 2B

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Dr. Charles Drew, innovator of blood plasma storage

NATIONAL INVENTORS HALL OF FAME

One of the world's most impactful surgeons, educators and innovators, Charles Drew (1904-1950) invented a safe way to store, process and transport blood plasma.

His work not only saved lives during World War II, but it also revolutionized blood plasma storage through the process of blood banking and continues to save lives today.

Drew's desire to pursue a degree in medicine was influenced by the death of his sister by tuberculosis while he was in high school. In 1922 he earned a football and track and field scholarship to attend Amherst College in Massachusetts, where he was one of 13 Black students in a student body of 600.

Drew, who was born in Washington, D.C., received his bachelor's degree from Amherst in 1926, and to earn money for medical school, worked for two years as a biology instructor and coach at Morgan College (now Morgan State University) in Baltimore. He then enrolled at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

At McGill, Drew immediately distinguished himself, winning the J. Francis Williams Prize in Medicine and the annual scholarship prize in neuroanatomy, working on the McGill Medical Journal and being elected to the medical honor society Alpha Omega Alpha. He completed his medical and master of surgery degrees in 1933.

During his internship and residency at Royal Victoria Hospital and Montreal General Hospital, Drew studied issues related to blood transfusions, or the

Please see **DR. CHARLES** | 2B

« RIDES »



VOLKSWAGEN

The 2026 Volkswagen Tiguan SUV is redesigned, and the SEL-R Turbo gets a power boost as well.

Extra power isn't VW Tiguan's only upgrade

Sport utility vehicle shows off redesign and tech in SEL-R version

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Volkswagen redesigned its Tiguan SUV last year for the third generation.

You can't get the seven-passenger version anymore but that's just as well. The third seat was unusable for adults or children. What we have now is a Tiguan that's actually larger, more powerful (if you go for the top R-Line model) and much quieter than the outgoing truck. You also get more tech.

My test vehicle was a Tiguan SEL-R Turbo that gets a significant power boost for 2026. The 2.0-liter turbo that makes 201 horsepower gets bumped to 268 hp. This gives the Tiguan significantly quicker acceleration to 60 miles per hour. The eight-speed transmission sends power to all four wheels using VW's Four-Motion system.

The SEL-R also gets some nifty

exterior upgrades. Light bars up front and in rear stretch from side to side with an illuminated VW logo in the center, giving the model a distinct profile in the dark.

The SEL-R's interior is full of up-to-date tech and features. A huge touch screen houses most of the car's controls. The screen is bright with sharp graphics. The response is quick and it feels more intuitive than before. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard and wireless. Climate controls are easier to find and there is a 12-speaker Harmon Kardon sound system for good measure.

You should be able to find a comfortable position in the power adjustable front seats. Each is ventilated, heated, cooled and covered in leather. Feeling a bit stiff? Give yourself a massage. You may not find that feature on any of the Tiguan's competition.

The rest of the interior is certainly a nice place to be. There is abundant room for five people and ample room in the lift gate area. The rear seats fold to expand your cargo area.

The Tiguan SEL R-Line certainly benefits from the revised engine. The 67 extra horses give the R-Line the kind of pep that ups its fun-to-drive quotient considerably. The R-Line zips along instead of plodding like its lower priced siblings. Tap the gas and the R-Line heeds your command. It's not blazing fast but certainly isn't slow. The Four-Motion drive system certainly helps it stick to the highway even in rainy weather. Cornering is more than adequate for an SUV, and it handles twisty roads without feeling loosey goosey.

This revamped Tiguan is also quiet on the highway. Regular conversation can be had without

Please see **EXTRA** | 2B

Driving techniques to reduce fuel costs

FEATURE IMPACT

If you're feeling pain at the pump, you're not alone.

However, it's not just rising gas prices that can impact your wallet - it might be your own habits on the road that negatively impact fuel efficiency and add extra strain to your vehicle.

With gas prices fluctuating by more than \$1 per gallon nationally in recent years, Mercury Insurance is highlighting how driver behavior can significantly influence fuel costs.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, aggressive driving - rapid acceleration and hard braking - can reduce fuel economy by up to 40% in city driving and 30% on highways, increasing annual fuel expenses by hundreds of dollars.

For the average American driver, that inefficiency adds up quickly. AAA estimates that annual fuel costs can exceed \$2,000 depending on vehicle type and

region.

A 30-40% reduction in fuel economy can translate into hundreds of dollars in additional fuel expenses each year - before factoring in the added wear on key vehicle components.

