

Life!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2025 SECTION B

Just what is a 401(k) and how does it work?

By Jameson Thornton

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Have you ever wondered what a 401(k) is? It's our retirement income consisting of contributions from your salary every pay period with a percentage matched by the employer. It is deposited into a stock market-based account that you can access when needed throughout your life. With the thought of not being able to pull from it until the age of 59 1/2.

Created in the 1970s, the 401(k) was a way for the employees to save for retirement that would be in theory protected from taxes. This would also allow the employee to keep the loss from their paycheck as a pension normally dropped by 50% of previous pay. This protects the standard of living from change.

A 401(k) consists of three internal accounts: two Individual Retirement Accounts and possibly a Brokerage account. One IRA is called a Roth, which is money contributed and taxed up front. The benefit is there will be no taxes taken when disbursements occur at 59 1/2 even on the money gained.

With the traditional IRA, all your deposited money grows. However, upon taking the money out for retirement you will be taxed on everything, not just the gain. However, contributions can be claimed, resulting in less taxable income. The brokerage will be treated as the traditional IRA but with potentially higher taxes. For those under 59 1/2, maximum contributions are \$7,000 annually.

How do we maximize the use of the 401(k) prior to retirement with limited taxes being inflicted? First, any early withdrawal could result in heavy fees

Please see JUST | 3B

Older people reap brain benefits from new technologies

By Paula Span

KFF HEALTH NEWS

It started with a high school typing course. Wanda Woods enrolled because her father advised that typing proficiency would lead to jobs. Sure enough, the federal Environmental Protection Agency hired her as an after-school worker while she was still a junior.

Her supervisor "sat me down and put me on a machine called a word processor," Woods, now 67, recalled. "It was big and bulky and used magnetic cards to store information. I thought, 'I kinda like this.'"

Decades later, she was still liking it. In 2012 — the first year that more than half of Americans 65 and older were internet users — she started a computer training business.

Now she is an instructor with Senior Planet in Denver, an AARP-supported effort to help older people learn and stay abreast of technology. Woods has no plans to retire. Staying involved with tech "keeps me in the know, too," she said.

Some neuroscientists researching the effects of technology on older adults are inclined to agree. The first cohort of seniors to have contended — not always enthusiastically — with a digital society has reached the age when cognitive impairment becomes more common.

Given decades of alarms about technology's threats to our brains and well-being — sometimes called "digital dementia" — one might expect to start seeing negative effects.

The opposite appears true. "Among the digital pioneer generation, use of everyday digital technology has been associated with reduced risk of cognitive impairment and dementia," said Michael Scullin, a cognitive neuroscientist at Baylor University.

It's almost akin to hearing from a nutritionist that bacon is good for you.

Please see OLDER | 2B

«RIDES

2025 Volkswagen Atlas won't shrug with sportier and more spacious model

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Volkswagen introduced the Atlas SUV in 2020 to great reviews.

A few years later it chopped off 5 inches, ditched the third row and made it in more agile and, well, sporty.

The Atlas Cross Sport is for those who want a big vehicle with a lot of sass and spice. It has that is spades. As I said, the sport version of the Atlas is 5 inches shorter in length and 2 inches shorter in height than the regular Atlas. That still makes the sport version fairly hefty. It will seat five and carry a good amount of stuff. It's a mid-sized so those five

passengers will have lots of space to stretch out.

The interior is not only spacious, but its comfortable and stylish. The leather seats are very comfortable up front. They are power adjustable and offer a massage function. The rear seat is spacious with properly padded cushions.

The 60/40 split bench will allow you to carry longer items and one or two passengers. There is also a center armrest if you don't have a third passenger.

The dash has a configurable display that's bright and clear. The same can be said of the 12-inch touch screen. The graphics are sharp and crisp, but there are some problems. Get-

ting to menus is a problem because of the wonky touch screen controls. The lack of physical buttons is also a problem.

Those problems aside, the rest of the interior is fine. There is good storage for small items, plenty of cupholder and ample space for larger items. I really like VW's ambient light graphics on the dash and the upscale materials finishings used throughout the cabin.

The Atlas Cross Sport is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that makes 269 horsepower and 273 pounds-feet of torque. The transmission is an eight-speed version that sends

power to all four wheels in about 7.5 seconds. This setup can let the Cross Sport hit 60 miles per hour which is pretty quick for Motion as VW calls it, something this big.

Please see VOLKSWAGEN | 2B



TODD MALLOY

Inner Peace Counseling Center founder Todd Malloy is a licensed marriage and family therapist.

