

Local holds EEO training

By **DON MONCRIEF**
Editor, The Union Advocate
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AFGE Local 987 held EEO training the first week of June. It was taught by AFGE Supervisory Attorney Jenny Celestin-Pratt, from the Women and Fair Practices Department. The training, she said, “went well. The attendees were engaged in the topic, had questions and examples related to the various topics discussed.” Especially reasonable accommodations, she said. “Everyone seemed to enjoy the class and the discovery exercises we did involving a reasonable accommodation hypo and a non-selection hypo.”

Celestin-Pratt went on that the training was important because employees need to know their rights in the workplace and that employment decisions are supposed to be based on relevant job facts and not based on discriminatory factors. “Employees should understand the EEO process from the counseling stage through the appeal stage, the theories of discrimination and the reasonable accommodation process.”

Agenda topics she covered were:

- ♥ EEO Official time under 29 CFR 1614.605
- ♥ EEO Protected Statuses and the Federal Laws covered
- ♥ EEO Process and deadlines
- ♥ Theories of Discrimination
- ♥ Burdens of Proof for the various types of actions
- ♥ Damages/Remedies
- ♥ Settlement Agreements
- ♥ Hearing Stage that covered discovery, summary judgment, and prehearing stage.



AFGE Supervisory Attorney Jenny Celestin-Pratt, from the Women and Fair Practices Department listens to a question during the EEO training held the first week in June. (AFGE Local 987 photos/Don Moncrief)

ment, and prehearing stage.

- ♥ Motion for Summary Judgment and Response to Motion for Summary Judgment
- ♥ Prehearing reports and conference call

“It is important for our members to know the protections provided by EEO laws, the

EEO process, the theories of discrimination, the burdens of proof and how to meet those burdens,” she said as far as how this will help them better serve BUEs. “This will also help provide our members with insight on how to address certain matters in a proactive manner.”



To sign up for EEO online classes visit:
<https://educationtraining.afge.org/AFGETrainingEducation/EEO.html>

ATTENTION MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS

STOP TELLING EMPLOYEES “THERE IS NO UNION.”



Before advising employees about their rights,
**CHECK WITH LABOR RELATIONS,
HUMAN RESOURCES, OR YOUR LEGAL OFFICE.**
Do not give employees incorrect information.

EEO-AFFECTED EMPLOYEES STILL HAVE OPTIONS FOR:

- ⊗ Personal Representation
- ⊗ Reasonable Accommodation
- ⊗ EEO Complaints
- ⊗ Workers' Compensation
- ⊗ MSPB Appeals
- ⊗ Office of Special Counsel Matters
- ⊗ Disciplinary and Adverse Actions
- ⊗ Employment-Related Guidance
- ⊗ And More

TO MANAGEMENT:

Executive Orders, agency guidance, litigation, or political noise do **NOT** erase the Union. Know the facts before you speak.
THE UNION IS STILL HERE.
EMPLOYEE RIGHTS STILL MATTER.
MEMBERS STILL HAVE REPRESENTATION.



THE FACTS:

- ✓ AFGE Local 987 **HAS NOT BEEN DECERTIFIED.**
- ✓ The Union still exists.
- ✓ Employees still have rights.
- ✓ Members still have representation.
- ✓ Employees may choose representation where permitted by law and policy.

WHO WE REPRESENT

AFGE Local 987 continues to assist and represent Union members.

ALL WAGE GRADE EMPLOYEES (TRADES)

- 👤 Members-Only Representation
- 👤 Personal Representation
- ⚖️ EEO Assistance
- ♿ Reasonable Accommodation Guidance
- 📄 Employment-Related Assistance
- 🤝 Guidance and Support for Union Members

STOP THE MISINFORMATION.
**IT HURTS EMPLOYEES AND
CREATES LIABILITY.**

DON'T SPREAD RUMORS. KNOW THE FACTS.
THE UNION HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.



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STILL REPRESENTING.

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**WE
STAND
TOGETHER.
WE
FIGHT
TOGETHER.
WE
WIN
TOGETHER.**



A full two and a half years late

Juneteenth marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed.

The troops’ arrival came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House two months earlier in Virginia, but slavery had remained relatively unaffected in Texas—until U.S. General Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Orders No. 3: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.”

The Emancipation

Proclamation

The Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, had established that all enslaved people in Confederate states in rebellion against the Union “shall be then, henceforward, and forever free.” But in reality, the Emancipation Proclamation didn’t instantly free any enslaved people. The proclamation only applied to places under Confederate control and not to slave-holding border states or rebel areas already under Union control. However, as Northern troops advanced into the Confederate South, many enslaved people fled behind Union lines.

Juneteenth and Slavery in Texas

In Texas, slavery had continued as the state experienced no large-scale fighting or significant presence of Union troops. Many enslavers from outside the state had moved there, as they viewed it as a safe haven for slavery.

After the war came to a

close in the spring of 1865, General Granger’s arrival in Galveston that June signaled freedom for Texas’s 250,000 enslaved people. Although emancipation didn’t happen overnight for everyone—in some cases, enslavers withheld the information until after harvest season—celebrations broke out among newly freed Black people, and Juneteenth was born.

That December, slavery in America was formally abolished with the adoption of the 13th Amendment.

