

## AFGE: 2022 - a great year for members

By AFGE Leadership

From the most membership net growth in seven years to a new law granting full retirement benefits to first responders and law enforcement officers injured on the job, 2022 has

been nothing short of a great year for AFGE members.

This year, our activists continued to rise to the occasion, taking advantage of new opportunities under President Joe Biden despite the pandemic and some hostile agency officials who've

resisted Biden's pro-collective bargaining directives. We fought hard on Capitol Hill, in court, and at the bargaining table. We organized like never before because we know the only way to have a real voice and power is through all of us

standing together as one.

That's why we should be proud of all our accomplishments big and small – they are testaments to our fighting spirit and teamwork.

Now that we've made it into the new year, let's take a walk

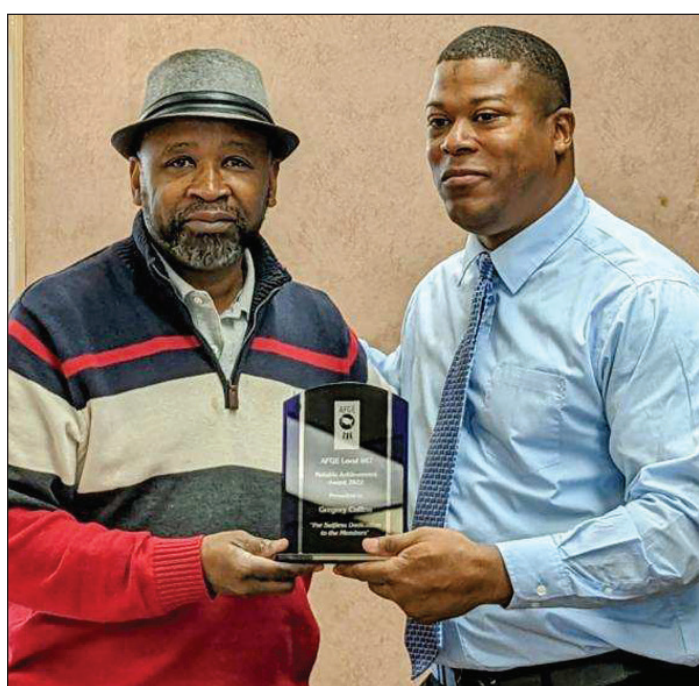
down memory lane and remind ourselves of the great work we did and what we've accomplished together this year.

Here are some highlights:

1. AFGE got its growth motor running again this year with positive months of

growth, setting us up for a good 2023. We beat our monthly goal of organizing 3,500 new members a month except for January, and we also won exciting new organizing campaigns, pushing our year-end membership

See YEAR, page 3



### Local awards

AFGE Local 987 President Marion Williams presented a number of awards on behalf of the Local during a holiday gathering recently. Receiving the Notable Achievement Award for 2022 were, top row from left, Greg Collins, Mike Ferguson and Brandon Hayes; second row from left, Iife Bonner, Teresa Freeman and Gwen King; third row from left, Ramona Higgins and Brandon Respress. Not pictured, but also receiving the Notable Achievement Award were: Jeanette McElhaney and Sam Berry. Receiving the Employee of the Year Award for 2022 were, bottom row from left, Linda Baxter and Don Moncrief.

## Merit System Principles

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board Merit System Principles (5 USC § 2301)

1. Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity.

2. All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.

3. Equal pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national

and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance.

4. All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.

5. The Federal work force should be used efficiently and effectively.

6. Employees should be retained on the basis of adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance

should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards.

7. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.

8. Employees should be protected against arbitrary

See PRINCIPLES, page 3



# 561st AMXS gifts 5-year-old cancer survivor Christmas presents, honorary squadron membership

By KISHA FOSTER JOHNSON  
78th Air Base Wing  
Public Affairs Office

On one of the coldest days of the year, the 561st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron with the Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex at Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, warmed many hearts by surprising a child with Christmas gifts and fellowship Dec. 22, 2022.

The 561st AMXS, who maintains F-15 aircraft, invited Keason Milton and his mother, Tiffany Milton, to their hangar to help celebrate the 5-year-old completing his last chemotherapy treatment.

“Several months ago, we all got together and decided that we were going to adopt a family this year for Christmas as a way to give back to the community,” said Robert Koehler, 561st AMXS mechanic work lead.

Keason has been battling Ewing-like Sarcoma since the age of two. The rare cancer can occur in the bones or the soft tissue surrounding the bones.

As part of the commemoration of ending his chemotherapy, members of the 561st AMXS decided to fulfill some of Keason’s Christmas wish list.

Though he moved about quietly, Keason excitedly ran around a large table holding many presents from him. “Mommy, can I open them?” he asked while tugging at his mother’s sweater. Once she gave the okay, he tore into the various wrapped packages.

Among the gifts was a gaming system, television, watch and remote-control car.

“We wanted to help the family with a Christmas that they perhaps couldn’t afford because of all of the medical bills,” said Koehler. “The whole 561st gave



**Jim Kelly, left, 561st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron director, makes Keason Milton, front right, an honorary squadron member during a Christmas party held at Robins Air Force Base Dec. 22, 2022. The 561st AMXS sponsored the event for the child who has battled cancer since the age of two. (U.S. Air Force photo Alexandra Shea)**

money or went out and got gifts for the family.”

Tiffany Milton was overwhelmed with gratitude from the showering of heartfelt kindness.

“We are very excited and thankful,” said Milton while fighting back tears. “We’ve been through a lot and just for people to recognize and bring attention to childhood cancer is blessing. We are thankful to be here, for him to be here through this journey.”

“I wanted something very special for him to do so he’ll know hey, I completed this big event with completing chemo and let’s celebrate,” she contin-

ued. “So we combined everything together, and we’re here today with all of our family and friends – all our new friends, which is the crew here and the base.”

