

Life!

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2026 SECTION B

Black colleges collaborate on state health data consortium

By Herbert L. White
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A health data initiative at North Carolina A&T State University has secured \$1.86 million in grants to improve public health and mitigate racial disparities.

The Historically Black College and University Health Equity Data Consortium secured three awards, including \$850,000 from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust over two years to launch infrastructure for a multi-institution program to address public health outcomes and disparities in underserved communities across North Carolina.

Johnson C. Smith University is among the participating HBCUs, as are Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State, Shaw and Winston-Salem State universities. Appalachian State University, UNC Pembroke and Western Carolina University are associate members.

The consortium led by executive director Jason Mose Ph.D. prioritizes equitable surveillance and community engagement that includes data collection and integration of social determinants of health to record experiences that drive disparities.

"This award from the [Reynolds] trust reflects a selective philanthropic investment in statewide health equity infrastructure," PaDonna Webb, A&T's assistant vice chancellor of health and wellness said in a statement. "The size of the award, multi-year structure, and continuation tied to progress reporting indicate a high bar for readiness, governance capacity, credible partnerships and accountability for results."

The North Carolina Division of Public Health via Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Health Infrastructure Grant donated \$810,000 to support statewide data modernization workforce development for the state public health system.

"Consortium members will benefit through strengthened statewide partnerships with the state Department of Public Health and local health depart-

Please see **HBCUS** | 2B

As US housing costs rise, investing feels different

By Hailey Stone
UNC MEDIA HUB

Rebecca Henriques is graduating from college with the kind of checklist that should make the future feel steady.

She has a job lined up in Raleigh. She and her girlfriend have an apartment secured in Durham. She already has a Roth IRA through Vanguard, built from the kind of advice many young adults hear but do not always act on: start now, put money away when you can and let time do the rest.

From the outside, it looks like a clean beginning. The reality has been less neat.

Even getting approved for the apartment required proving a version of adulthood that had not fully started yet. There was an offer letter, expected income and enough paperwork to show that the next chapter was real, even if the first paycheck had not arrived. The numbers existed, yet the life around them was still catching up.

That gap feels familiar to a lot of young adults right now.

Housing affordability is not only changing where people can live. It is reshaping how they think about saving, investing, retirement and long-term stability in the first place. The old sequence - graduate, get a job, buy a home, build a future - still lingers as the ideal, but it no longer feels automatic. For many, it feels delayed, stretched thin or increasingly out of reach.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, students in Professor Laura Ruel's user experience design and usability course have spent the semester working with Vanguard, an

Please see **AS HOUSING** | 2B

« RIDES »

Volkswagen Atlas looks familiar, but still a great return on investment vehicle

By Winfred Cross
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Volkswagen Atlas has been around since 2018 without huge changes in its look.

That may be coming next year. I wouldn't let that keep me from considering the Atlas as a purchase. It's still a great choice.

I do hate the V6 is no longer an option. For now, you have to be satisfied with the 2.0-liter turbo-four that Volkswagen uses for everything. This engine makes 269 horsepower with 273 pounds-feet of torque. Mated to an eight-speed transmission then engine power is directed to all four wheels through Volkswagen's 4motion all-

wheel drive system. All of this works smoothly but not without problems. While the power is delivered smoothly, driving the Atlas at lower speeds is a bit of a problem. The vehicle feels a bit jerky delivering power during city driving. You can adjust once underway, but it feels unnatural. Once you get the Atlas on a freeway or underway on a highway trip everything springs to life. The vehicle feels spirited and moves itself with authority. It handles like a typical German vehicle - just oversized. The ride is smooth but a little on the firm side. It glides over bumps with no problems and does so with

a quiet cabin. The cabin is one of the Atlas' strong points. My test car was the larger vehicle which seats six (Captain's Chairs in the center). There is ample space for all six passengers while providing near best-in-class storage behind the third row. The dash has wood accents (couldn't tell if fake or real) that warm the interior. The dash has a digital gauge cluster that's bright and crisp and can be configured. The 12-inch touch screen is easy to use and has up to date graphics. The touch-sensitive volume control can be aggravating so I used the steering wheel buttons in-

stead. The overall fit and finish were nearly flawless.

My test car was an SE with a technology package. The standard equipment list is lengthy before you get to that package, however. That equipment includes a six-speaker audio system, USB ports in all three rows, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, wireless smartphone charging, voice controls, adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, blind-spot warning, blind-spot intervention and lane keeping system.

The technology package includes 20-inch wheels, front and rear LED light bars with illuminated VW badges, remote engine



VOLKSWAGEN

The 2026 Volkswagen Atlas is roomy and has nearly flawless fit and finish with smooth road manners.

start, hands-free rear lift gate, front and rear parking sensors, towing hitch with 5,000-pound towing capacity and manual rear window shades.

If that's not enough you can add a panoramic sunroof. 4motion and Captain's Chairs were also added to my vehicle.

Please see **VW** | 2B



Heart for mending broken hearts

Grief counselor helps clients deal with loss, no matter the form it takes

ABIDING GRACE LLC

Willetta Collins Jones, owner and founder of Abiding Grace LLC, puts her training as a grief counselor to help clients who are dealing with loss - from the death of a loved one to a job.

By Cameron Williams
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Grief comes in many forms and affects everyone differently.

Willetta Collins Jones, owner and founder of Abiding Grace LLC, has always had a heart for serving. As a grief coach, she supports people going through loss.

"It's a part of me," said Jones, whose resume include school administration and teaching in Georgia, Maryland, Delaware, New

Jersey and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools from 1986-1996 as well as life skills/GED program director at the Ada Jenkins Center in Davidson. "It's part of the family values that [she and husband Horatio] have with our mothers and families. My mother was a trained social worker, and my husband's mother was an extension agent for the state of Maryland. ... So, we are always looking for ways to help people."

Horatio Jones, who has been in the news industry for over 50 years, is a grief coach as well - in large part because of things he has seen in his time in media.

