

Life!

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2026 SECTION B

Make your guy more aware of his own health

By Cameron Williams
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Men should take control of their health, too. Health advocates are encouraging them to establish a relationship with a primary care physician to maintain fitness and lower the risk of illness. June is Men's Health Month.

"People who regularly see a primary care doctor... on average live between 2.8 and 3.5 years longer," said Dr. Jake Weaver of Novant Health. "It doesn't sound like a whole lot but that is in the sense of no lifestyle change. The only notable difference between person A and person B is that one sees their primary care physician and one doesn't. On average those people make healthier decisions."

On average most men after they turn 18 don't see a primary care physician until their 40s. But Weaver says seeing a primary care physician earlier in life can start the process of getting screened for more serious diseases earlier, which in turn helps prevent them.

"A lot of the chronic diseases that I manage," Weaver said, "whether that's type 2 diabetes, whether that's obesity, whether that's hypertension - whether that's other forms of heart disease, high cholesterol - all of those are more and more modifiable the earlier on that we're catching it. ... We have calculators now that can estimate your 10- and 30-year risk scores at age 30 now versus before. We're waiting 'til we turn 45 to start looking for these things."

Don't fear the white coat

Often, people will avoid doctors due to white coat hypertension, or a subconscious fear of physicians and/or what they may say.

Weaver said to break this it starts at a young age having a good relationship with your pediatrician.

"For a lot of people that is very much, oh, this is the place I have to go once a year to get my blood drawn," Weaver said, "or I go and somebody pokes me or something, nothing ever really meaningful happens from that visit or changes, and as a guy myself, as someone who has the exact same thought process, taking the doctor hat off, I totally get that."

Please see **MAKE** | 2B

Army sergeant turns bare barracks into living space

By Camille D. Ford
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The inspection was standard.

Sergeant Major Santiago moved through the Fort Bliss barracks room by room, measuring what he found against what the Army expects. Most rooms met the standard. Some didn't. Then he opened a door that stopped him.

He finished and gathered the battalion outside in a horseshoe formation. Sgt. Briyana Taylor was summoned to stand at the center of it. She is deeply introverted and standing in front of her entire unit while her sergeant major addressed the formation was not something she had prepared for. She had built the room for herself.

Santiago told the formation that most of the rooms he had walked through were disgusting and dirty. Then he stopped at Taylor's. He said no one had ever gone that deep into transforming a barracks room at Fort Bliss. He said it was above the standard. He awarded her an Army Achievement Medal.

Taylor hadn't didn't seek it. "I wasn't designing it to get any recognition," she said. "So the fact that I received recognition and awards for it, it made me feel really happy."

What she had built started two years earlier, inside a quiet she hadn't anticipated and a room she almost couldn't stand to walk into.

Please see **ARMY** | 2B

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Researcher Kizzmekia Corbett-Helaire develops coronavirus vaccines, therapies

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR MICROBIOLOGY

Kizzmekia Corbett-Helaire Ph.D. is Melvin J. and Geraldine L. Glimcher assistant professor of immunology and infectious diseases at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Freeman Hrabowski Scholar.

Corbett-Helaire is also a Shutzer assistant professor at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study and Associate Member of the Phillip T. and Susan M. Ragon Institute. Her laboratory studies host immune responses to coronaviruses and other emerging and re-emerging viruses to propel novel vaccine and antibody therapy devel-

opment. Corbett-Helaire earned a degree in biological sciences with a secondary major in sociology from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County in 2008, where she was a Meyerhoff Scholar and NIH undergraduate scholar. She earned her Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology in 2014 from UNC Chapel Hill, where she earned multiple honors, including a director's scholarship.

Prior to Harvard, Corbett-Helaire was a research fellow and scientific lead at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Vaccine Research Center. Her NIH team co-designed a leading COVID-19 vaccine, mRNA-1273, from viral sequence and

rapidly deployed it to industry partner, Moderna, Inc., for Phase 1 clinical trial, which unprecedentedly began only 66 days from viral sequence release. mRNA-1273 is a now used around the world to prevent COVID-19 disease.

Alongside mRNA-1273, Corbett-Helaire's patent portfolio includes universal coronavirus and influenza vaccine concepts and novel therapeutic antibodies. In all, she has more than 15 years of experience studying dengue virus, respiratory syncytial virus, influenza virus and coronaviruses, garnering several prestigious awards and recognitions, including the J. William Fulbright Prize for International Un-

derstanding. Corbett-Helaire invests much of her time in understanding goals with mentorship, Combining her research with mentorship, serves communities as an advocate of STEM education and vaccine awareness.

