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New wave: sea power turned into energy at Los Angeles port

San Pedro, United States

Floating blue paddles dance on the waves that lap a dock in the Port of Los Angeles, silently converting the power of the sea into usable electricity.

This innovative installation may hold one of the keys to accelerating a transition away from fossil fuels that scientists say is necessary if the world is to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

"The project is very simple and easy," Inna Braverman, co-founder of Israeli start-up Eco Wave Power, told AFP.

Looking a little like piano keys, the floaters rise and fall with each wave.

They are connected to hydraulic pistons that push a biodegradable fluid



Floaters are raised out of the water during a demonstration of Eco Wave Power electricity generation technology using the power of ocean waves in the harbor at AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro, California, on August 26, 2025.

been successfully commercialized at a large-enough scale.

The history of the sector is full of company shipwrecks and projects sunk by the brutality of the high seas. Developing devices robust enough to withstand the fury of the waves, while transmitting electricity via underwater cables to the shore, has proven to be an impossible task so far.

"Ninety-nine percent of competitors chose to install in the middle of the ocean, where it's super expensive, where it's breaking down all the time, so they can't really make projects work," Braverman said.

With her retractable dock-mounted device, the entrepreneur believes she has found the answer.

"When the waves are too high for the system to handle, the floaters just rise to the upward position until the storm passes, so you have no damage."

through pipes to a container filled with accumulators, which resemble large red scuba tanks.

When the pressure is released, it spins a turbine that generates electrical current.

If this pilot project convinces the California authorities, Braverman hopes to cover the entire 13-kilometer (eight-mile) breakwater protecting the port with hundreds of floaters that together would produce enough electricity to power 60,000 US homes.

Supporters of the technology say wave energy is an endlessly renewable and always reliable source of power.

Unlike solar power, which produces nothing at night, or wind power, which depends on the weather, the sea is always in motion. And there is a lot of it.

Tough tech

The waves off the American West Coast could theoretically power 130 million homes -- or supply around a third of the electricity used every year in the United States, according to the US Department of Energy.

However, wave energy remains the poor relation of other, better-known renewables, and has not

The design appeals to Krish Thiagarajan Sharman, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

"The Achilles heel of wave energy is in the costs of maintenance and inspection," he told AFP.

"So having a device close to shore, where you can walk on a breakwater and then inspect the device, makes a lot of sense."

Sharman, who is not affiliated with the project and whose laboratory is testing various wave energy equipment, said projects tend to be suited to smaller-scale demands, like powering remote islands.

"This eight-mile breakwater, that's not a common thing. It's a rare opportunity, a rare location where such a long wavefront is available for producing power," he said.

AI power demand

Braverman's Eco Wave Power is already thinking ahead, having identified dozens more sites in the United States that could be suitable for similar projects. □

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Guest Dan Rimada, founder of Bodega Cats of New York holds a cat named Ashley in a bodega corner store on December 17, 2025 in New York City.

New York seeks rights for beloved but illegal 'bodega cats'

New York, United States

Simba, a large cat with thick ginger and white fur, is one of thousands of felines that live in New York's corner shops known as "bodegas" even if their presence is illegal.

Praised for warding off pests, so-called bodega cats are also a cultural fixture for New Yorkers, some of whom are now pushing to enshrine legal rights for the little store helpers.

"Simba is very important to us because he keeps the shop clean of the mice," Austin Moreno, a shopkeeper in Manhattan, told AFP from behind his till. The fluffy inhabitant also helps to entice customers.

"People, very often, they come to visit to ask, what is his name? The other day, some girls saw him for the first time and now they come every day," said Moreno.

Around a third of the city's roughly 10,000 bodegas are thought to have a resident cat despite being liable to fines of \$200-\$350 for

keeping animals in a store selling food, according to Dan Rimada, founder of Bodega Cats of New York. Rimada photographs the felines for his social media followers and last year launched a petition to legalize bodega cats, which drew nearly 14,000 signatures.

"These cats are woven into the fabric of New York City, and that's an important story to tell," he said.

Pressure point

Inspired by Rimada's petition, New York City council member Keith Powers has proposed a measure to shield the owners of bodega cats from penalties. His legislation would also provide free vaccinations and spay or neuter services to the felines.

But animal shelters and rights groups say this wouldn't go far enough. While Simba can nap in the corner of his shop with kibble within paw's reach, many of his fellow cats are locked in basements, deprived of food or proper

care, and abandoned when they grow old or fall ill.

Becky Wisdom, who rescues cats in New York, warned that lifting the threat of fines could remove "leverage" to encourage bodega owners to better care for the animals.

She also opposes public funds being given to business owners rather than low-income families who want their cats spayed or neutered.

The latter is a big issue in New York, where the stray cat population is estimated at around half a million.

Radical overhaul

Regardless of what the city decides, it is the state of New York that has authority over business rules, said Allie Taylor, president of Voters for Animal Rights.

Taylor said she backs another initiative proposed by state assembly member Linda Rosenthal, a prominent animal welfare advocate, who proposes allowing cats in bodegas under certain conditions. □

New York model, carved in a basement, goes on display

New York, United States

A painstakingly detailed model of New York City will go on display this week after a US truck driver spent 21 years building it in his basement as an evening hobby. The wooden model, made to scale with some 800,000 pieces, gives a bird's-eye view of landmarks like the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, as well as New York's more distant boroughs.

"It's almost like coming in on an airplane when you're looking out the window at 4,000 feet," creator Joe Macken, 63, told AFP in front of the colorful 50- by 27-foot (15- by 8-meter) structure.

"People walk around the city all the time, but they don't really see it like this. They're looking up. Now you're looking down," he said.

The exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York opens Thursday and runs through the summer.

Macken began his project in 2004, spending a couple of hours each night crafting sections of the city by carving balsa wood and sticking it to small polystyrene boards, which he then stored individually.

He said his wife and three children had been "very supportive" of the hobby.

The final display joins together more than 300 of the polystyrene boards to depict the entirety of New York City, including its waterways.

'Did I really make this?'

It is not an exact replica of today's New York: the Twin Towers, which were destroyed in the 9/11 terror attack in 2001, feature alongside the new One World Trade Center.

Macken, a native New Yorker now living elsewhere in the state, said even he was surprised to see the finished project after more than two decades.

"I can't believe it. I mean, I look at this and I'm just like, did I really make this?" he said. □



Joe Macken of Queens poses by a 50-by-27-foot model of New York City during a press preview February 10, 2026 of "He Built This City: Joe Macken's Model" at the Museum of the City of New York.

200 love letters found in a Nashville home tell the story of a couple's courtship during WWII

By **TRAVIS LOLLER**
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Highlights from a trove of more than 200 love letters that tell the story of a couple's courtship and marriage during World War II are now on display digitally through the Nashville Public Library, offering an intimate picture of love during wartime. The letters by William Raymond Whittaker and Jane Dean were found in a Nashville home that had belonged to Jane and her siblings. They were donated in 2016 to the Metro Nashville Archives.