"I started with the Wilmington, Delaware, News Journal as a copy boy back in 1967," he said. "I then became one of the reporters on one of their teams at the time. I was also a news director at WBOC-TV, a CBS affiliate in Maryland for

Please see **GRIEF** | 2B

Doctor guides through wearable tech

By Greg Lacour
NOVANT HEALTH

Ask Dr. Denise Dennis-Coke about health-tracking devices, and she'll show you the ones she's wearing.

"I have on my Dexcom Stelo, my Oura ring and my Garmin watch," she says with a chuckle. "For me, it's like,

'Let's see what the data says, and then let's see if we can improve it' - which is how I would recommend most people approach it."

Like doctor, like patient. Denise-Coke is an obesity medicine physician and medical director for the CoreLife Novant Health Charlotte region. For the

past decade or so, as both a consumer and a physician, she's observed the rocketing development of wearable tech that tracks health metrics - Apple, Samsung, Garmin, and Fitbit smartwatches and Oura smart rings, not to mention glucose monitors like Dexcom G7s and Stelos and Abbott Lingo.

The devices fall into three main categories:

- Fitness trackers, like smartwatches, that monitor daily movement, heart rate and workouts

- Smart rings, which measure sleep, heart rate and temperature

- Glucose and metabolic sensors, which track blood sugar and provide real-time insights into metabolism

With current and anticipated AI advances, wear-



STOCK PHOTO

Wearable technology like glucose monitors make it easier to track health metrics.

able technology is expected to swell from a \$70 billion global industry in 2024 to \$153 billion by 2029.

Yet Denise-Coke emphasizes that not every device works to enhance every patient's health - and some people might be better off with no device at all.

"We already are in an era of screen and notification fatigue, and when you add your health data on top of that, that can be quite anxiety-provoking for some people and fatiguing for others," she said.

Denise-Coke added that she's fallen victim herself: Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 2B

Grief counselors partner to resolve circumstances

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about 10 years. I also worked as a producer for CBS News for 34 years, so I have seen a lot and it makes it easy for me to empathize with people who are going through a lot."

In 2018 Horatio and Willetta became certified grief coaches and the next year, Abiding Grace was launched. Every person and every grief situation is different, so every case starts with what Willetta describes as a "discovery call."

"I call it the 'get to know each other,' call," she said. "It helps me see if I as a grief coach and the person as a client will fit together. This is a partnership we form. So, after asking the initial questions and finding out if the partnership will work, the person will decide if they want to start having sessions with me."

Abiding Grace has several counseling options and prices vary based on the number of sessions a client feels are needed.

"We have different packages that range from six sessions, eight sessions, 10 and even 12 sessions depending on what conclusions we come to after we have our discovery call," Willetta said. "There is what I call an investment fee, because you are investing in your mental health. That is a \$100 flat fee. It happens before the discovery call."

With every individual comes unique challenges in coaching them through grief. The most important key is listening and comforting.

"I use different techniques that we were taught in grief coaching to guide me," Willetta said, "and then, my faith and just getting to know that person and making them feel safe. In the sessions this is something that will be good for them and good for both of us. We learn from each other. It's not a situation where I'm up here on a pedestal and you're down here. It is a partnership."

A common misconception is that grief can only come from the loss of a loved one. Willetta said there are 450,000 different types of grief and loss.

"There is grief from the death of a loved one," she said. "People can grieve the loss of a pet. The loss of a job can cause grief; the loss of a relationship. And that is just a small amount of them."

Said Horatio: "Anything that causes a change in life circumstance can bring you grief. ... Essentially you are thrown off your axis. That is what we as grief coaches deal with. Most people think of the easiest thing that one will grieve is death, but it is anything that spins you off your axis. We empathize with people experiencing that and want to help."

Charlotte doctor guides through wearable tech with expertise

Continued from page 1B

She's awoken in the middle of the night and reached for her smartphone to open her Oura app — the companion app for the titanium Oura ring, a smart ring that tracks sleep and other health metrics. In other words, she's interrupted her sleep to check the data that shows how well she's sleeping, which defeats the purpose of tracking sleep data.

Because of her experience on both ends of the wearable tech equation, we asked Dennis-Coke to answer some basic questions: Which devices are available, who are they best suited for, and what's to come in the years ahead?

What are the most common health tracking devices?

The first category would probably be your fitness and activity trackers, like the Apple Watch, the Samsung watch, the Garmin, the Fitbit. The Fitbits probably were the first of this generation. These monitor basic activity levels. You can track your performance. You can track steps.

From there, we have glucose monitoring and metabolic monitors, like the (Dexcom) G7, the Stelos, the Abbott Lingos — there's quite a few of them. (They work by using a tiny sensor wire just under the skin, typically placed on the back of the upper arm, to measure glucose levels.) Some platforms have built AI integration into those devices, and they use the data collected to give you guided coaching.

Let's say your glucose spikes after you eat a certain type of food. These devices can use that information to suggest better options. AI features started appearing in these systems two or three years ago, and they've been steadily improving ever since.

These devices seem to track amazingly precise health and fitness data. How much attention should people pay to the numbers?

The goal is not necessarily to get into the granularity of it. You want to take more broad strokes.

You want to attach this to some kind of targeted goal.

For example, if I'm concerned about my sleep, I would say, 'Let's see how many hours of sleep I'm getting. Let's look at advice from a medical perspective on how to improve my sleep. Can I see a little bit of progress in that area?' So it's more that sort of thing — not so much to know exactly how my body's functioning every minute of the day.

Generally, what are the benefits of health tracking devices?

I always say, all behavior change starts from knowing what those behaviors are. You can only change what you're aware of. You can build on top of that, motivating your daily habits. For some people who are recreational athletes, it can help them track their performance. It can help you to track your sleep, your stress, your recovery (from workouts), and things like that.

