



CHATHAM OUTREACH ASSISTANCE

CORA, or Chatham Outreach Assistance, offers fresh produce at a food pantry.

NC counties absorb new SNAP costs without state help

By Ashley Freddie
NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH NEWS

Scotland County Manager April Snead spent this year's budget season outlining the kinds of tradeoffs that local governments face every spring: which capital projects can move forward, which can wait and how to stretch taxpayer dollars.

This year, another unexpected expense landed on the ledger.

Beginning Oct. 1, North Carolina counties will start to shoulder millions of dollars in additional administrative costs to operate the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Congress shifted more responsibility for administering the program to states through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1) passed in 2025.

In North Carolina — one of 10 states where counties administer SNAP — that shift from paying 50 percent of the costs to paying 75 percent will fall to local governments.

County leaders started searching the proverbial couch cushions for extra dollars, hoping the General Assembly would absorb an estimated \$52 million in new administrative costs for at least the first year. That funding, however, did not appear in the final state budget that was signed into law by Gov. Josh Stein on July 7.

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« APPRECIATION »

Professor Jeffrey Leak celebrated

By Ashleigh Fields
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

UNC Charlotte professor Jeffrey Bernard Leak died June 29 at age 57, but his legacy lives on in the many circles and communities that surrounded him in his last days.

Hundreds gathered for Dr. Leak's funeral at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on July 7. A professor of English and Africana studies, he was revered by students and beloved by Friendship's congregation, where he was a deacon.

Dr. Leak, a Charlotte native who is survived by his wife Renee and children Jaelyn and Rylan, was recalled as a father figure and mentor who moved mountains in the lives he touched.

"Leak lectured with the passion and charisma of a minister and instructed with the wisdom and care of a loving parent while inspiring like an icon," former student L. Monique King said in an interview with Inside UNCC.

Others knew him from playing pick-up basketball on the UNCC campus, while others appreciated his lectures and words of wisdom on life.

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« RIDES »

Subaru Outback Wilderness boasts more rugged looks, more powerful engine

By Winfred Cross
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Subaru has not only introduced two new electric vehicles but has revamped its immensely popular Outback.

The station wagon shaped SUV is no more. It's been replaced with a more rugged, truck-shaped vehicle that brings the beloved vehicle into the current century.

The new look is hard to miss. This is a truck, not to be confused with anything else. The grille, wheel well openings and the side sills are covered in thick, black cladding, which is standard on the Wilderness model I drove. The square shape looks almost tank-

like with this trim. The vehicle has 9.5 inches of ground clearance so you can travel over a lot of terrain. The 17-inch, black matte finished wheels are fitted with all-terrain tires. Overall, this is a good-looking vehicle, but some may miss the quirkiness of the old model.

The interior is also gone through a complete redesign. An option package that includes black, Nappa Leather and copper accents. The very large vertical touch screen has been replaced by a not as large horizontal screen with actual buttons underneath to control some functions. The screen has crisp graphics and also provides

a 360-camera view. The leather seats are ventilated, power adjustable, heated and cooled.

The rear outboard seats are also heated. USB ports and air vents allow for three-zone climate control. There is enough room for three adults with plenty of storage space for stuff in the hatch area.

The infotainment system is now Google-based with Alexa as the assistant. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are also available. The Wilderness trim gets a really good Harmon Kardon audio system. Nothing like having some serious tunes while bashing through the woods.

The new Outback is pow-



SUBARU

Subaru's Outback Wilderness is designed with a truck-oriented body and grille.

ered by a turbo-charged 2.5-liter flat boxer engine connected to a continuously variable transmission. The sends the 260

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UNSPASH

new businesses are 80% to 90% more likely to fail before their fifth year, but successful entrepreneurs share similarities. In Charlotte, the Business Journals reported just under 3,400 Black-owned business, which account for 6.5% of all firms in the region.

Square biz: Entrepreneurs on keys to sustainability

Among their tips: take a lean and strategic approach to growth

By Charles K Harris
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

In the years since COVID sent economic shockwaves across all markets, reports indicate that more small businesses are being launched than ever.

Rates of long-term success, however, remain unchanged with between 80% and 90% of small businesses failing within the first five years. Unsurprisingly, the rates are higher among Black small business owners.

But this is not always the case, and in Charlotte, there's evidence Black entrepreneurs can and do successfully create and maintain thriving businesses. A February article in The Business Journals reported Charlotte has just under 3,400 Black-owned businesses, which account for about 6.5% of all firms in the region.

The national average of Black-owned businesses is less than half that at 3.4%. Even in Atlanta, the

Black wealth mecca, it's 10%.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to business ownership, there are some general practices and common mistakes that can help better prepare would-be entrepreneurs.

The Post reached out to three Charlotteans who have built lasting and lucrative brands.

Frank Johnson is vice president of ACCESS Services, a staffing company, since 1994. Johnson also worked for several years in the banking industry advising small business owners.