Whittaker, who went by Ray, was from New Rochelle, New York. He moved to the Tennessee capital to attend the historically Black Meharry Medical College, according to the library's metropolitan archivist, Kelley Sirko. That's where he met and dated Jane, another student at the college.

The pair lost touch when Ray left Nashville. In the summer of 1942 he was drafted into the Army. Stationed at Fort Huachuca in Arizona, he decided to reestablish contact with Jane, who was then working as a medical lab tech-



Pictures of William Raymond Whittaker and his wife, Jane Dean Whittaker, are on top of letters the two of them wrote to each other while he was serving in the military, photographed Monday, Feb. 9, 2026, in Nashville, Tenn.

nician at Vanderbilt University.

A 'pleasant and sad surprise'

The library doesn't have Ray's first letter to Jane, but it does have her reply. She greets him somewhat formally as "Dear Wm R."

"It sure was a pleasant and sad surprise to hear from you," she writes on July 30, 1942. "Pleasant because you will always hold a place in my heart and its nice to

know you think of me once in a while. Sad because you are in the armed forces maybe I shouldn't say that but war is so uncertain, however I'm proud to know that you are doing your bit for your country."

Jane then goes on to list perhaps as a hint? a string of mutual acquaintances who have gotten married recently, noting those who have had children or are rumored to be having chil-

dren. She signs off, "Write, wire or call me real soon Lovingly Jane."

A story told in letters

"You can't help but smile when you read through these letters," Sirko said. "You really can't. And this was just such an intimate look at two regular people during a really complicated time in our history."

Sirko said Nashville archivists have not been able to locate any living relatives

of Ray and Jane, so most of what they know about them is from the letters. The couple did not have any children, according to an obituary for Ray, who died in Nashville in 1989.

The donation also included a few photographs and Ray's patch from the historically Black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha.

Beyond a love story, the collection gives "this in-the-moment perspective of ... what it's like just navigating certain racial issues, certain gender issues, their work, the life of a soldier, all of these things," Sirko said. That's why the archivists wanted to make it more accessible to the public.

Love and doubts

Just two months after the first letters, the romance has heated up. Ray has been assigned to Fort McClellan in Alabama, where he will help organize the reactivated and segregated 92nd Infantry Division, which went on to see combat in Europe. In an undated letter from September 1942, he tells Jane, "I have something very important to tell you when I do see you and you will be surprised to know as to what it is."

A 410-pound manatee rescued from a Florida storm drain is now recovering at SeaWorld Orlando

By **FREIDA FRISARO**
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A manatee that got stuck in a Florida storm drain while seeking warmer waters is now on the mend at SeaWorld Orlando after a large effort to rescue it. Multiple fire rescue units and officials from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the University of Florida and even Jack's Wrecker Service were brought in Tuesday to get the 410-pound (186-kilogram) sea cow out of the storm drain in Melbourne Beach.

The crews convened on the scene after a worker with Melbourne Beach



This photo provided by Brevard County Fire Rescue shows members of Brevard County Fire Rescue help rescue a manatee that was stuck in a storm drain on Monday, Feb. 9, 2026 in Melbourne Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

spotted the manatee, the city's Vice Mayor Terry Cronin told WESH-TV in Orlando.

"We're in the process of improving the storm drain across Melbourne Beach. Our people were doing a survey. And one of the surveyors noticed a manatee in what is called a bethel box," Cronin said.

The male manatee was taken to SeaWorld Orlando, where it is being cared for in one of the park's medical pools, spokesperson Stephanie Bechara said.

"He's breathing on his own, moving independently and showing in-

terest in food. Our teams are adjusting water levels to support buoyancy and comfort as part of his care," Bechara said.

She said they work to stabilize and rehabilitate rescued manatees so they can ultimately be returned to the wild.

The protected species is still recovering from a mass starvation event. In 2021, officials recorded more than 1,100 manatee deaths, mostly caused by starvation. The state's Fish and Wildlife agency said the number of deaths were down significantly, with 565 deaths recorded in 2024, and 555 deaths in 2023.

Bernini and the pope who promoted him celebrated as Vatican marks 400 years of St. Peter's Basilica

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

ROME (AP) — A new exhibition in Rome is celebrating one of the most important patron-artist relationships in European history, one that propelled a young prodigy named Gian Lorenzo Bernini into a towering figure of Baroque art and architecture.

"Bernini and the Barberini," which opens Thursday, explores the complex relationship between Bernini and Pope Urban VIII, who ruled from 1623-1644. Urban is credited with discovering Bernini and, with him, embarking on a project to make Rome the artistic center of Christian civilization.

Urban is being celebrated in a host of Vatican initiatives this year, as the Holy See marks the 400th anniversary of his consecration of the new St. Peter's Basilica, in 1626. While the basilica was a century in the making, Urban put the finishing touches on its interior, including by commissioning Bernini to build his famous baldacchino canopy over the tomb of the saint.

Even before he was pope, though, then-Cardinal Maffeo Barberini identified in



Journalists attend the press preview of the exhibition "Bernini and the Barberini" at Palazzo Barberini in Rome on Feb. 11, 2026.

the young Bernini a talent that surpassed even that of his father Pietro, in whose artist's studio Gian Lorenzo learned his craft.

After he became pope, Urban commissioned a series of works from his young charge and "immediately realized that Bernini could become the Michelangelo of his century," co-curator Andrea Bacchi told a press conference Wednesday at Palazzo Barberini, where the exhibit is being held.

In the process, Bernini helped Urban assert the primacy of the Catholic Church in Europe at a time when its power was being challenged, added co-curator Maurizia Cicconi.

"Urban VIII had the intuition to govern through culture, drawing on the skills of the most talented artists," Culture Minister Alessandro Giuli said in a statement. "There is no doubt, however, that Gian Lorenzo Bernini was his favorite, a lost

son to whom he entrusted the great building projects of St. Peter's Basilica along with the image and memory of his pontificate."

The exhibition limits itself to the two-decade duration of the Bernini-Urban relationship, and thus excludes some of Bernini's best-known works that, even today, define the urban landscape of Rome and the Vatican.

After Urban's death, Pope

Innocent X commissioned Bernini to design the fountains of Piazza Navona, including the remarkable "Fountain of the Four Rivers" which remains one of the most important examples of Baroque sculpture in the Eternal City.

After Innocent, Pope Alexander VII commissioned Bernini in 1656 to design and build the massive colonnade that encircles St. Peter's Square.

But the exhibition, featuring loans from museums and private collections around the world, explores the origins of Bernini's experience as a papal artist and architect. And it credits Urban with having given him his earliest works, including the baldacchino canopy which just last year was restored and cleaned in time for the Vatican's 2025 Holy Year.

