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BLUFFTON, INDIANA • Wells County's Hometown Connection

\$1.00

Man denied bail reduction in privacy invasion charge

By SYDNEY KENT

A man from Ohio was denied a reduction in his \$50,000 bond in the Wells Superior Court last week. He is currently still incarcerated in the Wells County Jail.

Steven Carl Thomas, 61, was charged with nine counts of invasion of privacy, all Class A misdemeanors, after he sent his wife a series of emails despite a no-contact order between the two. According to a probable cause affidavit, Thomas reportedly sent 12 texts and 14 emails between Nov. 2-8 — 19 of the messages referenced a prayer or religion, while others requested to remove the no contact order and referenced a call from the Department of Child Services.

The no contact order was issued due to an additional case that Thomas was out on bond for when he sent the string of emails. In early October, Thomas was charged with residential entry and breaking, a Level 6 felony, and battery with bodily injury, a Class A misdemeanor.

The charges were filed after police responded to a call that Thomas refused to leave his estranged wife's property. Officers noted a slew of broken glass from the front door of the home.

Thomas's wife reported that the two had been separated for months, and that Thomas had not lived in the home at any point. Divorce papers, which Thomas reportedly refused to sign, were on the table. A man who witnessed the incident, as well as a victim in the battery with bodily injury charge, reported that Thomas forced his way into the residence. The man sustained minor wounds from broken glass.

A status hearing is set for 10 a.m. Jan. 16 in the Wells Superior Court for both cases.

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Steven Carl Thomas



Future artists

Artists Alex and Dylan Dominguez are both focused and excited about their garden gnome paintings at the Hue Can Painting class on Nov. 27. (Photo by Jonathan Snyder)

Cyber Monday marks years' biggest online shopping day

And one more chance to save on gifts

By HALELUYA HADERO
AP Business Writer

Consumers are scouring the internet for online deals as they begin to cap off the five-day post-Thanksgiving shopping bonanza with Cyber Monday.

Even though e-commerce is now part and parcel of our everyday lives and much of the holiday shopping season, Cyber Monday — a term coined back in 2005 by the National Retail Federation — continues to be the biggest online shopping day of the year, thanks to the deals and the hype the industry has created to fuel it.

Adobe Analytics, which tracks online shopping, expects consumers to spend between \$12 billion and \$12.4 billion on Monday, making it the biggest online shopping day of all time.

For several major retailers, the "Cyber Monday" sale is a days-long event that begins over the weekend. Amazon's, for example, kicked off on Saturday and runs through Monday. Target's two-day event began overnight on Sunday, while Arkansas-based Walmart kicked off its most recent discounts Sunday evening.

Consumer spending for Cyber Week — the five major shopping days between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday — provides a strong indication on how much shoppers are willing to spend during the holiday season.

Shoppers have been resilient this year in the face of stub-

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DCS staffing report nearly 100 percent

But one county in southern Indiana met just 53 percent of the need

By WHITNEY DOWNARD
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Staffing levels for family case managers meet 99 percent of the need statewide, according to the annual staffing and caseload report from the Department of Child Services, but some areas of the state face a greater need than others.

"Some of the most integral among the agency's staff members are family case managers. FCMs are the state's front line against child abuse and neglect. Maintaining management caseloads for staff members is critical to ensuring the agency provides the best service possible to those in need," DCS Director Eric Miller said in a report recently submitted to the Indiana State Budget Committee.

The agency compiles an annual report documenting its staffing needs following a series of scandals triggered by the resignation of Miller's predecessor, Mary Bonaventura. In a scathing letter, Bonaventura claimed children would die following state funding cuts and subsequent, independent reviews found that DCS had a staffing crisis.

Legislative reform dictated that the agency "shall" meet certain goals when it came to FCMs, requiring more manageable caseloads and reducing the number of children overseen by individual staff.

Staffing details

DCS, the state's third-largest agency, has 4,100 staff members and a little more than half of those are FCMs. But of those 2,100 FCMs, just 1,637

employees have an active caseload with another 158 FCMs in training. The remaining FCM staff oversee hotlines and licensing services within the agency.

However, the agency needs 24 additional FCMs to meet the required Child Welfare League of America standards limiting staff to:

- No more than 12 cases (families) per month for caseworkers conducting child protection assessments
- No more than 17 family cases for caseworkers providing ongoing support to families involved in child protective services
- No more than 12 cases if caseworkers are conducting family-centered casework

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Donors speak about what moves them

Detail how they plan donations

By THALIA BEATY
Associated Press

What motivates people to donate to charities or causes they care about is often deeply personal. Donors name relatives or friends who have survived or died from illnesses. They recount tearful conversations with their children. They point to their aspirations for how their communities and the larger world could be improved.

In advance of GivingTuesday, The Associated Press interviewed people from across the country with a variety of life experiences about why they give, which organizations they choose to support and how they plan their giving throughout the year.

While not all will participate in GivingTuesday, which started in 2012 as a hashtag, the date has become a central part of nonprofit fundraising and a kind of last chance to meet their budget goals for the following year.

