

Life!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2026 SECTION B



SHUTTERSTOCK

Seasoned grill masters know the key to great hamburgers and hot dogs also includes proper preparation of buns.

How to ensure grilling success

FEATURE IMPACT

There's just something timeless about a summer cookout with friends, family or neighbors.

Whether it's the sound of burgers sizzling on the grill or the smell of your favorite seasonal sides, the event invokes nostalgia and camaraderie.

While the spotlight may land on the burgers and barbecued fare, seasoned grill masters know the supporting cast matters, too. Makers of soft, delicious hamburger and hot dog buns fit to be the foundation of summer gatherings for more than 100 years, the bun experts at Wonder suggest a few ways to ensure your entertaining ventures are successful throughout the season.

Do what you can ahead of time

Stick to a mix of easy favorites and make-ahead sides to keep prep manageable while offering something for everyone to enjoy.

When possible, prep ahead of time so you can keep your focus on the fun and your attention on the hot grill. Chop vegetables, wash lettuce for burgers, make sure you have picked out the perfect buns, form and season beef patties and mix marinades the day before the big bash to avoid last-minute rushes around the kitchen.

Prep the grill

Patience is key when it comes to grilling, as a properly heated grill is the foundation for good cooking. Give gas grills enough time to come to temperature, around 10-15 minutes, and allow charcoal to ash

Please see **ENSURE** | 3B

Boost landscape's beauty with these fall planting tips

By Melinda Myers

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Add some immediate and long-term beauty to the landscape with fall plantings.

The soil is warm and the air cooler, making it easier for plants to adapt to their new location and more comfortable for gardeners.

Replace fading annuals and fill voids in the garden with pansies, snapdragons, ornamental kale, stocks and other cool weather plants. Use cold hardy pansies that provide color in the fall garden, survive most winters, and come back blooming in the spring just as the snow melts. Pop in a few pumpkins, decorative squash and gourds for a bit of fall flair.

Create or purchase container gardens filled with fall favorites. Set them by a front entrance or on a patio, balcony, or deck. Gardeners will enjoy this last bit of color, and the pollinators will enjoy the nectar and pollen as fall fades to winter.

Consider making a few permanent changes with perennials, trees, and shrubs. Use them to enhance an existing landscape or replace those that have outgrown their location or were damaged by this summer's storms, extreme heat and drought. With the warmer soil and cooler air, plants are less stressed and establish more quickly.

Give new plants plenty of room to reach their mature size. Small transplants will eventually grow to

Please see **BOOST** | 3B

« RIDES »

Mazda CX-90 crossover hybrid adds more horsepower to outstanding bloodlines

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

I've driven the Mazda CX-90 several times since its debut in 2024.

Since then, it's been tweaked and even modified to hold only five people with more cargo space. In that configuration it's called the CX-70.

When you configure the CX-90 as the top dog PHEV Premium Plus, you have something that competes with stuff that costs a lot more. But it also lacks much of the panache of its more expensive counterparts.

Like all Mazdas, the CX-90 drives quite well. The SUV doesn't have the driving prowess of, let's say the CX-30, but it is far more responsive than most SUVs its size. Its most notable feature is the

plug-in hybrid option. This gives the truck an electric range of 27 miles. That combined with its hybrid fuel economy gives it a range of 500 miles. Impressive, very impressive.

It's more of a fault than a quirk, but it's been fixed, sorta. The CX-90 is Mazda's biggest vehicle, but it will only hold six people who travel with very little luggage. Four people will be comfortable if you get the captain's chairs in the second row. The two in the third row have little room.

Mazda also needs to up the build quality a bit. The fit and finish is wonderful but closing the doors do not give you a nice solid thunk. That shouldn't be so on a luxury vehicle. Actually, it shouldn't be so on any vehicle.

There are still plenty of

reasons to buy the CX-90. It's a very handsome vehicle. Mazda's design language has given it a whole fleet of handsome vehicles. The styling is very upscale crossover more than SUV. The interior takes that up a notch. There are luxury vehicle vibes going on. Everything looks designed and not pieced together. All materials look premiums well they should.

I do wish Mazda would fix its infotainment system touchscreen. It's partially a touch screen if you are using Apple CarPlay. On the other apps you need to use the selector knob to access the functions.

The biggest upgrade is horsepower. The in-line six cylinder gets 340 horsepower and 369 pounds-foot of torque. Like most Mazdas, premium fuel is

required to squeeze the most horsepower out of the engine. This makes this big puppy feel more spirited when giving it some gas. Getting in and out of traffic is far more rewarding. You also can tow 5,000 pounds.

I don't think there is a Mazda built the handles poorly but if so, this is not the one. Despite the girth, Please see **MAZDA** | 2B



MAZDA

The 2026 Mazda CX-90 handles well, but ride quality depends on road surface.



ASCENT HOUSING

Lake Mist Apartments in Charlotte, where Mecklenburg County government estimates that over 77% of low-income housing was lost between 2015 and 2024.

Private fund aims to save local affordable housing

\$225 million initiative aims to expand stock by acquiring properties

By Amanda Abrams

SHELTERFORCE

In Charlotte, as across the United States, investors are gobbling up affordable but unsubsidized apartment complexes, renovating them, and then raising rents.

Earlier this year, Mecklenburg County government estimated that over 77% of the area's low-cost housing was lost between 2015 and 2024, largely through that manner. The report also identified "a 32,601-unit gap in rental units affordable for extremely low-income households who are at or below 30% of the area median income."

Figures like these inspired a couple of prominent local businessmen, Erskine Bowles and Nelson Schwab, and a real estate firm, Ascent Housing, led by Mark Ethridge, to join forces in 2020 to

create the Housing Impact Fund. The fund aims to buy and hold naturally occurring affordable housing, or NOAH, rental communities throughout the city.

To date, the fund has raised \$225 million from private investors. It has acquired 11 apartment communities totaling nearly 2,000 units, and fund leaders say they plan to acquire, renovate, and protect another 1,500 apartment units for 5,000 low- and moderate-income residents. All told, as many as 10,000 residents could benefit from fund investments by the end of 2028.

