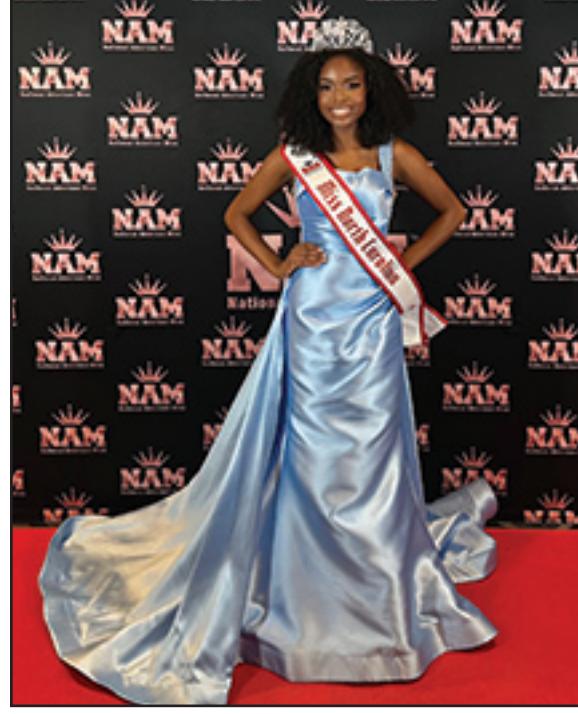


Life!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14, 2025 SECTION B



NATIONAL AMERICAN MISS

Tori Jarrett of Charlotte won the National American Miss North Carolina title in June. Jarrett, 20, is a junior at Spelman College in Atlanta.

Tori Jarrett earns National American Miss NC crown

By Herbert L. White

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Tori Jarrett of Charlotte won the National American Miss North Carolina crown in July.

Jarrett, a 2023 Cato Middle College High School graduate, will represent North Carolina at the National American Miss national competition in Orlando, Florida in November. The Spelman College junior won several optional competitions, including first in Spokesmodel and Casual Wear Modeling and first runner-up in Miss Personality.

"Winning this title feels like a full-circle moment," Jarrett, 20, said. "I've always believed in using your gifts to serve others, and I'm so excited to take this platform and pour back into the community that made me...I want to use this moment to uplift youth voices, advocate for sustainability, and show young girls what's possible when you lead with heart, hustle, and purpose."

Jarrett, who is pursuing a degree in chemistry at Spelman, is president of Spelman Sisters of STEM, co-president of Planned Parenthood Generation Action and founder of Beauty & Brains, a nonprofit that introduces girls to science through hands-on beauty workshops. She is author of a children's book, "The Recycling Rhythm of Rosie & Ron," which teaches environmental literacy through storytelling and was invited to speak at the UNCF Mayors' Masked Ball.

National American Miss awards more than \$1.5 million in cash, scholarships, and prizes annually to support the growth and development of young women nationally. Pageants are held in every state for girls and women ages 4-39 across seven age divisions.

Food insecurity tied to mortality risk for cancer survivors

PENN NEWS

Lack of access to healthy food is a threat to the lives of cancer survivors—a significant and often overlooked factor affecting their long-term health outcomes. A new study shows that those experiencing food insecurity had a 28 percent relative increase in risk of death as compared to those who were food secure.

In the study, published recently in JAMA Health Forum, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine analyzed data

Please see FOOD | 2B



LILY SUM FLOWER SOME PHOTOGRAPHY

Marquila Tarrance, Erica Views and Crystal Danielle are founders of the Who Is She Brunch.

It's more than a meal: Feeding empowerment

Who Is She Brunch includes networking and support for women

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Brunch is more than a meal. It's an opportunity to empower women.

The Who Is She Brunch Aug. 23 from 12-2 p.m. at Pine, 4100 Raleigh St., will include panels, guest speakers, and networking opportunities. Tickets are \$241.94 (including fees) and available at Eventbrite.

The brunch was founded by Marquila Tarrance, Erica Views and Crystal Danielle. Originally in-

volved in separate projects, they in government and corporate spaces.

"It's crucial that we continue to have events like this and support each other, because some of the resources that were previously available to us are just simply no longer there," said Maria Yvette, a business and partnership strategist. "So, we're having to pave new ways, figure out different ways in the door, going around the back door and the windows. We're having to be very creative and resil-

Please see IT'S MORE | 2B

Survey: MMR vaccine outweighs risks

KFF HEALTH NEWS

The United States is amid the second-highest year of measles cases since 2000, when the disease was declared eliminated in this country, meaning that cases within the U.S. originated outside the country.

As of May 8, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 2025, there have been over a thousand confirmed U.S. cases of measles and three confirmed deaths from measles. Because many cases go unreported, this number is considered an undercount.

In contrast to the current outbreak, from the time the United States declared that measles was no longer endemic through last year (2000-2024), there's been an average of about 180 measles cases a year.

While many Americans know how measles can spread, most cannot accurately estimate the prev-



UNSPLASH

Americans agree vaccinating children against measles outweigh the risks, according to a survey by Annenberg Science and Public Health.

alence of complications associated with measles such as hospitalization or the risks it presents during pregnancy, according to the latest Annenberg Science and Public Health survey, which was conducted among 1,653 empaneled U.S. adults from April 15-28 by the Annenberg Public

Policy Center's April 2025 health survey finds that:

Two-thirds of U.S. adults (67%) know that it's false to say that vaccines given to children like the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) cause autism—but that declined significantly from 74% in 2021.

Americans overwhelmingly say the benefits of the MMR vaccine for children outweigh the risks (83% to 17%).

Many more Americans (70%) think healthy children should be required to be vaccinated to attend public school because of the potential risk to others who are not vaccinated than think it should be a matter of parental choice (18%).

Most Americans know the most common ways measles can be spread, but about half are not sure how

Please see SURVEY | 3B

«RIDES

A relic from bygone hatchback era, Volkswagen's Golf more than holds up well

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

America once had a huge love affair with the hatchback and Volkswagen's Golf got a lot of it.

It was the original hot hatch (it was originally called Rabbit, I think) that forced other companies to join the fray.

Alas, there aren't many hatchbacks left. Heck, if it's not a crossover or utility vehicle, most buyers are just not interested, and I haven't even mentioned the electric stuff.

Still, the Volkswagen Golf still soldiers on. Actually, this is the best Golf ever in R guise. It's a wonderful mix of speed, tenacious handling and all-out fun to

drive fury.

The revised Golf R was introduced in 2022. The 2025 version gets a few updates. The styling is a bit sleeker. The hood looks a little lower than before. The overall shape makes it look fast standing still. The Golf looks even better at night with the illuminated VW emblem and LED light bar that runs across the grille.

The interior of Golf R has also been touched. The infotainment screen is a lot larger, and the graphics look sharper. The screen seems to respond quicker to the touch. The lack of real buttons can be a problem. It's easy to activate something you aren't inter-

ested in, or shutdown something you are. That aside, the Golf's interior is a nice place to be. The front seats are really comfortable and will fit a variety of physiques. The driver's seat has a multitude of adjustments which is very appreciated. The rear has enough space for two adults. There is a center hump that would make a third passenger very uncomfortable. All of the interior leans toward upscale with a sporty, muscular sense.

The dash is Volkswagen's digital cockpit with a 10.25-inch configurable display. A head up display is visible to the driver and

Please see A RELIC | 2B



VOLKSWAGEN

The 2025 Volkswagen Golf R is a survivor from America's hatchback love affair.

