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Officials uncertain of next steps for economic development

By HOLLY GASKILL
Bluffton and county officials have expressed some uncertainty about the future of the economic development following Chad Kline's resignation from the Wells County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development. The Chamber announced

Kline's resignation Tuesday, and its Board of Directors followed with a statement shortly after saying the vacancy would not be filled. They wrote, "We will work with the Wells County Commissioners, City of Bluffton and our member towns and governmental entities in an effort to have the

economic development services historically provided by the Chamber instead be provided with the leadership of local government." According to a Chamber press release, Kline will remain in the role through April 12. Several officials indicated the announcement reportedly came as

a surprise. The Chamber and local government entities have been engaged in negotiations regarding their contract with the Economic Development Commission since August, but officials said a resolution seemed near. "It's unfortunate," said Bluffton Common Council member Scott

Mentzer. "I thought we were really close to making a deal." Mentzer had been appointed to negotiate the primary snag in the contract, a list of key performance indicators. Since their discussion at the March 4 commissioner meeting, Mentzer said he and the
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Human Sundaes?!

As a reward for \$9,500 worth of donations in the Kids Heart Challenge, some of the top selling kids from Bluffton Elementary got to douse teachers in ice cream, chocolate, marshmallows and other dessert items. Above, from left to right are Craig Helfrich, Joey Villanueva, Jake Amstutz, Kole Meyer, Schlaura Linderwell and Alyssa Moser were participants in the sundae soaking.



Middle, Hayden McElevelen (left) and Sophia Cornetio decorate.

At right, the kids who did the honors are Layton Johnson (left), Clarica Shively (middle foreground) and Clark Winnie (right foreground).



At bottom are Memphis Gerber (left) and Knox Zoda. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)



Annual report shows increase in violent and sexual crimes

By SYDNEY KENT
Wells County continues to experience a decrease in the number of drug-related cases for the second year in a row. However, violent and sexual crimes are on the rise. Prosecutor Andrew Collins has released his office's 2023 annual report, detailing these and other numbers. Andrews noted that in prior years, data has been separated by the number of charges filed. The 2023 report reflects the number of total criminal cases filed instead, with previous years updated to the new format.

"Please remember a case will often consist of multiple charges or counts filed against one individual," Andrews wrote in the report. "A case is defined by the level of the most serious charge filed in the case." The number of drug-related charges has steadily declined, with 145 cases filed last

year; 269 cases in the same category were filed in 2019. Battery cases rose from 53 to 81 from 2022 to 2023. A further breakdown of this data, not included in the report, reflects a significant increase in domestic violence from prior years. In 2023, 55 of the 81 cases involved domestic battery. According to the data, there were a total of 643 cases filed in 2023, an increase from the 622 cases filed the year prior. Of these cases, 220 were felony cases and 423 misdemeanors. Sixty-two juvenile cases were also opened. Numbers declined in cases of burglary (2) and theft (63). One rape case was filed. There were seven child molesting cases and five sexual misconduct with a minor case also filed, both higher than the year prior. Cases involving sexual crimes were more
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Gubernatorial forum highlights taxes, government

By WHITNEY DOWNARD
Indiana Capital Chronicle
All eight of the hopefuls running for governor across three parties appeared at a business-friendly forum in Fishers Tuesday, where candidates regularly reverted to prepared talking points on taxes and economic development. In addition to the half-dozen candidates appearing on the May Republican ballot — U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, Brad Chambers, Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Eric Doden, former Attorney General Curtis Hill and Jamie Reitenour — the forum featured Democrat Jennifer McCormick and Libertarian Donald Rainwater.

McCormick is the sole candidate to qualify for the Democratic primary ballot and the Indiana Libertarian Party nominated Rainwater in a private convention. Hosted by the National Federation of Independent Business, the Indiana Builders Association and Americans for Prosperity, the forum featured six questions in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Audience members chatted with candidates before and after the lunchtime event.

Taxes
The General Assembly is in the midst of a two-year study on the state's tax system and a gradual decrease of the income tax to 2.9%. Crouch's defining campaign proposal has been to "axe" the state income tax completely over several years, which is roughly an \$8 billion impact on state revenues. Doden said he was "thoroughly in favor" of the task force and would consider eliminating the income tax but only in a "fiscally responsible way."

"To get rid of the income tax, right now, it would put a 40% hole, or \$8 billion hole, in the budget. And so without saying what you're going to eliminate in expenses or not saying how you're going to replace the tax — that's just not responsible," Doden said. While several candidates bemoaned Indiana's current state of taxation, Chambers struck a more cheerful tone, noting that Indiana consistently ranks as one of the most tax-friendly states for businesses in the country. "Indiana does a pretty good job; our legislature has done a pretty good job. We're top nine in the country for low taxation," Chambers said. "I think the best way to lower everyone's burden is growing the top line and adding more taxpayers by growing our population and adding more businesses — small and large." Rainwater criticized the income tax and sales tax alike — and vowed to curb future taxes in addition to vetoing any budget increases if elected governor. "We're getting taxed to death. I don't care that we're better than 40 other states. If we're not number one, we're not good enough," Rainwater said. McCormick, meanwhile, said that while "we needed" to address income taxes and even gas taxes — the latter a policy proposal from Hill as well — her bigger concern was about "hidden taxes" in areas she said Republicans had neglected over the decades. "For the last 20 years the Republicans had their chance. They said we're keeping all these taxes down — well ask local peo-
(Continued on Page 2)

Congressional leaders sell \$1.2T spending package to members

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional leaders from both parties looked to put a positive light on a \$1.2 trillion spending package that lawmakers are working to approve before funding expires at midnight Friday for a host of key


government agencies. Text of the legislation had not been released as of Wednesday afternoon, but lawmakers and aides were expecting an official unveiling later in the day or early Thursday. The package, which is expected to pass, will wrap up Congress' work on spending bills

for the year — nearly six months after the fiscal year began. This year's dozen spending bills were packed into two packages. The first one cleared Congress two weeks ago just hours before a shutdown deadline for the agencies funded through the bills. Now Congress is focused on

the second, larger package, which includes about \$886 billion for defense, about a 3% increase from last year's levels. The bill also funds the Departments of Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Labor and others, with non-defense spending expected to be relatively flat compared to the

prior year. Leaders worked to sell the package to members. In a closed-door meeting with GOP lawmakers in the morning, Speaker Mike Johnson described a few of the policy changes that House Republicans were able to secure in the latest
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Outside

Sunny and chilly, showers move in tomorrow
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Criminal justice policy in the crosshairs of the session

Crime is a perennial issue already prominent in this election year's conversation. So, before memory fades and the pitched political battles of 2024 derail our attention, let's reflect on the last few months of criminal justice policy at the Statehouse.