Alexandria Washington, owner of Creative Faces by Alexandria, has become one of the area's most sought after estheticians for over two decades.

Jermaine Johnson (no relation to Frank Johnson) is half of the brother duo who founded No Grease Inc. Jermaine and his identical twin Damien opened a single barbershop almost 30 years ago

that has now ballooned into a multi-state grooming, education and workforce development empire.

When starting a business, a critical first step is often overlooked: serious self-inspection.

"[Ask yourself] 'Am I willing to be patient with slow growth while my name and reputation grows?'" Washington asked.

Washington also said moving past common misconceptions about small business ownership is crucial, adding it isn't "an easy life with a huge return. Far from it. It's a true hustle."

Said Jermaine Johnson: "Entrepreneurship is not glamorous. The

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F. Johnson



Washington

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Montford Point Marines: First for Corps

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

The first Black Marine Corps recruits trained in North Carolina.

The Montford Point Marines broke the Corps' color barrier during World War II, training at a segregated camp in Jacksonville near Wilmington before deployment. From 1942-49, more than 19,000 African Americans trained in an area known as Montford Point, now part of Marine Corp Base Camp Lejeune. Volunteers trained in segregated facilities as the Corps became the last of the armed services to take African Americans.

"It was like the black West Point," Montford Pointer and Johnson C. Smith University alumnus Thomas McPhatter told The Post in a 2004 interview. "We were the best Black folk could find."

Charlotte has important



U.S. MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Marines PFCs Willie J. Kanody (from left), Elif Hial and John Alexander on the beach at Iwo Jima during World War II.

connections to Montford Point, starting with Pvt. Howard Perry, the Corps' first black recruit. The Marines' first African American officer, Lt. Fred Branch, was a Hamlet native and JCSU alumnus while McPhatter, who dropped

out of college in 1944 to join the Corps, was the last Montford Pointer to retire from active duty in 1983.

To the tradition-steeped Marines, taking Black Americans into the ranks was verged on heresy. From its formation in 1775

— a year before the United States declared independence — the Corps was all-white until President Franklin Roosevelt signed an executive order banning racial discrimination by all federal agencies in 1941. A

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Entrepreneurs dish on the keys to sustainability

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reality is that successful business owners earn freedom through responsibility. Before you can enjoy flexibility, you must first build systems, teams, and processes that can function without your constant presence.”

Jermaine Johnson also notes eager entrepreneurs often overlook the reality that even if profitability is achieved it is rarely instantaneous.

“A common misconception is that success happens overnight,” he said. “Most people [only] see the ribbon cutting, the social media posts, or the grand opening. They rarely see the years of sacrifice, failures, debt, uncertainty, and persistence that came before it.”

Frank Johnson recommends considering if the lack of a structured schedule is really the best fit.

“[It’s worth asking] ‘Can I work without supervision?’” he said. “‘Am I a self-starter?’”

Jermaine Johnson agrees, emphasizing that assessing work ethic is important.

“Business ownership often requires more discipline, more sacrifice, and more accountability than traditional employment,” he says, “Entrepreneurship is not a destination; it’s a commitment to lifelong learning.”

When asked about high failure rates, all three agreed on a common cause: poor preparation. “Lack of capital is the primary contributor,” Frank Johnson said. “Without sufficient capital businesses are forced to constantly operate with their backs against the wall. Whatever capital you think you might need, double or even triple that number.”

Said Washington: “It’s improper planning. ‘Starting off too big. I think in this society we are taught to go big right away but sometimes we have to crawl a bit.”

Her remedy is plain.

“Build a name, build a following and build a reputation that will support you and then expand and go bigger.”

Frank Johnson adds: “Adopting a lean and mean approach allows you to survive on less and stretch dollars further. Make sure your personal finances are in order and you are not overextended.”

“People underestimate the importance of business planning, marketing, financial management, systems, sales, and customer acquisition,” Jermaine Johnson said, adding entrepreneurs should take caution against overinflating customer demand.

“Many people start businesses because they have talent, but talent isn’t enough. Success requires mastering both your craft and the business behind the craft.”

But even the most prudent potential business owner will get nowhere without start-up funds.

The Federal Reserve reported in 2024 Black applicants seeking small business loans from traditional banks faced both a higher rate of denial and higher interest rates when approved than their white peers.

There are other resources, though.

“The reality is that many of the greatest Black businesses in American history were built long before investors came calling,” Jermaine Johnson said. “Entrepreneurs have often had to rely on creativity, relationships, and resourcefulness long before they gained access to traditional capital.”

Recommended funding sources include credit unions, community development financial institutions, supplier diversity initiatives, mentorship programs and business incubators.

Seeking capital closer to home is another longstanding method in the Black community.

“The story of Black entrepreneurship is the story of people creating opportunities despite obstacles, building institutions despite exclusion, and finding ways to create value even when resources were limited,” Jermaine Johnson said.

Although seeking investment from family and friends may be more comfortable, Frank Johnson stresses professionalism and transparency.

