

Life!

THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2026 SECTION B

Charlotte streets a challenge to my confidence

As Charlotte grows, it means more congested roads.

It's hectic and overwhelming to navigate. With unpredictable drivers, highway exits, and construction at nearly every corner, it can be especially difficult for a driving newcomer like me to grasp. I've been told driving isn't hard and if everyone else can do it, I should too. Well, I have trouble trusting myself.

I lack confidence to make real-time judgments behind the wheel. That huge responsibility and that one vital mistake I could make terrifies me.

Just trying to maintain speed, I can feel my foot trembling involuntarily up to the point where I might just accelerate suddenly from intense nervousness. At that moment, an immense fear hits. Sitting in the driver's seat means commitment, and once I'm controlling a four-wheel vehicle at 85 mph, I feel trapped. I couldn't just jump out or give up. It was my responsibility to bring myself and that car from point A to point B.

For someone who already doubts herself behind the wheel, Charlotte roads can feel impatient and unpredictable. I feel most comfortable having someone I trust in the passenger seat — mostly to guide me and make the judgment calls I don't trust myself to give.

During the summer of my apprenticeship, I had to drive at 7:40 a.m. through an hour of heavy traffic every morning from Charlotte to Fort Mill, South Carolina. It was a big contrast to driving full speed on the highway. Instead of cruising and focusing on being inside the white lines, I had to be extra vigilant with the brake pedal as well as my surroundings. The concept that was a struggle for me to grasp was merging. I'm not a very confident driver, and if you want to make sure you make it to the right exit especially during traffic hours, you must be assertive.

When I needed to change lanes, drivers honked at my attempt. It was a struggle to understand how much space I had between cars. I figured that indicating my intentions was enough, but it seems I was sorely mistaken.

One time when I had to get to an exit, my sister had to reassure me that I was able to merge. So, I

Please see **DRIVING** | 2B

Kennedy wants a peek at Americans' health records for vaccination clues

By Amanda Seitz and Darius Tahir

KFF HEALTH NEWS

U.S. health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is pursuing federal government access to most Americans' medical records, in a quest to research a link between vaccines and autism — a connection the medical establishment studied for decades and flatly rejects.

The Department of Health and Human Services is seeking data from little-known state systems that allow hospitals and clinics to exchange detailed, identifiable patient information, KFF Health News has learned.

In private meetings, some public health leaders have objected to giving Kennedy's team access to such data, raising doubts that it's legal or that the information would even be useful.

They have also expressed concerns about allowing the federal government to peer into the minutiae of Americans' medical records, which could mean viewing anything from doctors' notes to prescription history. HHS has offered no insight into how it will protect or handle the personal health information it obtains.

But Kennedy told KFF Health News that medical records are key to investigating the cause of autism,

Please see **KENNEDY** | 3B

« RIDES »

Toyota's Crown Signia hybrid leaps forward with outstanding fuel efficiency

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Do you go hybrid or electric? Which provides the best value and save the most on fuel?

Some new car buyers are faced with this dilemma. Electric will get you away from high gas prices but the cost and lack of range on said vehicles may be prohibitive. Hybrids use less gas with the aid of self-recharging batteries but also can be expensive. What do you do?

I like electric vehicles, but I'm not sold on the infrastructure yet. I like hybrids but most are noisy under hard acceleration and feel underpowered. If I had to pick, it's a hybrid

for me, especially if it's the Toyota Crown Signia. It's got the room and the range. The price and noise? We'll talk about that.

The Crown Signia is different from the Crown sedan. Toyota calls it an SUV, but it is essentially a station wagon. It seats five people comfortably and can carry a moderate amount of stuff. Fold the rear seat and it can carry a lot of stuff if you only need to carry another person. The Signia is powered by a 2.4-liter hybrid system that has a combined output of 240 horsepower. It can tow up to 2,700 pounds and in AWD form can achieve nearly 40 miles per gallon in the city.

I had the Crown Signia for a week, and I can tell you Toyota may be underestimating its fuel efficiency. This thing absolutely sips gas. With a 14.5-gallon tank, the Signia can travel 565 miles before the next fill up. That's impressive for something that can haul five people around a city and doesn't need to be plugged up.

Driving the Crown Signia is easy and pleasurable. The vehicle isn't quick but accelerates quick enough. If you need to floor the thing to pass it proves capable, but there is a noise penalty. The engine is quite noisy, even for a hybrid. Certainly, the power is for more than adequate



TOYOTA

Toyota's Crown Signia hybrid has good power, an upscale cabin, excellent range and outstanding fuel efficiency that offset its noise.

to get to where you are going but the trip may not be as quiet as hoped.

This is surprising considering how upscale the cabin feels. The Crown Sig-

nia could easily slip into the Lexus lineup. It doesn't Please see **TOYOTA** | 2B



ATRIUM HEALTH

Dr. Cortlyn Brown (second from left), director of Atrium Health's Care Everywhere Street Medicine Project with colleagues. The initiative treats unsheltered homeless people across the region.

Atrium Health takes treatment to streets

Care Everywhere Street Medicine Project serves region's homeless

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

An Atrium Health initiative is taking medical treatment into Charlotte's streets.

The Care Everywhere Street Medicine Project is designed to treat unsheltered homeless people across the region, who often lack access to traditional healthcare due to barriers like a lack of insurance or transportation. The initiative's goal is to improve access to preventative care before urgent treatment is required.

According to Mecklenburg County Community Support Services' 2025 State of Housing Instability and Homelessness Report, found that 77% of low-cost housing available in 2015 was wiped out by 2024 as redevelopment and gentrification spread across the region. Black people, who make up 29% of the county's population, account for 74% of the homeless population. The most recent Point-In-Time census found

384 unsheltered people on a single night in Mecklenburg.

The study combined local, regional and national data on homelessness, housing stock and affordability.

Care Everywhere, which includes scheduled outreach to sites where the unsheltered are encamped, is staffed by doctors from Carolinas Medical Center's Department of Emergency Medicine. They provide services ranging from dispensing medications for chronic conditions to point-of-care testing and wound care.

"This program is about showing up, consistently, in the places where people already are," Dr. Cortlyn Brown, director of the street medicine initiative and an associate professor of emergency medicine at Carolinas Medical Center said in a statement. "By removing common barriers and being a reliable presence, we are able to connect with people who might otherwise remain discon-

nected from the health care system."