« RIDES »



WINFRED CROSS | THE CHARLOTTE POST

The electric Lucid Air Grand Touring has electronic all-wheel drive, travels 512 miles on a single charge and accelerates from 0 to 60 miles per hour in 3.0 seconds.

Lucid EV delivers on high-end luxury, power

Upstart electric vehicle blends posh design and high performance

By Winfred Cross
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

I get excited when I get a chance to drive something I've never driven before. Imagine how I felt when I was getting Lucid.

What's a Lucid, you ask? It's a high-end luxury electric car company that's been selling cars since September 2021.

It started in 2007 as a Atieva, a Southern California-based company that specialized in powertrains and batteries for automakers.

The company changed focus in 2013 when it hired Peter Rawlinson, chief engineer of Tesla's Model S. He convinced the company to develop its own cars. Eventually the company became Lucid Motors and secured \$1 billion investment from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, which was enough to bring the Air Pure to life. How good was it? The car debuted in 2021 and won

Motor Trend magazine's prestigious Car of the Year award, the first time the publication issued that award to a new company.

There are now several different Air models and even a higher end model called the Sapphire. I got a chance to drive the Air Grand Touring (GT) which sits directly under that model.

I think the Air GT is a thing of beauty. It has a slippery shape with a drag coefficient of 0.197 (the lower the number the better the car manages air flow around itself, allowing for better range). It's wide, long and somewhat low which allows for an interior with lots of space. The tinted glass roof doesn't open but it gives the car a more spacious feel. It has a "frunk" (front trunk) and a trunk that hold a great deal.

The GT's interior is truly something to behold. The choice of materials took a lot of thought. There is leather, glass, wool, metal and

whatever other expensive stuff you can think of. All those elements are blended in a way that looks more curated than simply picked. My car's interior had a Mojave Extended leather theme. The sun visors are attached to glass because there is no headliner. The glass is tinted but I wish there was a way to darken the roof or Lucid should provide a shade at least. There is a power-adjustable shade for the back window.

The dash is a 34-inch piece of glass that houses a lot of info. There's a digital gauge cluster and room for Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. I found it to be the right height, so it doesn't block the driver's view of the road. There is a 12-inch screen over the center console that is power operated. Actually, about everything in the car is power operated. I found both screens to have sharp, clear graphics and everything re-

Please see **LUCID** | 2B

How to lower stroke risk and save lives

By Cameron Williams
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Stroke is the leading cause of death and long-term disability in the United States despite approximately 80% being preventable.

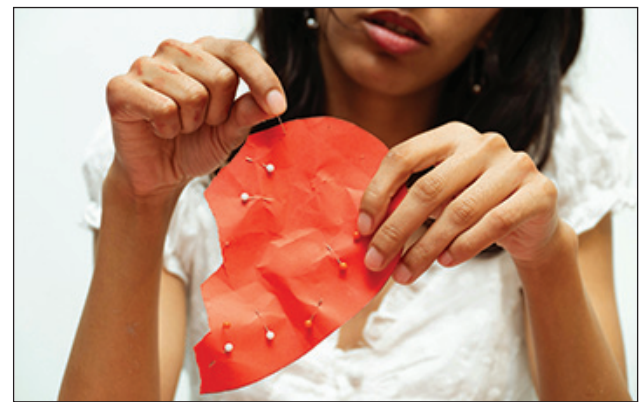
It is important for people to understand the warning signs for stroke, a sudden debilitating attack or loss of consciousness caused by an interruption in blood flow to the brain. It's also important to lower the risk of having one.

"What I kind of stick with is called BE FAST a mnemonic," or learning tool, said Novant Health neurologist Dr. Hunter Hewitt. ... "B is for balanced. Suddenly you are off balance and unable to walk on your own. E is for eyes. All the sudden your eyes stick to one side; you are seeing double or lost part of your vision. F is for face. Your face starts drooping on one side or the other. A is for arms. If you hold your arms up one side is weaker

than the other. S is speech. You start to have trouble talking or your words are slurred. T is time, because the faster you get seen, the more likely we can do something to save some of the brain [cells]."

Stroke affects the Black community disproportionately. According to stroke.org, Black Americans have a 50% higher likelihood of having a stroke compared to other racial groups. They also suffer from higher mortality rates and are more likely to have one under the age of 65.

"When you have some of those vascular risk factors, your risk of having a stroke goes up," Hewitt said. "If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, if you smoke, have high cholesterol, all of that puts you at higher risk. When you talk about the Black community, they are more likely to have some of these risk factors. Why? It can be a very complex pic-



CHRISTIAN AGBEDE | UNSPLASH

Black Americans have a 50% higher likelihood of stroke any other ethnic group according to stroke.org. They also suffer higher mortality rates and more likely to suffer on under age 65.

ture. Some of it might be genetic and some of it might be due to socioeconomic or demographic factors. So, that is a very mixed picture."

