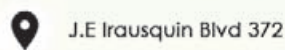




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## Elevate Prize winners gain more than \$300K in funding. They learn to better tell their own stories

By **GLENN GAMBOA**  
AP Business Writer

For Mónica Ramírez, being named one of this year's 10 Elevate Prize winners means so much more than the monetary and structural support that comes with it.

It means the work she does with her Fremont, Ohio-based nonprofit Justice for Migrant Women, which advocates for the rights and needs of migrant and rural women and other marginalized communities, is still valued despite the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

"As immigrant and migrant community members are being threatened and attacked around our country, it's really important to have shows of support like the Elevate Prize is providing because we've seen a retraction -- a big retraction -- in support," said Ramírez, who burst into tears when she learned she had won. "The award means we are able to do the work that we know is so urgently needed."

Like all Elevate Prize winners announced Tuesday, Justice for Migrant Women will receive \$300,000 in unrestricted funding and Ramírez, its founder and president, will receive support and training on organizational growth and increasing the group's visibility.

Elevate Prize Foundation CEO Carolina Garcia Jayaram told The Associated Press that a group's public profile has become more important these days. Not only does it help with fundraising and informing the public, but visibility "is also a form of protection,"



CEO of the Chef Ann Foundation, Mara Fleishman, a winner of this year's Elevate Prize, chops apples for a salad at her home, Monday, Feb. 16, 2026, in Boulder, Colo.

she said.

"It's more important than ever to double down on leaders like Monica," said Jayaram.

To help Elevate Prize winners get more attention for their work, Jayaram said the foundation is launching "Good Is Trending," an initiative that will include taking over NASDAQ's Times Square billboards on Tuesday to shine a spotlight on the winners.

That bigger spotlight is something prize winner Mara Fleishman, CEO of Chef Ann Foundation, which brings made-from-scratch meals to schools, hopes will bring her nonprofit to the next level. The Boulder, Colorado-based organization has already attracted support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Waverley Street Foundation for its work,

which supports elementary and secondary schools in developing menus that are less dependent on processed foods and utilize more fresh local produce.

"We've worked with over 17,000 schools and reached more than five million kids," Fleishman said. "But how do we take the work we've done and turn it into something digestible for legislators and advocates to understand what is possible?"

Fleishman said her foundation needs to find ways to get the public to become a "force multiplier" for its message and carry it into school board meetings and statehouses around the country.

A lot of that work can be done through storytelling, Jayaram said. And the Elevate Prize selection panel took the potential stories

the nominees could tell into account when choosing the winners.

"People pay more attention to people than they do to issues," Jayaram said. "So when you can ground an issue in the story of a person, of a community, of a neighborhood, suddenly the whole world can start to engage and relate to that because it's not that different from a community and a neighborhood and a family somewhere else."

The Elevate Prize Foundation has believed in the power of storytelling for years. Last year, it even launched its own production house Elevate Studios to tell the stories of its prize winners more effectively, on platforms ranging from YouTube videos to feature-length documentaries released in theaters.

Ramírez says she looks forward to telling the stories of the people she supports through Justice for Migrant Women.

"I really think that the Elevate Prize is going to help us give a microphone to the people that we serve," she said. "That's my hope." The 2026 class of Elevate Prize winners are: Shabana Basij-Rasikh, president and co-founder of SOLA (School of Leadership, Afghanistan), an Afghan-led organization advocating for social change through girls' education; Hillary Blout, founder and executive director of For the People, which helps people get released from prison; Manu Chopra, CEO of Karya, which brings AI advancements to low-income communities; Mara Fleishman, CEO of Chef Ann Foundation, which brings made-from-scratch meals to schools; Aisha Nyandoro, CEO of Springboard to Opportunities, which supports residents living in federally subsidized affordable housing; Tom Osborn, founder and CEO of Shamiri, which brings mental health care to underserved regions, starting with Africa; Ai-jen Poo, executive director of Caring Across Generations, which centers care as a national priority; Mónica Ramírez, founder and president of Justice for Migrant Women, which supports migrant and rural women's rights; Krutika Ravishankar, co-founder and executive director of Farmers for Forests, which protects and restores forests across India; Utkarsh Saxena, executive director of Adalat AI, which develops AI tools for the court system. □

Associated Press



# What we can learn from lovebirds, the rare birds that mate for life

By **COLLEEN SLEVIN** and  
**ROSS D. FRANKLIN**

**Associated Press**

**PHOENIX (AP)** — Minutes after getting to a park in the middle of Phoenix, you can see flashes of green in the sky and hear chatter because love is in the air or at least, the lovebirds are.

The small parrots are transplants from the other side of the world that are thought to be descendants of pet birds. Arizona is believed to be home to the largest colony of rosy-faced lovebirds outside southwestern Africa. They've been able to survive in a place known for sweltering weather by sticking close to humans and their air conditioning. The lovebirds may have something to teach humans this Valentine's Day about keeping strong romantic bonds.

## How did African lovebirds end up in Phoenix?

Rosy-faced lovebirds are originally from another arid region, the Namib Desert, which stretches from Angola, across Namibia and into South Africa. They are one of nine species of lovebirds.

Around the world, lovebirds are a popular pet. No one knows for sure how the lovebird colony started in Phoenix but they were first noticed around the city in the 1980s.

Some think pet lovebirds escaped or were let loose by their owners or escaped from a pet store, said Robert Carter, a volunteer for the Maricopa Bird Alliance who leads bird walks in the Phoenix area. Others have speculated that they could have flown all the way to Arizona but Carter thinks in that case, they would've found another arid area to stay along the way. The population has grown to an estimated 2,000 birds in Phoenix today, he said.

They can be seen sticking their heads out of the holes in cactus and palm trees that they roost in. They're also known to hang out near air conditioning vents on really hot days to



Lovebirds gather on the ground to feed in Encanto Park, Jan. 18, 2026, in Phoenix.

Associated Press

at least be a little less hot, including at Arizona State University's science building.

While Carter thinks they should have been left in Africa, he admires their adaptability.

"They definitely show a sense of resilience to the situation that they're in," he said.

While Phoenix's lovebirds are believed to be the largest, most firmly established colony outside of Africa, there are also fairly well-established colonies of rosy-faced lovebirds in parts of Hawaii on the Big Island and in Maui, said Kenn Kaufman, field editor for Audubon magazine who has written about lovebirds.

Another kind of lovebird, the Fischer's lovebird, appear to have established a small colony on the southern coast of Portugal, he said.

## How did the birds get their name?

Lovebirds earned their name because of their tendency to form lifelong bonds with their mates, who like to perch close together, almost like they're cuddling. While many parrots mate for life, fewer than half of bird species do, Kaufman said.

While genetic testing has

revealed that birds considered "socially monogamous" sometimes also breed with other birds while raising their young with their mate, lovebirds are not known to stray. They often clean their mate's feathers, especially the hard-to-reach ones, and feed one another food throughout their lives, not just when they are courting, like some other birds, Kaufman said.

People who have kept lovebirds as pets report that their mate seems depressed when they lose their partner by not being active or making abnormal calls, said Dr. Stephanie Lamb, associate veterinarian and bird specialist at the Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital. □

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# Whether it's a mini-sabbatical or an adult gap year, more people are taking extended work breaks

By COLLEEN NEWVINE  
Associated Press

If you daydream about getting a break from work, you might picture two weeks of vacation or a long weekend getaway. But some people dare to imagine something bigger and find ways to get a substantial breather from stress or their day-to-day routines.

Mini-sabbaticals. Adult gap years. Micro-retirement. Extended career breaks go by many names and take many forms, from using the time between jobs to explore or taking an employer-approved leave to becoming a digital nomad or saving up for a monthslong adventure. Creating space for a reset, whether mental, physical or spiritual, is the common thread.