It's more than a meal: Feeding empowerment

Continued from page 1B

ient when we are providing opportunities for women like us."

The idea of brunch resonated most with the founders, primarily because it's trendy, not just a meal but a time to connect.

"It kind of escalated to not only a community, but just going across the country with involving women online as well as in person, on ways to strategize and build businesses, to grow their organizations, to have community, to find support, to find a best friend or even a gym partner" Danielle said.

Views added: "Initially, when we decided to come together and create a safe space for women, we knew that the thing that all girls love is brunch, and so we wanted to curate a luxurious brunch."

Empowerment comes in different forms, but for the brunch organizers, the word holds weight because it's an opportunity for women to equip themselves for growth.

"In our community, it's not taken lightly by the women that we're inspired by, it's not taken lightly by the women that look up to us and when we hear the word empowerment, we're looking for strength, strength from the other women, strength from the things that they have built," Dan-

elle said. "This movement has been built and centered around empowerment from the beginning, not because we had all the empowerment, but we realized at a very, very early stage in meeting each other, that empowerment could grow by all of us joining together and being together and building a community from this."

The brunch's theme is "Girl, Stop Sleeping On Yourself," which reflects the founders' mission of encouraging women to realize their potential.

"I know a lot of times as women, we kind of miss the mark with that, because we put everything above us and before us," Tarrance said, "but in this particular event, we definitely want the women to take away that you are powerful, amazing, and your capabilities and your responsibilities should not hold you down. Be exactly who you are in all of your resilience."

For women who are hesitant to leap into entrepreneurship, the founders encourage them to "do it scared."

"All three of us are individual creators and business owners at this point, and we had to do it scared," Views said. "We are very uncomfortable every single year, planning the brunch, executing the brunch, but at the end of the day, we're doing something that matters to so many more women, other than just us."

A relic from bygone era, VW's Golf more than holds up well

Continued from page 1B

a ventilated 15-watt wireless charger is included.

The Golf R is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that now makes 328 horsepower, up 13 hp from last year. The power is sent to all four wheels via a seven-speed automatic transmission (the manual is no more for 2025). There are paddle shifters to manually shift the car. Also, the all-wheel drive system uses torque vectoring that sends the right amount of torque to the wheels that need it the most. There is adaptive chassis control, and a sport-tuned suspension.

It's hard to put into words how much fun the Golf R is to drive. You can reach 60 miles per hour in 4.4 seconds, go from 60 to 0 in 105 feet and pull 0.99 g on a skid pad. I didn't do the third thing but the first two I can speak proudly about. This thing grabs and corner and slingshots you through it while keeping its poise. Navigating urban traffic is done without pause. Passing is effortless it's nearly an afterthought.

The Golf R is surprisingly pleasant on the road. There isn't a lot of road or wind noise, but you can hear the engine which is a good thing. There's a distinct growl that is fairly throaty for a four-cylinder.

The car is also more comfortable than expected. The adaptive suspension

dampers are great at helping with the car's grip and allowing the suspension to soak of most of the bad roads.

If this car has a fault, it's the climate controls. The air conditioner works perfectly. The 100-degree heat we experienced was no joke. The Golf's cooling system kept the cabin frosty feeling. Getting the system to work is the problem. The touch sensitive controls were a bit awkward and especially hard to use at night.

The only other problem is the car's price. This compact is nearly \$50,000. It's well put together and does its job masterfully but that's a lot of cash.

Still, I'd buy this car if funds allowed. The excellent handling balanced with a smooth and comfortable ride make The Golf R one appealing vehicle.

Pros:

- Bold styling
- Well-appointed interior
- Roomy interior
- Comfortable seats
- Powerful, responsive engine
- Great brakes
- Excellent driving dynamics
- Hatch back design
- Frosty three-zone climate system

Cons:

- Price
- Frustrating climate controls

Food insecurity tied to higher mortality risk for survivors

Continued from page 1B

from more than 5,000 respondents who shared their cancer diagnoses as part of a nationwide, government-sponsored health survey.

"Food matters in cancer care and outcomes," said study senior author Jaya Aysola MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Medicine and executive director of the Centers for Health Equity Advancement at Penn Medicine. "The results show that simple, integrated solutions can help prolong the lives of cancer survivors by helping put healthy food on their table."

Addressing root causes Food insecurity, estimated to affect about 40 million people in the U.S. alone, is the condition in which good nutrition is of limited or uncertain availability. It is considered a significant socioeconomic factor in overall health and has been linked to higher risks of chronic diseases including heart disease,

diabetes, some mental health disorders, hypertension, kidney disease, and colorectal cancer.

The investigators made use of data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2011 and 2012 National Health Interview Surveys, as well as the U.S. National Death Index through 2019. Their analysis covered a total of 5,603 adults 40 and older who reported having had a cancer diagnosis on the NHIS and answered its questions relating to food security.

A total of 579 (10.3%) of the respondents reported food insecurity. This group had higher all-cause mortality — overall risk of death — through 2019, compared to cancer survivors who did not report food insecurity. After adjustment for potentially relevant differences between respondents, such as sex, age, smoking status, and the presence of other illnesses, there remained a significant mor-

tality gap between the groups—the food-insecure group having an estimated 28% increased risk of all-cause mortality.

Analyses of subsets of the respondents also showed that respondents reporting food insecurity and non-participation in government food assistance programs had about 42% increased risk of all-cause mortality—and 42% of increased risk of cancer mortality.

This is the first study to review and find a connection between food insecurity and mortality in people with cancer.

"Screening for food-insecurity in clinical practice, expanding food assistance program eligibility, and guiding people to resources may help reduce this apparent connection," according to John Lin, a medical student and HEAL (Health Equity Advancement Lab) fellow at the Centers for Health Equity Advancement, and the study's first author.



DANIEL CHANG | KFF HEALTH NEWS

Francoise Cham of Miami has health insurance coverage for herself and her daughter through the Affordable Care Act marketplace, also known as Obamacare. The budget law signed by President Donald Trump on July 4 creates new rules for verifying eligibility for subsidized coverage, shorter enrollment periods, and other changes that will cause a projected 870,000 Floridians to lose health insurance by 2034.

Even anti-Obamacare states face new law's consequences

By Daniel Chang
and Sam Whitehead
KFF HEALTH NEWS

MIAMI — GOP lawmakers in the 10 states that refused the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion for over a decade have argued their conservative approach to growing government programs would pay off in the long run.

Instead, the Republican-passed budget law that includes many of President Donald Trump's priorities will pose at least as big a burden on patients and hospitals in the expansion holdout states as in the 40 states that have extended Medicaid coverage to more low-income adults, hospital executives and other officials warn.

For instance, Georgia, with a population of just over 11 million, will see as many people lose insurance coverage sold through ACA marketplaces as will California, with more than triple the population, according to estimates by KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

The new law imposes additional paperwork requirements on Obamacare enrollees, slashes the time they have each year to sign up, and cuts funding for navigators who help them shop for plans. Those changes, all of which will erode enrollment, are expected to have far more impact in states like Florida and Texas than in California because a higher proportion of residents in non-expansion states are enrolled in ACA plans.

The budget law, which Republicans called the "One Big Beautiful Bill," will cause sweeping changes to health care across the country as it trims federal spending on Medicaid by more than \$1 trillion over the next decade. The program covers more than 71 million people with low incomes and disabilities. Ten million people will lose coverage over the next decade due to the law, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

Many of its provisions are focused on the 40 states that expanded Medicaid under the ACA, which added millions more low-income adults to the rolls. But the consequences are not confined to those states. A proposal from conservatives to cut more generous federal payments for people added to Medicaid by the ACA expansion didn't make it into the law.