Studies have also indicated that more young people who are 30 and younger suffer strokes at a higher rate.

"A big part as to why is we are seeing these younger individuals get

some of these chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and so the risk goes up," Hewitt said. "It used to be that if you were a young person, unless you had an uncommon blood clotting disorder, a young person wouldn't get strokes. But now it is common to see 20-year-olds and 30-year-olds who get it because

Please see **HOW TO** | 2B



HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Kizzmekia Corbett-Helaire developed one of the earliest COVID-19 vaccines.

Combining her research with mentorship, serves communities as an advocate of STEM education and vaccine awareness.



WINFRED CROSS | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Interior of the Lucid Air GT. At speed, the vehicle is quiet and keeps wind noise at a minimum.

Lucid EV delivers on high-end luxury, power

Continued from page 1B

sponded quickly. A four zone-climate control system is controlled on the lower screen. Ambient lighting is also controlled on that screen as is most of the car's functions.

The infotainment system is a Surreal Sound Pro Audio setup that uses Dolby Atmos sound processing with 21 speakers.

The front seats are as comfortable as your favorite living room recliner but far more supportive. Both seats offer a multi-setting massage mode. Each can be manipulated to find the perfect seating position as well. Both seats are heated and cooled.

The rear seat has an enormous amount of leg room. The floor is flat so even the middle person has plenty of room. The roofline drops off in the back so tall folks may wish for more head room. There are vents for climate control, USB-C outlets, heating and a rear center console display screen for rear passengers.

Electric cars produce horsepower instantly. It also helps that the motors are on the axles. The GT has two motors to give it electronic all-wheel drive. The motor combination makes 819 horsepower, which propels the Air GT to 60 miles per hour in 3.0 seconds, which is really quick for something this large.

Power comes on smoothly and, of course, quickly. It's also deceptive. I found it hard keeping this car under 35 mph. Going through a school zone took a lot of concentration to not speed. This car likes to run.

You find out how well the Air GT runs once you get on the freeway. This car accelerates so smoothly you'll be above the speed limit in no time. There are selectable drive modes so you can choose how to attack these streets. You basically get a sport, economy and cruising mode and they do feel different. The car rides on an electronically adaptable suspension that figures out road conditions and adjusts accordingly.

You can blast down open road with confidence. Hit the accelerator and the GT whisks you down the road in eerie quiet. Chance upon some curvy roads and the Lucid's suspension digs in and give stability. You can slice up the road with no worry. Cornering is just as inspiring. There's little body roll.

If you're wondering how far you can go on a full charge, you will be surprised. The Lucid GT Air can get up to 512 miles on a charge, depending on the wheel size you select. It takes about 12 minutes to get 200 miles of charge. I charged the car twice. Each time I was around 290 miles. It took about 70 minutes to get to 100%. I was using an ultra-fast charger, but the network was charging at regular speeds. A charging cord comes with the car, and it can be charged on Tesla's network.

The GT is quiet. You don't hear the tires and of course the engines are quiet. Wind noise is also at a minimum. This vehicle is certainly impressive on the highway.

I did have a few gripes about the Lucid but most of them apply to all EVs. I'm ol' school, so I prefer at least a start/stop button. If you have the key fob on you, the car can be started by touching the door handle. You can also start the car by pressing the key fob twice. There are no buttons on the key fob. You can get a headliner, but my car had an all-glass roof. Again, it's tinted but I would like to be able to adjust the tint.

My biggest concern is the price. The Lucid GT starts at \$114,000, which is a lot of cash. If I calculated correctly, my test car was \$132,900, which does not include destination. This is a lot of car, but asking so much for something that's unproven may be why the company is struggling.

Quality certainly isn't Lucid's problem. I found the fit and finish to be good and the quality of selected materials was spectacular. My one-week encounter with the Lucid makes me think I could easily learn to live with this spectacular electric car.

- Pros**
- Luxury branded EV
 - Elegant exterior styling
 - Posh interior
 - Expensive feeling materials
 - Ridiculously long range
 - Smooth, quiet ride
 - Excellent handling
 - Copious amounts of room
 - Loaded with tech and standard equipment
- Cons**
- Sky-high price
 - No start/stop button
 - Limited rear headroom for tall folks

Make your guy more aware of his own health maintenance

Continued from page 1B

It takes a lot to take that first step and say there's a problem, I need to go talk to somebody about it."

Going to a doctor doesn't make you weak or meek. It is a simple preventative measure to better your health long-term.

"The goal is breaking the stigma essentially of saying, 'hey, there's a weakness associated with going to a doctor,'" Weaver said. "My goal for all my patients is one, we should be doing things that prolong your life, things that help you achieve the goals you want to have in your life, things that make you stronger, not coming to me is making you weaker for any metric."