Cost, personal responsibilities and fears of being judged by colleagues, friends and family members are some of the obstacles that prevent people from hitting pause on their work lives and setting out in search of new perspectives, according to sabbatical experts and people who have taken sabbaticals.

## No longer just for academics

American attitudes toward taking time off are different from the ones in much of Europe, where free time and rest are prioritized, said Kira Schrabram, an assistant professor of management at the University of Washington's business school who studies meaningful and sustainable work. In the European Union, workers are entitled by law to at least 20 days of paid vacation a year.

But more companies are allowing weeks or months of paid or unpaid leave as a way to retain valued employees, according to Schrabram. Seven years ago, she brought her experience researching burnout to the Sabbatical Project, an initiative founded by Harvard Business School Senior Lecturer DJ DiDonna that promotes sabbaticals



In this photo provided by Micaela Sling Media, Roshida Dowe, foreground, rides a camel accompanied by several participants of the ExodUS Summit, an event business she co-leads to help Black women take career breaks and move abroad.

as "a sacred human ritual" to which more people should have access.

Schrabram, DiDonna and University of Notre Dame Professor Emeritus Matt Bloom interviewed 50 U.S. professionals who took an extended break from non-academic jobs. From the responses, they identified three types of sabbaticals: working holidays that involved pursuing a passion project; "free dives" that combined exciting adventures with periods of rest; and quests undertaken by burned-out people who engaged in life-changing explorations once they had recovered sufficiently.

More than half of the interview subjects self-funded their hiatuses. In an article for the Harvard Business Review, the researchers made a case for sabbaticals as a tool employers could use to recruit, keep and foster talented workers. But since extended paid leaves are not common, "we're really pushing back on the idea that a sabbatical needs to be sponsored by an employer," Schrabram said of the Sabbatical Project, which created a network of coaches and mentors to encourage the sabbatical-curious.

## Leading by example

Roshida Dowe was 39 years old and working as a corporate lawyer in California when she got laid off in 2018. Instead of seeking a new job right away, she decided to spend a year traveling. Struck by how many how many people asked how she managed it, Dowe decided to decide to try working as an on-line career-break coach. She and Stephanie Perry, a former pharmacy technician who also took a gap year to travel and found a calling in coaching, co-founded ExodUS Summit, a virtual conference for Black women to talk about taking a sabbatical or moving abroad. Speakers at the event discuss both practical considerations like finances, safety and health care, and more philosophical topics like the value of rest and breaking free of intergenerational trauma.

Showcasing women who set off to see the world is powerful because "a lot of us aren't open to possibilities we haven't been shown before," said Dowe, who moved to Mexico City as part of her own reinvention.

"When I coach women

who are looking to take a sabbatical, the main thing they're looking for is permission," she said.

For Perry, a 2014 vacation in Brazil served as a catalyst for when she met people staying in her hostel who were traveling for months, not days. She researched budget travel and found people making it work on \$40 a day.

Prior to that, "I thought for sure people who traveled long term were all trust fund babies," she said.

## Funding the dream

Cost is a common obstacle for people considering a break. There are creative ways around that, said Perry, who has legal residency in Mexico and an apartment in Bogota, Colombia. "Housesitting is the reason I can work very little and travel a lot," she said.

Perry, who has a YouTube channel where she posts videos about traveling or becoming an expat as a Black American, raises money through her subscribers to sponsor Black women on sabbaticals.

When Ashley Graham took a break from her work at a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., she mapped out a road trip that included visiting friends with whom she

could stay for free.

"It was a great way to connect with my past life," said Graham, who subsequently relocated to New Orleans after loving the city during her sabbatical travels.

Taylor Anderson, is a certified financial planner based in Vancouver, Washington, specializes in helping clients plan for sabbaticals. She said many of the same principles apply to saving up for one as they do to saving for retirement. Both require financial discipline as well as a willingness to recognize when it's safe to spend.

"We talk about money breathing. Sometimes it's inhaling, sometimes it's exhaling," Anderson, who has experienced the benefits of a sabbatical reboot herself, said. "Often we find that people do have money saved, but they're afraid to spend it."

"The question of 'What is enough?' is really difficult," she added.

Can everyone afford to take a month or more without a paycheck? Of course not. But for those who have built up a nest egg, "the cost is actually less than you might assume," she said.

## Risks and rewards

Artists Eric Rewitzer and Annie Galvin put two employees in charge of their San Francisco gallery in 2018 to spend the summer in France and Ireland.

"It was terrifying," said Rewitzer, who described himself as having been a workaholic and control freak. "It was a huge exercise in trust."

When they returned to San Francisco, Rewitzer saw the city differently. He felt his life had been out of balance too much work and too little time in nature.

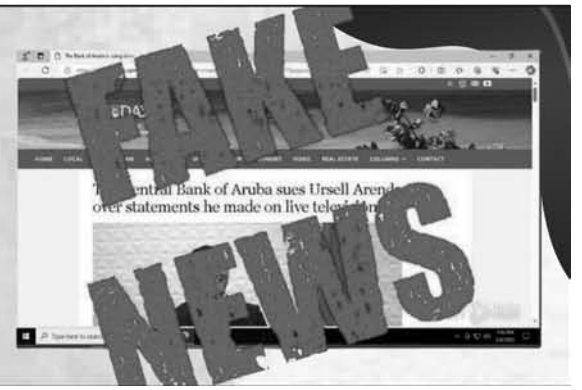
That shift in perspective led the couple to buy what they thought would be a weekend home in the Sierra Nevada. It turned into their full-time home when they shut down their gallery during the COVID-19 pandemic. □



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## 'Adopt a Statue' program for Milan's iconic Duomo restores centuries-old marbles



A detail of Milan's Duomo cathedral is pictured at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026.

By **MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ**

Associated Press

**MILAN (AP)** — A 15th-century statue that once stood outside Milan's iconic Duomo has found a new home. The Bearded Saint with Book was recently restored under the "Adopt a Statue" program, launched in 2020 by the centuries-old institution that oversees the cathedral's conservation. As

of Feb. 13, it is on display at Piazzale Cadorna, behind a glass window at the headquarters of FNM, a Lombardy-based transport company.

The program recruits donors either companies or individuals to fund restoration of a statue under a loan agreement that allows it to occasionally be displayed outside the Duomo.

Associated Press

"The uniqueness of this project is that statues that would otherwise remain in our deposits are restored and brought back to their original beauty," the program's project manager, Elisa Mantia, said in an interview with The Associated Press. "In that way, they can continue to tell the story of the Duomo even in places that are far from the monument."

These agreements are in some cases granted for an initial one-year term and may be renewed. The initiative follows previous fundraising campaigns in which donors could adopt gargoyles or spires in exchange for inclusion in the Duomo's donor register, where contributors' names are recorded as part of the cathedral's long history of support.

### From storage to public display

The construction of the Duomo began in 1386, under the rule of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, then lord of Milan, in collaboration with the city's archbishop. The cathedral was built on the site of two preexisting basilicas and its completion took more than five centuries. One of its bronze doors was not installed until 1965. Because construction spanned centuries, the Duomo's statues were carved by artists from different regions and periods, resulting in a monument that reads as a timeline of evolving artistic styles.

The Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, which oversees

the cathedral's conservation, has sought funding to restore statues removed over the centuries for maintenance or safety reasons. "Culture can save the world," Andrea Gibelli, president of FNM, said during a press conference on Feb. 13 to mark the unveiling of Bearded Saint with Book. "We want to spread the cultural riches we are fortunate to have, which are often overlooked or not fully appreciated."

Other sculptures adopted under the program by different sponsors have included a 16th-century David, a depiction of Samson and the Lion, and a statue of Saint Matthew the Apostle.