"Politicians in non-expansion states should be furious about that," said Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

The number of people losing coverage could accelerate in non-expansion states if enhanced federal subsidies for Obamacare plans expire at the end of the year, driving up premiums as early as January and adding to the rolls of uninsured. KFF estimates as many as 2.2 million people could become uninsured just in Florida, a state where lawmakers refused to expand Medicaid and, partly as a result, now leads the nation in ACA enrollment.

For people like Francoise Cham of Miami, who has Obamacare coverage, the Republican policy changes could be life-altering.

Before she had insurance, the 62-year-old single mom said she would donate blood just to get her cholesterol checked. Once a year, she'd splurge for a wellness exam at Planned Parenthood. She expects to make about \$28,000 this year and currently pays about \$100 a month for an ACA plan to cover herself and her daughter, and even that strains her budget.

Cham choked up describing the "safety net" that health insurance has afforded her — and at the prospect of being unable to afford coverage if premiums spike at the end of the year.

"Obamacare has been my lifesaver," she said.

If the enhanced ACA subsidies aren't extended, "everyone will be hit hard," said Cindy Mann, a health policy expert with Manatt Health, a consulting and legal firm, and a former deputy administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

"But a state that hasn't expanded Medicaid will have marketplace people enrolling at lower income levels," she said. "So, a greater share of residents are reliant on the marketplace."

Though GOP lawmakers may try to cut Medicaid even more this year, for now the states that expanded Medicaid largely appear to have made a smart decision, while states that haven't are facing similar financial pressures without any upside, said health policy experts and hospital industry observers.

KFF Health News reached out to the governors of the 10 states that have not fully expanded Medicaid to see if the budget legislation made them regret that decision or made them more open to expansion. Spokespeople for Republican Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina and Republican Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia did not indicate whether their states are considering Medicaid expansion.

Brandon Charochak, a spokesperson for McMaster's office, said South Carolina's Medicaid program focuses on "low-income children and families and disabled individuals," adding, "The state's Medicaid program does not anticipate a large impact on the agency's Medicaid population."

Enrollment in ACA marketplace plans nationwide has more than doubled since 2020 to 24.3 million. If enhanced subsidies expire, premiums for Obamacare coverage would rise by more than 75% on average, according to an analysis by KFF. Some insurers are already signaling they plan to charge more.

The CBO estimates that allowing enhanced subsidies to expire will increase the number of people without health insurance by 4.2 million by 2034, compared with a permanent extension. That would come on top of the coverage losses caused by Trump's budget law.

"That is problematic and scary for us," said Eric Boley, president of the Wyoming Hospital Association.

He said his state, which did not expand Medicaid, has a relatively small population and hasn't been the most attractive for insurance providers — few companies currently offer plans on the ACA exchange — and he worried any increase in the uninsured rate would "collapse the insurance market."

As the uninsured rate rises in non-expansion states and the budget law's Medicaid cuts loom, lawmakers say state funds will not backfill the loss of federal dollars, including in states that have refused to expand Medicaid.

Those states got slightly favorable treatment under the law, but it's not enough, said Grace Hoge, press secretary for Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, a Democrat who favors Medicaid expansion but who has been rebuffed by GOP state legislators.

"Kansans' ability to access affordable healthcare will be harmed," Hoge said in an email. "Kansas, nor our rural hospitals, will not be able to make up for these cuts."

For hospital leaders in other states that have refused full Medicaid expansion, the budget law poses another test by limiting financing arrangements states leveraged to make higher Medicaid payments to doctors and hospitals.

Beginning in 2028, the law will reduce those payments by 10 percentage points each year until they are closer to what Medicare pays.

Richard Roberson, president of the Mississippi Hospital Association, said the state's use of what's called directed payments in 2023 helped raise its Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals and other health institutions from \$500 million a year to \$1.5 billion a year. He said higher rates helped Mississippi's rural hospitals stay open.

"That payment program has just been a lifeline," Roberson said.

The budget law includes a \$50 billion fund intended to insulate rural hospitals and clinics from its changes to Medicaid and the ACA. But a KFF analysis found it would offset only about one-third of the cuts to Medicaid in rural areas.

Trump encouraged Florida, Tennessee, and Texas to continue refusing Medicaid expansion in his first term, when his administration gave them an unusual 10-year extension for financing programs known as uncompensated care pools, which generate billions of dollars to pay hospitals for treating the uninsured, said Allison Orris, director of Medicaid policy for the left-leaning think tank Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

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Survey: MMR vaccine for kids outweigh risks

Continued from page 1B

common complications are – or what the risks are during pregnancy.

The survey finds that more than 8 in 10 Americans (83%) are not worried that they or someone in their family will contract measles over the next three months.

"Since the overwhelming number of individuals in this country, including children, either have had measles or have been vaccinated against it, it is unsurprising that few are worried about getting the virus," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and of the survey. "But with measles cases reported in 31 states and vaccination rates dropping, everyone should be knowledgeable about the symptoms, treatment, and the prevention of measles through the highly effective MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine."

The two doses of the measles vaccine – which are recommended at ages 12-to-15 months for the first dose and 4 to 6 years old for the second dose – are 97% effective at preventing measles among those who are vaccinated and exposed to it, the CDC reports.

Preventing measles with the MMR vaccine

Although decades of research have established that the childhood vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella is the best way to protect against measles, some parents are hesitant to have their children vaccinated, in part because of the debunked claim that the MMR vaccine can cause autism.

Two-thirds of Americans (67%) say the purported link between MMR and autism is a false one. While the proportion who say the MMR vaccine does not cause autism is sizeable, it is significantly lower than the 74% who said so in June 2021, when the ASAPH survey first asked this question.

In the current survey, 1 in 7 people (14%) say it is true that the MMR vaccine causes autism, an increase of 5 percentage points from June 2021 (9%).

To most Americans, the benefits of the MMR vaccine for children outweigh the risks by a wide margin (83% vs. 17%). However, the percentage of Americans who believe the benefits outweigh the risks has dropped slightly but significantly from August 2023, when 89% said the benefits outweighed the risks.

Further, 81% say it is true that medical professionals recommend that those who are able to be safely vaccinated take the MMR vaccine even if their chances of exposure are low. This proportion is significantly higher compared to April 2024, when 74% said this was true.

Most agree on vaccine requirements for children to attend public school

When asked about their views on MMR vaccine requirements for children attending school, vastly more people agree that healthy children should be required to be vaccinated to attend public school because of the potential risk to others who are not vaccinated (70%) than say parents should be able to decide, even if it creates risks for others (18%).

These results show a significant uptick in support for school vaccine requirements in the 20 months since August 2023 (63%), and a significant decline among those supporting parental choice (22% in August 2023).

Risks during pregnancy not widely understood

For people who are pregnant and have not had the MMR vaccine, getting measles can lead to serious complications, such as delivering a low-birth weight baby and early delivery.

When asked to select among a list of complications that could occur in someone with measles who is pregnant, a third of survey respondents correctly identify delivering a low birthweight baby (34%) or experiencing an early delivery (34%) as complications of having measles while pregnant.

More people identify death as a possible complication this year (16%, significantly more than the 12% last year). A small number of people incorrectly indicate that diabetes (7%) and blurred vision (11%) are more likely to occur if you have measles while pregnant. They are not. Most Americans (57%) say they are not sure what the complications are.