"Most drivers think of aggressive driving as a safety issue, but it's also a cost issue," said John Dicken, director, material damage claims at Mercury Insurance. "From a claims standpoint, we see how habits like hard braking and rapid acceleration accelerate wear on brakes, tires and suspension components. Smoother driving isn't just more efficient - it helps reduce preventable damage over time."

The cost of driving aggressively

- Fuel is only part of the equation.
- Brake replacement can range from \$300-800 per axle, depending on the vehicle.
- A new set of tires can cost \$600-1,200 or more.
- Poorly maintained or underin-

flated tires can lower gas mileage by roughly 0.2% for every 1 PSI drop in pressure, according to federal transportation data.

Over time, inconsistent maintenance and aggressive driving habits compound these costs.

"Driving behavior directly impacts how often certain parts need to be replaced," Dicken said. "When drivers anticipate traffic, maintain steady speeds and keep up with routine maintenance, they reduce strain on their vehicle and potentially avoid unnecessary repair expenses."

Tips that make difference

Consider these strategies to improve efficiency and reduce vehicle wear:

- Accelerate gradually: Avoid rapid starts and jackrabbit acceleration, which significantly reduce fuel economy.
- Brake smoothly and anticipate stops: Looking ahead and easing into stops reduces stress on

Please see **DRIVING** | 2B

Pharmacists and your GLP-1 experience

FEATURE IMPACT

Roughly 1 in 8 American adults take GLP-1 medications for diabetes or weight loss and the number continues growing, according to a recent KFF Health poll.

People considering these drugs understandably have many questions, ranging from which GLP-1 would be best, what side effects might they experience and whether their insurance will cover it.

The health care professional who prescribes GLP-1s is a key source of information, but another vital partner is the medication expert on your health care team: your pharmacist.

"GLP-1s are more complicated than your typical antibiotic or medicines like cholesterol drugs, and they require particular expertise to manage effectively," said Martin Torres, PharmD, director of pharmacy, University of California, Irvine. "With their medication management expertise, pharmacists are particularly equipped to counsel people on GLP-1s. Our guidance can help



SHUTTERSTOCK

Pharmacists can provide key information on GLP-1 drugs, such as side effects and safe usage.

people maximize benefits and minimize the risks."

GLP-1s are intended to be taken long-term, so it's helpful to consult with the pharmacist at your medical center or clinic. The health-system pharmacists who work collaboratively with doctors in these settings can serve as ongoing

guides on your GLP-1 journey. Here are three ways they can support you.

Managing costs
Health-system pharmacists are an important resource for helping figure out how to pay for your medications. If you have insurance, they can help

determine which GLP-1s your plan covers and which will suit you best.

If your plan doesn't cover these drugs or you lack insurance, pharmacists can help you find alternative payment options, such as a drug-maker coupon or medication-support pro-

Please see **WAYS** | 2B

Extra power isn't VW Tiguan's only upgrade

Continued from page 1B

shouting. Wind and road noise are kept at bay. This can be appreciated while the Tiguan delivers a smooth but firm ride that feels typically German. Highway imperfections don't upset the chassis. The four-wheel independent suspension soaks up most of the bad stuff while the SUV moves briskly down the road.

There's not much bad stuff to say about the Tiguan R-Turbo. There is no hybrid version of the Tiguan, at least not yet. And yes, Volkswagens can be a bit finicky when it comes to reliability, but even Toyota is having problems these days. The Tiguan SEL R-Line checks a lot of boxes. It's easy to drive and even easier to enjoy.

The SEL R-Line Turbo comes with a great deal of standard equipment that

includes all-wheel drive, adaptive headlamps, 20-inch wheels, upgraded ambient lighting, ventilated leather seats, 15-inch touch screen, heated steering wheel, heated rear seats, automated parking system, panoramic glass roof, head-up display, remote start, lane keeping assist, blind spot intervention and eight-speed automatic transmission.

The Volkswagen Tiguan SEL R-Line Turbo is \$43,085.

Pros:

- More available horsepower
- Roomy interior
- Lots of Tech
- 15-inch touch screen
- AWD
- Quiet, comfortable cabin
- Pleasant highway ride

Cons:

Evergreen plant selection for landscape and year-round care

Continued from page 1B

and rhododendrons are some of the favorite evergreens of gardeners and deer. Protect new plantings by surrounding them with a cylinder of hardware cloth sunk into the ground and at least four feet high.

Applying wildlife protection, including repellents, before critters start feeding increases the chance of success. Consider applying an organic rain- and snow-resistant repellent, like Plantskydd (plantskydd.com), at planting. This odor-based repellent helps prevent damage and its rain and snow resistance means it needs to be reapplied less often. Just follow the label directions for the most effective control.