Health is more than physical

While most people think of health from the physical standpoint, it also applies to one's mental state. Eighty percent of U.S. suicides are men, who live with a stigma

they have to be tough and can't express their grievances. Weaver said it is of utmost importance for men to be able to open up about their mental state.

"Keeping everything bottled up and by not seeing anyone, there is no pressure release valve," he said. "We feel isolated and [the mental state] has gotten worse. We have seen the numbers get worse and worse as the years have gone on. ... It comes down to being lonely. That is why, going back to establishing those long-standing relationships, it is important."

Opening up about your feelings isn't something to shy away from. It helps the brain by just being able to share.

"We have so much evidence and data talking about just by talking about these things does absolutely nothing to increase the risk of suicide," Weaver said. "It does the exact opposite."

How to lower stroke risk and save lives in process

Continued from page 1B

they smoke, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol and it is a perfect storm."

What do you do in the moment during a stroke?

Immediately call 911.

"Not just because it gets you there safely," Hewitt said, "but it also gets you seen faster, because that helps you get put at the front of the line. That way, I get called down and we're working on it as fast as we can. Thankfully nowadays we have new medication, these clot-busters. If you come in within four and a half hours of symptoms starting, so there is a time limit, that is why it is so important, but we can potentially dissolve the clot and help you get back to normal, or at least as close as we can."

There are plenty of ways to lower stroke risk. Hewitt says it starts with diet, exer-

cise and regular doctor visits.

"When we talk about diet, the goal is what we call a Mediterranean diet," he said. "That doesn't mean it has to be Mediterranean food, it just means where it's high in fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans. If you're going to have meat, fish is the best. Chicken is OK. Try to avoid red meat no more than once or twice a week... Then with exercise, we want to exercise for an hour at least three times a week. Something that makes you break a sweat and gets your heart pumping. ..."

"Seeing your doctor is very important. A lot of times, someone comes in that has had a stroke and turns out they also have diabetes or high blood pressure. If we catch these things early, it will really reduce the risk."



SGT. BRIYANA TAYLOR

A standard issue Fort Bliss, Texas, barracks room after a Sgt. Briyana Taylor redesign. Taylor sources all materials from Marshalls, HomeGoods, Ross, and Facebook Marketplace, keeping each transformation within a \$300 budget.

Army sergeant transforms bare barracks room into living space

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From Camden to Fort Bliss

Taylor grew up in Camden, New Jersey, the oldest of six children. Her mother worked long hours and was rarely home. Nobody assigned her the job of keeping the household together. She just did it, trailing behind her brothers, fixing things, rearranging, making the spaces livable. She didn't think of herself as creative. It was simply what she did with a space that needed attention.

After college she became a second-grade teacher, which surprised people who knew how deeply shy she was. Then 2020 arrived, the pandemic shut her school down, and a recruiter crossed her path. She was 23. She walked into the recruiting office and signed the contract without telling anyone first.

"No one in my family has ever joined the military," she said. "I just went straight to the office and signed a contract, and I came back with all my army gear and my family was like, 'what the heck did you just do?'"

The room the Army assigned

Taylor cried every day for the first month of basic training. What got her through was connecting with people going through the same thing. But basic training had ended inside a structure with people around her. Fort Bliss was different: a post quieted by the pandemic, a standard-issue room, and almost no one she knew.

When she walked in, it was exactly what she had been bracing for on YouTube: dull walls, standard flooring, no color. A Government Accountability Office report would later name what soldiers across installations described in spaces like that one: feeling isolated, depressed, and trapped.

Taylor felt it every time she came back at the end of a duty day.

"I wanted to have a space that would make me feel calm and relax," she said. "Something I could just come back and decompress."

Taylor-made room

Taylor's favorite color is pink, and she took the room all the way there. She

covered the floor with contact paper, hung curtains, put up wall art, and kept going until the space looked like someone had moved in with intention rather than simply been assigned there. The military had already taken enough of her personality.

"I feel like in the military, it kind of takes away my personality a little bit," she said. "So, I went in my room to be something."

She stayed within what barracks regulations permitted but wasn't asking for approval beyond that. She wasn't sure there'd be no repercussions. She did it anyway. Her chain of command walked through and was impressed. The bare version, she said plainly, would have made that first isolated year depressing.

Word spreads

After the inspection and the medal, word traveled. Soldiers began appearing at Taylor's door, asking if she could do for their space what she had done for hers. She said yes. She set a \$300 budget and sourced the way she always had: Marshalls, HomeGoods, Ross, Facebook Marketplace.