We're also seeing some of these platforms integrating with each other. The first device I got was my smartwatch, but I ended up getting the Oura ring when it did an integration with Dexcom (which measures glucose levels). So now you have your glucose data coming into your movement data, and you can look at those things together — like, how do my glucose patterns vary based on my movement patterns?

What are some of the disadvantages and risks of health tracking devices?

There are some privacy concerns. This data is all warehoused by these big companies, and it can be sold. You don't know who it's going to. How's it going to be used? How's it being shared?

There are some accuracy issues, too. This is one of the reasons why I believe it should be used more as a broad estimation of what's happening and not so much like a granular, detailed tracking. There's variability, and there are inaccuracies sometimes in how some of this data comes through or is measured.

ured.

You just want to be careful with some of this information. You wouldn't want to start restricting a whole macronutrient like carbs because you're seeing glucose spikes every time you eat something with carbs. It probably would make more sense to have that conversation with your healthcare provider and be mindful of not restricting your diet too much as a result of the data that you're getting.

And if you have a serious health condition such as diabetes or an arrhythmia, I would definitely monitor that under a medical provider's care. I would not use a consumer device for that.

How much will AI influence the future of health tracking devices?

As AI continues to improve, more people are likely to use health tracking devices that include these features. Interestingly, now they're also looking at diagnostics — devices that can detect symptoms before they even start to appear. The Oura ring does a little bit of this, because sometimes it'll tell you, based on your biometrics, that you might be coming down with an illness.

So I think that's going to potentially be a big thing. I think there's just going to be more to come in this area.

As a general rule, which health tracking devices are best for which kinds of health goals?

If you're a runner, probably a Garmin. If you're just a general walker, mover, exerciser, maybe you'll be fine with your Apple Watch or Samsung or Fitbit. It just really depends on the person. For people with blood glucose issues, probably the Dexcom and Abbott blood glucose monitors, and to track sleep and optimize performance, the Oura ring or WHOOP (a fitness tracker worn on the wrist).

But I'd encourage people not to just jump on a trend. There's no one-size-fits-all.

As housing costs rise, investing feels different for young adults

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international investment management company, on a year in review project, thinking through how a financial platform can present information in a way that feels clearer, more useful and easier to trust.

The assignment is rooted in User Interface(UI)/User Experience(UX) design, but it brushes up against a wider set of questions about affordability, financial literacy and what people need from investing tools when everyday life already feels expensive.

The partnership began after Ruel met Steve Schang, a Vanguard senior user experience researcher who focuses on customer experience design, at a regional UX conference where she had presented work involving AI, web design and eye tracking. That conversation developed into a collaboration where the first Vanguard project focused on younger, novice investors and how the company could better reach them. The current project shifted to a

different audience, but the value of the work stayed much the same. Students were not designing for a fake company or turning in ideas that disappeared once the semester ended. They were working on a real problem for a real organization. "You're actually pitching your ideas to this company and they're taking you seriously," Ruel said. "This isn't like, 'Oh, well, this is nice that the kids are doing this.'"

That matters because the financial strain students are designing around is often the same one they are living through.

Henriques, a senior double majoring in computer science and economics, said she first got into investing after her brother explained the value of opening a Roth IRA. The logic made sense immediately. Start early. Contribute steadily. Give yourself time. Most of her investments are still in Vanguard, largely in a total market fund, with one share of Ferrari stock tucked in because she loves Formula One.

But investing still feels daunting for many people her age, especially when so much financial knowledge is expected and so little of it is formally taught.

"I think that our education system does a poor job of teaching people personal finance skills," she said.

In 2019, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law requiring public high school students to pass an Economics and Personal Finance course in order to be eligible for graduation. As the Class of 2024 was the first to meet that requirement, some young investors today do not have that course knowledge.

The gap between understanding and accessing financial resources becomes harder to ignore when housing starts crowding everything else. A person can understand that investing matters and still struggle to prioritize it. A person can know retirement is important and still keep moving it further down the list because rent is due, debt is real and homeownership feels less like the next step than a distant possibility.

Corey Hedges of North Main Financial Group LLC, in Charlotte wrote in an email that he sees housing shaping financial planning conversations from multiple directions. Younger clients are often balancing affordability with student loan debt, a combination that can make qualifying for a mortgage harder before they even get close to buying a home. Others are delaying long-term saving because so much of their income is already going toward rent, housing costs or trying to save enough for a down payment.

For many younger adults, he added, the traditional path of degree, house and family before 30 has become increasingly difficult to reach.

That changes what feels urgent and if homeownership remains the goal, long-term investing can slip into the background.

"Unfortunately, I think housing affordability can reduce the prioritization of retirement planning and other long-term goals for many young people," Hedges said. "It makes it easy for those long-term goals to seem so far away that they can lose their real-time significance."

That same shift is visible in Henriques' life, even as someone who has already started investing.

She and her girlfriend are moving to Durham after graduation in part because Chapel Hill feels increasingly unrealistic. Too many people want to live close to campus, she said, and not enough housing exists to absorb that demand. The result is a market where prices keep climbing because people still must pay them if they want to stay nearby.

"It's always been terrible in Chapel Hill," she said, "but it's especially bad right now."

That pressure does more than determine a ZIP code. It changes how people imagine the future. A move becomes more than a move. Rent becomes more than rent. Every monthly payment starts competing with whatever long-term version of stability a person is trying to build.

When someone feels financially stretched, it becomes easy to sideline tomorrow to manage today.

"I believe the hardest part about balancing immediate needs and long-term goals is the emotional aspect," Hedges wrote. "It is very easy to set aside long-term goals due to the pressure of meeting your near-term obligations."

His answer is not a generic formula.

"You need to have a plan," he stated. "And you need to have a plan that is unique to your situation."

That emphasis on fit and clarity runs alongside what students are being asked to think through in Ruel's class.