Make sure new plantings receive sufficient moisture during the first few years as they become established. Apply enough water to moisten the top 12 inches of soil when the top four to six inches feel dry. Individual trees need 10 gallons of water for every inch diameter of trunk measured at 4.5' high. Apply the water to the area under the dripline and several feet beyond for evergreens.

Spread a one- to three-inch layer of woodchips, shredded bark, leaves or evergreen needles over the soil surface. The finer the mulch material, the thinner the layer needed. Pull the mulch away from

tree trunks and stems of shrubs, perennials and annuals.

Organic mulches insulate plant roots from temperature extremes, conserve moisture, suppress weeds during the growing season and improve the soil as it breaks down.

Winter preparation starts at planting and continues into fall and even winter in milder parts of the country. Evergreens continue to lose moisture throughout the winter even when the soil is frozen or dry. Continue to water evergreens, moisture-loving plants and new plantings as needed when the temperatures are in the 40s, the soil is dry and not yet frozen or covered with snow.

Investing time in proper plant selection and year-round care will help healthy, attractive evergreens thrive for many years.

Melinda Myers has written over 20 gardening books, including *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 was commissioned by *Tree World Plant Care* for her expertise in writing this article. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

Ways pharmacists can help maximize GLP-1 experience

Continued from page 1B

gram. **Effective and safe usage** Figuring out the optimal dose and frequency for each patient typically takes time. Many people also experience side effects. Pharmacists can help you manage the risks and maximize the effectiveness of your GLP-1 in several ways.

- They're experts in flagging potential harmful interactions between GLP-1s and other medications or supplements you're taking.
- They can work with you to cope with or lessen side effects such as nausea, reflux and constipation.
- They can advocate to your doctor for increasing or decreasing your dose to get you to the safest effective amount and coordinate any other needed medication changes.
- They can teach you how to administer your

medication properly to avoid waste.

Lifestyle changes Health-system pharmacists are also resources for lifestyle counseling to make the most of your GLP-1. There's a common misconception that GLP-1s simply melt away fat. Rather, by reducing cravings, they help people eat less - and that can open the door to developing healthier eating and activity habits.

Pharmacists can provide a wealth of information on the effects of lifestyle modifications. The strategies for healthy eating and physical activity they share can help make these a routine part of your life for long-term success.

To learn more about how health-system pharmacists can impact your overall health, visit yourpharmacist.org.

Discontinuing a GLP-1: At least half the people

who start GLP-1s will stop within the first year. High costs, insurance issues and side effects are among the reasons people discontinue use. If you anticipate stopping your GLP-1, your health-system pharmacist can help smooth the transition.

A pharmacist's extensive knowledge of medications is valuable not only for starting but also for stopping GLP-1s. They can help by:

- Determining whether a different GLP-1 or a more affordable source for the drug is right for you
- Helping people understand the source of side effects and how to lessen and manage them
- Providing advice on alternative medicines that may help patients reach their goals
- Guiding people on tapering their doses to avoid a hard stop

The Creatives: A podcast about Charlotte's most creative people

On SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts and Spotify



Driving techniques that reduce fuel costs and wear

Continued from page 1B

brake systems. Maintain consistent speeds: Using cruise control on highways can help improve fuel efficiency.

Keep tires properly inflated: Check tire pressure monthly and before long trips. If you're unsure what your vehicle's tires should be inflated to, locate the sticker inside the driver's side door jamb for the proper PSI inflation or refer to the owner's manual.

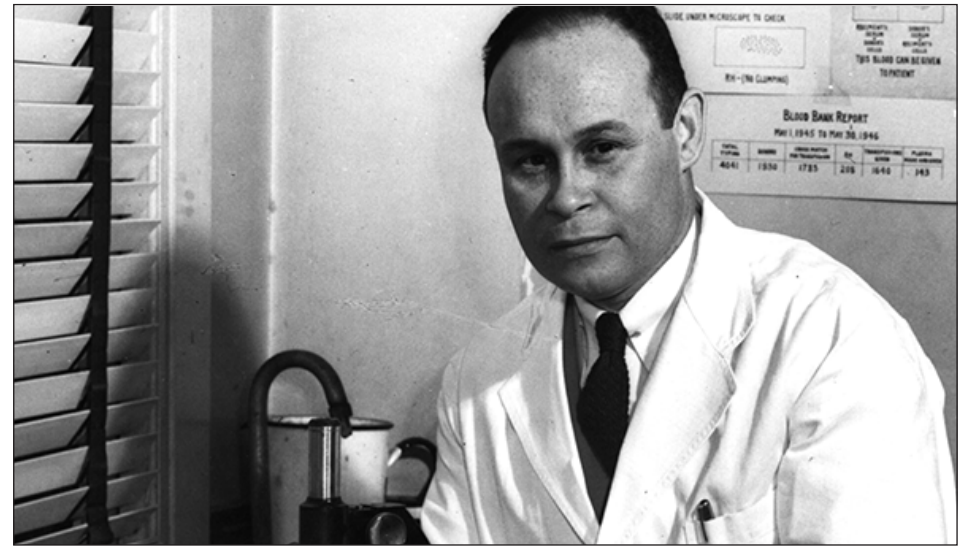
Remove excess weight: Extra cargo and unused roof racks reduce efficiency and increase drag.