One therapist's systematic approach to mental wellness

Todd Malloy advocates for greater diversity and access to help

By Charles K. Harris

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Todd Malloy is on a mission to heal.

Malloy, a licensed marriage and family therapist has dispensed his healing for almost two decades as a psychotherapist, certified sex therapist and certified sexuality educator to men and women across the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.

While Malloy, 63, sees clients of all backgrounds, his interest in helping Black men is particularly keen, coming from a very personal place.

A native of Providence, Rhode Island, Malloy's journey to his own healing seemed stunted from the start. When he was 5 years old, Malloy's father abandoned the family, leaving his mother to care for him and his younger brother on her own.

"My mother told me that I was now the man of the family," he said.

Despite his youth, it was a charge Malloy took seriously, simultaneously navigating the perilous landscape of being a young, Black, urban male lacking essential resources.

"I wanted to do well for my family, in a legal way," he said.

Malloy knew doing better starts with a quality education — something he did not feel he was getting in the poorly funded, largely minority public schools in his district.

To that end, Malloy applied to and was accepted to a parochial school. Over the next four years he paid the \$215 a month tuition on his own. By the time his senior year arrived, Malloy knew what he wanted to do.

"I wanted to work in psychiatry [because] when I was a kid, life told me it was fragile," he said. "Understanding how fragile life is, I wanted to be a resource to help people live their best life."

Malloy's goals, however, were

stymied. During an internship at a psychiatric hospital, Malloy was asked in front of white mental health professionals his career choice.

"I was told 'Black boys don't do that,'" he said. "[Then] I was told how much schooling was involved — 12 years. Four years for a bachelor's degree, four years for medical school and four to

five years for residency. That scared me because I did not come from people with money.

"It wasn't just a dream deferred. It was a dream lost."

Discouraged but still eager to do well, Malloy pursued a mechanical engineering degree at the University of Hartford. Though not the field of his choice, he applied himself diligently and became a suc-

On The Net
toddmalloy.com

Please see THERAPIST'S | 2B

Stress less, snack smarter for school days

FAMILY FEATURES

If back-to-school season feels more overwhelming than exciting, you're not alone.

Between adjusting schedules, planning meals and organizing school supplies, it's easy for families to feel the pressure this time of year.

With the right strategies and simple routines, you can reduce the chaos and make it a smoother, healthier experience for the whole family.

These registered dietitian-approved ideas can help get you started:

1. Set the tone with a fast and easy breakfast

Getting kids motivated in the morning is no small task. Start the day with upbeat, energizing music and a nourishing meal like Breakfast Taquitos, paired with Yo Quiero's Grab & Go Guacamole, Bean Dip and Salsa, to help kids focus and make the morning routine feel more like a dance party.

2. Skip the sandwich at lunchtime

If your kids are tired of



SHUTTERSTOCK

Colorful and delicious alternatives to the sandwich can make school days better for families.

sandwiches — and you're tired of wasting time on food that comes back half-eaten — try a quick and easy option that balances fiber, protein and good-for-you carbs like these ham, cheese and apple wraps made with Jazz Apples.

3. End the lunchbox struggle

Use colorful bento boxes

to keep packed lunches organized and visually appealing then take

advantage of blueberries from Consalo Family Farms to create Blueberry Gummy Snacks, a better-for-you alternative to packaged treats that you won't find left untouched at the bottom of lunchboxes.

4. Change the snacking game with dips

While many a baby carrot

and celery stick has found its way home from school lunchboxes untouched, adding Mini Cucumber

Veggie Dips featuring Nature Fresh Farms Lil' Chills Mini Cucumbers to after-school snack trays can make all the difference.

5. Prevent the after-school meltdown with smart snacks

School days are long, and kids often come home hungry. Keep them satisfied and stable by setting out an After School Snack Board featuring Sunset

Please see STRESS | 2B



VOLKSWAGEN

The 2025 Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport has excellent handling and excellent size for hauling people and gear.

The all-wheel drive, or 4Motion as VW calls it, benefits something this big.

Please see VOLKSWAGEN | 2B

Therapist's systematic method to mental health

Continued from page 1B

uncessful engineer and family man, raising four children.

As middle age approached, though, Malloy felt a lacking.

"I had a sense of humanity which wasn't being addressed," Malloy revealed. "I asked myself, 'When I die, will it have even mattered that I lived?'

"[I realized] we all have to take ownership of the type of life we want to have."

So, at 42, Malloy started a new journey to an old dream, which included becoming an ordained minister, earning a bachelor's and master's degrees as well as pursuing postgraduate studies. Given his "eclectic journey," Malloy offers a systematic approach to mental wellness versus the heavily favored Freudian method.

