

# Life!

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026 SECTION B

## NC's 'loneliness epidemic' impacts thousands of us

By Zamone Perez  
NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

Many North Carolinians have said they struggle to form and maintain friendships, but researchers said social connection comes with myriad health benefits.

It is often called the "loneliness epidemic" because one in three Americans said they lack meaningful relationships. Culprits can be technology, urbanization or lingering fear about COVID-19.

Whatever the cause, studies show a lack of social engagement increases the risk of premature death, heart disease, dementia and mental health disorders like depression and anxiety.

Jaimie Krems, director of the University of California-Los Angeles Center for Friendship Research, said the solution is clear.

"The number one antidote to loneliness is friendship," Krems said. "It's not religion, marriage, children; it is friendship."

In 1990, just 3% of Americans said they had no close friends. Three decades later it was 12%. Krems likes the idea of "aggressive" friendship: taking the initiative to reach out without feeling guilty. She suggested putting recurring meetings on the calendar with friends, whether for an outdoor activity or simply coffee.

Some people treat friendships as transactional, making sure they get as much as they give. But Krems stressed it is OK to be a little needy sometimes, such as asking friends for a personal recommendation about a doctor, a mechanic or even a favorite book.

"One of the things that might be counterintuitive is to ask for help," Krems said. "Help-giving is the defining feature of friendship."

A 2021 survey found trends such as people marrying later and becoming more geographically mobile than in the past are also strongly associated with increasing rates of social isolation and loneliness.

Krems suggested if you find yourself thinking of a friend, do not put it on your "to-do" list for later. Instead, text and ask for 10 minutes on the phone. Then, a friend who might be busy knows you don't need an hour of conversation but just enough time to touch base.

## Beyond aesthetics: Check out home design trends

FEATURE IMPACT

Heading into a new year, home design is once again evolving. Homeowners are blending comfort, personality, sustainability and connections to the outside world this year. More than just aesthetics, these trends are warm, intentional and rooted in real life.

Whether you're refreshing a room or planning a full-blown makeover, consider these ideas for inspiration that feels both timeless and fresh.

### Warm, earthy palettes

This year, say goodbye to whites and cool grays. Instead, cozy earth tones like clay, sage, caramel and rich neutrals create a grounded, inviting atmosphere. Refresh walls or cabinetry with these earthy hues or try color-drenching - using a single hue in varying tones across walls, trim and ceilings - for a bold new vibe that feels both timeless and modern.

### Flowing, curved shapes

As homes trend more toward feeling lived-in rather than staged, hard edges and rigid forms are taking a backseat. In 2026, curves are everywhere: soft archways, rounded furniture and curved statement pieces - think circular mirrors or oversized armchairs - create fluid, comforting spaces.

### Natural materials and textures

Designs this year celebrate materials that age beautifully, like natural stone, reclaimed wood and textiles that tell a story. Consider woven pillows and throws, handmade pottery, textured walls and wood with visible grain to enrich rooms with sensory de-

Please see [HOME](#) | 2B

## At-home solution with the taste of takeout with spicy tuna sushi rice cups

FEATURE IMPACT

If you're cozying up at home but takeout cravings are calling, it may just be time for a pantry refresh that brings bold flavors straight to your kitchen.

No matter what kind of cook you are - Bumble Bee Snackers are your new secret snack-section solution.

For unbeatable convenience and flavor, consider Bumble Bee Snackers for an at-home recipe enhancement. They're shaking up the tuna aisle in single-serve cans with a variety of bold flavors that are perfect for snacking or light lunches, including zesty Lemon Pepper, rich and savory Hickory Smoke, tastebud-tingling Sweet Heat, spicy-sweet Thai Chili and nostalgic Tuna Salad. If you're more of a traditionalist, classic Chunk Light Tuna is an ideal complement for crackers or veggies.

The premixed 3-ounce cans can be enjoyed on their own or paired with other favorites like celery sticks, carrots, cucumber, crackers or tortilla chips.

Snack menu shakeups are sweeping the country; in fact, 50% of Americans agree it's hard to find snacks that meets all their

needs, according to a survey conducted by Bumble Bee Seafoods and Fleishman-Hillard's True Global Intelligence. The survey also found hungry families are looking for more "bang for their buck," affordability, protein and ease for eating on the go.

While value and convenience are important, great taste still tops the list - flavor remains the single biggest driver of snacking decisions. To ensure convenience and flavor is on your menu, consider these Spicy Tuna Sushi Rice Cups as an easy way to enjoy the taste of takeout from the comfort of your own kitchen.

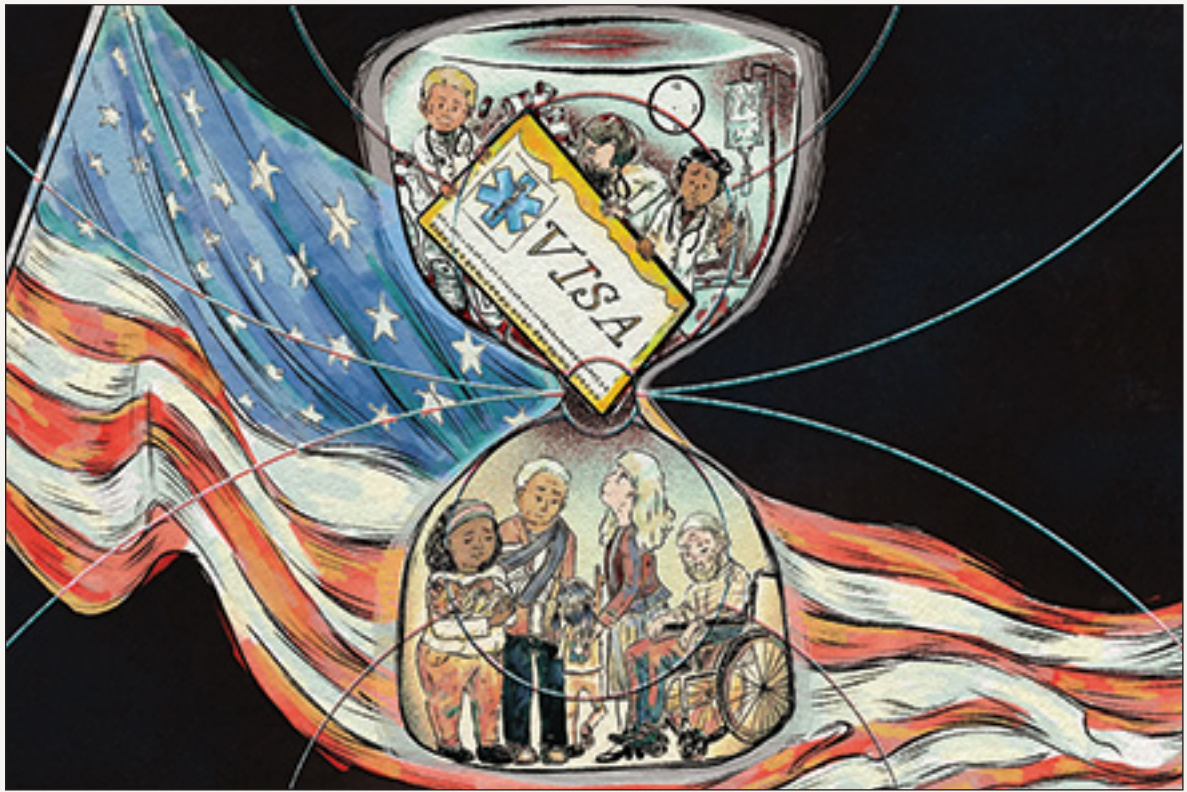
Visit [BumbleBee.com](#) to discover more ways to shake up snacking at home.

