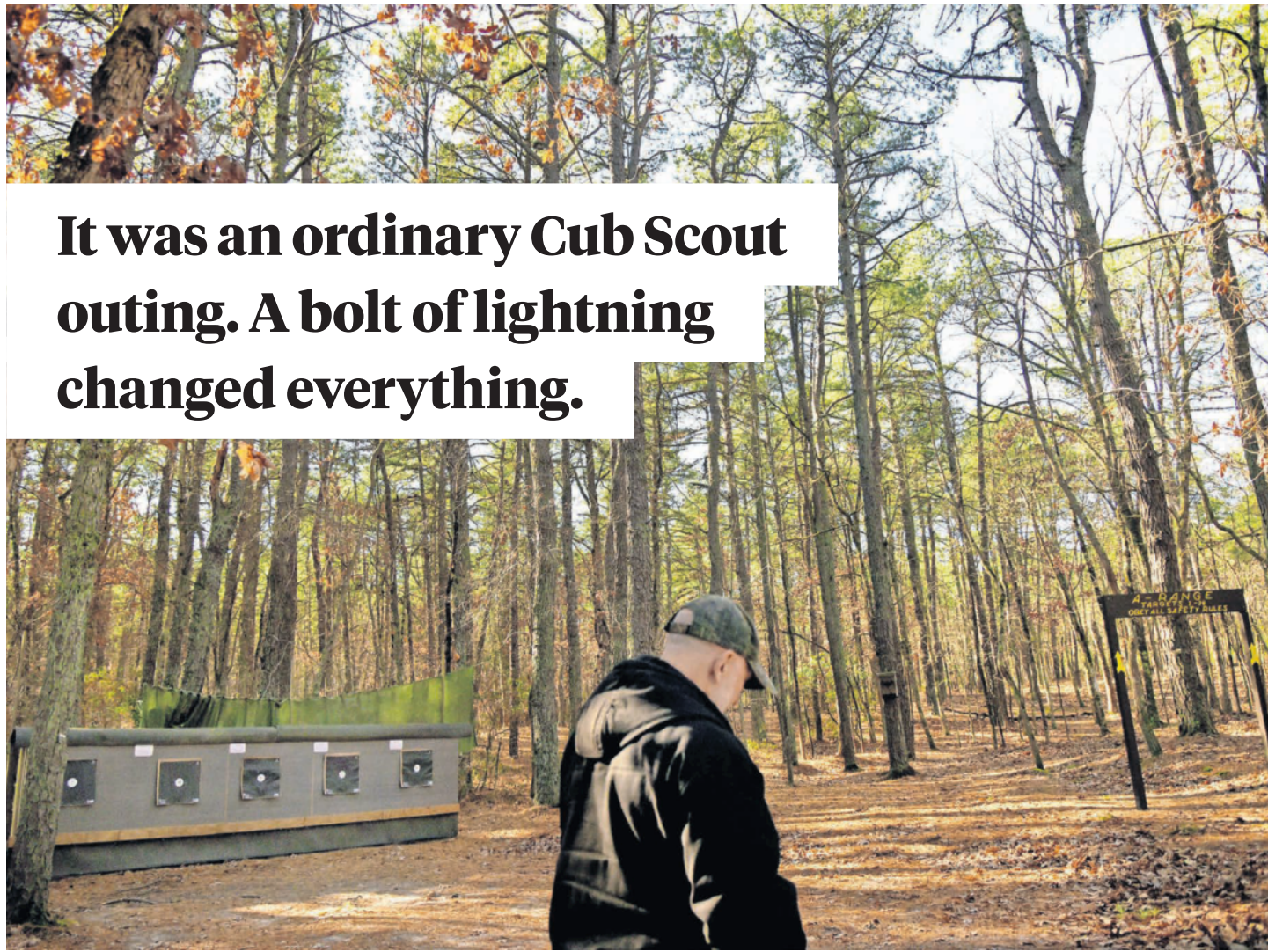


**SUMMER MOVIES**

FROM THE MINIONS TO 'THE ODYSSEY,' HOLLYWOOD'S SUMMER MOVIE SEASON IS PACKED WITH BIG NAMES AND FRANCHISES. **16**

# Sunday

**South Jersey TIMES**



**It was an ordinary Cub Scout outing. A bolt of lightning changed everything.**

Lightning struck last July at a Cub Scout outing in the Pine Barrens. "We weren't doing anything dangerous. We weren't out where we weren't supposed to be," said Bud Thomas, above, a volunteer instructor who was injured in the strike. *Jim Lowney, for NJ.com*

*"It was like the finger of God came down," one witness recalls of the incident that left an instructor dead and sent 14 people to the hospital.*

Riley Yates *NJ.com*

It came out of nowhere, the "ungodly" sound.

A deafening roar, a blazing bright light, an earth-shaking jolt. And with that stroke of lightning, a Cub Scouts outing in New Jersey's Pine Barrens became a triage center.

"When I turned around and looked to see what happened, everybody was on the ground," remembered 82-year-old volunteer Gene Grodzki. "Kids, parents, all of our guys were down."

A 10-year-old boy was blown out of his sneakers. Another had burns up his legs and back. Kids were in shock, their parents hugging them, trying to comfort them. A scout leader had holes in the bottom of her boots and burns on her feet.