“Tell them, ‘Look, there are no guarantees,’” he said. “You might lose everything.”

Washington highlights the importance of adequate preparation, knowing your numbers and being prepared to answer questions.

“Most of the time you do not get second chances to make an impression,” she said, “so you have to make the effort to impress and shine the first time.”

Jermaine Johnson points out potential investors need to know if the proposed business is truly marketable.

“A great product does not guarantee a great business,” he said. “[If] you see a problem you can solve and a value you can create, then you’re on the right path. Capital tends to follow

demonstrated value.”

Said Washington: “Research the field you desire. Are you filling a need in your area?”

Frank Johnson emphasizes reliability and reputation above all else.

“It eventually comes down to your personal credibility,” he said. “Can you deliver what you say you can? When you make a mistake, own it. Never oversell yourself.”

Even after successfully getting a business off the ground, maintaining success is ongoing, which boils down to customer satisfaction.

Geographical location, product or service availability and competitive pricing can all influence sales, which is why research prior to establishing a business is critical.

Another important part of customer retention is quality of service. Complaints happen regardless of business size or color of the owners; however, bias targets Black businesses in particular and some of the finger-pointing comes from within the Black community.

“Customer service skills are lacking,” Washington said. “[They] include making a client feel wanted and special. Follow-up on the satisfaction of clients is also sometimes missing. These are keys to making an impression.”

To better prepare, Washington encourages would-be business owners to find an established practitioner to shadow and create an immersive experience.

“Work with another more experienced artist to gain the inside scoops of success,” she said. “Learn customer service skills based on your industry.”

Said Jermaine Johnson: “The issue is more than race alone. Consumers generally support businesses that offer the best combination of quality, service, convenience, consistency, and value. Every business owner should strive to compete and win on excellence.”

Patronizing Black businesses goes beyond “helping a brother out,” though.

“Supporting quality Black-owned businesses isn’t charity,” Jermaine Johnson said. “It’s an investment. It’s ownership. It’s community development. It’s helping create the jobs, opportunities, and institutions we want to see in the future.”

Frank Johnson agrees.

“It is very disappointing when Blacks do not do a good job of supporting Black businesses,” he said. “I encourage Blacks to give [Black businesses] some grace if you can. In many cases, it is a miracle that they are even in business at all, [and] they need our support to ...flourish.”

When Black enterprises flourish, the success reverberates throughout the community.

“More Black-owned businesses mean more local ownership, more mentorship, more commercial development, and more wealth circulating through our communities,” Jermaine Johnson said. “It means more examples for young people to see themselves. It means more families building assets and passing opportunities to future generations. When Black businesses succeed, Charlotte succeeds.”

Washington views more Black entrepreneurs in the marketplace as an opportunity for success.

“[More businesses] offer more diversity in the nail industry,” she said. “[It] also encourages us to work together more and help each other through education, advancing ourselves and not waiting for others to do it.”

“Black-owned businesses can help close the racial wealth gap,” Frank Johnson said. “Wealth is not accumulated by working for someone else. Increasing Black business ownership can enhance the city’s efforts to build a more resilient local economy.”

Successful Black entrepreneurship also creates a meaningful foundation for others to build on.

“We can give our young ones something to aim for,” Washington says, “To [help them] see it’s possible for our culture to be successful.”

Jermaine Johnson adds: “Income can change your life. Institutions can change generations. [Our experience] is the story of people repeatedly finding ways to build, create, and contribute, even when the odds suggested otherwise. That spirit is not only Black history. It is American history.”



A great product does not guarantee a great business. [If] you see a problem you can solve and a value you can create, then you're on the right path.



No Grease co-founder
JERMAINE JOHNSON

UNC Charlotte professor Jeffrey Leak celebrated

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“From the classroom to Belk Gym to every corner of campus, he made people feel seen, valued and supported,” the College of Humanities & Earth and Social Science, where Leak worked for over three decades, wrote in a statement. “His kindness, curiosity and unwavering care for students and colleagues built community everywhere he went. His legacy lives on in the students he taught, the programs he shaped, the community he nurtured and the countless people he lifted up along the way.”

Dean Chris Boyer said Dr. Leak had a “calm” and “unyielding” commitment to the school.

“It is easy to see why he was such a beloved and respected figure across our campus and our city,” Boyer said.

Dr. Leak was a devoted educator who spent years giving back to young scholars after earning a bachelor’s degree from Campbell University in 1990 followed by a master’s from the University of Delaware and a doctorate from Emory University. His teaching career began at the University of Vermont, but his greatest impact was at UNCC, where he joined the faculty in 1998.

As a tenured professor, Dr. Leak was interim associate dean of the Honors College, director of the Gantt Center and UNC Charlotte’s Center for the Study of the New South, director of the McNair Scholars Program and faculty president.

In an interview published by the African American Intellectual History Society, Dr. Leak said his time as faculty associate in academic affairs was a springboard into leadership roles at the university.