A before-and-after video she posted reached nearly 12 million views. Some commenters said the new generation was soft. What came in larger numbers were comments about mental health, about what it meant to have a space that felt like theirs.

"Making your room a home away from home," Taylor said. "Because a lot of soldiers, this is their first time being away from home. And it's depressing."

Taylor doesn't walk into a barracks and see the room. She sees the person who lives in it and builds toward that person. Sports, gaming, sneakers, makeup, clothes: whatever she knows about someone shapes the design. She built entire rooms around a single piece, a football ottoman under \$20; wall art that handed her the vision the moment she found it.

What changes

Taylor has watched soldiers scream when they walk into finished rooms. Some jump. Some say they don't want to leave. One soldier she designed for

had grown up without stable housing and had never had a space he could call his own. When she finished his room, he cried. She cried alongside him.

Another told her afterward that he felt safe in his room, not more comfortable, not simply better. Safe, inside a building where physical safety is a baseline assumption, and what he named with that word had nothing to do with physical safety at all. "Going back to a room with no personality at all, it can make you even more sad or depressed than you already are," Taylor said. "I feel like if you have a space that's designed, it just ignites something."

A 2025 peer-reviewed study of more than 8,700 Army barracks residents found that poor living conditions were directly tied to anxiety, loneliness, and insufficient sleep. Mental health disorders accounted for more hospital bed days among active-duty troops than any other medical condition in 2023, and diagnoses had climbed nearly 40% since 2019.

Taylor is not a therapist and doesn't present herself as one. She is a sergeant with a skill set and a materials budget, applying both one room at a time to a problem she recognized in herself.

Force readiness

Captain Xavier Hernandez commands Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 501st General Support Aviation Battalion. When a commander goes on record about what one of his soldiers built, it isn't small talk.

Hernandez said Taylor's work directly improved morale within the 1st Armored Division Combat Aviation Brigade barracks. He didn't soften the readiness argument: chronic stress and inadequate rest don't stay in the barracks when the duty day starts. They degrade cognitive focus and operational performance and show up in retention, discipline, and unit cohesion.

"She has provided soldiers with a vital sanctuary," Hernandez said, "contributing significantly to their overall mental health and daily quality of life."



SHUTTERSTOCK

Tart cherry cottage cheese smoothie is a good source of protein.

Nutrition-boosting tips to spread protein through the day

BRANDPOINT

Most Americans are eating enough protein. They're just eating it wrong.

Protein is the macronutrient of the moment - for muscle building, losing weight and staying strong - but nutrition researchers say two things are missing from the conversation: timing and quality.

Spreading protein intake across the day produced about 25% greater muscle protein synthesis, even when the total daily intake was identical, according to research published in the "Journal of Nutrition."

"Your muscles don't have a bank account," said performance nutritionist Chris Mohr PhD. "You can't deposit all your protein at one meal and expect your body to save it for later."

Most researchers point to a target of about 30 grams of high-quality protein per meal to maximize muscle protein synthesis in most adults.

However, grams aren't everything. The source matters just as much.

"Aim to get most of your protein from whole, nutrient-dense foods rather than relying on powders, bars and snacks that don't have much else to offer," Mohr said. "Supplements have their place, but they should build on a real-food foundation, not replace it."

Quality comes down to amino acids - specifically, whether a source contains all nine essential ones the body can't produce on its own. Animal proteins (dairy, eggs, meat, fish) check that box. Many plant proteins don't and tend to be lower in leucine, the amino acid most critical for triggering muscle growth. Dairy is especially rich in leucine.

Mohr recommends a source of dairy at every meal, including milk, Greek yogurt or cottage cheese. He suggests cottage cheese with the highest levels of protein, such as Mulu cottage cheese that contains 18 grams of protein per serving - one-third more than the leading brand.

Additionally, Mohr offers these tips to spread protein intake throughout the day:

- Start with a protein anchor. Build your morning meal around protein, such as scrambled eggs with cottage cheese or a Tart Cherry Cottage Cheese Smoothie with nut butter.

- Layer in protein at lunch. A salad with grilled chicken, a turkey and cheese wrap or a grain bowl with edamame and hard-boiled eggs can hit the 30-gram target.

- Make snacks count. Use cottage cheese as a base for dips or keep hard-

boiled eggs on hand for quick, protein-rich options. Or, in just 7 minutes when time is of the essence, you can prepare Air Fryer Cottage Cheese Toast with a delicious drizzle of hot honey.

- Treat dinner as a cap, not a catchup. By evening, protein intake should already be well distributed. Try a moderate portion of fish, lean meat or legumes alongside vegetables.