### Spicy Tuna Sushi Rice Cups

Recipe courtesy of @amateur\_husband on behalf of Bumble Bee Seafoods

- Sushi Rice:
- 2 cups sushi rice, cooked
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Tuna mixture:

Please see [BEYOND](#) | 2B



OONA ZENDA | KFF HEALTH NEWS

Visa waivers for hundreds of foreign doctors training in the United States threatens their ability to remain in this country to practice in underserved communities.

## Visa delays threaten deployment of doctors

Foreign-born physicians fill gaps in underserved communities

By Arielle Zions

KFF HEALTH NEWS

Hundreds of foreign doctors about to complete training in the U.S. will have to leave the country if the federal government doesn't rapidly process their visa waiver applications, which have been languishing since the fall and winter, immigration attorneys say.

The waiver program, run by the Department of Health and Human Services, allows physicians who aren't U.S. citizens to stay in the country while transitioning from the visa they used during their training to temporary worker status. In exchange, the doctors agree to work in underserved areas for at least three years.

"It will be the patients that suffer the most because in about three months, there's going to be hundreds of places that are not going to have a physician that should have," said a psychiatrist caught in the delay.

The doctor - whom KFF Health News agreed not to identify because they fear government reprisal - was among hundreds who applied this year for a J-1 visa waiver through the HHS Exchange Visitor Program.

If they receive one, the psychiatrist - who attended medical school in their home country in Europe before coming to the U.S. for their residency and fellowship - would work with vulnerable and disadvantaged patients in New York.

In recent years, the HHS program reviewed waiver applications in one to three weeks, according to two immigration attorneys.

But it currently has a backlog of hundreds of applications, which still need to be reviewed by the State Department and approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, according to four attorneys interviewed by KFF Health

News.

They said the foreign physicians will likely have to return to their home countries if their applications don't advance to USCIS by July 30.

For them to reenter the U.S., their employers would have to pay a new \$100,000 fee associated with the H-1B work visa. It's a cost that many hospitals and clinics in rural and underserved areas say they can't afford. "That's the cliff that this train is headed for," said Charles Wintersteen, a Chicago-based attorney who specializes in health workforce-related immigration.

HHS spokesperson Emily Hilliard didn't answer questions about the number of pending applications or explain what caused the delays. But she said the Exchange Visitor Program has reviewed all fiscal year 2025 clinical J-1 waiver applications, as well as

Please see [VISA](#) | 2B

## What people get wrong about food

By Zoe Behrendt

UNC MEDIA HUB

When UNC Chapel Hill exchange student Alannah Nic an tSionnaigh arrived from Ireland, grocery shopping felt unfamiliar almost immediately.

"It's a lot of packaged goods," she said. "And the bread is sweeter... and somehow springier."

Bread lasted longer. The product looked different. And nearly everything, from snacks to pre-packaged meals, seemed designed to sit on shelves far longer than she was used to.

Back home, she said, food felt simpler, and more perishable.

"A lot of times, the bread wouldn't even last a day," she said. "You had to eat it when you bought it."

Her experience highlights a growing conversation in the United States about what's in food, and what should be.

As the Food and Drug Administration moves toward reducing artificial ingredients, including petroleum-based food dyes, many Americans are paying closer attention to labels than ever before. But some nutrition experts say that focus may be skewed.

### Shift in focus

In 2026, the FDA outlined priorities that include improving food chemical safety and encouraging a shift toward natural alternatives for additives like synthetic dyes. The goal is to reduce long-term health risks and improve overall nutrition across the country.

The conversation has quickly gained traction online, where influencers and consumers alike are pushing for "cleaner" ingredients and fewer artificial components in

Please see [WHAT](#) | 3B



MEGAN PATTON | UNC MEDIA HUB

Packaged jelly candies consisting of 22% dried fruit. The fruit candies contain no artificial coloring. European candies generally include more natural fruit content than American ones.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Spicy Tuna Sushi Rice Cups.

# Visa delays threaten deployment of doctors

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some from fiscal 2026.

The department is "implementing key process improvements to prevent future delays" and "working diligently" to evaluate remaining applications ahead of the July 30 deadline, she said.

The psychiatrist in limbo said employers hiring J-1 waiver physicians have to show they were unable to fill positions with American workers. If the doctors they planned to hire can't arrive on time — or at all — patients will have to wait even longer for those vacancies to be filled, they said.

Wintersteen said postgraduate medical education positions are largely funded through Medicare and that "the taxpayers who pay for that training will not get the benefit of it."

Physicians and immigration attorneys said HHS hasn't explained the delays or let them know what to expect from their applications.

"Why would HHS want to take a program that is working — a program that places hundreds of U.S. trained international physicians in highly underserved parts of the country every year — and slow-walk it into non-existence," Jennifer Minear, a Virginia-based health workforce immigration lawyer, said in an email. "How does that serve the public health? It is baffling."

#### Waiver delays

The U.S. healthcare system depends on foreign-born professionals to fill its ranks of doctors, nurses, technicians, and other health providers, particularly in chronically understaffed facilities in rural and low-income urban communities.

Nearly a quarter of physicians in the U.S. went to medical school outside the U.S. or Canada, according to 2025 licensing data.

Once noncitizens complete postgraduate education in the U.S., which typically ends on June 30, they must return to their home country and wait two years before applying for an H-1B work visa. Or, they can seek a J-1 waiver, which lets them remain in the U.S. on H-1B status in exchange for working for three years in a provider shortage area.

The attorneys said they're seeing delays only in the Exchange Visitor Program, not in the other federal or state J-1 waiver programs.