We all want safe neighborhoods. We also crave vindication and are enamored by crime fighters in fiction and real life. It's part of our nature. After all, Law and Order has staying power for a reason. Not coincidentally, the General Assembly proposes new crimes and enhanced penalties every year. This year was no exception.

One proposal would have made it a misdemeanor to engage in "reckless spinning" (think of doing donuts in the parking lot), and another would have criminalized the sale of "food containing high fructose corn syrup." Neither bill made it to the finish line.

Others did. A new law makes it a felony to damage a sprinkler system in a penal facility. Another increases the penalty for falsely reporting a crime if it results in bodily injury or death, and a third will make it a felony to smuggle a "chemical intoxicant" into a jail.

"Sounds good," you might say. Damaging public property, disrupting jail operations, and siccing SWAT on people you dislike are antisocial behaviors we cannot accept. Moreover, protecting life, liberty, and property is arguably the first function of government.

But the Indiana Code already criminalizes all this bad behavior (except dealing in Twinkies). These actions are criminal recklessness, criminal mischief, or illegal trafficking. Adding more statutes or jail time is unlikely to deter any of it. On the contrary, overcriminalization will lead only to charge stacking, coerced plea agreements, and, ultimately, the uneconomical and counterproductive practice of mass incarceration.

Addressing genuine criminal ingenuity

Admittedly, we occasionally encounter novel behavior that existing criminal law cannot capture. House Enrolled Act 1047, authored by Rep. Sharon Negele, is a cutting-edge piece of legislation that addresses a genuinely new development: artificial intelligence.

While some fret about the science fiction fantasy of self-aware Terminator-style robots, our experience with AI has spawned a real-life horror. Using AI, pornographers have begun inserting unwitting "participants" into their work. And internet trolls using "undressing apps" are transforming PG social media posts into R-rated images.

HEA 1047 will criminalize this conduct. Importantly, it will criminalize the action while minimizing damage to free speech. Hopefully, the bill will have the desired effect.

Tackling the root cause of crime

Still, thicker law books are generally not the way to curb criminal activity. There is almost nothing new under the sun regarding crime. We've had millennia of murder, arson, battery, theft, rape, and the like. Criminal law is steeped in this history but also adaptable enough to deal with uncertainty.

The law codifies and defines offenses but uses words of general applicability to fit various circumstances. Moreover, the law criminalizes conspiracy, imposes accomplice liability, and treats an attempt to commit a crime like the crime itself. All these tools allow courts, juries, and good prosecutors to fill any gaps in the criminal code that might arise. In other words, a lack of crimes to prosecute is not the problem.

Instead, we must address the root causes of crime, including unmet mental health needs and substance abuse. The General Assembly took steps toward improving the mental health of Hoosiers in 2023, and the 2024 session continued that effort.

House Enrolled Act 1238, authored by Rep. Wendy McNamara, and House Enrolled Act 1418, proposed by Rep. Lori Goss-Reaves, build on past progress.

HEA 1238 concerns mentally incompetent criminal defendants. These individuals cannot comprehend or participate in the proceedings against them and, therefore, cannot constitutionally stand trial. Instead, they must be assessed and provided services to restore their competency. HEA 1238 will improve the restoration process for low-level offenders by speeding up the evaluation process and providing an off-ramp for those suffering from certain conditions that are unlikely to improve.

Similarly, HEA 1418 will provide pregnant women charged with a drug crime a chance to access treatment without jail. The bill allows a judge, in consultation with the prosecutor, to refer women to a diversion program that provides services rather than a prosecution that provides jail time.

Conclusion

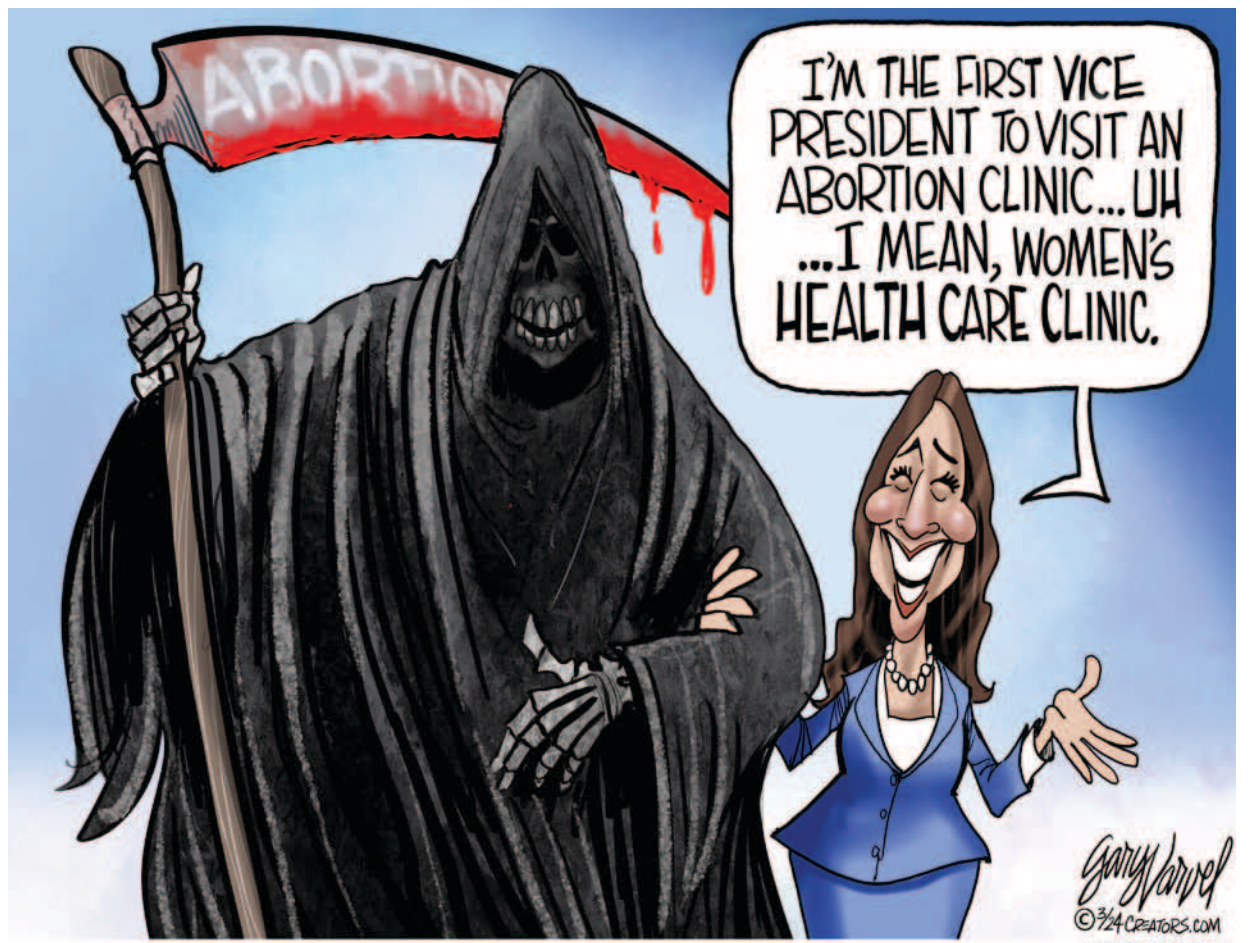
As with most sessions in recent memory, the 2024 session included bills to enact harsher penalties and new crimes. This urge is understandable but undesirable. Innovative legislation like HEA 1047, HEA 1238, and HEA 1418 reflect a better approach. So, when campaign commercials and flyers start to fill the airwaves and mailboxes with promises to be tough on crime, let's remember there is another way. We can enhance public safety while fostering a more just and economical criminal justice system.

