

Baby formula role in death often end with manufacturer

David Hilzenrath and Holly K. Hacker

KFF HEALTH NEWS

In September 2016, a distraught mother sent infant formula maker Mead Johnson a message: "REMOVE ME FROM YOUR LIST!!!! DO NOT EMAIL OR MAIL ME ANY MORE!"

"It is because of your animal based pre-term artificial baby food crap that you peddle to hospital NICU's that my son is dead from NEC."

The mother was referring to neonatal intensive care units and necrotizing enterocolitis, an often fatal condition in which intestinal tissue can die and allow infection to spread through the body of an infant born prematurely.

In an internal memo, Mead Johnson cited its "extensive quality and safety checks" and concluded there was "not a reasonable possibility" that the formula caused the baby's death. "No further investigation is needed. This file can be closed," the memo said.

And with that decision, the company narrowed the chance that the mother's anguish could draw attention to any danger the formula might pose to other infants.

The mother's email and the company's memo assessing it were used as evidence in the court cases *Watson v. Mead Johnson* and *Whitfield v. St. Louis Children's Hospital*, et al.

When doctors, hospitals, parents, or others alert manufacturers that babies got sick or died while receiving infant formula, what happens next is left largely to manufacturers such as Abbott Laboratories and Mead Johnson Nutrition, giants of the industry.

Mead Johnson's handling of the mother's email showed how that can play out.

Under federal rules, if a complaint about an infant formula — such as a report of an adverse event — shows a possible health hazard, the company must investigate.

But it doesn't always have to inform the government agency that oversees the safety of infant formula.

A company must complete an investigation and notify the Food and Drug Administration within 15 days only if it finds "a reasonable possibility of a causal relationship between the consumption of an infant formula and an infant's death."

If that happened even once over more than a quarter century, the FDA could find no record of it,

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New US disease threats after federal health program cuts

By Stephanie Armour

KFF HEALTH NEWS

As beachgoers flock to water, danger could be lurking in some areas.

Researchers this spring discovered flesh-eating bacteria in water in several coastal locations across New York's Long Island, and town officials in the Hamptons vacation destination posted an alert about the findings. Eight people in Florida have been infected this year, and Mississippi health officials in June urged people to take precautions.

About 1 in 5 people infected by the bacteria die, sometimes within a day or two of becoming ill, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet. The bacteria, *Vibrio vulnificus*, can enter open wounds and cause tissue death and systemic sepsis.

"Many people with *Vibrio vulnificus* infection can get seriously ill and need intensive care or limb amputation," the CDC says.

The risk of such public threats is mounting because climate change is expanding the territory of certain pathogens, but researchers say there's another concern. The Trump administration has cut investments in programs and agencies that prevent, track, and respond to health hazards the federal government is now confronting.

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« RIDES »

Subaru-Toyota collaboration scores again with the sport electric Trailseeker

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Subaru and Toyota have a joint agreement that continues to produce new vehicles.

The revamped BZ has spawned the frisky Uncharted, a compact all-electric SEV. Now the larger BZ Woodland has produced the midsize Trailseeker, an SEV that's more suited for off-roading.

The Trailseeker will probably do very well in the wild. It has generous ground clearance, symmetrical all-wheel drive and a lot of horsepower. It has 8.5 inches of ground clearance and an X-drive mode to take you through deep snow, mud and sand.

I, of course, will take Subaru's word on that because I don't do a lot of traveling through the wilderness, so I'm good. I can tell you that as an everyday driver the Trailseeker is way more than capable.

The Trailseeker, brand new for 2026, has two electric motors that combine for 375 horsepower and about 396 pounds - feet of torque. That's healthy enough to get the vehicle to 60 miles per hour in less than 4.3 seconds. It's able to tow 3,500 pounds if need be and has a range between 274-281 lies per charge. There is a generous 31.3 cubic feet of space once the rear seats are folded. It can recharge on

Tesla's Super Charging network (NACS) from 10% to 80% in 28 minutes. An adapter is provided to charge at non-Tesla chargers and also a home charging cord.

The Trailseeker accelerates briskly. Plant your foot and you are catapulted onto the freeway. Passing is an afterthought because torque and horsepower are instant. The symmetrical all-wheel drive makes the car feel planted if you get aggressive. Body roll feels well under control while cornering and the vehicle stays straight and true while motoring down the open highway.

The ride is surprisingly comfortable for an all-

wheel drive vehicle. Not a lot of bumps and thumps are transmitted into the cabin. There is no engine noise so the only sounds you hear and some tire hum and wind noise which is basically muted. You don't have to play the superb Harmon Kardon audio system at high volumes to enjoy the excellent clarity.

The Trailseeker's interior is similar to the BZ Woodland save for the various Subaru touches that abound. The cabin is spacious - large enough for five adults in comfort. The front seats of my Touring addition were covered in optional leather, ventilated and heated. The driver's seat was power adjustable



SUBARU

The new Subaru Trailseeker is a midsize sport utility vehicle with generous horsepower and interior space.

and had memory settings. The passenger seat was also power operated. Both were comfortable with enough padding and bolstering to hold you in

place. There is a bounty of tech that's standard included nearly every driver's aid including Subaru's Eyesight. Please see **SUBARU** | 48



ADOBE STOCK

Extreme temperatures put people with heart and cardiovascular disease at risk for life-threatening illness, especially in hot weather.

Heart health and heat: How hot is too much?

As temperature rises, it's more than uncomfortable, it's dangerous

By Cameron Williams

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As temperatures rise, so does the risk of those heat-related ailments.

Extreme heat is dangerous for many reasons, especially for people living with heart disease who need to be particularly careful during the summer. Black people face a disproportionately higher burden of cardiovascular disease compared to white their white peers - they are 30% more likely to die from heart disease and significantly more prone to hypertension and strokes. Extreme heat increases those chances.

Dr. Sai Vanam, a cardiologist with Novant Health, says it is common for the heart to work harder in hotter weather.

"As temperatures rise, it puts

more stress on the heart, specifically," Vanam said. "I see a lot of patients. Dehydration is probably one of the most common reasons for me seeing a patient, to be honest, and we should ... drink about 2 liters of water, but in the summer I think we should aim for a higher goal, so probably around 2.5 to 3."

Dehydration can also affect those with pre-existing heart conditions at a more severe level.

"If you have pre-existing cardiac conditions you should aim to increase your water intake, because in the summer it is natural to sweat more, but in doing so you are losing so much water out of your body that dehydration becomes likely. And dehydration is a big stress on the heart. When you are dehydrated, you get less blood to the rest of your organs because

the heart slows down when you're dehydrated."