Besides his practice, Malloy has recently begun working as a lecturer, producer and author as well as serving on the national board of the American Association of Sexual Educators, Counselors and Therapists.

Buoyed by field experience and an increasing list of credentials, Malloy feels his personal path combined with a deep spiritual awareness makes him an especially valuable resource to Black men in the mental health space – particularly given the underrepresentation of Black men providers and counselors.

Statistics show that men in general are far less likely than women to seek mental health help or counseling. And Black men even more so.

"First, men are told that they aren't supposed to ask for help," Malloy said. "Admitting is weakness. Admitting equals vulnerability."

In Black culture, toxic standards are perpetuated by the gangster/thug/lone wolf caricature.

"[Black men are taught] emotions are bad," he said. "A 'real man' has to be impenetrable. We are taught to suffer in silence, and we turn ourselves into pressure cookers."

"We have to be deprogrammed in a sense. Black men have to be very intentional about change. We have to take ownership and chart our own journey."

Another hurdle Malloy identifies is the lack of normalizing mental wellness and self-care, including seeking professional assistance.

Despite much progress in the understanding and methodology of mental health care, many stigmas persist.

"When you say you are going to therapy so many people still think you must be crazy," Malloy said.

Another misconception Malloy highlights is the fear of losing control or volition during treatment.

"Great apprehension exists around the notion that discussing emotional health will inevitably result in unwelcome and overwhelming discomfort, shame or anxiety," he said. "A lot of Black men fear being 'attacked' in therapy, [but] you have to remember as Black men in this country, what do we have? Not much. But we have respect. If you take that from us, we'll have nothing."

To help assuage unease, Malloy promotes the power of autonomy and individual specific approaches, emphasizing each client's role in their own treatment.

"You're the expert at you. You know yourself best," Malloy says. "The client is responsible for creating and living up to his own standards. I'm here to partner with them through the process."

"You [also] need to remember how our people have been treated by the medical community," he remarks, pointing to yet another potential roadblock to black men pursuing mental health help.

Unethical medical treatment and research such as the Tuskegee syphilis study and the Henrietta Lacks case illustrate why such fears are valid. In fact, a 2022 Pew Research Center study revealed that 61% of black adults believed that such shocking medical research misconduct was just as possible to occur now as it did in the early 20th Century.

Malloy hopes that an increase in Black counselors and therapists will establish more trust and a willingness to engage from the Black community. While there may be initial caution and discomfort, Malloy assures it is well worth the effort.

"I love helping people achieve their goals," he said. "Yes, growth is often uncomfortable, but it's the means to knowing our authentic selves which can only lead to more success and contentment."

Stress less and snack smarter for school days

Continued from page 1B

Sprinkles Snacking Tomatoes, cheese cubes, fruit and whole-grain crackers.

6. Stock up on convenient snacks

Whether you're running out the door (or just walked in from a long day), snacks that don't require peeling, chopping or anything resembling effort like single-serve, Grab-and-Go Snacks from Del Monte, which come in flavors including Mixed Fruit, Mango Pineapple and Cherry Mixed Fruit, make it easy to choose something healthy without the drama.

7. Capture an easy weeknight win

You don't need to spend an hour cooking dinner to get something satisfying on the table. Weeknights are hectic, so focus on go-to meals that are fast, flavorful and kid-approved like these Barbecue Cheeseburger Folded Quesadillas featuring caramelized Shuman Farms Vidalia Onions.

8. Try a healthy evening treat

Kids want something sweet after dinner, but many traditional desserts are loaded with added sugars. These Mandarin Popsicles made with Bee Sweet Citrus Mandarins are a fun way to satisfy that craving while sneaking in fruit.

Together, these health-conscious brands are backing the Healthy Family Project back-to-school campaign with a shared goal: inspire better habits and give back where it counts. Through a collective donation to the Foundation for Fresh Produce's K-12 programs, they're helping support nutrition education in schools across the country. Because when fresh thinking meets real collaboration, families win.

Visit HealthyFamilyProject.com to find more recipes that help families pack healthier lunchboxes, fuel busy afternoons and make more produce a part of everyday life.

Volkswagen Atlas won't shrug with a sportier, spacious model

Continued from page 1B

fits from four-wheel independent suspension with front and rear stabilizer bars. Electric power steering makes the vehicle easy to turn and park.

Put the Cross Sport on the road and you appreciate the handling quickly. It's easy to maneuver the vehicle in and out of traffic. The 2.0-liter engine has a lot of grunt to get you moving quickly and the extremely competent braking system can get you out of trouble if needed.