Atrium Health also collaborates with Roof Above to link patients with social services resources and long-term support to build trust and consistent care over time. In addition to focusing on acute and chronic medical needs and supporting long-term health outcomes, the program is also a training platform for clinicians and trainees.

"At its core, this work is about dignity," Brown said. "Every person deserves access to care and to be treated with respect, and that does not change based on where someone sleeps at night. This program lets us deliver on that commitment in a way that actually reaches people."

On The Net
atriumhealth.org/community/everywhere-street-medicine-project

Trump's rural health bet meets NC desert

By Sarah Jane Tribble and Amanda Seitz

KFF HEALTH NEWS

WILLIAMSTON — Two years after her brother's death, Debra Pierce still wonders whether the 50-year-old would have survived his heart attack if her local hospital hadn't closed.

"The sad thing is we'll never know if he could have been saved that night or not, because we don't have a higher level of care in this county," Pierce said as she stood outside the mobile home where she last hugged her brother.

Emergency crews from a neighboring town worked on Stanley Sears for a half hour but couldn't revive him for the long drive to the closest hospital, records show.

In the tall grass — which would be mowed if Sears were still alive — Pierce swiped through the photos on her phone. She stopped at a picture that showed Sears smiling. Pierce chuckled and then sighed: "Bless him."



SARAH JANE TRIBBLE | KFF HEALTH NEWS

A weathered sign hangs across the drive to the shuttered Martin General Hospital in Williamston, North Carolina. The hospital, the only one in Martin County, closed abruptly in August 2023.

The local hospital had closed a year before Sears' death, leaving behind a gutted healthcare system. Martin County does not have paramedics on its ambulances, and it can be 20 miles or more to the closest — and often overcrowded — emergency rooms.

The healthcare gaps in Martin County illustrate

the finite reach of a \$50 billion rural health fund that Republicans crafted to strengthen support for President Donald Trump's signature tax and spending measure, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, last year. Though the cash has not been doled out, Republican candidates in competitive midterm elections — including the closely

watched battle for the congressional district that encompasses Martin County — are casting the fund as a lifeline that will shore up critical rural health services across America.

The money has been highly anticipated in North Carolina, where most residents live in rural counties. Pierce, a Repub-

Please see **TRUMP'S** | 2B

Driving Charlotte streets challenge confidence

Continued from page 1B

did. I'd signal, give the other drivers a moment, and start to change lanes. But then, I was met with an aggressive horn blast. The car behind me decided to speed up.

To prevent a collision, my sister had to take control of the wheel back to our own lane. During the whole ordeal, I remember my entire body feeling heightened and numb. My eyes started to well up from all the distress. I truly believed I almost caused a horrible accident.

The fact that my sister had to intervene was proof that I needed someone in the passenger seat with me. Every time I'm honked at, or when people decide to pass is a reminder that I don't belong on the road, though it may not be true.

In America, driving is a rite of passage. Economic independence starts

with your means of transportation. Owning a vehicle provides important necessities such as getting to the grocery store and getting to work. Without it, you rely on alternatives that can be unreliable and out of your control such as public transportation.

The same applies to relying on someone else to drive you around. Instead of running your own schedule, you're dependent on theirs. I have been doing this for quite some time, and it has gotten to the point where it feels debilitating.

I notice the hindrance of going against what's expected. It feels stagnant to depend on others to get anywhere. I've been forced to confront my anxiety and trust myself. I hope it works.

Jaslynn Vorachith is a senior at Johnson C. Smith University and emerging journalist fellow at The Post.

Toyota Crown Signia hybrid leaps forward with efficiency

Continued from page 1B

have wood and a lot of other higher end finishes but the way the cabin fits and feels is far above pedestrian. There are no cheap feeling bits and pieces. I wish there was a bit more room, however. Again, it's adequate but feels a little smaller than the Venza, the vehicle it replaced last year.

The Crown Signia's ride quality is almost plush feeling. The four-wheel independent suspension keeps most of the bad stuff at bay, even on bumpy roads. The AWD system works well in bad weather and also gives the Signia a little bit while cornering.

Body roll feels under control if you find some twisty roads.

The interior is comfortable. The front seats are leather covered, ventilated and heated. Each is power operated and is extremely supportive. The digital dash can be configured to display a variety of information, while the 12.3-inch touch screen controls Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and a JBL 11-speaker infotainment system.

My test car was the Limited model with a tech package. Yep, it was loaded. I didn't find anything missing on the Crown. The tech package included panoramic cam-

era view, lane change assist, traffic jam assist, puddle lights and front and rear parking assist.

The Crown Insignia starts at \$48,890 for the Limited trim. If you want one with the Advanced tech package add another \$1,895. The as-tested price with destination and roof rails was \$53,919.

Pros:

- Handsome styling
- Excellent fuel economy
- Upscale interior
- Decent towing capacity
- Lots of standard equipment

Cons:

- Loud engine under hard acceleration
- Limited cargo space

Trump's \$50B rural health bet meets a NC health care desert

Continued from page 1B

ican who blames county officials for the hospital closure, said she has faith Trump will help them. "Old man's doing his job up in there," she said.

On paper, Martin County — home to about 22,000 people — looks like a top contender to receive at least some of the \$213 million that's been earmarked for North Carolina.

Yet County Manager Drew Batts said it won't be the answer for his residents.

"The \$50 billion is not something that is specifically going to help our situation," Batts said as he walked into the shuttered hospital in April. "It's not going to help us get this place reopened."

Martin County won't get direct relief from Trump's rural health fund — because its hospital isn't open. North Carolina is distributing the money among existing health and social service organizations. Plus, federal regulators set limits on how much can be spent on construction and building renovations.

'We can only pray'

Martin General Hospital closed abruptly in 2023, surprising employees and shocking patients, who had to be wheeled out on stretchers and transported elsewhere to finish treatment. The closure even stunned local elected leaders, who say the company operating the county-owned hospital, Quorum Health, did not notify them it intended to shut down operations and file for bankruptcy.

Quorum spokesperson Lisa Anderson said the company had told county commissioners of the hospital's ongoing financial challenges.

Politicians have spent the years since trying to reopen the hospital, with county taxpayers pouring an estimated \$2.9 million into maintenance, utilities, and other costs in the hopes of resuming operations, Batts said.

The county is now considering spending at least \$1.5 million, he said, to create two higher-level paramedic units with quick-response vehicles, specially equipped with electrocardiogram equipment or other "advanced lifesaving support."

Pierce said she is praying the county can add paramedics and reopen the hospital.

"There's some answered prayers happening every day," she said. "So, we can only pray and hope, you know?"