“I did not know, in fact I had no inkling at the time, that I would serve as director, but what I’ve learned about leadership is that often the skill set you develop in one setting is transferable to another,” he said.

Dr. Leak’s skills transformed programs across communities, as he chaired the C.W. Kerry Scholarship at Friendship Missionary Baptist and was a fellow for the American Council on Education while mentoring students outside the class-

room.

“His life reflected excellence in every sense of the word,” family friend Dr. Sharon Monique shared in a Facebook post. “One of the greatest gifts Jeff gave our family was his time, wisdom, and unwavering belief in us. He walked me through every stage of my rigorous three-year PhD dissertation with patience, encouragement, and brilliance.

... “Jeff never sought recognition for what he did. He simply served. He poured into students, colleagues, church members, family, and friends with grace, humility, and love. His wisdom filled every room, his faith anchored every conversation, and his kindness left an imprint on everyone privileged enough to know him.”

Dr. Leak was an active academic and writer, with three publications: “Visible Man: The Life of Henry Dumas,” “Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature” and “Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler.” He earned a national literary honor from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association for one of his works, which were published by the University of Georgia Press in addition to the University of Tennessee.

Dr. Leak studied the myth of black intellectual inferiority and published research tied to critically acclaimed Black writers ranging from Henry Dumas to George S. Schuyler.

UNCC students said he actively fought those stereotypes, providing a support system on campus.

“Dr. Leak I credit for speaking positivity into my life when I was filled with much doubt. Even though I was a biology major he took the time to work with me on getting into a science program offered at UNCC,” Samuel Hanna wrote. “He did more for my development as a scientist than any of my program professors at that time.

“His efforts gave me the confidence to pursue a career in the sciences. I thanked him many times when I would see him at church throughout the years. I sincerely wish I could thank him one more time.”

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Counties absorb SNAP costs without state help

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"We always think it's unfortunate when a mandated program gets funding cut," Snead said. "The county also always has to make up for that funding, and we do that the best way we can. We juggle other things in the budget."

"It's not easy. It can become a burden on our taxpayers. We have to have the revenue to run mandated programs."

The funding shift arrives just as counties prepare for new work requirements, more frequent eligibility reviews and increased pressure to reduce payment errors in the federal program — changes local officials say require more staff, not fewer.

Counties expected help that never came

For months, county leaders urged lawmakers to appropriate the funds to cover the additional administrative costs, arguing that the changes represented a state responsibility for a federally funded program.

Andrew Blackburn, governmental affairs director for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, said the organization met repeatedly with legislative leaders, budget writers and health committee chairs before the budget was released on June 30.

"We had a lot of positive conversations, a lot of understanding that the counties were not financially positioned to take on the debt," Blackburn said. "But I would also say that every person we talked to pointed out to us that this state budget was going to look a lot different from previous state budgets, that there was not as much revenue available to the state as in previous budgets."

He said county leaders understood this year's budget would be tighter than recent years and were never guaranteed funding, but they remained hopeful after what Blackburn described as productive conversations.

"Quite frankly, we're a little disappointed that the counties were not offered any help in defraying those expenses," added Joy Hicks, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners director of advocacy and policy. "I almost had an optimism, because we had such strong support from the health chairs themselves."

Sen. Jim Burgin (R-Angier), a Senate Health Committee chairman, confirmed that lawmakers had "a good healthy discussion" on helping counties shoulder the costs. He said that some of those discussions included targeting assistance toward smaller rural counties if the state could not afford to help every county.

"Since we weren't going to help everybody. We weren't going to help Wake and Mecklenburg. What about Bertie? Some of the small counties where a penny of their tax rate is only a few thousand dollars and it's real hard," Burgin told NC Health News.

With the state spending plan being released on June 30 and county spending plans due on July 1, some counties may have been left scrambling and wondering who would be left holding the bag.

Federal rules mean more work, higher stakes

The additional costs come as county social services departments prepare for one of the biggest overhauls to SNAP in years. H.R.1 expands work requirements, increases the requirements for eligibility verification, requires more frequent recertifications and places greater emphasis on reducing payment errors.

The state budget included several investments intended to improve SNAP administration, including:

- \$2.5 million one-time funding — Modernize NC FAST, including AI-assisted eligibility tools and error screening; up to \$1.5 million may be used for a contract with the Government Data Analytics Center.
- \$2,176,198 recurring — Hire 25 positions in the Division of Child and Family Well-Being (part of the Department of Health and Human Services) to reduce SNAP payment errors, including county quality leads, quality control analysts, policy staff, trainers and data analysts.
- \$611,170 annually — Hire seven regional Continuous Quality Improvement training specialists to support county social services departments administering SNAP.
- Vendor funding (one-time only) — Produce reports on SNAP and welfare expenditures, including out-of-state benefit use and spending by retailer type.