The effort is significant. It is, however, only part of a housing solution in a county where, in 2024, more than 108,000 rental households were cost-burdened and over 52,000 households were severely burdened, spending more

than 50% of their income on housing. Most of these cost-burdened families are low-income.

Seeking solutions

Historically, Charlotte's leaders have been slow to recognize the area's need for affordable housing. In 2014, a study led by Raj Chetty, an economics professor at Harvard University, that examined economic mobility in 50 cities nationwide ranked Charlotte dead last. Two years later, police shot and killed Keith Lamont Scott, a Black man whose family swears he was unarmed. The city experienced four nights of protests, some of which turned violent.

The report and the unrest shook Charlotte, fueling a growing awareness that the city's expanding economy wasn't reaching everyone. "There was a conviction

Please see **PRIVATE** | 2B

Design home workout space around you

FEATURE IMPACT

It's a tale as old as treadmills: You buy a new exercise machine with the best of intentions, only for it to become an expensive laundry rack that makes you feel guilty every time you glance over at it.

When it comes to making lifestyle changes, the key is not to overhaul your whole routine at once, but to figure out what habits match your lifestyle, personality and passions.

Use these tips to create a home workout space you'll keep using after the novelty wears off.

Figure out what you enjoy

Before you commit to a big equipment purchase, think about what kinds of exercise feel natural and enjoyable (and which ones make you groan).

If you love running, a treadmill may be worth the space it takes up. However, a rack of dumbbells might just wind up collecting dust if you hate lifting



SHUTTERSTOCK

Design your in-home gym around your favorite exercises and equip it appropriately.

weights. Yoga or dance enthusiasts may prefer to design a more studio-like home gym, while body-weight strength trainers could be happy with a pull-up bar in the doorway and

a mat to do planks on. Consider joining a workout class or gym for a month or two to try different kinds of exercises and machines so you'll have a better idea of what's worth investing

in permanently.

Evaluate the space you have

A good home workout area needs to work around the physical realities of your house or apartment. If

Please see **DESIGN** | 3B

Private fund aims to save affordable housing

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that something needed to be done,” said Tom Hanchett, a local historian and author of the 2025 book “Affordable Housing in Charlotte.” Indeed, by 2018, rents in the city had increased 36% over the past half-decade, and homelessness was rising.

Charlotte has a Housing Trust Fund financed by a biennial affordable housing bond. From its creation in 2001 through 2016, voters consistently approved housing bonds ranging from \$10 to \$20 million typically once every two years. In 2018, city leaders increased these bonds to \$50 million, and voters overwhelmingly approved them.

In 2024, they approved \$100 million in bonds. This year, city council voted 9-2 to approve a budget with a \$125 million affordable housing bond. So far, over 11,000 units of low-income housing have been built or preserved using Housing Trust Fund money.

But “low-income” is a broad term. A 2018 Charlotte Observer investigation found that over 70% of units built with city funds were unaffordable to the city’s lowest-income households—and that city officials had counted homeless shelter beds funded with public assistance as “affordable housing for the very poor.”

It was in this environment that Ethridge began to consider preservation. The Charlotte native had worked as commercial real estate loan originator and had read clients’ business plans detailing their intentions to buy and upgrade old apartment complexes. Finding ways to maintain them wasn’t yet on the radar of many local affordable housing advocates.

Ethridge researched approaches taken by other groups, such as the Austin Housing Conservancy (now the Texas Housing Conservancy), the NOAH Impact Fund in the Twin Cities, and the Washington Housing Conservancy in the nation’s capital.

Ethridge subsequently launched a couple of pilot projects of his own. He was beginning to pull together investors, city funding, and federally backed loans when he connected with two Charlotte-based business leaders.

A business-backed plan takes shape

“Erskine [Bowles] and I were looking to do something together. His emphasis was primarily economic mobility. Mine was homelessness. We started talking to people and learned that those two things intersected with the lack of affordable housing,” says Schwab, a longtime Charlotte businessman who has led several theme park corporations.

Bowles, another Charlotte resident, formerly served as President Bill Clinton’s chief of staff and as president of the University of North Carolina system. Close friends since college, Bowles and Schwab had started a private equity firm together in the 1990s and were now, in their 70s, looking to do something beneficial for the community.

Developing new affordable housing was daunting, but preserving private NOAH properties “felt like something we could get our arms around,” Schwab said. When Schwab and Bowles asked around about who was doing that work, Ethridge’s was the only name that came up.

The three met shortly after and they found common cause. Ethridge needed money—ideally a fund—that would allow him to compete with other buyers and to provide more certainty about what he could afford. Schwab and Bowles were skilled fund-raisers with deep contact lists and a predisposition to act, as Schwab puts it, as “pushers, not pullers.” Plus, they were trusted within the city’s business community.

In early 2020, Housing Impact Fund launched, with Schwab and Bowles serving as fund managers, and

Ethridge and Ascent as the operating partner. Ascent identifies properties for purchase, secures financing, oversees renovations, and manages the fund’s properties.

The fund’s goals were to purchase properties at risk of gentrification that were located near transportation, good schools, and services, with all units affordable to people earning under 80% of area median income, and to set aside a third for households with incomes at 30 percent of AMI or less. The fund commits to maintaining those rates for 20 years.

Two key factors made these goals achievable. First, Mecklenburg and the city of Charlotte both agreed to contribute amounts equal to each rental community’s property taxes, to be used as subsidies that would offset costs for extremely low-income families. Reportedly, as of April 2026, 560 units have received those subsidies.

Second, the fund has been successful at raising impact investor capital with 20-year loan terms and returns as low as 6%. “The good news is there is private sector capital out there that doesn’t need us to match what [market rate] returns look like,” Ethridge said.

Implementing the vision

The timing was fortuitous. In 2021, with interest rates at historic lows, institutional capital flooded Charlotte’s housing market. The rapid rise in corporate-owned single-family homes throughout the region drew the most attention, but Ethridge says multi-family properties were also quickly snapped up.