The HHS clinical care program received 750 waiver applications last year, Minear and Wintersteen said, and is reserved for doctors working in pediatrics, psychiatry, family and internal medicine, or obstetrics and gynecology.

The program typically needs to forward recommendations to the State Department by mid-March, according to a letter from John Whyte, CEO of the American Medical Association.

Minear said HHS stopped processing applications in late September or early October before it started forwarding them again a few months ago.

"But the pace is dramatically slower" than usual, she said.

Minear said the State Department usually takes two or three months to review HHS recommendations and must send them to USCIS before July 30 for most of the doctors to stay in the country.

If they don't make that deadline, Wintersteen said, doctors will have to leave the country unless they obtain another kind of visa, get a J-1 waiver through another program, or extend their current visa by taking board exams or doing additional training.

The psychiatrist, who is supposed to start work on July 1, said they applied for a waiver in order to stay in the U.S. with their partner, and because it would let them help the most vulnerable mental health patients. They said their future clients would likely include trafficking survivors, homeless people, and prison or jail inmates. "That's the population I want to work with," they said.

#### Waiver delay meets H-1B dilemma

President Donald Trump issued a

September proclamation that railed against the tech industry's use of H-1B work visas. The order created the \$100,000 fee that applies to workers in all fields — not only tech — living outside the U.S. The payment doesn't apply to those already in the country.

As of Feb. 15, employers had paid the fee for 85 workers, according to a court filing from USCIS. It's unclear if any of those payments were for physicians or other medical providers.

The psychiatrist said officials at the hospital that plans to hire them said they can't afford to pay to bring them back to the U.S. if they must go home.

"A lot of hospitals who hire J-1 waiver physicians are in underserved areas, and so they treat Medicare and Medicaid patients," they said. "By definition, for the most part, they're not rich hospitals."

Barry Walker, an attorney in Tupelo, Mississippi, focused on health workforce-related immigration, said employers have already spent money on recruiters and attorneys like him to help with the waiver process.

Adding the H-1B fee is "just a deal killer, especially for the small, rural hospitals," he said.

Attorneys said most employers will sponsor physicians in need of an H-1B visa only if they're in lucrative specialties, such as cardiology or orthopedics, in which they can recover the cost of the fee.

They said healthcare facilities are much less likely to pay the fee to hire foreign nurses, lab technicians, and other healthcare professionals who are more likely than physicians to complete their training outside the U.S.

Employers can request fee exemptions, but attorneys said they haven't heard of a hospital or clinic being granted one.

#### Fighting on two fronts

Physicians, hospital leaders, lawmakers, and immigration experts are trying to draw attention to the J-1 waiver delays at HHS while hoping to overturn or limit the new H-1B fee.

The Trump administration hasn't acted on letters from hospitals, medical societies, and rural health organizations that requested an exception to the \$100,000 fee for physicians or all healthcare workers.

In March, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced a bill that would create a healthcare exemption. It has not yet had a hearing.

At least three lawsuits — from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a group of 20 states, and a coalition of plaintiffs that includes a company that recruits foreign nurses and a union that represents medical graduates — are seeking to end the fee entirely.

As for the J-1 waiver delays, the American Medical Association CEO asked the Exchange Visitor Program to use "emergency batch processing" for physicians with contracts to start work this summer.

Efrén Manjarrez, president of the Society of Hospital Medicine, which represents doctors who work in inpatient units, also called for emergency measures.

"Every day this backlog persists is a day that hospitalized patients in these communities face greater risk," he wrote in a letter to the program.

Meanwhile, Canadian hospitals have been recruiting foreign physicians completing their training in the U.S., the psychiatrist said. They said one of their friends accepted an offer, withdrawing their HHS waiver application to head north.

The psychiatrist said if they must leave the U.S., they'll be separated from their partner and out of a job for months as they work to get licensed in their home country.

Even if their employer were able to afford the H-1B fee, they're not sure they'd want to return.

"This entire process has been so incredibly painful and just soul-crushing," they said. "I would rather go to a country that would appreciate my motivation to work with patients."



SHUTTERSTOCK

Small details are getting big attention in home designs as well as room designs that serve multiple purposes.

# Beyond aesthetics: Check out home design trends

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tail and an artisanal feel.

#### Personalized nostalgia

Blend vintage finds with contemporary art to create a space that's truly your own. That means vintage finds, heirloom pieces and decor that evokes memory — even quilted textiles or classic checkered tiles — styled in fresh, modern ways to add warmth and individuality.

#### Attention to statement details

Small details are getting big attention this year. Swapping out basic cabinet hardware and lighting fixtures for artisanal, tactile metals can help elevate kitchen cabinets or bathroom vanities, turning them into design statements.

#### Flexible, multifunctional spaces

With hybrid work and lifestyle blending continuing into 2026, rooms should be

designed to serve multiple purposes. Reading nooks can double as workstations.

Living rooms effortlessly transition from day to night. Adaptable furniture, hidden storage and smart layouts help make multifunctional spaces feel intentional and uncluttered.

#### Outdoor-inspired interiors

The connection to nature grows stronger inside homes with greenery, natural light and materials that echo the outdoors. From indoor-outdoor flow to plant-rich spaces that feel alive and tranquil, biophilic design promotes calm, comfort and connection.

Visit eLivingtoday.com to find more design inspiration to make your home more personal and grounded in comfort.

## « BLACK BRILLIANCE »



TONY AWARDS

Oprah Winfrey went from a challenging childhood in rural Mississippi to nationally syndicated talk show host to media titan and the first Black woman billionaire worth an estimated \$3.1 billion.

# Oprah Winfrey: TV journalist, activist and philanthropist

NATIONAL WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

At the heart of everything Oprah Winfrey does, there is a consistent message — that individuals should take personal responsibility for their lives, and to improve the world.

Winfrey was raised by her grandmother in Kosciusko, Mississippi. Despite having a modest childhood, Winfrey became an industry trailblazer and one of the most notable women on television.

Winfrey is a producer, actress, television icon. She was the first Black American woman to own her own production company. She was nominated for an Academy Award in her first movie, "The Color Purple."

Winfrey was once television's highest-paid entertainer as the successful host of a syndicated television talk show that reached 15 million people a day. The Oprah Show lasted for 25 seasons.

Winfrey does all that she can to eradi-

cate child abuse. As a victim herself, Winfrey knows the damage abuse does to young lives. She was a major force in the drafting, lobbying, and passage of the National Child Protection Act. The act was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994.

The legislation establishes a national registry of child abusers to help employers and those working with children to screen out dangerous people.

Winfrey is also a committed philanthropist, providing significant assistance to schools (Morehouse College, Tennessee State University, Chicago Academy of Arts) as well as to the Chicago Public Schools. She also funds battered women's shelters and campaigns to catch child abusers.