'They just want to not die'

With its nine hospitals, the region's largest health system is ECU Health, connected to East Carolina University. The system has become a de facto safety net for 29 counties. Batts and Brian Floyd, the Greenville-based system's chief operating officer, have lobbied state and federal lawmakers, walking them through the shuttered hospital and asking for help.

"It's a real healthcare crisis that has already proven itself to have lost lives that perhaps didn't have to be lost," Floyd said. "They just want to not die because there's nowhere to go when you have an emergency."

Eleisa Ann Evans drove 2 1/2 hours from a small town near the Outer Banks on a recent evening so her aunt could get care at an ECU Health ER in Greenville. Once there, Evans said, staff told her to leave her 79-year-old aunt in the waiting room and wait outside because of capacity issues.

Evans said she was outraged at the way the staff treated her. She said she had been standing behind her aunt's wheelchair while inside and "wasn't using nobody's chair."

With Martin General gone, all the surrounding counties are "also in jeopardy," Floyd said. "No one knows what to do" with that large of a healthcare "desert," he said.

What healthcare is left in the county includes one urgent care center, run by a private company, and a nonprofit health clinic, operated by Agape Health Services, which accepts patients from five counties and plans to build another primary care clinic to meet demand.

ECU Health signed a letter of intent last year to reopen Martin General as a rural emergency hospital that would provide outpatient care as well as an ER. Under the terms of the deal, Martin County would pay to refurbish the hospital, and the North Carolina General Assembly would have to give ECU Health \$210 million, of which \$150 million would pay for the construction of a new inpatient tower at ECU's Beaufort Hospital.

The health system, through its affiliate Access East, won a portion of North Carolina's \$213 million first-year payout from the rural fund. But the federal money can't be used to reopen Martin General, Floyd said.

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Invisible expert: What if your knowledge could generate income beyond your paycheck?

By Marlon Smith

SPEAKER AUTHOR BLUEPRINT

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Kennedy wants a peek at Americans' health records

Continued from page 1B led the initiative for the health department to collect and examine medical records.

Federal officials met with leaders of the state-run health information exchange systems several times over the past year and asked how the personal medical records they maintain could be used for vaccine research, according to seven people who participated in the discussions or were familiar with them.

Craig Behm, who runs the Maryland health information exchange, said Kennedy's team asked about how the vast trove of medical records they store from hospitals and health systems could be used to study vaccines.

"If this administration wants to conduct research on the effectiveness of vaccines, are you saying you all can help us conduct that research?" Behm recalled being asked by a top official at HHS' health information technology office.

Last June, Behm and leaders of other state exchanges met with Kennedy's top advisers to discuss sharing more medical data with federal agencies. The state organizations followed up with a pitch in October for a new surveillance system that would give the federal health department "real-time, 24-hour data feeds on opioid and chronic disease trends" within a year, according to a presentation reviewed by KFF Health News.

Under the proposal, HHS would get data from 90% of the population's medical records by 2028.

Administration officials regularly asked during the meetings how the records could be used to monitor vaccine safety. Kennedy has rejected the federal government's current vaccine-monitoring systems; decades of research has

shown immunizations are safe and effective for most people.

"Vaccine safety, or whatever words you want to use, has come up pretty consistently in those conversations," said John Kansky, CEO of the Indiana Health Information Exchange.

Kansky sees the potential value of sharing information from the exchanges for public health but is worried about the focus on vaccines: "It's like, oh man, I wish you would have picked something that pushed fewer buttons for people."

System monitors chronic disease Nearly every state has at least one health information exchange — often regulated by state laws and run by private companies or nonprofits — that enables hospitals and health systems to immediately share patients' medical records with one another.

The systems allow doctors and nurses to quickly pull up nearly anyone's medical history and records at emergency rooms or share after-visit summaries and notes with patients' primary care providers, for example.

In certain circumstances — most often dealing with cases of infectious diseases such as measles or flu — the exchanges notify public health authorities, like the state health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Using the exchanges for broader public health purposes is not an unusual idea in itself. But it can present privacy, legal, and ethical complications, health officials say.

In the end, Behm said his organization in Maryland declined to share more data with the federal government for vaccine research, noting that sharing medical records for that purpose would require a rash of approvals from hospitals, state political

leaders, and research boards.

Any new data-sharing agreement should also have a clear, detailed framework outlining what would be shared and with whom, he added.

"A number of us said, 'We can't do anything our agreements don't allow us to do, so no,'" Behm said. Indeed, most health information exchanges have contractual restrictions on who can access clinical data.

Kansky said Indiana is still weighing whether to provide additional data for Kennedy's project, and that nothing has yet been shared.

HHS spokesperson Emily Hilliard did not answer questions about how many states are participating in Kennedy's project, what new data the agency is collecting, how much the federal government is spending on the initiative, how it is protecting patient privacy, or who has access to the data.

"HHS is strengthening public health surveillance and modernizing data systems to better understand and combat the childhood chronic disease epidemic as part of Secretary Kennedy's Make America Healthy Again agenda," Hilliard said in an emailed statement. "Americans deserve robust systems to monitor the drivers of chronic illness."

Kennedy has asserted, without evidence, that vaccines can cause chronic illness.

A Kennedy partner in Nebraska At least one state has been cooperative.

The former leader of Nebraska's state health information exchange has led the effort to share data from medical records with the federal government.

Jaime Bland, former CEO of CyncHealth — the Nebraska health information exchange used by most hospitals and health sys-

tems in the state — said several states are looking to "open up channels" to provide more analysis to Kennedy's team.

"They're looking at the data differently and providing some insights back to the CDC," Bland told KFF Health News.

Bland was among a group who proposed that CyncHealth would help kick off the initiative, according to a 43-slide PowerPoint presented to federal officials during an October meeting.

CyncHealth and other state health information exchanges would "ingest data from hospitals, clinics, laboratories, pharmacies, payers, and social services agencies," then "link claims and clinical records through a master patient index."

Data from the exchanges "will be deidentified where appropriate," according to one slide.

The federal government would pay the exchanges for furnishing the records, according to the proposal: \$3 a person, annually.

Officials would "frame publicly that this is not a new database, but a federated trust model that delivers real-time data for all HHS missions," the presentation reads.

After the meeting, Nebraska's health department was awarded a large grant from the CDC, and CyncHealth in turn got millions of dollars from the state.

On Dec. 19, the CDC announced new funding under its Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity program, which sends money to state and local health departments for lab work, health information enhancements, and solutions for outbreaks.