To close out the party, Jim Kelly, 561st AMXS director, named Keason an honorary squadron member.

“Adopting Keason as a member of the squadron lets him know that he has a huge extended family,” said Kelly. “The gesture just goes to show that the character and heart of the men and women serving our country go deeper than just fixing airplanes.”

## Medal of Honor spotlight Army Tech Sgt. Ralph Neppel

By KATIE LANGE  
DoD News

Army Tech. Sgt. Ralph George Neppel suffered devastating injuries after being blown up by a tank in Germany toward the end of World War II.

He lost both of his legs in the ordeal, but his bravery and courage in holding German forces back earned him the Medal of Honor.

Neppel was born Oct. 31, 1923, in Willey, Iowa. His parents, Max and Rose, had a 200-acre farm on which they raised him, his three brothers and three sisters. Neppel was only 9 when his father died, so he spent a lot of his youth and teenage years helping his mother with the farm. He was doing that until

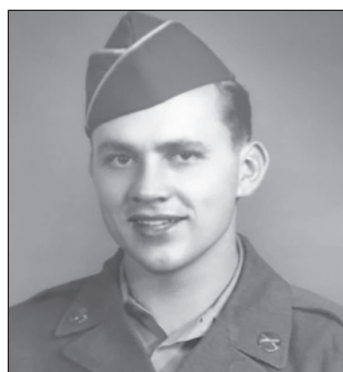


Photo courtesy defense.gov  
**Army Tech Sgt. Ralph Neppel**

Then-Sgt. Neppel was the leader of a machine gun squad in Company M when it happened.

At the time, his unit was defending an entrance into the village when a Germany

try protection, they withdrew.

Neppel’s courage despite devastating injuries helped break the enemy counterattack.

The 21-year-old survived his wounds, but he spent a lot of time in hospitals and his remaining leg had to be amputated due to the severity of the damage.

On Aug. 23, 1945, Neppel and 26 other men received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the war. He received the award from President Harry S. Truman.

A few months later, Neppel and Jean Moore got married. They went on to have two sons, Max and Brian, and two daughters, Vernona and Gail.

Neppel was discharged from the Army on Feb. 18, 1946. Prior to that, he was promoted to the rank of technical sergeant and fitted with prosthetic legs, according to an article in the December 1947 edition of the Des Moines Register.

Neppel moved back to his hometown, where he continued to help his mother run the family farm.

According to the Iowa City Press-Citizen newspaper, he went back to school, graduating from Buena Vista College in 1952 before doing some graduate work at Drake University. For several years, Neppel was a part-time real estate agent, the Press-Citizen said.

He also worked for the Iowa City Veterans Affairs Medical Center for nearly two decades before retiring in 1971.

Neppel and his wife moved to Iowa City at some point in the 1970s.

He also served on the Iowa Governor’s Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped.

The Press-Citizen said Neppel was the owner and president of Johnson County Propane from 1979 until his death on Jan. 27, 1987, after a short illness. He was 63.

Neppel was buried in the Holy Family Cemetery in Lidderdale, Iowa.

In 1988, an addition to the Iowa City Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center was dedicated to Neppel.

# BBB offers tips on holiday returns, exchanges

The weeks following the Christmas holiday are often busy for retailers exchanging or refunding holiday gifts. As consumers interact with businesses, it is important to consider a few key facts regarding product returns or exchanges.

Stores are not legally required to accept exchanges or give refunds unless the merchandise was defective or misrepresented. While most retailers offer refund and exchange programs, policies vary significantly from one store to another.

Fortunately for shoppers, one positive outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic is that many retailers have become more lenient in their return policies. Despite this, be sure to double-check policies this holiday season, even if you are familiar with the brand, as stores can change their policies frequently.

The following tips from your Better Business Bureau should help to make your holiday returns run more smoothly.

**Get to know store policies.** Before you make a purchase, find out if the store has a return policy and, if so, how it works. Understand that many retailers change their policies for the holiday season.

If the store does allow returns or exchanges, find out if you will need to pay a restocking fee. Ask the seller if they offer cash refunds, exchanges, or store credit. Store policies are usually posted at the check-out counter or printed on the back of receipts.

**Understand online store return policies.** If you are shopping online, search for the seller’s return policy and read it through before clicking “buy.” Find out if they accept returns or exchanges and who pays the shipping when an item is returned.



**Kelvin Collins**

In some cases, you can save on shipping fees by returning an online purchase to the local brick-and-mortar store.

**Get the details on a product’s warranty.** Most electronics and home appliances come with warranties honored by the manufacturer, not the retailer. Find out how

returns and repairs are handled if an item stops working or needs replacement parts. Will the retailer ship the item to the manufacturer for you, or will you need to deal with the manufacturer directly?

Knowing the answers will leave you well-prepared for any future issues.

**Keep your receipt and packaging.** Most stores will only accept returns and exchanges if you present the item with its receipt and original packaging.

Always include a gift receipt with items you give and hold on to any gift receipts you receive.

**Bring your ID.** Many stores ask to see your ID when you return an item to avoid holiday return scams. Sometimes retailers require you to bring your ID and the original form of payment.

If this is the store’s policy where your gift is from, you may need the assistance of the gift giver to obtain a refund or exchange.

**Make returns in a timely fashion.** Almost all return policies are valid during a specific period. Some stores modify their return period during the holidays, so don’t risk missing your chance to make your return. Take the item back to the store without delay.

For more holiday tips, visit [BBB.org/Holiday](https://www.bbb.org/Holiday).

## Resolving to get in shape? Don’t forget your feet

(StatePoint) While you may want to tone your abs, glutes and triceps in the new year, there’s one often-overlooked area of the body that deserves your attention too: your feet!

