

ARMED FORCES DISPATCH

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SIXTY-FOURTH YEAR NO. 4
 JULY 8, 2024



REMEMBERING THE FALLEN Air Force Airman 1st Class Bobbie Mills places a rose to honor a fallen airman during the Khobar Towers memorial ceremony at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., June 25, 2024. Placing a flower over the toes of the service member's boots is a tradition that honors the lives lost. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Briana Beavers

House passes defense spending bill with pay raise for troops, divisive culture-war provisions

by Svetlana Shkolnikova, Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON - House Republicans narrowly pushed through a defense spending bill on June 28 that provides a significant pay raise for troops while also undoing social policies conservatives deemed a distraction from the Pentagon's warfighting mission.

The 217-198 vote was split along party lines, with Democrats refusing to support provisions in the legislation that roll back travel reimbursement for service members who are stationed in states with abortion restrictions, ban funding for gender-affirming care and gut diversity initiatives.

"This bill contains a laundry list of partisan proposals that divide Americans," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

Republicans dismissed the cut programs as wasteful spending that took attention and resources away from readying the military for an increasingly aggressive China and other growing threats around the world.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, argued the Defense Department has been turned into a "woke social engineering experiment that is more concerned about transgender surgeries and pushing a radical agenda than ensuring that we have the military that is necessary to defend the United States of America."

"There is no wonder that recruiting levels are down," he added.

The bill provides \$833 billion for the Pentagon to innovate and modernize and gives all troops a 4.5 percent pay raise as well as an additional 15 percent pay raise for junior enlisted service members. It also contains \$18 billion in cuts to the White House's requested defense budget, including \$612 million from climate resiliency efforts and \$53 million from diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2024-06-28/house-defense-spending-bill-culture-wars-troops-pay-14325955.html>

ARMY VET FACILITY PROVIDES CARE, STRENGTHENS PARTNERSHIPS AT PORT HUENEME NAVY BASE

by Lt.j.g. Drew Verbis
 Naval Base Ventura County

PORT HUENEME - Soldiers at Army Veterinary Treatment Facility Port Hueneme, a detachment of Veterinary Readiness Activity-San Diego, work to provide comprehensive public health support for veterinary services while strengthening interservice cooperation on board Naval Base Ventura County.

said the U.S. Army is the only branch in the military to offer veterinary health services for all DoD organizations and all pets living on base must be registered with the veterinary treatment facility.

"Our top priority is to provide care for Military Working Dogs (MWD) or government owned animals," said Baxter. "We also care for privately owned animals on base, which supports our public service to the community and strengthens the interservice partnership with servicemembers."

for military goats," said Trecek. "I've also performed an x-ray on an owl, and the Channel Islands foxes are probably the cutest and most unique animals I have ever provided care for."

Trecek said this is her first time working on a Navy installation.

"Ranks have different names, but the respect and comradery are the same," said Trecek. "It's a beneficial experience to connect and intermingling with all the different branches; I love meeting new animals and people."

NBVC supports 110 tenant commands on its 3 installations, Point Mugu, Port Hueneme, and San Nicolas Island.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/474927/army-vet-facility-provides-care-strengthens-partnerships-port-hueneme-navy-base>

According to the Army, Veterinary Readiness Activity-San Diego provides support that stretches across multiple countries and Navy vessels, which includes protecting, promoting, and improving the health of privately-owned animals, MWDs, government owned dogs, and food health protection.

"We care for many types of animals," said Baxter.

Cpl. Kelsea Trecek, Army animal care technician, agreed. "One time I provided an exam



U.S. Navy photo by Master-at-Arms 1st Class Jon Cason

Sgt. Jade Baxter, Army animal care technician, assigned to Veterinary Readiness Activity-San Diego, performs a routine wellness check on Laila, a military working dog from Naval Base Ventura County Force Protection.

Marine Corps West welcomes new CO

CAMP PENDLETON - Brig. Gen. Jason G. Woodworth relinquished command of Marine Corps Installations West here to Brig. Gen. Nick I. Brown during a command turnover ceremony June 27. Maj. Gen. Maxwell, commanding general, Marine Corps Installation Command highlighted the importance of community support to servicemembers and their family. "None of the bases and stations operate as an island in and of themselves," said Maxwell. "In fact, most Marines live in the communities. We have spouses who work in the communities, and our kids go to school in the communities. Woodworth said, "We defend the ideals of this nation... installations protect the force, and the families of those that go forward and do that mission."