The CDC recommends measles vaccination before but not during pregnancy for those who are unvaccinated; however, only 15% know this. The CDC notes: "Even though MMR is a safe and effective vaccine, there is a theoretical risk to the baby. This is because it is a live vaccine, meaning it contains a weakened version of the living viruses." The CDC recommends the MMR vaccine be given a month or more before someone becomes pregnant, if that person was not already vaccinated against measles, mumps, and rubella.

Most know how measles spread, few grasp risks

Amid the current measles outbreak, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) say there are more measles cases in the U.S. than in the

comparable period last year.

More than a quarter (27%) indicate that they are not sure whether there are more cases than last year, 5% think there are fewer cases, and 11% say the number of cases is about the same.

More people know how measles spreads: Most Americans can identify common ways measles spreads. Two-thirds (66%) correctly say that measles can be spread by touching a contaminated surface and then touching one's nose, mouth, or eyes, a significant increase from last April when 59% indicated this as a means of spreading measles. Slightly fewer Americans (63%) correctly say that measles can be spread by coughing or sneezing, no statistical difference from last year.

Few know the measles incubation period: Very few of those surveyed know how long a person infected with measles can spread the virus before developing the signature measles rash. One in 7 (14%) correctly estimate that a person can spread the infection for four days before developing a rash, while 12% estimate that the period is one week. The majority of people (55%) report not being sure. These results are unchanged from April 2024.

Few accurately estimate symptoms and complications: Although a majority of respondents know common ways that measles can spread, about half of Americans express uncertainty about how often certain complications occur – and only a small percentage can accurately estimate them. Accuracy was determined for these symptoms if the respondent estimated the incidence within a range of 4 percentage points of the actual CDC incidence.

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of people who would experience specific symptoms and complications out of 100 people with measles.

Hospitalization: The CDC reports that about 13% of people who got measles in 2025 were hospitalized, but just over 1 in 8 Americans (13%) estimate this incidence correctly. A third (33%) say they are not sure about the incidence and the remainder either overestimate (36%) or underestimate (17%) the incidence of those with measles who will become hospitalized. This represents no significant change from 2024.

Diarrhea: According to the CDC, about 1 in 10 people who become infected with measles will experience diarrhea as a result. Fifty-four percent of Americans are not sure how many people out of 100 with measles would experience diarrhea, a significant increase in uncertainty of 6 percentage points since April 2024, when we last asked this question (48% unsure). Four percent estimate accurately, 33% overestimate the incidence (down significantly from 40% last year), and 7% underestimate the number.

Beliefs about non-vaccine treatments for measles

Visiting Texas during the measles outbreak in March of this year, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in a Fox News interview that doctors were getting positive results by treating measles with, among other things, cod liver oil, which contains "high concentrations of vitamin A and vitamin D."

Health experts grew concerned that the emphasis on vitamin A could be misleading to suggest that vitamin A could prevent the disease among those exposed to it. However, experts on infectious diseases emphasize that vitamin A cannot prevent someone from getting measles. And a recent New York Times story reports that Texas physicians treating measles patients say they have cared for "a handful of unvaccinated children who were given so much vitamin A that they had signs of liver damage."

The ASAPH survey asked about vitamin A and cod liver oil as a preventive measure against measles and found that a plurality says that taking a daily dose of vitamin A (46%) or a large amount of cod liver oil each day (47%) has no effect on whether one will get measles.

An equal number are unsure about the effectiveness of each (45% and 48%, respectively). Just 9% say taking vitamin A daily helps protect one against getting measles and just 4% say taking large amounts of cod liver oil each day would do the same.

As for the general health benefits of taking a large amount of cod liver oil every day, 48% say they are unsure whether there are any health benefits or not. Just as many say cod liver oil improves a person's health (16%) as say it harms (15%) one's health. (A 2024 study suggests that fish oil supplements "might be a risk factor" among healthy people for atrial fibrillation and stroke.)

A fifth (22%) say taking large amounts of cod liver oil every day has no effect on one's health one way or the other.

Medicaid parents rush to vaccinate their children

By Jackie Fortier

KFF HEALTH NEWS

For two decades, Washington, D.C., pediatrician Lanre Falusi has counseled parents about vaccine safety, side effects, and timing. But this year, she said, the conversations have changed.

"For the first time, I'm having parents of newborns ask me if their baby will still be able to get vaccines," Falusi said.

Throughout the country, pediatricians say anxious parents are concerned about access to routine childhood immunizations, especially those with children on Medicaid, the government insurance program for low-income families and people with disabilities. Medicaid covers 4 in 10 children in the U.S.

"It really became an issue when RFK Jr. stepped into the role of HHS secretary," said Deborah Greenhouse, a pediatrician in South Carolina.

The concern accelerated after the shake-up of a key Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vaccine advisory body in June, raising fears that millions of American families could soon have to pay out-of-pocket for shots now covered by their health insurance.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime anti-vaccine activist, removed all 17 members of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the panel responsible for recommending which shots are included in the nation's adult and childhood immunization schedules.

Kennedy replaced the panelists with new members aligned with his views, prompting alarm among medical professionals and public health experts.

"People should be worried about what's going to happen to the availability of vaccines for children," said Jennifer Tolbert, deputy director of the Program on Medicaid and the Uninsured at KFF, a national health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

Under the Affordable Care Act, health insurers are required to cover all ACIP-recommended vaccines. States and other jurisdictions use the childhood vaccine schedule to set immunization requirements for schoolchildren.

ACIP's recommendations also determine which vaccines get covered by the Vaccines for Children Program, a CDC-funded initiative that provides free immunizations to low-income and uninsured children. Half of children in the U.S. are eligible for the VFC program.

If the new ACIP members withdraw support for a particular vaccine and the CDC director agrees, Tolbert said, the consequences would be immediate. "It would automatically affect what is covered and therefore which vaccines are available to children on Medicaid," she said.

Health insurance companies have not yet said how they would alter coverage, but Tolbert said such a move would open the door for private insurers to refuse to cover the vaccine.

Pediatricians worry about a future where parents might have to choose – pay hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket for shots or leave their kids unprotected.

The health insurance industry group AHIP said that health plans "continue to follow federal requirements related to coverage of ACIP-recommended vaccines and will continue to support broad access to critical preventive services, including immunizations."

Pediatricians say news about President Donald Trump's new budget law, which is expected to re-



ADOBESTOCK

More parents who are Medicaid recipients are reaching out to pediatricians about scheduling vaccinations for their children ahead of changes in federal law.

duce Medicaid spending by about \$1 trillion over the next decade, also prompted questions from parents.

While parents may be worried about losing their Medicaid, the law doesn't mention vaccines or change eligibility or benefits for children's Medicaid, Tolbert said. But less federal funding means states will have to make decisions about who is covered and which services are offered.

To raise the revenue needed to pay for Medicaid, states could raise taxes; move money earmarked for other spending, such as education or corrections; or, more likely, reduce Medicaid spending.

"And they may do that by cutting eligibility for optional populations or by cutting services that are optional, or by reducing payments to providers in the form of provider rates," Tolbert said. "It's unclear how this will play out, and it will likely look different across all states."

In May, Kennedy announced in a post on X that the CDC is no longer recommending the covid-19 vaccine for healthy children and pregnant women. The move prompted a lawsuit by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other physician groups that seeks to freeze Kennedy's directive.

In June, the new ACIP members appointed by Kennedy voted to recommend that adults and children no longer receive flu vaccines with thimerosal, a preservative rarely used in some flu vaccines. Anti-vaccine activists, including Kennedy, have rallied against thimerosal for decades, alleging links to autism despite no evidence of any association.