These interviews have been edited for length:

HOUSTON — A longtime resident of Houston, Monica Fulton, 51, prioritizes giving to organizations serving the city's residents. She's volunteered with the Houston Food Bank for decades, doing "everything except the cold room. Because I don't like the cold," she joked.

Fulton, who is originally from Panama, sees her giving and volunteering

as a way to make a difference, something she has tried to pass on to her children, who are now 18 and 20 years old.

"You look at what's happening in the world and you tend to feel helpless. And what I try to teach my kids instead of feeling helpless is find one little patch of grass that you can make better," she said.

Usually, at the beginning of the year, Fulton sets aside the funds that she intends to give to nonprofits, with the majority going to the food bank, a nonprofit that provides services to people without housing, a women's fund and an arts education organization. But she keeps aside a portion to respond more flexibly, including on Giving

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Jill Biden wants holiday visitors to feel like kids again

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Step inside the White House during the holidays by walking beneath the branches of a Christmas tree. Stroll along a hallway decorated with oversized holiday candy and other sweets. See Santa's sleigh and his eight reindeer suspended above the

grand foyer in dramatic fashion.

Jill Biden wants everyone who visits the White House during the holidays to feel like a kid again.

"Each room is designed to capture this pure, unfiltered delight and imagination" so visitors "see this time of year through the wondrous, sparkling eyes of children," the first lady said Monday at the

first of a month's worth of holiday receptions. About 100,000 visitors are expected for the holidays.

"Magic, Wonder and Joy" is the theme this year, President Joe Biden's third in the White House.

Jill Biden said it was "so amazing" to see the Christmas tree atop the entrance to the East Wing when they returned Sunday night after

spending the Thanksgiving holiday in Nantucket, Massachusetts.

"When Joe and I saw that last night, we were just, like, mesmerized," she said.

The whimsical set of oversized decorations is meant to inspire the feelings of awe and wonder that put children on joyful edge during the holidays, White House aides said.

Throughout two public floors of the White House, the décor features several nods to the 200th anniversary of the publication of the poem and book commonly known as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." (The official title is "A Visit from St. Nicholas.")

The papier-mâché reindeer sus-

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Outside

Mostly sunny and windy, 'warmer' tomorrow

Today	Wed.	Thursday
High 27	High 41	High 49
Low 17	Low 26	Low 36

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Online

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Vol. 95 No. 23

TUESDAY
November 28, 2023

The Gospel Barn of Bluffton Presents

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Indiana DCS staffing

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 • No more than 12 to 15 children in out-of-home care
 The report calls FCMs “some of the most integral” to the agency’s mission, whose “dedication helps prevent future maltreatment as families rebuild and learn to provide a safe environment for the loved ones in their care.”

Of the agency’s 19 regions, 10 meet staffing standards and an additional four have at least 90 percent of the staff they need. The statewide staffing level is 99 percent.

The report details staffing by region and county, with several areas in southern Indiana below the ideal range. Region 14, which covers Bartholomew, Jackson, Jennings, Johnson and Shelby counties had the biggest staffing shortage, with just 74 percent of FCM need met.

However, two counties in the area — Jackson and Jennings — were fully staffed. Bartholomew had just over half, 53 percent, while Johnson had 64 percent and Shelby had 70 percent.

With 12-weeks of training, replacing staff isn’t as easy as hiring a new person — especially since recent graduates don’t immediately

handle a full caseload. And DCS, like other employers, has had difficulty retaining and recruiting employees in a tight labor market with a historically low unemployment rate.

In Fiscal Year 2023 — a period of time from July 1, 2022 to June 31, 2023, which is the calendar for the state budget — DCS reported losing 739 FCMs and hiring another 890.

One factor the agency cited was low pay, something noted in the 2022 State Personnel Department compensation study. Prior to that initiative, pay started at \$35,776 and increased to \$40,092 after the 12-week training period. Following the study, pay started at \$47,320.

Increasing salaries helped with retention but “challenges remain(ed) due to the difficult nature of the work.”

The report details recruitment efforts such as increasing the number of job fairs from 15 to 25, visiting colleges and universities, and hosting interview events at offices with five or more openings.

The importance of FCMs, families

High FCM turnover, according to the report, “can” result in: longer fos-

ter care stays for children, delays in timely assessments of allegations of abuse and neglect, disruptions in child placements and increased rates of repeat maltreatment.

“Supporting family case managers is paramount to ensuring the best service for the children in DCS’ care,” the report said.

The agency uses a six-month caseload average but “strives to hire 120 percent of its six-month average need of family case managers during October, November and December of each year to be prepared for one of the busiest times each year, which is March through May.”

Case numbers trended down in fiscal year 2023, with a total of 14,163 children interacting with DCS through informal adjustments, collaborative care or “child in need of services” compared to 15,838 the previous year — a decrease of over 10 percent.

Between months caseloads also fluctuated from a low of 6,797 in July 2022 to a high of 9,651 in September 2022.

The agency highlighted several areas where it said it succeeded, including: fewer families in need of formal intervention, fewer children

in residential care, fewer children who experienced repeat maltreatment and improved ratio of supervisors to case managers.