Efficiency, safety, sustainability
The Environmental Protection Agency

reports that transportation accounts for roughly 28% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. While vehicle technology continues to improve, individual driving behavior remains one of the most immediate ways drivers can reduce both fuel consumption and environmental impact.

"Small, consistent changes in how we drive can produce meaningful savings over time," Dicken said. "It's one of the simplest ways drivers can protect both their budget and their investment."

For more information about efficient driving and other cost saving measures, visit MercuryInsurance.com/Resources.



SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE

Dr. Charles Drew's development of blood plasma storage has saved millions of lives.

Dr. Charles Drew, the innovator of blood plasma storage tech

Continued from page 1B

process of transferring blood through an intravenous line. Continuing his research in this area, he earned a Rockefeller fellowship in 1938 and pursued a doctorate at Columbia University, where he began working with physician John Scudder. Together, Drew and Scudder conducted extensive research in blood preservation and fluid replacement and developed a trial blood bank. Drew's 1940 doctoral thesis, "Banked Blood: A Study in Blood Preservation," cemented his status as an expert in this developing field.

Drew's breakthroughs in blood preservation occurred at a critical time, as World War II was ongoing in Europe, and Great Britain needed large amounts of blood and plasma to treat its wounded soldiers. Using the experimental blood bank they had just tested as a blueprint, Drew and Scudder spearheaded the "Blood for Britain" program to ship plasma overseas.

The delivery of plasma was crucial. Blood contains two primary components,

red blood cells that carry oxygen throughout the body, and plasma, which is primarily water mixed with proteins and electrolytes. Plasma is effective in helping replace essential fluids and treating shock, two functions essential to saving lives. Additionally, plasma on its own is easier to preserve and transport, and it can be used with any blood type. Drew and his team developed novel ways to extract, preserve and ship plasma on a large scale, sending 5,000 liters of plasma to England.

Following the success of the "Blood for Britain" program, in 1941, Drew became both the first Black surgeon to serve as examiner on the American Board of Surgery and the first director of the American Red Cross Blood Bank in New York. He created several mobile blood donation stations, which would later be known as bloodmobiles.

Despite the great need for blood as the U.S. entered World War II, the armed forces insisted that the Red Cross pilot project follow a racist policy, excluding Black donors. Though in January 1942

the Red Cross announced it would begin accepting blood from Black donors, it would still segregate the blood. Drew objected to such policies.

In 1944, he wrote a letter to the director of the federal Labor Standards Association regarding the segregation of blood by the National Blood Bank. Drew wrote, "It was a bad mistake for 3 reasons: (1) No official department of the Federal Government should willfully humiliate its citizens; (2) There is no scientific basis for the order; and (3) They need the blood."

Following his work with the National Blood Bank, Drew focused his efforts on training and mentoring his surgical residents and medical students. In 1944, he was appointed chief of staff at Freedmen's Hospital, he was elected Fellow to the International College of Surgeons in 1946 and consultant to the surgeon general in 1949.

At the time of Drew's death following a car wreck in 1950 in Burlington, N.C., he was professor and chief of surgery at Howard Medical School.

Will federal SNAP junk food bans make people healthier?

By Fran Smith

CENTER FOR HEALTH JOURNALISM

Twenty-two states are moving to restrict what people can buy with their food benefits, targeting soda and candy in a huge, uncontrolled policy experiment backed by little evidence.

In April 2025, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins invited governors to request federal approval to test ways to encourage healthier eating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by limiting purchases of sugary foods and drinks. Under the banner of the Make America Healthy Again movement, the federal government swiftly approved requests.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's approvals turned a controversial idea into a string of projects stretching from Hawaii to Virginia, affecting millions of low-income Americans.

Such bans may seem logical. Some policymakers across the political spectrum have long argued that the government shouldn't support people's pur-

chases of clearly unhealthy products, especially soda.