The competition forced the fund to settle for older properties that needed more renovations. But it also allowed the fund to start preserving affordable apartments that were most at risk of disappearing.

Investments have continued to come in. With interest rates now higher, Charlotte’s housing market has cooled, allowing the fund to focus on acquiring newer properties that require fewer renovations and typically pay 60-65 percent of the cost of new construction. Ascent also offers supportive services, such as workforce development, financial literacy, and tutoring for kids.

The fund has performed well relative to the others around the country that Ethridge had studied. While their models are all slightly different, the Charlotte group has raised the most money and imposes the strictest income restrictions on its units.

Of course, acquisition financing often requires multiple funding streams. For example, Ascent has used loans from other local public and private housing funds, including one managed by LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Charlotte, noted Ralphine Caldwell, senior executive director of LISC Charlotte, in an email to Shelterforce.

They partner in pursuit of a common vision, she emphasized—namely “to move quickly to preserve and expand affordable housing opportunities before properties are acquired for market-rate conversion.”

Fred Dodson Jr., chief operating officer and executive vice president of real estate at DreamKey Partners, a local nonprofit housing developer and community development financial institution, offered an optimistic assessment of the impact fund’s growing reach: “It’s a win for Charlotte and for low-income people,” he says.

Rodneisha McCathern and her two kids are among those who have benefited. McCathern had been couch surfing and staying in motels for four years before landing an apartment last February at Ascent Pineville, one of the fund’s properties.

“I love it,” McCathern said. “My kids have peace, and we have a place to heal.”

Ensure grilling success beyond flipping burgers

Continued from page 1B

over completely. When grilling different types of food, it’s especially helpful to set up cooking zones – direct and indirect – so you can cook meat, veggies and buns differently or move finished food to one side, as needed.

Additionally, to help prevent sticking, lightly oil the clean grill grates before cooking. Using tongs and a paper towel dipped in oil is often more effective than coating foods with oil.

Use a meat thermometer

You may be a seasoned grill master, but guesswork can lead to mistakes, especially when cooking for a crowd.

Avoid overcooked (or worse, undercooked) chicken and burgers by using an instant-read thermometer to help ensure meat is cooked safely while retaining its juicy flavor.

Grill buns correctly

Burgers and hot dogs are classics for a reason, but avoiding soggy buns and mid-bite fallout requires the right bun for the job. Striking the perfect balance of pillowy softness with the structure to hold their shape through every loaded topping, condiment and bite is key when choosing the right bun for the job.

More than just a vehicle for grilled favorites, Wonder Classic Hamburger and Hot Dog Buns are a familiar taste that makes cookouts delicious and have held it together, literally and figuratively, for more than a century.

In continuing its longstanding partnership with the USO through the annual Deploy the Joy campaign, you can keep an eye out through Sept. 12 for special pack-

aging on select products with scannable QR codes for a chance to win a \$10,000 Birthday Bash.

For great grilled buns, follow a few easy steps:

1. Brush cut sides of buns with softened butter, mayo or both to help the bun brown evenly.

2. Lightly salt the buttered side before grilling.

3. During the last 2 minutes of cooking burgers or dogs, place buns cut-side down over medium-low heat for 30-60 seconds. Look for a light golden toast, crisp enough to hold up.

Let food rest before serving

After grilling, give meat a few minutes to rest before serving or slicing. This allows juices to redistribute throughout the food for better texture and flavor.

Layer burgers, condiments and toppings

After toasting buns, add a thin layer of sauce to coat the bun then lettuce that’s been patted dry to remove moisture. Add cheese to the opposite bun and be sure to place the burger and other toppings in the center to keep moisture away from the bread, preventing sogginess. Follow this simple order for sturdy buns:

- Toasted top bun
- Condiment or sauce
- Cheese
- Burger
- Tomato and onion
- Lettuce
- Condiment or sauce
- Toasted bottom bun

You can find more ways to host a successful barbecue by visiting WonderBread.com/recipes.

Mazda CX-90 crossover is a fine ride

Continued from page 1B

the CX-90 handles smoothly, not giving in to body roll. It negotiates twisty roads well enough and corners with authority.

The ride quality depends on the road surface. The CX-90 can feel smooth, but it can also be a bit jittery.

The Mazda CX-90 is very quiet on the road. Noise levels increase a bit when you travel over 70 miles per hour but not by much. Normal conversations can be maintained without yelling. If you are not in the mood for conversation you can enjoy the Bose premium sound system.

Along with Apple CarPlay and the Bose sound system major feature include a panoramic sunroof, all-wheel drive, integrated Navigation system, heated front and second row seats, heated windshield wiper washers, heated steering wheel, power folding and dimming mirrors, sec-

ond row Captain’s chairs, premium leather ventilated front seats, surround view camera and a host of driver’s aids.

The CX-90 has its drawbacks but has far more pluses than minuses. I’ve liked this vehicle from the start and find no reasons to dislike. The estimated cost was \$59,295.

Pros:

- Handsome looks
- Luxury-like interior
- Stout engine
- AWD
- Plug-in hybrid tech
- Great fuel economy
- Loads of features
- Mazda handling

Cons:

- Limited cargo space
- Tight third row seat
- Doors sound a bit thin when closed

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Design home workout space around your likes

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you have a whole room or finished basement to dedicate to the cause, this won't constrain you too much. If you're working with a corner of your home office, bedroom or garage, saving space becomes a more critical factor.

In these cases, it all comes down to priorities. If you only have room for one piece of bigger equipment, get the one you know you'll actually use, whether that's an elliptical, strength machine, standing bicycle or rowing machine. Then build out your collection with other items that can be easily moved and stored, like resistance bands and small weights or dumbbells.

Start small and expand as needed

Don't fall into the trap of thinking you need to have everything before you can get started. It's often better to build out your workout space slowly – get a few things at a time, see what you use regularly and figure out what you might be missing along the way. Maybe you realize you enjoy lifting weights and keep wishing you had

heavier ones, signaling a need to upgrade.