Nebraska's state health department was awarded \$18.7 million — the most of any state last year, though Nebraska is the 38th most populous state.

By comparison, Texas received \$9.2 million, and California got \$10.8 million.

CyncHealth was then awarded three contracts totaling \$13.6 million from the state health department just weeks later, on Jan. 9 and Jan. 16, according to a publicly accessible database of state contracts.

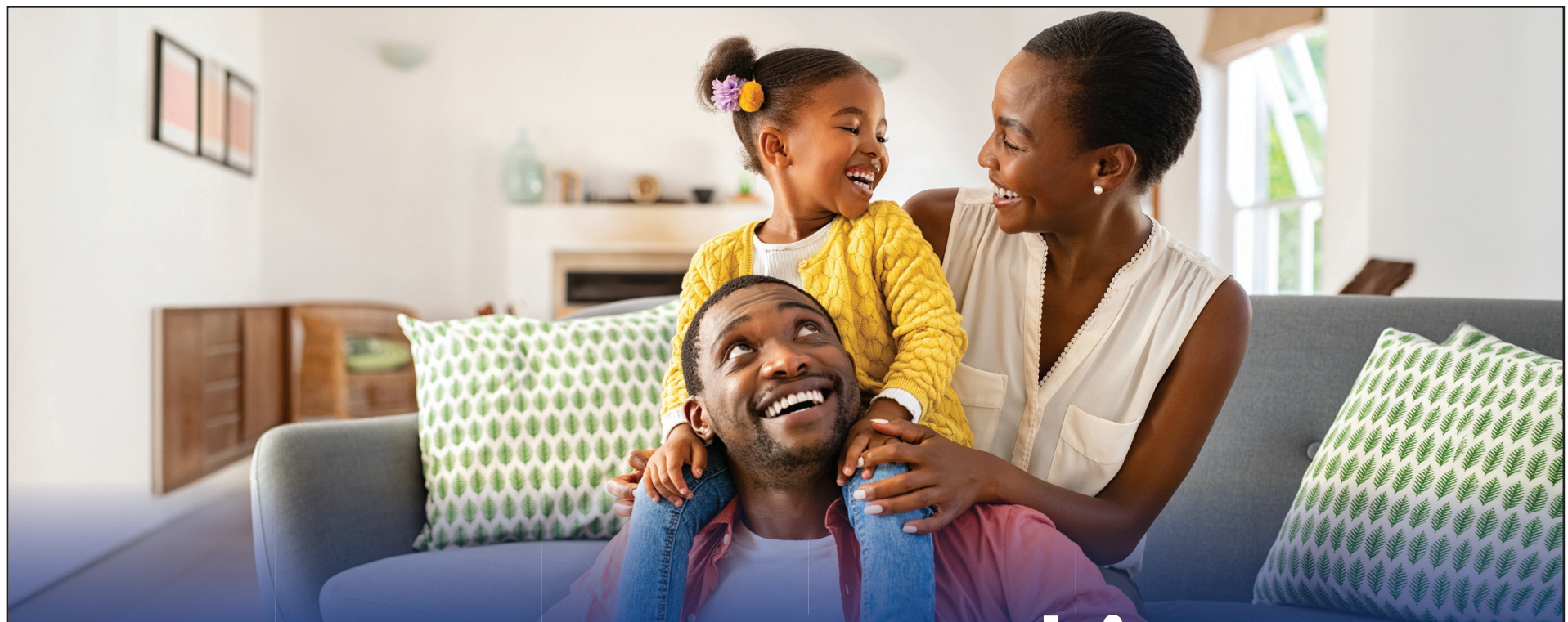
Grace McNamara, a spokesperson for CyncHealth, said it retained \$2.4 million of the funding for Kennedy's project; the remaining money was distributed to "other participating states and various vendor organizations for implementation support."

A former CDC official who was aware of the transaction, but not authorized to speak publicly about it, confirmed the money was intended for CyncHealth to supply data for Kennedy's initiative to look at vaccines and autism. McNamara said that the "work is focused on improving outcomes related to acute and chronic illnesses."

"The referenced project is not research, but rather a proof-of-concept project on how health information exchange and public health can work together to improve health outcomes and is not specific to autism," she said in an emailed statement.

McNamara did not answer questions about what type of medical data is being provided to the federal health department or whether patients' identifying information is removed.

Bland left her post at CyncHealth — where she was paid nearly \$420,000 a year — in December. She was named in April as the chief data strategist for the MAHA Institute — a think tank founded by allies of Kennedy and Trump to advance their Make America Healthy Again movement.



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Meet the red kiwi everyone's talking about this spring

FEATURE IMPACT

While spring may be a season of fresh starts, your reset doesn't have to include a closet clean-out or juice cleanse. Sometimes the easiest upgrade is simply adding something new, fresh and unexpectedly delicious to your plate - and when something as unique and exciting as a red kiwi hits stores, it's the kind of spring discovery you have to try.

Enter Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit, the berry-sweet seasonal fruit dietitians are already excited about, and one you'll only find in stores for a limited time this spring.

With its naturally vibrant ruby-red center and sweet flavor that tastes like a cross between a kiwi and berries, it's quickly becoming one of the most talked-about fruits in the produce aisle. Beyond its striking color, it delivers antioxidant vitamin C along with anthocyanins - the beneficial plant nutrients that naturally give red fruits their signature hue.

Plus, it makes it easy for families to add more whole-fruit nutrition to everyday routines. Naturally sweet and simple to prepare, it's a kid-friendly snack parents can feel good about serving on its own or adding to breakfast bowls, lunchboxes and quick spring recipes.

Registered dietitian Lauren Manaker said it's exactly the kind of simple upgrade people are looking for this time of year.

"I love recommending foods that make healthy choices feel effortless, and Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit is a great example," Manaker said. "It's naturally sweet, visually beautiful and a nutrient-dense fruit that delivers antioxidant vitamin C in every bite. Adding foods like kiwi to your routine is an easy - and delicious - way to boost the

overall nutritional quality of your day."

Forget restrictive resets. Adding one colorful, crave-worthy fruit to your routine can be a smarter - and more enjoyable - place to start.

Simple ways to enjoy kiwi
Easy to enjoy on its own - just slice and scoop - RubyRed Kiwifruit also makes everyday meals a little more special.

For a quick breakfast or snack, try layering sliced kiwi into a yogurt parfait with Greek yogurt and granola. The berry-sweet flavor pairs perfectly with creamy textures and adds a refreshing seasonal twist.