Over the years, she has built the course around collaborations with outside organizations, from media outlets to public health agencies to legal technology companies. The projects vary, but the standard stays the same. Students must think beyond what looks polished and ask what helps someone move through a system with less confusion. With Vanguard, that means understanding finance as more than data on a screen. It is also timing, trust, risk and the private strain people carry with them when they log in.

"You're learning about UX, but you're actually learning it in the context in which it's used," Ruel said.

That has made the class feel more tangible for Henriques too. It is one thing to learn interface design in theory. It is another to build something for a company whose tools already shape people's real financial lives.

She also sees the limits of presentation when trust is involved.

Vanguard has repeatedly encouraged her to use its digital advisor, but she has not. Part of that is practical. She does not want to pay for something she feels she can do herself. But the hesitation is also about transparency. If a digital system is making decisions with her money, she wants to know what it is doing and why.

"If I'm giving AI my money, I want to know literally everything that it is doing," she said.

That distinction matters. Younger users are not only asking for financial tools to look cleaner or feel more modern. They want them to make sense.

A platform can be sleek and still feel distant. It can simplify the layout without easing the uncertainty behind it. In finance, design is not only about aesthetics. It is about whether a person understands what they are seeing well enough to make decisions they can live with.

Ruel sees that need for clarity as part of why the original Vanguard project felt so important. It centered on younger investors who had barely entered the financial world, if at all. Students were listening to peers, asking what they wanted from an investment platform and trying to understand what might make them engage instead of back away.

"There needs to be some education about how these things work," Ruel said.

That urgency is not just academic for her. She pointed to her own daughter, a full-time nurse at UNC Hospitals for nearly five years, who still could not reasonably buy a house in Chapel Hill. In that kind of environment, financial literacy stops feeling like an extra skill and starts feeling more like part of basic survival.

The broader industry is grappling with those tensions too.

Wallace Foutch III, an investment banking analyst at Bank of America in New York, described a financial world that is far more visible than it used to be. More people can access information, more people can participate in markets and more tools are available to people who once would have been shut out of them.

"There's way more transparency now," he wrote in a message thread to UNC Media Hub reporters. "People can access information and participate in markets that used to feel totally closed off to anyone without a Goldman email address."

But he pushed back on the idea that finance is becoming more human-centered out of goodwill. This shift has not necessarily made the industry softer but in his view, has made mistakes harder to hide.

"I think the 'human-centered' piece is less about the industry having some kind of awakening and more about the fact that the consequences of getting it wrong are just more visible now," he noted.

That applies to housing too.

Foutch described the housing crisis as "a real gut-check for the industry" because capital still tends to move toward the best returns, and affordable housing often is not where those returns are strongest.

He pointed to more creative financing structures, including tax credit programs and community development funds, where incentives can align more closely with projects that help people.

Still, the larger tension remains.

Housing exposes the difference between what markets reward and what many people need.

That is partly why a project like Year in Review carries more weight than it first appears to. A financial recap is not just a set of balances or graphs. It is a moment where a user is asked to look at the last year of their financial life and decide what it means. Progress may feel slower than they hoped for. Goals may still look distant. The account may show movement, while the person looking at it still feels stuck. In that kind of moment, wording matters. Hierarchy matters. What gets emphasized and what gets explained matters.

In 2019, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law requiring public high school students to pass an Economics and Personal Finance course in order to be eligible for graduation. As the Class of 2024 was the first to meet that requirement, some young investors today do not have that course knowledge.

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VW Atlas a familiar and outstanding investment

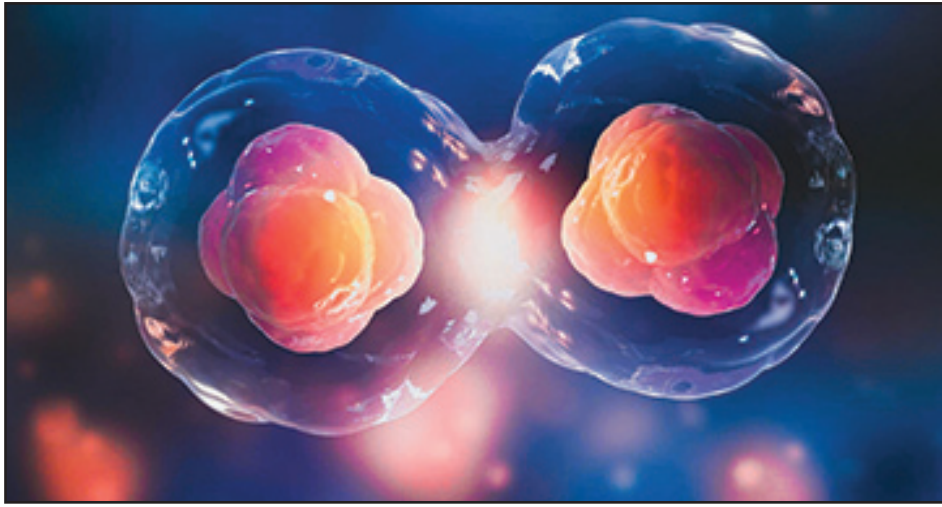
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The Atlas SE with the technology package lists for \$45,630. Optional packages pushed the MSRP to \$48,174 which does not include destination.

Pros:

- Handsome styling
- Spacious interior
- Comfortable seats
- Powerful engine

- Plenty of standard equipment
 - Comfortable ride
 - Solid handling
 - Quiet cabin
 - Five-star crash rating
- Cons:
- Can be difficult to drive at low speeds
 - Touch controls are a bit sensitive



STOCK PHOTO

Embryo donation is becoming a more common path for people looking to have a baby.

Embryo donation provides new route to potential parenthood

By Emily Gessner
UNC MEDIA HUB

Lauren Martin is a mother of five children who have come into her and her husband's lives through a variety of paths.

After adopting their eldest, the Martins turned to IVF therapy for their next two girls. They planned to create and use a certain number of embryos so they would not have to think about what to do with any unused embryos.

However, after conceiving their two girls, Martin experienced a health issue and realized she would no longer be able to use the remainder of her embryos. That's when she and her husband started looking into embryo donation.