“A lot of people hit the gym or dust off their home exercise equipment in January,” says Danielle Butto, DPM, FACFAS, a board-certified foot and ankle surgeon and a Fellow Member of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons.

“But without proper precautions, a new exercise routine can cause foot and ankle injuries that could sideline you just as you’re hitting your stride.”

According to ACFAS, here’s what to know as you follow through on your resolution to get fit:



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) jacoblund /iStock via Getty Images Plus

### Common injuries

■ Don’t play through the pain of an ankle sprain.

Avoiding treatment can not only cause further damage to the ligaments which may take

much longer to heal or possibly require surgery, but you may be overlooking a more serious injury - a stress fracture.

■ A stress fracture may

**See FEET, page 3**

## Achieve resolution success with helpful planning tools

(StatePoint) The new year is often a time to set new goals. However, statistics show that very few people are successful in keeping their resolutions.

Why? Likely, because they don’t have a realistic, long-term plan. And, as Ben Franklin said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

This year, create “SMART” goals - as in Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely. Here are a few ideas on how to set yourself up for success with some of the most common New Year’s resolutions.

**1.** Focus on fitness  
According to a survey of adults who made a New Year’s resolution, the most pop-



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) jacoblund /iStock via Getty Images Plus

ular goal (48%) was to exercise more. The best way to stick to it is to do something you enjoy.

So whether it’s running, bik-

ing or yoga, find a way to make it fun. That might mean purchasing new workout clothes

**See TOOLS, page 3**

March 20, 1943, when he enlisted in the Army to serve during World War II.

After training, Neppel was assigned to the 329th Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division, which landed on the beaches of Normandy less than two weeks after D-Day. By the end of September 1944, they had made it through France and into Luxembourg. From there, the division fought its way into Germany.

By December 1944, the 329th had taken over most of the town of Birgel, Germany.

However, German forces needed the village to be able to press on with their surprise counteroffensive in the Ardennes Forest — which would later be known as the Battle of the Bulge. So, German officers ordered that Birgel be retaken.

At dusk on Dec. 14, the Germans made their move.

tank and 20 enemy infantrymen attacked their position.

Neppel fired as they approached, but he waited until the enemy was about 100 yards out before raking their foot soldiers with his machine gun and killing at least a dozen of them at once.

The tank continued to move forward. When it was about 30 yards out, it fired a high-velocity shell into Neppel’s unit’s position.

The blast wounded the entire squad and blew Neppel about 10 yards from his gun. One leg was severed below the knee, while the other was torn up terribly.

Despite those horrific injuries, the young sergeant dragged himself back to his gun on his elbows.

As the tank and enemy infantrymen continued to move toward him, he remounted his gun and fired, killing the remaining enemy foot soldiers.

When the tank’s crew realized it no longer had any infan-

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YEAR

From page 1

higher than we were in January. We ended November with 281,661 members, compared with 281,045 in January. In October, we had the highest net growth – a gain of 677 members – since 2015.

2. An AFGE-backed bill granting full retirement benefits to first responders and law enforcement officers injured on the job passed Congress and became law.

3. Another AFGE-backed bill – Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics - became law, expanding health care benefits for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits and providing funding and training for workers needed to process these new claims.

PRINCIPLES

From page 1

action, personal favoritism, or coercion for partisan political purposes, and prohibited from using their official

FEET

From page 2

feel like an ankle sprain at first, but you'll notice additional warning signs, such as swelling without bruising, and pain even during normal activities or when touching the area.

If you have any of these symptoms, have your foot and ankle evaluated by a foot and ankle surgeon as soon as possible.

Pain or swelling around your Achilles tendon after a workout could be indications of Achilles tendonitis.

Untreated, a stretched or strained Achilles tendon may worsen over time, leading to

4. We defeated the VA closure commission.

5. A 4.6% pay raise for federal workers in 2023.

6. The Department of Education agreed to refund lost union dues, ditch an imposed contract, and restore payroll dues deduction, among other things.

7. We won countless cases involving discrimination, wrongful termination, or other injustices, including one in which a Bureau of Prisons local president was awarded \$300,000 in compensatory damages.

8. At the Department of Defense, we successfully fought back attempts to delay the ending of the two-year probationary period for newly hired DoD civilians at the end of 2022, bringing DoD in line with the one-year probationary

period used at most other federal agencies. Other wins at DoD are listed here.

9. AFGE mounted a large midterm program to elect pro-worker candidates and won big.

10. AFGE fought to get Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson on the Supreme Court. She was confirmed by the Senate in a historic vote.

11. AFGE members in D.C. fought hard and won. A bill – D.C. Government Paid Leave Enhancement Amendment Act (B24-615) - expanding paid family leave for D.C. government workers is on its way to become law.

12. The Environmental Protection Agency agreed to postpone the closure of the full-service analytical Houston laboratory until 2027. It's a temporary win, but a win

nonetheless!

13. Employees at the understaffed US Penitentiary Thomson and the Federal Correctional Complex Florence were given a locality pay boost, thanks to AFGE local leadership's hard work.

14. We successfully negotiated safe re-entry agreements like that of the Social Security Administration and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

15. We continued to win expanded telework programs like that of the National Science Foundation, which will enjoy those as part of its new four-year collective bargaining agreement, and that of the National Archives and Records Administration.

We are excited for 2023 and even more wins and membership growth!

authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for election.

9. Employees should be protected against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information which the employees reasonably believe evidences:

a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

- Source: MSPB.gov

TOOLS

From page 2

or equipment or finding a friend to join in to socialize with and to keep you going.

Just remember to start slow, track your progress and you'll soon be getting fit in your favorite way.