Add some atmosphere

Dark, dismal home gyms are more likely to make your workout feel like a punishment instead of a part of your day worth looking forward to. Creating a space you enjoy being in is just as important as choosing a workout you enjoy doing.

For you, that might look like choosing an area of the home with plenty of natural lighting to make you feel more awake – or adding string lights and color-changing wall sconces for a relaxing yoga session.

Maybe it means adding art on the walls or a floor-to-ceiling mirror so you can check your form. A large rubber floor mat with a cheerful design, a sound system to play your favorite hype songs or a daily calendar of motivational quotes could be the magic ingredient to get you into the right mindset so you can crush your workout. As long as it works for you, anything goes.

For more tips, visit eLivingtoday.com.

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »



CARL VAN VECHTEN

Langston Hughes was a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance through his writing.

Langston Hughes an influential figure of Harlem Renaissance

POETRY FOUNDATION

Langston Hughes (1901-1967) was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, the flowering of black intellectual, literary, and artistic life that took place in the 1920s in a number of American cities, particularly Harlem.

A major poet, Hughes also wrote novels, short stories, essays, and plays. He sought to honestly portray the joys and hardships of working-class black lives, avoiding both sentimental idealization and negative stereotypes. As he wrote in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too."

This approach was not without its critics. Much of Hughes's early work was roundly criticized by many black intellectuals for portraying what they thought to be an unattractive view of black life. In his autobiographical *The Big Sea*, Hughes commented:

"'Fine Clothes to the Jew' [Hughes's second book] was well received by the literary magazines and the white press, but the Negro critics did not like it at all. The Pittsburgh Courier ran a big headline across the top of the page, LANGSTON HUGHES' BOOK OF POEMS TRASH. The headline in the New York Amsterdam News was LANGSTON HUGHES THE SEWER DWELLER. The Chicago Whip characterized me as 'the poet low-rate of Harlem.' Others called the book a disgrace to the race, a return to the dialect tradition, and a parading of all our racial defects before the public. ... The Negro critics and many of the intellectuals were very sensitive about their race in books. (And still are.) In anything that white people were likely to read, they wanted to put their best foot forward, their politely polished and cultural foot — and only that foot."

In fact, the title "Fine Clothes to the Jew," which was misunderstood and disliked by many people, was derived from the Harlemites Hughes saw pawning their own clothing; most of the pawn shops and other stores in Harlem at that time were owned by Jewish people.

Lindsay Patterson, a novelist who served as Hughes's assistant, believed that Hughes was critically "the most abused poet in America. ... Serious white critics ignored him, less serious ones compared his poetry to Cassius Clay doggerel, and most black critics only grudgingly admired him."

"Some, like James Baldwin, were downright malicious about his poetic achievement. But long after Baldwin and the rest

of us are gone, I suspect Hughes' poetry will be blatantly around growing in stature until it is recognized for its genius. Hughes ... was unashamedly black at a time when blackness was démodé. He had the wit and intelligence to explore the black human condition in a variety of depths, but his tastes and selectivity were not always accurate, and pressures to survive as a Black writer in a white society (and it was a miracle that he did for so long) extracted an enormous creative toll."

Nevertheless, Hughes, more than any other black poet or writer, recorded faithfully the nuances of black life and its frustrations.

In Hughes's own words, his poetry is about "workers, roustabouts, and singers, and job hunters on Lenox Avenue in New York, or Seventh Street in Washington or South State in Chicago — people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten, buying furniture on the installment plan, filling the house with roomers to help pay the rent, hoping to get a new suit for Easter — and pawning that suit before the Fourth of July."

Hoyt W. Fuller commented that Hughes "chose to identify with plain black people ... precisely because he saw more truth and profound significance in doing so. Perhaps in this he was inversely influenced by his father—who, frustrated by being the object of scorn in his native land, rejected his own people. Perhaps the poet's reaction to his father's flight from the American racial reality drove him to embrace it with extra fervor."

Hughes' parents separated shortly after his birth and his father moved to Mexico. The elder Hughes came to feel a deep dislike and revulsion for other African Americans.

Although Hughes had trouble with both Black and white critics, he was the first Black American to earn his living solely from his writing and public lectures. Part of the reason he was able to do this was the phenomenal acceptance and love he received from average Black people. A reviewer for *Black World* noted in 1970:

"Those whose prerogative it is to determine the rank of writers have never rated him highly, but if the weight of public response is any gauge then Langston Hughes stands at the apex of literary relevance among Black people. The poet occupies such a position in the memory of his people precisely because he recognized that 'we possess within ourselves a great reservoir of physical and spiritual strength,' and because he used his artistry to reflect this back to the people."



MELINDA MYERS

Plant daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, and other bulbs in fall for additional color next spring.

Boost landscape's beauty with these fall planting tips

Continued from page 1B

large specimens. Temporarily fill the voids with annuals for immediate results. Each year, fewer are needed as the plants grow.

Plant trees so the root flare, the place where the roots curve away from the trunk, is even with or slightly above the soil surface. Dig a hole the same depth as the distance from the root flare to the bottom of the rootball. Make the hole two to five times wider than the rootball.

Roughen the sides of the hole and backfill with the existing soil. Water thoroughly and spread a two-to-three-inch layer of mulch over the soil surface, keeping the mulch away from the tree trunk.

Follow a similar planting procedure for shrubs. Plant them so the crown, the place where the stems meet the roots, is even with the soil surface. Be sure to keep the mulch away from the stems.

Make sure all plantings are properly watered throughout the fall. It takes perennials, trees and shrubs several years to become fully established.

Call 811 at least three business days before digging. Wisconsin residents can also file online at www.DiggersHotline.com and people in any other state can visit <https://811beforeyoudig.com/811-In-Your-State/>. This free service will contact all the utility companies who will mark the location of their underground services in the work area.

It's an important step to reduce the risk of injury and the inconvenience and expense incurred if an owner damages a utility and does not make the call.

