

OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

On the ballot

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TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2023



GREG MCWILLIAMS FOR THE O-A NEWS

In this file photo, Auburn Tigers offensive lineman Kaleb Kim (54) can be seen at the Auburn vs. Alabama game at Jordan-Hare Stadium on Nov. 30, 2019. Kim will appear on Season 20 of "The Bachelorette," which premieres on June 26, 2023.

Kaleb Kim to appear on 'The Bachelorette'

He'll compete to win Charity Lawson's heart

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Former Auburn University offensive lineman #54 Kaleb Kim will appear on Season 20 of "The Bachelorette" to vie for the heart of AU graduate Charity Lawson.

Kim was named as one of the 25 men to be a contestant on the reality television dating show that premieres on ABC on June 26 at 8 p.m. You can also watch the series on the Hulu streaming service.

The show will air on ABC every Monday from June 26 to Aug. 21. After that, it'll be on every Tuesday from Aug. 22 to Sept. 5.

Kim, 26, is a construction salesman from Norcross, Georgia. He graduated from AU after playing on the football team from 2015 to 2019. He was a regular starter on the team and logged 17 career starts.

"This former Division I football player spent many years bettering himself and is ready to take the next step and find true love," the ABC website reads. "As a loyal,

caring and consistent partner, Kaleb K. will go the extra mile to appreciate his partner's passions."

According to the website, Kim is passionate about pushing himself to be the best and is excited to put his competitive edge to the test to win Lawson's heart. He is a blue belt in jujitsu, would love to coach high school football and hopes to visit South Korea one day to learn more about his heritage.

In March, ABC announced that Auburn graduate Charity Lawson would be the next Bachelorette for the show. Lawson is a 27-year-old child and family therapist from Columbus, Georgia. She earned a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation and disability from Auburn in 2018 and a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling in 2022.

Lawson was previously a contestant on the latest season of "The Bachelor" with Zach Shallcross. She was sent home after making it to the final four.

During the "Women Tell All" special that aired in March, host Jesse Palmer surprised Lawson with the news that she would be the next Bachelorette. After the



RICKY MIDDLESWORTH VIA ABC

Auburn University graduate Charity Lawson poses for a promotional photo from ABC. A total of 25 men will compete for a chance to win her heart on Season 20 of the reality television dating show "The Bachelorette," which premieres on ABC on June 26.

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Melt coming to Auburn

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The Birmingham-based sandwich shop Melt will open a new location in Auburn in early 2024.

Laura Kowalczyk and her daughter Laura "Lou" Huddleston will own the new Melt at The Village at Samford Trace on East Samford Avenue, across from Auburn High School. They expect construction to begin in early July. Further details about the opening aren't available at this time.

"My mom and I are so excited to bring Melt to Auburn," Huddleston said. "This venture will give us something different. It will give us something that people are really, really excited about."

Melt serves up a mix of modern takes on toasted sandwiches, hamburgers, sides, salads and appetizers. They also serve vegan and gluten-free options. Customers can enjoy a wide range of drinks including Adult Capri Suns (pina coladas,) Necessary Evils (domestic beers) and craft beers on tap.

Huddleston said they will have a rotating menu that will match the farming seasons. They are also planning menu items tailored to specifically to the Auburn-Opelika community.

The Auburn site will mark Melt's fourth brick and mortar restaurant in Alabama. They also have locations in Birmingham, Hoover, and Huntsville. The 2,800-square-foot restaurant will feature a full bar, a covered patio, board games and an area out front for the lawn game cornhole.

"It encourages families to maybe put away their phones for a little bit and play games before they get their food," Huddleston said.

Huddleston and Kowalczyk have a long history with Melt. Huddleston worked for the restaurant for two years while attending nursing school in Birmingham. Kowalczyk grew up with Melt co-founder Harriet Despinakis.