Critics have countered that SNAP food bans don't aim to improve the health of low-income people but seek to punish them and drive them to drop crucial government benefits.

Even as the federal government promotes these restrictions in the name of health, it has made massive cuts to the program's budget and expanded stringent work requirements. SNAP enrollment fell by 6% — 2.5 million people — between July and December 2025, and the drop-off will accelerate as the full force of these sweeping changes takes effect.

Nine states have already implemented the SNAP food bans. A lawsuit against the USDA, filed in March on behalf of SNAP recipients, seeks to block the new rules in five states, so some plans are on hold. SNAP benefits may not be used to buy alcohol, but the USDA has never before allowed states to prohibit purchases of other drinks or foods because of con-

cerns it would push people off the program. That has made it difficult to assess the impact of restrictions, and research is sparse.

In the most comprehensive review to date, researchers at Washington University in St. Louis searched five leading databases of scientific literature and found only seven studies of the issue. They included simulation models and short-term randomized controlled experiments with low-income participants. The results were mixed.

The modeling studies predicted that excluding soda and other sweetened beverages would reduce purchases of those items and improve diets. One of the studies also suggested the bans could reduce obesity and type 2 diabetes over 10 years.

The controlled studies, too, showed that when a product can't be bought with food assistance, people buy a little less of it. In one study, household purchases of sugary beverages declined by an aver-

Please see WILL | 3B

Will SNAP junk food bans make people healthier?

Continued from page 2B
 age of \$2.66 per week. Only two of the studies took the next step and explored whether people then eat better in general, but found no meaningful change in diet quality. Perhaps, the researchers theorized, eliminating a few cans of soda a week isn't enough to make much difference. Or, people may have continued to buy soda and sweet snacks with their own money or chosen alternatives that weren't much healthier.

The USDA has framed the new state initiatives as pilot programs, generally approved for two years, that will answer questions about the impact of these bans. By law, such projects must include evaluations, and historically the agency has demanded rigorous ones. But many states have received approval with only cursory, preliminary evaluation proposals.

Nebraska, for example, offered a single paragraph saying the state will survey a sample of SNAP participants quarterly about their

spending habits, and work with retailers to review purchases. The state also said it will publicize the restrictions through SNAP-Ed, a program the federal government has eliminated.

The USDA did not lay out strict evaluation protocols, or a clear set of metrics, benchmarks or outcomes. That left states to devise their own approaches. These vary so widely it will be difficult, if not impossible, to get a broad picture of the benefits and consequences of the policies.

"We should be able to say to every state, 'You have to collect the same data. We will gather it at the national level and be able to make some generalizations,'" said Kate Bauer, associate professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Michigan and director of its new Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health Policy. "Coordination is critically important, and that's not what's happening here."

Monitoring spending habits and retail records

will tell us what we already know, Bauer said — that people won't use SNAP to buy soda if it's prohibited. "What we want to know," she said, "is did it change dietary intake? Did it change health outcomes? Were there unintended outcomes, like stigma or discrimination?"

Until recently, questions like these might have been answered through other channels, even without state investigations. But the administration has weakened, and in some cases dismantled, mechanisms for measuring significant shifts in food policy by cutting funding for health research — especially studies of marginalized communities — and by ending the annual Household Food Security Survey, widely regarded as the best tool for assessing food access.



GETTY IMAGES

Twenty-two states are looking to enact new rules prohibiting junk food from SNAP benefits. Nine have already done so.



ANNIE SPRATT | UNSPLASH

Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States — and the leading cause of cancer death for men under the age of 50.

Immunotherapy cancer treatment proves promising at Duke University

By Zamone Rerez
 NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

As colon cancer rates among people younger than 50 skyrocket, a new clinical trial that uses immunotherapy, rather than physically demanding chemotherapy, is yielding promising results.

Spencer Laird received an initial colon cancer diagnosis and surgery, but his cancer returned and 13 tumors were found on his lungs. Laird feared the side effects of chemotherapy, but his wife, CarleyAnn, researched alternative treatments. They landed on a clinical trial at Duke University that tests a combination of immunotherapy drugs. A traditional treatment such as chemotherapy targets rapidly-dividing cells in the body — a hallmark of cancer.

The problem is many healthy cells divide rapidly, too, which contributes to chemotherapy side effects, such as nausea, fatigue and hair loss. Immunotherapy helps train healthy cells to seek and destroy only cancerous cells.

"I think that if I were even still here, I would more than likely be in pretty bad shape, just with the side effects and the sickness and everything that comes along with the chemo and radiation," he said. "I just feel very blessed to not have had to do that, to have kind of another way out, not only another way out that doesn't have side effects, but that is working."