Or finish a warm spring day with Red Kiwi Ice Pops. Blended with fruit juice and frozen with fresh slices of kiwi, they're simple, colorful treats that feel just as fun for adults as they do for kids.

A seasonal find worth grabbing
Part of the excitement: it isn't around for long. This limited-time seasonal fruit is available in stores nationwide through May, so it's one you'll want to grab while you can.

Visit Zespri.com/RubyRed to find a store near you and explore more recipes before the season ends.

Red Kiwi Yogurt Parfait
2 Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit

1 cup Greek yogurt
1/3 cup nutty granola
Dice one kiwi and thinly slice one.

In bottom of tall glass, layer 1/4 cup yogurt, kiwi and granola. Continue layering with remaining ingredients.

Red Kiwi Ice Pops
4 Zespri RubyRed Kiwifruit, peeled
pineapple juice (or fruit juice of choice)

Dice three kiwis into small cubes. Thinly slice remaining kiwi and reserve.

In blender, blend kiwi cubes and pineapple juice until smooth.

Put sliced kiwi in ice pop

mold and pour juice mixture over top.

Freeze until chilled.

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Alex Haley: 'Roots' author also co-authored Malcolm X's story

BRITANNICA

Alex Haley (1921-1992) was an American writer whose works of historical fiction and reportage depicted the struggles of African Americans.

Although his parents were teachers, Haley was an indifferent student. He began writing to avoid boredom during voyages while serving in the Coast Guard (1939-59). His first major work, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" (1965), was an authoritative and widely read narrative based on Haley's interviews with the Black Muslim spokesman.

The work is recognized as a classic of African American literature.

Haley's greatest success was "Roots: The Saga of an American Family" (1976). This saga covers seven American generations, from the enslavement of Haley's African ancestors to his own genealogical quest.

The work forcefully shows relationships between generations and between races. "Roots" was adapted as a multi-episode television program, which, when first broadcast in January 1977, became one of the most popular shows in the history of American television and galvanized attention on African American issues and history.

That same year Haley won a special Pulitzer Prize. A successful sequel was first broadcast in Feb-

ruary 1979 as "Roots: The Next Generations." Another TV adaptation of the novel debuted in 2016.

"Roots" spurred much interest in family history, and Haley created the Kinte Foundation (1972) to store records that aid in tracing black genealogy. Haley later admitted that his saga was partly fictional; the book was also the subject of a plagiarism suit, which Haley settled out of court.

In 1978, Haley's boyhood home in Henning, Tennessee, north of Memphis, was restored and opened to the public. On the same grounds, the state later constructed the Alex Haley Interpretive Center (2010), which educated visitors in genealogical methodology.



Haley

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BIDS

Kannapolis City Schools (KCS) is requesting bids by **Tuesday, July 14, 2026 at 10:00 A.M.** for work at **A.L. Brown High School Cyber Campus 415 Martin Luther King Jr Ave, Kannapolis NC. 28083.**

This project will involve the replacement of existing Dual Temperature, Chilled and Hot Water piping systems serving the Cyber Campus Building on the A.L. Brown High School Campus, including all associated components, wiring, wall and ceiling work. The installation of new systems will be carried out in compliance with local building codes and regulations. Testing and commissioning of the new system will be performed to ensure its functionality and reliability. Training for District personnel in the operation and maintenance of the new systems will also be required to be provided. Throughout the project, safety measures will be strictly adhered to, and the work will be scheduled to minimize disruption to the facility's daily activities.

A mandatory pre-bid conference will be held for this project at Kannapolis City Schools A.L. Brown High School Cyber Campus on Tuesday, June 23, 2026 at 9:00 A.M. Bring proper ID.

Request of Documents and design or questions should be directed to the Owner's Engineer, Optima Engineering attention Emily Bridges via email (ebridges@optimaengineering.com) a minimum of 3 days prior to the bid date.

EMPLOYMENT

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Senior Software Engineer at Moody's Investors Service, Inc. (Charlotte, NC). Design & maintain scalable database systems across cloud & on-premise environments. Reqts: Bachelor's deg or foreign equiv in Comp Info Systems, Comp Sci, Info Tech or a rel technl fld + 5 yrs of progressively resp exp performing software development & designing technical solutions. Anticipated hiring base salary range: \$154,669 to \$169,000/yr. To apply, please submit resume through careers.moody.com or via e-mail at hrbox28@moody.com. Please refer to Job Ref. 13054.

Software Engineer at Moody's Investors Service, Inc. (Charlotte, NC). Contribute to ongoing feature development of web applications based on service-oriented architecture, involving UI, Services & databases. Reqts: Master's deg or foreign equiv in Comp Sci, Eng, or a rel fld + 3 yrs of exp performing software development & designing technical solutions. Anticipated hiring base salary range: \$133,536 to \$138,550/yr. To apply, please submit resume through careers.moody.com or via e-mail at hrbox28@moody.com. Please refer to Job Ref. 13113.

EMPLOYMENT

SOFTWARE ARCHITECT

The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. seeks a Software Architect in Charlotte, NC. Participate in all aspects of PNC's Corporate and Institutional Banking's Systems Engineering Group activities. Specific duties include: (1) participate and contribute towards design discussions across the Lending technology organization; (2) while focusing on innovation, ensure applications follow technology and customer delivery goals of PNC; (3) analyze existing legacy systems and their interactions to understand business functionality; (4) design the integrations solutions in an optimized way by understanding the entire workflow and the upstream and downstream systems thoroughly; (5) engage in various Enterprise architecture forums and groups across PNC; (6) participate in solutioning enterprise needs and goals; (7) stay up to date on enterprise architecture standards and patterns; and (8) gatekeep the various interactions across multiple technology platforms in the lending world.

Bachelor's degree in Engineering, CIS, MIS, Computer Science, or Information Technology plus 5 years of experience architecting enterprise solutions based on microservices and event-driven architecture, including SOA-based web services and SOAP-based APIs, in or for the financial services industry is required. Must have experience with: (1) leading the design of scalable, enterprise-level application systems utilizing Java/J2EE, Spring Boot, Kafka and microservices architecture for the enterprise collections recovery process; (2) creating detailed software architecture diagrams to document technical challenges and define robust, future-proof solutions; (3) providing technical leadership and guidance to software development teams, including consulting on system integration and data migration strategies; (4) reviewing and approving the technical low-level software designs and conducting thorough code reviews to ensure quality and compliance with architecture standards; (5) defining DevOps Practices and Tools using Bitbucket, Jenkins, Artifactory, and Azure; (6) containerization and Orchestration Technologies using OpenShift or Kubernetes; (7) integrating observability tools including Splunk, Kibana, and Dynatrace for monitoring and logging across microservices; (8) designing and managing data models and databases using Erwin Data Modeler, with hands-on experience in Oracle SQL and MongoDB; and (9) utilizing Performance Engineering and Optimization standards using Dynatrace and either JMeter or HP Performance Tester including systems running on WebSphere.