One effort potentially having an impact and decreasing the number of children in DCS’ system: kinship care, or family members raising children when their biological parents are unable to do so.

In the latest budget cycle, DCS pushed to add a \$300 monthly stipend for kinship caregivers, who are typically unlicensed and don’t qualify for foster care payments.

Additionally, calls to Indiana’s 24-hour Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline were down in the last year.

“While the hotline has historically seen an increase in reports year over year, there has been a recent plateau and reduction in the number of reports generated...” the report said, listing calls per year. “From (fiscal year) 2016 to (fiscal year) 2019, the hotline received a 14 percent increase in reports. This is believed to be due in large part to increased awareness of the hotline.

“In (fiscal year) 2023, the hotline saw a 4 percent reduction in reports since the previous year.”

Weather

Tuesday, November 28, 2023
 (24-hour observations at 9:21 p.m. Monday)
High: 29; Low: 20; Precipitation: None
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 1.23 feet at 9:45 p.m. Monday

Wells County forecast

Today: Mostly sunny, with a high near 27. West wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 17. Southwest wind 10 to 15 mph.

Wednesday: Sunny, with a high near 41. West wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph.

Wednesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 26. Southwest wind around 10 mph.

Thursday: A 40 percent chance of showers after 1 p.m. Partly sunny, with a high near 49. Breezy.

Thursday Night: Showers. Low around 36. Breezy. Chance of precipitation is 80 percent.

Friday: Showers, mainly before 1 p.m. High near 44. Chance of precipitation is 80 percent.

Friday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers before 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 30.

Saturday: Partly sunny, with a high near 45.

Saturday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 34.

Sunday: A 30 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 52.

Sunday Night: A chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 37.

A Sumatran rhino calf adds to endangered species of fewer than 50

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A critically endangered Sumatran rhino was born in Indonesia’s western island of Sumatra on Saturday, the second Sumatran rhino born in the country this year and a welcome addition to a species that currently numbers fewer than 50 animals.

A female named Delilah gave birth to a 55-pound male calf at a sanctuary for Sumatran rhinos in Way Kambas National Park in Lampung province, at the southern tip of Sumatra island.

The calf is fathered by a male named Harapan, who was born at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2006. He was the last Sumatran rhino in the world to be repatriated to Indonesia, meaning that the entire population of Sumatran rhinos is now in Indonesia.

Most of the remaining rhinos live on Sumatra, several in captivity. They are threatened by destruction of tropical forest habitat and poachers who kill the animals for their horns, which are prized for making ornaments and for use in traditional medicine in China and other parts of Asia.

“This birth is also the birth of the second Sumatran rhino in 2023. It emphasizes the government commitment of the Indonesian Government on the rhino conservation efforts in Indonesia, especially the Sumatran rhino.” Indonesian Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar said in a written statement.

She added that, from the semi-natural breeding efforts, there were five live births of Sumatran rhinos at the Way Kambas sanctuary.

A conservation guard found Delilah with the newborn male calf next to her on Saturday morning, 10 days earlier than the estimated date of delivery.

Delilah and her baby are in good condition as the calf is now able to stand upright and walk. Not long after he was discovered, he was able to breastfeed in a standing position, said a statement from Indonesia’s Environment and Forestry Ministry.

The Sumatran rhino is legally protected in Indonesia. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species describes the Sumatran rhinos as critically endangered: the population is declining and only about 30 mature animals remain.

Cyber Monday

(Continued from Page 1)
 bornly high inflation, which recently reached its lowest point in more than two years yet remains painfully apparent in areas like auto and health insurance and some groceries, like beef and bread.

Economists, meanwhile, have cautioned strong spending is likely to wane in the coming months.

Stressed consumers are relying on savings to fuel their shopping and are facing more pressure from credit card debt, which has been on the rise along with delinquencies. They’ve also been embracing “Buy Now Pay Later” payment plans, which allow shoppers to make payments over time without — typically — charging interest.

The National Retail Federation expects holiday shoppers to spend more this year than last year. But the pace of spending will slow, it said, growing 3 percent to 4 percent compared to 5.4 percent in 2022.

A clear sense of consumer spending won’t emerge until the government releases sales data for the holiday season, though preliminary data shows some good signs for the retail industry.

According to Adobe, shoppers spent a record \$9.8 billion online Friday — marking a 7.5 percent jump from last year. Meanwhile, Salesforce, which also tracks online shopping, estimated that Black Friday online sales totaled \$16.4 billion in the U.S. and \$70.9 billion around the world. And Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks in-person and online spending across all payment forms, reported that overall Black Friday sales excluding automotive rose 2.5 percent from a year ago — a smaller but still notable jump compared to 2022’s double-digit growth.

According to the firm, online sales rose 8.5 percent, while in-store purchases were up just 1.1 percent. Those numbers are not adjusted for

inflation, which means that real sales in-stores could have dipped due to high prices.

Other data showed Black Friday saw some increases in store traffic — with large crowds in stores nationwide feeling more similar to pre-pandemic days.