Winfrey launched her television network OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) in 2011.

# At-home solution with taste of takeout with spicy tuna sushi rice cups recipe

Continued from page 1B

1 can (5 ounces) Bumble Bee Snackers Lemon Pepper  
3-4 tablespoons mayonnaise  
1-2 teaspoons Sriracha, or to taste  
1/2 teaspoon soy sauce  
1/4 teaspoon wasabi (optional)  
Assembly:  
nori (seaweed sheets)  
furikake seasoning  
spicy mayo or Sriracha, for topping  
wonton crisps, for topping  
Heat oven to 375 F.

To make sushi rice: Mix cooked rice with rice vinegar, sugar and salt. Let cool slightly.

To make tuna mixture: In bowl, combine tuna (no draining needed), mayonnaise, Sriracha, soy sauce and wasabi, if desired. Mix well.

To assemble: Cut nori sheets into squares and press into cups of muffin tin to line them.

Fill each nori-lined cup with sushi rice, pressing gently to form small nest shape. Sprinkle furikake over rice then top with spoonful of tuna mixture.

Bake 8-10 minutes until heated through and edges are slightly crispy.

Remove cups from muffin tin, drizzle with spicy mayo or Sriracha and top with wonton crisps.



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

On SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts and Spotify

# What we get wrong about food labeling

Continued from page 1B  
everyday foods.

Global food systems expert and registered dietitian Bridget Hollingsworth argues that the intense focus on certain ingredients may be a reductionist view of a broader systemic challenge. "There's very limited evidence to prove that [food dyes] alone are directly causing disease," Hollingsworth said. "It's not usually about one ingredient."

Instead, she said, those ingredients often signal something bigger. "They're markers of more processed foods," she said. "And those foods tend to replace more nutritious options in people's diets."

## The 'clean label' illusion

As companies respond to consumer demand, many have begun marketing products with labels like "natural," "no artificial dyes," or "clean ingredients." But those labels don't always mean a product is healthier.

Hollingsworth said the rise of "clean label" marketing can create a false sense of improvement.

"Some of these products make people feel like they're making a better choice," she said. "But nutritionally, it may not actually be that different."

That perception is often reinforced by social media, where viral videos and influencer posts highlight certain ingredients as harmful while promoting alternatives as inherently better.

"There's a lot of information out there that focuses on one thing," Hollingsworth said. "If everyone is only focused on color, then it's not necessarily going to lead to the changes people actually need to be healthier."

Sabrina Hartwell, an Olympic sports dietitian at UNC, sees a similar trend among athletes and students navigating nutrition advice online.

"There's always a new trend telling people to cut something out of their diet," she said. "It's important to look at credible research instead of reacting to what you see online."

Hartwell adds that focusing too heavily on specific ingredients like food dyes can create unnecessary anxiety, especially when larger nutritional factors, like overall diet quality, play a much bigger role in long-term health.

In other words, swapping artificial dyes for natural ones may change how food looks, and how it's marketed, but not necessarily how it impacts long-term health.

## What actually matters

For Hollingsworth, the most important factor isn't a single ingredient, but the overall quality of a person's diet.

"When I talk to patients, I tell them to focus on foods that are closer to how they came from the farm," she said. "Fruits, vegetables, beans. Those are the things that are going to have a much bigger impact."

That perspective is echoed in athletic performance as well.

"There is really no research behind food dyes impacting athletic performance," Hartwell said. "It's not one of our macronutrients, so it can't really add or take away from performance."

Instead, she emphasizes the importance of overall nutrition, including carbohydrates, hydration and balanced meals, rather than focusing on individual ingredients.

But for those working directly with food production, the difference between processed and whole foods is even more tangible.

At a local farmers market in Chapel Hill, Audrey Thompson, who helps run her family's business T5 Farms in Liberty, North Carolina, says many consumers misunderstand the difference between grocery store food and locally grown products.

"A lot of produce in stores is grown to last, not to taste," Thompson said. "It's often picked a week or more before it even gets to the shelf."

Thompson said that impacts both flavor and nutrition.

"You get way more nutrients out of fresh produce," she said. "And way more flavor."

Her perspective also challenges the growing reliance on labels like "organic" or "natural," which she says can be misleading.

"We're not certified organic," Thompson said. "But we grow everything basically that way. Labels don't always tell the full story."

Instead, she says, understanding where food comes from matters more

than what's printed on the packaging.

"When you're buying from a farmers market, you can actually talk to the people growing your food," she said.

## The cost of eating 'better'

That message can get lost in a culture increasingly driven by convenience and cost.

According to national nutrition data, the majority of Americans do not meet recommended daily intake levels for fruits and vegetables. Instead, diets often rely heavily on processed and packaged foods. The very products most likely to contain additives.

But for many people, those choices aren't just about preference. They're about affordability.

"I honestly don't really know where to start on that," Nic an tSiobhain said when asked about the price of food in the United States.

While demand for natural and organic foods continues to rise, those options often come with a higher price tag.

But Thompson says that assumption doesn't always hold true.

"Some of our products are actually cheaper than what you'd find in stores," she said. "We only raise prices when our costs go up."

Still, access remains a challenge.

"A lot of people just don't know where to go," Thompson said. "There are so many farmers markets... but people don't always think to look."

## A global perspective

Comparisons between U.S. and European food systems often fuel debates about regulation, with many Americans believing Europe has stricter rules around additives and food safety.

But Hollingsworth cautions against oversimplifying those differences.

"There are actually synthetic dyes allowed in the European Union that aren't allowed in the U.S.," she said. "So, it's not always as straightforward as people think."

While she supports efforts to remove unnecessary additives, she worries that focusing too heavily on those changes could distract from more meaningful improvements.

"I think getting those out of food is a positive step," she said. "But if we prioritize that over bigger changes in the food system, we might be missing the point."

That "bigger picture," she said, includes improving access to nutritious foods, increasing public education around diet and addressing systemic barriers that shape how people eat.

## Changing the conversation

As food policy continues to evolve, experts say the challenge isn't just reforming what goes into food but reshaping how people think about it.

The current focus on ingredient lists and labels reflects a growing awareness of health and nutrition, but it can also lead to confusion about what truly matters.

For consumers standing in a grocery aisle, trying to make the "right" choice, that distinction isn't always clear.

According to both Hollingsworth and Hartwell, the answer is simpler than it might seem.

"It's not about scanning every ingredient," Hollingsworth said. "It's about building a diet that includes more whole, nutrient-dense foods overall."

Hartwell echoed that sentiment.