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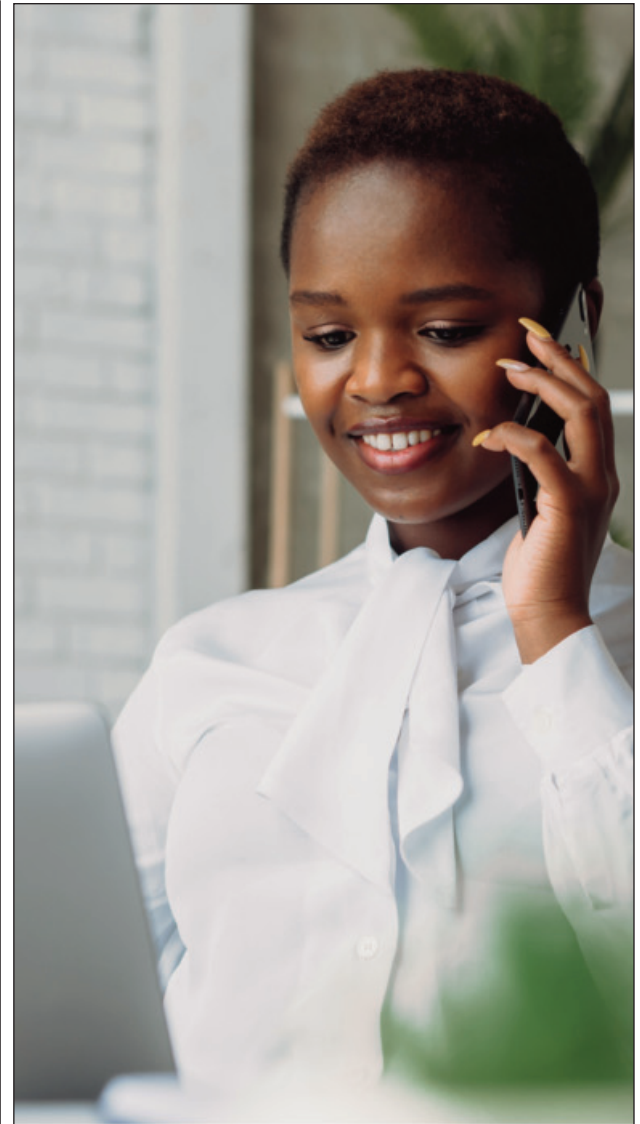
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THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2026 PAGE 6B

« ON THE MARQUEE »

Juneteenth celebrations abound

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

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

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 11: Heads Up Penny
- June 18: TBA
- June 25: Bourbon Sons and Outrun the Weekend
- July 2: Sol Fusion
- July 9: Spiked featuring DJ Elixir

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.

• Juneteenth celebration with Jay Ward, 6 p.m., Charlotte Studio Artists, 3045 N. Davidson St.

An evening with Charlotte's poet laureate honoring Juneteenth. Following the reading, there'll be engagement in a community discussion. Artists from the "250 Years of Becoming: The American Journey" exhibition will also be on hand to reveal insights into their work and the stories behind their pieces.

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 4

"An American Celebration," a day for family fun, food and music 12-2 p.m. at the Gaston County Museum of Art & History, 131 W. Main St., on the court square in Dallas, N.C.

Please see **WHAT'S** | 6B

Charlotte Squawks for a third decade of city parody

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte is getting roasted for the 21st year.

"Charlotte Squawks: Hold My Beer" is returning at Booth Playhouse, 130 N. Tryon St., through June 28. The Charlotte roast will feature satirical commentary, musical parodies and sketch comedy focusing on local and national events. Tickets start at \$39.76 at blumenthalarts.org.

Co-creators Mike Collins and Brian Kahn originally started "Charlotte Squawks" as a fundraiser on local television. The production was later picked up by Blumenthal Arts, where it grew into what it is today.

"We reprised it two more times as a fundraiser, but they found that we weren't very good at raising money because we (upset) all the sponsors," Kahn said. "But people seemed to enjoy it, so Blumenthal took us on," Kahn said.

Described as having a "Saturday Night Live" feel, the production has a mix of local talent, visuals and satirical commentary on the Charlotte experience.

"We've got so many great actors that have been with our show for a huge number of years," Kahn said. "In fact, we have a couple that have been with us since the very beginning. That allows a lot of collaborative creative workflow of ideas back and forth, which has been really a lot of fun."

As the city continues to grow and change, "Charlotte Squawks'" creative process evolves, sometimes leading up to opening night. The goal is to keep the

Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 6B



Charlotte actor Chloe Shade earned the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship from American College Theatre Festival as well as the Jane Alexander Emerging Artist Award.

Charlotte actor earns national theater award

UNC Charlotte grad Chloe Shade wins Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

UNC Charlotte alumna Chloe Shade has earned a national theater award.

The American College Theatre Festival awarded Shade the 2026 national Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship, the organization's highest honor. Shade, who was selected from regional winners who advance to the national competition, also earned the Jane Alexander Emerging Artist Award given to a national finalist based on performance and a required essay.

For Shade, who lives in Charlotte, earned her undergraduate degree at UNCC in 2022 and completed her master's in public administration in 2025, the recognition was validation of a talent she had not always prioritized. While she has spent years performing, directing and producing theater, the award encouraged her to take her abilities as an actor more seriously.

"I was like, OK, I didn't see myself here, but I guess I might have a special skill, and this is something that

I should pour into more," she said.

Shade's current projects include directing "Terminus" at Theatre Charlotte, developing the Apartment Series, a production staged in an apartment, and launching her own theater company, Me Show Co.

Although she recognizes her acting abilities, Shade's passion lies in the technical and business side of theater. She is focused on creating opportunities for artists behind the scenes and her goal is to help strengthen Charlotte's theater ecosystem through directing and arts administration, especially in BIPOC communities.