The year following 1865, freedmen in Texas organized the first of what became the annual celebration of “Jubilee Day” on June 19.

In 1979, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth an official holiday; several others followed suit over the years.

In June 2021, Congress passed a resolution establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday; President Biden signed it into law on June 17, 2021.

- Source: History.com

SPECIAL: The War Horse

‘I feel lost.’ Anxiety grows among veterans cut off from VA one-on-one therapy

By LEAH ROSENBAUM
The War Horse

Phoebe Ervin tried everything to drown out the sound. As golf fans descended on her Long Island, New York, community in late September to watch the U.S. and Europe compete for the Ryder Cup, she tried desperately to ignore the whir of helicopter blades.

This time, they were ferrying VIPs to the course, not flying above the desert of Iraq.

“It just really brought up some bad memories,” said the 58-year-old Army reserve veteran, who suffers from mental health issues after multiple deployments during the Gulf and Iraq wars. “I was on edge the whole weekend.”

Normally, she would speak with her VA psychologist about coping mechanisms. But just weeks earlier, Ervin had been told by her therapist of 16 years that she had been getting one-on-one mental health sessions at the Department of Veterans Affairs for too long.

She was getting cut off. “I feel lost,” she said. “All this stuff is happening to me, [but] I have no outlet to talk to anybody.”

Ervin is one of more than three dozen veterans who reached out to The War Horse to share their deeply personal mental health struggles after the news organization reported in late August how VA medical centers across the country have been limiting the number of one-on-one therapy sessions veterans can receive as part of their care.

Spencer McKinstry, a Marine veteran in New York, said he still struggles with nightmares and wakes up in “a puddle of sweat,” but he was told at the end of last year that he had reached the limit of mental health sessions at his regional VA medical center after seeing a psychologist there for nearly three years.

McKinstry’s psychologist spelled it out in a clinical note, reviewed by The War Horse: “Despite clinical need and veteran’s treatment preferences, undersigned [the psychologist] has repeatedly been informed by her supervisor ... that she must adhere to local clinical policies and procedures that restrict most veterans to a maximum of 24 therapy sessions or there will be disciplinary action taken.”

“I did my job,” said McKinstry, who did two combat deployments to Afghanistan. “You said you’d take care of me for the rest of my life. The rest of my life is



Phoebe Ervin was in a documentary about how horse therapy can be used for veterans for PTSD (Photo courtesy of Phoebe Ervin)

not 20 sessions.”

VA is emphatic that it has no policy to cut off one-on-one mental health sessions and says that its doctors work hand in hand with veterans to craft care plans.

“VA always works with Veterans over an initial series of health sessions and collaboratively plans any needed follow-on care after that,” VA Press Secretary Peter Kasperowicz said in an email response to The War Horse. “As part of this process, Veterans and their health care team decide together how to address ongoing needs.”

“The goal is recovery, healing and helping Veterans achieve greater independence and resilience.”

But mental health providers in five states told The War Horse they have been under pressure in recent years to cap one-on-one therapy, as the department struggles to find enough providers to care for the 1.7 million veterans who get mental health treatment at VA. The caps have been rolling out for years during both the Biden and Trump administrations. The War Horse obtained policies from VA medical centers through a Freedom of Information Act request: Some recommended discharging most patients after eight sessions, others after 15 or 24. While the reduced number of sessions may be enough for some veterans,

providers and veterans say that many need longer-term treatment. Veterans told The War Horse they experienced increased anxiety, depression, substance use, and PTSD symptoms after losing access to one-on-one therapy.

One Navy veteran said he “ended up spiraling” after the VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, ended his one-on-one therapy after nine consecutive months in October 2024. Joe R., who asked that his last name be withheld to protect his medical privacy, said he stopped taking his medication, took up smoking again, and started drinking after being sober for seven years.

The good news: After a six-month disruption in his treatment, he was eventually able to get one-on-therapy again through a private mental health provider billed to VA through its community care program. He said he’s doing better now, but is still angry about the interruption.

“It’s a bit hypocritical to say, ‘Come here, I’m here to help you and take care of you,’ and then kick you out the door because you didn’t get better on their timeline,” he said.

In responding to questions for this article, VA’s Kasperowicz pushed back, saying the agency could not address individual allegations in detail without

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First Article Test Lab: Ensuring readiness through rigorous parts validation

By JOSEPH MATHER
78th Air Base Wing
Public Affairs

In an era of increasing global uncertainty, the U.S. Air Force’s ability to project air power at a moment’s notice hinges on the meticulous maintenance and readiness of its aircraft.

At the heart of this mission is the First Article Test Lab, a specialized unit within the 802nd Maintenance Support Squadron at Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, dedicated to ensuring every spare part meets the highest standards of quality and reliability.

The lab’s work is a comprehensive and vital process that directly contributes to the operational readiness of the Air Force. Before a new part from a contractor is approved for full-scale production, it undergoes a battery of rigorous tests to verify that it meets exact design specifications. This crucial step prevents potentially catastrophic failures and ensures the integrity of the Air Force supply chain.

“To ensure mission success and bring our crews home safely, every aircraft must be airworthy and reliable,” said Dustin Collins, 802nd MXSS Laboratory Production Flight chief. “In First Article Testing, we are the first line of defense, certifying that every spare part meets the design drawing requirements and specifications.”