The couple now makes the eight-hour drive from their home to Durham every two weeks for treatment. For Laird, the results for his particular type of cancer have been encouraging. He now has just three tumors, the biggest of which is the size of a pencil eraser.

Dr. Nicholas DeVito, a medical oncologist and assistant professor at Duke University, said immunotherapy can give patients with certain late-stage intestinal cancers a better chance at living longer — and without the side effects and limited success that sometimes accompany chemotherapy.

"With immunotherapy, you're retraining your immune system," he said. "It is learning to fight the cancer off inside your body. This really treats cancer more of like an immune failure, rather than like an infection that you're treating with an anti-biotic like chemotherapy."

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States.

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DAVIDSON COMMUNITY PLAYERS

Luna Mackie and Dionte Darko in Davidson Community Players production of "Actually" April 25-May 3 at Armour Street Theatre in Davidson.

Truth, ethics and a dose of theater

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

Davidson Community Players will pose questions of truth and ethics with a pair of contemporary stage productions.

The company will present "The Lifespan of a Fact," and "Actually" at Armour Street Theatre (307 Armour St. in Davidson) over the next month. "The Lifespan of a Fact," a comedy-drama based on the book by co-authors John D'Agata and Jim Fingal, runs through April 26. The play explores the boundaries between artistic truth and objective journalistic facts.

"Actually," a drama that navigates truth, perspective and sexual consent, runs April 25-May 3.

Tickets are on sale at davidsoncommunityplayers.org/main-stage or by calling the box office at (704) 892-7953 during business hours. Tickets for each program are \$15-\$27 plus state tax and fees.

"Theater is where we gather to connect, share ideas, and grapple with our most pivotal civic questions," executive director Steve Kaliski said. "At a time when much of our information arrives in quick bursts from questionable sources, plays like 'The Lifespan of a Fact' and 'Actually' encourage us to think critically and form our own conclusions. Both plays are smart and en-

Please see **DAVIDSON** | 6B

« ON THE MARQUEE »

Free music, etc. kicks off SouthPark After 5

By Herbert L. White
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The latest events, stage productions and exhibits in Charlotte and beyond:

April 16

"Strings, Sax, & Soul" with violinist Karen Briggs, Billboard-charting saxophonist Jazmin Ghent, and vocalist Maria Howell at Booth Playhouse. The collaboration delivers smooth jazz, soul, and improvisation.

Showtime: 7 p.m. Tickets: www.blumentalarts.org.

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 Fleetwood Mac with Square Roots.

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

Through April 26

Davidson Community Players presents "The Lifespan of a Fact" at Armour Street Theatre (307 Armour St. in Davidson). The comedy-drama based is on the book by co-authors John D'Agata and Jim Fingal. The play explores the boundaries between artistic truth and objective journalistic facts.

Tickets are on sale at davidsoncommunityplayers.org/main-stage or by calling the box office at (704) 892-7953 during business hours. Tickets are \$15-

Please see **BENEFIT** | 6B



GASTON COUNTY MUSEUM

Shakeeka Watts Brooks' basket weaving prowess is on display in the exhibit "Woven with Purpose: Innovating Basketry for Generations to Come" at Gaston County Museum of Art & History.

Basketry as art: Prowess on display at Gaston museum

'Woven with Purpose' highlights Charlottean Shakeeka Watts Brooks

By Herbert L. White
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Shakeeka Watts Brooks is a master at weaving baskets into functional art.

The Charlotte artist's work is the subject of the exhibit "Woven with Purpose: Innovating Basketry for Generations to Come," which debuts April 24 at the Gaston County Museum of Art & History in Dallas. A free reception with the artist on April 25 from 1-3 p.m. at the museum is open to the public.

Brooks, owner of Hand Works By Shakeeka, draws on techniques rooted in West Africa, where people brought to the Americas as slaves transitioned their skills to the new surroundings by using materials like needles to create sturdy, functional baskets.

"Pine needle basketry has a rich and enduring history, especially within African American communities," said Brooks, a Polkton, N.C., native. "The craft is deeply connected to the traditions enslaved Africans carried with them to America, particularly the art of coiled basket weaving."

The materials Brooks use are everyday items that can be found in nature or at home, reflecting the ingenuity and creativity Africans brought to America generations prior.

"I use natural materials such as long leaf pine needles, raffia, cotton rope, waxed linen thread, sinew, ceramic, seashells, nuts, wooden beads, wood slices and pinecones in my basketry," Brooks said. "I use weaving methods that are traditional to my roots but are nontraditional in design. My goal is to turn this art form, known to many as a craft, into a fine art, by incorporating sculptural techniques into my designs."