Zach Stock is an appellate public defender and serves as legislative counsel for the Indiana Public Defender Council. He wrote this for the Indiana Capital Chronicle



Zach Stock

Hoosier Opinions



Abortion is a winning issue for Republicans

The visit by Vice President Kamala Harris to a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic in St. Paul, the first ever visit by a president or vice president to an abortion clinic, is getting the considerable attention it deserves.

When America's vice president visits and pays homage to the nation's largest abortion provider, it's news. And what she said there is also news.

Harris predictably distorted truth and reality, pitching the boilerplate left-wing headline calling the destruction of our unborn health care.

However, the vice president did everyone a favor by stepping into the limelight and removing any doubt about how far on the left side of the political spectrum she stands.

All this, of course, is political calculation by Democrats to headline abortion as an election year issue, thinking this is a loser for Republicans.

But here, Harris and her party are wrong.

A good place to start is the truth. Indifference to the sanctity of life is not health care. And, the Supreme Court, in the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade, did not take "a constitutional right ... from the people of America, from the women of America," as the VP said.

Harris is a lawyer, so she must understand that Supreme Court justices don't issue rights or take them away. They interpret the U.S. Constitution. In Dobbs, the court found that Roe's understanding of the constitution, perceiving a right justifying abortion on demand, was incorrect.

Let's look at the latest Gallup polling, published July 2023.

Per that polling, 34% say abortion should be legal under any circumstances, 51% say it should be legal under certain circumstances, and 13% say it should be illegal in all circumstances.

But when Gallup breaks out the 51%, 13% say "certain circumstances" means "most" circumstances, and 36% say "certain circumstances" means "few" circumstances.

So, per Gallup, "the result is 47% of U.S. adults favoring expansive abortion rights (legal in all or most



Star Parker

cases) and 49% favoring more restrictive rights (legal in only a few or no cases.)"

American attitudes about abortion do not reflect the simple-minded message of our vice president. The Gallup data shows sentiments of most Americans leaning against abortion.

Let's also consider where abortion stands in the pecking order of what voters feel are the most critical issues now facing the nation.

Per a Harvard CAPS- Harris poll released in January asking Americans about their top issue concerns, number one, 35%, said immigration; number two, 32%, inflation; and number three, 25%, economy and jobs. Only 7% listed abortion as their top issue of concern.

Not only is net American sentiment about abortion far different from what Democrats want to portray, despite the importance of the issue, it is far from what voters list among their top concerns.

These issues that most concern voters define the agenda on which Republicans should focus.

And how should Republicans handle the abortion issue? I turn again to the words of Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president.

"In this age, and in this country, public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail. Against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces judicial decisions."

Abortion is not among the issues that voters note are the highest concern to them. But it is far too important to not address.

In the spirit of Lincoln, Republicans should work to mold public opinion and help push sentiment, already favorable to an abortion-free country, more solidly in this direction.

In contrast to the vice president's distortions, abortion is a social issue, not an individual issue. There is mother, there is father, and there is a child.

And there is a country badly in need that the integrity of marriage and the American family, in an aging country with dangerously diminishing birth rates, be restored.

In brief, America's future depends on a culture of life. This should be the Republican message.

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Massive cicada invasion, and other hokey hoax

Now that spring has arrived, regardless of the doctrines of Punxsutawney Phil, who, by the way has only a 39% accuracy over the gross of years he's been prognosticating, it's time to move on.

Angelkeep also missed out on the St. Patty's Day pot of gold hype. Nary a ha'pence to be found. Then came the barrage of weather hypes claiming the Arora Borealis might be spotted in northern Indiana. Hype originators suggested watching every night in 2024. Angelkeep's puts it's money on first spotting Peter Cottontail hopping down the bunny trail.

Hippity, hoppity, Easter's on its way. Now that fact-hype you can hang your bunny ears on.

Let Angelkeep set the record straight on the hype of the cicada invasion with the magnitude of kryptonite. Look, up in the sky, it's a bird, it's a plane, it's a giant screaming cicada.

Some of the facts presented since January are true. In 2024, for the first time since 1803, two periodical cicadas will emerge in the same season. Newscaster hype screams, "DOUBLE BROOD," louder than a thousand cicada's can sing. Well, truth be known, two periodical emergent broods at the same place will likely only occur in eastern Illinois. Eastern Indiana will be safe from the albatross of noise.

What's a periodical cicada? Seventeen-year locust named Brood XIII will begin to emerge from their seventeen-year underground lifestyle once the ground temp reaches about 64°. They will be around approximately from Mother's Day to Father's Day, then go underground for another seventeen-year silence.

Angelkeep Journals

Hype claimed Indiana and Illinois would be hit by this brood at the same time as the thirteen-year cicadas named Brood XIX. That is true in only about two or three counties in each state. Eastern Indiana will remain silent from any periodical cicada brood until the year 2038 when Brood X emerges for the first time since 2021.

By the way there are only three broods of 13-year cicadas, XIX, XXII, and XXIII. For Roman numeral-challenged Angelkeep readers, that's numerically equivalent to 19, 22, and 23.