RetailNext, which measures real-time foot traffic in stores, reported that store traffic rose 2.1 percent on Friday. Sensormatic Solutions, which also tracks store traffic, saw a bigger increase — reporting a 4.6 percent jump in shopper visits on Black Friday compared to a year ago. That also marks a turnaround from an average decline in store traffic seen throughout 2023 to date, Sensormatic said.

Grant Gustafson, head of retail consulting and analytics at Sensormatic, said that this marked the most significant Black Friday increase that his organization has seen in recent memory.

“This is a really good barometer of what to expect for the remainder of the holiday season,” Gustafson said. “The overall trend that we saw in traffic is a really positive sign for not only physical retail, but also for e-comm retail — that the consumer is willing to spend when they find out (about significant sales).”

Electronics, clothing, toys and jewelry were among the categories that saw the most growth this Black Friday, per Adobe. Health and beauty products as well as sporting goods also saw significant sales increases.

Retailers began offering holiday deals in October this year, continuing a trend that started during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been resurrected multiple times due to supply chain clogs or inflation woes. But many consumers waited to buy until Black Friday.

Mickey Chadha, retail expert and vice president at the credit rat-

ing agency Moody’s, believes that discounts will likely be quite strong and continue in the coming days, primarily because inventory, especially in discretionary categories, remains higher than demand. But he said the deals likely won’t be as good as last year, when retailers had more items on hand.

The investment bank Jefferies, which tracked 54 retailers during Black Friday, said Monday that it found that a majority of them offered flat discounts compared to last year. Still, Salesforce’s data showed discount rates rose to 30 percent in the U.S. on Black Friday, enticing customers to buy.

“They’re once again playing a game — and winning the game — of discount chicken, where they wait for retailers to discount to where they feel most comfortable,” said Rob Garf, vice president and general manager of Retail at Salesforce. “And that’s what’s happening.”

According to Adobe’s stats, spending exceeded Black Friday during the weekend as consumers spent \$10.3 billion to take advantage of discounts that have been higher than years past. On Thanksgiving Day, Adobe said shoppers had spent another \$5.6 billion, up 5.5 percent compared to last year. That’s nearly double the amount consumers spent online in 2017, showing the continued shift to online shopping during the gift-giving season.

The resale industry, which has grown in recent years, is also expected to be a significant part of the holiday shopping season. Salesforce predicts 17 percent of holiday gifts this year will come from resale markets like Facebook Marketplace or ThreadUp, as well as brands like Canada Goose, Patagonia and Coach offering resale options on their sites for environmentally conscious consumers or those who enjoy vintage offerings.

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Rotary dictionary delivery

The Bluffton Rotary Club renewed its annual distribution of dictionaries to Wells County third-grade students, part of the club's literacy and youth efforts. Over 400 dictionaries were presented to students in all three public school systems. Above, Rotarian Mitch Harnish with students from one of the four Lancaster Elementary School classes. Rotary has been delivering non-powered-word-definition-devices to Wells County schools for 14 years. (Photo provided)

Christmas at the Limberlost Cabin

On Sunday, Dec. 3 the Limberlost Historic Site in Geneva will host a Christmas program from 1 to 5 p.m. Visitors are invited to see the cabin decorated for the holiday, listen to some carols and enjoy some cider. Admission is \$6 and reservations are asked to 317-232-1637.



Merry Christmas to the 'Mentor Moms'

Members of the Foltz Bay View Literary Club recently presented a "Merry Christmas" gift of \$300 to Dawn Fowler for the Mentor Moms program at Family Centered Services. Book club members left to right are President Amy Greiner, Marge Ellis, Fowler and Treasurer Pam Blessing. Book club meetings are held at the Family Centered Services building on Tuesday afternoons. (Photo by Barbara Barbieri)

Area Things to See and Do

ALL FOR ONE PRODUCTIONS, FORT WAYNE
www.allforonefw.org

ALLEN COUNTY WAR MEMORIAL COLISEUM
Le Chic Holiday Market, Dec. 1 & 2. www.memorialcoliseum.com

ARENA DINNER THEATER, FORT WAYNE
"One Christmas Eve at Evergreen Mall," Dec. 1-17; "LMNOP," Jan. 19-28; "Funny Money," March 1-16; "A Delightful Quarantine," April 19-May 4; "The Drowsy Chaperone," June 14-29. www.arenadinnertheatre.org

CLYDE THEATRE, FORT WAYNE
Brian Regan (comedy), Dec. 7; Tribute to Elton John/Billy Joel; Debutants & Friends: Jan. 20; Foy Vance, Jan 28. ClydeTheatre.com or at 1-800-514-3849.

EMBASSY THEATER, FORT WAYNE
Lindsey Stirling: Dec. 4; "The Hip Hop Nutcracker (Touring)," Dec. 5; Cirque Dream Holiday: Dec. 7; Phil Holiday Pops: Dec. 14-17; "Sleighin It Tour": Dec. 20; Straight No Chaser: Dec. 20; "Napoleon Dynamite Live!," Jan. 18; Tim Allen: Jan. 26; Joy Koy cinmenny: Feb. 4; http://fwembassytheatre.org/events

FIRE AND LIGHT PRODUCTIONS, FORT WAYNE
PPG Arts Lab, 300 E. Main St., Fort Wayne; "Elf Jr.," Dec. 14-16, Arts United Center, 303 E. Main St., Fort Wayne; "The Sound of Music," Jan. 18-20, Arts United Center, 303 E. Main St., Fort Wayne; "Finding Nemo Jr., April 11-13, Arts United enter, 303 E. Main St., Fort Wayne. Tickets at fireandlightproductions.com.