"I want to portray how basketry has evolved from domestic and utilitarian purposes such as gathering crops, winnowing rice, storing grain, and carrying vegetables and water into a beautiful, sculptural art form that can be displayed in galleries and museums."

"To know one's cultural heritage is very important to me. We must preserve our traditions, beliefs, and way of life for our future genera-

tions to practice them. I believe that not knowing and preserving our cultural heritage will result in the suffering of cultural degradation. I hope the work that I create will not only inspire the younger generation to learn about and appreciate their ancestors' art form and struggle, but to inspire them to learn the craft of pine needle basket weaving and carry on their traditions and legacy."

The exhibit will be on display in the first-floor gallery of the museum through Aug. 22. The museum, located at 131 W. Main St., is open weekdays from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Admission is free.

"We are delighted to present this vibrant exhibit, "Woven with Purpose: Innovating Basketry for Generations to Come," museum director Alexandria Pizza said in a statement. "Traditional pine needle basketry has a deep history in the American South but Ms. Brooks has transformed what was for many years a utilitarian craft into a creative expression of movement, form and function."

« MOVIE REVIEW »

A love triangle that takes a swing at diversity

By Dwight Brown
BLACK PRESS USA

You, Me & Tuscany
2.5 stars

She loves him. She loves him not. He loves her. He loves her not.

One woman. Two men. She's living a lie and falling in love under the Tuscan sun.

How did that happen? That premise, by Kristin Engle, involves a young woman, an Italian villa and a big fib. That notion was turned into a script by Engle's screenwriter husband Ryan Engle. It's not the kind of project that usually includes a Black female lead character.

But that unique possibility drove producer Will Packer ("Girls Trip") to build a love story around that atypical casting. Something in the mold of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" or "Mamma Mia!" Something that meets rom/com genre requirements but also adds a fresh spin.

The night the very unprofessional house sitter Anna (Halle Bailey, "The Little Mermaid") winds up in a hotel bar alone, not much is going right. She's just lost a job for wearing her last client's clothes (Nia Vardalos, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding"). A depressed Anna catches the eye of an Italian tourist, Matteo (Lorenzo de Moor). He casually mentions that he owns an empty villa in a small Tuscan town. Before you can say "arrivederci," she's on a plane to Italy—and he has no idea.

With director Kat Coiro ("Marry Me")



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Halle Bailey and Regé-Jean Page in a scene from "You, Me & Tuscany."

at the helm, all the production pieces are assembled in a very simple and commercial way. The bright lighting and glossy cinematography (Danny Ruhlmann) make Tuscany look like a shiny, postcard-perfect setting. However, it's not as impressive as the cinematography in "The Equalizer 3," which made Italy's Amalfi Coast so dramatically beautiful you'd want to grab your passport and go. For a broke twentysomething, Anna dresses awfully well (costume designer Massimo

Cantini Parrini) and has lots of clothes for someone who arrived in Italy with just a purse and a shoulder bag. Another hiccup is the bland, mediocre rom/com score (composer John DeBney).

By comparison, the very catchy playlist is more successful, mirrors Anna's journey and helps to create a hip, romantic mood: Grammy winner Olivia Dean crooning "So Easy (To Fall in love)," Ari Lennox's ode to Black

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Violinist Karen Briggs returns to Middle C Jazz April 16 for "Strings, Sax and Soul."

Benefit concert for Botswana on April 19

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\$27 plus state tax and fees.

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 diocese 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.

April 25-May 3
Davidson Community Players present "Actually" at Armour Street Theatre (307 Armour St., Davidson). "Actually," a drama that navigates truth, perspective and consent.

Tickets are on sale at davidsoncommunityplayers.org/main-stage or by calling the box office at (704) 892-7953 during business hours. Tickets are \$15-\$27 plus state tax and fees.

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 inter-

twined 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 1
Grammy Award-winning gospel music artist Hezekiah Walker in concert, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, 3400 Beatties Ford Road.

Doors open at 7 p.m. for the program, in which proceeds benefit Barber-Scotia College. Half of proceeds will go toward accreditation preparation; 25% to scholarships and 25% to sustain operation needs. Tickets: <https://tinyurl.com/BSC-concert>

May 2
Mint to Be: The Feminine Body as Costume Art, Mint Museum, 6-10 p.m.

The exhibit is a living runway where fashion, identity, and self-expression collide. Created by Professor Perrine DeShield-Jenkins, the Met Gala-inspired event invites guests to experience femininity as both art and narrative.