If you remember hearing cicadas in 2023, fear not, you are sane. Only a few of the many types of cicadas are periodical. Other types sing annually, find sweethearts in the process, and mate to guarantee the next year of more songs. This includes new crusty hollow shells clinging to tree bark. The "shells" are the exoskeletons left behind when cicadas emerge as transformed adults.

There is nothing to fear but fear itself. Cicada are not dangerous, not harmful unless you just planted a new fruit tree. They don't sting-only sing. They don't bite, and you can safely bite into them. Some offer recipes to sink your teeth into. Angelkeep heard about a cicada taco, best served on Taco Tuesday.

Cicada singing can reach 100 decibels, a level equivalent to a



Alan Daugherty

motorcycle or factory machine. Add another ten percent to reach the level of a rock concert, a car's horn, or a crying baby. Thus, cicadas are much safer to listen to than a hungry and soiled baby girl.

Hello silence my old friend, I've come to talk with you again...

Yes the "once in a lifetime" dual emergent cicada cacophony will not exist at Angelkeep or anywhere nearby. One must travel to experience the 100 decibels times-two Concerto in Cicada XIII+XIX. Surprisingly there will be a few scientists race to ground zero, but probably causing no grid lock in any form. Compare the rare double-Brood emergence as another Y2K. All hype, no strife, and Angelkeep for one will enjoy listening to the common cicada choir.

Did you know...a cicada is not a locust?

Did you know...a cicada spends 99.5% of its life as a nymph?

Did you know...a cicada adult (imago) has red eyes and orange wing veins?

Did you know...male cicadas often congregate on a single tree and collectively sing choruses to increase volume, thus attracting more females?

If you go out at night and listen to the variety of songs of the different cicadas singing their little hearts out for a romantic rendezvous (only males sing) you've been duped again. You only hear katydid's at night. Cicadas sing only in daytime. Katydid's croon by the moon.

Angelkeep sure hopes that Indiana's "April showers, bring May flowers" will not dampen the excitement of April's total equinox hype.

Mr. Daugherty is a Wells County resident who, along with his wife Gwen, enjoy their backyard and have named it "Angelkeep."

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Holly Gaskill, Editor
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Spring is here and Gloria is counting her blessings

Spring is bursting in splendor. Birds sing the sweetest of songs in melodious chirps, grass is growing tall enough to mow, and the garden is being tilled. Spring. Could life be any better than in this season of new beginnings?

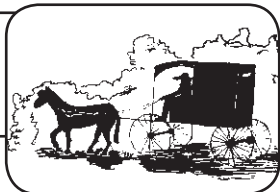
Fourteen years ago, on one of those days of spring perfection, I stood beside the man I adored and loved; I became his wife after promising I would love him for all of his days and care for him to the best of my ability.

The following spring we excitedly awaited the birth of our first-born, Julia. Ten years after that, on a spring day, Daniel and I took our turns at court, testifying for our precious foster children to be added as a forever part of our family. It did not matter who was adopted and who was not, we were family. Then a year later on a perfect spring day we were all working together in the chestnut grove. "Life is almost perfect," I declared, beaming at my beloved. He enjoyed as much as any of us, it was what we had dreamed of for so long.

Several days later life had a quick change of events. Daddy was called home to Jesus. We sobbed and we grieved, yet we rejoiced with deep joy- Daddy was already in heaven where we were all plan-

The Amish Cook

by Gloria Yoder



ning to go, he just got there a step ahead of us.

The days melted into weeks and months. Almost two years have passed since then, the One whom we cannot even see has carried us where we could not walk, and gave hope where there was none

I've got to tell you one little thing that happened just last week. We were at my parent's house for supper. We relished the food from Mom's table- one of my favorites, a breakfast menu for supper. Still in the back of my mind I knew we'd soon need to go home, in order to do the chores before dark. Yes, flashlights have their place, but who likes choring in the dark?

I didn't feel like going home just yet; something I've been missing conversations with adults. Chatter with children is precious, yet a steady diet of it gets you ready for others on your level as well. So while the children played I settled down in the cozy living room of Mom and Dad's cabin and enjoyed the moment.

It wasn't long until I decided wisdom would tell us to head on home before it's pitch dark. That's

what we did. Arriving at home Julia took two children to the house while the other three went choring with me.

I had milked the goat when the rain clouds moved on west, and the sky lightened, providing plenty of light for me to go feed the sheep and the boys to put in the ducks and feed the rabbits.

"Children, look! Remember what God promised? He's a father to the fatherless! He gave us ample light to see!"

"He's also a husband to the widow!" Austin added. My heart again filled with joy as I walked down the chestnut field toward the sheep. Yes, we are given more than enough to keep on with life abundant. His supply will never reach the point of exhaustion, no matter what our feelings may tell us during those hard times.

Looking back over past years, there is so much to ponder, looking in the future we don't know even a single detail, but that's okay. God's got it- every little detail.

Lastly, I'll be giving you a rec-



ipe for Mom's biscuits. We have made many batches of these simple no-fuss biscuits.

Emergency Biscuits Recipe

- 2 c flour
- 1 t. salt
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 6 tablespoon lard or shortening
- 1 cup milk
- Mix first 4 ingredients.

Add milk and fold into dry ingredients.

Drop on cookie sheet, or if you are tight on time, just press into a 9 by 9 inch cake pan.

Bake at 350 for 15-20 minutes or until done.

Yummy with an added dash of garlic powder or herbs such as basil, parsley, or oregano.

Yield: 1 dozen

Fast-food hazards: What you need to know

Also: Understanding your heart disease risks

Question: I don't get what's so bad about fast food — you can get a grilled chicken sandwich and nice hash brown potatoes. It's what's affordable and tastes good. — Steve L., Urbana, Illinois

Answer: Convenience and price do matter when you are eating out, and fortunately many fast-food places have expanded their menus to include salads that you can keep healthy by not adding things like creamy dressings, bacon, or fried chicken bits, and you could eat a piece of grilled chicken without a bun or ranch dressing. But much fast food won't love you back: It is fried, full of saturated fats, and excess salt, and is highly inflammatory. That means it disrupts your intestinal microbiome — leading to health problems that include arthritis, diabetes and obesity — and causes cardiovascular disease and skin aging (yes, wrinkles).

Plus, the processed carbs in buns, fries, and breading can spike your blood sugar, aggravating diabetes or increasing your risk of developing it. And the sugars added to sodas, shakes, and even a Double Quarter Pounder (it has 10 grams of sugar) increase your risk for sexual dysfunction and liver disease, and they promote dementia. One study even found that fast food is associated with depression in teens because it is high in sodium and low in potassium. Another found a link between eating fast food and an increase in skin and respiratory problems such



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

as asthma, congestion, and eczema.