- Eat slow-digesting protein before bed. Studies show consuming casein protein before sleep - the slow-digesting protein found naturally in dairy - supports overnight muscle repair. One-half cup of cottage cheese or a glass of milk before bed is a practical, evidence-backed way to put science to work.

To find more protein-rich solutions to power your day, visit muluprotein.com.

Tart Cherry Cottage Cheese Smoothie

Servings: 2
 1 cup Mulu low-fat cottage cheese
 1 frozen banana, peeled
 3/4 cup frozen tart cherries
 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed
 1 cup low-fat milk
 1 tablespoon nut butter
 water

In blender, blend cottage cheese, banana, cherries, ground flaxseed, milk and nut butter on high speed until completely smooth, 45-60 seconds.

If smoothie is too thick, add water, 2 tablespoons at a time, and blend to preferred texture.

Pour into two glasses and serve or pour into sealed jar or container and refrigerate overnight; stir or shake well before drinking.

Nutritional information per serving: 310 calories; 35 g carbohydrates; 22 g protein; 10 g fat.

Air Fryer Cottage Cheese Toast

Servings: 2
 1 cup Mulu low-fat cottage cheese
 2 slices sourdough bread
 2 teaspoons hot honey
 2 teaspoons chili crunch
 Preheat air fryer to 400 F.

Spread 1/2 cup cottage cheese onto each slice of sourdough bread.

Transfer slices into fryer basket. Cook about 7 minutes, or until cottage cheese is golden, bubbly and lightly set.

Remove toast from air fryer. Drizzle 1 teaspoon hot honey and 1 teaspoon chili crunch over each slice and serve.

Nutritional information per serving: 295 calories; 38 g carbohydrates; 19 g protein; 6 g fat.

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Experts who stay invisible are losing opportunities daily

By Marlon Smith
 SPEAKER AUTHOR BLUEPRINT

Across Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham, and communities throughout North Carolina, there are talented professionals, entrepreneurs, ministry leaders, educators, and community advocates whose knowledge could change lives.

Yet many of them remain invisible.

Not because they lack expertise.

Not because they lack passion.

But because they have never learned how to position themselves as authorities in a world where visibility increasingly creates opportunity.

Today, we are living through one of the greatest economic shifts in modern history. The creator economy has grown into a marketplace valued at more than \$250 billion globally. The online learning industry is projected to exceed \$400 billion. The global coaching industry now exceeds \$4.5 billion and continues to grow rapidly.

What do all of these industries have in common?

People are getting paid for their knowledge.

For decades, many individuals believed success depended primarily on degrees, titles, promotions, or years of experience. While those things remain valuable, today's economy increasingly rewards people who know how to communicate their expertise, build trust, and establish visibility.

The question is simple: If people are searching online every day for answers, solutions, and guidance, why shouldn't they find you?

Too many gifted people remain hidden while less qualified individuals build larger audiences, attract more opportunities, and generate greater income simply because they understand personal branding, speaking, authorship, and positioning.

That is exactly why the Speaker Au-

thor Blueprint Summit (TheSpeakerBlueprintSummit.com) was created.

On June 27 in Charlotte, attendees will discover practical strategies for building influence, increasing visibility, writing books that establish authority, leveraging artificial intelligence, generating speaking opportunities, and creating additional streams of income.

This is not a motivational event.

This is a blueprint for individuals who are ready to transform their knowledge into opportunity.

Whether you are an entrepreneur, executive, coach, educator, nonprofit leader, consultant, pastor, or aspiring speaker, the marketplace is changing quickly.

Those who learn to position themselves will thrive.

Those who remain invisible may continue watching opportunities pass them by.

I have personally given keynote presentations in 45 states and 19 countries and have spent more than three decades helping individuals maximize their potential and expand their impact.

Your expertise has value.

Your story has value.

Your voice has value.

The only question is whether the world will hear it.

Seats are limited.

Reserve yours today at: www.TheSpeakerAuthorBlueprint.com

Marlon Smith is an international keynote speaker and best-selling author whose presentations have inspired audiences in 45 states and 19 countries. For more than 34 years, he has helped leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, and professionals increase their impact, visibility, and success. As founder of the Speaker Author Blueprint Summit, he is on a mission to help people transform their knowledge, experiences, and stories into greater influence, income, and legacy. Learn more at www.TheSpeakerAuthorBlueprint.com



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'Beehive' an ode to '60s music

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

Big hairdos and powerhouse 1960s women in music are back - at least on the stage.

Centre Stage production of "Beehive: The '60s Musical," is June 25-July 12 at the theater company's headquarters, 501 River St., Greenville, S.C. Tickets are on sale at centrestage.org or by calling the box office at (864) 233-6733. Advance reservations are encouraged. Tickets range from \$33-\$38.