2. Connect with family and friends

With busy schedules, staying connected with friends and family can be difficult. Resolving to keep in touch can be easy though, thanks to new digital tools.

Luckily, a subscription service like AmericanGreetings.com allows you to send a variety of digital greetings for any holiday or occasion. To ensure you keep in touch, the person-

alized greeting cards can be pre-scheduled for delivery by email up to one year in advance or can be sent via text or social media.

3. Improve finances

If improving your finances is one of your goals, the best place to start is to track your previous year's expenses and categorize them. You might be shocked how those daily lattes or online impulse buys add up! Then, find a financial system that works for you.

This could be as simple as a spreadsheet outlining and recording your set expenses and discretionary funds; or syncing your data to your online accounts utilizing a budget-tracking app. Once your system is in place, you'll be able to find areas for improvement and set new finan-

The good news? Many injuries are preventable. Foot and ankle surgeons offer five tips to help you keep your feet and ankles healthy:

1. Be smart. Consider consulting a personal trainer at first to ensure you're practicing good form, and to increase the duration and intensity of your workouts gradually and safely.

2. Stretch. Incorporate mobility and stretching into your fitness regimen, particularly before and after workouts.

3. Be footwear aware. Wear properly-fitting athletic shoes that support the arch of the foot, provide heel cushioning and are designed for the exercise in which you're engaged. These measures can help you avoid

plantar fasciitis and neuromas.

Wear cotton or nonslip socks to help prevent painful blisters, which can become infected and cause more serious issues, especially if you have diabetes.

4. Guard against bacteria. Sweaty shoes, public showers, exercise equipment and the pool deck are breeding grounds for fungus, viruses and bacteria.

Wear water shoes in public areas, and after workouts, and get your feet clean and dry quickly.

5. Book an appointment. Foot and ankle pain isn't normal. It signals a problem that needs to be evaluated, diagnosed and treated by a specialist who fully understands this part of the body.

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cial goals for the future.

4. Get organized

Getting organized is always a top resolution for the new year - and managing your schedule is a simple way to relieve stress and improve productivity. Start by outlining your daily, weekly or monthly commitments with a planner or online calendar.

Google Calendar, for example, is a free option that allows you to view and color code appointments by category. Plus, by recording and prioritizing your responsibilities, you'll also be able to see your free time, so you can make time for things you enjoy.

5. Make time for mental health

In addition to improving physical fitness, managing

mental wellness should be at the top of the resolution list. According to Mental Health First Aid, Americans cited enhanced self-confidence (64%), increased productivity (67%), and increased happiness (71%) as the top benefits of mental self-care.

So, start your year by adding "mental break" moments to your daily and weekly schedule (maybe on your new calendar). Self-care can be anything from meditation and sleep, to cooking or reading, as long as it helps you decompress, unwind and find your mental zen.

New Year's resolutions can feel overwhelming; but by using available tools to plan ahead and keep you on track, you'll have realistic ways to achieve your goals.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Decisions:

EEOC sues two for race discrimination, harassment, retaliation

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission announced recently that it has filed two separate race discrimination lawsuits – one against Alto Construction Co. Inc., a site development and asphalt paving construction company based in the Tampa area, and another against J.A. Croson, LLC, a plumbing and HVAC contracting company based in the Orlando area.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit against Alto, its management regularly used the N-word in front of Black employees. Specifically, the complaint alleges that a white site supervisor told a Black employee that "we say the N-word here a lot" and, despite the employee's objections, the site supervisor continued to use the N-word on a daily basis.

The complaint also alleges that a white division manager humiliated the Black employee by ramming a shovel from the back between his legs. The Black employee objected to the assault and, in response, was fired later that day.

In a completely separate action, the EEOC filed suit against J.A. Croson. According to the EEOC's lawsuit, company management routinely used derogatory slurs in reference to non-white employees. For example, management referred to Black employees by the N-word, "boy," "biscuit lips," and "African bastards." They referred to Hispanic workers as "stupid Mexicans," "wetbacks," and "these f--ing Puerto Ricans," among other things. The EEOC further alleged that J.A. Croson referred to non-white employees as "non-essential" and "useless," and assigned them the least desirable work tasks. When non-white employees complained of the racial discrimination, J.A. Croson fired them.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The EEOC filed its suits against Alto (Civil Action No. 8:22-cv-02238) and J.A. Croson (Civil Action No. 5:22-cv-00435) in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlements through its conciliation process.

EEOC sues Shepherd Electric for race discrimination, retaliation

Shepherd Electric Co., Inc., a wholesale electrical distributor that operates in the Baltimore/Washington area, violated federal law when it fired two former managers because of their race retaliating for complaining about race-based discrimination, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charged in a lawsuit filed recently.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Shepherd Electric discriminated against two Black former managers at the company's Laurel, Maryland warehouse. The EEOC alleged after one of the former managers complained the company disciplined Black employees more harshly than white employees, he was fired despite his many years of service with outstanding performance. The EEOC further alleged the company discriminated against another former manager when it unlawfully fired him one week after he complained the company paid a significantly higher salary to a newly-hired white employee who performed his same job duties.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits race discrimination and retaliating against employees for complaining about such behavior. The EEOC filed suit (EEOC v. Shepherd Electric Co., Inc., Civil Action No. 1:22-cv-02492) in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Maryland after first attempting to reach a voluntary pre-litigation settlement through its conciliation process.

Focus Plumbing pays \$500,000 to settle suit

Focus Plumbing, LLC agreed to pay \$500,000 and along with Focus Electric, LLC, Focus Concrete, LLC, Focus Fire Protection, LLC, and Focus Framing, Door, & Trim, LLC, agreed to furnish comprehensive injunctive relief to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently.