Are you seeing a trend here? Fast foods have a potentially negative effect on every bodily system. You need five to seven servings of fresh fruits and veggies a day, plenty of fiber, a good dose of minerals and vitamins, and water, tea or coffee (no cream or sugar added).

To learn how to make your own quick-to-prepare, good-for-you meals check out Dr. Roizen's "What to Eat When Cookbook" and iHerb's recipes at www.iherb.com/blog/recipes, including morning muffins, comfort foods and healthy office lunch ideas.

Question: My doctor has me worried about heart disease — just because my LDL cholesterol is up a bit and my blood pressure — sometimes — registers too high. It seems like he's trying to get me to have a lot of expensive tests and use more

medications. — Patricia M., University Heights, Ohio

Answer: Sounds like you have a caring doctor. Elevated LDL can increase deposits of artery-clogging plaque and up your risk of stroke, heart attack, dementia, peripheral artery disease, high blood pressure and kidney failure. But like you, a lot of folks aren't aware of how much of a risk that heart disease poses. A recent American Heart Association survey shows that more than half of the participants didn't know heart disease was the no. 1 killer of U.S. adults.

In order to have a solid picture of your cardiovascular health, blood tests for lousy LDL cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose are important. And there are three other tests that are often smart to get.

1. About 20 percent of folks are at risk for high lipoprotein(a) levels. The condition runs in families and can dramatically increase your risk for an

early heart attack. A simple blood test can be done at the same time as you get your LDL checked.

2. A coronary CT calcium scan can show if you have high levels of plaque in your coronary arteries. This is very useful in midlife, especially if you have risk factors because of a family history of coronary heart disease, diabetes or high LDL cholesterol levels.

3. Screening with ultrasound for an aortic or cerebral aneurysm is smart for men age 65-plus or older than 55 with a family history of aortic aneurysms and for women age 65-plus who have smoked, have a family history of aneurysms or have high blood pressure.

Your doctor is just looking out for your health; you can help that effort by upgrading your nutrition and increasing your physical activity to 150-300 minutes a week, adopting stress-relief techniques like meditation and yoga and improving sleep habits.

Bluffton Parks Department Earth Day 5K registration

Registration is open for the Bluffton Parks Department's annual Earth Day 5K.

Join Bluffton Parks & Recreation for our minimal footprint 5K to celebrate Earth Day.

Saturday, April 20th at 9 a.m. at the Bluffton City Gym.

The race is designed with a minimal footprint which includes no new shirts, bibs, or plastic. Previously unused event shirts and bibs are being recycled

in addition to live plants and trees for awards and prizes.

Cost is \$10 and includes event registration, all the free past event t-shirts and swag you can hold, and overall and age group awards. Runners and Walkers are welcome.

Sign up now at <https://raceroster.com/events/2024/86614/earth-day-5k>.

For more information visit www.blufftonindiana.net.

'Making Waves' art at Fort Wayne's Orchard Gallery

"Making Waves" art is featured at the Orchard Gallery in Fort Wayne throughout the month of March.

All items by the 30 artists will have a water focus and include wall art, jewelry and pottery.

Hours are Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The website is www.TheOrchardGallery.com.

Online Directory

Check out these websites of local & area companies and businesses.

Genesis Pest Services genesispestservices.com	MR. KOOL Heating and Cooling mrkoolheatingandair.com	DAZEY'S SUPPLY dazeys.com/bluffton-in
INDIANA FARM BUREAU INSURANCE Bluffton Office (260) 824-2234 infarmbureau.com	JC'S GARAGE DOOR SALES & SERVICE jcsgaragedoor.com	Daniel's JEWELERS daniels-jewelers.net
WELLS COUNTY 4-H GROWS HERE extension.purdue.edu/wells	3 RIVERS 3riversfcu.org	ABOVE & BEYOND Vehicle Reconditioning abovebeyondrecon.com
Goodwin-Cole & Harnish MEMORIAL CHAPEL A Tradition of Caring thegmcfamily.com	RiverStone DENTAL riverstonedental.net	Bluffton Tire blufftontire.com
INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS AUDIO VIDEO SECURITY NETWORKING icav.us	HIDAY AUTOMOTIVE GROUP hidaymotors.com	Edward Jones EdwardJones.com
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Still Waters FAMILY DENTISTRY stillwatersfamilydentistry.com	Bi-County Services of Adams & Wells County bi-countyservices.com	Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home thomarich.com
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		HOME COURT HOME CARE homecourthomecare.com
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Cheeto is a six-month-old, orange tabby male.

A Talk with Tego



TJ is a two-year-old, torbie female.

These are just a few pets available for adoption at the Wells County Animal Shelter, 1613 W. Cherry St., Bluffton. For more information call 824-6063.



Rugar is a three-year-old, Texas Heeler, neutered male.



Tego

Tego's Tips: Cats like sunlit windows while dogs prefer looking out windows.

Weekday walking program at the City Gym

The Bluffton Parks Department is promoting a free weekday walking program. The City Gym will be open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. through the end of

March. Walking has many health benefits but can be difficult during the colder months.

Participants can enter through the glass door on the West side of the build-

ing at 128 E Market St. Sign in on the wooden door each day. If you are the last to leave the gym, turn off the light in the southwest corner of the gym. 1 mile is equal to 20 laps.

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Tigers poised for an exciting softball season under new leadership

By RYAN WALKER

Bluffton's softball season went up and down throughout the 2023 season. At first, the Tigers lost their first four games, tied the next two and won two straight followed shortly after on a four game tear.

It resulted in a 7-16-1 final record and finished the year winning just one of the final 11 games. They were later bounced by ACAC rival South Adams in the sectional 10-3.

In the offseason, head coach Ben Powers decided to retire after three seasons, leaving the Bluffton job open.

In came Tyler Sonnigsen. Sonnigsen went to Bluffton, while his son, Kedrik, just graduated from Southern Wells in 2023. His daughter, Madyson, will be coming with him after playing her first two seasons for Norwell.

Sonnigsen heard the position was opening up from a few people. He thought and prayed about it with Madyson in mind and decided to take it.

"Then you take a look at the roster and think, 'Hey, their roster is pretty solid with six seniors and five juniors with addition of Madyson,'" Sonnigsen said. "So, I floated the idea out at home, prayed about the possibility and eventually we figured it would be in Madyson's best interest to at least try and get it."

The roster he's taking over will have a plethora of opportunities with many athletes on the team. Last year, senior Lily King was one of the Tigers' top players on the mound and at the plate, but was the only one that graduated.