While the number of adopted statues isn't disclosed and not all are displayed in public spaces, Mantia said that her institution has pre-selected around 30 sculptures as eligible for restoration. Each case must be authorized by Italy's cultural heritage authorities, as the process involves a formal loan agreement subject to conservation, insurance and transport regulations. □

## 17th century wreck reappears from Stockholm deep

**Stockholm, Sweden**

A 17th century Swedish Navy shipwreck buried underwater in central Stockholm for 400 years has suddenly become visible due to unusually low Baltic Sea levels.

The wooden planks of the ship's well-preserved hull have since early February been peeking out above the surface of the water off the island of Kastellholmen, providing a clear picture

of its skeleton.

"We have a shipwreck here, which was sunk on purpose by the Swedish Navy," Jim Hansson, a marine archeologist at Stockholm's Vrak - Museum of Wrecks, told AFP.

Hansson said experts believe that after serving in the navy, the ship was sunk around 1640 to use as a foundation for a new bridge to the island of Kastellholmen.

Archeologists have yet to identify the exact ship, as it is one of five similar wrecks lined up in the same area to form the bridge, all dating from the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

"This is a solution, instead of using new wood you can use the hull itself, which is oak" to build the bridge, Hansson said.

"We don't have shipworm here in the Baltic that eats



The remains of a 17th century shipwreck is pictured after resurfacing in Stockholm, Sweden, on February 17, 2026.

the wood, so it lasts, as you see, for 400 years," he said, standing in front of the wreck. □



# Russian prosthetics workshops fill up with wounded soldiers

## Vsevolozhsk, Russia

After losing his right leg on the battlefield in Ukraine, Dmitry, a former fighter with Russia's Wagner paramilitary group, is walking again thanks to a new prosthetic limb.

With hundreds of thousands of soldiers coming back from the front wounded, Russia's prosthetics workshops -- like the one outside Saint Petersburg where AFP met Dmitry -- have been filling up with ex-fighters.

Dmitry, 54, had already fought in Syria and for Moscow-backed separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region before Russia launched its full-scale offensive in February 2022.

He recalled his injury with a faint smile.

His unit was bombed as it tried to cross the Dnipro river.

The next moment, he saw his right leg lying next to him. Torn off.

"It was my first injury," said Dmitry, who declined to give his last name and goes by the call sign "Barmak". "I was surprised that I fought so long and was constantly lucky."

He also suffered a serious abdominal injury, spending eight months in hospital and a year in a wheelchair.



A patient runs on prosthetic limbs as Mikhail Moskovtsev, 53, the private prosthetics workshop head, uses his smartphone at the studio's grounds in the Leningrad region on January 22, 2026.

"The atmosphere is friendly here, almost soothing," he said of the private prosthetics workshop in Vsevolozhsk, outside Russia's second-largest city.

In the small studio, workers in ventilation masks were measuring, buffing and painting artificial limbs as Dmitry had his fitting inspected.

## Hefty payments

Russia does not say how many of its soldiers have been killed or wounded in Ukraine -- but independent

reporting and Western intelligence estimates put it in the several hundreds of thousands.

Government data shows Moscow issued 60,000 more prosthetic limbs in 2024 than in 2021, the last full year before the war -- a 65-percent increase.

Even if they don't disclose how they lost a limb, workshop head Mikhail Moskovtsev told AFP it was "obvious" who the ex-soldiers were among his clients.

"These are specific wounds,

for example from mine blasts" -- easily distinguishable from the victims of car accidents and extreme sports enthusiasts.

Moskovtsev does not ask questions.

"For me everyone is equal," he said. "I don't ask the person where it's from or the reasons behind it. If they want, they talk on their own."

His workshop employs around a dozen people.

State-of-the-art prostheses can cost up to five million

rubles (\$65,000).

Russian veterans can choose between public and private facilities, and are offered a host of rehabilitation programmes and cash pay-outs depending on the severity of their wounds.

Dmitry got three million rubles.

"I bought my car with it," he said, adjusting his prosthetic leg as he climbed into a new black pick-up truck outside the centre.

A seasoned soldier, he told AFP he was impressed by the support Moscow offered wounded veterans -- contrasting it with a sense of abandonment after the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan or the Chechen campaigns of the 1990s and early 2000s.

"I remember very well the return of the veterans of Afghanistan and the famous phrase from the bureaucrats: 'I'm not the one who sent you there'.

"It was the same with the soldiers of the first and second Chechen wars," he said.

## 'New elite'

The support is just one way Russia has overhauled its economy and geared its entire society to support the offensive on Ukraine. □



Traditional garments, known as a 'fugu', are displayed for sale on a street in Accra on February 13, 2026.

## Accra, Ghana

Ghanaians have rushed to defend their colourful handwoven "fugu" smocks after President John Mahama's wearing of the loose-fitting traditional garment on a recent state visit to Zambia caused an online storm.

Traditionally produced in northern Ghana on narrow-strip looms, the fugu is widely treated as the west African country's national costume, worn at festivals, political events and -- increasingly -- in offices and public life.

But Mahama's choice to

# Ghana rallies round traditional tunic after foreign mockery

walk the red carpet and inspect a guard-of-honour parade in Lusaka while rocking a blue-white-grey striped version of the flare-armed tunic drew mockery from non-Ghanaians on social media, with some calling the garment inappropriate for a head of state.

Unfazed, Mahama's government declared Wednesdays "fugu" day on his return home, with traders and weavers reporting a spike in demand for the centuries-old attire since.

"People are coming specifically for it now," textile trader William Nene said as he folded freshly woven

smocks, which are also known as "batakar", at his small stall in central Accra. Customers have filtered in asking for the same style recently worn by the president.

"Since the discussion online, many want to wear something that shows they are Ghanaian," said Nene. The furore has triggered a broader conversation about identity, heritage and support for local textiles.

## 'This cloth is ours'

Shadrack Yao Agboli, a fugu weaver who also works with the National Commission on Culture, has a home workshop

where long bands of handloomed fabric hang to dry in the afternoon sun.


"More young people are asking questions: how it's made, where it comes from," he told AFP as he guided a thread through a wooden loom.

Weaving provides livelihoods for many families, he said, adding that each garment can take days to complete.

"When leaders wear it, it reminds people this cloth is ours," Agboli said.

Historian and cultural commentator Yaw Anokye Frimpong called the fugu "an unofficial national dress" with practical and historical roots. □





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## Planning on snorkeling? Get to know our “Dorado”

**(Oranjestad)—If you're ever planning on snorkeling during your vacation on Aruba, you may spot fish that you can't recognize. One of these may be the “Dorado”, a common fish that swims all year long in the waters of Aruba.**

Dorado has many different names it can be referred to. Dral, Dorao, Drals, Drado, are some of them in Papiamentu. In English, it is also called Mahi Mahi, Dolphinfish, or Dorado. It's a good example to reflect on why there can be many names. The same fish becomes known by different common names, why? Common names come only when a group of people, to understand each other, assign a name to a fish. Mahi Mahi, for example, comes from Hawaii and means “very strong”. Dorado is based on Spanish and refers to the golden yellow color that the fish shines with under the sun. Why

it's called Dolphinfish in English is not well defined and while there are several stories around this, none have been confirmed.

Dorado is found in all tropical to subtropical oceans around the world. Dorado is very popular both for recreational fishing and for consumption. It is known among fishermen as an exciting catch and a fish that puts up a good fight. Its meat is very good for consumption and it is also commercially fished for that reason.

They grow very fast, up to 2.7 inches (almost 7 cm) per week. They can live up to a maximum of 5 years although very few reach that age. Most become adults within 1 year but many become reproductive after just 5 or 6 months and reproduce very quickly too. They live in open water on the surface most of the time. Many fish



seek them around sushi lines or floating objects on the sea. Often you will find a group landing together and if you keep a male on the line, often the others will stay close or can keep the group interested by giving shrimp or squid.