The vehicle's handling can take on twisty roads with no problem. There is

little body roll while cornering and the light, but direct steering allows you to keep the vehicle where it needs to be.

Ride comfort is also great. The suspension soaks up a lot of bumps and offers a smooth, firm ride. The car remains pretty quiet, even at higher highway speeds.

The Atlas Cross Sport has plenty of standard equipment and lots more depending on which trim level you pick. I had one of the SEL models that comes with panoramic sunroof, upgrades headlights, leather seats, power driver

and passenger seats, head-up display, predictive adaptive cruise control, 30-color ambient lighting system and navigation system.

The SEL models start at \$47,190 and top out at \$52,195 for the R-Line.

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- All-wheel drive
- Plentiful standard equipment
- Good fuel economy

Cons:

- Wonky touch controls

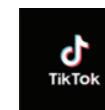
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Older people reap brain benefits from the latest technologies

Continued from page 1B

"It flips the script that technology is always bad," said Murali Doraiswamy, director of the Neurocognitive Disorders Program at Duke University, who was not involved with the study. "It's refreshing and provocative and poses a hypothesis that deserves further research."

Scullin and Jared Benge, a neuropsychologist at the University of Texas at Austin, were co-authors of a recent analysis investigating the effects of technology use on people over 50 (average age: 69).

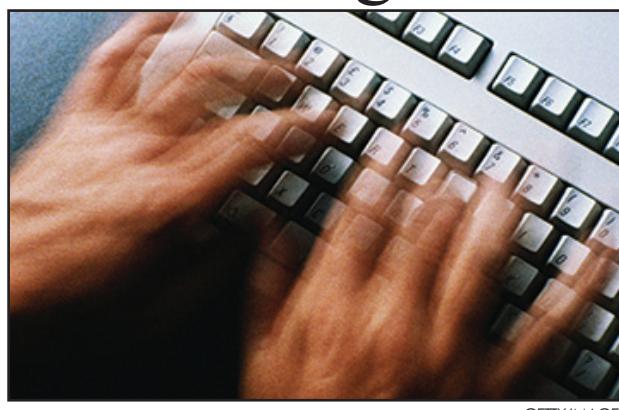
They found that those who used computers, smartphones, the internet, or a mix did better on cognitive tests, with lower rates of cognitive impairment or dementia diagnoses, than those who avoided technology or used it less often.

"Normally, you see a lot of variability across studies," Scullin said. But in this analysis of 57 studies involving more than 411,000 seniors, published in *Nature Human Behavior*, almost 90% of the studies found that technology had a protective cognitive effect.

Much of the apprehension about technology and cognition arose from research on children, sometimes focused on adolescents, whose brains are still developing.

"There's pretty compelling data that difficulties can emerge with attention or mental health or behavioral problems" when young people are overexposed to screens and digital devices, Scullin said.

Older adults' brains are also malleable, but less so. And those who began grappling with technology in midlife had already learned "foundational abilities and skills," Scullin said.



Technology can help older people stay engaged and mentally sharp.

Then, to participate in a swiftly evolving society, they had to learn a whole lot more.

Years of online brain-training experiments lasting a few weeks or months have produced varying results. Often, they improve a person's ability to perform the task in question without enhancing other skills.

"I tend to be pretty skeptical" of their benefit, said Walter Boot, a psychologist at the Center on Aging and Behavioral Research at Weill Cornell Medicine.

"Cognition is really hard to change."

The new analysis, however, reflects "technology use in the wild," he said, with adults "having to adapt to a rapidly changing technological environment" over several decades.

He found the study's conclusions "plausible."

Analyses like this can't determine causality. Does technology improve older people's cognition, or do people with low cognitive ability avoid technology? Is tech adoption just a proxy for enough wealth to buy a laptop?

"We still don't know if it's chicken or egg," Doraiswamy said.

Yet when Scullin and Benge accounted for health, education, socio-economic status, and other demographic variables,

they still found significantly higher cognitive ability among older digital technology users.

What might explain the apparent connection?

"These devices represent complex new challenges," Scullin said. "If you don't give up on them, if you push through the frustration, you're engaging in the same challenges that studies have shown to be cognitively beneficial."

Even handling the constant updates, the troubleshooting, and the sometimes maddening new operating systems might prove advantageous. "Having to relearn something is another positive mental challenge," he said.

Still, digital technology may also protect brain health by fostering social connections, known to help stave off cognitive decline. Or its reminders and prompts could partially compensate for memory loss, as Scullin and Benge found in a smartphone study, while apps help preserve functional abilities like shopping and banking.

