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(Courtesy photo)

South Arkansas Arts Center has announced cast for Neil Simon's Rumors

SOUTH ARKANSAS ARTS CENTER

The South Arkansas Arts Center (SAAC) has announced the cast for its upcoming production of "Rumors" by Neil Simon, generously sponsored by Murphy-Pitard Jewelers and All About Flowers. The fast-paced farce will take the SAAC stage April 10-12 and 16-18, bringing a night of laughter, confusion, and classic comedy to audiences.

The production features Kate Flynn as Chris Gorman and Bill Meyer as Ken Gorman, the first guests to arrive at the disastrous dinner party. Mary Catherine White appears as Claire Ganz alongside Steven Vick as Leonard Ganz, while Abby Cate plays Cookie Cusack opposite Brandon Johnson as Ernie Cusack. Rounding out the couples are Glenn Cooper played by Levi Nesbitt and Cassie Cooper played

by a local actor. Jacarlus Hill portrays Officer Welch, and Callie Blair appears as Officer Pudney.

Director Rhett Davis said rehearsals have been filled with laughter as the ensemble builds strong chemistry. "Our cast has been having a ton of fun every night and you can see the chemistry on the stage between each of the couples in the show," Davis said. "We have a lot of familiar faces on the stage, and they're really blending well as an ensemble introducing new elements nightly that have myself and Emma Lawyer, stage manager, in stitches."

Set in a large, tastefully appointed townhouse in Sneden's Landing, the story begins when the Deputy Mayor of New York, Charlie Brock, has just shot himself. Though it's only a flesh wound, the incident sets off a chain reaction of panic

and deception among the guests arriving for his tenth wedding anniversary party. With Charlie bleeding in another room and his wife Myra nowhere to be found, the guests concoct increasingly elaborate explanations, sending the evening into a whirlwind of mistaken identities, frantic cover-ups, and outrageous comedy. Brimming with razor-sharp wit, slapstick mishaps, and Simon's trademark charm, Rumors by Neil Simon is a laugh-out-loud comedy that proves the truth may be the funniest thing of all.

Performances will take place April 10-12 and 16-18 at the South Arkansas Arts Center, located at 110 E. 5th Street. Please note, show times have changed; night performances will begin at 7pm and the matinee will begin at 2pm. For more information, call 870-862-5474 or visit SAAC online at www.saac-arts.org.

Ouachita County now under a burn ban

BY KATE FLYNN

Ouachita County Judge Robert McAdoo has placed Ouachita County under a burn ban as the entire state of Arkansas faces a moderate to high risk of wildfires.

While many counties in the area have not yet announced burn bans, Dallas and Bradley counties are also under a burn ban.

While under a burn ban, no outdoor burning is allowed, and it is important to remember to practice indoor and outdoor fire safety.

"Sparks from activities such as fireworks, outdoor equipment, or open flames can ignite dry vegetation and cause fires to spread quickly," stated a news release about wildfire prevention from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture in Dec. 2025.

Safety tips from the department include:

Avoid outdoor burning and any activity involving open flames, including fire-

works, campfires, trash burning, grilling with open flames, and prescribed or controlled burns.

Use caution when driving or operating machinery in dry areas. Avoid driving over dry grass, ensure trailer chains are off the ground, and do not drive on flat tires.

Be aware of dry conditions when outdoors. If using fireworks, keep water nearby to quickly extinguish any sparks.

If you see a fire, call 1-800-468-8834. Avoid flying drones near fires, as they can interfere with firefighting efforts.

Keep up to date on conditions across the state by viewing the county-by-county wildfire map and following the Department on social media.

To view the current wildfire risk map, visit the Department of Agriculture website at agriculture.arkansas.gov or mip.agri.arkansas.gov/agtools/Forestry/Fire_Info?show_districts=False



Wildfire risk and burn ban map from Monday morning (image courtesy of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture)

Launching rockets takes off with young and old rocketeers alike in Central Arkansas

SEAN CLANCY

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Tim Becker is seated at a small table in a field on a recent Saturday afternoon at Two Rivers Park in Pulaski County. With a small crowd around him, he begins the countdown.

"I've got continuity, and we're going in five, four, three, two, one."

Becker, who lives in Benton, pushes a red button on a small control panel and whoooooosssssshhhhhhhhh, a small white rocket is launched. It quickly climbs into the blue sky above the green field to oohs, ahhs and joyous laughter from the group watching the takeoff.

Shortly after the single-motor rocket has reached its apogee, a parachute opens and it floats gently back to earth, somewhere in the garden plots behind the launch site.

The rocket's owner, Neil Furqueron of Little Rock, sets off to find it.

"That's how Neil gets his steps in," Becker says before beginning the countdown for the next launch.

Furqueron and Becker are members of the Central Arkansas Rocketry club. One Saturday a month the club comes to this spacious field to send their rockets skyward.

The club was founded about four years ago by Shan Wade of Little Rock, who had been teaching rocketry to classes of kids for a couple of years. The Arkansas group is local Section 909 of the National Association of Rocketry, which has been around since 1957.

Central Arkansas Rocketry, which Wade says has about 12 members, was started "in the hopes of connecting with fellow rocketeers in the Central Arkansas area as well as promoting both the sport of Rocketry and Rocket Science among Arkansans of all ages," according to its website, centralarkansasrocketry.org.

The club has worked with rocketry groups in several Arkansas schools and is helping students from Little Rock Central High School's American Rocketry Challenge (ARC) team, who would fly their rocket with the club later in the afternoon. The flight was "very good," Wade says in a text.

'A REAL ROCKET'

Wade has been a rocketeer for about 40 years. It all began when he

was 10 years old and living in Oklahoma. He'd developed an interest in aviation and space and saw an ad for a homemade space shuttle rocket kit in the back of a comic book.

"You had to sell customized greeting cards to get it," he says. "I had to sell so many sets of greeting cards, and I think I ended up buying a few for myself to make the limit."

Unlike some of those old back-of-the-comics ads that didn't always live up to the hype (X-ray glasses, "sea monkeys"), the kit Wade received was "a real rocket," he says, still impressed all these years later. "I can't tell you how long I worked on it, but I built it myself. It was pretty complicated."

Wade's family lived on about five acres of land near Stigler, Okla., which offered plenty of room for his new rocket hobby. His first launch, however, wasn't without hangups.

"It took off and arced over into this elm tree about 100 yards away," says Wade, who works for the Pulaski County sheriff's office. "There it stayed until it came down in a big storm a few months later. But I loved it and continued on."

Rocket-eating trees are an occupational hazard. Wade points to a row of trees on the northeast edge of the field where one of his rockets still hangs from its parachute.