"I'm just very, very proud of my friend for everything she's done and created," Kowalczyk said of Despinakis. "Lou and I have always talked about doing something together, and this just seemed to be a great way to jump into that."

Despinakis and business partner Paget Pizitz began Melt as a food truck in 2011 before opening the first stationary restaurant in the Avondale neighborhood of Birmingham. Huddleston wants the Auburn sandwich shop to be somewhere where families can feel safe.

"There's a huge community that lives in Auburn and Opelika outside of the university. I think it was just really important to make sure that that community in particular felt really comfortable at our restaurant," Huddleston said.

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Pickleball tournament returns

Over 700 players to compete in Opelika

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Starting Tuesday, Opelika will be hosting the six-day-long 2023 USA Pickleball Atlantic South Diamond Regional tournament at the Opelika Pickleball Facility.

This will be the second time the city has hosted this regional tournament. Last year, the tournament generated an estimated \$420,000.

About 725 players representing more than 20 states will participate in this tournament with hopes of qualifying for the 2023 USA Pickleball National Amateur Championship later this year, according to a release from the City of Opelika.

Jim Young, president and tournament director of the Opelika Pickleball Club, said he's amazed to see how the sport continues to grow and to see how each tournament they host brings in more and more players.

"People complement us from

all over the world because of the foresight that the city government has had here to build one of the preeminent spots in the United States for people to come play pickleball," Young said.

Players often tell him that they can't wait to return.

"One of the things that speaks volumes is that there are a lot of tournaments that are available to players, and we have a waiting list where we've had to turn people down to play in this

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A couple competes in the Paddles at the Plex tournament, which was held at the Opelika Sportsplex on March 4, 2023.

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Bachelorette

From A1

initial shock, she said “absolutely yes” to becoming the next lead.

“I’m the bachelorette! Like, I

can’t even say that without crying, screaming, but I am the next bachelorette. It’s me,” Lawson said. “I’ve waited forever to find the love of my life, and it blows my mind that I can meet my person and be engaged and literally have my happily ever after.”



BUILDING 1 - VIEW 02

RENDERING PROVIDED BY PAVAN REDDY OF AUBURN VENTURES, PAVANREDDY@AUBURNVENTURES.COM

Melt is expected to open in Samford Trace the beginning of 2024.

Melt

From A1

Kowalczyk said they also want to create an environment that’s warm and welcoming.

“We’d like to embrace the community and the community embrace us. The huge appeal for me is it’s just a fun and welcom-

ing environment where you can get some good food at the same time,” Kowalczyk said.

The Village at Samford Trace is expected to have 35,000 square feet of retail and office space. Iron Tribe Fitness, owned by former Auburn University Cheerleader, Forrest Walden, is also scheduled to open in the complex once construction is finished.

Pickleball

From A1

tournament and it’s a six day tournament,” he said.

During the tournament this week, Anthony Ryan from Gulf Shores could be certified as the first wheelchair candidate in the world to be a credentialed USA Pickleball referee. On Friday, certified referees will watch Ryan and deem if he’s ready to become a level one referee.

“I think that it is amazing that they would pick this tournament and this site for him to make this accomplishment because he’s having to travel from Gulf Shores all the way up here to do that,” Young said.

While the Opelika Pickleball Facility hasn’t had any wheelchair players compete in a tournament before, Young said the facility is ADA compliant. The sport also allows wheelchair players to compete against standing players with a few different rules, like being able to hit the ball off a double bounce instead of only a single bounce. “There’s a couple of extra rules, but other than that everybody plays the same,” Young said. Other differences regard placement of the wheels like where they need to be to serve and where the wheels need to be in the non-volley zone.

The opening ceremony will begin at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday followed by 60+ Men’s Doubles

and 60+ Women’s Singles. Each day the meets will begin at 8 a.m.

One of the competitors coming to the tournament is 17-year-old Alia Brown of Alpharetta, Ga. She’s a ranked #1 in 4.5 Women’s Singles in her age group, #4 in Junior Women’s Singles and #14 in Junior Women’s Doubles.