1ST PRESBYTERIAN THEATRE FORT WAYNE
Almost Maine: Jan. 26-27; firstpresfortwayne.org/theater/

BOTANICAL CONSERVATORY
Timeless Tradition 40 Years through Jan. 7; info at botanicalconservatory.org.

FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATER
"The Color Purple," Feb. 9-18, 2024; "Six Degrees of Separation," March 15-24; "Jersey Boys," May 4-19; "Something Rotten," July 21-30. Arts United Center box office 260-424-5220; info at www.fwcivic.org.

FORT WAYNE MUSEUM OF ART
Open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (until 8 p.m. on Thursdays, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. www.fwmoa.org

FURTH CENTER, ANGOLA
trine.edu/furth

HONEYWELL CENTER & EAGLES THEATRE, WABASH
Honeywell Center: Cirque Dreams Holiday: Dec. 5; Four Horsemen: Dec. 7; Scott McCreedy: Dec. 7; Pam Tillis/Phil Vasser: Dec. 13; American Girl Live Concert, Dec. 15; Thunderstruck Wizards of Winter: Dec. 16; Dinosaur World Live: Jan. 26; Little River Band, Feb. 2; 360 Allstars, Feb. 3; Princess Bride/Cary Elwes; 1954 The Tribute: March 2; Tommy Jones/The Shondells: March 30; **Eagles Theatre:** A Bing Crosby Christmas: Dec. 12; Nelson, Jan, 18; Sons of Mistro, Feb. 8; Michael Palascak: Feb. 14; https://www.boxofficeticketsales.com/honeywell-center

ARTS UNITED CENTER—FW
Fort Wayne Ballet's "The Nutcracker"; Dec. 1-3. 7-10. fortwayneballet.org

PURDUE-FORT WAYNE THEATER
Productions at Williams Theatre on the Purdue-FW campus. www.pfw.edu/visual-performing-arts.

SCIENCE CENTRAL, FORT WAYNE
1950 N. Clinton St. in Fort Wayne. Hours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Info at 260-424-2400 or at www.sciencecentral.org

SWEETWATER SOUND, FORT WAYNE
Performance Center
Tickets: 800-514-3849 or eTix

BAKER STREET CENTER, FORT WAYNE
Christmas at the Centre (Maleena Felger, Aicia Pyle & Mike Conley, Los Galaxy, Snooth Edge 2): Dec. 9; Duke Tumatoo & Power Trio: Jan. 20; www.bakerstreetcentre.com

PIERE'S ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE
Etix.com

LERNER THEATRE, ELKHART
Carpenter Tribute/Debbie Tayulor: Dec. 7; Colin Mochrie: Feb. 10; Rodney Carington: Feb. 23; TheLerner.com

WAGON WHEEL, WARSAW
"A Christmas Carol," Dec. 1-17. Tickets 866-923-2618 or wagonwheelcenter.org

ABCINEMA, DECATUR
130 W. Monroe St., Decatur. Information: www.abcinemainc.com or 260-724-SHOW

Understanding pre-heart failure

Also: Breaking the cycle of depression

Question: My doctor says I have pre-heart failure. What is that exactly and how can I prevent complete heart failure? — Glen G., Grosse Pointe, Michigan

Answer: A report from the Heart Failure Society of America reveals that 24 percent to 34 percent of U.S. adults have pre-heart failure. And many of those folks go on to develop heart failure. In fact, they caution that soon the lifetime risk of heart failure may hit 24 percent, meaning that one in four adults will develop the condition.

Heart failure, AKA congestive heart failure, is a progressive condition that happens when your heart doesn't fill up with enough blood or is too weak to effectively pump out blood to supply the rest of your body with what it needs to function properly. As a result, blood and fluid build up in your lungs, legs and feet. Breathing is compromised. Kidney and liver function are impaired.

It can be caused by high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, obesity or cardiomyopathy — the thickening, stiffening and/or enlargement of your heart muscle. It results in gradual worsening of your overall health, because your blood isn't able to supply your body with enough oxygen and nutrients or keep organ systems working properly.

Pre-heart failure, also called asymptomatic left ventricular dysfunction (ALVD), means you have evidence of left-ventricular dysfunction and or left-ventricular hypertrophy (enlargement and thickening of that area of the heart), but no outward symptoms of heart failure.

There are many ways to support your heart health and help control pre-heart failure. They include taking antihypertensive ACE inhibitors, beta blockers and statins. And for folks with electrical disturbances of their heart rhythm, automatic implantable cardioverter defibrillators and biventricular pacemakers may be helpful. In addition, adopting healthy lifestyle habits, including not smoking, getting doctor-supervised physical activity, eating a plant-based diet and managing stress, can provide major benefits. You're lucky you got this early diagnosis; take advantage of the opportunity to improve your longevity — and for more heart-loving choices, check out LongevityPlaybook.com.