Urban hasn't always been treated kindly by historians, perhaps best known for having refused to pardon Galileo Galilei, who was condemned as a heretic by the Inquisition for his beliefs that the Earth revolves around the Sun. In 1992, Pope John Paul II said the church had erred in condemning him. □

Associated Press

Colour and caution as banned kite-flying festival returns to Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan

Brightly coloured kites soared through the skies over Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore this weekend, marking the return of a festival after a 19-year ban that had been imposed over safety concerns.

Families and groups of friends gathered on rooftops and in parks and streets for the three-day kite-flying festival in Punjab province, known as 'Basant', the Urdu language word for the spring season it traditionally marks the arrival of.

"Everyone is excited - all of Punjab, all of Pakistan. It has become hard to find kites and strings be-

cause they sold out," said Shahzaib, a kite flyer, with drums playing in the background.

Punjab authorities banned the festival in 2007 due to a series of fatal accidents caused by glass powdered-coated kite strings and celebratory aerial gunfire.

The exceptionally sharp strings, known as manjha, had badly injured and killed pedestrians and motorcyclists, prompting the crackdown.

But this year authorities relented, allowing the festival for three days but with ramped up safety measures in place in a move

welcomed by many Lahoris and thousands who travelled to the city from across the country to take part.

"People had lost businesses when the ban happened. After the ban lifted I sold 20,000 to 25,000 kites," said Tariq, a kite maker.

Rights groups and cultural activists have long criticised the ban, arguing that poor enforcement rather than the festival itself was to blame for past tragedies.

Some official events planned to take place during the festival were cancelled after a suicide blast at a mosque in Paki-



Artists play traditional drums next to a hoarding with portraits of Pakistan's former Prime Minister and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) party Nawaz Sharif and his daughter and Chief Minister of the country's Punjab province Maryam Nawaz Sharif, as vendors sell kites to mark Basant Festival in Lahore on February 4, 2026.

stan's capital Islamabad on Friday killed 31 people.

Police were deployed across the city to enforce safety rules, while hospitals were placed on alert to

deal with potential injuries. Authorities also monitored kite sales including using QR codes to track kites - and confiscated banned materials, including glass-coated strings. □

Milan's Olympic pin mania has collectors running between landmarks and swarming an exchange center

By COLLEEN BARRY

Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — A dozen people outside a Milan metro station on Wednesday stared intently at their phones until 8 a.m., when an Instagram post provided a location. It sent the group sprinting.

"Run, don't walk: we're in the Castello area," said the post. "Pins are available while supplies last."

Early each morning in Milan, eager collectors have been gathering to await word of the exact spot where they can score highly prized, limited-edition Olympics pins that if they're fast enough are free.

Ilaria Pasqua has gotten up and out early every day since Saturday to snag the coveted pins from YesMilano, the city's promotional agency, and she plans to complete the collection of seven neighborhoods including Isola and Porta Venezia and five iconic landmarks, like the Duomo. She teamed up with three collectors she met on the first day, and they have developed a system to be among the first in line.

"I know it can sound like it's a bit extreme, and (like) it's a waste of time. But actually, I've met these people that I am doing this with, so it's nice," said Pasqua, an English teacher in Milan. "It's a way to get to know the city that you live in or



Patrick Shannon, a coach for the Chinese skeleton team, displays China's three pin designs at the Milan Cortina Olympic Village, during the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, Thursday Feb. 5, 2026.

Associated Press

are visiting. It's also social. I'm really enjoying it, to be honest. And you take a little treasure with you home every day, so it's fun."

Each day after receiving her pins, Pasqua says she stuffs them deep in her coat pocket out of view from latecomers looking for a trade that she doesn't want to make.

Pin Pecking Order

Pin collecting is an essential part of the Olympic subculture, with people traveling far and wide to the Games just to add to what is often a very substantial array of enameled pins at home.

For those with little pa-

tience for treasure hunting who want to get right down to business, Milan is the first Olympics to offer an official pin trading center since Pyongyang in 2018.

Sponsored by Warner Brothers, it features an area where children can interact with costumed Looney Toons characters, creating the next generation of pin-traders, along with a dozen tables where die-hard traders from as far away as the United States and Japan up boards with their wares. Eddie Schneider of Lindenhurst, NY who has been trading pins since the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. Among his 25,000

pins is one from the 1948 London Games, which his mother attended.

"I consider it like going to a World's Fair every two years," he said at the center. "You get to go different places and experience different cultures and have fun."

The king pins

Elite collectors know the intrinsic value of each category, including retail, delegation, team, sponsor, media and national Olympic committees. Japanese media pins are among the most coveted by die-hard collectors, for their rarity, while in Cortina ath-

letes were keen to get an Iran pin and in Paris Snoop Dogg's pins were the buzziest.

Official pins incorporate the Milan Cortina 26 logo and the Olympic rings, which are produced exclusively by the Los Angeles-based pin maker Honav, the rights-holder for the Milan Cortina Winter Games and the upcoming 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games.

Honav's owner Mario Simonson said his company designed hundreds of pins and produced millions for these Games each bearing the Honav backstamp for authenticity. The International Olympics Committee collects royalties for the use of the logo and rings.

Pins without those official features have "zero value" for serious traders, he said.

Pindemonium

London resident Josh Waller, 21, collected his first pin at the 2012 Summer Games, when he was 8 years old. He now has over 10,000 stashed in his room, and brought 1,500 to Milan to trade. "Pindemonium," he calls it. His collection of London Olympic pins, including vintage issues, is award-winning. He belongs to a group of online traders that exploded after the Tokyo Games, when the pandemic kept spectators at home, and he has developed software to authenticate high-value pins. □

Thai coffee chains cut default sugar content in coffee and tea drinks in a new health push



Customers wait for their coffee outside a coffee shop in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026.

Associated Press

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI

Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — For many Thais, a meal doesn't feel complete without an iced coffee or tea so sugary it could pass for dessert. The government, concerned about the health consequences, wants them to dial it back.

Starting Wednesday, nine major coffee chains across the country have pledged to cut the default sugar content in some of their drinks by half in a government initiative aimed at tackling excessive sugar consumption.

According to the Health Department, Thais consume an average of 21 tea-

spoons of sugar per day, more than three times the World Health Organization's recommended limit of six teaspoons. Health officials warn that such high intake increases the risk of obesity, diabetes and other diseases.

The initiative is the first significant step to change consumers' sugar consumption behavior, said Amporn Benjaponpitak, the director general of the department.

Pakorn Tungkasereerak, the department's deputy, said 2025 data show that about 45% of Thais aged 15 and older are obese, while 10% of the population has diabetes. □

Princess Casino Aruba Announces Carnaval Bash This Wednesday – A Night of Pure Aruban Carnaval Energy



Palm Beach — Princess Casino Aruba is inviting locals and visitors alike to experience the vibrant spirit of Aruba's Carnaval during its highly anticipated Carnaval Bash, happening this Wednesday, February 11th starting at 6pm at the casino.