Dorado can be found in our waters around the island all year round, but there are periods when it is easier to find than others. □

**Source: The Department of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries (Santa Rosa).**

## Aruba's Nature is to be Cherished

**The national park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are more places on the island that are a preserved area like the Bubali Plas which is a bird sanctuary.**

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the island's past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the in total seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches during breeding season? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after lay-



ing her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches. A very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

### **Bubali Magic**

This beautiful close-up image of the pink bird is courtesy of Michiel

Oversteegen of the Aruba Bird-life Conservation. This important foundation showcases and builds awareness of Aruba's birds and other native flora and fauna. You may have seen a 'pink cloud' lately at the Bubali or Spanish Lagoon Wetlands areas? It's most likely to be Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) or 'Chucharon Cora' as they are known in Papiamentu. This unusual looking bird forages in shallow muddy water while sweeping

its flattened bill from side to side to catch small fish, crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates. The Roseate Spoonbill remains an uncommon sight as they are vulnerable to degradation of feeding and nesting habitats (Wetlands).

The afore mentioned is just a part of what Aruba's nature has to offer. We cannot stress enough to go, see for yourself. The island has the most beautiful beaches but it is also worthwhile to go beyond this and get an idea of our entire island. Lately there is a discussion going on about the effect certain activities have on our nature, for example the ATV vehicles cause a lot of dust, noise and leave tire tracks. Animals live in these areas where the vehicles run, often with high speed and with detrimental consequences to flora and fauna. Motorized vehicles are forbidden to drive on the sand dunes in the Northern part of the island and all beaches in Aruba are forbidden for any motorized vehicle. Treasure our island to enjoy it like you do: as a tropical and natural paradise. We truly appreciate it! □





**infini**  
by Urra Crea

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## Well-known media personality in Aruba, Julia Renfro, passes away



**(Oranjestad)**—Yesterday on social media, friends and family announced the sad news of Julia Renfro's passing, someone known on Aruba for her work in Aruba Today and Aruba Weekly, as well as her work as a photographer.

Julia's brother, Donnie Renfro, shared a post on social media announcing her passing. "I am sad to announce the passing of my sister, Julie Renfro, after a short illness caused by a hemorrhage," Donnie Renfro wrote in his post. "A private reunion will be planned for family and close friends."

According to her profile on social media, Julia Renfro worked as a content creator for Aruba Tourism Authority, for the government of Aruba, different hotels and news outlets. For a while, she was editor in chief of Aruba Today. She was also a liaison for news media in the United States, covering big headlines like the disappearance of Natalee Holloway.

Friend and family remember Julia as a cheerful and warm person, who had great compassion for animal, and was a great friend. Aruba Today sends its condolences to Julia Renfro's loved ones. May Julia rest in peace. □

## The legend of the Kibrahacha tree

**ORANJESTAD**—The Kibrahacha is a famous tree known locally for its bright, yellow flowers that blooms for just three days. Scientifically known as *Tabebuia billbergii*, and in English as the Yellow Poui, this tree is native to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, and is considered among locals as one of the most spectacular trees on the island. But did you also know that the beautiful yellow flowers have a story behind them?

The Kibrahacha is said to have extremely hard wood—so hard that it can break an axe. In fact, that's what its name means in Papiamentu: "kibra" (break) "hacha" (axe). The flowers bloom around April and May, but this only last for about three days, as the flowers start to fall off and the tree starts growing its green leaves. The Kibrahacha is especially particular, as it's the only one among its neighboring trees to starts blooming first.

### The legend of the Kibrahacha

Written by Hubert (Lio Booi)

One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock,

suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudawechea, who was a epistemophile, to come see his father.

Aterima wasted to time and went to go fetch Kudawechea. Upon telling Kudawechea that her father was sick, he immediately accompanied Aterima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aterima that the only thing that can cure her father is a home-made potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudawechea was determined to bring back Aterima's father back to health, and so off they went to the nearest Kibrahacha tree.

When they arrived at the tree, they saw that it was covered head to toe in thorns, with only a few closed flowers at the very top. Kudawechea, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aterima to start plucking the thorns of the tree to climb to the top where the flowers are. Aterima, just as



determined to save her father, didn't hesitate to start.

To her surprise, every time she plucked a thorn of the tree, a bright, yellow flower bloomed in its place. The thorns were hard to pluck out, but Aterima continued plucking with enthusiasm and wonder at the unfolding sight before her. Not too long after she was able to fill her entire satchel with the yellow flowers.

Kudawechea, satisfied to see Aterima so happy and encouraged to help her father, took her back to her hut.

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aterima's mother quickly made a tea out of the flowers and gave it to her sick husband. Miraculously, after just one sip of the tea, the father's fever left his body immediately, and he opened eyes and sprung up feeling new.

The next morning, they all visited the same Kibrahacha tree that saved the life of Aterima's father and they saw another miracle. The tree was covered again in the same bright, yellow flowers, with not a thorn in sight. And as the legend goes, from that day on, the Kibrahacha tree no longer produced any more thorns. □





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Shalom Hair & Nails Bar | Twist of Flavors | Dunkin Donuts  
Treasure Cove | El Patio Tacos & Tequila | M8 Boutique  
Fusion Restaurant, Tapas, Wine & Piano Bar

## Aruba's underwater wonderland

(Oranjestad)—Exploring the underwater wonders is something you should definitely do during your stay in Aruba. The underwater world has everything to offer that makes a snorkel trip so exceptional; an impressive, colorful sea life with exotic fishes, turtles and beautiful coral reef. The historic shipwrecks, located on the Aruban seabed are also worth a visit. Aruba is known for its white beaches and blue oceans, which means there are many fascinating underwater spots you can explore. So take your snorkeling gear and visit some of these top places for underwater exploration.

### Tres Trapi

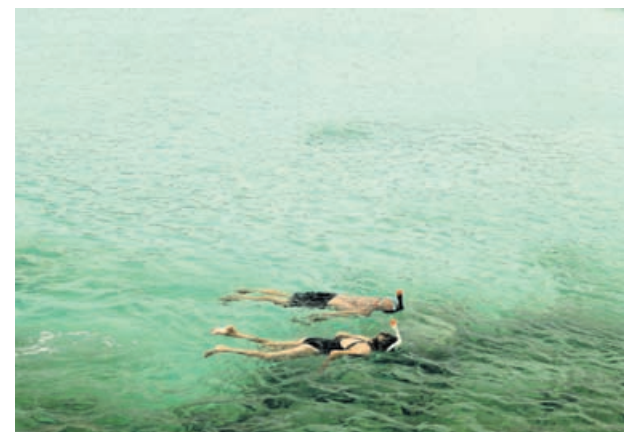
'Tres Trapi' means three steps in Papiamentu. The beach is called Tres Trapi because it is accessible by a tiny stairway carved into the rocky coastline. Tres Trapi is a small beach, located on the north-western side of the island, an approximately 5 to 10 minute drive from Palm Beach. From the unique steps you walk right into the clear and turquoise blue ocean. While you're snorkeling, you will encounter all kind of tropical fishes and sea stars. The kind of starfish you will find in the Aruban waters is the red cushion sea star. This is a starfish that is commonly found in the shallow waters of the Caribbean Sea and if you are lucky during your snorkeling visit to Tres Trapi, you may come across one of the green sea turtles. Respect the animals, keep your distance and just enjoy the view. Also remember; it is a once in a life time experience.

### Antilla shipwreck

Antilla is a 400-foot-long ship, built in 1939 in Hamburg, Germany. Antilla came to Aruba, because it had to find a neutral port. When Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, the crew decided to let their own ship sink, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Dutch Navy. Antilla lies on its portside in Malmok bay, and the sunken WWII ship is now one of Aruba's most popular snorkeling and dive spots. However, the ship wreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes, but the ship wreck alone is already impressive enough.