The EEOC alleged that since 2017, Focus subjected a class of monolingual Spanish-speaking female employees to a hostile work environment and quid pro quo sexual harassment that included unwanted touching, groping, sexual advances, sexually offensive comments and requests. The EEOC's lawsuit further alleged that employees were threatened if they rejected the sexual advances whereas others were offered better work assignments and hours if they acquiesced to sexual acts.

This alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, including sexual harassment.

EEOC, Kroger resolve religious discrimination lawsuit

The Kroger Limited Partnership I will pay \$180,000 to settle a religious discrimination lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently. The EEOC had filed suit on behalf of two former employees who worked at a Kroger store in Conway, Arkansas.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Kroger Limited Partnership I engaged in religious discrimination when it disciplined and ultimately fired the employees for refusing to wear an apron with the company's "Our Promise" symbol because they believed it represented support for the LGBTQ+ community. Kroger denies the allegations.

The EEOC filed suit (EEOC v. Kroger Limited Partnership d/b/a Kroger, Store No. 625, Civil Action No. 4:20-CV-01099 LPR) in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas, Central Division, after first attempting to reach a voluntary pre-litigation settlement through its conciliation process.

The parties decided to resolve the case with a consent decree to avoid additional costs and uncertainties of future litigation.

As part of the settlement, Kroger Limited Partnership I has agreed to create a religious accommodation policy and provide enhanced religious discrimination training to store management.

# Do you know?

## What is a union?

## And why should you join?

People who aren't in a union or don't know anyone in a trade or labor union are often unsure what labor unions do and why someone would join.

### WHAT IS A UNION?

Labor unions strive to improve the lives of all working families – to bring economic justice to the workplace and social justice to our nations.

It's all about making sure working families receive what they deserve. A labor union or trade union is an organized group of workers who unite to make decisions about conditions affecting their work.

### WHO ARE UNION MEMBERS?

There are over 60 unions representing over 14 million workers throughout the country.

No matter what work you do, there's a union that represents your work. Teachers, miners, firefighters, farmworkers, bakers, engineers, pilots, public employees, doctors, nurses, plumbers, bus drivers, office workers, computer professionals and so many more professions all have unions.

### BENEFITS OF BELONGING TO A UNION

One of the big reasons that workers join a union is to ensure fair treatment in the workplace. As a union member, people usually\* have a collective voice regarding:

- Pay & wages
- Work hours
- Benefits – including retirement plans, health insurance, vacation, sick leave, tuition reimbursement, etc.
- Working conditions
- Ways to balance work and family
- Best ways to get work completed
- Other work-related issues

\*(Only DC government AFGE members are permitted to bargain over pay, wages and/or benefits)

Another advantage of belonging to a union is that members earn 30% more than non-union workers. And if you're a union worker, you are also much more likely to have health and pension benefits.

In addition, unions give workers a strong collective voice that's heard in government. Unions represent workers in talk with lawmakers and remind politicians that working families voted them into office.

Brought to you by AFGE's Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation (Y.O.U.N.G.)

Learn more at [afge.org/wfp](https://afge.org/wfp)



# 10 decisions doctors encourage you to make today

(StatePoint) The New Year represents a fresh start and is the perfect time to invest in your health.

However, you may be unsure what resolutions will have the biggest impact. Doctors say that the easy, tangible actions you take are some of the most important.

“Many people kick off the start of each new year with big-picture health resolutions,” says Jack Resneck, Jr., M.D., president of the American Medical Association (AMA). “The good news is that small, positive health choices made right now can have long-lasting effects.”

Want to get started today? Here are the 10 resolutions the AMA recommends top your list this year:

1. Exercise is essential for your physical and mental health, so get moving today. A good rule of thumb for adults is at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity, or 75 minutes a week of vigor-

ous-intensity activity.

2. Vaccination is the best protection against a number of serious illnesses. To protect yourself and your family, get up to date on your vaccines, including the annual flu shot and the COVID-19 vaccine for everyone 6 months and older. Your doctor can let you know if you’re due for a COVID booster. If you have questions, speak with your physician and review trusted resources, including getvaccineanswers.org.
3. Get screened. Estimates based on statistical models show that since April 2020, millions of screenings for breast, colorectal, and prostate cancer diagnoses may have been missed due to pandemic-related care disruptions. Check in with your physician. If you’re due for preventive care, tests or screenings, make an appointment. These measures are designed to keep you healthy and help your doctor spot certain conditions before they become more serious.

4. High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can increase your risk of heart attack or stroke, and it affects millions of Americans. Visit [ManageYourBP.org](#) to understand what your blood pressure numbers mean and what you can do to get your blood pressure under control.
5. One in 3 American adults has prediabetes, a condition that can lead to type 2 diabetes if left unmanaged. However, there are steps you can take that can help delay or even prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes. Learn your risk by taking a simple 2-minute self-screening test at [DoIHavePrediabetes.org](#). This resource also features helpful lifestyle tips that can help you reverse prediabetes.
6. Whenever possible, drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages and replace processed foods - especially those with added sodium and sugar -- with nutritious, whole foods, including fruits,

vegetables, whole grains, nuts, herbs and spices.

7. If consuming alcohol, drink only in moderation. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans defines that as up to one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men, and only by adults of legal drinking age.
8. Speak with your doctor or health care professional about quitting tobacco and nicotine use. Declare your home and car smokefree to eliminate secondhand smoke exposure.
9. Follow your doctor’s instructions when taking prescription drugs – especially opioids. Always store and dispose of these medications safely to prevent misuse. Whenever prescribed antibiotics, take them exactly as directed. Not taking the full course can lead to antibiotic resistance, a serious public health problem, and will not make you feel better if you have a virus, such as a cold or flu.