King split the majority of the innings in the circle with junior Averi Petty, both throwing 50-plus innings of work. Petty returns, and Sonnigsen will bring his daughter who threw 40 innings and posted a stellar 1.92 ERA and struck out 39.

Also returning will be senior Tyrah Shaw, who tossed 33 innings last year for the Tigers.

Defensively and at the plate is where Sonnigsen is most excited about.

"I think the thing that jumps out at me is the vast amount of players who can do so many things defensively," Sonnigsen said.

"I also think we have a sneaky amount of power at the plate. I'd say stirring up little things on defense and building confidence at the plate is what's gonna make or break us."

One thing is for certain: the outfield will be in good hands. Returning junior Marly Drayer will be patrolling centerfield again for the Tigers. She was a second-team allconference performer her freshman year, and followed it up hitting .344, a team-high 22 runs and second-best 12 stolen bases. Defensively, Drayer had one error on the season for a .977 fielding percentage.

The infield will be a fun puzzle for Sonnigsen to put together.

Across the diamond, seniors Madison Smith and Kayla Kiefer will be the primary candidates behind the dish. Shaw can also play third and second base. Kiefer will play some third base and shortstop as well. Juniors Isabella Stout and Tressa Renner will fill out the remaining spots on the infield.

Petty held down first base last year when not on the mound.

Offensively, Bluffton might have its most impact.

The Tigers return six players that had 20 hits or more. King was the top hitter on the team in nearly every offensive statistic, but is the only subtraction to the lineup.

Petty had 27 hits, Kiefer (26) and Shaw will be the top-returning bats. Petty also slugged 10 extra base knocks and Kiefer was second on the team with a .419 average.

Other contributors include Stout, who hit .375 and had 12 extra base hits, and Claire Craighead, who in limited action hit .571 with six doubles.

To perform well in the Allen County Athletic Conference, the Tigers will need to outdo their 1-5 record in a loaded field.

Four teams finished with a 4-2 record or better in the conference: Woodlan (5-1) followed by 4-2 records by Heritage, South Adams and Jay County. South Adams was also solid despite a 3-3 conference record, finishing 19-10.

ryan@news-banner.com



Tressa Renner (left) and Isabella Stout (right) will be a pair of infielders leading an experienced Bluffton softball team this year. The Tigers will be returning all but a few pieces and will be heading into 2024 with new head coach Tyler Sonnigsen. (News-Banner file photos)

Betancourt, Garrett & Lewis look to continue Tigers' baseball success in 2024

By RYAN WALKER

Jason Pierce's Bluffton Tigers went from a .500 ballclub in 2022 to a stellar 18-7 record in 2023.

The team in 2024 will have some holes to fill in it, losing Manchester University signee Drew Pressler, its starting shortstop Andrew Onuegbu and a pair of outfielders. However, the experience on the roster should make the transition better and have the Tigers right back in the mix.

"(Our) Goals are to win, win, and win some more," Pierce said.

According to Pierce, the team will return three seniors who have been starting since their freshman seasons: Braxton Betancourt, Brody Lewis and Eli Garrett.

Betancourt headlines the talented group of seniors, as he is one of the top pitchers and hitters in the area. Last season on the mound was where he was most dangerous, posting a 2.12 ERA, and striking out 78 batters in just 43 innings. That was all after dealing with an arm injury to begin the season and having to limit his innings load. He also slugged five home runs with 33 RBI and finished with a .402 batting average. He also stole 16 bags.

"As always, Braxton returns with a lot of experience and talent," Pierce said. "Coming off an arm injury last season he was not able to throw as many innings for us but still found a way to be a first-team all-state first baseman. He definitely swings it well and has a high baseball I.Q. which is always a good thing. He knows he has to be even more versatile this season by rotating positions, but he embraces this."

Garrett, who is signing with Indiana Tech for baseball, dealt with a lower-body injury for a chunk of the season, but managed to hit .327 with nine RBI. He also will pitch and is gearing up for an impactful senior campaign.

Although Lewis didn't make much of an impact with the bat, his work behind the plate catching holds down a solid pitching rotation.

Another returning slugger to the Tigers'

lineup is senior third baseman Lukas Gehrett, who hit .327 with 17 RBI. Nick Pastori comes back as another .320 average guy.

The strongest part of the Tigers' squad this year is its pitching rotation, returning all of the starters from last year. On top of Betancourt, Bluffton will be set with Griffin Morgan and AJ Strevler on the bump.

Morgan tossed the second most innings on the team last year, posting a solid 3.08 ERA in 11 appearances with 52 strikeouts.

Strevler came onto the scene as a freshman and threw the third most innings, hurling 30.2 innings and ended up with a 2.28 ERA.

"Pitching will definitely be a strong suit for us as we return all three of our top pitchers in our rotation," Pierce said.

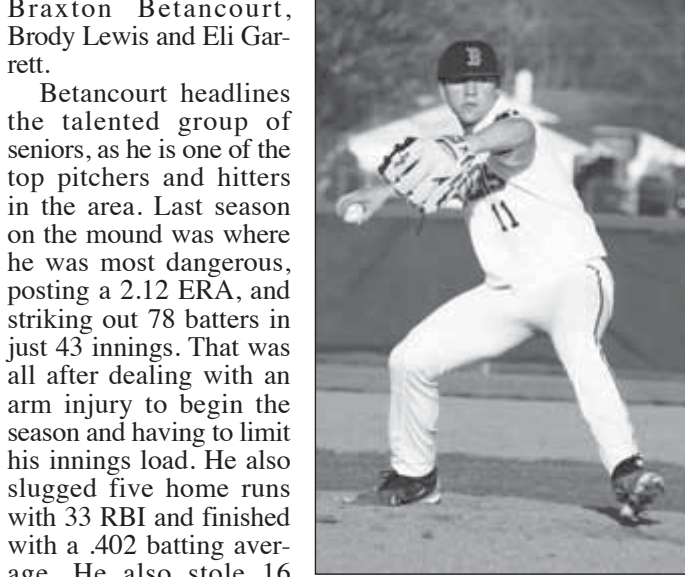
The team will be also looking at some unfamiliar faces and freshmen to get meaningful playing time this year. Axton Beste, Cameron Williams, Easton Blair and Xzavier Driscoll were mentioned by Pierce to help fill the outfield voids and throw on the mound occasionally.

In terms of the ACAC, Bluffton will be in the mix again. Heritage will always be toward the top, winning the title last year at 6-0 and making a deep 3A tournament run last year. Woodlan finished second with a 5-1 record, and Bluffton third at 4-2.