The field at Two Rivers Park is one of just a few public places the club is allowed to fly their rockets.

"Private land is getting harder to find," Wade says. "Little Rock doesn't allow it in the city limits."

Launches are allowed in an area of Burns Park in North Little Rock, he adds, but there are several restrictions.

"Here in the county, they don't have those regulations," Wade says.

"I wish it were larger," Furqueron says of the field. "My dream would be to find a sod farm out east that would let me launch there."

ROCKET KITS

The rockets flown this afternoon by the club are low- and mid-powered craft that don't require a special license, Wade says. Many are made from kits produced by Denver-based Estes Industries, which has been around since the late 1950s. Sending them skyward are motors that look like rolls of coins and are filled with

propellants like compressed black powder or ammonium perchlorate composite.

When ready to fly, they are attached to thin metal rods on small launch pads on a pair of metal sawhorses. They're connected by a wire to a 12-volt battery, which itself is connected to a silver box with a launch pad selection switch and a red launch button that Becker pushes after the countdown. Before each launch, he reads off a card filled out by the rocket's owner that includes the date, the owner's name, the rocket model and other information.

Most of the rockets are a few feet tall, but some are bigger. Wade has brought his black, metallic flake, 7-foot-3-inch, mid-power AeroTech Mirage rocket that he built from a kit and that he will connect to a large metal rail and launch from a pad nearby.

There's also one shaped like a wire spool, a far cry from the typical, sleek rocket design.

"This should not fly," says club member Steve Scharenborg, 69. "We're going to prove that it does. You put a big enough motor in it and you can fly a brick."

OLD SCHOOL HOBBY

Jeff Mercer of Greenbrier is a 71-year-old "born-again rocketeer."

He got into rocketry as a kid in 1970, but went on to pursue other interests. Now he's retired from the Northwest Arkansas National Airport, his kids are grown and he has the rocket bug again.

"I joined up with this group of guys," he says of the rocketry club, "and it's been a real neat experience."

Along with the seven rockets Mercer brought today is an Estes catalog he has had since 1967. Back then an Astron Alpha, touted in the ad copy as a "great 'first' rocket," was going for \$1.50. Nowadays rockets can start around \$14 and go up to about \$160. Like most hobbies, things can get pricier.

But, Mercer says, "it's not crazy expensive. You can spend between \$15 and \$100 and have a good rocket."

He still gets the same enjoyment building and launching rockets now as he did when he was young.

"There's something about that

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Trump says US is talking with an Iranian leader as he extends deadline for striking power plants

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — U.S. President Donald Trump said Monday the U.S. was talking with a "respected" Iranian leader and claimed the Islamic Republic was eager for a deal to end the war. He also extended a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on its power plants, saying it has an additional five days.

Trump's turnaround, which held out the possibility of resolving the war now in its fourth week, served to drive down oil prices and jolt stocks. It offered a reprieve after the U.S. and Iran traded threats over the weekend that could have cut electricity to millions in Iran and around the Gulf, and knocked out desalination plants providing many desert nations with drinking water.

Trump told reporters Iran wants "to make a deal," and claimed U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner had held talks with an Iranian leader on Sunday. He did not say who that was, but said the U.S. has not talked to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

Iran denied talks had been held. "No negotiations have been held with the US," Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf posted on X, adding that "fakenews is used to manipulate the financial and oil markets."

Trump said Iran would give up its enriched uranium

Trump said if a deal is reached, the U.S. would move to take Iran's enriched uranium, which is critical to its disputed nuclear program. Iran has adamantly refused such demands in the past, insisting it has the right to enrich uranium

for peaceful purposes.

Turkey and Egypt meanwhile said they had spoken to the warring parties, the first sign of coordinated mediation from regional heavyweights.

The war launched by the United States and Israel has killed more than 2,000 people, shaken the global economy, sent oil prices surging, and endangered some of the world's busiest air corridors.

Trump threatened over the weekend to "obliterate" Iran's power plants unless the country releases its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passed before the war, within 48 hours. That deadline would have expired late Monday Washington time.

The five-day extension was "subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions," Trump said.

Speaking later in Tennessee, Trump said his administration has been negotiating "for a long time" with Iran.

"They want peace," Trump said. "They've agreed they will not have a nuclear weapon, you know, etc., etc. but we'll see." He said there's a "very good chance" a deal will be reached this week, crediting his threat to blow up Iranian power plants.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer indicated he was aware of talks between Iran and the U.S.

"We, the U.K., were aware that was happening," he said Monday, without giving further details.

Possible international mediation

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he spoke by phone with his

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Rubio to testify in trial of former roommate accused of secretly lobbying for Venezuela

JOSHUA GOODMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI — The federal trial of a former Miami congressman accused of secretly lobbying for Venezuela's government during the first Trump administration began Monday with Secretary of State Marco Rubio set to testify over his interactions with his old friend.

Prosecutors allege David Rivera was a hired gun for former President Nicolás Maduro, leveraging Republican connections from his time in Congress to push the White House to abandon its hard line on Venezuela's socialist government.

Rivera, who at one time had been Rubio's roommate in Florida, allegedly persuaded then Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez — now Venezuela's acting president — to award him a \$50 million lobbying contract to be paid by state oil company PDVSA. As part of the alleged foreign influence campaign, prosecutors say Rivera was aided by Texas Republican Rep. Pete Sessions and a convicted Cali cartel associate as he sought meetings with the White House and Exxon Mobil on Maduro's behalf.

The trial offers a rare glimpse into the often unseemly role Miami — long a haven for exiles, corruption and anti-communist crusaders — plays in shaping U.S. policy in Latin America. As such, it is perhaps fitting that Rubio, Miami's most prominent politician, is set to take the stand Tuesday about his meetings with Rivera while the former congressman and an associate were allegedly helping Maduro mount a charm offensive in Washington.

Also likely to face scrutiny is Rodríguez, who relied on Rivera to set up meetings in New York, Caracas, Washington and Dallas in a bid to build U.S. support for normalizing relations with Venezuela — an effort that failed at the time but now appears within reach, albeit on unequal terms, following Maduro's ouster and the ascent of his more pragmatic aide.

"This case is about two things: greed and betrayal," prosecutor Roger Cruz said in his opening statement Monday. "The evidence will show that for \$50 million these two defendants made a pact to secretly lobby for Nicolás Maduro, the communist director, and his second in command Delcy Rodríguez."

Indictment details alleged covert lobbying and money-laundering scheme

An 11-count indictment, unsealed in 2022, charges Rivera and Miami political consultant Esther Nuhfer with money laundering and failing to register as a foreign agent.