Vanam cited the disproportionate number of African Americans affected by cardiovascular disease for understanding the effect of heat-related illness.

"Heart conditions in general are more prevalent in African Americans," he said, "things like coronary artery disease, heart failure. If you look at demographics, African Americans tend to be more prone to these conditions. So, if you have pre-existing heart conditions, such as the ones I mentioned, it puts you at greater risk when, as it gets hotter, dehydration poses a higher risk, especially when you have pre-existing heart conditions."

Vanam also adds older people are at higher risk of heat-related

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« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Selma Burke, sculptor of FDR dime

NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MUSEUM

Selma Burke discovered her love for sculpture as a child and followed her passion to the Harlem Renaissance in New York, Parisian art studios, and even the White House.

The artist behind President Franklin Roosevelt's image on the dime, she was a dedicated art teacher and one of the most notable sculptors of the 20th century.

Burke, born on December 31, 1900, in Mooresville, was the seventh of Mary Jackson and Neal Burke's 10 children. Her father was a Methodist minister who also worked on the railroads and cruise ships. Burke's interest in art began at an early age, sculpting small objects and animals with white clay from a nearby riverbed. "One day, I was mixing the clay and I saw the imprint of my hands," she told the New York Post in 1945. "I

found that I could make something... something that I alone had created."

Burke's father encouraged her artistic pursuits. She often used the objects he brought back from his ocean travels as the models for her sculptures. Her interest in African art began with a collection of African artifacts the family inherited from Burke's uncles who had done missionary work abroad. Burke's mother, on the other hand, encouraged her to follow the more practical career path of nursing. Burke graduated Slater Industrial and Slater Normal School (later Winston-Salem State University) in 1922. She went on to Saint Agnes Training School for Nurses in Raleigh, where she graduated as a registered nurse in 1924. After that, she completed further nursing training in Philadelphia.

Burke moved to New



SELMA BURKE

Selma Burke, who was born in Mooresville, with a bust of Booker T. Washington.

York City in the late 1920s where she worked as the private nurse for Amelia Waring, an heiress to the

Otis Elevator empire. Waring helped Burke gain exposure to the arts and

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U.S. DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Growing health challenges from flesh-eating bacteria to an invasion of screwworm will test federal agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services that have undergone program cut-backs imposed by the Trump administration

New US disease threats after federal health program cuts

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Consider the reemergence of screwworm, which can infest and kill livestock, in the U.S. in June. The U.S. Department of Agriculture lost 18% of its workforce in the first six months of 2025, according to a report from the USDA's Office of Inspector General, and the agency's winnowed-down inspection service is helping lead the response to the parasite.

Or malaria. A freeze on foreign aid disrupted international malaria prevention efforts, and new federal guidance in May warned that the U.S. is vulnerable to the reintroduction of the infectious disease.

And when it comes to Vibrio, the Trump administration began removing hundreds of deep-sea instruments that monitor ocean waters and yield data that helps predict conditions that can allow the bacteria to flourish. Researchers have used the data to study Vibrio, which can multiply rapidly when water temperatures and salinity increase.

"It is important to track coastal temperatures, and that will relate to the distributions of Vibrio," said Christopher Gobler, a professor in the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at New York's Stony Brook University, though he added that there are also other sources of data for researchers.

The Trump administration reversed its plan to dismantle the ocean monitoring system following bipartisan opposition to the effort in Congress.

But it's still curtailing Vibrio surveillance. The life-threatening species that's found in water can also sicken or kill people who eat contaminated seafood, such as raw oysters infected with the bacteria. And infections from Vibrio vulnificus linked to consuming raw or undercooked shellfish have been increasing as the presence of other pathogens in food decrease.

Since 1995, 10 states have participated in a federal program called the Foodborne Disease Active Disease Surveillance Network, or FoodNet. The program, with the CDC, monitors and track cases of foodborne illness caused by eight specific pathogens, including Vibrio. But last year the Trump administration stopped requiring those states to report on all but two pathogens, which means states no longer must report cases to the CDC.

Federal officials deny the moves are putting Americans at risk, saying the CDC continues to monitor these pathogens through other national surveillance systems to ensure ongoing visibility into disease trends and outbreaks.

Meanwhile, some former health leaders say the ramifications of sweeping cuts to health agencies and global prevention programs are becoming more apparent, undermining U.S. response efforts and initiatives that aim to safeguard the country from diseases.

"We are letting down defenses that were necessary to protect against microbial threats," said Tom Frieden, a former CDC director who is now president and chief executive of Resolve to Save Lives, which works to stop preventable disease. "Instead of protecting, we're doing the opposite."

Do limited resources mean higher risks?

The administration defends its actions, including massive layoffs at government health agencies, as necessary to eliminate wasteful spending.

The Department of Health and Human Services "is advancing the most significant public health reforms in a generation focused on prevention, accountability, scientific transparency, and better health outcomes," agency spokesperson Emily Hilliard said in an email. "The Department is putting American families at the center of public health decision-making."

Evidence suggests health risks are rising even as the Trump administration pulls back on resources for research, detection, and response.

Early in his administration, President Donald Trump opted to freeze and review work on global health programs. Trump's cost-reduction effort, led by billionaire Elon Musk, also dismantled the U.S. Agency for International Development.

As a result, work was disrupted on the President's Malaria Initiative, a George W. Bush-era program aimed at combating malaria in hard-hit countries that is credited with saving more than 11 million lives. USAID had invested more than \$9 billion in the program since 2005.

In addition, 80% of USAID grants for global malaria programs were targeted for termination, according to KFF, an independent research group that includes KFF Health News. The report didn't include data on the total value of those specific malaria grants.

And the spending freeze halted research for more effective malaria vaccines. The administration dissolved the CDC's Division of Parasitic Diseases and

Malaria, shuffling staffers to other divisions and interrupting work on the disease. HHS didn't respond to an email asking how many staff members had been moved.

The life-threatening infectious disease spread by mosquitos was eradicated from the U.S. in 1951. But the CDC's updated guidance on investigating domestic cases warned in May that "the country remains susceptible to malaria reintroduction."

An outbreak in 2023 resulted in 10 people in Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, and Texas becoming infected locally, and mosquitoes capable of transmitting malaria are found throughout most of the country.

"The majority of U.S. residents lack protective immunity against malaria, rendering persons susceptible to severe illness and death if infected," the CDC said in the May report.