### Baby Beach

Baby beach is a lagoon with crystal blue ocean. The beach is located on the southern part of the island. On the way to the famous beach, you will drive through the old capital of Aruba, San Nicolas. The old Aruban culture can be still felt and experienced here, so do not hesitate to get out of your car and walk around for a while. Baby beach is a child friendly beach, since it is shallow and the water has a pleasant temperature. The name therefore fits well with the beach. Further in the lagoon, you'll find a lot of people snorkeling. This is an excellent spot to go under water exploring—but do take care not to go too far out; outside the lagoon the waves can be pretty rough! In the lagoon there is an



area marked until where it is recommended to snorkel and on the beach you will find different facilities. It is a perfect beach to spend your day snorkeling and relaxing.

### Mangel Halto

Mangel Halto beach is located in Savaneta, on the southern-west part of the island. The beach is different from the other beaches in Aruba; it is beach full of mangroves. The main entrance to reach the beach is through a small bridge that takes you through the mangrove trees. There are diverse spots where you can enjoy a perfect beach day, accompanied with wooden stairs built to allow easy access to the water and a dock to sit on and enjoy the view. Mangel Halto is also worth a visit for the snorkeling experience. Inside the bay, the water is clear and you'll find many colorful fish. Outside the bay is a bit more challenging for beginners because of the wind and the waves, but the coral is alive and it is snorkel heaven. □

## Rock stacking and its harmful effects



(Oranjestad)—The organization Aruba Birdlife Conservation has in the past raised concerns about the phenomenon of "rock stacking" in the area of Baby Beach and warned about the dangers it poses, especially for children.

As known, "rock stacking" is not illegal in Aruba, but its impact on nature is harmful as the stones form part of the natural habitat of small animal species living in Aruba's wilderness. Experts warn that "rock stacking" could even lead certain species to extinction.

In Aruba, much of the "rock stacking" also occurs near Arikok National Park. Although this activity is not illegal in Aruba, it may be time for park authorities to impose stricter regulations on this activity.

Tourists often believe that the meaning behind this activity is making a wish, but they do not realize its negative impact.

Aruba Birdlife Conservation's post not only raises alarms about the activity but also now that this phenomenon has reached Baby Beach, some of the stacked stone towers are up to 1.7 meters high, which can be very dangerous, especially for children. □



## Keeping up with the conniving spider... Nanzi fools Cha Tiger



**Many years ago, Cha\* Tiger did not live in the mondi\*, but among civil society. Back then, he was feared by everyone. When he walked past in a halfway, everyone around would make room immediately, that's how ferocious he was.**

One night a group of friends was hanging out and they were talking about Cha Tiger. "You know, that tiger sure is incredibly strong and I don't trust him one bit. He probably eats a lot too. Oh, I'm so scared of him!" one person said.

"Oh, don't be stupid! What can Cha Tiger do? He's all bark and no bite, that's it. I certainly am not afraid of him. I bet you guys that I could even sit on his back like I would any donkey." It was Nanzi who said this. The people around him laughed at his remarks, thinking how silly it was for him to say such things.

"You, Nanzi? You are such a liar! He'll stomp you into next Tuesday, stop saying such nonsense."

"I'm not lying!" Nanzi defended himself. "He'll take me all the way to Shon Arei\*."

The next morning, Shon Arei already knew of what Nanzi had been saying about Cha Tiger. He was really curious to see if Nanzi was brave enough to put his money where his mouth is. Cha Tiger walked past.

"Hey, Cha Tiger!" someone called to him. He growled at the person. "Hey, Cha Tiger! Listen!"

"Nanzi made fun of you, said he wasn't afraid of you at all! Said he could sit on your back and that you weren't as strong as we think you are."

Cha Tiger stopped dead in his tracks, furious. "Well, I'll set him straight!" Cha Tiger ran toward Nanzi's house, prepared to teach Nanzi a painful lesson. The entire way there he was growling and yelling, making everyone around aware what was going to happen. They all ran inside and peaked through the blinds to see the fight that was going to unfold.

Nanzi also heard Cha Tiger's screams, slowly getting closer and closer. He was terrified. His face turned pale, and his teeth started chattering like someone with a high fever. Sweat was dripping down his forehead.

When Cha Tiger arrived at Nanzi's place, he stormed in and saw Nanzi's frail body lying face down in the corner. "Hey, how are you, Cha Tiger?" Nanzi asked, his voice trembling. "I Heard you were making fun of me in front of your little friends, so I came to hear from your own mouth what you have to say to me," Cha Tiger

retorted, still fuming.

"Me? Talk bad about you?" Nanzi chuckled nervously. "People are such liars, I swear. Can't you see how sick I am here?" Nanzi took a pause, like someone who couldn't breathe properly. In his case of course, it was probably from extreme fear. "Shi Maria\* wanted to take me to Shon Arei, where someone can heal me from my illness." Still wrapped up in his act, Nanzi turned back face down. "Me, a father of nine little children..."

Cha Tiger was shocked. Nanzi looked absolutely terrible, God knows he was dying.

"Cha Tiger, you're strong. Could you put me on your back and take me to Shon Arei, I can barely walk," Nanzi pleaded. Cha Tiger took pity on the spider and agreed to do this favor. Nanzi climbed on the tiger's back, letting his body fall down and grabbing on to Cha Tiger's neck. "Would you mind putting a rope in your mouth so I can hold on? That way I can sit up straight," Nanzi asked. Cha Tiger growled in reluctance but said OK. And so they made their way to Shon Arei.

Once they started traveling through the mondi, Nanzi turned to Cha Tiger and said: "These mosquitos are so annoying! Cha Tiger, do you mind if I cut a piece of branch so I can keep these mosquitos away?" Cha Tiger let him take his branch.

Eventually they made it out the mondi to where everyone else was. Nanzi immediately perked up and whacked Cha Tiger with his branch, making the tiger jump. He ran all the way to Shon Arei's castle. Exhausted, he plumped down in front of His Majesty.

"See, Shon Arei? Cha Tiger ain't nothing but a big donkey!" Nanzi said proudly. Everyone around cheered: "Hurray, Nanzi!" Poor Cha Tiger was so embarrassed that he was fooled by the conniving spider, and so he ran into the mondi to hide. To this day, it's said that the tiger still hides away in the mondi.

Cha: Nickname placed in front of someone's name and can mean anything, like friend. However, it often has negative connotations first.

Mondi: dry wooded areas found on the ABC islands.

Shon Arei: The King

Shi Maria: Nanzi's wife.

Story and pictures are from "Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)" by Nilda Pinto. □