Prosecutors allege that to hide their work, Rivera set up an encrypted chat group called MIA — for Miami — with his main conduit to the Maduro government: Venezuelan media tycoon Raúl Gorrín, who was subsequently charged in the U.S. with bribing top Venezuelan officials.



Then Republican U.S. Senate candidate Marco Rubio, left, accompanied by then Republican candidate for Congress David Rivera, talks to reporters on Oct. 20, 2010 in Miami. (AP photo/Alan Diaz, file)

Members of the group used playful code words to discuss their activities: Maduro was the "bus driver," Sessions "Sombrero," Rodríguez "The Lady in Red," and millions of dollars "melons," according to prosecutors.

Rivera, 60, denies wrongdoing. His attorneys counter that his one-man firm, Interamerican Consulting, was hired by an American subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned oil company — not PDVSA itself — and therefore did not need to register as a foreign agent.

His three-month, \$50 million contract, they say, was focused exclusively on luring Exxon back to Venezuela — commercial work that is generally exempt from the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

"This is like a murder case without a murder, a drugs case without drugs, a kidnapping case without a kidnapping," Rivera's defense attorney Ed Shohat said in his opening statement to the 12-person jury.

"Nothing happened," he added. "Not one single policy of the U.S. was impacted by this case."

Rivera's meetings with Rubio and others was wholly distinct from that consulting work, Shohat said, and tied to efforts he undertook with Maduro's opponents to usher in leadership less hostile to the U.S.

He described Rivera as a "staunch freedom fighter" and ardent opponent of communism who would never do anything to benefit Maduro. "The government's theory is utterly preposterous."

Plaintiffs in a parallel civil case accuse Rivera of doing little of the promised work and using the contract as cover for illegal lobbying. Of the roughly \$20 million he received, \$3.75 million went to a South Florida company that maintained Gorrín's luxury yacht.

'No turkey' without Rubio

Rubio's expected testimony is highly unusual — not since Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan testified at a mafia trial in 1983 has a sitting member of the president's

Cabinet taken the stand in a criminal trial.

While Rubio isn't charged and there's no indication in the indictment that he acted improperly as a senator at the time, prosecutors say Rivera viewed him as a key ally in his outreach to the White House. For Rubio, prosecutors said in a pre-trial hearing last week, contact with Gorrín offered a backchannel to Caracas at a time U.S. authorities had detected a possible death threat against him from Venezuelan socialist party boss Diosdado Cabello.

Rivera and Rubio met at the senator's Washington home on July 9, 2017, according to the indictment. Rivera, the indictment says, told Rubio that he was working with Gorrín, who had persuaded Maduro to accept a deal in which he would hold free and fair elections.

"Remember, U.S. should facilitate, not just support, a negotiated solution," Rivera texted Rubio two days later as the senator was set to meet Trump, the indictment says. "No vengeance, reconciliation."

Following a second meeting between Rubio, Rivera, Gorrín and others, Rivera remarked in the chat that the bus driver — Maduro — would have to pay him for setting up the meeting with Rubio. Without the senator's support, Rivera said, there would be "no turkey," he wrote. At the same time, the group was trying to secure a meeting with White House aide Kellyanne Conway.

The outreach quickly unraveled, however. Later that month, Trump sanctioned Maduro and labeled him a "dictator," launching a "maximum pressure" campaign to unseat the president. Rubio took to the Venezuelan airwaves to press the White House's agenda.

"For Nicolás Maduro, who I am sure is watching, the current path you are on will not end well for you," Rubio said July 31, 2017, in a rare 10-minute address to the Venezuelan people that aired on Gorrín's network.

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Kim vows to 'irreversibly' cement North Korea's nuclear status, calls South 'most hostile'

KIM TONG-HYUNG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has pledged to irreversibly cement his country's status as a nuclear power while maintaining a hard-line stance toward South Korea, which he called the "most hostile" state, state media said Tuesday.

In a speech Monday to Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, Kim accused the United States of global "state terrorism and aggression," in an apparent reference to the war in the Middle East, and said the North will play a more forceful role in a united front against Washington amid rising anti-American sentiment. But Kim didn't call out U.S. President Donald Trump by name and said whether his adversaries "choose confrontation or peaceful coexistence is up to them, and we are prepared to respond to any choice."

His comments largely aligned with his statements at last month's ruling Workers' Party Congress, where he vilified Seoul but left open the door for dialogue with the Trump administration,

urging Washington to drop its demands for the North's nuclear disarmament as a precondition for talks.

State media said the Supreme People's Assembly, which concluded its two-day session Monday, passed a revised constitution but did not specify the changes. There had been expectations the revisions would codify South Korea as a permanent enemy and remove references to shared nationhood. That's in line with Kim's hard-line stance after he declared in 2024 that the North would abandon its long-term goal of a peaceful unification with the South.

Analysts say Kim's vilification of South Korea reflects his view that Seoul, which helped arrange his first meetings with Trump in 2018 and 2019, is no longer a useful intermediary with Washington but an obstacle to his push for a more assertive regional role. He has also shown sensitivity to South Korean soft power, driving aggressive campaigns to block the influence of its culture and language among North Koreans as he seeks to tighten

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Rockets

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anticipation of the countdown — five, four, three, two one. It's the same whether you're 15 years old or 100 years old. It's still a thrill to watch something you created take off into the sky and come back so you can do it again."

Furqueron, 65, also notes rocketeering's connection to his baby-boomer youth.

"It's a nostalgic thing from childhood," he says. "At the time, during NASA's Saturn rocket program, kids were building rockets. A lot of (current hobbyists) are from that era. It drops off, and they pick it up again."

A NEW GENERATION

While some club members are revisiting the hobby from their younger days, a new generation is making its own memories.

Along with the students from Central who will be here later, there are even younger rocketeers at the park, including 5-year-old

Beau Denman, who is here with his dad, Brad, for his first rocket launch.

Simon Woodard is a 7-year-old first grader from Little Rock who has been into rockets for about four years.

"We launched some on our own and then found this club on Facebook," says Simon's dad, Mark Woodard, who has also brought his younger son, Clark, a toddler who is at his first rocket launch. "He's always had a lot of fun coming here."

The club members were "super helpful when we first came by," Woodard adds. "We didn't always know what we were doing and they were, like, 'oh, you don't want to use this motor, use this kind. And use this kind of wadding and pack it this way so it fires right.'"

Introducing youngsters to rocketeering is a priority for the club, Wade says.

"We want to promote rocketry. It's a great STEM activity."