Mehmet Oz, M.D. and Mike Roizen, M.D.

Question: So many of my friends — and their teenage kids — are depressed. It's depressing me! What can we do to break out of this cycle? — Sheryl J., Providence, Rhode Island

Answer: You're right. There's an epidemic of the blues and of more serious chronic depression permeating every corner of the country. A recent study in JAMA Pediatrics found that in 2021, 20 percent of adolescents were contending with a major depressive disorder — and less than half of them received treatment. And an ongoing Gallup poll on depression in America reports that this year, almost 18 percent of adults are being treated for depression and almost 30 percent have received treatment at some point over their lifetime. That's a 7 percent increase since 2015. And a truly upsetting statistic from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that the suicide rate in 2022 was the highest ever recorded — up 16 percent since 2011.

The physical repercussions of mild and chronic depression are far-reaching, including poor stress management, dementia, obesity, premature heart disease and high blood pressure, sleep disorders, disrupted relationships, and an increased risk of cancer and decreased effectiveness of cancer medication.

Kids and adults need support and treatment to manage or shed their depression. That includes talk therapy, medication (for some), and a wide variety of self-help habits including interacting with your posse of friends and family, finding a passion, getting physical activity (150-300 minutes a week), and enjoying yoga, meditation, moderate-to-no alcohol consumption, and identifying what you have to be grateful for. One more important self-help technique: improved nutrition. A major study in JAMA Network Open found that eating highly processed foods is directly related to an increased risk for depression. Especially risky? Artificial sweeteners and artificially sweetened beverages; they seem to cause brain changes that lead to depression!

If you or your child is contending with depression, don't shy away from talking about it, reaching out to your doctor for advice, seeking treatment and upgrading your daily habits to support a happier healthier future.

Ouabache office hours

The office at Ouabache State Park will be open 7 days a week through Dec. 24th. Hours for the Wonderland of Lights will be from 6 to 9 p.m. each evening.

Auditions for "Noir Suspicious"

Auditions for a murder mystery comedy "Noir Suspicious," to be presented at the Auditorium at Life Community Church, have been announced for Friday, Dec. 1, at 6 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 2, 9 a.m. at the Auditorium.. Otto "Tank" Lowe will direct the production that has a cast of nine characters (five male and 4 female) with three being lead roles. Practices will be on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at the church. Performance dates are Friday, Feb. 16 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, Feb. 17 at 3 p.m.

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Donald Trump set to return to the witness stand in his civil fraud trial

By **JENNIFER PELTZ**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After a pugnacious first turn on the witness stand, former president Donald Trump plans to testify again next month in his civil fraud trial, his lawyers said Monday.

He is to return Dec. 11, defense attorney Christopher Kise said.

Trump had plenty to say during his initial testimony Nov. 6 in the case, which has questioned his net worth, accused him of misleading banks and insurers and threatened his future in business in New York.

The Republican 2024 presidential front-runner denies all the allegations, and he used his first stint on the witness stand to lambaste the case, the judge and New York Attorney General Letitia James, who brought the lawsuit.

"People don't know how good a company I built. You know why?" Trump complained as one of James' deputies questioned him. "Because people like you go around and try and demean me

and try and hurt me, probably for political reasons."

He called James "a political hack" and dismissed a pretrial ruling against him as a "fraud on behalf of the court."

The second round of Trump's testimony could be still more expansive. James' office led the questioning the first time; next month, that role goes to Trump's own lawyers, and they can ask about a wider range of subjects than they could during cross-examination before.

When Trump's son, company Executive Vice President Donald Trump Jr., testified for the defense this month, for instance, he lauded his father, traced the family's history in business back to the late 1800s and talked the court through a glossy slideshow replete with sumptuous photos of skyscraper views, golf fairways, ballrooms, roof terraces and estates.

Eric Trump, who is Trump Jr.'s brother and fellow EVP, is due to testify for the defense Dec. 6, Kise

said. Both Trump sons also testified during the attorney general's part of the case.

Now finishing its second month, the trial is putting a spotlight on the real estate empire that vaulted Trump into public life and eventually politics. He maintains that James, a Democrat, is trying to damage his campaign.

At the heart of the case are Trump's 2014 to 2021 annual "statements of financial condition," which were used to help secure loans and other deals.

A Trump Organization executive testified Monday that the company no longer produces such statements.

The company continues to prepare various audits and other financial reports specific to some of its components, but "there is no roll-up financial statement of the company," said Mark Hawthorn, the chief operating officer of the Trump Organization's hotel arm.

He wasn't asked why the comprehensive reports had ceased but

said they are "not required by any lender, currently, or any constituent."

Messages seeking comment on the matter were sent to spokespeople for the Trump Organization.

Hawthorn, a certified public accountant, has worked since 2016 for the company's Trump Hotels arm. Trump Jr. testified earlier that Hawthorn is functioning as the entire Trump Organization's chief financial officer, calling him "the finance guy within Trump world now" and saying the CPA "has taken on all those decisional responsibilities."

But Hawthorn said it was incorrect to say "all."