Plant daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, and other bulbs in fall for extra color next

spring. Add them to perennial and mixed borders. Start planting spring flowering bulbs after the nighttime temperatures hover between 40 and 50 degrees. Be patient since waiting until the soil cools reduces the risk of early sprouting that often occurs during a warm fall.

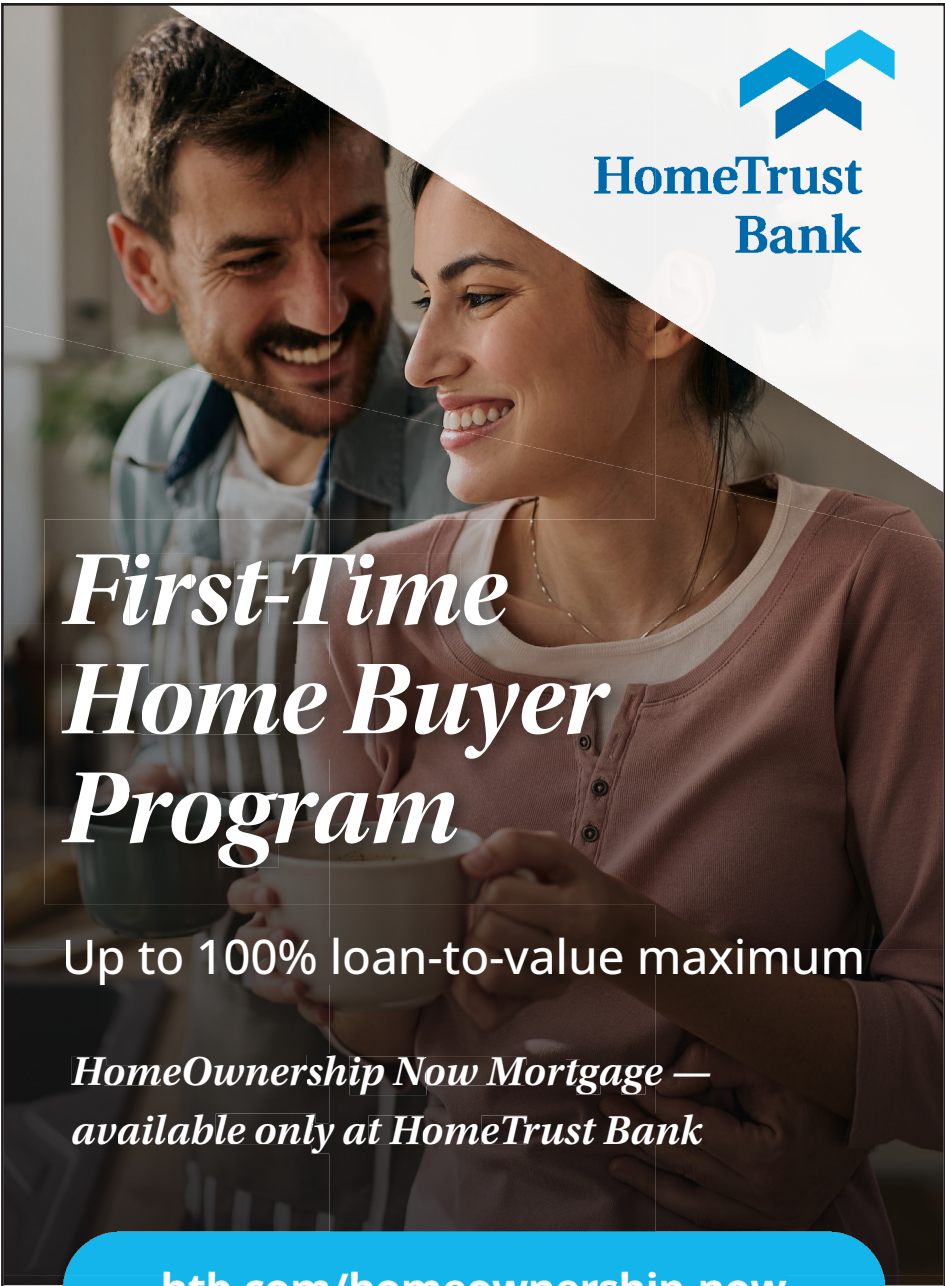
Set the bulbs at a depth of two to three times their height deep. Check the label for recommended spacing specific to the type of bulbs. Then cover them with soil, sprinkle on a low nitrogen slow-release fertilizer, working it into the top few inches of the soil, and water.

If critters are digging and eating the bulbs, plant the ones they tend to ignore. Daffodils, hyacinths, fritillarias, alliums, snow drops, and grape hyacinths are a few to consider. Otherwise, protect animal favorites like tulips and crocus with repellent, chicken wire, or bulb cages at planting. Then in spring, apply repellent as the bulbs burst through the ground.

Take advantage of the fall weather and often slower gardening time to add beauty to the landscape with fall planting. It will reduce the workload next spring and provide welcome color throughout the growing season.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition" and "Small Space Gardening."

She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" streaming courses and the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.



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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2026 PAGE 5B

Dolly also earned place in Black culture

By Alexandria Green-Jones
BLACK PRESS USA

Before some of us knew Dolly Parton as the Queen of Country Music, we knew her as the woman behind Whitney Houston’s song.



Parton

We knew the blonde hair, the rhinestones, and that unmistakable Tennessee voice. But somewhere along the way, Black America came to understand something deeper about Dolly; when she said she loved people, she had the receipts to prove it. The community is now left to mourn the icon who passed away at the age of 80, on Aug. 25, after dealing with an unknown medical condition. Known for her chart-topping country music hits, Dolly never felt as though she belonged only to one genre, or one kind of person. She showed up with humor, humility and a generosity that did not ask who you voted for before offering a helping hand. She made room for people, and in return, people from every corner of the culture made room for her.

A song brought Dolly and Whitney together

For Black audiences, the bridge to Dolly will always run through Whitney Houston. Parton wrote “I Will Always Love You” as she prepared to leave Porter Wagoner’s television show and released it in 1974. The original was tender and restrained, a country goodbye delivered with grace. Then Whitney got hold of it.