"Eating whole foods, limiting excess sugar and making sure you're getting enough fruits and vegetables throughout the day is going to far supersede worrying about food dyes," she said.

For Thompson, changing how people think about food goes beyond nutrition alone. "It's not just about what you're eating," she said. "It's about what you're supporting."

## Beyond the plate

As the FDA pushes forward with efforts to reduce artificial ingredients and improve food safety, those changes may influence how food is made, marketed and consumed across the country.

But experts say lasting health outcomes will depend on more than just what's removed from products.

They will depend on what's added back into everyday diets, and whether people have the access, resources and knowledge to make those choices.

Because in the end, the conversation about food isn't just about what's on the label. It's about what's on the plate.

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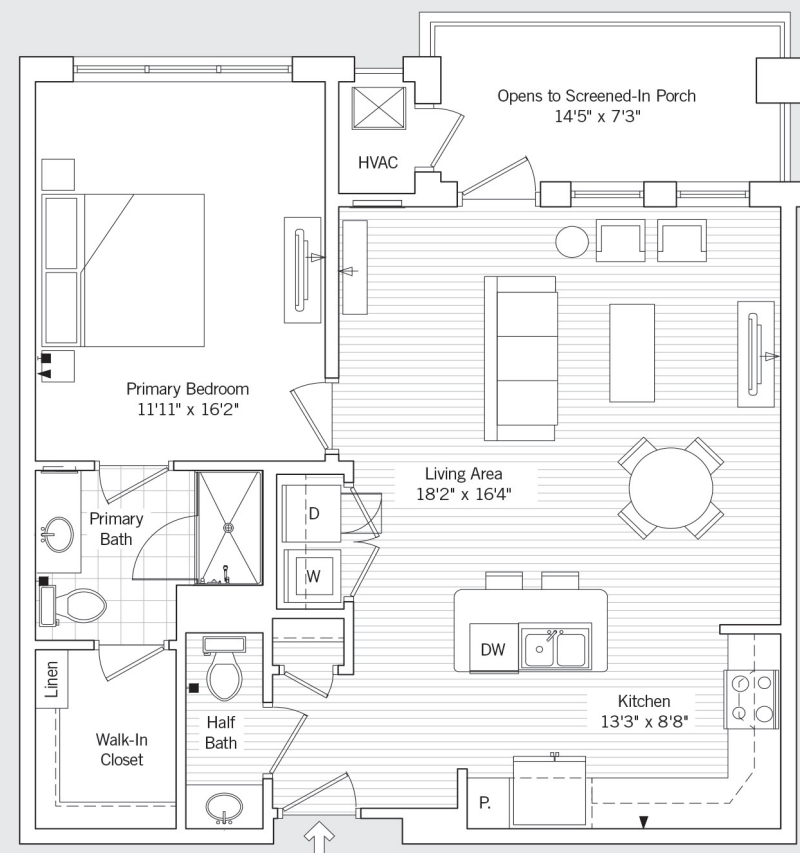
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## Clarification

An article in the Nov. 30 edition of The Post "Heart for mending broken hearts" referred to Abiding Grace LLC owner and founder Willetta Collins Jones as a grief counselor. She is a certified grief coach.

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## BIDS

### INVITATION FOR BIDS

Mecklenburg County Asset and Facility Management will receive single prime, lump sum, sealed bids for the **Pressley Road Park improvements Project until 2:00 PM (EST), on Tuesday, June 2, 2026**, at which time bids will be opened at Valerie C. Woodard Center, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC. Bid, Performance, and Payment & Material bonds are required. NC law and applicable regulations of various licensing boards and BDI provisions will be observed. The scope of work includes demolition, grading, utilities, prefabricated bridge installation, hardscape, planting, and other site improvements. Electronic plans and specifications can be obtained from McAdams Co. at (704) 527-0800 and/or by email at rogers@McAdamsco.com from 8am to 5pm, Monday - Friday. Mecklenburg County reserves the right to waive technicalities and to reject any or all proposals. A **non-mandatory Pre-Bid meeting will be held on site at 3:00 PM (EST) on Thursday, May 14, 2026** at 1431 Pressley Road, Charlotte, NC 28217. Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternative format for persons with disabilities. Please call **704-575-4947** for assistance.

## EMPLOYMENT

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## LEGAL NOTICES

### CATS Announces Public Hearing for Feedback on Fare Modernization Program

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

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

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

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

**Brett Baldeck**  
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The Voice of the Black Community

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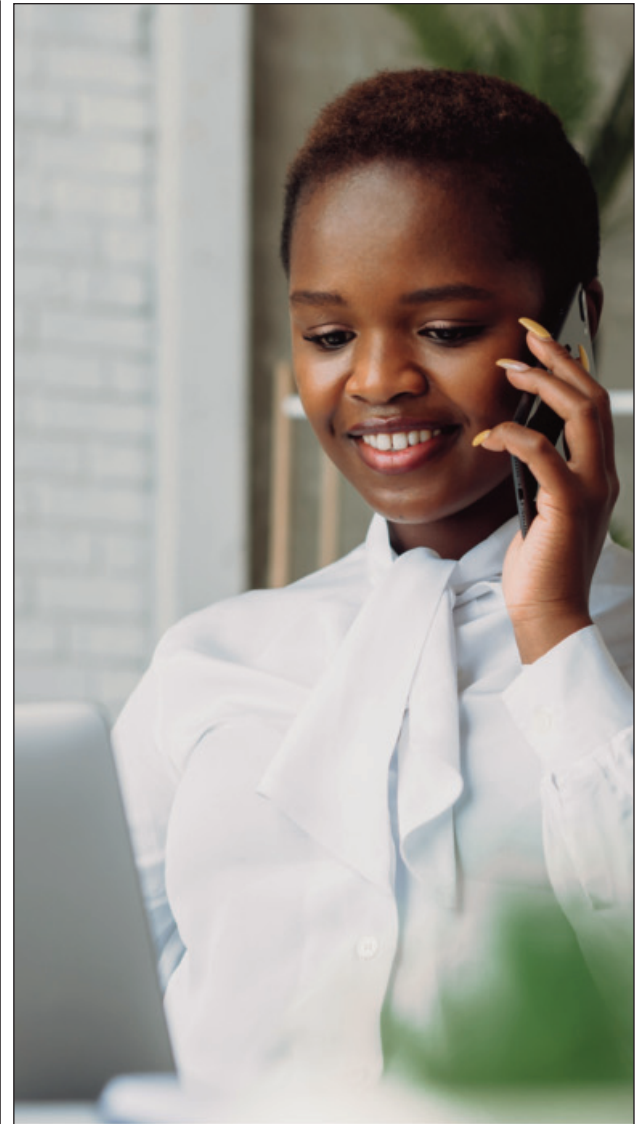
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THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026 PAGE 5B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



MIDDLE C JAZZ:

Smooth jazz master Kim Waters plays Middle C Jazz on May 8-10.