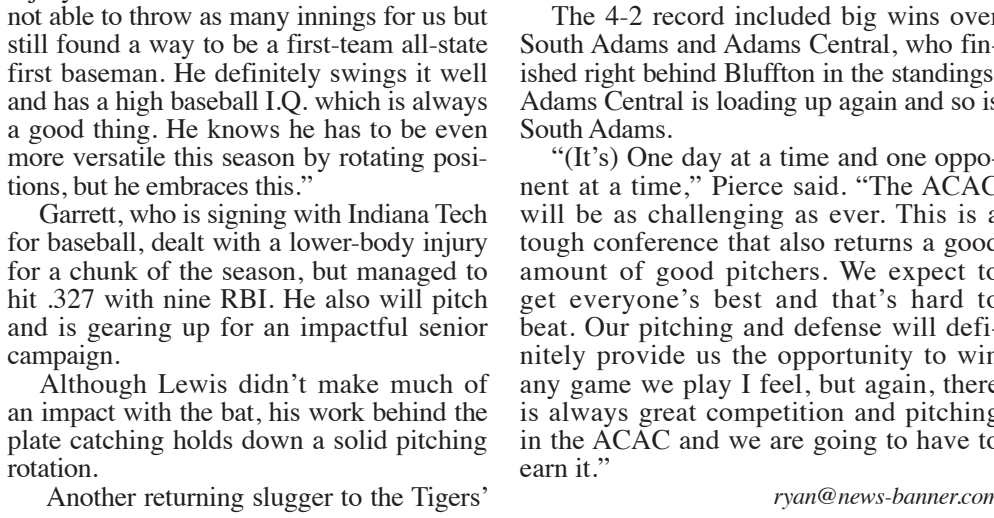
The 4-2 record included big wins over South Adams and Adams Central, who finished right behind Bluffton in the standings. Adams Central is loading up again and so is South Adams.

"(It's) One day at a time and one opponent at a time," Pierce said. "The ACAC will be as challenging as ever. This is a tough conference that also returns a good amount of good pitchers. We expect to get everyone's best and that's hard to beat. Our pitching and defense will definitely provide us the opportunity to win any game we play I feel, but again, there is always great competition and pitching in the ACAC and we are going to have to earn it."

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Tiger pitcher AJ Strevler throws a pitch during his freshmen season in 2023. He will be a part of a trio of starting pitchers to return this season. (News-Banner file photos)



Bluffton's Braxton Betancourt (middle, holding helmet) taps his helmet with teammates after launching a 3-run blast during the fifth inning against Manchester. Betancourt will lead a group of Tigers in his senior year after finishing 18-7 a year ago as a junior.

High School Calendar

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20
No events scheduled.
THURSDAY, MARCH 21
No events scheduled.
FRIDAY, MARCH 22
No events scheduled.
SATURDAY, MARCH 23

No events scheduled.
MONDAY, MARCH 25
No events scheduled.
TUESDAY, MARCH 26
No events scheduled.
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27
No events scheduled.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28
No events scheduled.
FRIDAY, MARCH 29
BASEBALL: Norwell vs. Evansville Central at Edgewood High School, 7:30 p.m.



NASCAR CUP SERIES

EchoPark Automotive Grand Prix
Schedule: Saturday, practice, 10 a.m., and qualifying, 11:30 a.m.; Sunday, race, 3:30 p.m. (FOX).

Last race: Denny Hamlin passed Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Martin Truex Jr. in the closing laps and won what became a tire management race at Bristol.

Next race: March 31, Richmond, Va.

Focused Health 250

Schedule: Friday, practice, 5:30 p.m., and qualifying, 6 p.m.; Saturday, race, 5 p.m. (FS1).

Last race: Chandler Smith moved to the lead after a blown tire cost Justin Allgaier a big lead and got a huge jump on an overtime restart to hold off Jesse Love and Sheldon Creed at Phoenix, giving Toyota its second straight victory in the series.

Next race: March 30, Richmond, Va.

NASCAR TRUCK SERIES

XPEL 225
Schedule: Friday, practice, 3:30 p.m., and qualifying, 4 p.m.; Saturday, race, 1:30 p.m. (FS1).

Last race: Christian Eckes passed Kyle Busch for the lead on Lap 159 and held off the career truck series victory leader by 0.141 seconds at Bristol.

Next race: April 5, Martinsville, Va.

FORMULA ONE

Australian Grand Prix
Schedule: Thursday, practice, 9:30 p.m.; Friday, practice, 1 a.m. and 9:30 p.m.; Saturday, qualifying, 1 a.m.; Sunday, race, midnight (ESPN).

Track: Albert Park Circuit

Last race: Verstappen, the three-time defending series champion, led another dominating 1-2 finish for Red Bull to win in Saudi Arabia.

Next race: April 7, Suzuka, Japan.

INDYCAR

\$1 Million Challenge
Site: Thermal, California.
Track: The Thermal Club
Race distance: 20 laps, 61.34 miles.

Next race: April 21, Long Beach, California.

NHRA DRAG RACING

Last event: Shawn Langdon won in Top Fuel and JR Todd won in Funny Car in Gainesville.

Next event: March 24, Pomona, California.

WORLD OF OUTLAWS

Next events: March 22, Ennis, Texas; March 23, Kennedale, Texas.

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Husband's hypochondria getting out of hand

Dear Annie: My husband is a hypochondriac. It is so very hard living with him. Every time he hears of someone in our family coming down with an illness, he claims he has it. He is a healthy man and perfectly able-bodied. I get disgusted when he takes a handicapped spot next to a store when I know he doesn't need it.

During the height of the pandemic, he was in hysterics all the time. I cannot tell you how many hours I spent trying to pacify him, looking for things that were no longer available, like a thermometer. Because he swore the many thermometers we had at home were not working. I would go to five or six stores. During a pandemic.

He hears about a disease, looks up the symptoms and swears he has it. He goes to his doctors (he has nine of them at this time) and will relay his "symptoms" to them. They run expensive tests, and he is on many medications because of this.

I tried to talk to his main treating physician, and the doctor told me flat-out that if my husband comes to him with problems, it's his responsibility to try to help him.

I tried several years ago to get my husband into therapy, but he refused.

I recently became very ill, and while I was sick, he was angry and unsympathetic. He wants to hear everything I am feeling — not because he wants to help me but because he is taking mental notes. He doesn't even bring me any water or hot tea.

Years ago, I had a serious injury and required surgery. The doctor prescribed some pain medication for me to take because I would be in pain after the anesthesia wore off. At home, I slept. I woke up in horrible pain, and a few hours later I told my husband I was going to take my medication. To which he said, "You never take medicine anyway and my hip was hurting so I took them, and they don't do anything for you." My husband had taken three days of my pain medication while I slept. I cannot describe how upset I was.