Drone crew conducts first all-Marine satellite comms launch, recovery

According to the *Marine Corps Times*, a Hawaii-based aviation unit recently conducted the first all-Marine satellite communications launch and recovery as the force aims to grow its drone force and capabilities for future operations. The Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 "Phantoms," hit the operational milestone June 20 out of MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. The event is significant because typically when units do launch and recovery missions, they must run command and control through line-of-sight communications, which severely restricts distances and requires specialized aviators and large transport aircraft.

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2024/06/27/drone-crew-conducts-first-all-marine-satellite-comms-launch-recovery/>

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U.S. MILITARY BASES IN EUROPE RAISE SECURITY THREAT LEVELS

Various news sources reported June 30 that U.S. military bases in Europe were put on a heightened state of alert over the weekend as installations urged vigilance among their members.

At U.S. European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, the Army garrison on Sunday issued a communitywide alert that the force protection threat level was elevated to condition "Charlie" until further notice.

Similar directives were sent to other bases in Germany, including the Army's Rheinland-Pfalz and Ramstein Air Base, which together form the largest U.S. military community overseas. The Rheinland-Pfalz garrison alert includes Baumholder and outlying installations in Romania and Bulgaria. Aviano Air Base in Italy also rose its condition level to Charlie, and other installations in Italy introduced enhanced security measures.

The Charlie threat level "applies when an incident occurs or intelligence is received indicating some form of terrorist action or targeting against personnel or facilities is likely," according to the Army's website.

Service members and others should anticipate significant delays at gate entry points because of increased security, according to the alerts. U.S. Army garrison in Stuttgart referred questions about the change in force protec-

tion to EUCOM. EUCOM said in a statement Sunday that it is "constantly assessing a variety of factors that play into the safety of the U.S. military community abroad. As part of that effort, we often times take additional steps to ensure the safety of our service members."

Military community members were advised to report any suspicious activity, monitor State Department travel advisories and take precautions to minimize personal risk, the statement added. Typically, military commands decline to get into specifics about changes in force protection measures for security reasons.

On June 29, Spangdahlem Air Base, an installation in rural western Germany, issued its own alert that said 52nd Fighter Wing airmen were prohibited from wearing their uniforms off base as a precaution, and must commute in civilian clothing. Spangdahlem officials on Saturday said that measures are in place to protect the community but that for "operational security reasons," the base could not provide more details.

In years past, commands have taken similar action on uniform wearing over concerns about terrorism threats. In 2010, EUCOM issued a directive that temporarily prohibited troops from wearing uniforms off post. In 2014, EUCOM limited uniform wearing off base to commuting,

a restriction that the command began to relax in 2022.

The military sets force protection levels at either Normal, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie or Delta, the highest state of alert. Bravo became common on bases for many years following the 9/11 attacks.

Charlie sets in motion "curtailment plans for nonessential personnel," according to the Army. Garrison officials in Stuttgart said that a variety of services would not be available because of the increased threat level. From Sunday until further notice, some of those reduced services included access to some eateries and on-post barber shops.

"Many other services will have significant numbers of employees teleworking or offices will be opened with reduced staff. Customers should maintain flexibility and allow for longer-than-normal service times," the garrison said in a statement.

In recent weeks, U.S. officials have been sounding the alarm on increased terrorism threats, stemming from the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the ongoing war in Gaza.

"We've seen the threat from foreign terrorists rise to a whole 'nother level after October 7," FBI director Christopher Wray said in June 4 written testimony before the Senate.

Navy sets sail on goodwill mission in Latin America, Caribbean

by Joseph Clark, DOD News

The Navy kicked off a two-month humanitarian and civic assistance deployment this week to five countries in the U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility as part of the United States' continued commitment to fostering goodwill and improving interoperability throughout the region.

More than 100 personnel aboard USNS *Burlington*, an expeditionary fast-transport vessel, will deploy next week as part of Continuing Promise, an annual series of civic engagements led by U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command.

This year's deployment includes missions in Jamaica, Costa Rica, Honduras, Colombia and Panama under the theme "Forward Together."

"This is our shared neighborhood," said Rear Adm. Jim Aiken, commander of the 4th Fleet and Naval Forces Southern Command, in previewing the deployment.