Trump

• Continued from Page 1A

Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan. Turkey has been an intermediary in past talks between Tehran and Washington.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry declined to comment Monday on whether the country had relayed messages between Iran and the U.S. On Sunday, Turkish officials said Fidan had also spoken to his counterparts from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, and the European Union, as well as with U.S. officials as part of efforts to end the war.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said Cairo has delivered "clear messages" to Iran focusing on de-escalating the conflict, according to his office. Egypt's Foreign Ministry said it was making "constant efforts and communications" with all parties.

An Egyptian official said the U.S. and Iran exchanged messages through Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan over the weekend aimed at averting strikes on energy infrastructure. The official was not authorized to speak to the media and so spoke on condition of anonymity.

Iran says Trump backed down

In the wake of Trump's turnaround, Iran's semiofficial Fars and Tasnim news agencies portrayed the American president as backing down.

"Since the start of the war, messages have been sent to Tehran by some mediators, but Iran's clear response has been that it will continue its defense until the required level of deterrence is achieved," Tasnim said. "With this kind of psychological warfare, neither the Strait of Hormuz will return to prewar conditions nor will calm return

to energy markets."

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard had promised retaliation if Trump carried out his threat, saying Iran would hit power plants supplying electricity to American bases, "as well as the economic, industrial and energy infrastructures in which Americans have shares."

Qalibaf, the parliament speaker, said earlier that Iran would consider vital infrastructure across the region to be legitimate targets, including desalination facilities critical for drinking water in Gulf nations.

The Fars news agency, which is close to the Revolutionary Guard, published a list of such facilities, including the United Arab Emirates' nuclear power plant. Over the weekend, Iran launched missiles targeting the city of Dimona in Israel, near a facility key to its long-suspected atomic weapons program. The facility wasn't damaged.

With the U.S. deploying more amphibious assault ships and additional Marines to the Middle East, Iran's Defense Council warned against any ground attack, saying it would "lead to the mining of all access routes."

Trump has said he has no plans to send ground forces into Iran but has not ruled it out. Israel has suggested its ground forces could take part in the war.

Israel strikes Tehran and Lebanon

Israel launched new attacks Monday on Tehran, saying it was targeting infrastructure. Explosions were heard in multiple locations. It wasn't immediately clear what had been hit.

Israel is also battling the Iran-linked Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, which has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel. In recent days, Israel has

hit apartment buildings in Beirut and bombed bridges over the Litani River in Lebanon's south.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the targeting of bridges "a prelude to a ground invasion."

The U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, UNIFIL, said a building at its headquarters in the coastal

town of Naqoura was struck by a projectile, which the force believes "was fired by a non-state actor," an apparent reference to Hezbollah.

Authorities say Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon and displaced more than 1 million.

Iran's death toll has surpassed 1,500, its Health Ministry has said. In Israel, 15 people

have been killed by Iranian strikes. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, along with more than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states.

Becatoros reported from Athens, Greece, and Magdy from

Cairo. AP writers Bill Barrow in Atlanta, David Rising in Bangkok, Charlotte Graham-McLay in Wellington, New Zealand, Sally Abou AlJoud and Bassem Mroue in Beirut contributed to this report.

Camden News

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"To give the news impartially, without fear or favor." (Adolph Ochs, 1858-1935)

"Impartiality means reporting, editing, and delivering the news honestly, fairly, objectively, and without personal opinion or bias.

"Credibility is the greatest asset of any news medium, and impartiality is the greatest source of credibility.

"To provide the most complete report, a news organization must not just cover the news, but uncover it.

"It must follow the story wherever it leads, regardless of any preconceived ideas on what might be most newsworthy.

"The pursuit of truth is a noble goal of journalism. But the truth is not always apparent or known immediately.

"A journalist's role is therefore, not to determine what they believe at that time to be the truth and reveal only that to their readers, but rather to report as completely

and impartially as possible all verifiable facts so that readers can, based on their own knowledge and experience, determine what they believe to be the truth.

"When a newspaper delivers both news and opinions, the impartiality and credibility of the news organization can be questioned.

"To minimize this as much as possible there needs to be a sharp and clear distinction between news and opinion, both to those providing and consuming the news.

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"As long as the newspaper keeps those constituencies in that order, especially its readers first, all constituencies will be well served."

(Walter Hussman, 1906-1988)

— Walter Hussman, Jr.
Publisher 1988-2022

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General Manager

Jason Hopkins
Regional Managing Editor

Heather Sullivan
Circulation Manager

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Grandson restricts access to his righteous flock

DEAR ABBY: I'm a Christian. I've raised my family to be Christians, and they have raised theirs to be Christians, even though we may not all be members of the same denomination.

Dear Abby
Jeanne Phillips



One of my grandsons believes that his denomination is the only one and the rest of us are all sinners. He and his wife have decided that no one outside of his church can see his child. It's his decision, his choice, but I'm heartbroken

and, of course, angry. I'm afraid my great-grandchild will grow up never knowing his great-grandparents or his grandparents. I believe that I will never know him.

I told my grandson I understand that this is his family and, therefore, his choice. He knows I'm heartbroken. Since they won't be coming to family gatherings, how should I handle gifts in the future? Should I acknowledge the baby and send a gift in the mail? I pray that someday soon my grandson realizes that we love him and his family. — PRINCIPLED IN FLORIDA

DEAR PRINCIPLED: I always thought Christianity was a welcoming religion. This is the first time I have heard of a de-

nomination that decides other Christians are not Christian enough. The church your grandson has joined sounds more like a cult than a religion. Before making any decisions about how, what or whether to gift anything to the new baby, ask your grandson whether accepting a gift from an "outsider" is even allowed.

DEAR ABBY: A dear friend of 40 years, "Dorothy," came to visit me for my birthday. She has visited numerous times over the years, and this was her third trip to my current home. As we were walking into the garage to take my car for a drive, she slipped off a small step and fell, injuring her shoulder and foot. Six months later,

she still wasn't healing and said she would file a claim against my insurance to cover some of her expenses (her medical was covered, but she needed more in-home care and had to board her dog for many months).

My insurance company has been diligent about investigating the incident and decided I had no liability as a homeowner. They determined that Dorothy's physical condition (diabetes, neuropathy in her feet, obesity) was more likely the cause of her fall and slow recovery. They recommended I have no contact with Dorothy, so we haven't spoken in eight months. When she learns of the insurance company's decision, I suspect she may sue me next.