The investments are targeted toward improving insights around errors and payments, but they do not replace the local administrative funding the counties had hoped for. Blackburn noted that North Carolina has already reduced its SNAP payment error rate from above 10% to just above 7 percent.

Error rates in fiscal year 2026 will be used to calculate new federal penalties states will pay tied to their payment error rate, beginning in fiscal year 2028.

States that erroneously pay out benefits totalling more than 10 percent of total cost or more could be responsible for 15 percent of benefit payouts. Since North Carolina's annual SNAP benefit total is about \$2.8 billion, a 15 percent cost share could cost the state as much as \$420 million — so state lawmakers are determined to drive down errors in the program.

While the state hasn't reached its goal, Blackburn noted that the decrease was the country's third largest decrease in error rates in a year.

"That is thanks to the herculean efforts of these individual counties working together with the State Department of Health and Human Services to make that happen," Blackburn said.

But that herculean effort will become a bigger lift as staff continue to work to decrease the payment errors on top of increased applications and new eligibility rules — with the hefty \$420 million price tag hanging over county officials' heads.

"We've been making the argument to the General Assembly leadership and budget chairs that if the state could have taken that

\$52 million burden off of the counties, they would have been just that much better prepared to do that, and now we have to try and do that with less resources at our disposal," Blackburn said.

Rep. Maria Cervania (D-Cary) said during last week's budget floor debate that lawmakers are asking state and county agencies to do more while reducing administrative capacity. She pointed to the elimination of more than 360 vacant central management and support positions from the Department of Health and Human Services. It's the budget's largest elimination of vacancies in one department while reducing the division's net appropriations by more than \$35 million.

"This is not efficiency. This is setting up our state and county services to fail," Cervania said. "And when they fail, it's not politicians who suffer the consequences, it is our seniors waiting for Medicaid approval. It is the child whose family depends on SNAP to feed that child, and not go starving. It is the person with disabilities waiting for services. It is the county social worker that's trying to do the work of three people."

Rural counties feel the squeeze

The financial impact of the new SNAP costs varies widely across North Carolina. In Halifax County, which has a \$64.8 million general fund budget, SNAP administrative costs could total about \$2 million, according to the NC Budget & Tax Center.

In Bladen County, where one fifth of residents rely on SNAP, county commissioners in January had been considering delaying infrastructure upgrades or cutting services, but state lawmakers who represent the county secured a budget provision covering the county's SNAP administrative costs for this year. County Manager Sam Croom said he was thankful that the local delegation secured the funding, but the uncertainty returns next year.

"If they don't fund it next year, then we would have to absorb that cost going forward," Croom said.

"Altogether it's not quite 1 percent of the budget, but with inflation, that's our number one driver, with inflation roughly running 4 percent year after year after year," he said. "It affects everything from contracted services that we have, to new purchases, to purchases for new ambulances, new sheriff's cars. Health insurance going up. Anytime that you keep tacking on almost \$400,000 along with the 4 percent inflation, it gets really tight, especially on the local level."

Wealthier counties such as Union have started retraining staff, educating participants about the looming eligibility changes and requesting more personnel to prepare for the increased workload.

Hicks said that many rural counties are already facing rising health insurance costs in the State Health Plan, which many counties use to cover their employees. There are also increased costs due to inflation, workforce shortages and debates over limiting property tax growth.

"We were really thinking about double and triple whammies, if you will, of unfunded mandates coming down to the county," Hicks said.

"If they are a small rural county that doesn't have a lot of occupancy tax or sales tax base, the biggest and almost only place for them to turn is to property tax," she said. "No county commissioner ever wants to raise property tax rates, but — particularly if they're a growing county — they need to meet growing population demands of things like water, sewer, additional public safety, build new schools."

Subaru Outback boasts rugged looks, power

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horsepower and 277-pound-feet of torque to all four wheels. The lifted suspension has electronically controlled dampers to give a more controlled ride.

The Outback's engine makes its power smoothly. There is plenty of giddy up when you ask the engine to help you pass slow-pokes or to head for that exit ramp exit/entry ramp. It's a bit harsh under hard acceleration but once it's up to speed, the vehicle quiets down. The all-terrain tires are not as loud as I thought they would be and wind noise was tolerable.

The Wilderness comes with selectable drive modes to help you with a variety of obstacles in the bush. I'm not that adventurous type, so Subaru's word I'll have to take.

Driving the Outback for a week left me with the impression that Subaru took its time while updating this vehicle. The looks may be polarizing to its core audience, but I think they will grow to like the new look. It drives a bit different from the last model but that's a good thing. The Outback has always felt stable, but this new body style feels more hunkered down.

The new body style also provides more

passenger and cargo room. The higher ride height also gives a commanding view of the highway. Subaru has packed all of its safety equipment in this car, so it is at least as safe as the outgoing model.

The fuel economy is not bad. You will probably get about 25 miles per gallon overall with highway topping out at 27 mpg. There is no hybrid or electric version now and neither has been announced as future vehicles.