The consequences of a single faulty component can be severe. Collins recounted a recent instance



Michael Sottile, 802nd Maintenance Support Squadron Physical Science Laboratory mechanical engineer, uses a micrometer to check the thickness of a first article aircraft part at Robins Air Force Base March 25. The dimensional analysis was used to determine if the first article aircraft part matched the engineering drawings. (U.S. Air Force photo by Joseph Mather)

where the lab’s vigilance prevented a potentially

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Employment scams study reveals soaring numbers

Reports of job scams have doubled from last year. Job hunters tricked into handing over thousands of dollars are being lured in with a new tactic: Task-based scams, where they are offered high pay to “like” and “subscribe” to videos online.

Over the last three years, nearly 50,000 people reported to BBB Scam Tracker after falling victim to an employment scam. Reports exploded in 2025, doubling over the previous year. BBB received hundreds of reports involving task-based scams where fraudsters impersonated popular companies.

In the new study “Employment scams soar, ‘video boosters’ left unpaid, and education needs are paramount,” BBB’s International Investigations Initiative examines patterns of reports, reviews the amount of money lost, and shares stories from those caught up in the scams so consumers can avoid them.

Since 2021, the BBB has laid out ways consumers and businesses can avoid scams and significant monetary loss. Previous studies examined business scams, online gambling, vehicle purchases, identity theft, and much more.

- Key findings:
- Over 600 reports to BBB about employment scams were “task-based”
 - Job scams conducted over text message exploded in 2025, making up half of all reports
 - Employment scams are rising, despite extensive public information about this type of fraud
 - Median losses have shrunk since 2023 but remain high at \$1,000
- BBB Scam Tracker employment scam reports by year:
- 2023 – 10,348 reports (\$2,000 median loss)
 - 2024 – 11,748 reports (\$1,500 median loss)



Kelvin Collins

- 2025 – 23,234 reports (\$1,000 median loss)
- What are the red flags of an employment scam?
- Unprompted job offers
 - Jobs offered without an interview
 - Too-good-to-be-true salaries
 - High-pressure offers to take a job immediately
 - Interviewers refuse to turn on camera
 - Payment to like or subscribe to videos online
 - Charges or taxes to withdraw money already earned
 - Upfront costs to begin work

How can I avoid employment scams?

- Do research on companies offering jobs.
- If someone reaches out to you out of the blue, attempt to find a posting for the job on the company’s official website.
- Never pay money to get your paycheck.
- No legitimate job will ask you to pay taxes or any other fee to “unlock” funds you have already earned.
- Avoid jobs paying you to watch videos, like them or subscribe to a channel. In nearly every case, this will be a scam.
 - Always use video in an interview if possible. If an employer offers you a job without an interview, be wary.
- Visit BBB.org to check out a business or register a complaint, BBB Scam Tracker to report a scam, and BBB.org/scamstudies for more on this and other scams.

New report finds most Americans don’t know how to protect brain health

(StatePoint) Americans overwhelmingly say brain health matters deeply as they age, ranking it on par with — or even above — physical health. Yet despite this concern, most adults acknowledge they do not know how to protect or maintain their cognitive health, according to the 2026 “Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures” report and a new nationwide survey released by the Alzheimer’s Association.

Eighty-eight percent of U.S. adults say maintaining brain health is very important, and almost all adults ages 40 and older surveyed (99%) say it is at least as important as physical health. However, only 9% say they know “a lot” about how to maintain their brain health. More than two-thirds say they worry about their brain health and about developing Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia.

“Americans care deeply about their brain health and say that midlife is the key time to start taking steps to support it,” said Heather M. Snyder, Ph.D., senior vice president of Medical and Scientific Relations for the Alzheimer’s Association. “But many don’t know where to start and are looking for clear guidance on actions they can take.”

The report comes as the impact of Alzheimer’s disease continues to expand nationwide. An estimated 7.4 million Americans age 65 and older are currently living with clinical Alzheimer’s dementia. Total annual costs of caring for people living with dementia nationwide — excluding unpaid care — are projected to reach \$409 billion this year, an increase of \$25 billion from 2025. Since 2000, deaths from Alzheimer’s disease in the United States have increased 134%.

Despite broad awareness that lifestyle behaviors influence brain health, the survey reveals a significant disconnect between belief and action — and between brain health and dementia risk. While 75% of respondents say lifestyle behaviors such as diet, physical activity and sleep are very important for maintaining brain health, only 46% say those same behaviors are very important for reducing the risk of

Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.

Only 50% report getting at least seven hours of sleep daily or most days, 39% say they eat a healthy, balanced diet regularly, 42% engage in mentally stimulating activities such as reading or puzzles, and just 34% report regular physical activity. Nearly one-third say they exercise less than weekly or not at all.

At the same time, Americans express strong interest in programs designed to support brain health. Seventy-three percent say they would consider participating in such programs, particularly those focused on cognitive exercises (57%), health monitoring (46%), nutrition (36%) and physical activity (26%).

Many adults view midlife — ages 35 to 64 — as a critical window for protecting brain health. Nearly two in five (38%) believe people should begin taking steps during midlife, and 46% say formal brain health programs are most appropriate during this stage. At the same time, about one-third view brain health as a lifelong priority.