Showtimes are Thursday-Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

The show created by Larry Gallagher is a musical tip of the cap to top acts from Aretha Franklin to Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, Petula Clark and The Supremes who pumped out timeless classics like "Respect," "Be My Baby," and "Downtown."

The choreography, costumes, and music highlight an era shaped by female empowerment as well as cultural change that shaped modern America.



YouTuber draws Gen Z to theaters

By Lindsey Bahr
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Young audiences turned out in droves to movie theaters around the country last weekend.

It wasn't for the big budget "Star Wars" movie, "The Mandalorian and Grogu," which fell sharply in its second weekend, however, but for a small budget horror from a 20-year-old first-time filmmaker that began on the internet.

"Backrooms," released by A24 in 3,442 locations in the U.S. and Canada, made an astonishing \$81.5 million in its first three days in theaters, according to studio estimates on Sunday. That's just a few hundred thousand dollars shy of what "The Mandalorian and Grogu" earned in its first three days last weekend; and "Backrooms," which was directed and co-written by YouTube creator Kane Parsons, cost only \$10 million to produce.

The wild success of "Backrooms" didn't even hurt "Obsession," which is also the directorial debut of a YouTuber, Curry Barker, who is only 26. Three weekends in, "Obsession," a movie that cost less than \$1 million to make, still hasn't dropped below its opening weekend earnings.

This weekend, it was up 10% with another \$26.4 million for a second-place finish, leaving Star Wars, the legacy franchise movie from the veteran filmmaker and the Walt Disney Studios, in third with \$25 million.

YouTube might not be the death of movie theaters after all. If this weekend is any indication, it could be the industry's new great hope.

It's a weekend where theaters also hosted the debuts of "The Breadwinner," a PG-rated family comedy starring the popular comedian Nate Bargatze, and "Pressure," a World War II drama about the tense 72 hours before D-Day with Oscar-winner Brendan Fraser. But it was the 20-something YouTubers that drew the most crowds. And both "Backrooms" and "Obsession" were produced by Blumhouse-Atomic Monster.

Abhijay Prakash, the president of Blumhouse-Atomic Monster said that the weekend is both staggering and validation of their business, which has from the beginning championed original horror movies that appeal to younger audiences, and generated over \$10 billion in box office to date.

He noted that they've made a point of looking for up and coming talent on YouTube and, knowing how Hollywood works, this weekend likely inspire a wave of copycats. But beyond that, he's encouraged by young creators who've had success online still value the cultural currency of theatrical movies.

"It's a great sign of relevance for us," Prakash said. "With some distance, we'll probably look back at this as a real turning point."

"Backrooms" started as a creepy pasta — an internet-generated urban legend — before Parsons turned the concept, about a never-ending expanse of dull, depressing rooms and hallways, into a viral web series, which he made with the help of the open-source 3D graphics software Blender.

« ON THE MARQUEE »



LIVENATION

Ari Lennox brings her North American tour to Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre on June 6. The show is in support of her third studio album, *Vacancy*.

Ari Lennox brings North America tour to Charlotte

Grammy-nominated R&B singer at Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre

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

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

June 4
R&B Live returns to Pinholes, 2306 Central Ave. with Tre'Jae and De-shawn Hill as the headliners.

For information, go to randblive.com.

Through July 9
The rebranded *Uptown Live* series kicks off at Truist Center Plaza from 5-9 p.m. with a DJ, live band, and food and drink for sale. The after party will continue at neighboring Fifth Street District, the largest concentration of locally owned bars and restaurants in Charlotte.

The lineup:
· June 4: Mo' Money
· June 11: Heads Up Penny
· June 18: TBA
· June 25: Bourbon Sons and Out-run the Weekend
· July 2: Sol Fusion
· July 9: Spiked featuring DJ Elixir

June 5-6
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra presents "Black Panther in Concert," Belk Theater, 130 N Tryon St. T'Challa becomes king and battles Killmonger in the 2018 Marvel film that introduced the cinematic world to Wakanda.

Ryan Coogler's feature-length film goes on the big screen as conductor Anthony Parnter and Charlotte Symphony performs Ludwig Gö-

ransson's Oscar and Grammy-winning score live on stage. Tickets range from \$39.15 to \$172.93 at tix.blumenthalarts.org.

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.

June 18
Trouble So Hard - Song & Stories of Slavery, Freedom, & Civil Rights, a live performance at Tyvola Senior Citizen Center, 2225 Tyvola Road. Performances are free, but registration is required at www.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.

· *Lullabies and Life: A Poetic Juneteenth Celebration*, 7:30 p.m., Belk Place, 230 N Tryon St. Featuring Jay Ward, MrWitzthePoet, Blue, Kyla "Cookie" Jones and Jay Smalls accompanied by Charlotte Strings Collective. Tickets are \$23-\$57 at

Ticketmaster.com.