It's exhausting. He has not worked in 30 years. He claimed and was granted disability. I just can't go on any more. I am retired and we have been married 15

years. He says he has been like this all his life.

I try to maintain my own hobbies and friendships. I try so hard to have some sort of peace.

I wait on him, even trimming his nails. He will sit there and complain if I go anywhere.

He has no hobbies, no friends, he spends his entire day on his laptop. He doesn't eat any vegetables or fruit.

I try to get him to go on walks, which end up with him pretending to fall so we have to go home.

Whenever we go anywhere, he will pretend to throw his hip or hurt himself.

I have actually witnessed pretending to fall down a short flight of stairs. I wish I had videotaped it because I'll tell you, I was just not even shocked, just disgusted.

When we first met and were dating, we went on hikes, long drives, dance classes, all kinds of stuff. Then we got married and a few months later he started saying he didn't feel well any time I wanted to go somewhere. The man I dated is not the man I married. He is some sort of freak actor.

I am disgusted and resentful. Thank you for any advice you can give me. I just feel broken. — Living With a Hypochondriac

Dear Living With a Hypochondriac: It sounds like your husband has a serious anxiety disorder. It's important for him to get professional help to treat his condition, or else it will spiral even further out of control. If he refuses to seek treatment, then perhaps it's time to reevaluate whether he is a good life partner.

In the meantime, set boundaries with him, continue nurturing your hobbies and friendships, and focus on your own self-care. A good therapist can help you process these difficult emotions and evaluate potential next steps.

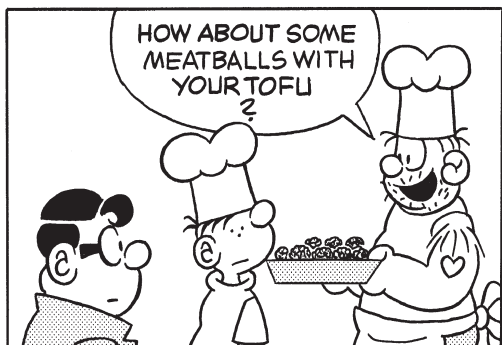
Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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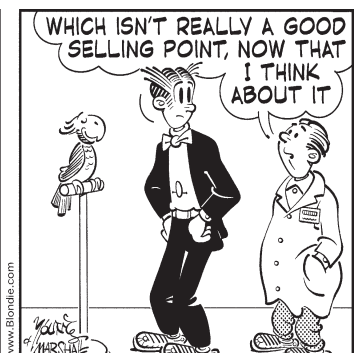
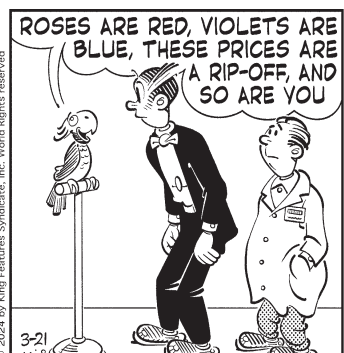
Dear Annie by Annie Lane



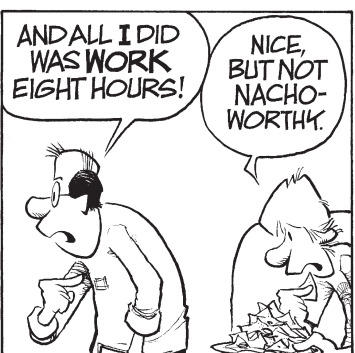
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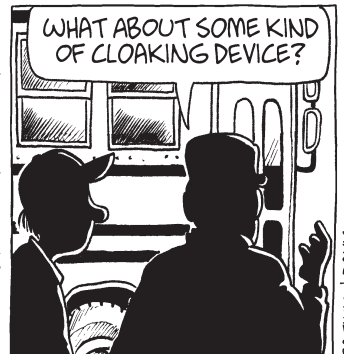
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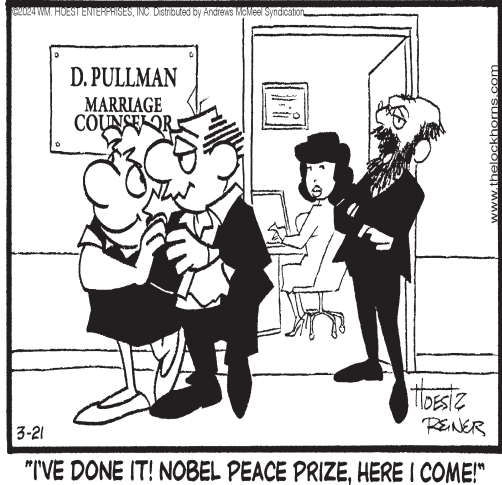


THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane



The LOCKHORNS



My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



Forgiveness is a healing balm for the troubled soul

that you committed a crime, were arrested, and were sent to jail. The day has now come for you to appear in court. As you stand before the judge, there is absolutely no doubt: You are guilty of the charges against you. According to the law, you must pay for this crime, and in this case, the penalty is a year in jail. The judge issues his verdict and pronounces your sentence. At once, the bailiff comes over to lead you away to prison.

But then something almost beyond belief happens. The judge steps down from the bench, stops the bailiff, and takes your place. He is innocent — but he goes to prison and pays the penalty for the crime you committed. You, on the

other hand, are free! This is a picture of what Jesus Christ did for us. We are guilty before God and deserve nothing less than death. But the Judge — Jesus Christ — took our place. By His death on the cross, He took the penalty we deserve, and we are free. Sin's penalty has been fully paid. But you must accept it! Believe it! Act on it! Know beyond a shadow of doubt that you belong to Him. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1, NKJV).

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

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Question: I'm not sure I can really forgive those who have deliberately hurt me. But I am miserable and they all seem so happy. This is hard to accept. — H.B.

Answer: Forgiveness is a healing balm for the troubled soul. God loves us enough to offer His forgiveness that opens the pathway to a relationship with the Savior of the world. When we are not willing to repent of sin against Him and humble ourselves, we are really rebelling against God and rejecting all that He has done for us by sending His Son to bring healing to our sin-weary souls.

Imagine for a minute

Table with columns for date, time, and various TV channels (WINM, CBS, Antenna, ABC, NBC, etc.) listing programs and their start times.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes solution time: 24 mins.

Table with 11 columns and 11 rows for crossword puzzle answers. Includes 'Yesterday's answer' and '48 Billboards'.