The Outback Wilderness starts at \$44,995. Optional equipment included onboard navigation, power moon roof, 360-degree camera system, Black Nappa Leather seating, ventilated front seats, additional power controls for driver's seat and power adjustable passenger's seat. That package costs \$4,090.

With destination, this outback will cost you \$50,535.

Pros:

- All new design
- More space
- Impressive optional engine
- Good fuel economy
- Updated interior
- Upgraded off-road equipment
- True mid-size status

Cons:

- Loses quirky appeal

Montford Point Marines: The Corps' first Black recruits

Continued from page 1B

year later, he signed a directive that allowed African Americans to serve the Marines, which was met with resistance in the Corps, where recruits trained in Parris Island, South Carolina.

Roosevelt was influenced by two women - educator Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of historically Black Bethune-Cookman College (now University) and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to open the Corps to everyone. Executive Order 8802 established the Fair Employment Practice Commission, which opened the door, at least temporarily.

"We were USMC-R, Selective Service," McPhatter said. "We were on trial. We were not supposed to stay in the Marines after the war. We were going to be off trial."

Training was brutal for recruits, with an exhaustive physical regimen designed to separate the best prospects from the rest.

"Parris Island couldn't compete with Montford Point," said McPhatter, a Lum-

berton, N.C., native who died in 2009. "I feel my knees are gone now because of doing the duck walk (with the knees pointed inward) and my rifle over my head."

Montford Point graduates served in the 51st and 52nd Defense Battalions as support troops at the front. They also fought in some of the war's bloodiest campaigns in the Pacific theater, including Saipan, Iwo Jima, Guam, Tinian, Peleliu and Okinawa.

"The last firefight on Iwo was my company turning back the last Japanese kamikaze," said McPhatter, who was a sergeant with the 8th Ammunition Company. "We were still living in holes, and we cut them down as they came down from the north. We just laid them out."

Camp Montford Point was deactivated in 1949 as Parris Island and San Diego, California accepted all Marine recruits. In 1974, Montford Point was named Camp Johnson after the Corps' first Black drill sergeant, Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson.

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LAURA CARBONE

Blues guitarist Selwyn Birch will perform a free concert at U.S. National Whitewater Center as part of the River Jam series.

25 years of 24 Hours of Booty

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

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

July 24-25

24 Hours of Booty, intersection of Wellesley and Queens Road West.

The 25th annual cycling and walking fundraiser starts at 7 p.m. at Myers Park Traditional soccer field, 2201 Wellesley Ave. More than 800 people will walk or run the 3-mile loop over 24 hours to raise money for cancer navigation and survivorship programs.

Information: 24foundation.org.

July 25

HBCU Cookout Scholarship Fundraiser, 4-8 p.m., Johnson C. Smith University, 100 Beatties Ford Road.

The seventh annual cookout includes live music by DJ 360, yard games, spades tournament, food trucks, line dancing and HBCU vendors.

Tickets are available at queencythbcus.org/events-gallery.

• *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.

• *Gino Rosaria* Smooth Jazz & R&B featuring *Saxl Rose* and *H'Atina*, 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., Middle C Jazz, 300 South Brevard St. Jazz pianist Rosaria with recording artists Saxl Rose and H'Atina.

Tickets: \$38-\$47.35 for the 6 p.m. show; \$34.42-\$41.96 for the 8:30 p.m.

Aug. 4

"Pride Is a Protest: Then and Now," 6-7:30 p.m., Levine Museum of the New South, 1800 South Blvd.

An interactive dialogue and presentation on pivotal moments in LGBTQ+ history that explores stories from Charlotte and the broader South, like North Carolina's first annual state-wide Pride march, "Out Today, Out to Stay," and consider how remembrance, celebration, and community-building can serve as forms of civic engagement.

Registration is free, but donations are encouraged (suggested donation \$10) that go to museum operations. Information: museumofthenewsouth.org.

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.

Aug. 13

Selwyn Birch, U.S. National Whitewater Center, 5000 Whitewater Center Pkwy. Showtime is 7 p.m. Free admission as part of River Jam.

The blues guitarist, vocalist and cinematic songwriter Selwyn Birchwood will give a free performance as part of the River Jam concert series. Birch is performing in support of the release of his fifth Alligator Records album, *Electric Swamp Funkin' Blues*. www.whitewater.org/events-races/river-jam/

Aug. 21

"Ruha Benjamin: Technology, Savior or Slayer," 7 p.m., The Pearl, 915 Pearl Park Way.

Harvey B. Gantt Center presents the MacArthur Fellow and scholar leading a conversation on artificial intelligence, creativity, race, and the future of society. Cost: \$10 (plus fees); free for Harper-Roddey Society members; free

Please see **START** | 6B



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Roberto Clemente, one of the first Latino athletes to merge baseball excellence with cultural impact as a Pittsburgh Pirates outfielder, is included in a traveling exhibit at Charlotte Museum of History through Oct. 18.