"There is no cause for concern," Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson Emily Hilliard said in a statement.

"As Secretary Kennedy has stated, no one will be denied access to a licensed vaccine if they choose to receive one."

"When the ACIP committee met last month, they reaffirmed that flu vaccines will remain accessible and covered, and they emphasized safety by ensuring these vaccines are mercury-free," Hilliard wrote.

"The Vaccines for Children program continues to provide COVID-19 vaccines at no cost for eligible children when the parent, provider, and patient decide vaccination is appropriate. Medicaid will continue to reimburse the administration fee."

But the possibility that a vaccine could be restricted or no longer covered by insurance is already changing how parents approach immunization. In Falusi's practice, parents are scheduling appointments to coincide precisely with their child's eligibility, sometimes making appointments the same week as their birthdays.

Melissa Mason, a pediatrician in Albuquerque, New

Mexico, has evaluated some patients who contracted measles during the multistate outbreak that started in neighboring Texas.

She's concerned that any new limitations on access or reimbursement for childhood vaccines could lead to even more preventable illnesses and deaths. Nationally, there have been more than 1,300 measles cases since January, including three deaths, according to the CDC. "We're seeing this outbreak because vaccination rates are too low and it allows measles to spread in the community," Mason said.

Children and teens account for 66% of national measles cases. Mason has begun offering the measles vaccine to infants as young as 6 months old, a full six months earlier than standard practice, though still within federal guidelines.

Last year, overall kindergarten vaccination rates fell in the U.S. At the same time, the number of children with a school vaccination exemption continued to rise.

Pertussis, or whooping cough – another disease that can be deadly to young children – is spreading. As of July 5, more than 15,100 cases had been identified in U.S. residents this year, according to the CDC.

Mason said pertussis is especially dangerous to babies too young to receive the vaccine.

For now, pediatricians are trying to maintain a sense of urgency without inciting panic.

In Columbia, South Carolina, Greenhouse used to offer families a flexible age range for routine vaccinations.

"I'm not saying that anymore," the pediatrician said.

She now urges parents to get their children vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.

She described anxious parents asking whether the HPV vaccine, which helps prevent cervical cancer, can be administered to children younger than the recommended age of 9.

"I actually had two parents today ask if their 7- or 8-year-olds could get the HPV shot," Greenhouse said. "I had to tell them it's not allowed."

With the vaccine requiring multiple doses months apart, Greenhouse fears time may run out for families to get the series covered by insurance. If they have to pay out-of-pocket, she's afraid some families may choose not to get the second dose. A second dose could cost about \$300 if no longer covered by insurance.

"I cannot be 100% sure what the future looks like for some of these vaccines," Greenhouse said. "I can tell you it's a very scary place to be."

Kennedy's newly appointed vaccine advisory committee is expected to hold its next public meeting as soon as August.

Classifieds

Classified Deadline: Monday at noon, prior to Thursday's edition

PAGE 4B Thursday, August 14, 2025

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Submittals must be received by September 4, 2025, at 5:00pm.

Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternate format for persons with disabilities by calling 980-314-2500.

INVITATION FOR BIDS

Mecklenburg County Asset and Facility Management will receive single prime, unit cost, sealed bids for the **Freedom Park Pond – Sediment Removal Project** until 2:00 pm EST., Thursday, September 11th, 2025, at which time bids will be opened at Valerie C. Woodard Center, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC, Room 6003. Bid, Performance, and Payment & Material bonds are required. NC law and applicable regulations of various licensing boards and MWBE provisions will be observed. The project involves mechanical dredging to remove sediment from Freedom Park pond. Electronic plans and specifications can be obtained from LJB Engineering PC, at (803) 679-2748 and/or by email at from 8am to 5pm, Monday - Friday. Mecklenburg County reserves the right to waive technicalities and to reject any or all proposals. **A non-mandatory pre-bid meeting will occur at 10:00 am EST., Thursday, August 21st, 2025 at the Whittington Field parking lot located at 1415 Princeton Ave, Charlotte, NC 28209.** This information will be made available in an alternative format for persons with disabilities by calling 980-341-2428.

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The project manual, construction documents, bid schedule and additional project details can be found on Habitat for Humanity of the Charlotte Region's website at: www.habitatclregion.org/bids.

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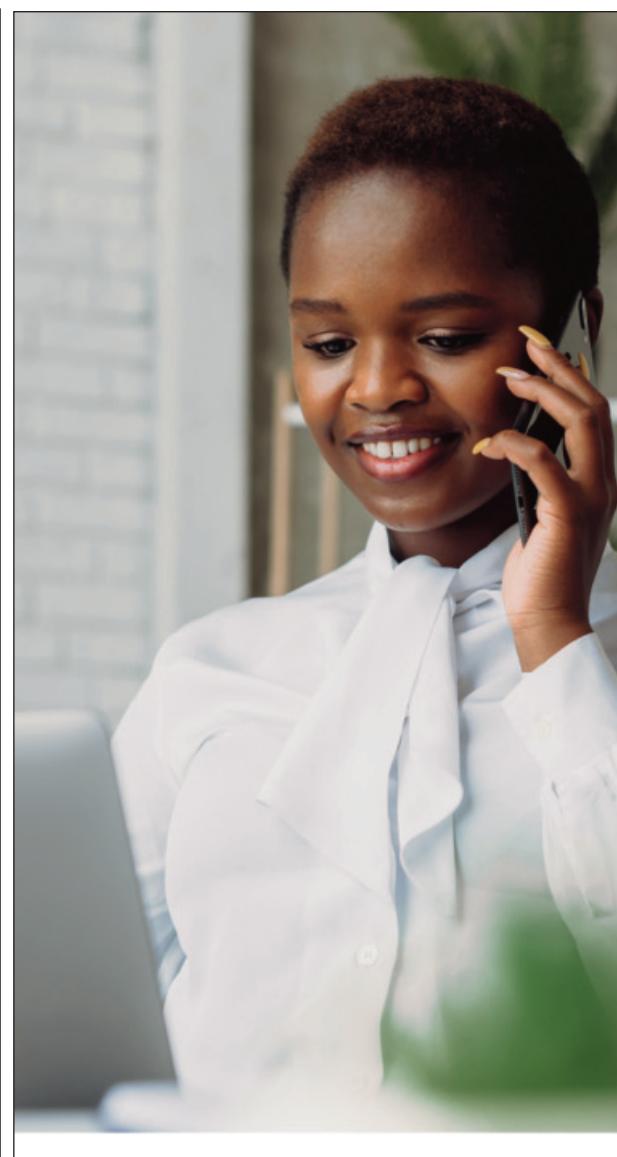
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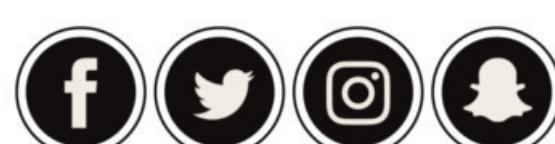
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»BOOK REVIEW

'You Belong Here' speaks to dangers of going home

By Connie Panzariello
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Megan Miranda treads over familiar territory in "You Belong Here," the story of a woman forced to return to the town that once suspected her of involvement in a terrible crime — a plot that echoes too closely the themes of her previous novels.

Twenty years ago, Beckett Bowery's college roommate lit a fire that killed two young men during a hazing ritual, and then seemingly vanished. Adalyn Vale's whereabouts remain a mystery in Wyatt Valley, a town divided between those connected to the elite college and the locals who know little about life behind its gates.