HHS declined to comment on any of the specific cuts but said the CDC works with domestic and international partners to reduce the burden of malaria and prevent its reestablishment in the U.S.

It's not just cuts to funding that are raising health risks, say researchers and former health officials. Significant staffing cuts mean there are fewer people working on preventing or tracking diseases, they say.

"Yes, the programs have been cut in terms of reduction in staff, but I would say, equally important, you have reductions in expertise," said Jeanne Marrazzo, CEO of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. "It's irreplaceable."

Screwworm is a species of parasitic blowfly producing larvae that can enter open wounds and devour tissue, infecting people and animals. Like malaria, it has long been eliminated in the U.S., and disease monitoring efforts have been key to keeping it out.

The cuts at USAID stripped more than \$300 million from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, which focuses on global food security and the monitoring of zoonotic diseases such as screwworm.

In the wake of the administration's cost-cutting initiatives, more than 20,000 employees are gone from the USDA, which develops and implements agriculture policy and provides resources to producers of livestock vulnerable to the parasite.

On June 3, the first new case of screwworm in the U.S. was confirmed, and there have now been more than a dozen animals infected with parasite. An expanding outbreak could devastate the cattle industry.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has denied that any staffing cuts during the Trump administration have led to screwworm's return. Instead, she has blamed the Biden administration, saying it didn't do enough to prevent reintroduction into the U.S. Rollins said on X that "uncontrolled illegal migration" under the previous Biden administration was partly to blame, providing no evidence.

The USDA did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Ashish Jha, a doctor who served as the White House covid response coordinator during the Biden administration, said there's no truth to the claim that immigrants lacking legal status have brought screwworm into the U.S.

Investments in tracking and combating diseases have suffered, he said, because HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is prioritizing the prevention of chronic disease at the expense of efforts to curtail infectious disease.

"Who doesn't want a healthier country? It sounds great, but it's kind of a bait and switch," Jha said. "They're doing the opposite. They're letting down our defenses that are necessary to protect us against microbial threats."

HHS' Hilliard disagreed, saying Kennedy's actions are making the agency more effective.

"Secretary Kennedy is delivering that reform by streamlining operations, reducing redundancies, and returning HHS to pre-pandemic staffing levels," she said. "At the same time, he is dismantling policies and incentives that contributed to a nationwide chronic disease epidemic."

Surveillance gaps

Jha pointed to Trump's decision to withdraw the U.S. from the World Health Organization, which coordinates global responses to public health issues and crises, and to the dismantling of USAID.

The pullback has had implications for the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, aid workers say.

Without the same amount of funding from USAID, the International Rescue Committee, which partners to deliver front-line health, surveillance, and outbreak preparedness activities in Congo, curtailed its programs.

Heart health and heat: How hot is too hot?

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illness.

"The older you get, the more your skin tends to be a little bit thinner," he said. "If you are out in the sun, you have a tendency to get dehydrated and put more stress on the heart. I think that is one population that needs to be careful and especially anyone in the geriatric community with a pre-existing heart condition."

While remaining indoors in air conditioning is preferable, other factors play a role in heat exposure, including

jobs that require outdoors work.

"Socioeconomic factors play a big role in this, but staying out of the heat at all costs for extended periods of time is definitely my recommendation," Vanam said. "If you have an A/C unit, keeping the house cool is important. Also, putting cold water on yourself too can help decrease the body's temperature. Lastly, when you're out in the sun it affects the skin directly too, so sunscreen is important to prevent things like skin cancer as well."

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HORIZON DEVELOPMENT PROPERTIES

The Trella affordable housing initiative is part of a collaboration between Horizon Development Properties, Urban Atlantic and JPMorganChase.

Blueprint to breakthrough: Tackling affordable housing in Charlotte

Horizon Development Properties, Urban Atlantic and JPMorganChase help neighborhoods and residents thrive.

JPMORGANCHASE

Finding an affordable place to live continues to be a challenge for many as widespread housing shortages persist across the U.S.

Rising home prices and high interest rates have made homeownership inaccessible for a large portion of the population. Meanwhile, as rental demand increases, the number of renters facing affordability challenges is also on the rise.

The State of the Nation's Housing 2025 by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies reveals that cost burdens for renters reached another record high in 2023. Similarly, the JPMorganChase Institute reports that renter affordability is declining and forcing people to devote more of their take-home pay to housing costs. There is a growing need for affordable housing across the U.S. and that rings true here in Charlotte.

To close that gap, it's essential that all Charlotte residents share in its growth with housing options that accommodate a range of needs and budgets. For Horizon Development Properties Inc. and Urban Atlantic this meant delivering a concrete solution to the local community, resulting in housing for individuals and families who otherwise might not have been able to live in the area.

Creating room in Charlotte

In fast-growing Charlotte, Trella Uptown offers a practical way for more residents to share in the city's momentum—keeping housing within reach while preserving the benefits of living near jobs, services and community life. Developed by a joint venture between Horizon Development Properties and Urban Atlantic and constructed with support from JPMorganChase, Trella Uptown includes 353 total homes, with 106 affordable apartments integrated into the community so residents can access the same finishes and shared spaces as everyone else.

A home is more than four walls when it also comes with places to recharge, learn and connect. The property includes a fitness center, maker space, podcast studio, rooftop areas with pickleball courts, outdoor spaces and even a pet spa. By blending affordability with high-quality amenities, Trella Uptown helps strengthen neighborhood continuity, supporting residents who want to remain close to work, school and family while contributing to Charlotte's long-term economic resilience.

Brett Macleod is a community development banker at J.P. Morgan, where he helps structure and deliver financing that supports affordable housing and community revitalization efforts. He is particularly focused on community

development finance and projects that expand housing access and neighborhood stability across the Carolinas and Mid-Atlantic region.

"We're proud of the far-reaching impact this project will have. It reflects Horizon Development Property Inc.'s mission to uplift our communities and expands the supply of high quality, affordable homes," said Brett Macleod, Community Development Banking, J.P. Morgan. "Every additional housing unit matters—and increasing the number that are affordable is critical."

"This is what it looks like when vision turns into action. At Horizon Development Properties Inc., we believe affordable housing should not mean compromising on quality, location, or opportunity. Trella Uptown reflects our commitment to creating communities where residents of all incomes can live, work and play while in arguably one of the most sought-after ZIP codes, and share in Charlotte's growth," said Fulton Meachem, president and CEO of Horizon Development Properties, Inc. "Through strong partnerships, we are not just building housing, we are building pathways to stability and long-term economic mobility for the families we serve."