Guests are welcome to come and play while enjoying a full night of entertainment, surprises, and high-energy excitement inspired by the colors, rhythms, and joy of Aruban Carnaval. The Carnaval Bash promises a festive atmosphere where gaming meets cul-

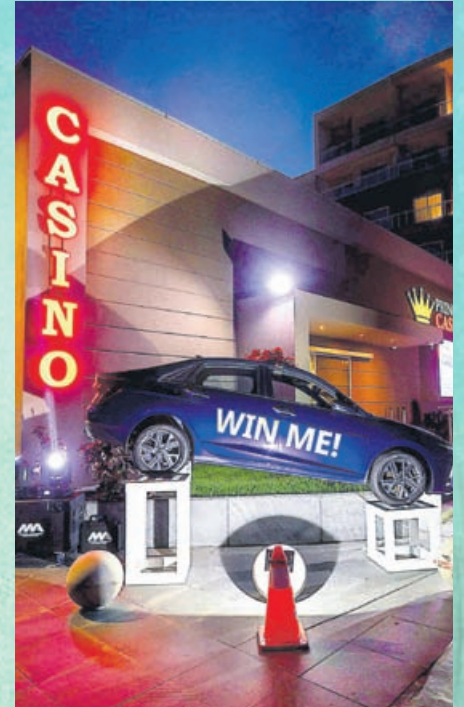
ture, live music, and celebration. Throughout the night, guests can look forward to:

- A surprise Carnaval act bringing authentic island flair
- Hourly cash prizes rewarding lucky players all evening long
- Continuous gaming excitement across the casino floor

Designed to capture the true Aruban Carnaval feeling, the Carnaval Bash blends thrilling casino action with live entertainment and nonstop surprises, creating an unforgettable midweek celebration.

Princess Casino Aruba encourages everyone to dress festive, bring their Carnaval spirit, and enjoy a night filled with fun, prizes, and unforgettable moments.

For more information, guests are invited to visit Princess Casino Aruba or follow the casino on social



media for updates.

Celebrate Carnaval the Aruba way, where excitement never stops and royalty plays to win at Princess Casino Aruba! □

Aruban snacks and where to find them



ORANJESTAD — Want to taste something different for a change? How about some Aruban snacks that you can find all around the island? Hop in your car, and go to these locations to find some of the most popular and tasty snacks that are beloved by our locals.

One of the staples of Aruban cuisine and snacks is the Pastechi. Pastechi is a Caribbean fried pastry that is filled with cheese, meat, chicken, veggies and sometimes even fish! Or perhaps you might want to try a croquette, locally called a "kroket," which is a crusty fried snack with typically a meat and dough mix filling. The Aruban kroket is based on its Dutch counterpart, the "bitterbal".

These two snacks are typically found in all local snack trucks, which can be found all over the

island, including on the side of the main road that stretches from San Nicolas to the Hotel Area. You can also find them at local bakeries all over the island. These places may also sell other snacks and sandwiches too, perfect for on-the-road lunch break.

While you're at it, why not accompany your snack with a refreshing "batido"? Batidos are fruit shakes, typically made with added milk for some creaminess. However, you can also ask to hold the milk. Batidos are commonly found in snack shops too. You may find some batidos along the flea market downtown.

If you are looking for something a bit more fresh and healthy, why not try some coconuts, or shaved ice from local vendors? These vendors carry their little shop at the back of their truck, so they are ever-moving around the island. However, there are a few spots where you can almost always find a coconut/shaved ice vendor:

- Right next to the Red Anchor in San Nicolas, on the way to Baby Beach.
- Along the main road next to the airport field.
- At the California Light House.
- At the Alto Vista Chapel.

These vendors may also sell other delights, like the beloved coconut-based dessert "cocada" or peanuts. All in all, in Aruba, you can always find some place to take a break and have a bite of something local, you maybe just might have to look for them! □

Photo credit: wheninaruba.com



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Experience a taste of Belgium in Aruba – Only at L'Avenue, Palm Beach



Nestled in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba, L'Avenue brings a fresh breeze of Belgian charm to the Caribbean. Just over a year since its grand opening, this intimate bistro has quickly made its mark with its warm hospitality, authentic cuisine, and elegant yet approachable ambiance.

Whether you're strolling through Palm Beach after a morning at the beach or looking for a special dinner spot, L'Avenue welcomes you with an inviting terrace, stylish décor, and the comforting aroma of Belgian classics crafted to perfection. It's a place where locals, travelers, food lovers, and beer connoisseurs come together — united by a love for great food, heartfelt service, and that unmistakable European flair.

At L'Avenue, every dish tells a story — one of tradition, seasonality, and bold yet balanced flavors. From crispy croquettes and perfectly poured Belgian beers



to steaming pots of fresh mussels flown in weekly, the menu offers something both comforting and surprising. Lunch includes a variety of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes steak, chicken, fish, and even rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty experience! But that's not all! L'Avenue is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of \$29.50 per guest, which includes a selection of their fine in-house wine.

More Than a Bistro A Culinary Destination

L'Avenue is more than just a place to eat — it's a culinary destination. A thoughtfully curated menu, an extensive selec-

tion of premium Belgian beers, and an atmosphere that balances European elegance with island ease make it one of the most talked-about dining spots in Aruba.

Whether you're looking for a casual lunch, a romantic dinner, or a celebratory evening with friends, L'Avenue delivers a dining experience that's as memorable as it is delicious.

Open daily for lunch and dinner

Located in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba
Come discover Belgium's best — right here at L'Avenue. ☐



Visit the historic museum at Fort Zoutman!

(Oranjestad)—Located in the middle of downtown Oranjestad, situated right next to the government building "Cocolishi", is one of the oldest buildings of Aruba: Fort Zoutman. First constructed in 1796, this site has been used (or left unused) in many ways and have survived eras of war and attempted dismantling.

When anyone refers to Fort Zoutman, they are actually referring to two separate buildings that, over the years, have been merged: the fort and the tower. That's right, the iconic 5-story, squared tower was not part of the original structure of the fort,

and is actually called "Willem III Toren". Constructed in 1867, this tower was named after the then-reigning king of The Netherlands, Willem III. Willem III Toren was originally a light tower, but after a request from Lieutenant Governor Jan Helenus in 1866, it also became a bell tower.

The fort itself was originally constructed to protect the commerce bay of Paardenbaai from pirates and other disreputable characters roaming the Caribbean Sea. Unlike the Willem III Toren, Fort Zoutman had a more tumultuous past, including the on-and-off reception of unwanted members of the

English military several times (The Netherlands was at constant war with England back in the colonial era).

Over the years, both the fort and the tower had functioned as different government center points, including a tax and stamps office. For some time these two buildings also housed a police precinct and jail, and even experienced abandonment until the Cultural Center Aruba Foundation (CCA) petitioned for its renovation in 1964, turning the site into the Historic Museum it currently is.

Despite its small size, The His-



toric Museum guards a rich depository of the commercial, military and social history of Oranjestad, offering a glance into how the social culture of the town came to be. If you are interested in history and want to learn more about Aruba, then Fort

Zoutman should definitely be included into your itinerary.