Brown has been playing in tournaments in Opelika for about two years now. Young said Brown is on the verge of leveling up to pro, and after this tournament she will likely make it.

The Opelika Pickleball Facility is located at the Opelika Sports-Plex on 1001 Andrews Road. Admission and parking for the tournament is free for the public.

Therapist will also be on site and available to help players stretch and work on aches and pains.

Here’s the schedule for the pickleball tournament

■ Opening ceremony at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday. Each meet that follows will begin at 8 a.m.

■ 60+ Mixed Doubles play Wednesday

■ 60+ Women’s Doubles and 60+ Men’s Singles play Thursday

■ Under 60 Men’s Doubles and Under 60 Women’s Singles play Friday

■ Under 60 Mixed Doubles play Saturday

■ Under 60 Women’s Doubles and Under 60 Men’s Singles play Sunday



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SEE KEY MOMENTS FROM THE 2023 PRIDEFEST IN AUBURN

Olivia Giselle of Tuscaloosa performs in a leotard that reads “My Drag Is Not A Crime” at the Pride on the PrideFest at Auburn’s Kiesel Park on Sunday, June 4, 2023. To see more photos from the Pride on the Plain’s event, point your smartphone camera at the QR code and tap the link. [NEWSVU](#)

Federal grants to help eliminate railroad crossings

JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — With the rail industry relying on longer and longer trains to cut costs, the Biden administration is handing out \$570 million in grants to help eliminate many railroad crossings in 32 states.

The grants announced Monday will contribute to building bridges or underpasses at the sites of more than three dozen crossings that delay traffic and sometimes keep first responders from where help is desperately needed.

In some places, trains routinely stretching more than 2 miles long can block crossings for hours, cutting off access to parts of towns and forcing pedestrians to attempt the dangerous act of climbing through trains that could start moving without warning.

“We see countless stories of people unable to get to work on time, goods being blocked from getting where they need to be and first responders being delayed by these trains that can be slowed or stopped — even seeing images of children having to crawl between or under freight trains in order to get to school,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said.

In one case Buttigieg mentioned, a Texas mom called 911 because her 3-month-old baby was in distress, but an idle train kept the ambulance from getting there quickly and the baby died at the hospital two days later.

In addition to problems associated with blocked crossings, roughly 2,000 collisions are re-



NATI HARNIK, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cars wait for a train to pass in January 2007 in Valley, Neb. With the rail industry relying on longer and longer trains to cut costs, the Biden administration is handing out \$570 million in grants to help eliminate railroad crossings in 32 states.

ported at railroad crossings every year. Nearly 250 deaths were recorded last year in those car-train crashes. In one instance Buttigieg cited, a woman in California wound up stopped on the tracks after traffic backed up and she was killed when a train slammed into her vehicle.

In recent years, the major freight railroads have overhauled their operations to rely on fewer, longer trains so they can use fewer crews and locomotives as part of efforts to cut costs.

The railroads insist those changes haven’t made their trains riskier, but regulators and Congress are scrutinizing their operations closely after several recent

high-profile derailments. And the problems at rail crossings are well documented.

These grants are part of \$3 billion in funding approved in the \$1 trillion infrastructure law for these rail crossing projects that will be doled out over the next five years.

A number of the 63 projects that will receive grants involve only planning and design work for eliminating crossings in the future, but most of the money will go toward physical improvements at crossings and eliminating longstanding problems.

In each of these grants, states and cities — sometimes with the help of the railroads — must cover at least 20% of the project cost.

CEO pay growth slows in 2022

Top salaries show smallest increase in 8 years, big pay gap

ALEXANDRA OLSON
Associated Press

After ballooning for years, CEO pay growth is finally slowing.

The typical compensation package for chief executives who run S&P 500 companies rose just 0.9% last year, to a median of \$14.8 million, according to data analyzed for The Associated Press by Equilar. That means half the CEOs in the survey made more and half made less. It was the smallest increase since 2015.