## Best spots to view the sunset

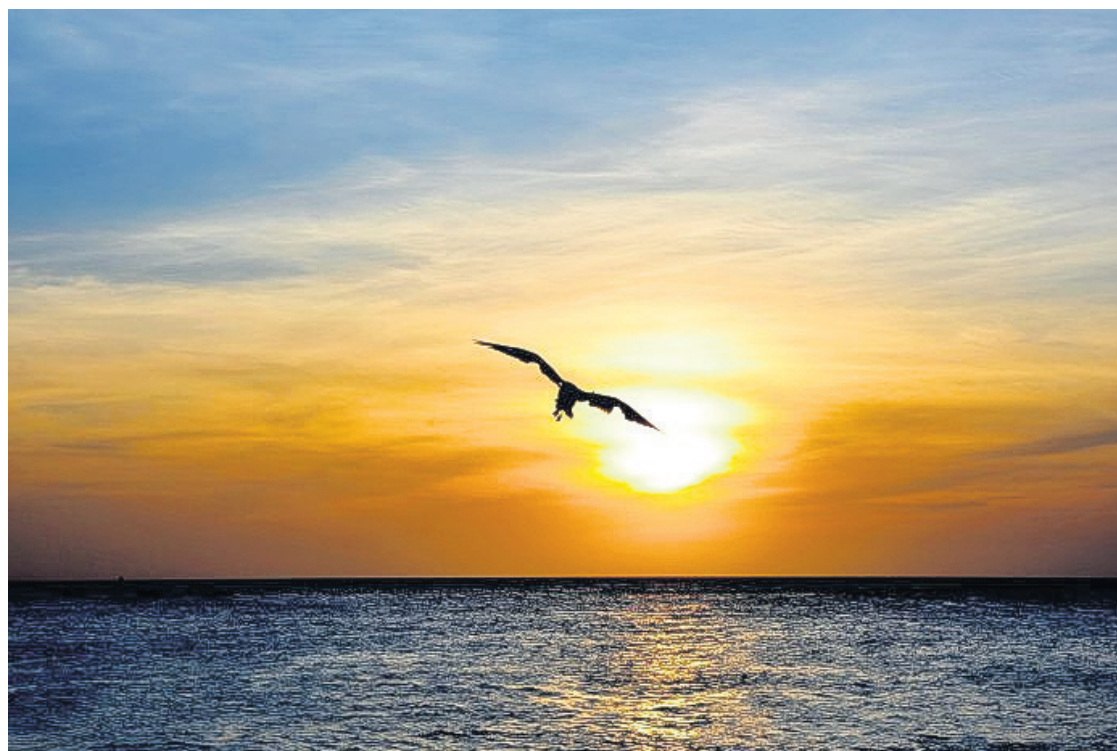
(Oranjestad)—What can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset? Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

### California Light House

Of course, being one of the highest points easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that crash on the northern side of the island.

### Manchebo & Eagle Beach

Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on



the beach has to be either the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as an experience!

### Arashi Beach

Another beach that has to

be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California Light House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the

Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple

### Hooiberg Hill

These last two options are for more active couples. If you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

### Casibari Rock Formation

If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back.hue.□

## Meet an Aruban trailblazers: Padu Lampe



(Oranjestad)—This week we remember one of our most beloved Aruban giant, Juan Chabaya Lampe—better known as Padu Lampe or Padu del Caribe. As one of the most important and renowned artists in the Aruban cultural sphere, Padu's long career led him to be honored today as "the father of culture."

On April 26th, 1920, Juan Chabaya Lampe "Padu Lampe/Padu del Caribe" was born in Nassastraat, Oranjestad. He grew up in a happy musical environment, and it is because of this that he developed a love for music. Starting from the age of 12, he was agile in the clarinet, mandolin and cuatro. Henry Lampe, his father, was also a well-known pianist and musician.

In a publication of the informative seminar, "Observer", from august 1st,

1962, Padu's many merits and friendly personality stood out. It was said that he was an excellent pianist with a personal style and full of surprises. Secondly, though the composer was not too familiar with music theory, he showed innovations in his compositions. Lastly, Padu was a promoter of Creole music around the world.

One of the most important moments in Aruban history, in which he was able to witness first-hand, was the first radio broadcast on the island on March 20th, 1954. Here, he was accompanied by Antillean guitarist Julian Coco and Hubert "Loi" Booi. In the art world, Padu was also a known painter. During his youth, he made several painting using his unique style. In 1939, he participated in an art exhibit in New York, where he won a bronze medal for his paint-

ing "Typical View of Aruba."

Padu remained a popular artist within the Dutch Antilles and the Caribbean as a pianist, singer, author and painter. Padu Lampe was a local artist who became renowned in Venezuela, Colombia, The U.S. and The Netherlands too. In the 1950s, he sold no less than 50 thousand copies of his long-playing albums (LPs). Padu Lampe was a multifaceted artist, inspired by his interest in parapsychology and supernatural phenomenon. He wrote three books in Papiamentu on the subject in 1986, which was published by the Aruban National Printing Press with sponsorship provided by the Prince Bernhard Funds Netherlands Antilles. Besides that, Padu passed his exam on "Society to Advanced Ethical Hypnosis" in 1964 in New Jersey. He received a certificate as a hypnotic technician, which gave him the authority to practice hypnosis in some states.

Over the course of his career, he received many accolades and awards in Aruba, Curacao, Venezuela and the Netherlands.

Padu del Caribe passed away on November 29th, 2019, at the age of 99 years old. Padu brought the Aruban culture around the world.

His legacy will remain ingrained in the Aruban cultural history, and he will be known forever as one of the most influential trailblazers of our community.

Padu will always be in Aruba's heart, because he had composed various special songs dedicated to the mothers of the island; his song "Sonrisa di un baby" ("A baby's Smile") has been written in three different languages. Padu also wrote our national anthem "Aruba Dushi Tera", along with Mr. Rufo Wever. This song was approved by the government of Aruba and was named the official anthem of the island in 1976.

Other songs that have been considered as being almost a second anthem for Arubans is the special composition he wrote for his wife Daisy Croes called "Abo so". Daisy later passed away in 1994.□

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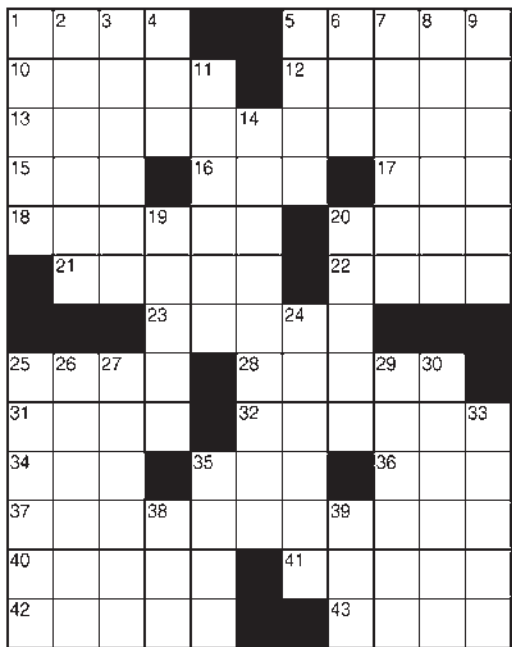
By THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 41 Lesson leader  
1 Sibilant summons  
5 Eiffel Tower setting  
10 Match in value  
12 Singer Cara  
13 Gram-matical category  
15 "My country — of thee"  
16 Attempt  
17 Beavers' creation  
18 Black Sea port  
20 Old letter  
21 Laundry problem  
22 Commen-tary piece  
23 Signed  
25 Auto-maker Benz  
28 Make wavy  
31 Singer Burl  
32 Yearly  
34 Catch some z's  
35 Employ  
36 Uno plus due  
37 Spot for spectacles  
40 Exodus figure

**DOWN**

- 1 Basil-based sauce  
2 Ten-armed swimmers  
3 Circle-in-a-circle, in Venn diagrams  
4 — Mahal  
5 Feel sorry for  
6 Rainbow shape  
7 Study  
8 Preposter-ous  
9 Appeared  
11 Admits  
14 Site for a car's oil  
19 Goes yachting  
20 "The Kiss" creator  
24 Writer Heming-way  
25 Checkers demand  
26 Arthurian island  
27 Meal  
29 Change genetically  
30 Church leader  
33 Dis-trustful  
35 Cold War side  
38 Glimpse  
39 Bossy's chew



2-28

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.