Defense lawyer Clifford Robert used Hawthorn's testimony to try to show that companies under the Trump Organization's umbrella have produced reams of financial documents "that no one had a problem with." A lawyer for James' office, Andrew Amer, stressed that the suit is about Trump's

overall statements of financial condition, calling the other documents irrelevant.

Trump asserts that his wealth was understated, not overblown, on his financial statements. He also notes that the numbers came with disclaimers saying that they weren't audited and that others might reach different conclusions about his financial position.

Judge Arthur Engoron, who will decide the verdict in the non-jury trial, has already ruled that Trump and other defendants engaged in fraud. The current proceeding is to decide remaining claims of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records.

James wants the judge to impose over \$300 million in penalties and to ban Trump from doing business in New York — and that's on top of Engoron's pre-trial order that a receiver take control of some of Trump's properties. An appeals court has frozen that order for now.

Ukraine has new way to get grain to world despite Russia's threat in Black Sea

By **HANNA ARHIROVA**
and **COURTNEY BONNELL**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Grain thunders into rail cars and trucks zip around a storage facility in central Ukraine, a place that growing numbers of companies turned to as they struggled to export their food to people facing hunger around the world.

Now, more of the grain is getting unloaded from overcrowded silos and heading to ports on the Black Sea, set to traverse a fledgling shipping corridor launched after Russia pulled out of a U.N.-brokered agreement this summer that allowed food to flow safely from Ukraine during the war.

"It was tight, but we kept working ... we sought how to accept every ton of products needed for our partners," facility general director Roman Andreikiv said about the end of the grain deal in July. Ukraine's new corridor, protected by the military, has now allowed him to "free up warehouse space and increase activity."

Growing numbers of ships are streaming toward Ukraine's Black Sea ports and heading out loaded with grain, metals and other cargo despite the threat of attack and floating explosive mines. It's giving a

boost to Ukraine's agriculture-dependent economy and bringing back a key source of wheat, corn, barley, sunflower oil and other affordable food products for parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia where local prices have risen and food insecurity is growing.

"We are seeing renewed confidence among commercial operators keen to take Ukrainian grain cargoes," said Munro Anderson, head of operations for Vessel Protect, which assesses war risks at sea and provides insurance with backing from Lloyd's, whose members make up the world's largest insurance marketplace.

Ihor Osmachko, general director of Agroprosperis Group, one of Ukraine's biggest agricultural producers and exporters, says he's feeling "more optimistic than two months ago."

"At that time, it was completely unclear how to survive," he said.

Since the company's first vessel departed in mid-September, it says it has shipped more than 300,000 metric tons of grain to Egypt, Spain, China, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Tunisia and Turkey.

After ending the agreement brokered by the U.N. and Turkey, Russia has attacked Ukraine's Black

Sea ports — a vital connection to global trade — and grain infrastructure, destroying enough food to feed over 1 million people for a year, the U.K. government said.

The risk to vessels is the main hurdle for the new shipping corridor. Russia, whose officials haven't commented on the corridor, warned this summer that ships heading to Ukraine's Black Sea ports would be assumed to be carrying weapons.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that allies had agreed to provide ships to help his country protect commercial vessels in the Black Sea but that more air defense systems were needed.

"Air defense is in short supply," he told reporters Saturday at an international food security summit in Kyiv. "But what's important is that we have agreements, we have a positive signal and the corridor is operational."

While a deadly missile strike on the port of Odesa hit a Liberian-flagged commercial ship this month, not long afterward, insurers, brokers and banks teamed up with the Ukrainian government to announce affordable coverage for Black Sea grain shipments, offering shippers peace of mind.

Despite such attacks,

Ukraine has exported over 5.6 million metric tons of grain and other products through the new corridor, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink tweeted Friday. Before the war, it was nearly double that per month, Ukrainian Deputy Economy Minister Taras Kachka said.

"The way that they're transporting right now, it's certainly much more expensive and time consuming," said Kelly Goughary, a senior research analyst at agriculture data and analytics firm Gro Intelligence.

"But they are getting product out the door, which is better than I think many were anticipating with the grain initiative coming to an end," she said.

Farmers also are facing low prices for their grain, which makes sending trucks to Odesa's often-attacked port not worth the risk for one agricultural company near the front line.

Instead, Slavhorod, which farms near the border with Russia in the Sumy province that faces daily shelling, has chosen to store its peas, wheat, soybeans, sunflower and corn in warehouses.

There's risk in keeping the 8,650-acre farm running at all: Signs warned of explosive mines near where

workers were collecting corn in a field nearly 2 miles from Russia.

Prices are low, the product remains near the border and at any moment" it could be destroyed, he said. "It's a big risk."

Since the war started, Ukraine has struggled to get its food supplies to countries in need. Even during the yearlong U.N. deal, when Ukraine shipped nearly 33 million metric tons of food, Russia was accused of slowing down ship inspections required to be done by all sides.

"This year, there is less enthusiasm because grain

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Perspective shift helps manage family drama

Dear Annie: When our son was born eight years ago this month, my husband and I were excited to have family from both sides come and help us and be there to support us.