Numerous studies have shown that while the number of people with dementia is increasing as the population ages, the proportion of older adults who develop dementia has been falling in the U.S. and several European countries.

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Congress is considering permanent grant programs for state governments to buy local food for schools and community food programs.

Congress considers farm-to-school grants

By Eric Tegethoff

NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

Bills with bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate would create permanent grant programs for state governments to purchase local food for schools and community food programs.

The legislation could improve on the Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program, a \$660 billion program the U.S. Department of Agriculture terminated earlier this year.

Sarah Hart, communications and engagement director for the Asheville-based Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, said in the first year of the now-canceled Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program, the number of meals served through the North Carolina Farm to School program jumped from 2 million to more than 3.6 million.

Hart pointed out one of the most important features of the newly proposed legislation is its permanence, which provides consistency for local farms and schools.

"There's a lot of challenges for both farms and schools to make the effort to have local farms be part of food in schools, and so (with) temporary or smaller programs, there's not often a lot of incentive to overcome those burdens," Hart said. "Large programs,

permanent programs do help to build that momentum."

Hart stressed the legislation's inclusion of funding for local food in child care centers is also important. She said early childhood education centers can be better entry points for small farms because these centers are smaller and often have less burdensome requirements than school systems.

Hart added there are many benefits to getting local food to children, as kids who have access to healthy, local fruits and vegetables are more likely to have a healthier diet when they're adults.

"They go home, they influence the diet and the shopping habits of the family," Hart observed. "They say, 'I ate broccoli at school. It was really great.' They go home, they get their mom to buy broccoli. We're improving the health of that family."

Hart emphasized purchasing local food for schools also keeps the dollars from those purchases in local communities, which in turn creates more sustainable communities. The National Farm to School Network said the bills in Congress are known as marker bills, which are unlikely to pass on their own but could be included in other legislation like the next farm bill.

Just what is a 401(k) fund and how does it work?

Continued from page 1B

and with a 10% tax on the withdrawal amount regardless of account, which could be higher if taken from the traditional or brokerage.

There are ways to pull from your 401(k) without penalty and taxes. One is to take a loan for your down payment on a home purchase or renovations, which you can pay back normally within five years. These are not taxed because they are not withdrawals.

Another is called a "Hardship Withdrawal" loan where there is a small amount of tax on the amount taken out. Withdrawing funds from a Roth account in this situation results in taxation only on the earnings generated by the account. There are other loans, but they are special

cases. Also, you can have only one loan at a time. Please discuss options with your finance department.

The issues with 401(k)s are the restrictions to access. Considering the penalties and taxes, it may be best to use it for what it was created for. To build a sizable amount of money to supplement your income in retirement.

One drawback is it was created as a supplement to your pension, which for the most part no longer exists. Also, it's a stock market product, so funds can affect how much you make or how much you lose. So, how do you bridge the gap and build your own bank? More on that later.

Jameson Thornton is founder of Today & Tomorrow Financial LLC in Newark, Delaware.

Bishop cops to wire fraud

THE AFRO-AMERICAN

Staccato Powell, a former bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, has pleaded guilty to wire and mail fraud and conspiracy to commit fraudulent activity.

The crimes were connected to an extensive scheme to gain control of properties belonging to the church in California.

Powell was responsible for forged documents, deception and false statements, according to the United States Attorney's Office of the Northern District of California, which announced the guilty plea last month.

Powell, 65, was officially disrobed by the church in 2021. The denomination, with approximately 1.4 million members worldwide, remains a pillar of the African American community.

Powell was indicted on Jan. 25, 2022, by a federal jury, alongside Sheila Quintana, a former church

lay leader. Quintana, 71, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud on April 22.

Court documents say Powell and Quintana were chief executive officer and chief financial officer, respectively, of Western

Episcopal District Inc., an entity that Powell established in 2016 after he was chosen as bishop of the AME Zion Church's Western Episcopal District.

In 2016, Powell directed pastors of AME Zion churches in the Western Episcopal District, which consists of churches in several states throughout the western region of the U.S., to sign deeds granting WED to their congregation's property — such as the church building, lots and residences.

At Powell's instruction, Quintana and other WED officers worked to complete the transfer of the titles via grant deeds.

From early 2017, Powell directed Quintana and other officers to secure loans using the properties of local AME Zion churches as collateral. To comply

with what lenders wanted, Powell arranged for the creation of false church resolution documents to support WED's loan applications. He told Quintana to create and sign these documents on behalf of local church officers.

Powell pleaded guilty to fraudulently gaining control of mortgages on the following church properties: Kyles Temple in Vallejo, California; First AME Zion Church in San Jose, California; Greater Cooper AME Zion Church in Oakland, California; University AME Zion Church of Palo Alto, California; and First AME Zion Church in Los Angeles.