2-28 **CRYPTOQUOTE**

GPZOBUP PFP AJUDBYV, YL LYP

HXY GBHUXUP QDL JLW XAP

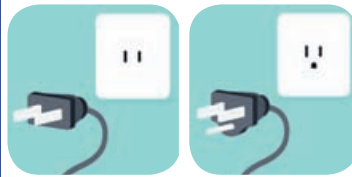
UL LUDPA OPLONP. — OABYHP  
**Cryptoquote:** GENTLENESS CLEARS  
THE SOUL, LOVE CLEANS THE MIND AND  
MAKES IT FREE. — DAVID BOWIE

**Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 17 - 24 2026**

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	19	AIDABLU	08.00	18.00	B	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	C	1
FRI	20	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	ISLAND PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EXPLORA I	08.00	18.00	C	1
MON	23	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
TUE	24	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1

**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: ★★★

2/18

**Answer to previous puzzle**

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

Difficulty: ★★

2/17

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Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima (R) receives the Berlinale Camera Award from film curator Jacqueline Lyanga during a photo call at the 76th Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, in Berlin on February 17, 2026.

## African diaspora's plural identities on screen in Berlin

### Berlin, Germany

Two films at this year's Berlin Film Festival follow members of the African diaspora telling stories by retracing the paths of their ancestors.

According to festival director Tricia Tuttle, "belonging, and the experience of living between worlds" is a key theme on this year's programme and it is particularly present in two films in the festival's official competition.

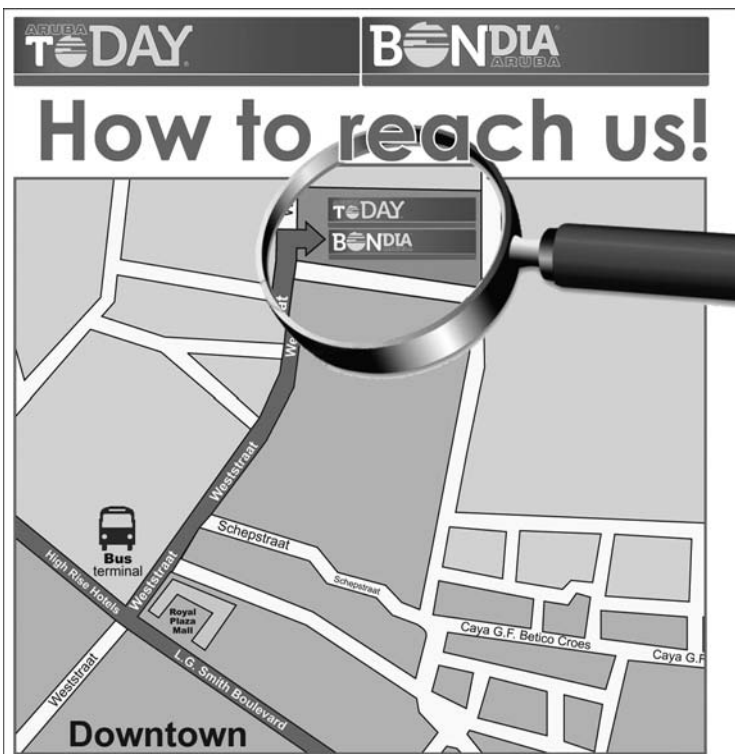
"In a Whisper" by Tunisian director Leyla Bouzid and "Dao" by Franco-Senegalese filmmaker Alain Gomis each tackle the subject of dual identity in their own way.

"Dao" depicts two interlaced events: a wedding near Paris and a funeral ceremony in Guinea-Bissau.

The film moves between the two in a sweeping, polyphonic narrative blending performances by professional and amateur actors, portraying a multifaceted Franco-African community refreshingly free from stereotypes. Shot over 20 days (10 in France and 10 in Guinea-Bissau), the film adopts an experimental approach, even including screen tests and casting interviews to unveil the characters.

### Scattered families

As a child, Gomis was deeply affected by the funeral ceremony held for his father in his village in Guinea-Bissau, the very place he chose to shoot the African portion of his film. Later, "I attended a wedding and thought that those two experiences really spoke to each other, and that they also said something about these families that are somewhat scattered," Gomis told AFP in an interview. □



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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



# Slalom is Mikaela Shiffrin's last shot at an Olympic medal in Italy. Good news? It's her best event

By **WILL GRAVES**

AP National Writer

**CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy (AP)** — Mikaela Shiffrin likes to invoke the adage from tennis great Billie Jean King that "pressure is a privilege." Even if, at times, it doesn't quite feel like it.

And it might not at the moment for the American skiing star as she prepares for her third and final race at the Milan Cortina Olympics. Shiffrin heads into Wednesday's slalom still looking for her first medal at Tofane and her first Olympic medal in a staggering eight years. A bafflingly slow performance in the slalom during women's combined last week cost Shiffrin and teammate Breezy Johnson a spot on the podium.

The winningest ski racer in history felt faster and more confident during the giant slalom a few days later, with her 11th-place finish more a testament to what she described as the "great-



**United States' Mikaela Shiffrin speeds down the course, during an alpine ski, women's giant slalom race, at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026.**

Associated Press

est show" GS had put on in quite some time than her actual performance. Shiffrin was just three-tenths of a second off the podium, a razor-thin margin in an event where the time gap between the winners and the rest of the field is usually far greater.

Shiffrin's meticulous preparation for her signature discipline she's already wrapped up a record ninth World Cup series title in slalom with two races remaining included reacclimating herself to the singular rhythm of an event where tempo is everything.

You'd think after 71 slalom wins including seven this year alone that would be no big deal. At this point in the 30-year-old's career, it's not.

"No matter how many runs of slalom I do it never gets easier," said Shiffrin, who collected her first Olympic gold in the event as a teenager in Sochi a dozen years ago. "It only gets like you become more aware of how challenging it is."

And that's just the physical part. The mental side is another matter entirely. Shiffrin carries the burden of expectations that are part

of the deal fairly or unfairly when you cut and paste your name all over your sport's record book. She has been characteristically transparent while discussing wrangling with those expectations, even though in many ways they're well outside of her control.

She arrived in the Dolomite Mountains confident those forgettable days in Beijing four years ago, when she failed to medal in any of the six events she entered, were behind her. The uncharacteristically slow run in the women's combined left her mystified and subdued. The aggressiveness she displayed in the GS left her upbeat and optimistic.

Still, when she stands in the starter's house during the final women's alpine race of these Olympics, the standard set for her will be different from everyone else, including reigning gold medalist Petra Vlhova of Slovakia.

"I can imagine what she's feeling right now," Vlhova said. "But ... she's strong and I believe she can make it. It takes a lot of energy but I believe that she can do it."

Vlhova has taken her own

winding path back to this moment. She shredded multiple ligaments in her right knee in January 2024 and didn't return to competition until the women's combined on Feb. 10. She didn't finish her run but it also in a way didn't matter as she hits what she described as the "restart" button.

During Vlhova's absence, Shiffrin has cemented her legacy. Her career World Cup wins in all disciplines currently stands at 108 and counting, including eight in her last nine slalom starts dating to the end of last season.

She is, by every measure, the best skier in the field. Yet the course is a little flatter and perhaps a little easier than what they usually encounter. There's a very real chance things could be just as tight on Wednesday as they were during the GS. Maybe even closer.

It means Shiffrin's margin for error during her two runs might be smaller than usual, and she knows it. Her run in the women's combined, when she was 15th, her worst ranking in a slalom race she's started and finished since 2012, caught

her off guard.

A dedicated student of her craft, Shiffrin believes her skis got misaligned a few times. The flat light on a gray afternoon played a factor, too. So did a mentality that she admitted didn't match the moment, something she'll try to address as she aims to end her fourth trip to the Olympics on an up note.

"I'm kind of going into it with my eyes open that we can see a very similar situation and I will try to handle it differently in my head," she said.

Such is the challenge that is unique to this once-every-four-years spectacle. There is little debate that Shiffrin is the Greatest of All Time. Her struggles under this specific spotlight, however, have put her in a strange and perhaps unenviable spot.

She has tried to handle it with grace. U.S. Skiing and Snowboarding president Sophie Goldschmidt called Shiffrin "the ultimate role model" and, even as she grappled with how a spot on the podium in the combined got away, she made it a point to give longtime teammates Jackie Wiles and Paula Moltzan their flowers after earning their first Olympic medals.