Getty images

10. Invest in your mental health by managing stress, getting sufficient sleep, exercising and seeking help from a mental health professional when you need it.

# Resolve to protect your finances, your family in 2023

(StatePoint) After a holiday season spent racking up credit card bills, many Americans consider making financial resolutions in the New Year. However, now is the perfect time to not only reevaluate your saving and spending, but also commit to creating a more holistic financial plan designed to protect your finances and your family.

Consumers are seeking stability and preparedness in today’s uncertain economic environment, according to a recent Consumer Sentiment Tracker study by Lincoln Financial Group. With ongoing inflation and market volatility, 56% of respondents cited protection from risk as being most important to them.

When it comes to thinking about their finances, people said they have

the greatest interest in protecting their family (39%) followed by their income (26%).

“Our research reinforced the importance of financial solutions that can help consumers navigate through market cycles and protect their loved ones,” said David Berkowitz, president, Lincoln Financial Network, Lincoln Financial’s wealth management business. “People are not only concerned about having enough to pay their bills, but also saving for retirement and preparing for the unexpected.

It’s important to have a well-rounded financial plan that can address those risks, protect assets and create positive outcomes for today’s families.”

To achieve a stronger financial future, don’t neglect your finances in 2023 —

instead, add a little TLC (Talk, Learn, Commit). Resolve to create a robust financial plan using these three tips from Lincoln Financial:

- Talk about it. Financial conversations play a crucial role. Be transparent with your loved ones about financial priorities so you can set expectations and work toward your shared financial goals.

Initiate ongoing discussions to stay on track with everything from saving for retirement to paying for a long-term healthcare event, which can happen suddenly and be very costly.

Also, consider talking to a financial professional who can help identify solutions that best meet your individual needs, as well as drive better outcomes. Lincoln’s research found those who work with financial professionals are more likely to prioritize retirement savings (26% vs. 10%).

- Learn more about tax-deferred investments. Life insurance can be more than just a death benefit, with some types of policies offering income replacement for unforeseen events. It can also protect your financial security from the impact of taxes, market volatility and longevity.

- Commit to maximizing your workplace benefits. Look into supplemental coverages like disability, accident and life insurance that may be available through your employer.

Solutions like these protect against unexpected events that can disrupt your ability to provide for your family or drive you into additional debt.

If you have an employer-sponsored retirement plan, make sure you are contributing and getting a match, if offered.

With a robust plan, you can help ensure a solid financial future for you and your family.



Getty images

## YOUNG

### Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation

The AFGE Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation program seeks to mobilize young union members to become leaders and activists for social change within AFGE and the Labor Movement.

AFGE members who are under the age of 40 and those mentors that are over 40 will work together to include younger workers into the union structure and keep them engaged in what’s at stake for working class Americans.

AFGE YOUNG intends to provide young members with networking opportunities and resources to engage in mobilizing other young workers into AFGE, union training to promote leadership skills, innovative social gatherings, AFGE conference meetings, and other engaging events. In doing so, AFGE YOUNG participants work to build lasting labor solidarity, advance issues of social and economic justice, and find more inclusive ways to engage the current and future generations in the Labor Movement.

**For more information, or to get involved at the Local 987 level, contact Brandon Respress at [brandon.respress@afgelo-cal987.org](mailto:brandon.respress@afgelo-cal987.org).**



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**Aflac Hospital Indemnity:** Pays Benefits for on and off-the-job accidents and sickness/surgery/maternity.

**Aflac Critical Illness:** Pays Benefits up to \$30,000 upon the occurrence of cancer, heart attack, stroke, and many other Critical Illnesses.

### NEW AFLAC DISABILITY

- Pays benefits for off-job accidents, sickness (covid included), surgery, & maternity.
- No health questions asked to enroll.
- Benefit amounts up to \*\$6,000 per month.
- It can be used with leave, or independently.

\*Max Benefit of \$6,000 per month.

**Nick Wells**  
**Cell: (478) 538-1652**  
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		3	4					
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	9		7			1	3	
5		6				7		9
	8	1			5		4	
				2		9	5	
					8	2		
				7	1	3		

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Fill in the blank squares in the grid, making sure that every row, column and 3-by-3 box includes all digits 1 through 9.

If you put a picture of yourself in a locket, you could say you are ... independent.

I want to start a new cooking show where you only get to pick one pan to use the whole time. It will be called: “Do you have the ‘skillet’ takes?”

Time To Read

N	C	Q	F	H	O	R	R	O	R	U	Y	G	X	W	K	A	D	M	L	Y	H
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J	Y	O	A	Z	P	W	T	W	C	A	Z	B	I	O	G	R	A	P	H	Y	N
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K	L	E	X	S	Z	C	R	L	L	C	C	R	I	M	E	G	A	I	P	L	L
M	O	R	T	T	S	T	D	I	M	I	W	A	A	E	U	M	I	K	H	C	I
O	G	L	O	R	K	I	B	C	P	Z	H	U	L	T	N	S	O	N	A	P	H
C	Y	Q	X	O	Y	O	C	X	S	S	V	P	O	F	Q	C	I	I	G	I	C
K	F	B	Z	P	F	N	F	S	B	B	T	V	G	U	I	D	E	C	R	X	U
A	E	H	M	S	B	L	Q	F	P	L	Y	N	Q	H	O	O	R	C	L	O	C
Q	G	Y	T	E	W	H	K	R	N	A	A	H	G	B	L	E	L	Y	Q	L	C

BIOGRAPHY

CLASSICS

FILM

HUMOR

MUSIC

POETRY

SCIENCE

TRAVEL

BLOGGING

CRIME

HISTORICAL

JOURNALISM

PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY

SPIRITUAL

TV GUIDE

CHILDREN

FICTION

HORROR

MEMOIR

PHILOSOPHY

ROMANCE

SPORTS

WAR

A little humor ...