Embryo donation is when people with remaining embryos after IVF donate those embryos for another person or couple to use for their own fertility and pregnancy journey. This process is also often called embryo adoption, although it is not legally considered adoption.

There are currently an estimated 1.5 million frozen embryos in the United States.

"It's become more common now to adopt an embryo, as opposed to making your own," said attorney E. Parker Herring, a board-certified specialist in family law and founder and director of A Child's Hope, an adoption agency in Raleigh. "So there are lots of services to provide embryos and you just need a release in order to get that."

The National Embryo Donation Center, based in Knoxville, Tennessee, currently has about 500 sets of embryos. An embryo set consists of three embryos.

The NEDC is a nonprofit that has a mission to "protect the lives and dignity of human embryos," according to its website. The NEDC provides for all the medical, legal and social aspects of embryo donation and adoption and acts as the interim caregiver for storing embryos with no charge to donors.

"Our donors donate to us, we've been getting embryos donated to us for over two decades, and we've received embryos from all 50 states," said Dr. Jeffrey Keenan, who specializes in infertility and reproductive medicine and is the president and medical director of the National Embryo Donation Center. "Similarly, we've had patients from all 50 states, the U.S. territories, about a dozen foreign countries - as far as China."

Over the past few decades, advances in fertility science have provided more opportunities for women to take control of their fertility journey. And as fertility sciences and options became popular, embryo donation arose as another option.

Keenan said that the first published history of embryo donation was done in the early 1980s by Dr. Alan Trounson in Australia.

Trounson, along with other researchers John Leeton, Carl Wood, Mandy Besanko and Angelo Conti, published their article in 1983 in "The British Medical Journal." The article, "Pregnancy Established in an Infertile Patient After Transfer of a Donated Embryo Fertilized In Vitro," discussed the first successful experiment with IVF and a human donor embryo.

Although the pregnancy ended in a miscarriage after 10 weeks, it proved that IVF was possible for individuals using someone else's donated egg cells.

Embryo donation progressed and was considered a viable option into the late 1990s.

In 1998, biologists at the University of Wisconsin established the first human embryonic stem cell line from a donated leftover embryo, according to a study by Risa Cromer, assistant professor of anthropology at Purdue University. That same year, for the first time, a child was born through the world's first embryo

adoption program.

Cromer said that researchers found that "these coinciding events became embroiled in ongoing ethical debate in the U.S. about using human embryos and fetuses to advance scientific research."

Many embryo banks across the United States, like NEDC, are pro-life and Christian-based organizations that take in the unused embryos to use them in later implantation for couples looking to adopt the embryos as their own.

There are many different reasons that people choose embryo donation as a way to have children. Keenan said that some people decide to go through NEDC because they "have a real heart for the plight of these frozen embryos," others have tried to go through adoption agencies and have been unsuccessful, so they turn to embryo donation, and others turn to embryo donation after going through IVF and being unsuccessful.

Carolina Conceptions is a medical clinic based out of the Triangle. Its focus is to help families make their dreams a reality, whether that be through basic infertility therapies or more in-depth treatment. The clinic focuses on infertility care in a variety of ways, such as IVF therapy, chromosome testing on embryos, egg and sperm donation and more.

Martin used Carolina Conceptions for her fertility journey.

"We did one round of IVF, and through that we have our two little girls, but we also had more embryos than we needed," Martin said. "And so with that we were able to, through friends of friends, find two other families that were also having trouble conceiving and didn't have an option to do IVF of their own. And so they adopted the rest of our embryos and grew their families that way."

Choosing to donate unused embryos can be a very difficult decision for many people. A lot of people feel this to be a heavy moral dilemma of whether or not to donate their unused embryos.

"Even though we feel that embryo adoption is the most moral and life affirming option, it's still not an easy decision to make," Keenan said. "To know that you have genetic offspring out there that are being raised by someone else, and that your children have siblings out there that are being raised by someone else."

Support groups for families and individuals have started to pop up across the United States. Dr. Carol Wheeler specializes in reproductive endocrinology and infertility, and she leads a support group at RESOLVE.

RESOLVE: The National Infertility and Family Building Association hosts support groups, provides advice and resources and acts as an online community for people experiencing IVF and embryo choices.

"Most infertility patients who have surplus embryos, particularly those who have conceived, do not feel that they should donate their embryos," Wheeler said.

She said that the decision of what to do with an embryo often comes down to the feeling of a connection.

"They may have concerns that there is another child out there somewhere who they don't know about who is genetically their child," Wheeler said. "Just as in adoption, they may have concerns about a donated embryo child contacting them in the future. Others may fear that they might need their frozen embryos in the future."

Sarah Ekis also hosts the support group at RESOLVE. Ekis is a recipient of embryo donation and has two children from the option. She said that while this option deeply changed her life in a positive way, not everyone feels that way and should have the autonomy to decide what is right for them.

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Robert Weaver broke new ground as cabinet secretary

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

Robert C. Weaver (1907-1997) was a prominent African American economist and public servant, best known for his groundbreaking role in U.S. housing policy and civil rights advocacy.

Weaver pursued higher education at Harvard University, earning a Ph.D. in economics. Weaver's career began in the 1930s with significant contributions to the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, where he played a key role in shifting African American political allegiance to the Democratic Party. He later took positions in various government agencies, where he focused on race relations and urban housing issues.

In 1933, Weaver became associate adviser to the secretary of the interior. His knowledge of urban issues and attention to administrative detail moved him to the top ranks of the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, which was better known as the "Black Cabinet." The panel was a loosely organized group of about 45 African American academics, civil servants, and community activists brought together by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune to advise President Franklin D. Roosevelt on matters pertaining to the Black Americans. Weaver was

instrumental in helping to engineer the "Great Switchover" of the African American vote to the Democratic Party.