"I'm interested in pursuing art that challenges our communities, that forces us to step away. I think a lot of the stories that we tell on stage are educating white audiences about what Black culture is versus taking an opportunity to teach Black communities something new and having them face themselves and contemplate and create change. Theater is definitely a catalyst for change."

Shade's interest in the administrative side of theater comes from

the realization that post K-12 and college graduate resources are limited for people pursuing a career in the field.

"We're building these young artists but then when it's time for them to go out in the world and survive there's nowhere for them to do so," she said. "I was spoiled for a long time at UNC Charlotte with the insane resources that the school has, the beautiful theaters that the school has. When I graduated, I was stomping my feet and pouting because I was like I just don't have access to that anymore."

Shade said she sees herself contributing to the gaps in the local theater community and hopes to help Charlotte become a place where artists can survive without having to relocate for lack of resources.

"The longer that I'm here, and the more I'm getting to know the arts organizations around and the artists around Charlotte, it's kind of starting to feel like I owe Charlotte something, my home something," she said.

« MOVIE REVIEW »

'Backrooms' unleashes unabashed horror

By Dwight Brown
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Backrooms
3.5 stars

"Get the hell out of there!" If audiences don't say it, they're thinking it. That's the mark of a psych-horror thriller that's done its job. Scare the weak. Rattle the strong. Leave no one behind. This fright fest is a credit to the genre.

A weird doorway materializes in the basement of Cap'n Clark's Ottoman Empire, a tacky furniture store. "Don't go in," said no one. That's the setup in a very innovative script by Kane Parsons, a YouTube creator. A store owner named Clark (Chiwetel Ejiofor, "12 Years a Slave") takes the bait and enters a catacomb, a maze of pale-yellow hallways and rooms that don't make sense. Clark asks, "Hello. Is there anyone there?"

His shrink Dr. Mary Kline (Renate Reinsve, "Sentimental Value") thinks he's delusional, but then why wouldn't she—that's her job to sniff out issues. Mary says, "Let's go back to the night Barbara left you." Something eats at Clark's soul. Like he's being called to answer both the inner challenge and the outer one. His curiosity writes a check his ass can't cash. And so, the horror. He enters another world.

Parsons gamely uses his popular web series Backrooms as the jump-off. The series is set in an alternate dimension of interconnected liminal spaces—abandoned commercial offices lit by fluorescent lights, with tile ceilings, cubbyholes and filled with cryptic imagery and unsettling sounds. Screenwriter Will Soodik ("Westworld") aids Parsons in the big screen adaptation, and he knows his way around strange places.

They melt the series, which received 216 million views, into a one-hour, 50-minute tightly woven storyline that looks innocent at first. Like a guy down on his luck sees an opportunity to explore and gets caught in the wrong places. Wait. Just you wait. At some



Chiwetel Ejiofor in a scene from the psycho-horror thriller "Backrooms," an A24 production.

point the oddness turns into outright horror seasoned by skewed "Inception"-like dimensions.

Production designer Danny Vermette, art director Alan Derksen and set decorator Trevor Johnston should take a deep bow. The locations and images they create will creep out the most hardened horror fan. Not with gallons of blood, or torture chambers. But with slanted walls, oddly piled furniture and beings that look like they might have been human. At some point. Then they toss in a body-chomping dinner table scene that will leave audiences flabbergasted. There is plenty of space around the characters, yet the footage feels claustrophobic. The special effects aren't off the chart but are there when they need to be. While the sound design steadily amplifies the tension, layering droning effects, foreign voices and electronic textures into an atmosphere of mounting dread.

The setting is suburban America in the 1990s. Some footage has a camcorder look, and the scratchy, out-of-focus images are reminiscent of the

times and technology. If "The Blair Witch Project" comes to mind, you're on the right track, but this film is more artful. Better thought out. Not accidental. Cinematographer Jeremy Cox knows astutely when the point of view should be that of one of the characters or the creepy observers. Editor Greg Ng doesn't waste anyone's time. The few pieces of quietness and normalcy are the breaks audiences need from the relentless tension.

Parsons has had lots of practice building this kind of terror. Even at just 20 years old, Parsons excels at sustaining a feeling of constant surveillance and unease. Explanations for the weirdness you're seeing don't come until the end of the film. And even then, the explanation is so cryptic it leaves more questions unanswered than answered. Parsons seems to encourage the cast to act as normal as possible. That approach gives the film a cinema verité feel, although you know all of it is fake. Yet you're still drawn in.

Part of the engagement is the colossal

Please see **BACKROOMS** | 6B



GENESIS SALAZAR

Chris Brown and Usher headline a joint concert stop July 17-18 at Bank of America Stadium.

What's ahead: Usher and Chris Brown show

Continued from page 5B

The event is free and open to the public as the lead-in to Gaston County's 4th of July parade at 2 p.m. The celebration will include arts and crafts for children, a foam party play area, hot dogs and free Tony's ice cream, Karma cakes sale, a cooling down spray station, music by DJ Alfredo, and the Great American Apple Pie Bake-Off.

For information, visit www.gaston-countymuseum.org.

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: raymondand-browntour.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.

Fetty Wap

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.

'Backrooms' unleashes all-out, full-tilt horror

Continued from page 5B

work of Ejiqfor, who is British but has an American accent that's so right. His Clark is dazed, burdened by the guilt of his past and failed marriage. He's trying to figure out his present and future. That's an emotional hook audiences can appreciate. Reinsve as Mary seems to have all the poise a therapist should have on the outside, yet she has her own demons.

Another hook that pulls viewers in. Lukita Maxwell as Kat, an employee, and Finn Bennett as Bobby, the videographer, are nice diversions. Those who play the creepy monsters do so without hysterics. They just bite into whoever deserves it.

Expect horror fans of all ages to appreciate this scary movie and to inter-

nalize images they won't forget. Don't be fooled by the slow, paced beginning. Your heartbeat will quicken in due time. Your blood pressure will rise. Not enough to call the EMS. Just enough to have them on speed dial.

On the TV show "The Price is Right," you get to pick between the box or the door. Take the box, dude. If your crazy ass takes the door and the portal to the other world, that's on you. Because audiences will be screaming at you to turn around and "Get the hell out of there!" Walk away from the threshold. Walk away.

"Backrooms" takes the time to seduce the audience, then pulls the rug from under them. Watch out.

Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.



TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

Earth, Wind & Fire is the subject of the documentary "Earth, Wind & Fire (To Be Celestial vs. That's The Way of the World)."