I truly don't feel I am at

fault. The area was clearly lit, there was no clutter or other impediments, and she had been up and down that step many times. I'm sorry to lose a treasured, decades-long friendship, but here we are. Am I wrong? — INNOCENT IN THE WEST

DEAR INNOCENT: You are wrong to end a 40-year friendship because some employee at an insurance company told you not to speak to Dorothy eight months ago. What you should have done then was tell your friend to contact her insurance company so the two companies can thresh out in court who is responsible for what and to what degree. It may not be too late to revive the friendship if you give her

a call now.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Good advice for everyone — teens to seniors — is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 446, Kings Mills, OH 45034-0446. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Andrews McMeel Syndication

ROYAL STARS ASTROLOGY

GEORGIA NICOLS
Moon Alert: Avoid shopping (except for food and gas) and big decisions after 6:15 p.m. EDT today (3:15 p.m. PDT). The Moon is in GEMINI.
Happy Birthday for Tuesday, March 24, 2026:
You are straightforward, direct and decisive. You have a vigorous imagination. This is a year of new beginnings, adventures and major changes. Keep your eyes open for new opportunities and be ready to take action. What you do now will bring benefit in the future. Prepare for leadership.
The Stars Show the Kind of Day You'll Have: 5-Dynamic; 4-Positive; 3-Average; 2-So-so; 1-Difficult
ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19)
★★★★ This is a powerful time for you because the Sun, Venus, Saturn and Neptune are all in your sign. In particular, today the Moon is dancing with Venus in your sign, which makes you charming and dip-

lomatic. People want to talk to you. Tonight: Discussions.
TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20)
★★★ Although you're focused on secret matters or issues that are behind the scenes (or private for some reason), today your finances are favored. In particular, you might buy something pretty for yourself or someone else. You might even attract money or favors to you. (We like!) Tonight: Check your money.
GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20)
★★★★ Today favors you. The Moon is in your sign dancing with fair Venus, which softens all your communications with others, especially friends and groups. You make a warm impression on everyone. For some of you, a friendship could turn romantic. Tonight: You're strong.
CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22)
★★★ Two contradictory influences are at play today: One influence makes you want to

seek privacy and hide. The other influence calls attention to you like a flattering spotlight. People admire you and want to reach out to you. In fact, a romance with a boss could begin. Tonight: Solitude.
LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22)
★★★★ Enjoy schmoozing with friends and groups today. In particular, you might be attracted to someone who is "different." You also might make travel plans with someone. Certainly, this is an excellent day to explore avenues in publishing, medicine, the law and higher education. Tonight: Friendships.
VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEPT. 22)
★★★★ You're high-viz today, which is a good thing, because you make a great impression on everyone. People see you as charming and approachable, which gives you an advantage in negotiating financial issues. However, be patient with partners, spouses and friends. Tonight: You're

admired.
LIBRA (SEPT. 23-OCT. 22)
★★★★ Do what you can to break free from your daily routine today. You need a bit of adventure and stimulation. Go off somewhere if you can. Travel would be perfect. Nevertheless, study and mental journeys will also appeal to you. You might make a new friend today. This new contact could become romantic. Tonight: Explore!
SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21)
HHH Financial negotiations with others will go well today, especially discussions that are work-related. However, today's energy also promotes passionate romance and affectionate liaisons. Although it's easy to work hard today, take time out for pleasure. Tonight: Check your finances.
SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21)
★★★★ Today your best choice is to "go along to get along" when dealing with oth-

ers. In fact, you might have to go more than halfway with a spouse, partner or close friend. Fortunately, they will be cooperative and friendly. This is also a great day to tap into your skills and talents to push the envelope. Show the world what you can do! Tonight: Cooperate with others.
CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19)
★★★ Your work will flow easily today because co-workers are supportive. In fact, you might encounter a flirtation or a romantic interest with a co-worker. Look for ways to make your workspace (or your home) more attractive in some way today. Tonight: Get organized.
AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18)
★★★★ Go ahead and please yourself today. If possible, do what you want. Have a good time. Enjoy socializing with others. Explore the arts and the entertainment world. Sports events and playful activities

with kids also might be on the menu. Romance is blessed! Tonight: Relax.
PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20)
★★★ Although you might be happy to hunker down at home today, you will also enjoy entertaining at home. You might become involved in decorating projects. You want to make where you live look more attractive. Some of you will buy beautiful things today. You also might have excellent money-making ideas! Tonight: Enjoy quiet time at home.
BORN TODAY
Actor Jim Parsons (1973)
actress Jessica Chastain (1977)
actor Steve McQueen (1930)
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Kim
Continued from Page 2A
his family's authoritarian grip.
In his speech, Kim expressed pride in the country's rapid expansion of nuclear weapons and missiles in recent years, calling it the "right" choice to counter future threats and "hegemonic pursuits" by "gangsterlike" imperialists, a term the North often uses for the United States and its allies.

"The dignity of the nation, its national interest and its ultimate victory can only be guaranteed by the strongest of power," Kim said. "The government of our republic will continue to consolidate our absolutely irreversible status as a nuclear power and will aggressively wage a struggle against hostile forces to crush their (anti-North Korean) provocations and schemes."
Kim has suspended all meaningful dialogue

with Washington and Seoul since the collapse of his second summit with Trump in 2019 over U.S.-led sanctions on the North.
Kim has recently been prioritizing Russia in his foreign policy, sending thousands of troops and large amounts of military equipment to support Moscow's war in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for aid and military technology. Facing the possibility of the war winding down, analysts say Kim may try

to keep his options open by taking a more measured approach toward Washington to preserve future dialogue, with the long-term aim of securing U.S. sanctions relief and tacit recognition as a nuclear state.
However, some experts believe that the United States and Israel's joint attacks on Iran and the killing of Tehran's previous supreme leader may have raised Kim's bar for reviving dialogue with Washington.