From 1945-55, Weaver had short-term university lecturing positions and a six-month stint in 1946 as acting deputy chief of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration's initiative in war-ravaged areas of the Soviet Union. From 1955-59, he was the state of New York's deputy housing commissioner and rent administrator; then from 1959-60 chaired the NAACP's national board.

In 1961, Weaver returned to government service as President John Kennedy's appointee to head the Bureau of Housing and Home Finance, declining the cabinet position as secretary of health, education, and welfare. It then became Kennedy's intent to elevate Weaver to secretary of a proposed cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development, but the proposal was stymied in Congress in 1961 and 1962 by Republicans and Southern Democrats because of the likelihood of a black man's appointment to the position.

In 1966, Weaver became the first Black cabinet member when he was appointed secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development by President Lyndon Johnson. Throughout his career, he authored several influential books on urban issues that shaped discussions on racial discrimination and urban renewal.



Weaver

HBCUs collaborate on North Carolina health data consortium

Continued from page 1B

Carolina." A \$200,000 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation award will fund the dissemination of findings and policy implications from its COVID-19 Impact Survey through Jan. 31, 2028. The survey was developed to generate localized evidence regarding the pandemic's effects on health, social and economic well-being across

the state to mitigate disparities.

"A fundamental equity strategy is community engagement," Webb said. "The consortium will use this funding to facilitate these efforts and offer neutral, data-driven input in accessible formats for near-term policymaking."

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The Charlotte Post
The Voice of the Black Community



FILE PHOTO

Jason Mizell, Run-DMC's DJ Jam Master Jay, was murdered in 2002. Jay Bryant, 52, pleaded guilty to the charge on April 27.

Guilty plea in killing of Jam Master Jay

By Jennifer Peltz
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Nearly a quarter-century after rap star Jam Master Jay of Run-DMC was shot to death, a man admitted in court April 27 to a role in a killing that stymied investigators for decades.

Jay Bryant, 52, pleaded guilty to a federal murder charge, telling a judge that he helped other people get into a building so they could ambush the DJ, born Jason Mizell, in his recording studio.

"I knew a gun was going to be used to shoot Jason Mizell," Bryant told a federal magistrate. "I knew that what I was doing was wrong and a crime."

Bryant's admission brings some closure — but also adds complexity — to a knotty case.

Bryant didn't name the other people with whom he acted. But a jury in 2024 convicted two other men, Karl Jordan Jr. and Ronald Washington, yet a judge subsequently cleared Jordan.

Washington has also challenged his conviction. Messages seeking comment were sent to his lawyers and Jordan's attorneys.

Bryant is expected to face a sentence somewhere between 15 and 20 years in prison, a penalty that covers the killing plus unrelated drug and gun charges to which he pleaded guilty earlier. No sentencing date has been set.

He gave a thumbs-up to someone in the audience before leaving court. The person declined to comment afterward, as did Bryant's attorneys.

Prosecutors had no immediate comment.

Mizell handled the turntables in Run-DMC, a pathbreaking trio he formed with friends Darryl "DMC" McDaniels and Joseph Simmons, known as DJ Run and Rev. Run.

With such 1980s hits as "It's Tricky," "My Adidas," and a version of Aerosmith's "Walk This Way," they helped rap climb the ladder from an urban genre into mainstream popularity. Run-

Please see **GUILTY** | 6B

Summer blockbusters ready to take on high stakes

By Lindsey Bahr
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The movies always feel bigger in the summer.

The budgets. The ambition. The names. The stakes. This summer, Hollywood has many of the regulars on the lineup: "Spider-Man," "Minions," "Star Wars" and "Toy Story." But the most eagerly anticipated is not a superhero, toy, or franchise: It's a 3,000-year-old epic poem.

For filmmaker Christopher Nolan, "The Odyssey," out July 17, isn't just a story. It's the story: A foundational piece that deserved to be done on the biggest possible scale, with all the resources modern Hollywood had to offer.

"There's a massive amount of pressure," Nolan told The Associated Press. "Anyone taking on 'The Odyssey' is taking on the hopes and dreams of people for epic movies everywhere and that comes with a huge responsibility."

It's a familiar feeling, though. He did three Batman films after all.

"What I learned from that experience is that what people want from a movie about a beloved story, a beloved set of characters, is they want a strong and sincere interpretation," Nolan said. "They want to know that a filmmaker has gone to the mat for it. I really tried to make the best film possible."

Three summers ago, "Oppenheimer" made nearly a billion dollars. "The Odyssey" has battles, gods, creatures and an army of movie stars — Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Zendaya and Tom Holland included. It's also the first movie shot entirely on IMAX film.

Please see **SUMMER** | 6B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



TURNER-CRAY INC.

Blues guitarist Robert Cray and his band will play the Carolina Theatre May 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Robert Cray Band and SouthPark After 5 show

Legendary blues guitarist takes the stage at Carolina Theatre on May 5

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

The latest events, stage productions and exhibits in Charlotte and beyond:

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 operational needs.

Tickets: <https://tinyurl.com/BSC-concert>

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 art and narrative.

General admission: \$45.
Charlotte Symphony presents Bach & Beyond, 7:30 p.m., Carolina Theatre at Belk Place.

Johann Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concertos frame an evening

that bridges the Baroque spirit paired with Handel's Water Music and a contemporary reflection on the form by *Caroline Shaw*.

Tickets \$34.55-\$120.80 available at [ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com).

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](https://www.ticketmaster.com).

Through 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 at [davidsoncommunityplayers.org/main-stage](https://www.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.

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 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](https://www.ticketmaster.com).

May 15-16
Charlotte Symphony presents Copland & Kahane at Knight Theater.

The season concludes with a deeply personal and poignant reflection on the meaning of home led by Grammy-winning music director Kwamé Ryan.

Through May 21
SouthPark After 5, a free evening entertainment series, is 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 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*.

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 at [livenation.com](https://www.livenation.com).