Houston’s 1992 rendition for “The Bodyguard” did not merely update the record. She took it to church, then carried it around the world. That opening a cappella moment, the controlled stillness and the key change that made everybody reach for a note they had no business trying to hit turned Parton’s country ballad into a global anthem. The single spent 14 consecutive weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, became the best-selling physical single by a woman and earned two Grammy Awards.

Instead of trying to deny contribution or rush to remind everyone who wrote the song, she celebrated the way Houston’s voice transformed it. In an industry with a long history of taking from

Please see **DOLLY** | 6B

What’s up, Flop? ‘Coyote vs. Acme’ is better on shelf

By Mark Kennedy
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Some Hollywood decisions defy logic. Like, who looked at the world of Looney Tunes, those unhinged cartoons of our youth, and thought: Let’s add a bunch of personal injury lawyers.

Such is the premise of the clunky, too-earnest, live-action-toon-hybrid “Coyote vs. Acme,” a film initially mothballed by the studio only to later be featured in theaters.

It began as a 1990 New Yorker parody that imagined Wile E. Coyote suing the Acme Corporation over their defective gadgets. The film then spent almost three decades in development hell, finally getting made in 2022 for about \$70 million but getting shelved by Warner Bros., which decided it was better as a tax write-off.

The setting is Albuquerque, New Mexico, where humans and cartoons live side-by-side, like “Who Framed Roger Rabbit.” The likes of Tweety, the Tasmanian Devil and Porky Pig all populate real sidewalks, cars and courtrooms. Why Albuquerque? It’s never explained, but Bugs Bunny once famously said: “I knew I should’ve taken that left turn at Albuquerque.”

The plot joins Will Forte, a small-time personal injury attorney reachable at 1-800-0-LAWYER, and his new client, the mute coyote, who is bleary-eyed and fuming that he has cabinets full of failed Acme products used in his never-ending hunt for his white whale, the Road Runner.

“Have you ever pulled the ripcord of your parachute and only a bunch of silverware comes out? It’s not your fault,”

Please see **WHAT’S** | 6B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



GETTY IMAGES

Young Thug headlines the New Generations Tour stop Sept. 18 at Bojangles Coliseum in his first concert run since 2019. Special guest Nav is also on the marquee.

Young Thug headlines New Generation Tour

Also: Anthony Hamilton headlines the Lowcountry Jazz Festival in SC

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

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

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. 5
“It Takes Two: A Jazz Celebration of the Great Duets,” Middle C Jazz, 6 p.m.

Maria Howell is the feature artist with special guest vocalist Ray Green. Tickets are \$46.15 for Baby Grand members; general admission \$56.15.

Sept. 11
Mozart’s Requiem: A 9/11 Memorial Concert, Knight Theater, 7:30 p.m.

On the 25th anniversary of 9/11, Charlotte Symphony, Opera Carolina, and Charlotte Master Chorale share a program of remembrance featuring Mozart’s Requiem and Ave verum corpus. Led by Opera Carolina Principal Conductor Stefano Vignati.

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 available at newgenerationlive.com.

· *Jazz Funk Soul*, Middle C Jazz, 6 p.m. The Grammy-Nominated group featuring Jeff Lorber, Everette Harp & Paul Jackson Jr. Tickets: \$70.15 for Baby Grand members, \$86.15 for general admission.

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.

Sep 25-26
“Bugs Bunny at the Symphony” brings Looney Tunes favorites to the big screen with original scores performed live by Charlotte Symphony. Showtimes are 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 25 and 3 p.m. Sept. 26.

Conducted by George Daugherty, the program features animated classics including “What’s Opera, Doc?”

and “The Rabbit of Seville,” with the orchestra performing in sync with the action on screen.

Sept. 25-27
Festival in the Park Fine Arts & Crafts Festival and Traditional Arts & Crafts Festival, Freedom Park.

Since 1964, the juried arts festival has brought popular music, arts and crafts and family entertainment to visitors from around the South. Artist applications are online at festivalinthepark.org.

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. 2-3
“Back to the Future in Concert,” Charlotte Symphony, Belk Theater.

The 1985 classic Back to the Future comes to the big screen with the Charlotte Symphony performing Alan Silvestri’s original score live alongside the film.

Audiences can follow Marty McFly and Doc Brown’s time-traveling adventure while hearing the score performed live by the orchestra.

Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 6B

‘RIP King.’ Fans pay respect to Tupac Shakur

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAS VEGAS — Sharda Williams woke up recently to someone blasting Tupac Shakur’s “Shed So Many Tears,” as they drove by her home.

Lately at work or while running errands, she has seen people wearing Shakur shirts. The late rapper’s presence is everywhere since the Las Vegas trial began, she says, calling it a hopeful sign that answers are coming in the death of her favorite artist.

“His spirit wants this to come out and wants this to get justice,” Williams said.

Nearly 30 years after Shakur’s death, the trial of the only person ever charged in his killing has drawn fans back to a loss many of them never stopped carrying.

For them, the case not only offers the person who may be responsible for Shakur’s death, but a chance for resolution after decades spent keeping his music, message and memory alive.

Former Southern California street gang leader Duane “Keffe D” Davis has pleaded not guilty to orchestrating the drive-by shooting in Las Vegas.

After his death in 1996, Shakur and his influence lived on through fans and pop culture. He received a posthumous star in 2023 on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, a street named after him in Oakland, California, and will be a character in the upcoming video adventure game “Stranger than Heaven.”

Fans see Shakur as a revolutionary
There’s no official memorial to Tupac where he was shot on the Las Vegas Strip on Sept. 7, 1996. But visitors stop at the intersection and fans gather regularly on his birthday, June 16, adding messages to a utility pole that is covered in remembrances, such as “RIP King,” “Tupac 4 Life” and “Gone but never forgotten.”