Traveling baseball exhibit is a hit in any language

Charlotte Museum of History hosts immersive showcase through Oct. 18

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

Latinos' impact on baseball and global culture is the focus of an exhibit in Charlotte.

"¡Pleibol! In the Barrios and the Big Leagues / En los barrios y las grandes ligas," is at the Charlotte Museum of History through Oct. 18. The bilingual exhibit is part of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in collaboration with the National Museum of American History.

Access to the exhibit is included with museum admission.

Baseball opened pathways to economic mobility for 20th century working-class people in the Americas and the Caribbean. Workers in agriculture and industrial communities in the United States and abroad used the sport to make ends

meet as well as a vehicle to strengthen community and organize for civil rights and justice.

As a result, the sport produced culture-defining athletes like Roberto Clemente (Puerto Rico), Fernando Valenzuela (Mexico), Rod Carew (Panama) and Sammy Sosa (Dominican Republic).

"It is an honor to bring this nationally recognized exhibition to Charlotte and provide an opportunity for

visitors to connect with these inspiring stories and the lasting impact of baseball and Latino culture on our nation's history," said Charlotte Museum of History CEO Terri White said in a statement. "We are especially excited to partner with the

Charlotte Knights to help bring our region's own baseball history into the conversation and create meaningful connections between this national story and our local community."

"¡Pleibol!" showcases the sport from community teams to the Major Leagues and highlighting how baseball brings people together across race, class, and gender through reproductions of historic and personal photographs, graphic and a short bilingual video.

QR codes provide more information in a virtual gallery as part of a 3D digitization collaboration with Smithsonian Latino Center and Smithsonian Digitization Program Office.



White

Gaston museum taps into unheard Black voices

By Herbert L. White
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A new exhibit at the Gaston County Museum of Art & History chronicles Black life from the perspective of people connected to it.

"The Many Unheard Voices: The African American Communities of Gaston County, 1870s to 1970s," runs through December 2027 at the museum, located at 131 W. Main St. in Dallas. Included in the exhibit are works from Gaston native John Biggers as well as artifacts from neighborhood schools that were linchpins of Black communities from Reconstruction to the fall of Jim Crow.

"There are three things that really make this exhibit stand out," museum curator and exhibit producer Alicyn Wiedrich said in a statement. "First, unlike other exhibits at our museum, this one was developed, from concept to completion, with input from community members: Oscar Reid of Belmont, Delores McNair and Shirlene Hoke of Dallas, and committee chair Ina Biggers of Gastonia.

"Second, through extensive research, including oral histories, the committee came to the understanding that unlike other African American communities - post-Civil War and pre-integration - the African American communities in Gaston County were very much centered around their schools, rather than their churches. This second feature of the exhibit really drives the narrative, especially as we uncovered the impact of Rosenwald Schools in the county."

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, more than 5,000 Rosenwald schools were built in the American South, including 18 schools and one teacherage in Gaston County. With grants from Sears Roebuck owner Julius Rosenwald, the schools educated Black students. Among the Rosenwald schools in Gaston County were Reid



GASTON COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART & HISTORY

The exhibit "The Many Unheard voices: The African American Communities of Gaston County, 1870s to 1970s" at Gaston County Museum of Art & History through 2027.

High School, Bessemer City School, South Point School, and Dallas Elementary.

"While there are only three of these school buildings remaining in Gaston County today, the impact on the lives of the students who attended those 18 schools cannot be overstated," Wiedrich said. "From those schools grew communities that sustained generations of African Americans in Gaston County."

The exhibit includes four pieces of art from the museum's Biggers collection, the first to be displayed since the conservation process began last fall.

"We're excited to finally be able to share some of the restored Biggers collection with the community," museum

director Alexandria Pizza said. "Dr. Biggers and his nephew and fellow artist, James Biggers, were important figures in our community and the art world at large, and we're honored to include their work in this feature exhibit."

In addition to the artifacts and information on display, the exhibit includes interactive arts area for children and adults based on the lives and art of John and James Biggers; reading and reflection space for oral histories and reading materials; and space for visitors to leave their reflections.

Admission is free. Museum hours are Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

On the Net:
gastoncountymuseum.org



DAVE TADA

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

Start September with Lowcountry jazz fest

Continued from page 5B
for students with valid ID (registration required).

Sept. 4-6
Lowcountry Jazz Festival, Gaillard Center, Charleston, S.C.

Performers include Anthony Hamilton, Lakecia Benjamin, Keiko Matsui, Rick Braun and Jonathan Butler.

Tickets: gaillardcenter.org.; information: lowcountryjazzfest.com.

Sept. 18
New Generation Tour at Bojangles Coliseum. Multi-platinum artist Young Thug makes his first headlining run since 2019. Special guest Nav. The tour will also showcase the label's newest signees, Tezzus, Diamond*, 1300saint, Iyrus, Yume, Biggs, and Unky. Tickets at newgenerationlive.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.