« MOVIE REVIEW »

Sanitized 'Michael' has rhythm with light touch

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Michael
2.5 stars

He was a Black singer who yearned to cross over from the African American community to mainstream America.

He did. Ironically, in the end, the Black fans who loved him first may be the loyalists who embrace this conventional biofilm when others won't.

This sanitized portrait lacks scandal and may disappoint some. But those who want to be reminded that Jackson was a singular talent get a nice refresh. Glimpses of his eccentric behavior (do you have a pet llama?) and the making of "Thriller," still the best-selling album of all time, are highlights. Seeing why Jackson set 39 Guinness World Records and cemented his legend is also enticing. So, what's the story behind the façade? A fairly compelling but never extraordinary script by John Logan ("Gladiator") gives us a peek that lasts up until the late '80s. Up until the allegations.

Clearly young Michael Jackson (Juliano Krue Valdi) is the protagonist and his father Joe (Colman Domingo) the antagonist. The patriarch demands attention, obedience and excellence from his sons who form the musical group The Jackson 5. Their allegiance to their dad has been manipulated by harsh intimidation and threats of beatings by a belt for those who don't obey. Michael has felt that wrath. Katherine (Nia Long), the matriarch, has witnessed it. Still, dad and family are jointly determined to seek a better life, like many working-class families—especially Black working-class families. Joe warns about the downside of staying in Gary, Indiana: "Y'all want to work in a steel mill like me for the rest of your days?"

Action-film director Antoine Fuqua ("The Equalizer") got his start as a music video director for Prince, Usher



LIONSGATE FILMS

Jaafar Jackson portrays the adult Michael Jackson in the biopic "Michael."

and probably most famously for Coolio in the "Gangsta's Paradise" video. Thus, the music and dance scenes in this film are well-composed, invigorating and expertly shot. The kinetic visuals are helped tremendously by Oscar-winning cinematographer Dion Beebe ("Memoirs of a Geisha"), who moves the camera around Jackson's performances as swiftly as a backup dancer. Four editors (Conrad Buff IV, Tom Cross, John Ottoman and Harry Yoon) snip the scenes down to their essence, add a steady beat and let the music drive the footage. While costume designer Marci Rodgers' ("BlackKkLansman") aptly replicates Jackson's famous accoutrements, from the sequined glove to the shiny military-style jackets. There's glitz where it needs to be.

Encino, California, here they come. In a heartbeat the family is in Los Angeles

and have become renowned Motown Record Corporation artists thanks to company executive Suzanne de Passe (Laura Harrier) and owner Berry Gordy (Larenz Tate). As crafty and menacing as Joe is, young adult Michael (Jaafar Jackson) is two steps ahead of him. The Jackson 5 hits like "ABC" (1970) and "I'll Be There" (1970) enhance the group's popularity. But Michael itches for his own career, "I love my family. I just want to do my own thing."

His driver Bill Bray (Keilyn Durrell Jones) becomes his confidant and lawyer John Branca (Miles Teller) his representative. Jackson: "You know what I'm after?" Branca: "To be the biggest star in the world!"

Add producer Quincy Jones (Kendrick Sampson) to the team, and Michael's first solo album *Off the Wall* makes a

Please see **SANITIZED** | 6B

Sanitized 'Michael' has rhythm with light touch

Continued from page 5B

big splash with hot singles like "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough." Next it's Thriller, with "Billie Jean" and its iconic, thumping bassline. Fame and independence follow—then suddenly the final credits roll.

Two elements elevate the film: groundbreaking music and innovative dancing inspired by Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. Their moves inspired Jackson, who put his own stamp on popstar performance choreography. As long as there are still videos of Jackson's famed 1983 appearance on TV's "Motown 25: Yesterday, Today Forever," kids will be moonwalking their hearts out.

Valdi as little Michael and Jaafar Jackson as the bigger one embody the best of the artist. They have his movements down to a science. And through the magic of audio vocal effects, they sound almost like him too. The young actor displays an innocence so vulnerable and tangible, you wince when his dad beats him. The older actor expresses a quiet, passive-aggressive strength and determination.

It peaks in scenes when he pulls away from his dad and manipulates the head of his record company (Mike Myers) into forcefully getting his videos on MTV, which had refused to play Black music, the kind of barrier many African American audiences will recognize. As Jackson's look-alike nephew, Jaafar is the man in the mirror. However, the novice actor's performance doesn't match the depth of Jamie Foxx's in "Ray" or Rami Malek in "Queen."

Domingo's interpretation of the narcissistic, helicopter dad and Long's portrayal of the mother who tries to protect her son are strong. Teller, Tate, Harrier, Jones, Simpson and other supporting actors, equally so.

The script and direction present a narrative about an artist who found his way to stardom, but not in a birth to grave way. It's closer in approach to "Bob Marley: One Love" and lacks the visual imagination of the Elton John bio "Rocketman." All three biographies would benefit from a mini-series more than a feature film. What's on view seems pat, professional and truncated, never daring, exceptional or comprehensive.

If you're a music fan who wants Michael Jackson's spirit brought back down to earth, his persona does hover in the room. Whether you're in an IMAX theater, a cineplex or living room you feel his presence, joy and music.

Does the footage push biofilm genre boundaries? No. Does it remind everyone that the '70s and '80s music was more fun because of Michael mania? Yes. It does that consistently for two hours and seven minutes.

Obvious omissions (Janet Jackson's participation, his children, etc.) may frustrate potential viewers seeking a tell-all. But Black fans—the first to embrace Michael—may still find joy in this celebration of his artistry, along with those seeking a PG-13 version of Michael's life.

Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

Guilty plea in Jam Master J case

Continued from page 5B

DMC was the first rap group with gold- and platinum-selling albums, a Rolling Stone cover, and a video on MTV. The trio was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2009. Mizell also mentored other hip-hop artists, including a young 50 Cent.

At 37, Mizell was gunned down in his studio in the Queens neighborhood where he'd grown up. His October 2002 death followed the late 1990s killings of two other hip-hop greats, Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. Authorities struggled with all three cases for years.