"Trella Uptown represents the kind of collaborative, community-focused development we strive for—one that brings together thoughtful design, inclusive housing, and strong local partnerships to create lasting value for both residents of Uptown and the broader Charlotte community," said Brant Snyder, chief executive officer of Urban Atlantic.

A broader commitment to Charlotte's future

While Trella Uptown is foundational, the vibrancy of a community depends on much more. In Charlotte, the firm provides banking services to more than 500,000 customers and works across sectors to expand economic opportunity. Over the last five years, JPMorganChase has invested more than \$5 million in local nonprofit organizations, supported 35,000 small business clients and delivered financial health education to thousands of residents to broaden access to banking, financial health resources, homeownership and other wealth building tools.

"As we work with local stakeholders to expand housing options, JPMorganChase's goal is to create inclusive economic opportunity for all," said Ryan McGauley, chair of the Carolinas Market Leadership Team at JPMorganChase. "When our communities thrive, we all thrive."

Learn more about affordable housing and community development at jpmorgan.com/commercial-real-estate.

The Charlotte Post

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Baby formula role in death often end with makers

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according to information obtained through public records requests.

'Never reported'
Under the Freedom of Information Act, KFF Health News asked the FDA for all notifications that manufacturers of infant formula sent the agency per the regulatory requirement since Jan. 1, 2020. The agency's Human Foods Program "did not receive any," Kimberly Jones, a government information specialist at the FDA, responded in March.

KFF Health News then asked the FDA to go back decades further — to Jan. 1, 2000. "After a diligent search of our files, we did not locate any responsive records," Jones wrote on May 5.

The FDA's search results were consistent with court testimony.

John Wallingford, a paid expert witness for Abbott, testified in a Missouri court in October 2024 that Abbott had never reported a single death under any regulation for preterm infant formula.

Wallingford clarified that he was not referring to adverse events in clinical trials, which are studies used for research and development and are subject to different procedures. Abbott informed the FDA about adverse events that occurred during a clinical trial, Wallingford testified.

Christina Valentine testified in a 2024 deposition that she never sent the FDA a report of death from NEC during her seven years as Mead Johnson's medical director for North America. In the deposition, used in the Whitfield case, she said she never concluded there was a reasonable possibility that an infant's death from NEC might have been related to a Mead Johnson product.

As medical director for North America, she was responsible for signing off

on those determinations, she testified in the Watson trial.

In the deposition, Valentine said she wasn't sure whether anyone else at the company sent a death report to the FDA.

In late May and mid-June, Mead Johnson spokesperson Jen O'Neill added to the picture.

"Where there is a physician report that includes an opinion that one of our products caused NEC in a preterm infant, we have treated that as a 'reasonable possibility of a causal relationship,' and we submitted an adverse event report to the FDA," she wrote.

"These physician reports were generally made by plaintiffs' paid experts, with which we disagree," she wrote.

O'Neill left unclear whether events Mead Johnson reported to the FDA were raised in lawsuits and, if so, whether the company reported them to the FDA before they surfaced in litigation.

Asked repeatedly when Mead Johnson filed the reports, O'Neill didn't say.

It's unclear why the FDA found no record of them.

Nor would O'Neill say whether the company submitted one related to the distraught mother's September 2016 complaint.

That mother's name wasn't publicly disclosed in the court record containing her complaint.

"[P]rior to the current litigation, we received very few reports relating to our products and NEC and even fewer for which our investigation uncovered any evidence supporting a reasonable possibility of a causal relationship," O'Neill wrote.

Industry personnel have reacted to some complaints with circular reasoning, as shown by court records from the Watson, Whitfield, and Gill v. Abbott Laboratories cases.

Company personnel didn't think their products caused harm, and they didn't view new cases as evidence of harm, records show.

'Reprehensible' conduct
About 2,300 newborns died of necrotizing enterocolitis in the United States from 2017 through 2023, the equivalent of almost one per day, according to a KFF Health News analysis of a government data set for those years. The database doesn't attempt to explain what caused those babies to develop NEC, and it doesn't count babies who survived NEC.

A wave of lawsuits has alleged that infant formula made by Abbott or Mead Johnson harmed or killed preterm babies by causing or contributing to cases of NEC. As of late January, 1,760 NEC lawsuits were pending against Abbott, company spokesperson Scott Stoffel said, clarifying a disclosure in a regulatory filing.

This article is based largely on transcripts, deposition videos, and exhibits from three court cases that went to trial in 2024. The lawsuits were filed by parents of babies who suffered or died from NEC.

Abbott and Mead Johnson have denied fault. They, along with various medical authorities including federal regulatory agencies and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have said that, when nutritional needs can't be met with human milk, formula is vital.

One of the cases, Watson v. Mead Johnson, led to a \$60 million judgment against Mead Johnson. Another, Gill v. Abbott, led to a \$495 million judgment against Abbott. The third, Whitfield v. St. Louis Children's Hospital, et al., led to a jury verdict in favor of Abbott and Mead Johnson, but the judge found errors and misconduct on the part of defense counsel,

faulted his own performance, and ruled the plaintiff was entitled to a new trial.

The judge's ruling in the Whitfield case is on appeal. On May 5, a Missouri appeals court upheld the \$495 million judgment against Abbott, saying "we find Abbott's conduct significantly reprehensible."

"Throughout the trial, the jury heard evidence that Abbott knew its formula posed significant risks to preterm infants weighing under 1500g yet made little effort to mitigate that risk," the court wrote.

On June 12, an Illinois appeals court reversed the \$60 million judgment against Mead Johnson and sent the case back for a new trial. The trial court risked prejudicing the jury by improperly admitting evidence about Mead Johnson's finances, including its revenues, profits, and executive compensation, the appeals court said.

In addition, the trial judge gave the jury erroneous instructions, the appeals court ruled. Any negligence on Mead Johnson's part hinged on a failure to warn, and the company's duty was not to warn the mother in that case of any danger, as she had claimed, but rather to warn doctors, the appeals court ruled.

In April, after another trial, a jury in Chicago ordered Abbott to pay four plaintiffs a total of \$70 million. Abbott is contesting that verdict and the Missouri appeals court's decision.

In at least four cases, judges have granted summary judgment in favor of Abbott — ruling for the company before the lawsuits reached trial.

'Branding NICU Babies'
Abbott makes Similac products, and Mead Johnson makes the Enfamil line.

The two companies have

vied to place their products in neonatal intensive care units, which serve as entry points to hospital contracts and the retail market, KFF Health News reported in a March article based largely on records from court cases.