The museum is open Monday to Friday from 9am-6pm, and Saturday from 10am-2pm. ☐

**Source: The Old Fort of Aruba
by Jan Hartog.**

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A thoughtfully crafted five-course dinner has been created to delight every palate and honor love in all its glory. Priced at \$145 per couple, the evening begins with a roasted beet and strawberry salad, followed by a velvety to-



mato cream soup. Savor succulent duck with gnocchi, then enjoy a juicy, tender short rib as the



main course. To end the night on a sweet and memorable note, delight in an irresistible explosion of chocolate and raspberry.

Reservations are highly recommended and can be made through OpenTable.com — The Birdie at Tierra del Sol. Celebrate love. Celebrate together. □

A guide for the perfect picture:

Where to find the most Instagrammable places in Aruba

(Oranjestad)—Imagine, you're out and about on the island and you want to take the most picture-perfect photo to show your friends and family back home and online. It seems like the perfect spot can be hard to find, but Aruba is full of great spots for a quick snapshot! Here are the most Instagrammable places in Aruba.

"I LOVE ARUBA"

Right on Paardenbaai Plaza, near the harbor entrance, you will spot a giant sign that reads "I LOVE ARUBA". A great first stop for a quick shot with the family, this spot is among the few that has become a favorite among tourists, especially those that are visiting Aruba through a cruise vacation. Speaking of giant signs that read "Aruba" (because there can never



be too many), there is another sign you can find along the Linear Park. It may be a long walk from the harbor to get there, but while you're at it, check out these other spots along the way!

Wooden Swing on Plaza Daniel Leo

While you're in Mainstreet Oranjestad, check out the wooden swing on Plaza Daniel Leo. This is another

favorite among visitors wanting a cute snapshot for Instagram. Since you've made it this far, one question: How many blue horses have you spotted already?

Mangel Halto



For a different take on beach photos, we definitely recommend Mangel Halto! You can get in the water right by the roots of these beautiful trees (please be careful not to climb them, though!). You will see beautiful skies, birds and other wildlife, and among the greenery of the mangroves, your picture is sure to pop!

Yacht Dock in Oranjestad

Last but certainly not least, the Yacht Dock in Oranjestad is the perfect spot to take a beautiful picture, especially at sunset. The dock is located behind the Wilhelmina Park. This spot offers a gorgeous view of the ocean and sunset, accompanied by the soft waves crashing on the shoreline. You may even spot some iguanas! □

Meet Aruba's biggest hero, Boy Ecury

(Oranjestad)—As part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and due to its strategic geolocation, Aruba was unexpectedly involved in the Second World War. As is known around the globe, this chapter in world history is one of the most tragic yet, and many soldiers and rebels have died on the front line during this time.



One of those rebels who have fought against the Nazi regime, was an Aruban named Segundo Jorge Adelberto "Boy" Ecury. Born in Aruba on April 23rd, 1922, Boy spent his childhood on the island, before being sent to The Netherlands by his father when he was 15 years old to continue his studies abroad. This was in 1937, three years before WWII broke out.

During the war, he actively participated in the rebellion in The Netherlands against the Nazi regime, but his rebellious streak and constant drive to fight for justice began even before the war broke out. Being a person of color with a Hai-

tian heritage living in The Netherlands made him vulnerable to discrimination, and this inspired him to be an activist, to stand up and fight against discrimination and oppression.

After seeing the horrific bombings of Rotterdam first-hand, he decided to join the resistance. At the same time, he was still studying and living with family in Tilburg. It was there where he met people who printed and distributed the rebellion newspaper. This would be the first of three rebellion group that he would join throughout his

4-year service to the resistance.

Boy's primary task as member of the group was to distract the German soldiers while others ran into hiding into alleyways. This he was able to do because of his skin color and confronting demeanor. Boy also participated in the multiple sabotaging operations against the German military occupying The Netherlands. These included bombings on German military trucks and trains. The group also helped people go into hiding, as well as opened fire against allies of the Nazi regime. In these operations, Boy really stood out for his cold bloodedness.

In 1943, he received a notice to be placed for work in Germany. This he refused, of course, and went into hiding using multiple addresses in multiple cities. Because he was a wanted man, he of course could not continue to be active as a rebel. However, stubborn and naturally rebellious as he was, he always tried to join in on the operations regardless.

In 1944, after his friend Luis de Lannoy, a fellow rebel from Curacao, was arrested and executed, he moved to Delft, where he joined his third and last group in Rotterdam. During this time, he wrote a goodbye letter for his family, possibly knowing the risks of him being active again in the big cities.

Eventually, he proved himself right. On November 5th, 1944, Boy Ecury was arrested by German soldiers. He was placed in the "Oranjestad" prison in Scheveningen, The Hague, where he was questioned. Despite being sold out by an acquaintance, he himself never gave away the names of his comrades. Famously, he told his cell mate: "I will die with a smile on my face."

On November 6th, 1944, Ecury was executed. He



was only 22 years old. Ecury was buried with military honor. In 1949, the Aruban Government erected a monumental bust of him in front of what is now the linear park trail, and in 1984 he received the Resistance Memorial Cross postmortem.

Boy's life motto was this: "In my father's house, there is no place for a traitor." □

Source: "De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)" by Evert Bongers.

Blackstone Beach



(Oranjestad)—Named after its most recognizable feature, the Blackstone Beach almost represents the opposite of the typical Aruban beaches. For one, it has black sand and is covered in black smooth stones. Secondly, it lies on the northern side of the island, away from the white sandy beaches of in the southern region. So, if you feel up for something different—or if it's opposite day, visit the Blackstone Beach.

Blackstone Beach shows the more natural side of Aruba; the stones that cover the beach and the shape of it has been crafted for thousands of years through volcanic eruptions, coral reef movements and wave activity of the rural northern part of the island.

Located further east to the Natural Bridge and Andi-

curi Beach, the Blackstone Beach is relatively easy to access. Once you get passed the Ayo Rock Formation, take the Andicuri road leading up to Andicuri Beach. There, you can park your car and take a 1km hike towards Blackstone Beach.