However, as time went on, we felt both sides of our extended families struggle with accepting the changes we made in how often we spent time with them (we were truly doing our very best; we both came from close-knit families and were very family-focused people).

It was an incredibly difficult season in our young lives as a family, and it almost split us apart for good. We got the counseling we needed and now have a better support system and things have, for the most part, been worked out since then.

My family lives nearby, and my husband's is four to six hours away, depending on if you're traveling with a young child and need to make frequent stops.

I'm so very touched by "Grandma Already," this wise and genuine grandma who doesn't mind "sharing" her grandchild and is just happy to know that her son and his

family are getting the love and support they need and deserve. More grandparents would be wise to listen and learn from her and try to give their now-grown children the benefit of the doubt.

Thank you for taking the time to post her letter. I pray more people choose the "high road" when it comes to loving loved ones. — Been There, Don't Want to Do That

Dear Annie: When our son was born eight years ago this month, my husband and I were excited to have family from both sides come and help us and be there to support us. We had been told by many people, both at the hospital and birthing classes, what to expect. Quite the opposite happened, and while it was a confusing and difficult time for us, we got through it together.

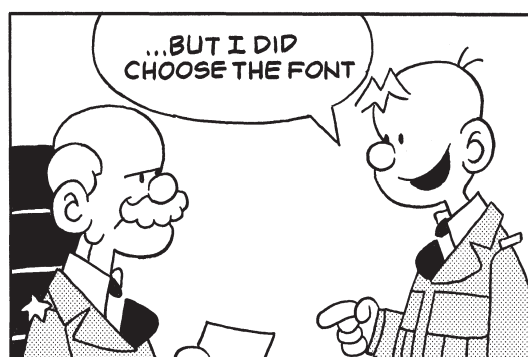
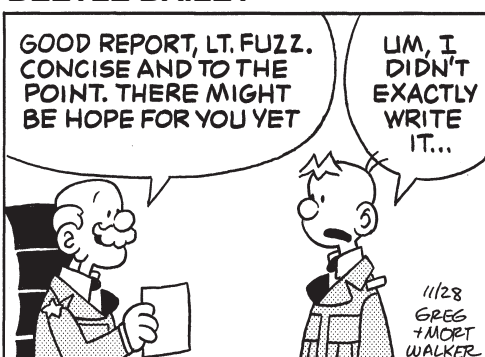
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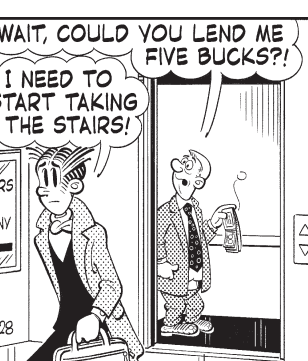
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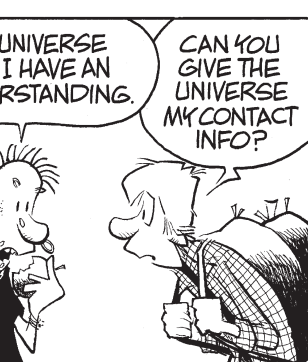
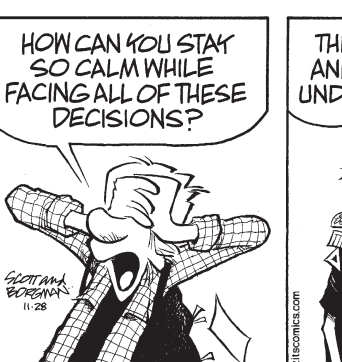
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My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



Our lives speak loudly to those around us

Q: I've always been a "nervous father," never feeling adequate for the responsibility; I have tried to care for my family and meet their needs, but it creates a lot of stress. I give my family everything they want, so I don't know why people think it's wrong to treat myself to a night or two out enjoying a beer with my buddies. Leaders, coaches, entertainers, and others, do it, why can't dads? — T.F.

A: Children are in the care of their parents for a very short time. A highly respected attorney who lived in a small town stopped on the way home from

work for a drink every now and then. One evening on his way home, as the snow was falling, he heard a sound behind him. Turning, he saw his son stepping into his footprints.

The father asked, "Son, what are you doing?" The son replied, "I'm following your footsteps." The father sent his son home, but he couldn't go into the bar. He realized, then, that a child will emulate a parent by what they see, not always by what they hear. Many parents provide for their kids but do not always set good examples. Children are

impressable. Our lives speak loudly to those around us, especially the children in our home. They will learn far more by watching than by just listening. We need to place God at the center of our families. God will honor parents who will teach their families by word and deed for He "blesses the home of the just" (Proverbs 3:33, NKJV).

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Solution time: 22 mins.

Grid for yesterday's crossword solution.

Yesterday's answer 11-28

Large crossword puzzle grid for the current puzzle.

TV schedule table with columns for time slots (11:28, M, A, D1, D2, 5 PM, 5:30, 6 PM, 6:30, 7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30, 12 AM, 12:30) and rows for various channels (WINM, CBS, Antenna, ABC, NBC, MNT, CW, PBS, FOX, etc.) listing programs and their descriptions.