July 17-18
Usher and Chris Brown, Bank of America Stadium.

Grammy winners Chris Brown and Usher 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 available at: raymondandbrown.com.

July 25
Fetty Wap, The Fillmore. The double-Diamond-selling and Grammy nominated hip hop artist ("Trap Queen," "679," "My Way") brings the Nostalgia Tour to Charlotte. Tickets: livenation.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.

Tickets are \$82-\$135 and available at thecarolina.com.

'Star Wars' director wants to spark new fandom

By Lindsey Bahr
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jon Favreau has been dreaming about making a Star Wars movie for most of his life.

He was 10 and half when the first film was released in theaters in 1977, which he went to see with his dad. From the opening shot of that Imperial Star Destroyer filling the screen, he was forever changed. It made him fall in love with the movies: The wonder, the world, the spectacle and the shared experience.

By the time "Return of the Jedi" came out he'd even found a job that was a little closer to the action: Movie theater usher.

For a screenwriter, director, actor and producer who has a billion-dollar film to his name, in addition to all that comes with being part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, he's always been ready to raise his hand when it comes to Star Wars. He voiced a Mandalorian in "The Clone Wars," played an alien in "Solo" and helped create "The Mandalorian" series and his immensely popular counterpart, Grogu (aka Baby Yoda). But believe it or not, he only ever got to direct one episode of the show (the first of the second season). So, yes, Favreau has paid his dues and now, at 59, he finally has a Star Wars movie of his own.

Inviting a new generation to Star Wars "Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu" is not simply Season 4 of the show on the big screen. Favreau should know, since he wrote both. And, perhaps more importantly, he knew there couldn't be any presumption of Mandalorian knowledge. Writing a show, he said, you can assume that the audience will have seen the prior season. A movie is different; it has to be if it's going to be a blockbuster.

"Even though in our hearts we are Star Wars fans, we make it for Star Wars fans, and we know that there's a certain



LUCASFILM LTD / DISNEY

This image released by Disney shows The Mandalorian, portrayed by Pedro Pascal, right, and Grogu in a scene from Lucasfilm's "Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu."

set of expectations around what Star Wars should be that we collectively hold, there is the responsibility to invite a whole new generation of people into Star Wars," Favreau said. "That means that if a Star Wars fan brings somebody who's not, they've got to have as good of a time as the fans do."

It's been nearly seven years since there was a new Star Wars movie released in theaters. That means there's a whole group of a six-and-a-half-year-olds who've yet to have a first time experience of their own.

"I want to make the next generation feel the way about Star Wars that I did when I saw it for the first time," Favreau said.

It can be intimidating going into a movie knowing that there were three seasons of television leading up to it. But the nice thing about Star Wars is, even people who don't know it at least kind of know it. Remember, Favreau said, George Lucas plopped audiences in the middle of an adventure in 1977 without a lot of explanation.

"George has always understood that you have to fit into the mythic structure," Favreau said. "There are certain story types that we connect with and understand and even if we might not

know the particulars of the story he's telling, we could drop right in and understand and know who to cheer for."

For this film, Favreau is pretty sure that most people have heard of Baby Yoda and can pick up on the dynamic between the little green guy and his enigmatic bounty hunter counterpart, played once again by Pedro Pascal. If you are a newcomer, that's pretty much all that you need to know. Also, the Mandalorian has a name: Din Djarin.

Din Djarin is a bit different

Season three left Din Djarin and Grogu at peace, at least for a moment. He's adopted Grogu as his son and apprentice, and they plan to live in a small cabin and take some jobs here and there to help protect the Outer Rim.

"He made it clear that he was only going to work for the good guys now," Favreau said. "We switched the Western archetype from the bounty hunter to the guy who's hunting down the bad guys in the wanted posters on the post office wall for the sheriff."

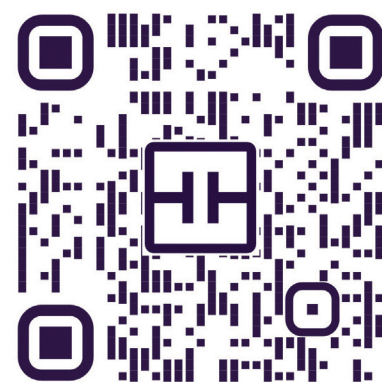
When we meet him again in the film, "he's a bit different from when we first met him, but he's still, at his heart, a gunfighter and a warrior," Favreau said.



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¹ National Association of REALTORS®, (March 29, 2024). .2025 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers. <https://www.nar.realtor/magazine/real-estate-news/nar-2025-profile-of-home-buyers-sellers-reveals-market-extremes>

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