As part of his guilty plea, Powell agreed to pay restitution of no less than \$3 million and no greater than \$12.5 million. He also agreed to surrender any claim, right or interest in the properties of AME Zion Church. Powell is out on bond, according to prosecutors.

His sentencing hearing is set for Sept. 23. He faces a maximum penalty of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine for each count.

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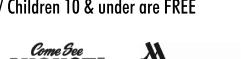
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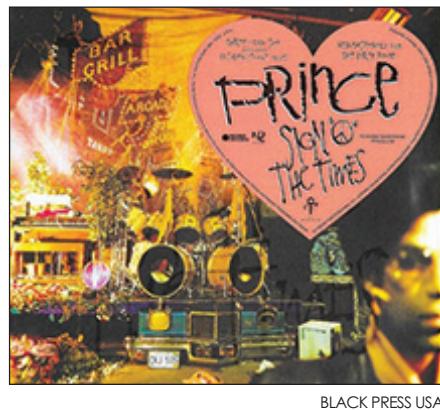
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BLACK PRESS USA

A poster from Prince's "Sign o' The Times" concert film. The 1987 movie is making a comeback in IMAX.

Prince's 'Sign o' the Times' returns in IMAX

By Stacy M. Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Nearly four decades after its debut, one of the greatest concert films in music history is returning to theaters.

Prince's "Sign o' the Times" — a dazzling mix of live performance and cinematic spectacle — will screen globally in IMAX theaters for one week only starting Aug. 29, offering fans a rare chance to experience the Purple One at the height of his powers.

Originally released in 1987, "Sign o' the Times" was born out of Prince's chart-topping double album of the same name, his first project after disbanding The Revolution. The concert film blended live tour footage with reshoots at his Paisley Park Studios, delivering a cinematic performance that critics and fans have since placed among the greatest of its kind.

While its initial theatrical run was modest, the film grew into a cult classic on VHS, long before being celebrated as a masterpiece of the genre.

The new IMAX restoration, developed with Mercury Studios, FilmRise, and Paisley Park Enterprises, amplifies the original with enhanced visuals and remastered audio. The format accentuates both Prince's unmatched showmanship and the brilliance of his band, which included guitarist Mico Weaver, bassist Levi Seacer Jr., keyboardist Dr. Fink, and horn players Atlanta Bliss and Eric Leeds.

But perhaps most striking is the spotlight on the women who shaped the performance: dancer Cat Glover's kinetic energy, Boni Boyer's soaring vocals, and Sheila E.'s explosive drum solo.

Please see PRINCE'S | 6B

Orchestra for the culture and high energy

By Freda Freeman

TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Orchestra Noir, the all-Black Atlanta-based orchestra, wants people to wear their dancing shoes.

Their concerts promise to be a party on a stage.

"Our concerts are so high energy. We encourage dancing and moving, we encourage you to wear your sneakers or dancing shoes because that's the kind of music that we're programming — R&B and hip-hop on instruments. We want you to feel a sense of pride in knowing this experience is authentic for the Black community," Maestro Jason Ikeem Rodgers said.

Tiffany Goode, a trumpeter who's been with the orchestra for seven years, described Orchestra Noir as a "beautiful gumbo of classical-trained musicians who use their instruments to create a new beautiful way of listening to R&B and the different kinds of music that we love."

Goode said Orchestra Noir wants to leave a legacy of Black musical excellence. "We want them to see Black excellence when they see us and the level of show that we put on, because Maestro is a person who demands perfection, and we always want to rise to that occasion," she said.

Orchestra Noir first performed in Raleigh last year. They were excited to return with The Culture 2000 Tour at the Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts on Aug. 29.

"Raleigh was one of the most charged-up audiences in our history. Charlotte and Raleigh were the first cities we toured, so they kind of started this touring business for us. They just take to it, they love it," said Rodgers, who first studied orchestra in North Carolina.

Please see ORCHESTRA | 6B



CHARLOTTE'S OFF BROADWAY

Charlotte's Off Broadway presents "Meet & Greet: An Evening of One Acts," Sept 4-21, 2025: Lane Morris, Marsha Perry, Joanna Gerdy and Stephanie DiPaolo

Laughter, 'Meet & Greet' reality in stage production

Charlotte's Off Broadway opens fall season with a play in three acts

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Three plays, one production.

Charlotte's Off Broadway kicks off the fall season with "Meet & Greet: An Evening of One Acts" bringing a night of comedy to the stage. The production runs Sept. 4-21 in the Black Box Theater at the VAPA Center. Tickets are \$30 per person, with a pay what you can night on Sept. 10.