Earth, Wind & Fire documentary shines spotlight on music royalty

By Dwight Brown

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Earth, Wind & Fire (To Be Celestial vs. That's The Way of the World)

3 stars

"When you wish upon a star, your dreams will take you very far, yeah." The lyrics from Earth, Wind & Fire's Grammy-winning song "Shining Star" couldn't be more appropriate for the band, this joyous documentary or the festival that hosts it.

As the Tribeca Film Festival marks its 25th anniversary, there are a lot of reasons to celebrate good times. And who could be a better choice to ignite the festivities and a nice-feeling aura than the world's most happy-go-lucky house band? Oscar-winning music documentarian Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson ("Summer of Soul...") judiciously brings the backstory of the 57-year-old R&B, funk, soul, jazz fusion, pop and Afro-pop group into the spotlight.

Yes, Questlove has assembled a tight tech crew. Editors Matt Cascella, Jessica Miller, Andrew Morrow and Timothy Ziegler piece together concert footage, old interviews, new ones and testimonials that lift the veil. What went on backstage behind the fancy pyrotechnic shows? Who was zooming who? The well-paced film examines bandleader Maurice White's creativity and his domineering leadership style while following the changing cast of band members whose numbers grew and shrank over time. With his unobtrusive camerawork, cinematographer Emily Topper's lens never intrudes but is placed where it needs to be.

Some viewers will embrace the bright shiny superstars who give their personal opinions of White, the band and the group's significance as a cultural phenomenon. After all, they were and are artists who brought all kinds of people together to hear their music and see their performances—all around the world. Getting Barack Obama and Michelle Obama's opinions is a coup.

Adding thoughts by Stevie Wonder, whose song "I Wish" was influenced by EW&F's "Shining Star," provides a link between greats. Hearing H.E.R., Flea, Booker T. and Lionel Richie's thoughts on the group's significance is enlightening too. The testimonials to the band's originality, musical genius, Afrocentric perspective and staying power are impressive. Albeit pretty standard for music docs.

None of the aforementioned folks need to do a hard sell. The fun music and electric performances do that. As the footage reminds all, it's hard to not want to turn bedroom lights down low when you hear "After the Love Has Gone." Everyone jumps out of their seats whenever "September" cranks up. And to this day, anyone who hears the harmony on "Boogie Wonderland" is filled with unbridled joy.

Solid documentaries delve into the good and the bad. This one does that fairly well. It recollects the group founder's beginnings and ingenuity and also his reckless behavior, gallivanting and superstar complex. Few may remember or know that White was a

drummer for the Grammy-winning Ramsey Lewis Trio. From 1966-70 White was the percussionist, Cleveland Eaton was on bass and Lewis on piano in one of the band's many incarnations. That background solidified White's musicianship, and glimpses of those days reveal that White was surprisingly bashful and intimidated at the idea of standing in front of a mic. What a metamorphosis! From shy guy to brassy, bossy lead singer, futuristic thinker, ethereal soul man, space-age artist and the ultimate showman.

Along the way band members like singer Philip Bailey, younger brother and bassist Verdine White and drummer-turned-singer Ralph Johnson fill in the missing details. The spaces between Grammy wins, worldwide touring, recording and mercurial evolution.

Viewers learn the hard, cold facts of artists' lives in a business that didn't always treat them fairly. Or pay them well. Broke? Sometimes. Deep in debt? Yes! The band members tell all, and not all of it flatters White or his management skills. Or his husbanding or fathering. It's the kind of true-story depth you'd read in a Rolling Stone article. But it's here on film. Sobering, illuminating—yet fun. White: "I wanted to reach a universal audience." Jimmy Jam: "You're thinking they're coming from Africa or outer space."

Questlove relies heavily on the familiar music-documentary formula of archival footage, celebrity commentary and retrospective interviews. The approach works but rarely surprises. That said, he exhibits a steady hand, pulls together the right artists, footage and moments. Maybe a bit less of the Obamas, who had EW&F perform at their inauguration party, and a bit more from friends and musicians more integral to the group might give this doc more cred and less fluff.

For example, legendary clothing designer Bill Whitten, who gave the group its iconic space-age costume look, is barely a footnote. Whitten is deceased, but his influence was major and clothes further established their Afrofuturistic sensibilities. He, like others, deserved more time. Also, wouldn't it be nice if the name of the film was just "Earth, Wind & Fire," and didn't include the unnecessary, tongue-tying hard-to-comprehend subtitle about celestial stuff that just seems irrelevant in a movie title?

This doc treads much of the same territory as Questlove's Sly Stone bio/doc "Sly Lives! (aka the Burden of Black Genius)." Similar recollections of pioneering, funk/soul bands with great crossover appeal. That's an observation, one that is neither pro nor con. Just true. Questlove has become "the" Black music archivist. That's a blessing and a great responsibility. He's the chosen one. This is one more precious doc in his ever-expanding library.

In the end, nostalgia and a celebratory feel will envelop all who see and listen. Especially baby boomers and Gen Xers who can mark milestones in their lives by EW&F hits. A "Shining star comes into view and shines its watchful light on you, yeah." It also shines on the 25th Tribeca Film Festival.



BLUMENTHAL ARTS

Blumenthal Arts presents "Charlotte Squawks: Hold My Beer," a roast of the Queen City with satire, sketches and musical parody, through June 28 at Booth Playhouse.

Charlotte Squawks for a third decade of Queen City parody

Continued from page 5B

material fresh and relevant.

"We start rehearsing the beginning of April," Kahn said. "The actors start to learn the lines. There's a lot of changes. It's a very fluid show. Who knows what's going to happen, whether we're going to have an interim mayor by the middle of the show."

The program has never been afraid to push boundaries. Kahn said that although the show is packed with satire, the goal is to get people to think.

"With politics, obviously things have gotten more tense and contentious nationally," he said. "But we don't pull

punches and I think there may be people that don't love some of the stuff we do or say and they can go see 'Mamma Mia!' I do think there is a place for creating a conversation around a topic or an issue."

The show brings together audiences to poke fun at the city while giving Charlotteans an opportunity to bond over shared experiences, from the fear of Exit 3A to reopening Club West.

"It's more of an experience that sort of creates bonds between audience members and friends that make an annual tradition, and I think that's really cool," Kahn said.

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- S. Daley, Florida

"These foods remind me of my mom's family traditions and growing up. It's a way to feel close to my heritage."
- Christina S., Georgia

"Traditions can live on for many generations. It's how we connect back to those who had us in mind when they established the traditions."
- Erica, Georgia

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