Health care providers are seen as trusted sources of guidance, but conversations about brain health rarely occur. Eighty-six percent of adults would welcome these discussions during routine visits. Yet only 14% report ever discussing how to maintain brain health with their provider, and just 11% say they have talked about reducing dementia risk.

To address these gaps, the Alzheimer’s Association is working with partners across communities, workplaces and health care systems to deliver research-backed resources and programs. These efforts are informed by the landmark U.S. POINTER study, which found that combining multiple healthy lifestyle habits can help protect cognitive function.

Learn more at alz.org/facts.

“The takeaway from this report is clear: brain health is a lifelong priority, not an issue limited to older age,” Snyder said. “By connecting individuals, communities, workplaces and health care, we can build a more equitable framework to support cognitive health and help reduce dementia risk for everyone.”

UNION MEMBERSHIP IS LIKE A GYM MEMBERSHIP.

DUES ARE PAID TO BE PART OF THE GROUP WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS AND GOALS.

BUT, JUST LIKE A GYM, IF WE DON'T SHOW UP, INVEST OUR TIME - OR PARTICIPATE, WE DO NOT GET STRONGER!

THE UNION ADVOCATE

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Please submit articles, photos, etc to don.moncrief@afgelocal987.org. For questions about story content, to pass on story ideas or to request coverage, please contact the aforementioned.

VETERANS

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permission from veterans to discuss their cases.

To verify complaints, The War Horse spoke with the friends and family of some of the veterans, as well as reviewed screenshots of therapy clinical notes. Phoebe Ervin went a step further and signed a waiver allowing VA to speak to The War Horse about her care.

If you are struggling with your mental health, help is available. Contact the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 then pressing 1, or text 838255.

Confronting Her Darkest Hour

Ervin calls Jan. 19, 2009, “The Black Day.”

That’s when she began hearing voices, telling her to kill herself. Alarmed, a friend took her to the Northport VA Medical Center on Long Island, where she has been getting mental health treatment ever since. She’s done art therapy, music therapy, group therapy, anger management courses, and has taken medication. Through a nonprofit foundation, she rode horses as part of equine therapy.

For 16 years, she also did one-on-one psychotherapy with a mental health provider.

This talk therapy was particularly helpful, Ervin said—but it took a long time for her to build trust with her provider. “If I don’t feel comfortable with you, I’m not going to talk,” she said. “That’s how veterans are.” Sixteen years is a long time to be in therapy—too long, according to many at VA. For one, there just aren’t enough therapists to provide every veteran who wants unlimited therapy. And there are signs this provider shortage is getting worse.

According to an August report from the VA’s inspector general, psychology was the most frequently reported area for severe clinical staffing shortages at VA medical facilities.

Research shows that short courses of certain types of therapy, like cognitive behavioral therapy, are highly effective for treating issues like anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

“I would absolutely agree that PTSD is recoverable for the vast majority of individuals,” said M. David Rudd, a professor of psychology at the

University of Memphis, who studies military suicide prevention. But, he said, “it requires quick treatment.”

When care is delayed, PTSD can become chronic and complicated by other conditions like substance use disorder. But unlike diabetes or high blood pressure, which VA will treat as a lifelong condition, mental health is viewed as something that only needs short-term treatment. “We, for whatever reason, tend to think of mental health differently,” said Rudd, an Army veteran who was a psychologist during the Gulf War for the 2nd Armored Division.

There is still a lot of stigma attached to mental health, he said.

When mental health treatment does end, Rudd said, it should be tapered down slowly. “It’s arguably unethical to just abruptly discontinue care for some individuals that are chronically ill.”

Veterans, particularly those who have served in combat, often have to deal with complicated and unresolved loss. Rudd said. “When a therapist cuts you off, it’s a reemergence of that loss, in a very symbolic, very significant way.”

But more than that, Rudd said, is a feeling of betrayal that veterans can feel from the VA medical system itself. “They feel like the very institution that they have committed to serve and sacrifice for and experience significant loss for has betrayed them,” he said. These types of policy changes “confirm that kind of betrayal.

An Abrupt End to Treatment

For Ervin, the length of treatment mattered, she said. She is still prepared to huddle in the bathtub with a comforter when a thunderstorm hits, and panics during the Fourth of July. But with long-term treatment and the weekly support of a therapist, she said she went from being homeless to working at a shelter for homeless men.

“I don’t give a damn how long it’s been,” she said. “Now you want to take it away, because you’re looking at the years, not at the accomplishments.”

Her younger sister, Alice Ransom, said she has seen “a tremendous change” in Ervin in the years that she has been in therapy. Ransom, who describes her sister as her “rock,” watched

her go from suicidal and having trouble holding down a job, to becoming a vibrant, productive person. But now, Ransom said, “I don’t know if she’s gonna slide back to her old feelings and ways.”

What was especially difficult for Ervin was the abruptness with which her sessions ended. Ervin said she wasn’t transitioned from weekly appointments to monthly, or even given much of a warning.

“They didn’t wean me off,” she said, “They just said, that day, ‘That’s it. Gone.’”

VA’s Kasperowicz disputes that, saying when Ervin’s “most recent round of care with a psychologist concluded in September,” the department “immediately reached out to the veteran to assess next steps and schedule additional treatment.” He said Ervin “has declined to engage in this follow-up discussion so far.”