The three acts will highlight three Black actors from Charlotte. The production will take the audience through "Hamilton Audition" by Susan Hatem, "The Job Interview" by Don Zolidis, and "Meet & Greet" by Stan Zimmerman and Christian McLaughlin.

"Hamilton Audition" was born from Hatem noticing the lack of representation in a play. "I was talking with a theater friend about Hamilton and about how great it was, but the women roles don't have a lot to do, and he was like, well, there weren't any women in the room. I was like, that's not an excuse and that's not true."

Although the play is comedic it also

explores real issues, Hatem hopes that the production will spark "a conversation of enjoyment, but also a conversation about race and gender."

Zimmerman's inspiration behind "Meet & Greet" came from his experiences writing for women throughout his career in sitcoms like "Golden Girls" and "Gilmore Girls."

"My first book published was called 'The Girls from Golden to Gilmore.' And I wrote that book because people kept saying, why do you keep writing for women?" Zimmerman said. "I love it, first of all, and they keep asking me to, so I really wanted to explore that idea of men writing for women, but also what is it like for women of that age to have to go and audition?"

The play showcases how hilarious it is when four actresses collide at an audition for a sitcom and comments on how society views aging in the entertainment industry, especially for women.

"We ask a lot of aging actors, both men and women, but especially of women," Zimmerman said. "We expect them to look the same, be the

same and, as we all discover, our bodies don't quite agree with that idea, and they change. Even though people think you can get a glow up or plastic surgery, you know, there are still certain things with your body that are inevitable."

"The Job Interview" takes a different approach and shows two candidates going through the job process that becomes more bizarre as the interview continues.

All three acts point out humor as well as harsh realities.

"Parody and satire are a way to reshape the conversation a little bit and make you think about things you didn't think you would," Hatem said.

On opening night, the audience will get to share their feedback in a post-show talkback with Zimmerman and Hatem and can continue the conversation with the playwrights.

Zimmerman said "There's nothing better than having live audiences and for a writer to hear where the laughs are or the tears or where people make noises. I love this part of it."

Parody and satire are a way to reshape the conversation a little bit and make you think about things you didn't think you would.

"Meet & Greet: An Evening of One Acts" co-writer SUSAN HATEM

MOVIE REVIEW

'Alien: Earth' presents a continuity conundrum

By Neal Broverman

MASHABLE

In the third episode of *Alien: Earth*, newly awakened after decades of cryo-sleep, cyborg Morrow (Babou Ceesay) announces, "I don't have a home. I'm gone a lifetime. Everyone I know is dead."

He tells this to Yutani (Sandra Oh), his dead boss' granddaughter and the current head of the Alien franchise's evil mega-corporation, Weyland-Yutani.

Morrow is the lone survivor of the USCSS Maginot, Weyland-Yutani's deep-space research vessel that departed Earth in 2055, only to crash-land there 65 years later, in 2120, when "*Alien: Earth*" is set. That timeline is not a problem in the Alien franchise's lore of decades-long space travel, e.g., between the events of "*Alien*" and "*Aliens*," Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley snoozed in an escape pod for 57 years.

But for viewers who believe or hope *Alien: Earth* is canon to all of the Alien films (except the *Alien* v. *Predator* spin-offs, which are generally not considered canon), we've encountered some turbulence.

What's the issue?

"Prometheus," the first Alien film in the series' timeline, mainly takes place in 2093. The *Prometheus* is also a deep-space research vessel, but one funded by the Weyland Corporation — not Weyland-Yutani — and containing a crew that includes the company's founder, Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce), and his daughter, Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron).

At that point in time, Weyland Corp. had not yet merged with the mysterious Yutani Corp.

The "*Prometheus*" sequel, "*Alien: Covenant*," is set in 2104, by which time Weyland and Yutani have joined forces as a new company, and they're funding the Covenant colonization mission. If that still holds true, why was the *Maginot* — which, again, launched in 2055 — branded as a Weyland-Yutani ship since it took off half a century



20TH CENTURY FOX

Charlize Theron and Idris Elba in a scene from "Alien: Earth."

before Weyland and Yutani merged?

Why does it matter?

If "*Alien: Earth*" suggests Weyland-Yutani was in existence in 2055, it would be hard to square that with the events of the 2090s-set *Prometheus* — where Yutani is not mentioned and Weyland Corp. exists as a solo enterprise — and *Alien: Covenant*, which is a direct sequel to *Prometheus*.