For instance, a Mead Johnson slide deck for a 2020 national sales meeting — later used in the Whitfield trial — outlined a plan for "Branding NICU Babies."

The litigation opened a wider window into the business and regulation of infant formula, including adverse event reports.

"Abbott complies with all applicable FDA regulations on adverse event reporting, including by keeping detailed records of every single complaint/adverse event report Abbott receives and investigating NEC complaints," Stoffel said in November. "FDA routinely conducts audits that include Abbott's adverse event investigations and reporting as part of its active regulation of infant nutrition."

Mead Johnson's O'Neill echoed that.

"Our adverse event reporting complies with all applicable regulatory requirements," O'Neill said in a November statement to KFF Health News. "The FDA audits Mead Johnson on an annual basis and has never identified any issue about our approach to reporting."

The reports the company filed with the FDA were submitted through the agency's regional office in Detroit, she said.

It's unclear whether the FDA looked in Detroit.

FDA rules require manufacturers to send written confirmations to a central office in the Washington area that oversees infant formula and other foods.

Asked if the company sent them to that office, O'Neill did not answer.

KFF Health News re-

quested an interview with Mead Johnson to clarify its statements about how it handled adverse event reports. The company did not grant one.

Plaintiffs have used internal documents from the companies to allege that, in house, people have long recognized a correlation between NEC and the use of preterm formulas made from cow's milk.

For example, in a 2010 research proposal shown in a deposition used in the Gill case, Abbott scientists wrote that NEC "is the most severe GI complication of prematurity and the use of bovine milk-based fortifiers and formulas are believed to be the primary risk factor."

A Mead Johnson document used in the Whitfield lawsuit cited "80% necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) risk reduction when human milk is used in place of formula."

Abbott has argued that correlation does not equal causation.

"Numerous studies and NEC authorities have made clear that preterm infant formula does not cause NEC; it's the absence of human milk that increases NEC risk rather than anything harmful in formula," Abbott spokesperson Stoffel said.

The FDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institutes of Health weighed in with a joint statement in October 2024, saying, "There is no conclusive evidence that preterm infant formula causes NEC" and "there is strong evidence that human milk is protective against NEC."

Mead Johnson's O'Neill said the scientific consensus is that there is no established causal link between the use of specialized preterm hospital nutrition products and NEC.

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Selma Burke, sculptor of Franklin Roosevelt dime

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culture scenes in New York. Burke began socializing with the artists and writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

She studied art at Sarah Lawrence College, modeling to pay for her classes. Burke twice traveled to Europe to hone her technique, where she studied under artists such as Henri Matisse and Aristide Maillo in Paris. But with the threat of Nazism rising in Europe, Burke returned to the United States. She taught art to youth in New York City through the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project and the Harlem Community Arts Center, where influential sculptor Augusta Savage was her mentor. In 1940, Burke opened the Selma Burke School of Sculpture.

Following the entry of the United States into World War II, Burke enlisted in the Navy, becoming one of the first Black women to sign up. Her assignment was to drive a truck at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. She injured her back on the job and while recuperating, she won a nationwide contest for the commission of a bronze relief portrait of President Franklin Roosevelt. Burke felt that photographs of Roosevelt were inadequate for her needs and requested a sitting with him. Roosevelt agreed and Burke sketched Roosevelt over two days in February 1944.

Roosevelt passed away in April 1945. His successor, President Harry S. Truman, unveiled Burke's relief portrait at the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washing-

ton, D.C. on Sept. 24, 1945. Though she endorsed it, Eleanor Roosevelt reportedly did not like the portrait at first, as it depicted her husband as a younger man. Burke responded that she intended the image to represent Roosevelt as Americans had long known him, not as he appeared in his final years. In addition to the bronze portrait, Burke's profile of Roosevelt is widely acknowledged as the basis for his image on the U.S. dime. The dime's image is officially attributed to U.S. Mint Chief Engraver John Sinnock, but many, including Burke, claim Sinnock borrowed from Burke's depiction.

Burke described herself as "a people's sculptor" and intended for her art to speak to wide audiences, including those who lacked an arts education. Her work often focused on the human body and she used brass, bronze, alabaster, and limestone, among other materials. Her sculptures included figures and busts of prominent African Americans such as John Brown, Duke Ellington, Mary McLeod Bethune, and A. Philip Randolph. Some of her well-known pieces include "Torso" (1937), "Temptation" (1938), "(Untitled) Woman and Child" (1950), and "Together" (1975).

Burke married architect Herman Kobbe in 1949 and the two moved to an artists' colony in New Hope, Pennsylvania. Kobbe passed away in 1955, but Burke remained in Pennsylvania for the rest of her life. Burke continued to emphasize arts education,

running the Selma Burke Art Center in Pittsburgh from 1968-1981. She taught children about the vibrancy of sculpture and encouraged them to touch works of art in order to fully understand them. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter awarded Burke with a Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement award. Burke received honorary doctorates from Livingston College in 1970 and Spelman College in 1988.

Burke completed her final sculpture in 1980: a nine-foot bronze statue of Martin Luther King Jr. that stands in Marshall Park in Charlotte. She died in 1995 in New Hope, Pennsylvania. Her sculptures are still on display at WSSU, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Mooresville Public Library.

Subaru scores again with electric Trailseeker

Continued from page 1B

Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, adaptive cruise control, heated steering wheel, heated rear seats, digital rear-view mirror, radiant leg heaters for front occupants, panoramic sunroof and 20-inch wheels are all standard.

A 14-inch touch screen was easy to operate to find most of the car's function. The gauge cluster is digital and can be configured to provide a variety of information. Two wireless chargers allow both front passengers to keep their phones topped off. USB-C ports are available up front and in back as well.

The rear seat is comfortable, but some may wish for a bit more legroom. Also, 281 miles per charge is ok but harsh winters may cut the range a bit. The charging speed seems to be quicker the lower the battery percentage.

I like this Trailseeker. It has more power and cargo room than the Solterra which debuted last year. The available power and cargo space will come in handy on long trips and the availability of the Tesla charging network will make trip planning a bit easier.

The Touring version of the Trailseeker starts at \$46,855. My test car was about \$48,500.

- Pros**
- All-new model
 - Plenty of power
 - Good cargo space
 - 281-mile range
 - Comfortable interior
 - Quiet ride
 - NACS charging available
 - Solid handling
 - Quiet ride
- Cons**
- More range would be nice
 - Variable charging speed

How women can optimize lower cardiovascular risk

FEATURE IMPACT

The threat of heart disease and stroke is growing substantially among women and girls as rates climb for health factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity, with 6 in 10 U.S. women projected to have at least one type of cardiovascular disease by 2050.