## Jazzy sets with Kim Waters

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

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

May 8

Opening celebration for “Beyond Boundaries: Black Abstraction” in the Elliot and Kimberly Perry Art Collection, Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, 6-9 p.m.

The celebration is for all ages and free, but RSVP is requested at Eventbrite.com.

The exhibit centers on Black abstraction as an expressive force within the Elliot and Kimberly Perry Art Collection. Featuring works across all galleries of the Gantt Center, “Beyond Boundaries” spans nearly three decades of collecting.

Through layered textures, dynamic color, and expansive forms, the works hold histories, emotions, and cultural knowledge that resist easy definition, inviting viewers to look closely and think deeply.

May 8-10

Kim Waters, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. Urban smooth jazz performer plays his hit tunes. Tickets at www.middlecjazz.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.

May 16

“Smooth: The Music of D’Angelo” at Carolina Theatre. A symphonic celebration of the singer’s catalog, scored, arranged, and curated by Harvey Cummings II. On the playlist are favorites “Brown Sugar,” “Voodoo,” and “Black Messiah.”

Tickets: www.thecarolina.com.

Through May 21

SouthPark After 5, a free evening event. Please see LIVE | 6B

## Screen fare from May to August

By Lindsey Bahr  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

This summer at the movies, the Minions are filmmakers, the Mandalorian is working for the good guys, Matt Damon tries to find his way home (again), Anne Hathaway, Zendaya and Tom Holland are everywhere and no one remembers Peter Parker.

Well, at least in the movie. The hope is that audiences not only remember but want to know what comes next for Spider-Man.

Hollywood’s summer movie season kicks off the first weekend in May not with a superhero movie but with “The Devil Wears Prada 2,” though one might argue that Miranda Priestly might be the Iron Man of fashion. May also brings a Billie Eilish concert film, the first “Star Wars” movie in seven years and a D-Day drama with Brendan Fraser as Dwight D. Eisenhower.

June kicks off with a live-action He-Man, a John Carney musical (with Nick Jonas and Paul Rudd!), an original Steven Spielberg sci-fi spectacle, the return of Supergirl and Woody and Buzz as well.

July brings a dose of Minions in 1920s Hollywood, Moana and a back-to-back dose of Holland and Zendaya, first in “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” and then in Christopher Nolan’s adaptation of “The Odyssey” where Holland plays Odysseus’ son Telemachus and Zendaya is the goddess Athena.

August ends the season with some comedy (“Super Troopers 3”), a supernatural horror (“The End of Oak Street”), a new Jane Schoenbrun film and two very different dog movies for two very different audiences. One is “PAW Pa-

Please see SUMMER | 6B



JOAN MARCUS

The cast of Luis Alfaro’s “Oedipus El Rey,” the final installment of his trilogy. Three Bone Theatre’s production is May 1-17.

## Charlotte production takes Oedipus takes Latino focus

Luis Alfaro’s ‘Oedipus El Rey’ at Three Bone Theatre through May 17

By Nikya Hightower  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Latin voices are amplified by Greek tragedy in a Charlotte stage production.

Three Bone Theatre’s “Oedipus El Rey” is the final installment of Luis Alfaro’s trilogy. Written by Alfaro and directed by Rod Oden, the production will run May 1-17, Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. Performances will be held at Arts Factory, 1545 W Trade St. Tickets are online at threebonetheatre.com/events/2526/oedipus-el-rey.

The theater is the first in the nation to produce all three of Alfaro’s works. The trilogy includes “Electricidad,” “Oedipus El Rey” and “Mojada.” “Oedipus El Rey” is a contemporary retelling of the Greek tragedy, making commentary on incarceration.

“I’m hoping that will connect with audiences so that they see the power of the story and the warning of the story of Oedipus on top of trying to get a voice out there for those that really need to have one, those marginalized communities,” Oden said.

In the original story, prophecy reveals Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus tries to avoid the prophecy, which leads to him fulfilling it. In the retelling, a young man navigates real life insti-

tutions and social barriers and tries to build a life outside of what is expected of him.

Both stories discuss fate vs. free will and if it’s possible to change a path that has been decided. Alfaro framed Greek tragedy in a new context with the goal of bringing social commentary to the incarceration system and the fatalistic nature of marginalized communities.

“It talks about how there’s almost a cyclical, systemic expectation, almost a destiny, a fatalistic end to Latino culture in California, that you’re going to grow up to be in a gang, and then you’re going to go to prison,” Oden said.

Putting stories like this on stage gives an opportunity for Latino voices to be heard by audiences and an inside look at cultures they may not be familiar with.

“I am a fifth-generation Californian. It is a rare time that I walk in a theater, and I feel like you’re talking to me, especially on the East Coast,” Oden said. “I had seen Electricidad and I was like, ‘oh, my gosh. This is my California Mexican heritage on stage.’”

In the production, Oedipus struggles to build his life back up after being incarcerated and turns back to gang violence due to a lack of support from rehabilitation systems. Framing the story in Greek tragedy

aims to spark a bigger conversation.

“Asking, why do these systems persist? Why do we allow this to happen?” Oden said. “He doesn’t want to be a part of it, but he needs a job. So what does he do? He turns to the thing that’s there.”

Oden said the power of Alfaro’s trilogy is the platform it provides to the community to be seen and not overshadowed.

“At a time when our cultural movement, our cultural identity in theater is representing non-traditional identities and bringing binary, non-binary, non-gender specific characters and talking more about supporting our African American culture, our Latin voices are just as important.”



I am a fifth-generation Californian. It is a rare time that I walk in a theater, and I feel like you’re talking to me, especially on the East Coast.



“Oedipus E. Rey” director  
ROD ODEN

## Slip’s showing on ‘The Devil Wears Prada 2’

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

The Devil Wears Prada 2  
2.5 stars

Looks like satin. Feels like polyester. Yet many will go window shopping and like what they see.

Twenty years ago, “The Devil Wears Prada” received two Oscar nominations: Meryl Streep for Best Actress and Patricia Field for Best Costume Design. It earned a respectable \$326.5 million at the international box office and became the fashion statement film.

Original director David Frankel is back along with OG screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna and most of the major cast. Can they freshen up a funny, 20-year-old satire that poked fun at frosty magazine editors like Vogue’s Anna Wintour? Can they give an old formula new life and a stronger emotional core? Or will what once felt novel feel hollow the second time around?