It would also conflict with certain plot points in "*Alien: Romulus*," a 2130s-set midquel that references the *Prometheus* mission by name.

In other words, having Weyland-Yutani exist in a different timeline than the films may be series creator Noah Hawley's way of saying his show operates in a slightly different universe than the films. That's something Hawley has hinted at, but never stated definitively.

And if it does exist separately, does that mean *Alien: Earth* will not acknowledge subjects explored in the more modern "Alien" movies, like the Engineers and their mutagenic black goo? It's hard to say, especially since a dissected facehugger in *Alien: Earth* contains black organs and both black and green blood.

Possible scenarios to square the W-Y discrepancy

So, how could the Weyland-Yutani of it all be explained? Let's play out a few scenarios:

1. The *Maginot* departed Earth as a Yutani operation and spaceship, but at some point post-merger was rebranded as a W-Y vessel to reflect the new company, possibly at a refueling stop or W-Y space station.

2. The *Maginot* was a joint operation between Weyland and Yutani corporations, but the companies wouldn't officially merge until much later.

3. Weyland-Yutani had already merged by 2055, but severed ties before the events of *Prometheus* (maybe Yutani didn't support a crazy expensive mission to find ancient aliens?), only to again join forces later.

Aside from continuity complications, the fact that the original Yutani was chasing — or stumbled upon — alien creatures decades before the events of *Alien* is a fascinating concept. The films, at least the ones made this century, center Weyland as the driving force of Weyland-Yutani's dangerous alien ambitions, while the TV series

Please see ALIEN | 6B



ORCHESTRA NOIR

Atlanta-based Orchestra Noir is an all-Black troupe that tours the country. **Orchestra for the culture**

Continued from page 5B

Born in Philadelphia, Rodgers fell in love with the piano at age 10. He attended Settlement Music School in Philadelphia when he was 16, and was later accepted into the piano program, studying classical music, at the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem. After college, he returned to Philadelphia as an instrumental music teacher and started five orchestral programs in five schools.

While teaching, Rodgers realized he wanted to be a conductor, so he started conducting throughout Europe, where he won several competitions. After that, he asked himself what he could do to make an im-

pact. Having thought about starting a Black orchestra for a long time, he became mission focused during the Black Lives Matter Movement and decided 2016 was the time and Atlanta was the place. Today, the orchestra has 50 members, 25 when on tour.

Of all his accomplishments, Rodgers – conductor, composer, arranger and director – said he's most proud to lead his ensemble.

"A conductor knows that you have to build with people, and an orchestra has to know you over time, but if you don't have the right leadership skills in play, it won't happen. So, to have an orchestra, build

it yourself, and exist for almost 10 years, I'm proud of that. And to do it with my people, to do it with African Americans, I'm most proud of that," he said.

Prince's 'Sign o' the Times' returns in IMAX

Continued from page 5B

that nearly shakes the screen apart. Critics once hailed the film with breathless praise, declaring it "the greatest concert movie ever made" and saying it "makes Michael Jackson look nailed to the floor." The IMAX revival confirms why.

From Prince's crabwalk across the stage into a split and spin, to intimate piano interludes and the gospel-tinged finale of "The Cross," the performance captures him as singer, songwriter, instrumentalist, dancer, and conductor all at once.

For longtime fans, the film represents Prince at his creative zenith, the moment when pop instincts and daring innovation

aligned perfectly. For those who never witnessed him live, this one-week IMAX run is more than nostalgia, an essential cultural event.

As Prince himself once said of his devotion to sound quality, "You can hear all the humanity in it. This is a top-of-the-line, sonically exquisite piece of work. You hear all the effort."

"Sign o' the Times" is not just a concert film, it's Prince in full flight, demanding to be seen and heard as he intended. And now, for one week only, audiences can finally do just that, larger and louder than ever before.

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'Alien: Earth' presents a continuity conundrum

Continued from page 5B

suggests it's actually the Yutani side steering the (space)ship.

Alternatively, perhaps Hawley will thread the needle and present a scenario where everything lines up and the original Weyland and Yutani characters were informing each other's disastrous decisions.

We shall see — unlike Xenomorphs, franchises are often imperfect organisms.

«OUT & ABOUT

PHOTOS BY DANIEL COSTON | FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST



The Ray Band performed at the Gatsby Gala, held at the Hilton Center City on Aug. 23.



The annual Miss May Tea, held at Rural Hill on Aug. 10 drew scores of patrons.



Mecklenburg County District Attorney Spencer Merriweather III (right) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Johnny Jennings celebrated the 20th anniversary of Pat's Place Advocacy Center with a special event at Pat's Place on Aug. 7.