This photo provided by the North Korean government, its leader Kim Jong Un, center, claps hands as he was re-elected to the top post of the ruling Workers' Party, during the party's Congress in Pyongyang, on Feb. 22, 2026. Independent journalists were not given access to cover the event depicted in this image distributed by the North Korean government. The content of this image is as provided and cannot be independently verified. Korean language watermark on image as provided by source reads: "KCNA" which is the abbreviation for Korean Central News Agency. (Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP, File)

Rubio
Continued from Page 2A
The State Department declined to comment.
Outreach to Exxon for Rodriguez
After the contract was signed, Rivera and Gorrin arranged a meeting in New York City between Rodriguez, then foreign minister and a PDVSA board mem-

ber, and Sessions, whose Dallas-area district included Exxon's headquarters.
Later, Sessions tried to broker a meeting for Rodriguez with Darren Woods, who had succeeded Trump's then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as CEO of Exxon. Rodriguez was looking to resolve a long-running investment dispute and enroll Exxon in reviving the OPEC nation's collapsing oil industry. The meeting never

happened as Exxon lawyers rebuffed the outreach.
Almost a year after helping Rivera make inroads with Exxon, Sessions secretly traveled to Caracas for a meeting with Maduro arranged by Gorrin and Rivera, the indictment says. As part of the effort, Sessions also agreed to deliver a letter from the Venezuelan president to Trump.
The defense team also wanted Maduro and White

House chief of staff Susie Wiles to testify. Maduro, through a lawyer, said he would invoke his constitutional right to remain silent if compelled, while prosecutors successfully quashed an attempt to subpoena Wiles, who was a registered lobbyist for Gorrin's Globovision network at the same time the media magnate was working with Rivera.
Before being elected to Congress in 2010, Rivera

was a high-ranking Florida legislator. During that time he shared a Tallahassee home with Rubio, who eventually became Florida House speaker.
Rivera has previously faced controversy, including allegations he secretly funded a Democratic spoiler candidate in a 2012 congressional race. Last year, federal prosecutors dropped the case after an appeals court threw out a sizable fine im-

posed by a lower court. Rivera was also investigated — but never charged — for campaign finance violations and a \$1 million contract with a gambling company while serving in the Florida legislature.
Rivera has denied any wrongdoing and said both investigations were politically motivated.

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1975 Muhammad Ali TKOs Chuck Wepner in 15 for heavyweight boxing title

Sports

4A

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Kansas' Bill Self undecided on coaching career

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Bill Self says he hasn't decided whether he will continue his Hall of Fame coaching career after the Kansas Jayhawks' season ended with a heartbreaking loss to St. John's in the second round of the NCAA Tournament on Sunday.

The 63-year-old Self has won two national championships and built a powerhouse during his 23 seasons in charge of the Jayhawks, but he has missed several games over the past few seasons due to heart issues and other health concerns.

"I've gone through some stuff off the court, so I'll get back and get with family and visit and see what's going on," Self said. "I love what I do. I need to be able to do it where I'm feeling good and healthy to do it fairly well. I'll get back home and it will all be discussed."

Self most recently missed a game at Colorado in January after taking

a precautionary trip to the hospital. He also had two stents inserted in his heart in 2023, and two more last year.

Self has been one of college basketball's most successful coaches since he replaced Roy Williams in Lawrence in 2003. He joined the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2017, and he became the winningest coach in Kansas history in November 2024, passing Phog Allen.

But Self's health problems are understandably something to consider. When asked Sunday if he was completely healthy, Self replied: "I don't know about completely."

"But I'm feeling — I feel as good as I've felt in a long time," Self added. "I'm not making any statements whatsoever. But every year, I think ... when you get to be doing it as long as I've done it, I look at it in five-year increments. Now I'm probably looking at it in more two-year increments,

so to speak. So I try to focus on this season and try to get us to a second weekend, which we failed at. So I'll go back now and break it down and see where that leads."

Self's Jayhawks have won 16 regular-season Big 12 titles — including 13 straight at one point — and nine conference tournament titles. His teams have reached three Final Fours, winning championships in 2008 and 2022.

But Kansas hasn't returned to the Sweet 16 since that second championship, going out three times in the second round and once in the first.

The Jayhawks' latest season-ending loss was gut-wrenching. Facing a 13-point deficit with 7 1/2 minutes to play, Kansas fought all the way back to tie it with 13.1 seconds left, but St. John's advanced on Dylan Darling's layup as time expired.

The final six weeks of the season

were rough for the Jayhawks. They ended Arizona's unbeaten season in a landmark victory on Feb. 9, but subsequently lost six of their final 11 games.

Self's career record stands at 855-272.

"My career ain't going to be based on one game," Self said when asked if it would be tough to end his career on such a crushing defeat. "I said I was going to get back and evaluate my health situation."

Self coached at Oral Roberts, Tulsa and Illinois before returning to Kansas, where the Oklahoma native was an assistant in his first coaching job 40 years ago. He has coached 43 NBA players at Kansas, including 12 lottery picks and 18 first-round picks.

Suns have 200th consecutive sellout, work to regain momentum

PHOENIX (AP) — The Phoenix Suns are one of the NBA's feel-good stories this season, having much more success than many anticipated after rebuilding their roster over the summer.

Suns CEO Josh Bartelstein says the best part is it's a team he actually enjoys watching.

Fans apparently agree with him.

The franchise had its 200th consecutive sellout crowd Saturday night, a 108-105 loss to the Milwaukee Bucks. It's the second-longest streak in franchise history and the fourth-longest in the NBA behind Miami, Golden State and Utah. Local TV ratings are up 64% compared to last season.

Even the current five-game losing streak can't completely dampen the mood. It's going to take more than a rough 10 days to derail the surprising momentum the Suns have built over the past few months.

"It's pride in building a team that makes the community, Suns fans, proud," Bartelstein said. "That was the goal. It's a basketball city and they love the Suns. We knew if we built a team that resembled the grit, toughness, playing with joy, that this city deserves, with the talent we had and would bring, that we'd be fine."

"Sometimes you've got to go through some tough times to come out on the other side of it."

The Suns' relative success — they fell to 39-32 after Saturday's loss — comes a year after one of the most disappointing seasons in franchise history. Last year's team was built around the so-called "Big 3" of 15-time All-Star Kevin Durant, Bradley Beal and Devin Booker while being led by veteran coach Mike Budenholzer, who won an NBA title with the Milwaukee Bucks in 2021.

But the Suns didn't even make the playoffs, finishing with a 36-46 record. Even worse, the team was a chore to watch, with spotty defensive effort and an offense that often turned stagnant, wasting the ample scoring power on the roster.

The crowds at Mortgage Matchup Center — once among the NBA's best — were becoming much more docile. They were still technically selling out games thanks to ticket sales from the high expectations at the beginning of the year, but some seats were empty and interest was fading fast.

It seemed as if the streak would end soon.

That's when owner Mat Ishbia, Bartelstein and newly hired general manager Brian Gregory decided on a new strategy. There would be no more star chasing. Sure, the Suns needed good players, but they also needed the right players, ones who would bring a more hard-nosed persona.

Durant was shipped to the Houston Rockets during the offseason for Jalen Green and Dillon Brooks. The latter has been particularly important to the team's culture change, averaging a career-high 20.9 points per game while providing an edgy presence that gets under the other team's skin.

Brooks has missed the past few weeks with a broken hand, but is expected to return fairly soon.