Jordan and Washington — Mizell's godson and old friend, respectively — were arrested in 2020. Prosecutors said the men were bitter about losing out on a piece of a failed cocaine deal that Mizell had tried to line up. Though Run-DMC was known for its anti-drug message, prosecutors and a trial witness said the DJ moonlighted in the cocaine trade in his later years to cover his bills and keep being generous to friends after music money dried up somewhat.

According to prosecutors and trial witnesses, Jordan shot Mizell while Washington blocked the door during the shooting and ordered one of Mizell's aides to get on the ground. Both men denied the allegations. Jordan's attorneys said he was at his girlfriend's home when the DJ was shot, and Washington's lawyers said he had no incentive to kill the famous friend who helped him financially.

Nearly three years after their arrests, prosecutors abruptly brought Bryant into their picture of the killing.

Saying that Bryant's DNA had been found on a hat at the crime scene in the studio and that he'd been seen entering the building, prosecutors added him to the murder indictment. He was already jailed on the drug and gun case.

Bryant knew someone in common with Jordan and Washington, according to testimony at their trial. But unlike them, Bryant had little, if any, connection to Mizell.

Bryant said in court Monday that he was connected with people who were involved in a cocaine deal with the DJ and that he "helped them kill Jason Mizell by helping them gain entry to the recording studio."

Bryant's uncle has said his nephew told him he shot Mizell after the artist reached for a gun. But no one else testified that Bryant even entered the studio.

Instead, prosecutors contended that Bryant was enlisted to make his way into the studio building and open a back fire door, allowing Washington and Jordan to walk in without buzzing up and alerting Mizell they were coming.

While neither Jordan's nor Washington's DNA was on the cap, then-prosecutor Artie McConnell suggested one of them had accidentally left it behind, and that Bryant had simply touched it at some point beforehand.

« OUT AND ABOUT »



DANIEL COSTON

Danny and Adrienne Dixon enjoyed the annual Wish Ball, benefiting Make A Wish, held at the Revelry on March 6.

Summer blockbusters ready to take on season

Continued from page 5B

Tickets for some IMAX 70 mm showings sold out in under an hour a full year in advance.

"The Odyssey" will be shorter than "Oppenheimer"; Three hours is the longest they've been able to get onto an IMAX film projector, after all.

"It's an epic film, as the subject matter demands," Nolan said. "But it is shorter." Summer movie season's fashionable kickoff

Hollywood may not save all its blockbusters for the hottest months anymore, but the 18 week corridor running from the first weekend in May through Labor Day remains the industry's most important, accounting for around 40% of the year's box office. And it's only surpassed \$4 billion once since the pandemic, in 2023.

Marvel movies often kick off the season, but last year filmmaker David Frankel got a call from Disney: "Avengers: Doomsday" wasn't going to be ready by the first weekend in May; Could "The Devil Wears Prada 2" step up?

May 1 is just days before the Met Gala and it would give the movie a long runway to play, he figured. It would also require a bit of a sprint — they finished the film just weeks ago. But the enthusiasm was motivating, from fans snapping photos of Hathaway and Meryl Streep on the New York streets, to support from Anna Wintour.

Love for "Prada" isn't the only thing that's changed in 20 years; Magazines have also become an endangered species.

"How does Miranda Priestly deal with this changing world and what's her future?" Frankel said. "The same with Andy Sachs: If all your ambition has been funneled in this one direction, what happens when you have to pivot and how do you adapt?"

The \$4 billion question

The movie industry is also adjusting to a new paradigm. Box office is down over 20% from pre-COVID levels. The rise in streaming, the pandemic and shifting theatrical windows altered people's moviegoing habits, perhaps permanently. And there may be one less major studio if Paramount acquires Warner Bros.

But, as James Cameron said, "hope springs eternal."

"We still have a very robust theatrical industry at a time when it was kind of almost pronounced dead," Cameron said.

The gap is not widening. Studios are committing to longer exclusive theatrical windows. Original movies and premium

formats are drawing crowds. And the market continues to expand globally.

Cameron is behind one of those only-in-a-theater experiences with the 3D Billie Eilish concert film (May 8). Using new technology, they used 17 camera systems to capture four nights of her Manchester shows last year.

"Seeing it in 3D is astonishing," Cameron said. "You really feel an intimacy with her and yet you feel the scale of the spectacle."

A summer for heavyweights

Nolan isn't Universal's only giant of cinema on its summer roster: Steven Spielberg is also returning to one of his most beloved genres with "Disclosure Day" (June 12). There are superhero movies as well, with "Supergirl" (June 26), which DC Studios co-head Peter Safran said is "is something cool and original and we haven't seen before," and "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" (July 31). The last Spidey film, which made over \$1.9 billion, ended with Holland's Peter Parker erasing himself from everyone's memory.

"This is a blockbuster action movie with all the humor and emotion we love about Spider-Man," director Destin Daniel Cretton said. "But at its heart, it's a story about learning how to reconnect with the ones you love."

A lot of power recently has shifted to PG-rated offerings. This summer has "Toy Story 5" (June 19), "Minions & Monsters" (July 1) and a live action "Moana" (July 10), which could all very well hit a billion dollars each.

One non-franchise family friendly film is "The Sheep Detectives" (May 8), in which the animals (Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Bryan Cranston) investigate the death of their beloved owner (Hugh Jackman). Writer Craig Mazin understands the hurdle: There have been a lot of stupid talking animal movies. But this one is different, he said, it's not just silly sheep doing silly things.

"There are some really beautiful moments and themes and things that parents can talk about with their kids," Mazin said. "And most importantly, it is legitimately a movie that is meant for everyone."

Then there's "Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu" (May 22), which is rated PG-13 but has an impossibly cute alien going for it. It's also one of several made for IMAX.

"People have got great TVs at home," said director Jon Favreau. "You've got to give them a reason to go out."

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