A lot has happened since 2006. COVID, remote work and a more humanistic approach to workplaces once ruled by tyrants has changed office behavior. In that way Miranda Priestly’s (Streep) Marie Antoinette-style management at Runway magazine feels like a relic, as does her over-attentive and very style-driven art director Nigel Kipling (Stanley Tucci). There are missteps at the office. A major blunder leads publisher Irv Ravitz (Tibor Feldman), egged on by his freeloading son Jay (B.J. Novak), to bring in fresh blood.

McKenna’s script sets up a major problem early on. It’s just enough of a plot piece to shake up the past and introduce the old guard to the future. Opening scenes capture New York’s metro-style hustle and bustle. Everyone dresses as if they instinctively understand the snooty dress code—look like a stylish New Yorker (costume designer Molly Rogers, “Sex and the City”).

Bright sunlight gleams off skyscrapers and glass-walled offices. As the ladies walk out of limos into Milan Fashion Week, their swagger is captured as if they’re warriors headed out



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway in a scene from “The Devil Wears Prada 2.”

to battle (cinematographer Florian Ballhaus, “The Devil Wears Prada”). Music inflames scenes in the glossiest ways (Theodore Shapiro, “The Devil Wears Prada”). The tone and feel mirror the first but have less shine.

The old Runway intern Andy (Anne Hathaway) is not the same. She’s become a serious journalist, someone Irv holds in high regard as he surprises Miranda with a new features editor. Andy gets a frosty welcome. Nigel says, “Look what TJ Maxx dragged in.” Her first days in the office are a string of errors, and not the comic kind. The old guard sees the new guard and tries to ignore the implications. Can’t they all just get along?

Another former lackey, Emily (Emily Blunt), has also had a career change. She’s now a big deal at a big fashion house and the Runway team has to cater to her. Emily: “If there are no advertisers, there’s no Runway.” Can she be trusted as she rekindles her relationship with Andy? What could go wrong? What could go right?

The overarching theme is that the print publishing landscape has changed, the digital world has taken over, and AI is breathing down its neck. If folks don’t adapt, the media conglomerates that run everything will run over them.

Miranda’s tenure is bright one day with possibilities and bleak the next with the subterfuge that comes with doing business and having ambitious rivals. If she can’t hold on to her job, those under her are in a world of trouble. In that way the narrative taps into modern times and career fragilities that haunt many in the workplace these days.

It’s easy for female viewers to relate to Andy’s modern woman issues. She tries to balance a career with an almost non-existent love life. Confiding in BFs like Lily (Tracie Thoms), who seem to have their lives more together. There’s something very astute, inquisitive and intuitive about the way Hathaway decides to portray the protagonist. And as

Please see SLIP’S | 6B

## Live music showcase at SouthPark After 5

Continued from page 5B

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.

- 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.

May 22-23

**Gerald Albright**, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. Nine-time Grammy-nominated saxophonist plays some of his greatest hits. Tickets at [www.middecjazz.com](http://www.middecjazz.com).

**Alex Bugnon**, Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. World-renowned pianist plays Charlotte. Tickets at [www.middecjazz.com](http://www.middecjazz.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 at [livenation.com](http://livenation.com).

June 18

*"Trouble So Hard - Song & Stories of Slavery, Freedom, & Civil Rights,"* a live performance at Tyvola Senior Citizen Center, 2225 Tyvola Road. In late October, *Trouble So Hard* was awarded a Mecklenburg County Culture Block Grant by the Arts & Science Council for the three performances.

Performances are free, but registration is required at [troublesohard.com/reserve](http://troublesohard.com/reserve).

June 19

Juneteenth Art Fest, 4-8 p.m., Shoppes at University Place 8931 JM Keynes Drive.

Second annual Juneteenth Art Fest celebrates the vibrant culture and history of Juneteenth with art, music, and community. The family-friendly event is free and features local artists, live music, dance performances, and a marketplace showcasing small, minority-owned business.

July 17-18

**Usher and Chris Brown**, Bank of America Stadium.

The Grammy winners have a pair of Charlotte dates on their North American stadium tour. The tour follows record-breaking accomplishments for both artists.

At the end of 2024, the North American leg of Usher: Past, Present, Future sold over 1.1 million tickets. In October, Brown's Breezy Bowl XX World Tour was his highest-grossing and the highest-grossing tour ever by a solo Black American male, earning nearly \$300 million and drawing 2 million fans in North America, Europe, and the United Kingdom.

Tickets are at [raymondandbrown-tour.com](http://raymondandbrown-tour.com).

Aug. 12

**P.J. Morton**, Carolina Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

New Orleans-based Morton is a soul singer, songwriter, performer and producer who has earned six Grammy awards and 22 nominations while selling out venues around the world.

Tickets are \$82-\$135 and available at [thecarolina.com](http://thecarolina.com).

## Slip's showing on 'The Devil Wears Prada 2'

Continued from page 5B

the interloper navigates around her old stomping grounds, there's a new dynamic. Her know-it-all boss is now as vulnerable as she.

Strep seems somewhat constrained as Miranda, like she's still finding ways to interpret how this Wintour wannabe might behave in the 2020s. Tucci has dialed down the bitchiness that plagued Nigel in the first chapter. He seems more human, concerned and in charge. Toning him down was a smart move. Blunt's Emily is a campy saboteur.

The quartet has great chemistry, but it's hard to feel invested in any of their emotionally detached characters. A long list of celebrity cameos will hold a bunch of surprises for the audience.

The other theme in play is that socially conscious women need to stick together to beat out the old boy's network that now rules business empires. The introduction of the mega-wealthy Barnes couple with Benji (Justin Theroux), an airhead egotistical billionaire, and his brainy wife Sasha (Lucy Liu), who's ready to define her own life, adds a new dynamic. They're played like they could be Bill and Melinda Gates, and that depiction couldn't be timelier.

Even with the updated plotting, this narrative feels redundant. There's a healthy nostalgia for the original fashion wars. Though once this venture ends, it's hard to imagine a chapter three being in the pipeline. Old fans may get enough of

what they want. New viewers might break into two camps: in this age of inflation and chaos, they may see the fashion world as frivolous or the perfect escapist antidote.

There's something very stodgy about Frankel's directing style. Few scenes have verve and often plod along as if they're stuck in the 2000s. However, the footage gains momentum leading up to the Milan shows. Then, at some point, Lady Gaga appears in a segment and sings and dances through her new dance hit "Runway."

The pacing picks up (editor Andrew Marcus, "Howard's End") and excitement enters. But if you've seen the music video for the song, with Lady Gaga and Doechii playing around, as directed by Parris Goebel, you know how even more electric this passage could've been. And if that kinetic energy had been sustained up until the end, chapter two would might be better than chapter one.