Beal was released during the offseason, leaving Booker as the team's unquestioned leader and the 29-year-old responded with the fifth All-Star appearance of his career. Budenholzer was fired and first-year coach Jordan Ott was hired.

So far, the moves have worked out quicker than expected.

The Suns are far from perfect, but with three weeks



Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker (1) drives against San Antonio Spurs during the first half of an NBA basketball game. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

remaining in the regular season, the playoffs are a realistic goal. That's a win for a franchise that looked like as though it might be one of the

league's worst teams back in October.

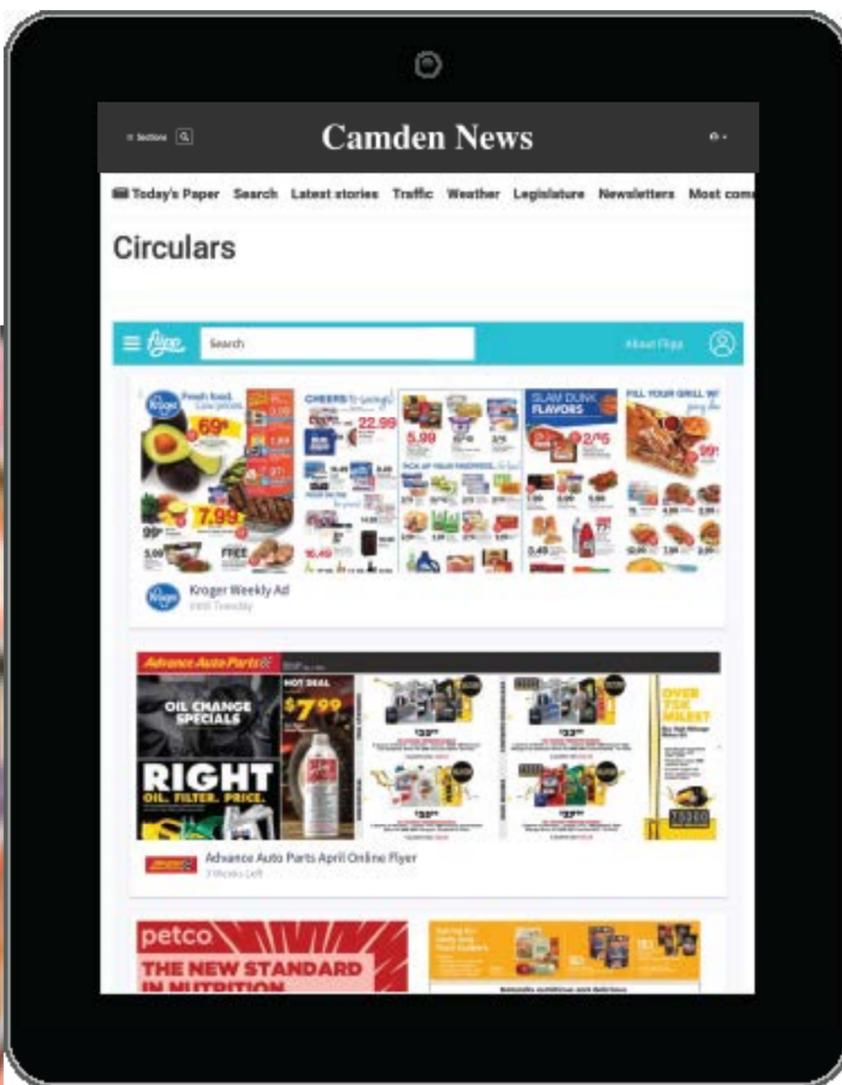
"It's one of the best stories in the NBA, if not the best," Bartelstein said. "It's all

fragile because the season's so long and we're banged up right now, but it's been a really fun season on the court."