- Eggs and ham: A day's work for a chicken, a lifetime commitment for a pig.

Why does a mother kangaroo hope it doesn't rain? She doesn't like it when the kids have to play inside.

How do you fix a broken chimp? With a monkey wrench.
- What do llamas like to eat? Llama beans.

What do you call a time-out in the Lions' football game? A paws.

What did the mother buffalo say to her boy as he was leaving? "Bison."

What kind of snack do little monkeys have with their

STATEPOINT CROSSWORD

THEME: GEOGRAPHY 101

ACROSS

1. Piece of data
6. Baryshnikov's step
9. Back wound
13. Soft palate hanger
14. \*Any high mountain
15. Tsar's edict
16. Means
17. Bishop of Rome's jurisdiction
18. Female water-elf
19. \*Highest mountain
21. \*Sea that is also the largest lake
23. A in MoMA
24. \*Small island
25. Ignited
28. Lamborghini model
30. Extravagant
35. 15th of March, May, July or October
37. \_\_\_\_-a-Sketch
39. Technology expert
40. Novice
41. Damage one's reputation
43. Lil' Bow Wow's first name
44. Bette Midler's movie "\_\_\_\_ Pocus"
46. "I'm \_\_\_\_ you!"
47. Unit of pressure
48. Denver breakfast choice
50. Big rig
52. \_\_\_\_ de Janeiro
53. Excessively abundant
55. Ensign, for short
57. \*Great \_\_\_\_ Reef
61. \*National Geographic \_\_\_\_
65. Gibson garnish
66. Arabic garment
68. D-Day beach
69. \*Longest continental mountain range
70. Nada
71. Energy to motion converter
72. Golf pegs
73. Red Cross bed
74. Follow as a conse-

quence

DOWN

1. Surfer's "man"
2. Tel \_\_\_\_, Israel
3. Ditty
4. Extremist
5. Masters without t
6. Ghost of Christmas \_\_\_\_
7. Miller High Life, e.g. \_\_\_\_
8. Four-eyes' gear
9. Bypass
10. Uber alternative
11. \*The largest continent
12. Past participle of "be"
15. Remove from political office
20. Eyelid infections
22. Opposite of nothing
24. Burning aroma producer
25. \*\_\_\_\_ sphere, the solid earth
26. "She is pulling my leg," e.g.
27. 9 a.m. prayer
29. \*\_\_\_\_ sphere, air surrounding earth
31. Sleeveless garment
32. Blood of the gods, Greek mythology
33. Harry Belafonte's daughter
34. \*\_\_\_\_ sphere, all water on earth
36. Aretha Franklin's genre
38. Type of crime
42. Young Montague
45. Brown and yellow finches
49. Cravat or bola
51. Financial gain
54. 100 centimes
56. "Barefoot in the Park" playwright
57. Summer ride
58. "Green Gables" protagonist
59. Amusement park attraction
60. Sturgeon \_\_\_\_ and salmon \_\_\_\_
61. Table mineral
62. Chow or grub
63. Biblical pronoun
64. Ready and eager
67. \_\_\_\_ sphere, all life on earth

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
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57	58	59	60					61				62	63	64
65						66	67			68				
69						70				71				
72						73				74				

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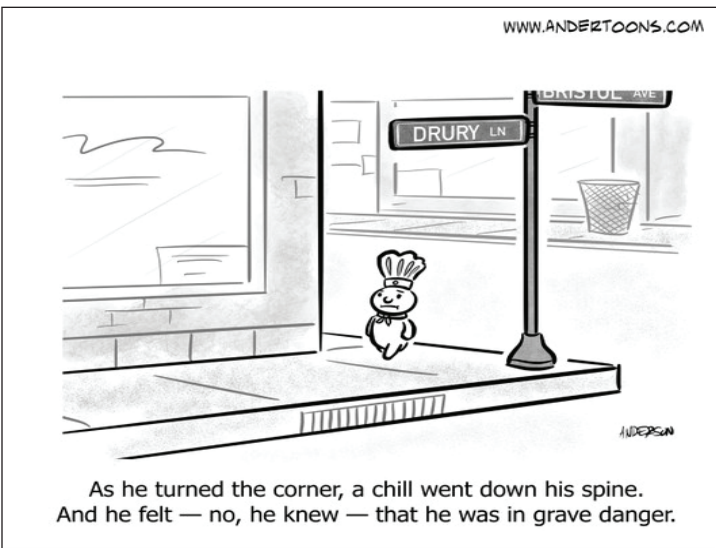
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E	U	S	N	E		T	O	C		S	E	E	T		
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Y	T	E	I	C	O	S		R	I	E	R	I	R	A	B
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STR8TS

No. 623

Medium

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					4			7
						3	5	

Previous solution - Easy

8	6	9	7		1	2	3	
8	9	4	6	5		2	3	
9			8	6	7		5	4
2		9	7	8	6	3	4	5
	7	8		9		5	6	
5	6	7	1	2	3	4		
6	5		2	3	4			8
	4	3	5	1	2	7	8	9
1	3	2		4	5	6	7	

How to beat **Str8ts** – Like Sudoku, no single number can repeat in any row or column. But... rows and columns are divided by black squares into **compartments**. These need to be filled in with numbers that complete a 'straight'. A **straight** is a set of numbers with no gaps but can be in any order, eg [4,2,3,5]. Clues in black cells remove that number as an option in that row and column, and are not part of any straight. Glance at the solution to see how 'straights' are formed.

How does a leopard change its spots? When it's tired of one spot, it just moves to another.

A German shepherd went to the telegraph office to send a telegram. "Woof," he wrote. "Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof."