This beach forms part of the Arikok National Park and is therefore a site that is preserved. This is why it is also relatively untouched by commercial influences. Despite being called a beach, do note that it is not advised to swim in the water, as the current is very strong and can easily stray you further in the wild ocean. However, you can still enjoy a spectacular view of the stones and the northern ocean that stretches out in front of the beach and take a picture with your friends or family! □

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Unique fauna of Aruba

For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have



very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi (parakeet, *Aratinga pertinax*)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs be-

tween 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Coneu (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigro-nuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Coneu, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Coneu can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Coneu has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of



3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Coneu is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Coneu is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Coneu can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. □

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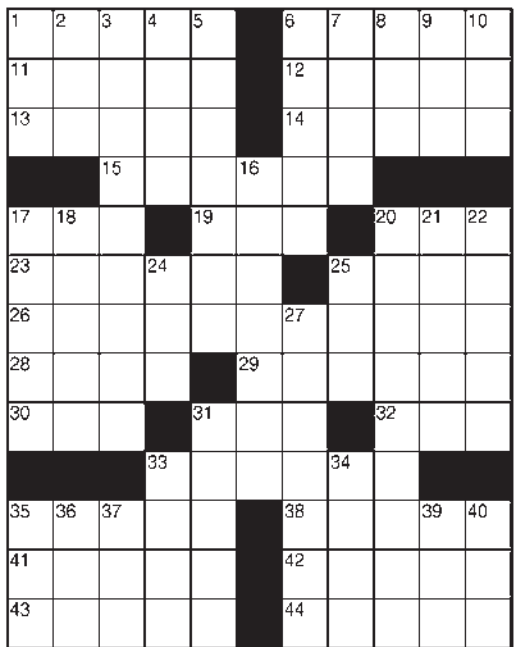
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 42 Patriot
1 Impressed greatly
6 Foxx of "Ray"
11 Cartoon genre
12 Undermine
13 Jeans material
14 Bar seat
15 Formal
17 Big D player
19 Pub pint
20 Kids' card game
23 Galahad's mother
25 Prudent
26 They help to develop breathing capacity
28 Preceding nights
29 Frozen expanse
30 — Moines
31 Martini base
32 Claire of "The Crown"
33 Second-largest nation
35 Yellow gem
38 Character found in kids' books
41 Not dozing

DOWN

- 1 Gum mass
2 Low digit
3 Rooftop turners
4 Mideast ruler
5 Lowers
6 Track great Owens
7 Prentious
8 Cattle call
9 Wedding words
10 Twisty fish
16 Didn't get up early
17 Imitated a kitten
18 Full of energy
20 Sources of sudden wealth
21 The Jetsons' dog
22 Utter over
24 Passport, license, etc.
25 Victory
27 Out of control
31 Peered
33 Soap unit
34 Secluded spot
35 Letter after sigma
36 Possess
37 Pussy foot
39 Bear abode
40 Lennon's love



2-23

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-23

CRYPTOQUOTE

HP HE MLMKHWJ SOMP GYZ

DMW MDDYLQAHEO HI GYZ RY

WYP DMUC SOY JCPE POC

DUCRHP. — OMUUG E.

PUZLMW

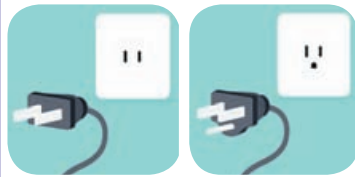
Cryptoquote: IT IS EASIER TO DO A
JOB RIGHT THAN TO EXPLAIN WHY YOU DIDN'T.
— MARTIN VAN BUREN

Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 9 - 15 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	09	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
TUE	10	MAJESTIC PRINCESS	07.00	18.00	B	1
		SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
WED	11	BRITANNIA	07.00	18.00	B	1
		CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE	08.00	23.00	C	1
		SEA CLOUD SPIRIT	08.00	14.00	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	12	MS RENAISSANCE	09.00	18.00	B	1
		CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	C	1
		CARNIVAL MAGIC	09.00	22.00	I	1
SAT	14	AIDAPERLA	09.00	21.00	C	1
SUN	15	NORWEGIAN PEARL	08.00	17.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



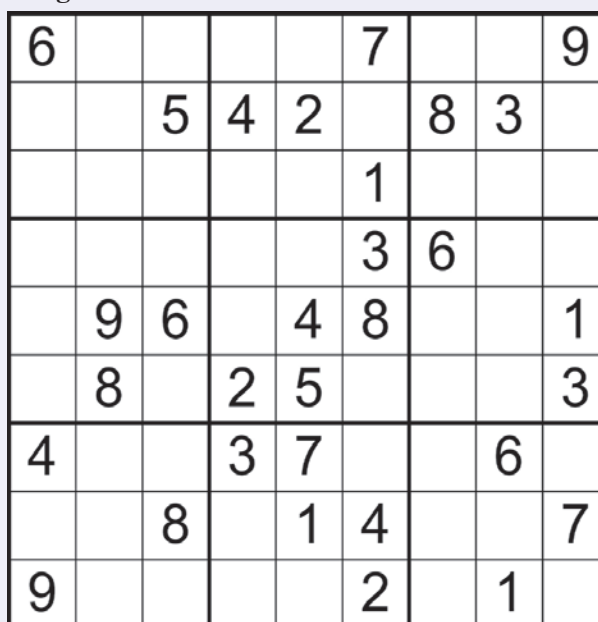
Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★

2/12

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★

2/11



A sign marks an entrance to a Moderna building in Cambridge, Mass., May 18, 2020.

Associated Press

Moderna says FDA refuses its application for new mRNA flu vaccine

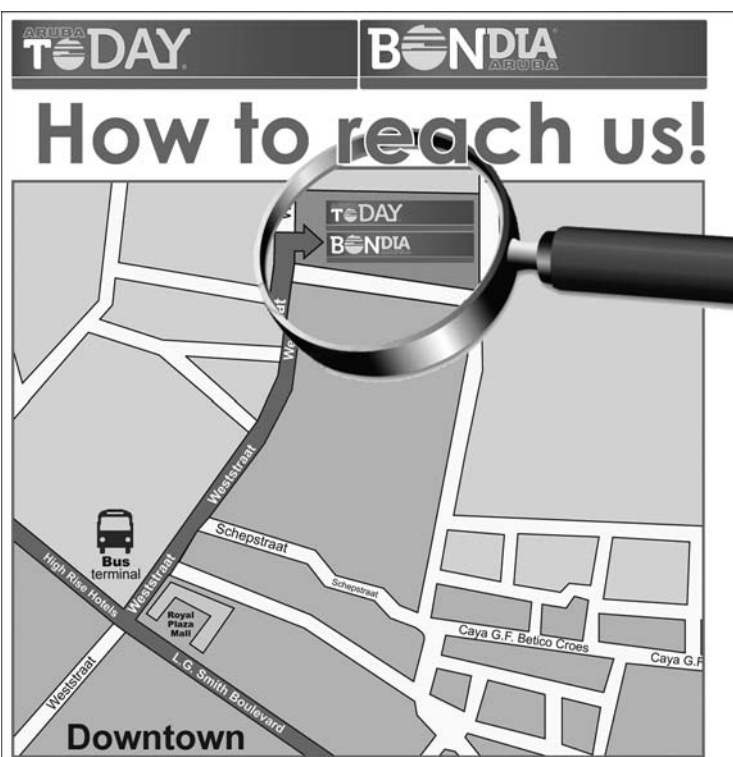
By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is refusing to consider Moderna's application for a new flu vaccine made with Nobel Prize-winning mRNA technology, the company announced Tuesday.

The news is the latest sign of the FDA's heightened scrutiny of vaccines under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., particularly those using mRNA technology, which he has criticized before and after becoming the nation's top health official.