General admission: \$45.

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.

Tuscany love triangle that takes a swing at diversity

Continued from page 5B
women "Soft Girl Era," "Let Me Love You" by Mario and Estelle's meditative "Live, Love, Learn." Production designer Elena Albanese ("The Spiderwick Chronicles") is a champ at making the villa gorgeous. Also, momentum is never an issue because editors Zene Baker and Troy Takaki ("Almost Christmas") give the film a steady, engaging rhythm. What's on view is sometimes formulaic, sometimes unpredictable.

Anna arrives in Matteo's hometown of San Conessa (actually Pienza in Tuscany's Val d'Orcia region). She barely has a dime in her pocket. Stranded, with all the hotels booked, a friendly taxi driver Lorenzo (Marco Calvani) drives her to Matteo's villa, Casa Luna. She sneaks in and spends the night. In the morning, she encounters his family and lies about why she's there. Surprisingly, they embrace her. There's Matteo's mom Gabriella (Isabella Ferrari), the very wary grandmother Nonna Alessia (Stefania Casini, "1900"), dad Vincenzo (Paolo Sassanelli) and the wild sister Francesca (Stella Pecollo). But the relative that catches Anna's eye is Michael (Regé-Jean Page, "Bridgerton"), Matteo's very suave cousin—and rival.

Coiro handles what's in front of her well. Her directing style is pretty standard for the genre. No striking artistry, just proficient filmmaking, and she builds the romance, jealousy and drama efficiently. But for a romantic comedy, the romance far outweighs the funny stuff. It misses opportunities for physical humor or biting satire. Most of the comedy comes from Anna's smart mouth friend Claire (Aziza Scott, "Home Before Dark"). But there's something so cliché about the character, the mannerisms and dialogue that Claire borders on being a sassy Black woman trope.

Coiro is far better with the flirting, goo-

goo eyes, heart-yearning elements. Which is good news for those who like involving love stories, especially female audiences. They'll find it easy to put themselves in Anna's shoes and ogle the man she adores. Why? Because there's no shortage of glam shots of the very photogenic Page. Shirt on. Shirt off. Smiling bright enough to light up the screen. His "Bridgerton" fans get all the Regé-Jean they can handle.

There's a weird part to Engle's script. Basically, the lead character is a con artist with little remorse. Unethical and hardly a role model. It's a bit unsettling. But her masquerade gives the movie its distinct verve. And along the way, the duplicitous interloper mends a family that's in great discord. Gabriella says, "You are the key to bringing our family together." Also, Anna's secondary trait as a wannabe chef, trained but not a professional, adds a cuisine angle that's oh so perfect for Italy.

Halle Bailey has an accessible young woman quality and plays a habitual liar in the most charming way. Casting her instead of a supermodel makes this Anna very approachable. However, some may wonder what could have been if a comic actress was in the role — someone with the comedic instinct of Tiffany Haddish or Melissa McCarthy who knows how to milk the humor out of scenes. It's a thought.

Meanwhile, Page, who's matinee idol handsome and very debonair, gives a performance that lacks depth and layering. Pecollo as the very saucy, twerking sister is hysterical. The rest of the supporting cast is vivacious and very amped up, like they're on a TV show.

It's easy to ignore the flaws and just have a good time under the Tuscan sun. She loves him. She loves him not. She lies. She mends. She entertains.

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Davidson Community Players explore contemporary topics

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gaging, with just enough humor to keep us on our toes."

"The Lifespan of a Fact" follows Jim Fingal (Jake McGraw), a fact checker on a mission to impress his editor, Emily Penrose (Bobbi Hawk), at a struggling New York magazine. Fingal, who has been assigned to verify an essay by writer John D'Agata (Vincent Raye), challenges the accuracy of D'Agata's work, which leads to conflicts over truth and fact as the publishing deadline draws near.

"Actually" examines truth through perspective and memory. The play set on a college campus challenges the consideration of how personal history, cultural expectations, and social dynamics influence the understanding of truth.

The story follows Amber (Luna Mackie)

and Tom (Dionte Darko), two Princeton University freshmen whose lives and perspectives intersect after a night of drinking and desire. Although they agree on some facts, they differ on others — especially what happened next. The play directed by Amy Wada tackles questions of consent as well as portrayals of gender, race, memory, and personal experience. Due to adult content and discussions of sexual assault, the play is recommended for ages 17 and up.

"Both plays show that truth is complex, whether public or private," Kalski said. "Together, they spark a broader conversation about listening, response, and moving forward. And for the most adventurous theatergoers, we're offering a one-weekend overlap so you can see both shows on the same day."

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