The clerk looked at the message and said, "There are only nine words here. You could add one more 'Woof' for the same price."

"But," said the dog, "then it wouldn't make any sense at all."

What kind of absents would you give an absent-minded squirrel? Forget-me-nuts.

4	9	3	1	7	5	8	2	6
7	1	2	8	6	9	5	4	3
8	5	6	4	2	3	7	9	1
2	4	9	5	3	6	1	8	7
9	8	7	2	4	1	9	3	5
5	3	1	9	8	7	4	6	2
3	6	4	7	5	8	2	1	9
1	2	5	6	9	4	3	7	8
6	7	8	3	1	2	9	5	4



# Turn to tradition for Tex-Mex taste

(Family Features)

The next time your loved ones crave a comforting dish that's warming from the inside-out, turn to an all-time classic with a touch of southern flair.

Take inspiration for this Tex-Mex Beef Lasagna from season 3 of "BBQquest: Beyond the Pit," a video series that dives into the long-held traditions, new flavors and everyday inspiration that make Texas barbecue legendary.

Developed from the show by BBQquest co-host and "Hardcore Carnivore" cookbook author Jess Pryles, this tasty take on comfort food can be the perfect solution for a family meal with plenty of leftovers.

After dinner, settle in together and learn pitmaster techniques from the experts as the series follows four themes that capture the essence of Texas barbecue: legacy and tradition; creativity and innovation; Texas trailblazers; and family and community.

"Since launching BBQquest four years ago, it's truly remarkable to see how much has changed and yet stayed the same when it comes to Texas barbecue, and that's exactly what you see in season 3," said Rachel Chou, Texas Beef Council's director of consumer marketing. "There has been so much exciting innovation around cooking methods and international flavors while there's still a huge dedication to long-held recipes and smoking techniques."

To find more pitmaster-worthy recipes, visit BeefLovingTexans.com.



Tex-Mex Beef Lasagna

Recipe courtesy of Jess Pryles on behalf of Beef Loving Texans

Total time: 60 minutes

Servings: 10

1    tablespoon olive oil

1    onion, diced

2    pounds ground beef

2    teaspoons kosher salt

1    teaspoon garlic powder

1/2    teaspoon cumin

2    teaspoons chipotle powder

1/2    teaspoon onion powder

15    ounces canned corn, drained

15    ounces canned seasoned black beans, drained

10    ounces canned diced tomatoes with green chiles, drained

15    ounces canned red enchilada sauce

1    cup Mexican crema or sour cream

nonstick cooking spray

12    corn tortillas

8    ounces shredded Mexican blend cheese

cilantro (optional)

green onions, thinly sliced (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 F.

In large pan or skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat then add onion. Cook until softened, 4-5 minutes, stirring regularly.

Add ground beef and cook, stirring regularly, until beef has browned.

Add kosher salt, garlic powder, cumin, chipotle powder and onion powder; stir well. Add corn, black beans and diced tomatoes. Turn heat to medium and simmer 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

In bowl, combine enchilada sauce and crema; mix well.

Spray casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray. Pour about 1/4 cup enchilada sauce mixture on bottom to prevent tortillas from sticking.

Layer 2-4 tortillas across bottom then top with layer of ground beef mixture. Use ladle to spoon some enchilada sauce mixture on top, distributing evenly. Top with another layer of tortillas then repeat layers until casserole is full, 3-4 layers. Top with shredded cheese.

Loosely cover dish with foil in tent shape to help prevent cheese from sticking then bake 30 minutes.

Remove foil and bake 10-15 minutes until cheese is bubbly and golden brown.

Cool 5 minutes before serving. Top with cilantro and green onions, if desired.

# Kick Winter's chill with hearty chowder

(Family Features)

Colder, shorter days call for a little comfort. Cozying up with a hearty meal on brisk winter evenings can help fight off the chill while savoring favorite flavors alongside the ones you love.

Avoid venturing into the cold for a trip to the store by turning to a pantry staple like sweetpotatoes. As one of the most versatile veggies, they're easy to add to a variety of recipes while enhancing both flavor and nutrition. Perfectly suitable for both simple and elevated dishes, they can be baked, microwaved, grilled, slow cooked or prepared on the stove so their sweet taste never goes out of style.

Their long shelf life – up to four weeks if stored properly in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area away from heat sources – means you can rely on sweetpotatoes throughout the winter as an on-hand ingredient. Additionally, as a "diabetes superfood" according to the American Diabetes Association, they're rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber, all of which are good for overall health and may help prevent disease, making them a key source of nutrients during wintertime.

When your family needs a warm-up on those frosty days, put sweetpotatoes at the center of mealtime (with an added kick) in this Jalapeno Sweetpotato Chowder. Loaded with the flavors of winter comfort, it's a filling meal that makes enough for a crowd so no one goes hungry.

Visit ncsweetpotatoes.com to find more comforting meal ideas.

Jalapeno Sweetpotato Chowder

Recipe courtesy of the North Carolina SweetPotato Commission

Servings: 6

2    large North Carolina sweetpotatoes, baked

1    small onion, 1/4-inch diced

1    tablespoons olive oil

1    quart chicken or vegetable stock

2    cups cooked chicken, cubed

1 1/2    cups whole corn kernels

2    teaspoons minced jalapenos

1/2    cup heavy cream

1    teaspoon salt

chopped scallions, for garnish

Peel baked sweetpotatoes; discard skin and puree.

In soup pot, saute onion in butter until softened. Add pureed sweetpotato and stock, as desired. Bring to boil, reducing liquid slightly.

Add chicken, corn, jalapenos, heavy cream and salt. Simmer 10 minutes.

To serve, ladle into bowls and garnish with chopped scallions.



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