Ervin said VA only reached out after she called the VA crisis line, and she no longer trusts the Northport VA to have her best interests in mind when it comes to mental health treatment. She is trying group therapy and is still being followed by a VA psychiatrist.

But since her therapy ended, Ervin said she has experienced an increase in anxiety, irritability, and other symptoms. At work, she said, “I can’t afford to be having outbursts,” so she stuffs her feelings down as much as possible.

At the shelter, coworker Louis Marcelin said, Ervin is the one going “above and beyond,” advocating on behalf of homeless veterans and linking them to services.

Now, her coworkers worry about her. Marcelin said Ervin became so anxious at work one day about no longer having access to therapy that she had to go to the hospital. “I never saw her like that,” he said.

Instead of feeling like herself, these days Ervin said she just feels tired. “I can see myself going backwards.”

This War Horse news story was edited by Mike Frankel, fact-checked by Jess Rohan, and copy-edited by Mitchell Hansen-Dewar. Hrisanthi Pickett wrote the headlines. This article first appeared on The War Horse and is republished here under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

This forward-looking approach ensures that the lab is prepared to meet the evolving needs of the Air Force and to continue its vital role in safeguarding the nation’s air power.

“I think there will always be a need for First Article Testing in the Air Force to ensure initial quality of manufactured parts,” said Collins. “However, as technology advances, inspection and testing equipment will not only perform these checks with increased speed and efficiency, but they will also capture a level of detail that was previously impossible.”

READINESS

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disastrous situation.

“The use of incorrect materials in components represents one of the most severe defects we encounter in the First Article Test Lab,” he said. “In a recent case, a vendor-supplied part, certified as correctly heat-treated, failed our lab’s hardness testing to verify the material’s strength. Had this part been used in an aircraft repair, the discrepancy in material properties could have resulted in premature equipment failure, with potentially catastrophic consequences depending on the specific component.”

The lab’s meticulous inspections are particularly critical for some of the Air Force’s key weapons systems, including the C-17, C-130, F-15 and C-5 aircraft. The availability of high-quality spare parts is essential for keeping these aircraft mission ready and able to respond to global contingencies without delay.

“If a plane is in for periodic maintenance and requires a new part, it’s important that the replacement is a quality part that will last until its next repair cycle,” said Collins.

“Having quality spare parts on hand ensures the mechanics can repair the planes quickly and get them ready to fly for any urgent mission around the world.”

The First Article Test Lab’s impact extends beyond immediate readiness, playing a crucial role in the long-term sustainment of the Air Force’s fleet. By preventing the introduction of substandard parts into the supply chain, the lab helps to avoid costly repairs and extends the lifespan of aging aircraft.

“Our overall mission at the WR-ALC is to deliver air power and combat readiness for our nation,” said Collins.

“The First Article Testing team fuels this mission by providing expert analysis that ensures our mission partners achieve on time, on cost and high-quality depot maintenance. If we do that successfully, we eliminate delays and guarantee the availability of critical parts to keep our aircraft mission ready.”

As technology continues to advance, the First Article Test Lab remains at the forefront of innovation. The team is constantly exploring new methods and technologies to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its testing processes.

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HOLD THE LINE FOR SAFE JOBS



Feds probe MARTA safety, spending after two stabbings

by Ty Tagami

ATLANTA — The federal government will review safety protocols and security spending at Atlanta’s transit agency after two stabbing attacks last week, one of them fatal.

The investigation comes as Atlanta’s Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority was supposed to be celebrating an important milestone with a public unveiling of its new high-tech railcars and fare gates.

MARTA has been upgrading its trains and stations in preparation for visitors from across the globe for the FIFA World Cup, which begins in Atlanta on June 15.

The first stabbing occurred after lunchtime on May 24 when a 40-year-old man was attacked in an Atlanta MARTA station. The next one, just before noon on Saturday south of downtown, left a great-grandmother from Atlanta dead.

Margaret Swan, 66, was looking at her phone while seated on a train headed away from Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, as many visitors will soon be doing.

Surveillance footage showed a man standing nearby as he pulled a folding knife from his right pants pocket and stabbed her more than 20 times around the chest and neck, according to a criminal complaint filed Tuesday in a U.S. magistrate judge’s courtroom in Atlanta.

Terrified passengers ran to the other side of the train, calling for help.

John Elijah Matthews, 25, of Decatur, was arrested at the next stop, the Oakland City station, and charged in the killing, according to the complaint, which was filed by an FBI special agent.

Matthews was formally accused on charges of committing Violence Against a Mass Transportation System.

MARTA has been installing a new payment system intended to ease friction at fare gates. It

allows riders to tap their phones to pay. Riders can now add a MARTA Breeze transit card to their phone’s payment system without downloading the MARTA application.

Previously, riders had to use the Breeze Mobile app, which has a rating of 1.5 out of five stars in Apple’s App Store.

MARTA has also been updating some of its rolling stock, adding railcars that feature open gangways, digital customer information displays and wireless charging stations.

The new CQ400 railcars, built by the Swiss company Stadler, are “the most technologically advanced in the country,” MARTA said last week, as it announced an unveiling for this week.

The agency had planned to show off the new railcars at an event for reporters on Thursday at its Avondale station in Decatur.

But on Tuesday, the day Matthews was charged in connection with Swan’s death, the agency canceled the event.

