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HOOKED ON MAHJONG

By Maggie Allwein
STAFF WRITER

Virginia Beach's Setting Sun parlor brings 19th century Chinese game to Hampton Roads

VIRGINIA BEACH — Inside an unassuming shopping center, the room hums of game tiles clacking against one another. Players sit, hunched over automated tables waiting for their next game. Tiles emerge from the bottom of the machine, all in a flawless line.

The game is mahjong, a table game that originated in China in the 1800s but has recently surged in popularity.

James Sagayno opened Setting Sun, southeastern Virginia's only mahjong parlor, in 2024 and says demand has exploded this year. He doesn't know exactly what the popularity surge stems from, other than natural gravitation to simplicity.

"The thing is resurgence of the culture," he said. "I feel like it's pretty natural, it's like



Top: Antoinette Empeno, center, and friends spend an evening playing mahjong at the Setting Sun gaming center in Virginia Beach. The game, which originated in China in the 1880s, is gaining popularity in the U.S. **Above:** Four pairs of hands clear the table of tiles following a round of mahjong at Setting Sun. **STEPHEN M. KATZ/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT PHOTOS**

card games, they never go away, even though we have PC computer games. People will still come back to something like this."

Mahjong is considered a game of skill and chance, and new players find it similar to rummy and poker. Though traditionally a four-player game, the rules can be altered to play with two or three.

Players go around the table and take turns drawing and discarding tiles. The objective is to gather four suits and one pair before another player. Suits can be combinations called chi, or a three-tile sequence; pong, which is three of the same tiles; or kong, four of the same tiles. A pair consists of two of the same tiles. Discarded tiles from other players are up for grabs.

See **MAHJONG** on Page A11

US says ceasefire in Gulf intact

Pentagon describes recent strikes by Iran as not 'major combat'

By Adam Schreck,
Ben Finley and
Elena Becatoros
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — U.S. military leaders said a ceasefire remains in effect a day after Iran was blamed for new attacks in the Strait of Hormuz and against the United Arab Emirates. The key American ally later said it came under Iranian drone and missile attack again Tuesday.

The United States and Iran have made competing claims over which side now controls the strait, which remains effectively closed.

Still, the fragile truce reached nearly a month ago appeared to be holding as U.S. forces pressed ahead with efforts to reopen the strait, a vital waterway for global energy. On Monday, the U.S. said it had opened a lane and sunk six small Iranian boats that had threatened commercial ships.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, the U.S. military's top officer, told a news conference Tuesday that Iran's renewed attacks hadn't reached the threshold of what Caine called "major combat operations." He said Tuesday marked a "quieter" day in the strait.

"No, the ceasefire is not over," Hegseth said, affirming Caine's assessment. They spoke before the latest attacks on the UAE.

At the White House, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said clashes with Iran related to American efforts to reopen the straight were "defensive in nature."

See **GULF** on Page A4

Chesapeake amends its \$1.7B budget plan

Additional needs for youth, fire department are among concerns

By Natalie Anderson
STAFF WRITER

CHESAPEAKE — City Council members plan to fund additional recreational and youth programs, fire positions, and a feasibility study for the redevelopment of Campostella Square using about \$1.5 million in reserve dollars in the proposed fiscal 2027 budget.

City leaders for weeks have been discussing the proposed \$1.7 billion operating budget, which funds 3.5% employee wage increases, step increases for public safety and nearly a dozen new full-time

positions at the public pool slated to open next year in South Norfolk. The multiyear capital improvement program totals \$245 million for fiscal 2027 and will prioritize fire station replacements and equipment upgrades.

The Chesapeake City Council is expected to consider and adopt the fiscal budget at its meeting next Tuesday.

Council members at the April 28 work session agreed to spend the \$1.5 million across multiple priorities. The proposed budget in recent years has set aside \$500,000 in reserve funding for council members to propose amendments. And for fiscal 2027, City Manager Chris Price set aside \$1 million to cushion the impacts of legislation from the General Assembly — namely, collec-

See **BUDGET** on Page A4

READY, SET, GLOW

In a shift from its traditional Oceanfront celebration, Virginia Beach is planning a holiday drone light show at Mount Trashmore Park. **Page 2**

HITTING THE POLLS

Trump's influence tested as Indiana, Ohio cast ballots in Tuesday primaries. **Nation & World, Page 7**

A LOADED SPRING

Princess Anne High's Marc Joe has been juggling coaching basketball and baseball with a new baby. **Sports**

COASTAL DINING

Rekaya Gibson checks out a Kill Devil Hills grill for her first stop in a series of visits to Outer Banks eateries. **Flavor**



Those speaking on behalf of Luke Walker said the director has reimagined Grassfield High's band programs. **STAFF FILE**

Students trumpet displeasure

Grassfield High's band members speak out after leader's job is eliminated

By John Buzbee
STAFF WRITER

CHESAPEAKE — Dozens of Grassfield High School families pleaded to the school board Monday evening to reverse the planned termination of a popular band director.

Over 150 students, parents and guardians crowded the board room. They credited Luke Walker with elevating the school's band program to the global stage. Families were notified last week his job with the high school would be terminated at the end of the school year.


Nearly 20 speakers addressed the board. They wore the band's jackets, jerseys and T-shirts. They

See **BAND** on Page A4

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WEATHER FORECAST

 Breezy and sunny. High of 81. **A18**

INDEX

Business A12
Classified A16-17
Comics B10-11
Lottery A2
Obituaries A15
Opinion A14
Puzzles B11
Sports B1
TV B9