Oct. 1
Mariachi El Bronx, 8 p.m., Carolina Theatre.

After a 10-year break, the eight-piece band is headlining a tour. Special guests Bedouin Soundclash and Max Diaz.

Tickets \$37-\$65 at ticketmaster.com and thecarolina.com.

Oct. 10
Daley, Neighborhood Theatre at 8 p.m. The British singer, songwriter and creative artist has worked with Stevie Wonder, Damon Albarn, Marsha Ambrosius, Robert Glasper, Jill Scott, Pharrell Williams and Jessie J. He's worked his way to Billboard chart success in the U.S. and critical acclaim from the Grammys, BET and Soul Train Awards.

Tickets: neighborhoodtheater.com.
Nov. 14
Boney James, Knight Theater, 7:30 p.m.

The contemporary jazz artist is live in Charlotte for one night only. The concert includes an intimate show of with classic favorites and live music magic. Tickets: blumenthalarts.org.

« MOVIE REVIEW »

Cinematic 'The Odyssey' does right by by Homer

By Dwight Brown
BLACK PRESS USA

The Odyssey

4 stars

"Promise me you'll come back."
"What if I can't?"

Back in ancient Greece, when Odysseus (Matt Damon), the king of the island of Ithaca, went off to fight the 10-year Trojan War against the city of Troy, he didn't know if he'd return. That was a thought his wife Penelope (Anne Hathaway), the queen, could hardly bear. When 10 more years were added to her husband's journey of war and self-discovery, his mysterious disappearance and her hardship became public lore.

Vultures, in the guise of suitors, invaded her palace and stayed, intimidating her and their young adult son Telemachus (Tom Holland), who longed for his father who left when he was an infant. Where is this legendary warrior?

It's a mythical tale passed down orally for centuries, then attributed to the poet Homer who supposedly recorded the folklore around the 8th century BCE, putting it in the form of 12,109 lines of poetry.

It's debatable whether there ever was a real Homer. What's undebatable is that writer/director Christopher Nolan ("Openheimer") has tamed this extravagant fable and its compelling mix of history and myths into a three-hour epic. It's an all-encompassing experience that will dazzle all who love adventure, history, romance, drama and war stories. The character arcs are done with a flourish.

The dialogue is often profound and only stumbles when 20th century words sneak into conversations. Odysseus fumes: "How long have I been stuck on this f—ing island?" It's likely that a king in that age would use other profanities to express his rage.

King Odysseus sets off with his faithful warriors, helped greatly by his second-in-command Eurylochus (Himesh Patel). Along the way they stow themselves inside a Trojan Horse to get behind the walls of Troy. They're there ostensibly to fight the enemy and retrieve the Spartan Queen Helen (Lupita Nyong'o), which pleases her husband Menelaus (Jon Bernthal), the king of Sparta.

Nothing goes easy for Odysseus and his crew. They're challenged by the witch Circe (Samantha Morton) and her machinations. Imprisoned by a gigantic cyclops. Forced, while on the open seas, to

navigate around deadly maelstrom-like whirlpools, rocky straits and ferocious storms. In the end, the king himself must find his way home if he is to save his endangered Ithaca and beloved wife and son.

The original fable is non-linear with flashbacks, flashforwards, stories within stories and a mix of their reality and that of the gods who watch over or curse them, like Athena (Zendaya). For the first 25 minutes of the film, a taxing back-and-forth structure along with keeping track of all the characters, names, personalities and plotlines, is a daunting task for even those with a great attention span.

Casual viewers may get lost, especially when it's eventually streamed at home, where a bathroom break could disrupt comprehension. But Nolan has a trick for getting audiences to keep their eyes on the screen and not run to the concession stand for popcorn during the film's long-running time. He filmed this extravaganza with IMAX cameras (cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema) and shot the voyage and its destiny in six countries. This is a monstrous quest with big vivid images that no one will want to miss—not even for a minute.

The palace interiors (production designer Ruth De Jong) are regal, while the beaches, battlefields, and ships with striking red sails are breathtaking. The queen's robes and her husband's armor dazzle (costume designer Ellen Mirojnick). Stringing everything together in a coherent, discernible pattern is not an easy mission, but editor Jennifer Lame nails it. And Ludwig Göransson's heady musical score elevates the drama to epic proportions. This is a spectacle unlike anything audiences could have imagined.

Nolan is more a cinematic wizard than a mere filmmaker. He's creating a consistently mesmerizing moviegoing experience. You get caught up in his view of the ancient world so completely you leave the theater feeling like you just went to war.

The action scenes are choreographed in ways that astound. The emotional intensity between the characters can be felt all the way to the back rows of the theater. The near-seamless, meticulously well-thought-out production, even with its jagged storytelling format, is a smooth operation. You lose all sense of time, and it feels like the story streams by in an hour when it actually takes 180 minutes to unroll.



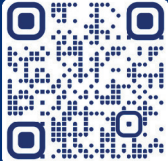
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