Beckett embodied that divide — her parents were professors at the school, but she grew up as a local until deciding to enroll herself. After the fire, she was suspected of being an accomplice and forced to leave her home. Now, two decades later, her daughter, Delilah, enrolls at the school, drawing Beckett back into Wyatt Valley's web.

Miranda is an author who always writes to her strengths, but in this book, she is sticking too close to them. Her 2016 adult debut, "All the Missing Girls," was a rewardingly twisty take on the genre that pulled off the story being told in reverse and provided a genuinely shocking conclusion. It also introduced Miranda's signature plot device: a woman haunted by tragedy, reluctantly returning to the scene of the crime, still the subject of small-town whispers and accusations.

This book feels like a recycle of that plot, and one that fails to grasp the electric undercurrent of intense female friendship Miranda usually has a knack for.

The reader never feels the magnetism of Adalyn or the emotional weight of Beckett's relationship with her, to the point where Beckett is still haunted by Adalyn's absence two decades later. More time spent in the past with their friendship and its effect on Beckett's identity might explain why Adalyn's hold remains so strong.

Miranda's description of the sinister-sounding hazing tradition called "the howling," where co-eds are chased

Please see DANGERS | 6B

Brooklyn's Black church choirs persist amid decline

By Fiona Murphy
RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

NEW YORK — On Sunday mornings in Brooklyn, nicknamed the borough of churches, the muffled sounds of choir singers, hand claps and Hammond organs can be heard from the sidewalks. The borough still has a church on nearly every block, but over the years, the number of people in the pews has thinned.

Many church choirs in the heart of Brooklyn, however, have kept singing — despite boasting fewer singers than in years past as neighborhoods face gentrification and organized religious affiliation decreases.

Standing in front of the gospel choir at Concord Baptist Church of Christ in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, Jessica Howard, 25, led the gospel standard "God Is" on a Sunday in July. Dressed in a powder-pink floral dress, she called out lines naming God as "joy in sorrow" and "strength for tomorrow." Some choir members wiped away tears as the song stoked emotions from around the room.

As a Black Christian person, as a descendant of slaves, I think when I sing, I feel really connected to my ancestors, said Howard, who grew up in Virginia and now sings as a soloist at Concord, where she's been a congregant for six years. "I really feel sometimes like it's not just me singing, it's my lineage singing."

Founded in 1847, Concord Baptist Church is Brooklyn's oldest historically Black congregation. At the time, a nearby neighborhood known as Weeksville, now considered part of central Brooklyn, was the second-largest free Black community in the United States before the Civil War, said Amanda Henderson, collections historian at the

Please see BROOKLYN'S | 6B

Creativity, collabs and music royalty

At home and beyond, saxophonist Adrian Crutchfield has played with best in the business



ADRIANCUTCHFIELD.COM

Saxophonist Adrian Crutchfield, who'll accompany CeeLo Green Aug. 8 at the Carolina Theater, is one of Charlotte's most accomplished musicians. Crutchfield has also played with Anthony Hamilton, Fantasia and Prince.

By Nikya Hightower
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Adrian Crutchfield still plays for Prince.

Crutchfield, who returns to Charlotte Aug. 8, play saxophone alongside five-time Grammy winner CeeLo Green at the Carolina Theatre, is one of the city's most accomplished musicians. Crutchfield has played jazz, hip hop, rock and funk as a versatile and prolific collaborator with talents like Grammy winners Anthony Hamilton and Lionel Richie.

By his own admission, Crutchfield cites his time with Prince was the most professionally significant because it challenged and sharpened his skills.

"People always say he used to play for Prince, and I correct them and say I still play for Prince" Crutchfield said. "As a colleague, Prince was the one who really pushed me to be an artist myself. He really encouraged me to step out and do it myself, instead of just relying on being his side."

Crutchfield got his start as a 4-year-old when he received his first saxophone from jazz standout Kenny G. at a concert in Roanoke, Virginia. Kenny G. noticed young Crutchfield's enthusiasm for music in the audience and in return gifted his saxophone.

"Roanoke is where I was made," Crutchfield said, "and Charlotte is what made me."

Crutchfield, who travels the country for weekend gigs in addition to teaching at a workshop in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that focuses on Prince's writing and music, devel-

oped his skill in Charlotte.

"I have to give credit to the Charlotte artistic community," Crutchfield said. "It's just a really beautiful community of artists, and it's really overlooked. Charlotte has an amazing artistic scene. The Carolinas period, we have an amazing artistic scene."

Crutchfield learned from creatives who shaped the local music scene, like Bill Hanna, known as the "Godfather of Charlotte jazz."

"Bill Hanna, he would invite me out to his jam session at the Double Door and Jack Straw's and all these other places, and that's where I cut my teeth," Crutchfield said. He also credits other Charlotte artists like Gerard Vincent, Ziad Rabie and Michael Porter as inspiration.

Crutchfield went solo in 2009 and has since released four albums. This year Crutchfield signed his first record label deal with Trippin 'n Rhythm Records and released the album "Slick" in May. The title came from a song he felt embodied the word's meaning.

"We were trying to come up with a name, and they said, 'We think this song really kind of describes you, Adrian. This is high energy, but also really suave and confident and, you know, slick.'"

Crutchfield typically puts storytelling at the front of his work but wanted to take a different approach with the new album.

"I wanted to give people the material to make up their own story. I

wanted to create the soundtrack that people could live their lives to every day," he said. "I wanted to give everyone the opportunity to

just have these songs and have something they could just live life to and experience life through, you know, just pop it on and go live life and see what happens and let this be the soundtrack."

Crutchfield points out the importance of growing pains and how each album reflects how he's matured as an artist.

"I still love the music I did when I first came on the scene, because it's free and uninhibited, it's just wild," Crutchfield said. "But I learned about certain things. I learned the industry. I studied more artists, and I became more seasoned myself as an artist."

When it comes to performing live, Crutchfield believes in reciprocated energy, that what you give is what you get in return.

"Live performance art, we're going to respond to the audience, so if the audience is dull and not having a good time, we're not going to have a good time either, and vice versa," he said. "The beauty of it is that no matter what size the audience is or who the audience is, I'm going to make sure that I have a good time because if I'm not having a good time, they're not going to have a good time."

In addition to teaching and performing, Crutchfield plans to continue releasing new projects including a new record next year.

"As artists we are always working on something new," he said. "You got to keep growing. You got to keep challenging yourself, because once you stop growing, you die, artistically and literally. That's the way life is. You got to keep growing."

Gullah Geechee elders preserve sacred songs

By Luis Andres Henao
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. HELENA ISLAND, S.C. — Minnie "Gracie" Gadson claps her hands and stomps her feet against the floorboards, lifting her voice in a song passed down from her enslaved ancestors who were forced to work the cotton and rice plantations of the South Carolina Sea Islands.

It's a Gullah spiritual, and the 78-year-old singer is one of a growing group of artists and scholars trying to preserve these sacred songs and their Gullah Geechee culture for future generations.

»MOVIE REVIEW

'Weapons' an organic and original horror mystery thriller

By Dwight Brown
BLACK PRESS USA

Weapons

3.5 stars

They're gone.

Just like that they disappeared into the night. At 2:17 a.m. Seventeen kids from a third-grade class vanished like ghosts. What the hell?

That premise in writer/director Zach Cregger's affecting horror/thriller is a seed that he grows organically. Starting with that mystery, then unraveling what happens afterwards in a compelling way that grabs any viewer's attention and holds it for 128 minutes until all is revealed.