This information from a new scientific statement published in "Circulation," the peer-reviewed, flagship journal of the American Heart Association, a global force changing the future of health for all, points to a rise in CVD that's in part fueled by increases in other health factors like diabetes and obesity. Nearly 32% of girls ages 2-19 may have obesity by 2050.

The report points to increases among women for all types of CVD, including heart disease, heart failure, atrial fibrillation and stroke.

"Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for women and remains their No. 1 health risk overall," said Stacey E. Rosen, M.D., FAHA, volunteer president of the American Heart Association and executive director of the Katz Institute for Women's Health and senior vice president of women's health at Northwell Health. "While many people may think conditions like high blood pressure are only occurring in older women, we know this is not the case. We know the factors that contribute to heart disease and stroke begin early in life, even among young women and girls. The impact is even greater among those experiencing adverse social determinants of health such as poverty, low literacy, rural residence and other psychosocial stressors."

However, there is positive news: Rates of high cholesterol are expected to decline among nearly all groups of women, and improvements are expected in some health behaviors that impact CVD, including healthier eating, more physical activity and less smoking.

The most efficient and effective way to reduce the prevalence of CVD is through prevention, prioritizing optimal health through the four health behaviors (eat better, be more active, quit tobacco and get healthy sleep) and four health factors (manage weight, control cholesterol, manage blood sugar and manage blood pressure) that comprise the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8.

Health behaviors

Promote healthy choices in the places where people learn, live and receive care, like schools, community centers, pediatric clinics and gynecology offices. Use digital tools, when helpful, to encourage and reinforce positive lifestyle changes.

Health factors

Managing chronic conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity early can make a difference, especially for women at higher risk. Work with your health care team to prioritize long-term support for managing these conditions, including early check-ins, team-based care and the use of digital tools that make care easier to access.

Care at every life stage

Each stage of life offers an opportunity to spot risks early and protect heart health.

For example, pediatricians should know that early menstrual periods can signal higher future cardiovascular risk. Coordinated care across specialties should be integrated before, during and after pregnancy. Research should continue to explore how lifestyle changes and hormone therapy around menopause impact women's heart health.

Social and demographic factors

Health systems should consider how social challenges - like access to healthy food, transportation or safe housing - combine with medical risks, designing interventions that improve heart health in each setting.

To access the full report and find more advice for a healthy heart, visit Heart.org.

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THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2026 PAGE 6B

The best movies of 2026 so far

By Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A quick summary of the movie year so far: The box office is booming, Gen Z is flocking to theaters and aliens are ... real?

It's been a curiously seesawing first six months. The movies have been dominated as much by 26-year-old You-Tuber-turned-filmmaker Curry Barker as they have 79-year-old Steven Spielberg. Some much-prized Hollywood IP has struggled ("Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu") while other franchises ("Toy Story 5") have been more than fine.

The favorites so far of AP Film Writers Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr are fittingly varied, running from shattering debuts to goofy sci-fi. Here are their picks.

"Disclosure Day"
Listen, I realize the alien stuff is a little blunt. And you can question the nostalgia baked into a modern-day movie where everyone huddles around TV sets. But when "Disclosure Day" is moving, Spielberg is back in an idiom all his own — and what reconnecting to that spirit means isn't simply wistful. This is a stealthily political movie about whether Spielberg's warm belief in humankind can exist today — if he can rebuild that suburban family home. "Disclosure Day" is as much Spielberg phoning home as was his autobiographic "The Fabelmans." (In theaters) — J.C.

"Project Hail Mary"
Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's adaptation of Andy Weir's space saga about a middle school science teacher who is called on to help save the dying sun is one of the easiest recommendations of the year. It is a most-ages crowd-pleaser, funny, warm and dazzling, with a hopeful spirit, a quotable alien sidekick and a quirkily charming lead in Ryan Gosling. (Streaming on Prime Video) — L.B.

"Rose of Nevada"
Everything feels like an echo in Mark Jenkin's dreamlike tale of time and sea. George Mackay and Callum Turner play crewmen who enlist on a rusty Cornish fishing boat that, upon its return, drops them off in the same English village, 30 years earlier. They're mistaken for two men thought to be lost. Jenkin, who shoots on 16mm and syncs sound in postproduction, makes films that feel out of time, and "Rose of Nevada" rocks to a haunting tide. (In theaters) — J.C.

"Tuner"
Remember how "Good Will Hunting" originally had a crime element to it and Rob Reiner (rightly) advised taking it out? Daniel Roher's crackling, original thriller "Tuner," a spiritual descendant of that great film, goes down that path successfully, creating a scenario where a workaday piano tuner, and musical prodigy who can no longer play, gets entangled in a criminal underworld, using his sensitive hearing to crack safes. Leo Woodall stars alongside Dustin Hoffman and Havana Rose Liu. (Available for digital rental) — L.B.

"Miroirs No. 3"
Christian Petzold, a great admirer of Hitchcock and "Vertigo," makes movies where identity, rather than people, can go missing. In this lightly enigmatic 86-minute chamber piece, a woman (Paula Beer) injured in a car crash decides to stay and recuperate at a nearby home where an older, solitary woman (Barbara Auer) resides. The unfolding drama is as beguiling as it is healing. (Available for digital rental) — J.C.

"The Invite"
A San Francisco couple host their upstairs neighbors for a last-minute dinner party in Olivia Wilde's deliriously sharp chamber dramedy about sex and marriage. Wilde both directs and stars as the neurotic Angela, whose relationship with Seth Rogen's Joe is already on the rocks, when their more, let's say, liberated neighbors Pina (Penélope Cruz) and Hawk (Edward Norton) arrive to stir things up for better and worse. The mix — contentious, revelatory, awkward and funny — proves a wonderful showcase for some great acting, staging and filmmaking. (In theaters) — L.B.

"Blue Heron"
Sophy Romvari's exquisite and soulful directorial debut melds documentary and fiction, past and present. It's based on her own childhood, when her Hungarian parents moved their family of six to Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Their teenage son is mentally troubled and distant, and you can feel "Blue Heron" yearning to reach him, through his disorder and through time. It's an aching, probing memory piece. (Streams July 21 on Criterion Channel) — J.C.

Please see **THE BEST** | 7B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



DAVID PETERS

J. Cole brings "The Fall Off Tour" to Spectrum Center July 10-11. PJ is the opening act.

J. Cole brings The Fall Off to Spectrum Center

Also: 'Art After Dark' and 'Beyond Boundaries' at the Gantt Center

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

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

July 9
Spiked featuring DJ Elixir will close to Uptown Live at Truist Center Plaza from 5-9 p.m., with food and drink for sale. The after party will continue at neighboring Fifth Street District.