Moderna received what's called a "refusal-to-file" letter from the FDA that objected to how it conducted a 40,000-person clinical trial comparing its new vaccine to one of the standard flu shots used today. That trial concluded the new vaccine was somewhat more effective in adults 50 and older than that standard shot.

The letter from FDA vaccine director Dr. Vinay Prasad said the agency doesn't consider the application to contain an "adequate and well-controlled trial" because it didn't compare the new shot to "the best-available standard of care in the United States at the time of the study." Prasad's letter pointed to some advice FDA officials gave Moderna in 2024, under the Biden administration, which Moderna didn't follow. □



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American Airlines	582 2700
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Jet Blue	588 2244
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

6301307

Studies test whether gene-editing can fix high cholesterol. For now, take your medicine

By LAURAN NEERGAARD

AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists are testing an entirely new way to fight heart disease: a gene-editing treatment that might offer a one-time fix for high cholesterol.

It's very early stage research, tried in only a few dozen people so far. But gene-editing approaches being developed by two companies show hints that switching off certain genes could dramatically lower artery-clogging cholesterol, raising hopes of one day being able to prevent heart attacks without having to take pills.

"People want a fix, not a bandage," said Dr. Luke Laffin, a preventive cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic. After co-authoring a promising study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, he said he was flooded with queries about how to participate in the next clinical trial.



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This undated image made available by the National Human Genome Research Institute shows the output from a DNA sequencer.

Everyone needs a certain amount of cholesterol. But too much, especially a "bad" kind called LDL cholesterol, builds plaque in the artery walls and is a main driver of heart attacks and strokes. Cardiovascular disease is the nation's and world's leading killer. Millions take cholesterol-lowering medicines such as statins, the cornerstone of treatment. But many still struggle to lower their cholesterol enough, and sticking with the drugs for life is difficult, with some quitting because of side effects.

Why genes matter for cholesterol

While your diet contributes, your liver produces the cholesterol your body needs, according to the American Heart Association, and genes play a role in how it's managed. Some people inherit genes that trigger very high cholesterol. Others have cholesterol that's naturally extremely low over their lifetime and seldom develop heart disease.

Years ago, Dr. Kiran Musunuru, a cardiologist now at the University of Pennsylvania, reported some of those lucky people harbor a mutation that turns off a gene named ANGPTL3, lowering their levels of both LDL cholesterol and another bad

fat, triglycerides.

Separately, geneticists at UT Southwestern Medical Center found still other people's extremely low LDL was due to loss of function of another gene named PCSK9.

"It's a natural experiment in what would happen if we actually changed the gene," said the Cleveland Clinic's Dr. Steven Nissen, who with Laffin oversaw an ANGPTL3 study funded by Swiss-based CRISPR Therapeutics.

What early gene-editing studies can and can't show

Today there are injected medicines that block proteins produced by the PCSK9 and ANGPTL3 genes in the liver, thus helping the body clear away cholesterol. The new research uses CRISPR, the Nobel Prize-winning gene-editing tool, to try switching off one of those genes in people at high risk from uncontrolled cholesterol.

In one study, 15 adults received a single infusion of tiny particles that carried the CRISPR tool to the liver, switching off the ANGPTL3 gene inside that organ's cells. Within two weeks, those getting the highest dose saw their LDL and triglyceride levels both drop by half, Laffin and Nissen reported in November.

Boston's Verve Therapeutics, a subsidiary of pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, earlier reported that its PCSK9-targeted editing infusion cut LDL cholesterol by a similar amount in a small study.

Both companies' initial studies were done in Australia, the U.K. and other countries. A Lilly spokesperson said U.S. study sites are opening. Nissen said a next-step study of CRISPR Therapeutics' approach should start later this year, with sites yet to be announced. Each company is pursuing several gene targets.

While people with naturally nonfunctioning ANGPTL3 or PCSK9 have no apparent bad consequences, longer studies of the gene-editing approach in far more people are needed, said Penn's Musunuru, who co-founded Verve. He said some participants in an earlier Verve study have been tracked for two years, their cholesterol still lowered. Gene editing is considered permanent. If edited liver cells reproduce, their progeny contain the altered genes, and Musunuru said the edits have lasted a lifetime in mice.

There are major safety questions to be answered, cautioned Dr. Joseph Wu of Stanford University,

who wasn't involved in either study. CRISPR-based therapies for any disease haven't been used enough to know long-term safety and the particles carrying the gene-editing tool can irritate or inflame the liver, he said. Another unknown is whether gene-editing hits only the intended target. That's why for now, studies largely target people at very high risk.

What to do now for better heart health

Whether gene editing eventually pans out, the American Heart Association lists eight key factors for better heart health that everyone should work on now.

Some involve lifestyle. Eat a heart-healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats like those found in nuts. Saturated fats can increase cholesterol while healthier diets can lower LDL levels and raise levels of HDL, the so-called good cholesterol. Also, be physically active, as exercise can increase good HDL and help lower triglycerides.

Maintain a healthy weight. If you smoke, quit. And get enough sleep.

On the medical side, control your blood pressure levels measuring less than 120 over 80 are optimal. Diabetes also harms the heart so control your blood sugar.

As for cholesterol, keeping levels of that "bad" LDL kind at 100 is considered fine for healthy people. But once people develop high cholesterol or heart disease, guidelines recommend lowering it to at least 70, even lower for those at very high risk.

When lifestyle changes aren't enough, statin pills like Lipitor, Crestor or their cheap generic equivalents block some of the liver's production of cholesterol and are highly effective at lowering LDL. There are a few other pill options for people who need additional help or can't take statins, as well as some injected medicines. □

Spring training initial focus on robot umpires and World Baseball Classic

By **RONALD BLUM**
AP Baseball Writer

Just 102 days after a thrilling World Series ended with the Los Angeles Dodgers becoming the first repeat champion in a quarter century, pitchers and catchers are back on the field Tuesday as spring training begins with an initial focus on ABS and WBC.

In what could be the last full season before a labor confrontation over a possible salary cap proposal, players are preparing for the Automated Ball-Strike system, giving teams a chance to appeal pitch calls by the plate umpire to so-called robot umps.

"I'm really excited about it. I've obviously seen it in Triple-A for a while," said Washington's Blake Butera, among eight new managers and at 33 the youngest in 54 years. "You always hear the chatter from the dugout getting on the umpires. It's like: Hey, challenge it. Let's see what you got."

ABS was tested in 13 spring training ballparks last year, and teams won 52.2% of 1,182 challenges, which averaged 13.8 seconds. Major League Baseball's 11-man competition committee voted in September to approve regular-season



The Automated Ball-Strike System plays on the scoreboard after a pitch call was challenged during the first inning of a spring training baseball game between the Chicago White Sox and the San Diego Padres, Feb. 26, 2025, in Phoenix.

use for 2026.

Each player will be measured for his strike zone starting at 10 a.m. to noon on a rolling basis during spring training the time of day to maintain uniformity and the data will be verified by the Southwest Research Institute.