Wisely, methodically, like a supreme storyteller, Cregger reveals plot pieces in layers. Try as you will, you can't guess the ending. Nor seemingly can any of the characters in this wicked tale.

All the students in Justine Gandy's (Julie Garner, Netflix's "Ozark") elementary school class have vanished. All except one. His name is Alex (Cary Christopher), and he doesn't remember much, though many try to pry info out of him. Justine is stumped too. At a town meeting, parents express their deepest fears for their missing kids and some rage uncontrollably. A dad named Archer (Josh Brolin) points at the teacher. Like she's a witch who's cast a spell and stolen his child. Archer,

"I have a passion to sing these songs," Gadson said.

On a recent summer day, her voice rang out inside Coffin Point Praise House. It's one of three remaining wooden structures on St. Helena Island that once served as a place of worship for the enslaved, and later, for generations of free Black Americans.

Gadson grew up singing in these praise houses. Today, as a Voices of Gullah member, she travels the U.S. with others in their 70s and 80s singing in the Gullah Creole language that has West African

roots. "This Gullah Geechee thing is what connects us all across the African diaspora because Gullah Geechee is the blending of all of these cultures that came together during that terrible time in our history called the trans-Atlantic slave trade," said Anita Singleton-Prather, who recently performed and directed a play about Gullah history.

The show highlighted Gullah contributions during the American Revolution, including rice farming and indigo dying.

Please see GULLAH | 6B



WARNER BROS.
Julie Garner stars in Warner Bros. "Weapons," a horror mystery-thriller that keeps the audience guessing about the disappearance of children.

screaming: "I don't understand at all. Why just her classroom? Why only hers!?" Fortunately, the school principal Marcus (Benedict Wong) calms the mob.

But who's going to solve this case? Archer pressures the police, who seem baffled. Then he does his own digging. Though warned not to, Justine tracks Alex down and wants to interrogate

him. Something weird is going on. Hard to put your finger on it. It's like the whole town is caught in a trance over this case and evil spirits are holding their emotions hostage and mocking them too. Folks are traumatized, scared and looking for clues.

Cregger could have relied on straightforward storytelling. Instead, what un-

Please see WEAPONS | 6B



RIONA MURPHY | RELIGION NEWS SERVICE
Soloist Jessica Howard sings at Concord Baptist Church of Christ in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn in New York, on July 20, 2025.

Brooklyn's Black church choirs persist

Continued from page 5B

Weeksville Heritage Center.

Louise Nelson, a Brooklyn native and church historian of the Berean Baptist Church in Crown Heights, said music was the foundation of the early church, and that remains true for churches in the borough today.

"The songs that uplifted us and kept us going through the midst of our misery — music is who we are," Nelson said. "I don't think you can have a church today without the music because it brings unity in that idea that we can all do it together."

According to Pew Research Center data, between 2019 and 2023, Black Protestant monthly church attendance fell from 61% to 46% — the largest decline among major U.S. religious groups. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, and its impact is visible in the thinning choir stands.

Glenn McMillan, Concord's director of music ministry and a musicology teacher at the City University of New York, who has worked in New York City church choirs since 1994, recalls a time when historically Black churches in Brooklyn regularly had multiple choirs at each parish.

"In the last 20 years, the members of church choirs started getting older because this generation does not see church as important as it was back in the day," McMillan said. The choir at Concord has shrunk from about 50 voices before the pandemic to 30 today, McMillan said. Back in 2006, the choir featured 100 voices.

According to research published by covidreligionresearch.org in June, Black Protestants attended church on Zoom more than other denominations during the pandemic, and they have been the slowest to return to in-person worship.

"The internet has taken over and streaming has taken over," McMillan said. "People don't go in to the building as much as they are streaming it."

McMillan said that when in-person services first resumed, it took a long time for the choir to rebuild because many members were still staying home for health reasons. Recently, though, he's seen more people showing up.

"I'm begging people my age to come to Concord," said Howard, the youngest member of the gospel choir, adding that only a handful of people around her age attend the church.

Gwen Davis, a senior member of Berean Baptist Church and a choir soloist for more than 40 years, recalled Easter services in the mid 1960s, when over 400 people filled the pews, and four separate choirs led the congregation in song.

"It was a lot of energy," Davis said. "Your ear got trained really well."

Today, Davis said, a typical service attracts approximately 150 people, and roughly 100 virtually. Over time, Berean's choirs have consolidated into a single mass choir with approximately 20 singers.

A professional soloist who has been singing at different churches across Brooklyn throughout her adult life, Davis said she believes one reason for choirs thinning out is the decline of music education in New York City Public Schools.

"When I was in high school, I had music every day," said Davis, who attended high school in the 1970s in central Brooklyn. "I don't think the children are learning notes and sharps and clefs. I mean, that was like general knowledge for us at the time."

During the 1970s fiscal crisis, the city of New York eliminated thousands of teaching positions, including art and music teachers, and converted music rooms into other classrooms, narrowing arts access in schools in low-income and majority-Black neighborhoods.

"For me, singing is not just singing,

it's ministry," Davis said. "Some of these old hymns were composed years and years ago, and those old hymns have sustained a people — many people."

Gentrification is another force reshaping Brooklyn. Between 2010 and 2020, Crown Heights lost nearly 19,000 Black residents while gaining about 15,000 whites, according to 2020 Census data. More than 75% of Bedford-Stuyvesant residents in 2000 were Black, while in 2020, around 41% were Black.

Those demographic shifts have hit historically Black Catholic parishes hard. St. Teresa of Avila in Crown Heights, which was the first church in the nation to hold Mass in Creole, will close by the end of the year. The anticipated closure demonstrates a wider pattern of Catholic churches that serve people of color closing, often attributed to declining attendance.

For Mike Delouis, 38, St. Teresa's longtime cantor and a son of Haitian immigrants who was baptized at the church, the loss is personal.

"Singing for me is not about performance but about participation," said Delouis, who juggles three services most Sundays between St. Teresa and the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Prospect Heights. "St. Augustine said singing is praying twice."

Delouis is part of a group fighting to keep the parish open, hoping to preserve a piece of their history in a rapidly changing Brooklyn. "Even through the process of gentrification, there are people that hear the music and they come in," he said.

In June, from his place in the choir loft, Delouis heard the priest announce the church's closure. The words hit hard. "It was actually kind of hard to finish," he said. "We only had the closing hymn to do, and I thought, 'Oh my gosh, no — we can't let this happen.'"

Jesteena Walters, 55, has been part of Bedford Central Presbyterian Church in Crown Heights since she was an infant. She began singing at age 6 in the junior choir, and when she turned 18, she transitioned to its Gratitude choir, which her older siblings also joined. "It was the young hip gospel choir of the church," Walters said.

Today, Gratitude no longer exists in the same way. Its members are older and often reunite only for special occasions, such as singing at funerals. Over the decades, Walters has also watched the congregation itself shift demographics.

"When I first went to Bedford Central, it was primarily a white church, and so we were in the minority at the time," Walters said, referring to the early 1970s. "In the years that would come, it was primarily a Black church." It later became home to a large West Indian population and today includes many members of Guyanese heritage.

"To be honest, I couldn't break down the history of Brooklyn in a way that says who came first," Walters said. "At the end of the day, I believe in people coming together, if we can truly connect, feel each other's pain and celebrate each other's joys."