July 9-12
Royal Improv Festival, VisArt Video & Café July 9, 7 p.m., Warehouse Performing Arts Center July 10 The July 9 show features Swell Music Improv, Play Cousinz Improv and Pillow Talk, 7 and 9 p.m. Solovela, Rat People, The Brownstones and Sunday Supper perform July 11 at 5, 7 and 9 p.m. July 12 show at Stage Door Theater at Blumenthal Arts headlined by TJ & Dave, 7:30 p.m.

July 10-11
J. Cole brings 'The Fall Off Tour' i 8 p.m. at Spectrum Center. Singer/songwriter PJ is the opening act. Tickets are \$48-\$321 and available at TicketMaster.

July 11
"Abstraction as Language - Digital Art Inspired by Beyond Boundaries," 12-2 p.m., Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Art + Culture Discover the meaning and power of abstraction in a digital art workshop inspired by the exhibition "Beyond Boundaries." After a self-

guided exploration of the exhibition across the Gantt's galleries and insights into artist Gabriel Mills's creative process from a recent artist talk, workshop participants will create original artwork through step-by-step instruction in Procreate. For ages 12 and older. Cost: \$10 (plus fees) per participant.

Through July 12
Centre Stage production of "Beehive: The '60s Musical," 501 River St., Greenville, S.C. Tickets are on sale at centrestage.org or by calling the box office at (864) 233-6733. 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 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."

July 16
"Art After Dark: Where the Cook-out Meets Arts + Culture," Harvey B. Gantt Center, 7-11 p.m. Ages: 21 and older. Cost: \$15 per participant (plus fees). Celebration of community, cul-

Please see **USHER** | 7B



SAMANTHA COLE

'Minions & Monsters' a yellow mash note to Hollywood

By Mark Kennedy

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Every once in a while, Hollywood gets high on its own supply and makes a love letter to moviemaking.

It happened recently with Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" and George Clooney's "Jay Kelly." Now it's time for the unlikelyst of love-letter writers: canary-yellow, gibberish-speaking, overall-wearing mini-monsters.

"Minions & Monsters" — the third chapter in the ongoing standalone adventures of the "Despicable Me" pint-sized enablers — is about the sheer greatness of moviemaking, and it's a navel-gazing misfire. Few industries — maybe journalism, sure — is as enamored at making its profession seem heroic.

The Minions this time find themselves at the dawn of both the movie business in Hollywood and the last push by suffragists to get the vote. It's a weird confluence that writers Brian Lynch and Pierre Coffin fumble.

The movie has playful references to old screen gods — Harold Lloyd dangling from the hands of a clock and Charlie Chaplin swallowed by the gears of a mechanical system — along Hollywood nods to "Casablanca" and the punny title "The Good, the Bad and the Stupid" — but the kids in the audience won't get them and their parents are just too tired. Harold Lloyd jokes don't hit as hard in 2026.

Two of the legion of faceless Minions step forward this time — best friends James and Henry, creative misfits amid a smear of yellow drones — to unite and make a movie. (Who knew there was a Minion counterculture?)

Things go very well at first — turns out adding a Minion or two to a cowboy or a heist movie makes them instant kings of the box office — and they soon move into a Beverly Hills mansion and become insufferable. James dreams of



UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Universal Pictures' "Minions & Monsters" bulges with send-ups of Hollywood's most notable monster movies, including the 1975 classic "Jaws."

winning an Oscar, which in this case is a statuette of a gold banana, a Minion obsession.

But they hit a wall when silent movies turn to talkies. And since they spout nothing but nonsense — "Fantastico" "miso soup" and "vamos" — can't make the transition. They're dumped out of the studio system.

That's when James and Henry finally get the plot going: Make their own killer monster movie by conjuring up real monsters. The first one they try turns out a little weird: The gigantic, fear-some octopus-dragon they request turns out to be a cute green Funko Pop-like critter called Goomi, voiced by Trey Parker. Goomi promises to find them some real monsters. But should we trust him?

Coffin, making his first solo directing effort after co-helming all three "Despicable Me" films and the first "Minions," voices all the Minions — he must be fun to have at parties — and is an assured hand. The violence levels are a little high for PG, including a beheading and various impalings, plus the usual senseless mayhem.

The screenwriters have included a romantic subplot involving a suffragette voiced by Zoey Deutch who falls for a

robot-alien (standout work by Jesse Eisenberg) in a storyline that makes less and less sense. And the framing device — a museum tour guide explaining how Minions shaped Hollywood — sags awkwardly.

Adults can keep awake looking for the Easter eggs Coffin has left for serious cinephiles: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," "Steamboat Bill, Jr.," "A Trip to the Moon," "Metropolis," "Citizen Kane" and "The Blob." Maybe the best moment in the movie is almost a throwaway: Director George Lucas, appearing as himself.

"Hooray for Hollywood" is on the soundtrack and that might have been the subtitle for the movie itself. There are some people whose eyes get moist thinking about picking up a film camera and following their muse, having their work play in a dark theater to cheers. And then there are others who just want to get on with it already. "Vamos!"

"Minions & Monsters," a Universal Pictures release that opens in theaters July 1, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for "violence/action, language, and rude/macabre humor." Running time: 90 minutes. One and a half stars out of four.



Comedian D.L. Hughley will team up with journalist Don Lemon for the DL + DL “Anything Goes” tour Sept. 19 at Ovens Auditorium.

Usher and Chris Brown at Bank of America Stadium

Continued from page 5B

ture, and creativity. The Gantt’s after-hours series unites art lovers, runners, creatives, and the community for an unforgettable night inspired by the joy of a family reunion. Includes live DJs, line dancing, games, interactive art experiences, storytelling, custom screen printing along with the Gantt’s exhibitions.

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 18
“Family First: Symbols of Us is Back,” Harvey B. Gantt Center, 12-2 p.m. Ages: 7 and older.

Cost: \$10 per participant (plus fees).

An afternoon to celebrate creativity, culture, and family connection through an

interactive workshop led by teaching artist Dawnunique. Create a custom, family-inspired emblem rooted in storytelling, heritage, and shared values, then bring your designs to life through screen printing.

July 25
Fetty Wap at 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 while selling out venues around the world.