Most teams appear reticent about allowing pitchers to challenge, preferring catchers and managers make the decisions.

"The first month will probably be the hardest month,"

said Detroit manager A.J. Hinch, a former catcher. "Maybe spring will help a little bit. But in the spring, you can try and fail and it's not that penal. You do that in San Diego or Arizona or a home opener against St. Louis, and it's a little more costly. We'll have a running tab on who's good at it and who is not. Because there might be some position players who get their optionality taken away from the challenged call."

Tampa Bay will be prepar-

ing for a return to Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Florida, repaired after hurricane damage caused the Rays to play home games last year at the New York Yankees' Steinbrenner Field in Tampa.

Player turnover

Most top free agents had signed ahead of spring training, and the biggest deals included Kyle Tucker and Edwin Díaz joining the Dodgers, Alex Bregman to the Chicago Cubs, Pete

Alonso the Baltimore Orioles, Dylan Cease the AL champion Toronto Blue Jays and Bo Bichette the New York Mets.

Free agents who stayed put included Philadelphia's Kyle Schwarber and the New York Yankees' Cody Bellinger.

Right-hander Freddy Peralta was acquired by the Mets from Milwaukee in the most notable trade.

Among Japanese players joining MLB, infielder Mune-taka Murakami signed with the Chicago White Sox, infielder Kazuma Okamoto the Blue Jays, and right-hander Tatsuya Imai the Houston Astros.

World Baseball Classic returns for first time since 2023

Japan will try for its fourth title and second straight when players leave their clubs for the sixth edition of the tournament, to be played from March 5-17 in Houston; Miami; San Juan; Puerto Rico; and Tokyo.

Rosters on the 20 national teams include 306 players under major league and minor league contracts, including 78 All-Stars.

"It was something I really wanted to be a part of," U.S. captain Aaron Judge said. "I think this team is going to be on a mission." □

Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese unite on a star-studded US World Cup qualifying roster

By **DOUG FEINBERG**
AP Basketball Writer

Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese will team up on the U.S. women's basketball World Cup qualifying roster that will play next month in Puerto Rico.

The two young stars headline the 12-player team that has a mix of veterans and youth. Clark and Reese have helped the rise of women's basketball over the past few years, starting with their memorable meeting in the NCAA championship game in 2023 that LSU won.

They'll be joined by 2024 Olympic gold medalists Kahleah Copper, Chelsea

Gray, Kelsey Plum and Jackie Young. Dearica Hamby and Rhyne Howard won the 3x3 bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Games.

Also making their national team debut will be Paige Bueckers, Sonia Citron and Kiki Iriafen. Aliyah Boston, who played for the U.S. at the Olympic qualifying tournament in 2024, rounds out the squad.

Clark only played in 13 WNBA games last season while dealing with a host of injuries. She participated in a USA camp in December and said she was healthy.

Three-time Olympic and

world champion Breanna Stewart will train with the team in Miami on March 7-8, but won't play in the tournament.

U.S. Olympic coach Kara Lawson will lead the team in San Juan for the first part of the tournament before returning to Duke to prepare the Blue Devils for the NCAA Tournament. She'll be assisted by Natalie Nakase, Nate Tibbets and Stephanie White. The trio were court coaches at that U.S. training camp in December.

The U.S. will face Senegal, Puerto Rico, Italy, New Zealand and Spain in the tournament. The Americans

have already qualified for the World Cup in Berlin from Sept. 4-13.

The Americans are looking for a fifth consecutive World Cup championship. □



Indiana Fever guard Caitlin Clark, left, fouls Chicago Sky forward Angel Reese, center, during the second half an WNBA basketball game in Indianapolis, Saturday, May 17, 2025.

Associated Press

U.S. speedskater Jordan Stolz wins the 1,000 meters gold in an Olympic-record time

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP National Writer

MILAN (AP) — Jordan Stolz pictured this moment most of his life, ever since he was 5 years old, learning to skate on a frozen pond in his Wisconsin backyard after falling in love with speedskating during the 2010 Winter Olympics and hoping to one day step atop the podium himself. So what was the little hassle of a 10-or-so-minute wait to make sure this first speedskating gold medal would be his Wednesday? Stolz needed to hold off on celebrating until another competitor got the chance for a re-skate, then soon enough was able to smile while leaning forward to



Jordan Stolz of the U.S. celebrates with his gold medal on the podium of the men's 1,000 meters speedskating race at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026.

Associated Press

Games. That's when Shani Davis — a mentor to Stolz — won his second consecutive gold in that event, and Chad Hedrick took the bronze. Dutch men had won the 1,000 at each of the past three Winter Games.

With Eric Heiden, the only speedskater to win five golds at one Olympics, sitting next to rapper Snoop Dogg in the stands, Stolz pulled ahead of de Boo by the time one full lap was done. Then de Boo moved in front. But Stolz took the lead at the final corner and crossed first with his hands on his knees.

He soon was celebrating with an understated pump of his right hand.

A full-on victory lap toting an American flag had to be put on hold for a bit, though: First, the day's last heat needed to be held. And then there was a 10-minute delay before Joep Wennebmaars of the Netherlands was given the chance at a re-skate because he had been bumped during his original heat.

But Wennebmaars didn't come close to beating Stolz, who entered the day as a big favorite and came through in the clutch. Stolz not only holds the 1,000 world record he set in January 2024 but is also a two-time world champion at the distance. Plus, he went 5-for-5 on the World Cup circuit this season in the event, confirming his status as the man to beat at the Winter Games.

In a surprising scene at the U.S. Olympic trials at Milwaukee in January, Stolz fell to the ice a few strides into the 1,000, then popped back up and ended up with the third-best time. No such issue when it mattered the most Wednesday. This race was Stolz's first of his four scheduled events in Milan and it is not unrealistic to think he could leave Italy with four gold medals, given his track record and dominance of late. □

receive his gold for winning the men's 1,000 meters at the Milan Cortina Games in an Olympic-record time. Now Stolz will hope to keep going and add to his collection of trophies as he entered three more events in Milan.

Skating in the next-to-last pairing at Milano Speed Skating Stadium, a temporary facility constructed for these Olympics that has been producing fast times so far, Stolz finished in 1 minute, 6.28 seconds.

The 21-year-old didn't threaten his world record of 1:05.37 but did better the Olympic standard of 1:07.18 that had stood since 2002 before Stolz was born. All four long track speedskating races in Milan have been won in the fastest times ever turned in at an Olympics.

Jenning de Boo of the Netherlands was a half-second slower than Stolz and took the silver medal. No one else came within a full second of Stolz's time. Zhongyan Ning of China got the bronze.

Stolz's medal was his first at this level: As a 17-year-old at the 2022 Beijing Games, Stolz came in 14th in the 1,000 and 13th in the 500.

It also was the first medal of any sort in the men's 1,000 for the United States since the 2010 Vancouver

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