McMillan emphasized that choirs continue to play a central role in Black church life, even as congregations decline in membership. "Choir singers are some of the most faithful churchgoers," McMillan said. "A choir is a community within the church community, and whenever you have a really consistent and strong choir, they grow with one another."

Howard said she hopes to become a choir director one day, and she credits McMillan and the gospel choir for encouraging her toward the role.

"I'd like to follow in that tradition," she said.

'Weapons' an organic and original horror whodunit

Continued from page 5B

folds does so in a Rashomon format. A sequence happens with one character's perspective. Later it's repeated, but from another character's viewpoint.

It's like a chain of voices that goes forward only after it's gone backwards. The script adds pivotal characters to this very captivating structure. Souls whose lives are intertwined: Justine's ex Paul (Alden Ehrenreich, "Oppenheimer") a fairly stupid cop. James (Austin Abrams) a junkie who sees too much. Alex's mom (Callie Schutter) and dad (Whitmer Thomas). And a visiting Aunt Gladys (Amy Madigan, "Field of Dreams").

Piecing the story together is a challenge. A good challenge. One that will keep audiences mesmerized.

As a director, Cregger has a smooth, engaging style. His guidance helps the entire cast give natural performances. He's got a nice feel for mood and movement. Knows how to build tension into an evolving mystery. Cregger works the audience's nerves in both obvious and subtle ways. In his hands, surprisingly, restraint and dread make the footage more tense and compelling than wall-to-wall gore could ever do.

By the time violence and slaughter rear their head, you're so invested in and sensitive to the characters that any bloodletting feels exceedingly intense. It's a style more similar to Hitchcock than George Romero or John Carpenter. More psychological, less physical.

The filmmaker is aided greatly by Larin Seiple's inobtrusive cinematography. His judicious camerawork goes indoors and outdoors seamlessly. Night shots under street lights, classrooms, sun-drenched front lawns. He makes it all look like we're watching middle America in crisis, up close.

The biggest compliment anyone can give a production designer is saying "I can't tell whether the footage was shot in a studio or in real locations." In that way Tom Hammock's perceptive design work

is invisible. Ditto costume designer Trish Summerville. Their version of suburban life rings true.

The musical score is creepy in all the right places. Credit Ryan Holladay, Hays Holladay and Zach Cregger for knowing when to go light with the piano music. When to go heavy with thundering drums. Fray the nerves. Add fright. Accentuate the gore scenes with jarring sounds. They get it just right. As does editor Joe Murphy who makes every single second of the film accountable for conveying emotions, vital plot twists, revelations, rivalries, demonic rituals and a fight for answers that never abates. No fat. All lean scenes.

The entire cast makes the characters on the page rise above any preconceived notions. The dynamics between Justine and Archer, as played by Garner and Brolin, go from warring humans to disparate souls on the same mission. That's because the two actors don't overplay their hands as two determined protagonists not sure of what's happening around them or to them.

Paul and James are the opposite kind of characters. Ehrenreich and Abrams portray the two men with overtly animated performances. Dim-witted cop. Dim-witted junkie. Tied together by bad decisions and bad luck. The characterizations are perfect.

However, not as perfect as Madigan's interpretation of Aunt Gladys. The veteran, Oscar-nominated actor knows how to get the most of a scene. Closeups of her face as she rages will be etched in viewers minds for a lifetime.

Beware when kids disappear. You never know where their vanishings will lead. And that's the strength of this well written, directed, filmed, acted and produced horror thriller. You never know until the script is ready to tell you what the hell just happened.

Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownLink.com.

Dangers of going home again

Continued from page 5B

through the woods by their peers, adds a sense of creeping danger to both timelines of the book. However, Miranda fails to make the consequences of being caught explicit, leaving some confusion as to why Adalyn took such drastic action.

If the implication is meant to be sexual violence, the story would be more powerful in addressing that and giving Adalyn's a purpose.

Miranda's ability to establish the settings of her novels as characters is present here and remains effective. Her portrayal of icy tensions in close-knit mountain towns is comparable to Shirley Jackson's grip on the eeriness of rigid New England villages.

The novel also hits a peak when exploring Beckett's anxiety over her daughter's safety in Wyatt Valley, and her fear of De-

lilah being harmed in retribution for her own suspected guilt.

The revelations in the last third of the book are rushed, hollow attempts at twists and lessen the impact of an ending that struck a genuinely poignant, tragic note. Miranda is a genuinely compelling thriller writer, but my hope is that she breaks her traditions and tries something new with the next book she writes.

BOOK REVIEW

An exploration of semi-fame

By Clare Solly

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

How does one follow up writing "A Hell of a Book" that wins the National Book Award?

If you're Jason Mott, you write a sort of, not-really, by all legal terms fictionalized — according to the forward — autobiographical story about what life is like as a semi-famous writer.

Or actually you write two viewpoints: one about a writer running away from his roots that seem to be choking the life out of him and the other about a writer running to help soothe the roots that made him.

The first, a middle-aged man who wrote said award-winning novel, is constantly misrecognized because writers, even award-winning ones, don't have status like film stars. Sometimes he goes along with it and he agrees with them, for good reason; there is safety in being someone else.

The second is a man who can't seem to outrun what it means to be American or a stalker who threatened to kill him, both showing up, often when least expected. This makes man No. 2 run not only from death and America but to seek out purchasing a gun, because his fame isn't able to protect him.

This novel, reminiscent of "The Invisible Man" and the works of Colson Whitehead and Ta-Nehisi Coates, has an inquisitive stance on things like time travel, sea monsters, death of loved ones and guns, and what each can do to a man, especially those who seem to be the referential mouthpiece of what it means to be an American today.

One man meanders through Minnesota, offering support to the masses through speaking engagements. The other lands what seems to be a dream job in "Europe-land."

Through old memories, the drudgery of book tours, the never ending "what's next" endlessly questioning their creativity, both imagine what could be and what could have been. The flipping between the two men's viewpoints of the world and what it can offer is humorous one moment and tugs at the right heartstrings the next.

This roller coaster ride filled with quips and wordplay personalizes some of the most tragic moments in America's recent history. The tragedy and pain through this never-ending climb to make sense of all that has come before, and all that will come after, is "like Sisyphus, a man who never misses leg day."

Filled with highlightable quotes and moments that make you stop and look around to see if anyone else is experiencing what you're reading, Mott's "People Like Us" echoes the pain and mystery of where life leads, the choices it hands us and the hope and desire for change.

Gullah Geechee music preservation

Continued from page 5B

expertise. At the theater entrance, vendors offered Gullah rice dishes and demonstrated how to weave sweetgrass into baskets.

More than 5,000 descendants of enslaved plantation workers are estimated to live on St. Helena Island, the largest Gullah community on the South Carolina coast where respect for tradition and deep cultural roots persists.

"A lot of our songs were coded, and this language is a language of survival, a

language of resilience, a language of tenacity," Singleton-Prather said, adding that despite slavery's brutality, the Gullah people were able to thrive, "giving our children a legacy — not a legacy of shame and victimization, but a legacy of strength and resilience."

Discovering Gullah culture and the roots of Kum-baya

Gullah culture includes art forms, language and food by the descendants of West Africans who have lived on the coasts of the Carolinas, Florida and Georgia since slavery.

"It's important to preserve the Gullah culture, mainly because it informs us all, African Americans, where they come from and that it's still here," said Eric Crawford, author of "Gullah Spirituals: The Sound of Freedom and Protest in the South Carolina Sea Islands."

For most of his life, he hadn't heard the word Gullah. That changed in 2007 with a student's master's thesis about Gullah culture in public schools.