Amid data center backlash, Google gives \$1M for South Georgia wetlands

ATLANTA — Google will spend \$1 million on conservation work in a watershed in South Georgia near one of its data centers.

The donation, announced this week, is part of a \$17 million commitment by Google to support seven waterway and infrastructure improvement projects nationwide. In Georgia, the nonprofit Ducks Unlimited will be putting Google’s money toward the restoration of 35 acres of wetlands in the Flint River Wildlife Management Area.

Google has a data center nearby, in Douglas County.

Data centers often use a significant amount of water to cool computer servers, although the one in Douglas County uses recycled wastewater. Google’s contribution announcement comes amid a backlash against data centers.

Data centers are a hot topic in Georgia, too. They need a lot of electricity to power their computer servers, so the Georgia

Public Service Commission (PSC), a state regulator, voted in December to let monopoly utility Georgia Power add nearly 10 gigawatts of power production, mostly for data centers.

That has raised concerns about ratepayers covering the cost of new gas turbines and utility lines to benefit big tech companies. Georgia Power has pledged not to shift costs like that.

Critics counter that those are short-term pledges and that long-term costs could still fall on regular ratepayers.

Kemp adds local sales-tax option for property tax cuts to special session call

ATLANTA — Some homeowners could eventually see a ro back in their property tax bills after Gov. Brian Kemp revised his call for a special session.

Last month, Kemp ordered lawmakers back to the Capitol to redraw district lines and to address legal concerns with the state’s voting system.

On Wednesday he expanded his proclamation to allow lawmakers from each county to vote on a sales tax-funded subsidy for homeowners.

A 1% Local Homestead Option Sales Tax (LHOST) would go before voters in each county in November if their local legislative delegation approves a referendum at the special legislative session, which starts June 17.

The sales taxes, which would go into effect in 2028, would subsidize property taxes owed by homeowners.

The new sales tax was authorized by Kemp’s signature on Senate Bill 33, which will cap increases in county valuations of owner-occupied homes at the rate of inflation.

The law is aimed at restraining rapid rises in value that have been driving up property tax bills.

Any LHOST approved under SB 33 would apply to a variety of products and services, including food, alcohol and motor fuels up to \$3 in retail sales price per gallon.

Kemp’s revised proclamation also calls on lawmakers to ratify after the fact his extended suspension of the 33-cent a gallon motor fuel tax.

After lawmakers temporarily waived that tax in March, Kemp extended it last month using his authority after declaring a state of emergency.

The gas tax suspension ended at midnight Tuesday.

It is unclear how many counties will call for an LHOST.

Clint Mueller, deputy director of ACCG, the association for county commissioners, said Thursday that he had heard of a few interested delegations.

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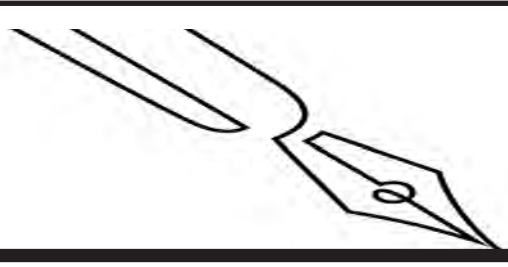
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Just for

King Crossword

- ACROSS**
- 1 Mule, for one
- 5 Unruly group
- 8 Bygone fliers
- 12 Lawman Wyatt
- 13 Stop — dime
- 14 Ornamental jug
- 15 Heart charts
- 16 Business card no.
- 17 Calf-length Stop
- 20 Son of Erik the Red
- 22 "War and Peace" author
- 26 Violin stroke
- 29 Cyclades island
- 30 British verb ending
- 31 Subject, usually
- 32 Fellow
- 33 Healthy
- 34 Internet address
- 35 Continent north of Afr.
- 36 Disinfectant brand
- 37 Oscar-winning actress in "The Fighter"
- 40 Arizona tribe
- 41 Prisoner
- 45 Conspiracy
- 47 Corn core

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16				17			
18					19			20	21			
			22			23					24	25
26	27	28				29				30		
31					32				33			
34				35				36				
37			38				39					
		40					41			42	43	44
45	46					47	48			49		
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

- 49 Big-screen format
- 50 — song (cheaply)
- 51 Lincoln nickname
- 52 Zilch
- 53 Swindles
- 54 Dogpatch adjective
- 55 Musician's jobs
- DOWN**
- 1 Future flower
- 2 Cod cousin
- 3 PTA and NEA, e.g.
- 4 Delta follower
- 5 Slogan
- 6 Count starter
- 7 Inflated party prop
- 8 Big rigs
- 9 Fans of pop icon Taylor
- 10 — Talks (online lecture series)
- 11 Lanka lead-in
- 19 Stitch
- 21 Golf's Ernie
- 23 Pageant crown
- 24 City on a fjord
- 25 Holler
- 26 "E Pluribus —"
- 27 Skin opening
- 28 Megaphone's kin
- 32 "Suffs" or "Rent," e.g.
- 33 Cheyenne's state
- 35 Mentalist's gift
- 36 Cariou of "Blue Bloods"
- 38 Smidgens
- 39 Slander in print
- 42 Mine, in Marseille
- 43 Tart flavor
- 44 Alimony recipients
- 45 USMC rank
- 46 Privy
- 48 Japanese sash

The Garden Bug

Urushiol oil

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac are all species within the genus *Toxicodendron*, which means "poison tree." These types of plants are native to the United States and are found in every state. They all contain an oily resin called **urushiol**, that protects the plant from fungal, bacterial and viral attacks. If urushiol touches your skin, it binds to proteins in your skin cells and can cause redness, itching, swelling and blisters. — Brenda Weaver

Sources: awaytogarden.com, etc.usf.edu, mayoclinic.org

THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

Then he took some of the seed of the land and planted it in a fertile field; he placed it by abundant waters and set it like a willow tree.