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

Sept. 19
Emmy award-winning journalist *Don Lemon* and comedian and radio host *D.L. Hughley* extend their DL + DL ‘Anything Goes’ tour to Ovens Auditorium at 7 p.m. Tickets range from \$55 to \$197 and are available at Ticketmaster.

Together, the pair delivers a comedy-meets-politics live experience where no topic is off limits.

The best moves of 2026, halfway through the year

Continued from page 5B

“Nirvana the Band the Show the Movie”

Slacker buddies develop crackpot schemes to land a gig at the Rivoli, a Toronto music venue, in this infectiously silly, lo-fi indie about time travel, friendship and dreams. Canadian comics Matt Johnson and Jay McCarrol may have a cult fanbase from their various series about these lovable losers, but I’m proof that no prior knowledge is needed to get on their goofy wavelength and enjoy the ride — and all the “Back to the Future” references. (Available for digital rental) — L.B.

“Minions & Monsters”

This year’s most affectionate ode to the golden age of Hollywood comes from ... the Minions? Yes, it’s an unlikely role for one of the most ubiquitous marketing forces in animation. But “Minions & Monsters,” a cartoony good time, finds that the best role yet for the yellow henchmen is as filmmakers. They had me at bello. (In theaters) — J.C.

“Is God Is”

Rage and revenge are the heart of Aleshea Harris’s adaptation of her Obie-winning play, in which twin sisters embark on a journey to find, and kill, their abusive father. The tale has both ancient Greek tragedy and Tarantino in its DNA, but it comes alive as its own shocking, vital creation driven by unforgettable performances from Kara Young, Mallori Johnson and a truly terrifying Sterling K. Brown. (Available for digital rental) — L.B.

“A Poet”

There hasn’t been a better protagonist this year than Oscar Restrepo (Ubeimar Rios). He’s a failed Columbian writer, a bit of a drunk and, as one character calls him, “a walking problem.”

But he’s also, despite his seemingly total lack of grace, a true believer in poetry. Simón Mesa Soto’s film, reportedly getting an English-language remake, is the tragicomedy of the year. (Available for digital rental) — J.C.

“Hoppers”

There is a gleefully chaotic spirit to Pixar’s “Hoppers,” about a determined young environmental activist who Avatars her way into the world of beavers in an attempt to block the construction of a highway overpass that would destroy her beloved glade. It is uninged in the best way.

Funny, weird and heartfelt with a terrifically distinct voice cast, including Dave Franco as a tyrannical insect prince. (Streaming on Disney+) — L.B.



This image released by Amazon Content Services shows Kara Young (left) and Mallori Johnson in a scene from “Is God Is.”

Motown Museum’s \$75M expansion aims to honor Detroit’s musical legacy

By Corey Williams
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — The Motown Museum in Detroit has been resonating with a different signature sound — the rumble of trucks, the buzz of drills and the pounding of metal — as one of the most significant sites in American musical history undergoes a \$75 million donor-driven face-lift ahead of its 2027 grand reopening.

The expansion of the Hitsville USA campus — a house where chart-toppers by Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and Diana Ross and The Supremes were written, rehearsed and recorded — aims not just to honor Detroit’s musical legacy, but also to increase the city’s footprint as an education and tourism destination.

The museum should enjoy the same level of promotion as other landmarks in the United States, former Motown music arranger Paul Riser Sr., comparing the seminal label’s potential to a tourist mecca in New York City.

“The city can really benefit by further marketing this whole concept here,” Riser said. “We need to see more pageantry of Motown. Every time I think Motown, I think Times Square.”

Cities across the U.S. have for years promoted musical heritage as a selling point to attract business conventions, exhibitions and tourists. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame attracts 500,000 people each year to Cleveland, while Nashville’s music history and attractions tied to country, gospel and other genres bring in about 17 million people annually.

The Motown Museum says it logs more than 100,000 visitors each year and is expecting at least 325,000 visitors per year after the expansion opens.

“Motown for many, many decades has been just a magical source of pride and inspiration,” said Robin Terry, Motown Museum chair and chief executive. “Visitors come to the little house that’s Hitsville USA — what used to be the headquarters of Motown — just to touch the magical space where so many of their musical icons ... got their start.”

Motown, uniquely Detroit

Motown was founded in 1959 by Berry Gordy in one of the three homes on West Grand Boulevard just north of downtown Detroit, that currently house the Motown Museum.

Just a year later, The Marvelettes’ “Please Mr. Postman” reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100. Hits like “I Heard it Through the Grapevine,” “Baby Love,” “My Girl” and “The Tracks of My Tears” soon sent the Motown sound around the globe.

Gordy moved the label to Los Angeles in 1972 and sold it to MCA Records in 1988. His late sister, Esther Gordy Edwards, founded the museum in 1985.

The 40,000 square foot (3,716 square meter) expansion is being constructed around the original Hitsville USA house and will feature a theater, a recording studio, retail space and a cafe, as well as immersive exhibits and a searchable back catalog of music and interviews.

“The expansion is so iconic and unique for Detroit,” said Riser, who joined Motown at age 17 and won a Grammy in 1973 for best R&B instrumental performance on The Temptations’ “Papa Was a Rollin’ Stone.”

“I would hope to see the legacies and the historical content preserved,” Riser said. “It’s OK to having buildings ... but if we don’t keep the legacies of these people who built this masterpiece, keep them in mind, we’ve lost something.”

Marketing music history

The Motown Museum is a must-see for international and domestic visitors, according to Jennifer Ollinger, senior director of tourism for Visit Detroit. The Michigan city clawed its way back from bankruptcy in 2014 and has seen something of a revival in recent years.

Motown is part of the pitch to businesses considering Detroit for conventions, conferences and other large gatherings, Ollinger said.

“We are the only place in the world that can claim Motown music as our own,” Ollinger said.

In Cleveland, rock ‘n’ roll is a pillar of the Ohio city’s brand, said Emily Lauer, vice president of Public Relations and Communications at Destination Cleveland.

“Out-of-town visitors and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame are very important for Cleveland,” Lauer said. “They are likely to stay overnight and spend money on hotel rooms, in our restaurants and in our stores. They get to see Cleveland and that strengthens the likelihood to come back.”

Nashville’s vibrant music scene, encompassing country, gospel and the storied Grand Ole Opry, brings in tourist revenue totaling more than \$11 billion annually.

Deana Ivey, president and chief executive of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp., said music has been the main reason tourists visit Nashville for three decades. The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development agrees.

“We’re the second fastest growing state in America and we’ve done that without a beach or casinos,” department commissioner Mark Ezell said. “Music is our draw to Tennessee.”



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