They leave balloons, cake or his favorite type of brandy, Hennessy. On a strip of concrete nearby, someone



TY O’NEIL | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Graffiti about Tupac Shakur on a pole Aug. 10, 2026, near the intersection where he was shot in Las Vegas, Nevada.

painted a rose with the phrase “the rose that grew from concrete,” a reference to Shakur’s posthumous book of poetry.

Atlanta resident Julie Hardy has been to the memorial three times on Shakur’s birthday to pay her respects.

“People still care, and he has not been forgotten,” said Hardy, 56.

For fans like Hardy, Shakur is more than just a rapper. Hardy categorized Shakur, the son of a Black Panther, among the likes of Black activists such as Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King Jr. because he wrote about the “revolution” and the ups and downs the Black community faces, she said.

Shakur’s philosophy that he dubbed T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E, which stood for “the hate U give little infants f—s everybody,” called for the uplifting of mar-

ginalized communities and demanded accountability from systems that oppressed Black people and the youth.

Hardy gravitated toward Shakur when she was 19 living in Cincinnati, Ohio, and her cousin showed her Shakur’s first solo album, “2Pacalypse Now.”

Shakur’s “Brenda’s Got a Baby” resonated with Hardy because of the high rate of teen pregnancy at the time, she said.

His song “Soulja’s Story” inspired her to write hip-hop songs because it told a story of things she also saw growing up in Black communities, such as police and gun violence.

When she saw on the news that he was shot, she called everyone she knew.

Hardy then went to her friend’s house

Please see **TUPAC** | 6B

Charlotte Symphony tribute to Tina Turner

Continued from page 5B

Oct. 2 program at 7:30 p.m.; Oct. 3 program at 3 p.m.

Oct. 8

Martin Lawrence, Ovens Auditorium. Due to demand, the comic adds Charlotte to the Y'all Still Know What It Is! Tour. Select dates on the tour will feature special guest appearances from comics Nate Jackson, Karlous Miller and Desi Banks. Loni Love and Benji Brown are set to appear at every stop. Tickets available via Ticketmaster.

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.

Oct. 16-17

The Music of Tina Turner by Charlotte Symphony, Knight Theater.

The Charlotte Symphony celebrates

music of Tina Turner featuring songs that defined her career, including "Proud Mary," "What's Love Got to Do with It," "Disco Inferno," and "Son of a Preacher Man." Oct. 16 concert at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 17 at 7:30 p.m.

Nov. 12

Best-selling author *Walter Mosley* is among the literary heavyweights highlighting Verse & Vino, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation's top fundraiser.

The showcase at Charlotte Convention Center's Crown Ballroom includes authors Lucy Foley, R.F. Kuang and Isaac Fitzgerald. Library advocates and book lovers will gather to raise a glass to the joy of reading, the library system's impact and the larger community. Proceeds fund library foundation initiatives.

Tickets are available at foundation.cmlibrary.org/verse-vino.

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.

Tupac fans celebrate rapper's cultural impact

Continued from page 5B

and prayed, hoping Shakur would survive like he did when he was shot in a robbery in November 1994.

She felt like a family member passed when she learned he died days later a hospital. He was 25.

"We looked up to him as an icon and a revolutionary, and now we're looking up to him as a legend," Hardy said.

Shakur inspired others in songwriting

Din "Lil Therapy" Malone took a bus from Denver, Colorado, to watch the trial in Las Vegas.

Malone was introduced to Shakur when he was 13 years old watching Shakur in his breakout starring role as a troubled teen in the 1992 movie "Juice." Then, he started listening to his music.

"Tupac taught me how to translate my tears into words," said Malone, a songwriter and artist. Outside of an overflow room in the courthouse, Malone wore a Shakur shirt and played Shakur's music on his phone's speaker.

Shakur wrote about his own hardships, and inspired Malone to do the same, putting into words experiences of being bullied as a kid or mourning family deaths, Malone said.

He grew up in a Crips-run neighborhood in Denver and — like Shakur — learned how to "live through the hood."

Shakur's song "It Ain't Easy" spoke to Malone about the importance of persevering when life isn't easy. Even though he never met the rapper, he said he felt like he lost an older brother.

Shakur's legacy continues

Williams, a North Carolina resident, runs a Facebook fan page for Shakur called All Eyez on Pac that has over 25,000 followers.

The 38-year-old has loved Shakur ever since she watched "Poetic Justice," the 1993 movie starring Shakur as a postal worker and Janet Jackson as a grieving hairdresser. One of the first Shakur songs she heard was "Dear Mama," and she said she was touched by Shakur's deep love for his mother, Afeni Shakur.

Over the years, Williams watched every video about Shakur and every interview of people who knew him, she said.

"That's what made me create the page because I really truly have a love for Tupac," she said.

She saw Shakur as a sweet, kind-hearted person who was misunderstood. Shakur wasn't perfect. He was convicted of sexual assault and acquitted on more serious charges in a sex abuse case in 1994. He was sentenced to 18 months to over 4 years in prison, but served nearly eight months before he was released. But Shakur was human, Williams said.

Some fans who sat in the courtroom during the trial still don't believe Shakur died, believing he faked his own death and is living in Cuba.

Williams said she was in denial when she first saw Shakur's autopsy photos but sadly came around to realize he was gone

"He would want to have justice," she said. "He would want to keep his name and legacy alive."



KETCHUP ENTERTAINMENT

This image released by Ketchup Entertainment shows the character Wile E. Coyote, voiced by Eric Bauza, in a scene from "Coyote vs Acme."

What's up, Flop? 'Coyote vs Acme' should've stayed on shelf

Continued from page 5B

Forte's character says in a TV commercial.

The lawyer wants to settle with Acme — as he usually does — for just a few hundred bucks, but his client wants to take down the world's biggest corporation. (Its slogan: "We're a company of family values that values its family of companies.")

There's a vast evil conspiracy at the heart of Acme — led by Foghorn Leghorn, I say, I say — which is fiercely protected by its combative chief legal counsel, played without much subtlety by John Cena.