EZEKIEL 17:5

Detail of "Peasant with Hoe II" by Georges Seurat (1888)

Five Spot™

Aviators' convention?

F	L	O	C	K

Move as a group

Type of acid

Organizes a hose or rope

Trustworthy

A noteworthy Day

Chickens and turkeys

S	D	R	I	B
S	I	R	O	D
D	I	L	O	S
S	L	I	O	C
C	I	L	O	F
K	C	O	L	F

Solution

Five Spot™

"It's not the doctor bills that worry me, it's the thought of having three daughters."

SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

Force

SUDERS

Grasp

RENAL

Increase

AIRES

Slow

ADMIYR

TODAY'S WORD

UNMARRIED

Today's Word

3. Raise; 4. Myriad

1. Duress; 2. Learn

Solution

SCRAMBLERS

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

THE KEY TO ACHIEVING MAXIMUM HEIGHT ON AN IRON SHOT IS TO OPEN THE CLUBFACE AT ADDRESS, THEN KEEP IT OPEN THROUGH IMPACT BY DELAYING THE ROLL OF THE RIGHT HAND OVER THE LEFT.

TO HIT AN IRON SHOT EXTRA LOW, DELOFT THE CLUBFACE BY SETTING THE HANDS WELL AHEAD OF THE BALL AT ADDRESS, THEN KEEPING THEM AHEAD OF THE CLUBHEAD THROUGH IMPACT.

SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

♦ Easy ♦♦ Medium ♦♦♦ Difficult

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Americanisms

"Sometimes the very thing you're looking for is the one thing you cannot see."

— Vanessa Williams

Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD. IF YOU NEED TO BORROW ANY TOOLS I'VE GOT PLENTY FROM THE LAST GUY WHO DECIDED TO MOVE.

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

Solution time: 25 mins.**Answers****King Crossword**

Weekly SUDOKU

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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

Weekly SUDOKU**Answer**

by Gary Kopervas



CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: E equals F

RE F QFQ BZEBFRIX EBJA
AFYRIO F HRO XPRIY FHJKP
F PFX Y, UJN RX RP QJIZ?
NRP UJKP EFP UZB FQJ.

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Solve Summer Hunger with Fresh Produce and Family-Favorite Snacks

FEATURE IMPACT

Bouncing from activity to activity and event to event this summer is bound to lead to bouts of hunger. To help keep your loved ones going amidst the hustle and bustle of pool days, baseball games and road trips, turn to filling snacks that curb appetites. Fresh, nutritious produce can transform afternoon pick-me-ups into moments of celebration. For example, Dandy Celery from Duda Farm Fresh Foods offers exceptional sweetness, crispiness and consistency in Peanut Butter Toast with Celery and Grapes. A familiar, kid-friendly favorite, this sweet-and-savory combination provides a pleasing crunch from lightly toasted bread, celery and grapes paired with soft, warm peanut butter. Fit for sharing with family and friends, Dill Pickle Dip is ready with the snap of a finger so you can serve a crowd without the hassle. Serve with crackers and celery for an easy solution whether you're hosting a backyard barbecue, tagging along for a tailgate or enjoying a slow afternoon with your nearest and dearest.

Dill Pickle Dip

Recipe courtesy of "Laughing Spatula" on behalf of Duda Farm Fresh Foods
Prep time: 5 minutes
Cook time: 5 minutes
Servings: 6

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 1/2 cup dill pickles, finely chopped, plus additional for garnish
- 1/4 cup Dandy Celery, finely chopped, plus additional for garnish
- 3 tablespoons pickle juice
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- crackers, for serving
- Dandy Celery Dippers, for serving

- Breadcrumb Topping:**
- 1 teaspoon butter
 - 3 tablespoons panko crumbs

Allow cream cheese to soften about 20 minutes outside of refrigerator. While cream cheese is softening, prepare breadcrumb topping. In pan over medium heat, stir butter and breadcrumbs until fully combined. Breadcrumbs will toast in 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat once toasted, as desired. In bowl, mix softened cream cheese, 1/2 cup pickles, 1/4 cup celery, pickle juice, dill, salt and pepper until fully combined. Transfer to serving bowl. Before serving, sprinkle dip with cooled, toasted breadcrumbs and additional pickles and celery. Serve with crackers and celery dippers.