Still, that’s unlikely to quell mounting criticism that CEO pay has become excessively high and the imbalance between company bosses and rank-and-file workers too wide. Discontent over that gap has helped fuel labor unrest, and even some institutional investors have pushed back against a few of the most eye-popping packages.

The smaller increase came after CEO pay soared 17% in 2021, when boards rewarded top executives handsomely for steering their companies through the pandemic-induced recession.

Many of the compensation pack-

ages were approved early in 2022, but even a small raise might seem lavish in retrospect against the backdrop of a year in which stock markets tanked to their worst performance since 2008, inflation erased wage gains, fears of a recession grew, and tech giants began laying off workers.

“I’m not surprised that after two record years in a row, pay hikes cooled somewhat,” said Sarah Anderson, who directs the Global Economy Project at the progressive Institute for Policy Studies. “What we shouldn’t lose sight of is that CEO pay is still off the charts by historical measures.” She said even a small hike last year was “outrageous.”

In contrast to recent years, CEO pay gains were lower than the 5.1% increase in wages and benefits netted by private-sector workers through 2022.

Still, worker pay failed to keep up with inflation, which was sitting at 6.4% at the end of last year. And the pay disparity between CEOs and rank-and-file workers, which has been widening for years, narrowed only slightly.

The median pay for workers at companies included in the AP survey was \$77,178, up 1.3% from \$76,160 the previous year. That means it would take that worker 186

years to make what a CEO making the median pay earned just last year. At the same group of companies in 2021, it would have taken 190 years.

The timing of some of the biggest pay packages struck a discordant note against the backdrop of difficult times for their industries.

Alphabet’s CEO, Sundar Pichai, ranked No. 1 in the AP’s pay survey this year with a package valued at nearly \$226 million. The vast majority of his compensation came from a grant of restricted stock, valued at \$218 million, and which Google grants its CEO every three years.

The leader of Google won’t reap most of the benefits of the stocks awards right away and how much he realizes ultimately depends on how Alphabet’s stock performs. Alphabet noted in its annual proxy filing that, compared with Pichai’s 2019 stock awards, a greater proportion of the latest batch will only vest if the company reaches goals for shareholder return.

Even so, Pichai received a total compensation package 15 times higher than this year’s median CEO pay just before Google laid off tens of thousands of workers. The company’s total shareholder returns fell 39% last year.

Like many companies, Alphabet’s equity portion of executive



PETER HAMLIN, AP ILLUSTRATION

compensation is designed to reflect results over several years. Since Pichai started as CEO in 2015, Alphabet’s stock has nearly quadrupled, and the company has become the third most valuable on Wall Street.

Alphabet declined to comment beyond its proxy statement.

Nearly 130 CEOs in the AP’s survey saw pay cuts last year. Among them was UPS CEO Carol Tomé, who received a total compensation package valued at nearly \$19 million, most of it in stock awards. That’s down 31% from \$27.6 million in 2021. UPS said Tome’s compensation was lower because she didn’t exceed performance targets by as much in 2022 as she did in 2021.

Tomé’s pay was 364 times higher than \$52,144 median pay for UPS workers, although the company notes that the average pay for full-

time drivers is \$95,000. UPS says its executive pay is “at the midpoint when compared to other companies of similar size and global scale.”

Some boards put the brakes on CEO compensation following pushback from institutional investors, who get the chance to vote in “Say On Pay” tallies at annual shareholder meetings, although such votes are only advisory and don’t compel boards to make changes.

Apple CEO Tim Cook was no. 3 in the AP survey with a compensation package valued at \$99.4 million, nearly identical to what Apple gave him in 2021. But Cook has requested a 40% pay cut for 2023, in response to the vote at last year’s annual meeting, where just 64% of shareholders approved of Cook’s pay package, compared to 94% the previous year.