"These companies think they can do whatever they want and get away with all of it because they do. We're sick of it and it stops now," says the emboldened Forte.

The coyote's fight comes to represent a larger struggle against corporate greed, which seemed to shadow the movie's underdog path as it went up against its own Goliath — Warner Bros. itself.

But not too long into this mess, you'll start to sympathize with Warner Bros. They aren't a ruthless corporation censoring a C-suite satire: They were protecting us from a poorly executed movie that misuses our cartoon favorites.

There are echoes of "Chinatown," "A Few Good Men" and "Erin Brockovich," but all slightly undercut because Wile E. Coyote at his heart is a homicidal maniac, plotting

to lure the Road Runner to court to murder and make a stew out of him. "You're kind of a psychopath, aren't you?" his lawyer asks him.

The action then inexplicably moves to Washington, D.C., where Acme tries to kill the coyote before he testifies in front of Congress, which includes Elmer Fudd as a senator. That's right, an assassination attempt — aided by no less than Tweety, using some sort of rocket-propelled grenade launcher — in our nation's capital. That's despicable!

Forte and the coyote have some harsh words, and then the filmmakers up the pressure by making the law firm teeter on insolvency. There's a chase scene involving rocket skates, a motorbike and a refrigerated truck, and there's a final character test in the form of a massive potential payoff that our human hero must navigate.

What's up, doc? No, really, we need a script doc.

Director Dave Green integrates the toons and humans well, but the story stumbles on using the Looney Tunes' deep roster. Bugs Bunny appears, at last, only at the hour mark — a criminal delay for such a fan favorite — and doesn't stick around. And Daffy Duck lends high-energy zaniness — all too short — as an inmate at St. Looneys ("for the exceptionally looney"). Instead we get more than two hours of a lethal, silent

Coyote.

Samy Burch's screenplay veers from underdog-versus-corporate power to zany detective story to end with a moral about never giving up in the face of failure, trying to remake the deeply troubled Wile E. Coyote into someone noble.

"No matter what happens, he picks himself up and tries again and again and again and again," says Forte. "He wakes up every morning with purpose and with hope and I think everyone should be inspired by that."

Really? By the menacing guy on the jet-propelled pogo stick and endless faulty products? This is a film only personal injury attorneys could love.

"Coyote vs. Acme," a Ketchup Entertainment release that's in theaters Friday, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for "cartoon violence and some language." Running time: 101 minutes. One star out of four.

Dolly Parton earned her place in Black culture as talent and ally

Continued from page 5B

Black artists while denying them proper credit, Dolly understood that acknowledging Whitney's greatness did not diminish her own. One woman wrote an extraordinary song. Another woman revealed everything else that song could become.

Parton later shared that she used some of the royalties from Houston's recording to purchase commercial property in a predominantly Black Nashville neighborhood. She called it "the house that Whitney built."

There was something beautiful about that acknowledgment. Whitney's voice had generated wealth, and Dolly wanted part of that wealth rooted among people she described as Whitney's people, and her people, too.

Dolly's relationship with Black America was not built on pretending she did not see color. She saw us. In a 2020 Billboard interview, she made her position plain: "Of course Black lives matter. Do we think our little white asses are the only ones that matter? No!"

It was blunt, funny, and completely on brand. But Dolly also understood that allyship could not stop with a quote. After learning why the word "Dixie" was offensive and painful to many people, she removed it from the name of her Civil War-themed dinner attraction. She called her previous understanding "innocent ignorance." More important, she fixed it.

That willingness to listen mattered. Dolly did not perform perfection or become defensive when someone pointed out harm. She showed that loving people means caring enough to learn, change and do better. In a time when public figures often double down just to avoid admitting they were wrong, Dolly simply chose not to be cruel.

Dolly's love also arrived in the mail. Inspired by her father, who could not read or write, she launched the Imagination Library in 1995. The program began in Sevier County, Tennessee, sending one free, age-appropriate book each month to enrolled children from birth to age 5. What started in the rural community that raised her grew into an international literacy movement.

By the end of 2025, the program had distributed more than 300 million books and was mailing about 3.4 million books each month.

Those books found their way into homes in big cities as well as small towns. In New York City, the Imagination Library has been promoted through public schools and community organizations in the Bronx.

For urban families navigating tight budgets, limited bookstore access or neighborhoods where children's books are not always easy to find, a brand-new book addressed directly to a child can mean more than one package. It tells that child, "This belongs to you. Your imagination matters."

That was Dolly's kind of giving: personal, useful and rooted in dignity. She also funded scholarships, supported hospitals, invested in medical research and helped families recover from disasters. Her \$1 million donation to Vanderbilt University Medical Center supported research connected to the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

She turned the money she made entertaining people into opportunities to help them live, learn and rebuild.

A preschooler opening one of Dolly's books in the Bronx did not need to know "Jolene." A parent reading that book at bedtime did not need to be a country music fan.

Her generosity crossed racial and economic lines because it met families in real life, at the mailbox, in a hospital room or after the unthinkable happened.

Legacy that felt like love

Parton leaves behind thousands of songs, beloved films, major businesses and enough rhinestones to keep heaven sparkling for a while. But her greatest legacy may be the way she made strength feel soft without ever making it weak. She knew exactly who she was, yet she never needed anyone else to become smaller so she could shine.

For Black listeners, her bond will always be part of that story. "I Will Always Love You" was never about choosing between the white woman who wrote it and the Black woman who took it somewhere new. Dolly gave the world the words. Whitney gave those words wings. Together, they created a piece of American music that refuses to stay inside one genre or belong to only one community.

That is why this loss feels personal, even to people who never met her. Dolly reminded us that tenderness can be powerful. She showed us that changing your mind can be a sign of character, that celebrating another woman's brilliance does not steal your light and that love means very little if it never becomes action.

Country music will forever call Dolly Parton one of its queens. But Black culture recognized something in her, too: a woman who respected our greatness, spoke up for our humanity and invested in our children. She did not simply leave this world loved. In the ways that mattered most, Dolly loved us back.

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