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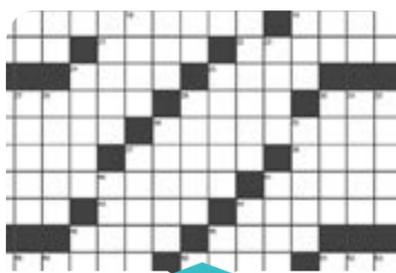
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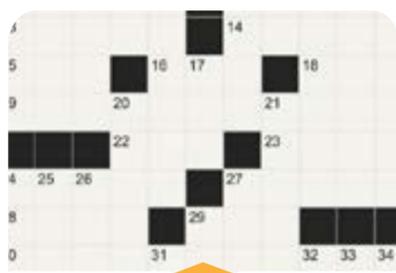
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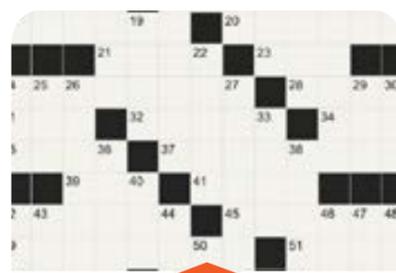
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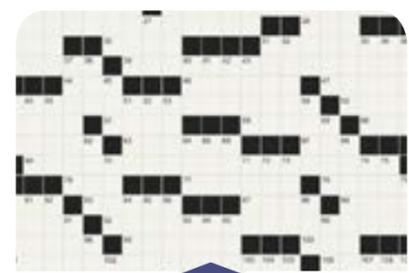
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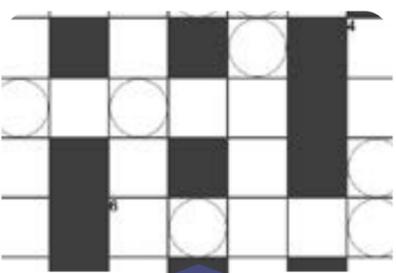
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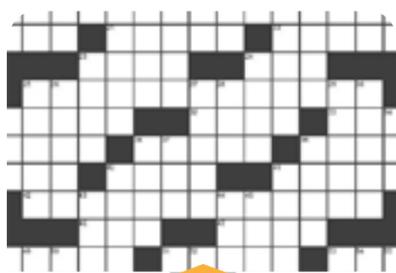
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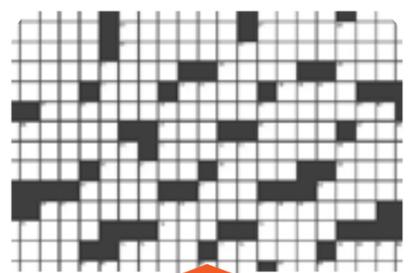
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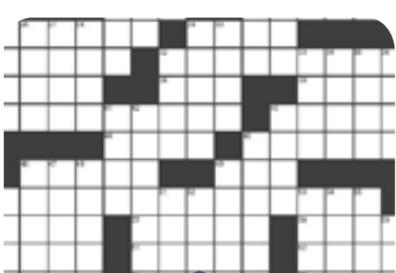
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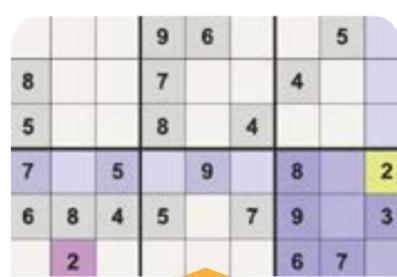
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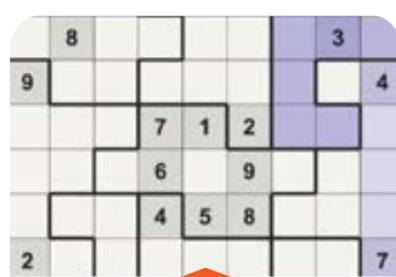
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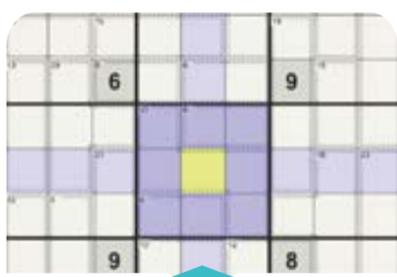
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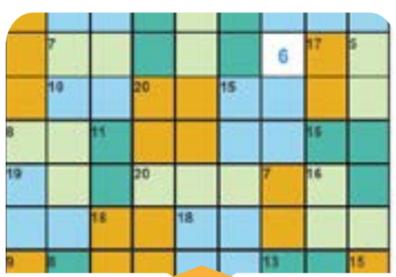
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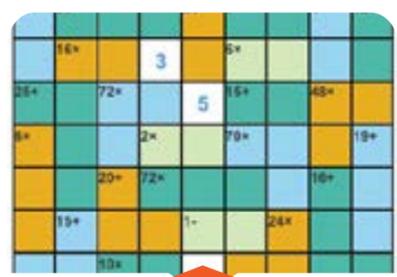
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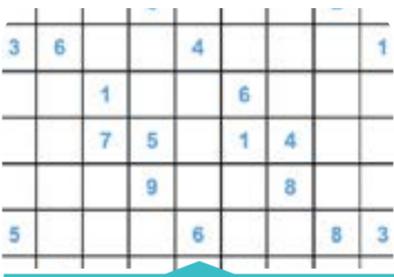
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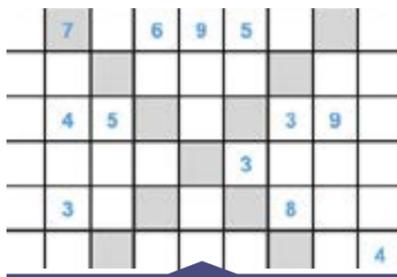
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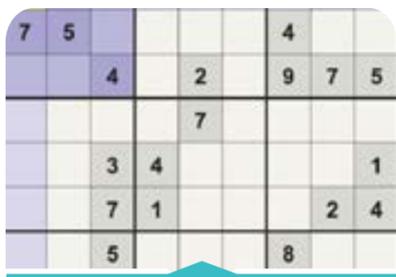
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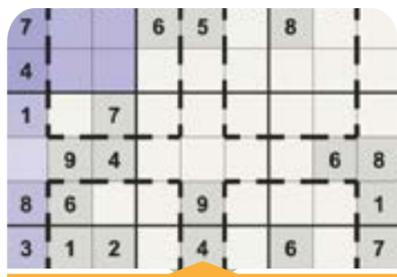
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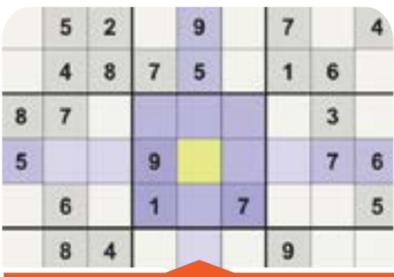
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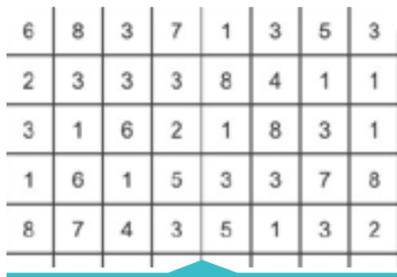
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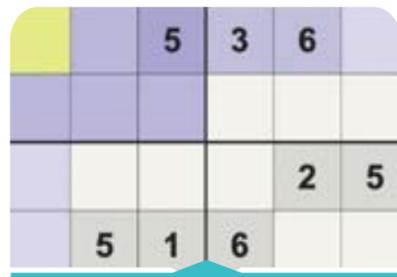
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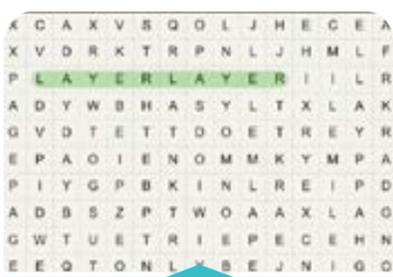
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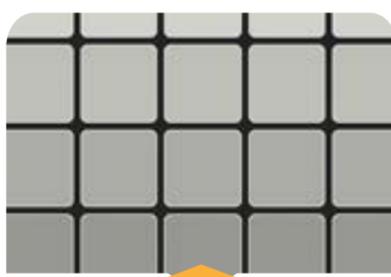
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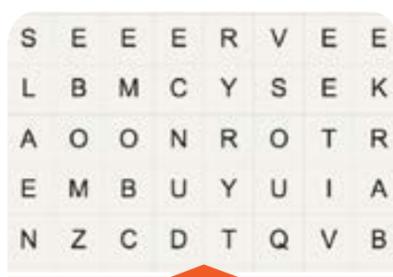
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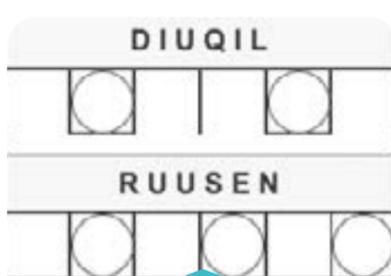
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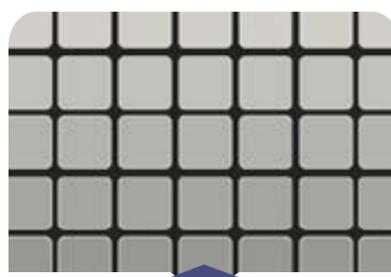
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