Also, the segment with Madonna's classic song "Vogue" blasting in the background is another oasis of vitality.

Modern themes creep into "TDWP2" as former colleagues unite for one more escapade. While loyal fans of the original will flock to theaters, new moviegoers might be flummoxed by what they encounter. The film might feel polished but artificial—more polyester than satin.

Visit film critic **Dwight Brown** at [DwightBrownInk.com](http://DwightBrownInk.com).

## Summer movies are upon us

Continued from page 5B

trol." The other is a Ridley Scott-directed postapocalyptic survival movie.

And that's not even counting the myriad streaming options, including a Ben Stiller pickleball movie, the return of Enola Holmes and a John Krasinski Jack Ryan movie.

May releases:

May 1

"The Devil Wears Prada 2" (20th Century Studios, theaters): A sequel to one of the most rewatchable movies of the century? Groundbreaking. But it's not just replaying the hits.

- "Animal Farm" (Angel Studios, theaters): Andy Serkis directs an animated adaptation of George Orwell's classic political allegory, featuring the voices of Seth Rogen, Woody Harrelson, Glenn Close and Laverne Cox
- "Deep Water" (Magenta Light Studios, theaters): Gene Simmons (yes, that Gene Simmons) produced this Renny Harlin survival pic about an airplane crash in shark-filled waters, starring Aaron Eckhart and Ben Kingsley.
- "Hokum" (Neon, theaters): Adam Scott visits a haunted Irish hotel in this supernatural thriller.
- "Swapped" (Netflix, streaming): Michael B. Jordan lends his voice to this animated body swap film about a tiny woodland creature who switches places with a bird.
- "Our Land" (Strand Releasing, theaters): Argentine filmmaker Lucrecia Martel's first foray into nonfiction storytelling centers on Chusichagasta leader and Indigenous activist Javier Chocobar, who was murdered in 2009.
- "Two Pianos" (Kino Lorber, theaters): This French melodrama from Arnaud Desplechin is about a gifted concert pianist (François Civil), lured back into performing by his former mentor (Charlotte Rampling).
- "The Last One for the Road" (Music Box Films, theaters): This Italian comedy follows two penniless, and perpetually buzzed, 50-somethings on a road trip.
- "An Autumn Summer" (Blue Harbor Entertainment, theaters): The summer before college is full of romance, sunsets and lazy days on the lake for a few friends.

May 7

"My Dearest Assassin" (Netflix, streaming): This Thai action film is about a girl with a rare and hunted blood type and her adopted assassin family.

May 8

"Billie Eilish - Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour (Live in 3D)" (Paramount, theaters): James Cameron shares co-directing credits with Eilish for this unique concert film, constructed from her Manchester performances last summer.

- "Mortal Combat II" (Warner Bros., theaters): Karl Urban reprises his role as Johnny Cage in this video game-inspired film.
- "The Sheep Detectives" (Amazon MGM Studios, theaters): Hugh Jackman plays a loving farmer who reads detective stories to his sheep at night. When he ends up dead, the animals (voices include Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Bryan Cranston) set out to help the town's dim-witted police officer (Nicholas Braun, with an English accent) solve the mystery in this star-studded comedy.
- "Remarkably Bright Creatures" (Netflix, streaming): Sally Field and Lewis Pullman star in this adaptation of Shelby Van Pelt's bestseller about a widow and an oc-

topus (voiced by Alfred Molina) who team up (yes, her and the octopus) to solve the mystery of her missing son.

"Silent Friend" (1-2 Special, theaters): Tony Leung and Léa Seydoux lead this centuries-spanning film about a ginkgo tree in a German town. It picked up several prizes at the Venice Film Festival.

May 15

"In the Grey" (Black Bear, theaters): Henry Cavill, Jake Gyllenhaal and Eiza González star in this Guy Ritchie action pic about elite operatives on an impossible heist.

- "Is God Is" (Amazon MGM Studios, theaters): Twin sisters (Kara Young and Mallori Johnson) are out for revenge in Aleshea Harris' adaptation of her Obie-winning play. "It's an epic road trip, it's a Greek tragedy. It's a love story between two sisters," Young told the AP.
- "Obsession" (Focus Features, theaters): Horror master Jason Blum produced this movie about a crush and the sinister downsides of a wish that comes too true.
- "The Wizard of the Kremlin" (Vertical, theaters): Jude Law transforms into Vladimir Putin in Olivier Assayas' historical drama charting the Russian president's rise to power alongside a character inspired by the real political strategist Vladislav Surkov. Paul Dano plays the fictionalized adviser.
- "Mobile Suit Gundam Hathaway: The Sorcery of Nymph Circe" (Bandai Namco Filmworks, theaters): Gundam fans will finally get to see the latest installment, which has been out in Japan for months.
- "Decorado" (GKIDS, theaters): Not many animated movies reference "The Truman Show" and "Scenes from a Marriage" as inspirations, but it's fitting for this Spanish-language drama about a mouse in the throes of existential crisis.
- "LifeHack" (Iconic Events Releasing, theaters): Inspired by true events, a group of good-hearted hackers try to take down a crypto billionaire from their bedrooms.
- "Magic Hour" (Greenwich Entertainment, theaters): Katie Aselton directs herself and Daveed Diggs in this drama about a couple navigating relationship challenges in a new desert home.
- "The Crash" (Netflix, streaming): This documentary looks at the suspicious circumstances surrounding a crash in Ohio that killed two of three young adults in the car.
- "Driver's Ed" (Vertical, theaters and VOD): Sam Nivola and a group of teens steal a driver's ed car (from Kumail Nanjiani) to visit his girlfriend in college.

May 20

"Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan: Ghost War" (Amazon MGM Studios and Prime Video, streaming): John Krasinski's Jack Ryan finally gets a movie of his own.

May 22

- "The Mandalorian and Grogu" (Walt Disney Studios, theaters): Pedro Pascal's bounty hunter makes his big-screen debut, alongside his adorable green counterpart. "He's a bit different from when we first met him, but he's still, at his heart, a gunfighter and a warrior," filmmaker Jon Favreau told the AP.
- "Tuner" (Black Bear, theaters): Leo Woodall plays a gifted piano tuner who finds out he also has a knack for cracking safes in this character-driven thriller from Daniel Roher (who won an Oscar for his documentary "Navalny"). Woodall, Roher told the AP, "has this boyish charm, this absolute hunkish, dreamy quality, but there's also the melancholy there ... that he deputizes to great effect."

### « OUT AND ABOUT »



DANIEL COSTON

Fred Whiffield received an award from the North Carolina Outward Bound Society at their annual Unity Breakfast on March 5.

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