Whatever happens, those who know Shiffrin well believe she will leave it all out there. If she does that she can make peace with the result, whatever it may be. "She has a lot of experience," Vlhova said. "She knows how to deal with it and as I said, I believe that she can make it." □



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## Tony Clark intends to resign as MLB players' union head, AP source says, as possible cap fight looms

By RONALD BLUM  
AP Baseball Writer

**TAMPA, Fla. (AP)** — Tony Clark intends to resign as head of the Major League Baseball Players Association, a person familiar with the union's deliberations said Tuesday.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because his decision, first reported by ESPN, had not been announced. The person said an announcement was likely later Tuesday.

Clark's decision took place during an investigation by the U.S. Attorney in Brooklyn, New York, into One Team Partners, a licensing company founded by the union, the NFL Players Association and RedBird Capital Partners in 2019.

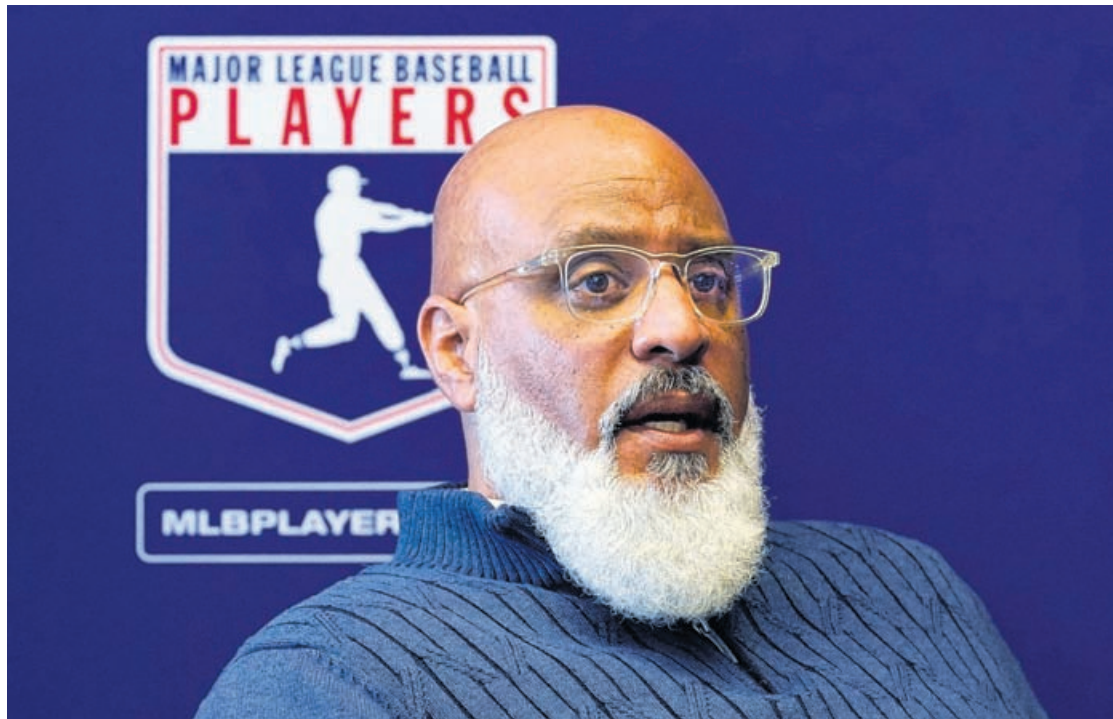
"A lot of people have known that the investigation has been going on," said the New York Mets' Marcus Semien, a member of the union's eight-man executive subcommittee. "I think that this happening during the investigation is not like, as a subcommittee, is not like overly surprising, but it still hurts and it's still something I'm processing."

Deputy executive director Bruce Meyer is set to be the primary negotiator in the upcoming labor talks, as he was in 2021-22. After Clark and Rick Shapiro led the 2016 negotiations, Meyer was hired in August 2018 as senior director of collective bargaining and legal and was promoted to his current role in July 2022.

Semien believes Clark is leaving to deal with the probe.

"I think so," he said, "because up to this point, before any investigations, I've had the ultimate confidence in Tony Clark to lead this player group. I've had the ultimate confidence in Bruce Meyer to be the lead negotiator for this player group."

The decision was made ahead of an expected start of collective bargain-



Major League Baseball Players Association Executive Director Tony Clark answers a question during a news conference in New York on March 11, 2022.

Associated Press

ing in April for an agreement to replace the five-year labor contract that expires Dec. 1. Management appears on track to propose a salary cap, which possibly could lead to a work stoppage that causes regular-season games to be canceled for the first time since 1995.

Adam L. Braverman, a former U.S. associate deputy attorney general and U.S. attorney in Los Angeles, was hired by the union's executive subcommittee as outside counsel, two people familiar with the group's action told the AP. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the union hadn't announced that. □



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Ronda Rousey arrives at the Los Angeles premiere of, "Mile 22," on Aug. 9, 2018, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

## Ronda Rousey, Gina Carano will end their MMA retirements and fight each other in May

By **GREG BEACHAM**

AP Sports Writer

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Ronda Rousey and Gina Carano will end their lengthy retirements from mixed martial arts to fight each other May 16 at Intuit Dome in Inglewood, California.

The two pioneering fighters announced their re-

turns Tuesday for a bout that will be staged by Most Valuable Promotions, the combat sports promotion established by influencer-turned-boxer Jake Paul and his business partner, Nakisa Bidarian. The show will be broadcast on Netflix.

The 39-year-old Rousey hasn't fought since 2016, while the 43-year-old Carano's eight-bout MMA career ended in 2009. They'll fight at 145 pounds for five five-minute rounds.

Despite their lengthy absences, Rousey and Carano remain two of the most iconic fighters in MMA history for their trailblazing careers. Carano led their once-outlawed sport into the mainstream of broadcast television, while Rousey secured the enthusiastic acceptance of women's MMA by Dana White and the UFC.

Rousey (12-2) rose to become arguably the biggest star in all of MMA after winning an Olympic medal in judo in 2008. Her armbar finishes and cage charisma singlehandedly prompted White to begin promotion of women's MMA, with Rousey at the center of his plans. Rousey won the UFC's first-ever women's bout in 2013 to claim the bantamweight title belt, and she still holds the promotion's record with six title defenses. After ending 11 of her first 12 fights in the first round, her career abruptly stalled when she lost back-to-back bouts to Holly Holm and Amanda Nunes, prompting her to move on to acting, professional wrestling and motherhood. "Been waiting

so long to announce this: Me and Gina Carano are gonna throw down in the biggest super fight in women's combat sport history!" Rousey said. "This is for all MMA fans past, present and future."

Carano (7-1) fought in the first Nevada-sanctioned MMA bout between women in 2006, and she won a series of fights that made her a network television draw in the sport's early days. She was stopped by Cris "Cyborg" Justino in her most recent fight in August 2009, and she moved on to an acting career despite repeated rumors of a return to the cage.

"Ronda came to me and said there is only one person she would make a comeback for, and it has been her dream to make this fight happen between us," Carano said. "She thanked me for opening up doors for her in her career and was respectful in asking for this fight to happen. This is an honor. I believe I will walk out of this fight with the win and I anticipate it will not come easy, which I welcome. This is as much for Ronda and me as it is for the fans and mixed martial arts community." Carano, who turns 44 in April, landed several prominent film roles and became a cast member of Disney's "The Mandalorian" before her contract was not renewed in 2021 after she expressed controversial right-wing views in a series of social media posts. Carano settled a lawsuit last year against Lucasfilm and The Walt Disney Company over her claim that she was fired for the posts. □

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