One instructor at the outdoor archery club in Jackson was knocked unconscious, awakening to wonder why he was being loaded into an ambulance. And another — 61-year-old Robert B. Montgomery of Cinnaminson, an electrical engineer — was killed instantly.

They had all come together that day last summer — about a dozen kids ages 7 to 12, their pack leaders and parents, and five volunteer coaches — so they could learn archery. It was supposed to be a fun chance for them to be outdoors experiencing something new in nature.

Then in an instant, nothing was the same.

Near a tree, the ground exploded, tossing a wheelbarrow's worth of dirt into the air. A quiver of arrows was scattered like pickup sticks, their carbon shafts bursting, their feathers blown off.

Another volunteer, Dan Afonso, was knocked off his feet, losing his glasses and telling police that it felt like someone had punched him in the back.



The range, Black Knight Bowbenders, sits on 50 acres of uninterrupted woods. It has quietly operated for more than 65 years. *Dave Hernandez, for NJ.com*

"I just went flying through the air," he said.

"It's a lot of juice," responded officer William Kozna, one of the first cops to arrive.

Grodzki's back was turned when the bolt hit, but he could feel the electricity, which made the hair on his arms stand on end.

"It was like the finger of God came down," he said.

Police body camera video captured the chaos. Officers barreling down potted Perrineville Road at 55 miles an hour, their cars bottoming out as they rushed to respond.

"There's a bunch of kids screaming here," a frantic parent told a dispatcher, according to audio also released by Jackson following a public records request. "My son got struck."

Ambulances, stretchers and flashing police lights. A woman stood, her hands over her face in disbelief, looking stunned. The scene was so complicated, authorities handed out wristbands to keep track of everyone.

"Am I going to be OK?" one of the burned

boys asked police.

"Yeah, you're going to be fine. You're good," officer Tyler Melnick reassured him, before he was taken to an ambulance.

"Bye, Daddy," he told his father, his voice shaking.

The range, Black Knight Bowbenders, sits on 50 acres of uninterrupted woods, a close-knit club of 130 members that has quietly operated on a sprawling stretch of tall pine woods for more than 65 years.

The bolt hit the only spot where people were that day.

"What are the odds?" Grodzki marveled.

We all use the phrase to describe a twist of fate that seems impossible, but happens anyway — *it was like being struck by lightning.*

The tragedy of July 16, 2025, was no metaphor, but a heartbreaking calamity in which nature reminded us of its awesome power — even in a state known more for its suburbs, malls, juggles and turnpikes than its unclaimed stretches of wilderness. **SEE LIGHTNING, A2**

**AIR TRAVEL**

## As Spirit Airlines shutter, impact felt in Jersey

*Company had large presence at Atlantic City, Newark airports.*

**Staff and wire reports**

Spirit Airlines said Saturday it is going out of business and has begun "an orderly wind-down of our operations, effective immediately."

The U.S.-based, low-cost airline said it was canceling all flights and shutting down customer service after 34 years in business.

The abrupt shutdown was expected to hit New Jersey airports hard, particularly Atlantic City International Airport — where Spirit has been one of only a few commercial carriers — and Newark Liberty International Airport, where the airline maintained a major operating base.

Although Spirit had gone bankrupt twice before, the company said high oil prices, which have been rising because of the war with Iran, made it impossible to stay aloft.

Some passengers arrived Saturday for flights and were stunned to find them canceled, while workers learned overnight they were out of jobs.

The loss of Spirit's low-cost service is also likely to reduce flight options and drive up fares as the competition seeks to absorb passengers and routes.

"To our Guests: all flights have been canceled, and customer service is no longer available," Spirit said in a statement.

"We are proud of the impact of our ultra-low-cost model on the industry over the last 34 years and had hoped to serve our guests for many years to come," the statement read. **SEE AIR TRAVEL, A8**

**KENILWORTH**

## \$1.8B AI data center coming to tiny town

*Residents say they were unaware of the project.*

Nyah Marshall *NJ.com*

A \$1.8 billion artificial intelligence data center set to open in a Union County borough is facing pushback from residents who say they had no idea it was coming to their 2-square-mile community.

Less than 20 miles from New York City, the nearly 400,000-square-foot data center is being built in Kenilworth on the site of a former pharmaceutical company headquarters.

Construction began in September, and the facility is expected to be fully operational by early 2027, according to planning documents.

But some of the town's 8,500 residents say they only just learned about the project in recent weeks as concerns about the site began circulating online and through community forums.

"This was not public information — not to Union County residents, and not even to **SEE KENILWORTH, A4**

**NATION & WORLD**

## Despite warnings, raw milk becoming more widely available

More than three dozen bills supporting raw milk have been introduced in statehouses across the nation. Dairy farmers say they can barely keep it in stock, even though prices can exceed \$10 or \$20 a gallon. **Page C1**



**SPORTS**

## Phillies' 4-game winning streak comes to an end

Miami Marlins' Max Meyer dominated with a career-high seven innings, silencing Philadelphia's bats in a 4-0 shutout loss. Jesús Luzardo (2-3, 5.50) will start for the Phillies today. **Page F1**