These simple snacks and more delicious summer dishes can be at the heart of your menu when made with Dandy fresh-cut vegetables from Duda Farm Fresh Foods, a leading, trusted American grower and processor of fresh vegetables that's celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2026. Marking a century of leadership in celery innovation, family farming, industry leadership and sustainable growth, it's spent six generations refining its approach to growing, harvesting and delivering high-quality fresh produce. From its early adoption of advanced farming practices to the development of fresh-cut solutions and waterjet cutting technology, the 100-year-old company has maintained a steady focus on improving flavor, efficiency and satisfaction. "Reaching 100 years is a milestone we owe to our dedicated team, strong industry partnerships and commitment to innovation," said Mark Bassetti, president of Duda Farm Fresh Foods. "As we honor our 100-year legacy, we remain focused on growing the future through innovation, sustainability and family values." Search for more summer snack ideas by visiting DudaFresh.com.



Peanut Butter Toast with Celery and Grapes

Recipe courtesy of "Floating Kitchen" on behalf of Duda Farm Fresh Foods
Prep time: 5 minutes
Cook time: 2 minutes
Servings: 2

- 2-3 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
- 2 slices cinnamon-raisin bread, toasted
- 5-6 seedless red grapes, halved
- 1-2 Dandy celery sticks, sliced diagonal
- 1 tablespoon granola
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup
- kale, mustard greens or arugula (optional)

Spread peanut butter evenly over surface of toasted bread. Top with grapes and sliced celery. Sprinkle with granola and drizzle with maple syrup. Top with kale, mustard greens or arugula, if desired.



Give pork chops the steakhouse treatment for Father's Day

Photo and story by Patti Diamond
King Features Syndicate

Father's Day meals don't have to be elaborate to feel special. Sometimes all it takes is setting aside a little extra time and serving something that says, "I thought you'd enjoy this." Many Father's Day menus revolve around steaks, burgers and the backyard grill. This year let's give the humble pork chop the star treatment. Stuffed with apples and onions and finished with herbs and Dijon mustard, they deliver steakhouse flavor without the steakhouse price tag. One of the things I love about cooking is its ability to turn ordinary ingredients into something extraordinary. A celebration doesn't come from the price tag attached to the meal. It comes from the thought behind it.

APPLE & HERB STUFFED PORK CHOPS

Yield: 4 Servings
Total Time: 50 mins.
4 thick-cut pork chops with bone if possible. about 1 1/2

- inch thick
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more as needed
- 1 teaspoon sea salt, plus more to taste
- 1 tablespoon butter, or more olive oil
- 1 apple, Granny Smith or similar, cored and thinly sliced
- 1 medium sweet onion, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme or 2 teaspoons fresh thyme, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary or 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper, plus more to taste
- Toothpicks to secure the stuffing
- Preheat the oven to 375 F.
- Using a small sharp knife, cut a deep pocket into the side of each pork chop, being careful not to cut all the way through. Season the chops inside and out with salt.

Heat an oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Add the oil and brown the pork chops on both sides, about 4 to 5 minutes per side. If the chops have a fat cap, briefly brown it as well. Transfer to a plate. The centers will still be undercooked. Add the butter to the skillet. Cook the onion for 2 to 3 minutes until softened. Add the apple and cook until tender. Stir in the vinegar, then add the panko breadcrumbs and cook for 1 minute more. Remove from the heat. In a small bowl, combine the Dijon mustard, garlic powder, thyme, rosemary and pepper. Spread the mixture over the pork chops and inside the pockets. Fill each pocket generously with the apple mixture and secure with toothpicks if needed. Arrange any remaining apple and onion mixture in the center of the skillet and place the pork chops on top. Cover and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the pork reaches 145 F in the thickest part. Let rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Outdoor grill fest fun with family, friends

Photo and story by Donna Erickson
King Features Syndicate

Open wide windows and doors to welcome in warm weather, friends and outdoor activities! Relaxing weekends are ahead and made just for gathering people together for a picnic at a city park or right on your own turf. A family-style get-together can kick off this longed-for new season with a superlative gathering including the people you know and want to get to know. Of course, some of the basics like burgers and potato salad might be essential to your gathering, but conversations, giggles, hugs, off-kilter moments, and laughter become the lasting impressions that children cherish.

Here are some ideas for prepping a grill fest for all ages:

Get Everyone Involved:

Once you decide on a place and time, divide prep responsibilities for salads, veggies, grilling, desserts, games and entertainment among individuals and families. For example, if cousin Jessica plays the guitar, ask her to bring it along for a rousing songfest. If Uncle Pete plays the fiddle, you'll no doubt get everyone dancing with his music. Get kids' assistance in shucking corn (match tasks to the appropriate ages and skill levels), or encourage others to stage a humorous play or a bicycle-and pet parade.

Beverage Center: Fill a small kiddie pool with bags of crushed ice. Bury canned sodas, juices, sparkling water, watermelon and water balloons in the ice. While the drinks and fruit stay chilled, the balloons will be ready for some cool-down wet fun after the meal.

Fun and Games: Create an atmosphere of activity with active games to play. Setting equipment out encourages people to participate and interact. Bring your ping pong table outside and create a tourney grid to keep players and fans engaged in lively competition. Set out a bubble brew with bubblers, chalk for hopscotch, jump ropes, and baseball gloves. Why not even play a round or two of musical chairs?

Grill Fest Pics: Snap some candid group photos with people posed in a large empty frame, hanging from a tree branch.

Plant a Family Tree: Do you have a favorite picnicking spot? Somewhere at Aunt Chloe's vineyard or in your grandfather's backyard? Plant a "family tree" in honor of a loved one at the location you choose and watch it grow over the years -- right along with the children who planted it.