"We have friends, and we have partners, and we enjoy that side-by-side [relationship] that we have with each and every one of them," he said. "We learn from them, and they learn from us."

This year marks the 14th iteration of the Continuing Promise mission series, which has continued to strengthen ties between the U.S. and countries throughout the region.

The mission is part of Southcom's Enduring Promise initiative, which aims to build friendship and solidarity with partners and allies in the Caribbean and Central and South America.

As part of the Continuing Promise deployments, U.S. personnel extend medical and veterinary services to local communities, conduct subject-matter exchanges and engineering projects, and host community events and band performances.

Navy medical personnel, construction experts, and musicians will deploy this year alongside Army veterinarians and professionals in the State Department-led Women, Peace and Security program to continue the tradition of extending goodwill.

"Both numerically and qualitatively, Continuing Promise has been one of the most impactful humanitarian missions in the Navy's history, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Zachary Smith, the mission commander for Continuing Promise 2024.



These are approximate positions of the Navy's deployed carrier strike groups & amphibious ready groups throughout the world as of July 1, 2024, based on Navy and public data. You can access this and other information through the U.S. Naval Institute's portal at <https://news.usni.org/topstories>.

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Retired admiral pleads not guilty in federal bribery case

In a *Navy Times* story July 1, a retired Navy admiral pleaded not guilty Monday in a Washington, D.C., federal courtroom to criminal charges involving an alleged bribery scheme that played out while he was still in uniform.

Retired Adm. Robert Burke, a former vice chief of naval operations, pleaded not guilty



Adm. Robert P. Burke, who is retired, faces federal bribery charges accusing him of awarding a sole-source contract to a company in 2021 in exchange for accepting a \$500,000-a-year job and stock options. U.S. Navy photo

Monday, as did his co-defendants, Yongchul "Charlie" Kim and Meghan Messenger, according to their attorneys.

Burke, Kim and Messenger are each charged with bribery and conspiracy to commit bribery, while Burke faces additional charges of performing acts of a personal financial interest and concealing material

facts from the United States.

"Adm. Burke is innocent and we look forward to presenting his case to the jury," Burke's attorney, Timothy Parlatore, said in a statement.

William Burck, an attorney for Kim and Messenger, said Monday that the government's case against them was "so way off base it's shocking."

"We are confident they will get a fair trial before the court and a jury," Burck said in an e-mail to *Navy Times*.

A hearing will be held next month to schedule a trial date, according to Parlatore.

An indictment unsealed last month alleges that the retired Burke, 62, took part in the scheme while serving as commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa from 2020 until his retirement in 2022.

Before that, Burke was the vice chief of operations from June 2019 to June 2020, and also served as the chief of naval personnel, according to his official biography.

According to the Justice Department, the alleged crimes started when a company run by Kim and Messenger, Next Jump, provided a training pilot program to "a small component" of the Navy from August

2018 to July 2019.

The Navy terminated a contract with that company in late 2019 "and directed Company A not to contact Burke," according to the Justice Department.

But Kim and Messenger allegedly went on to meet with Burke in Washington in July 2021, part an alleged effort to reestablish the company's ties to the Navy.

World's oldest living former racehorse living out final years on farm of Army civilian, wife

by C.J. Lovelace

Army Medical Logistics Command FORT DETRICK, Md. -- Military families are accustomed to multiple moves over the course of a career. It almost becomes second nature.

But what happens when members of that family are of the equine variety? That can add a unique level of complexity and stress, especially when those moves are cross-country or even to overseas locations.

It's a stress that Julie and Carmine Izzo have felt multiple times over Carmine's 21-year active-duty Army career, ever since they got their first horse while stationed at the former Fort Hood in Texas.

"It's not like you can just drag them out of the house and throw

"At the meeting, the charged defendants allegedly agreed that Burke would use his position as a Navy Admiral to steer a sole-source contract to [Next Jump] in exchange for future employment at the company," the Justice Department said. "They allegedly further agreed that Burke would use his official position to influence other Navy officers to award another contract to [Next Jump] to train a large portion of the Navy."

them in a car seat and go like you can with kids," Carmine laughed.

That was an astonishing 31 years ago, considering that same horse continues to run freely around the Izzos' farm in southcentral Pennsylvania. Today, at age 38, that thoroughbred named Axl is the world's oldest known living former racehorse, according to the Izzos and industry experts.

While it's certainly rare to find a former racehorse over even 20 years old, Julie said just how extraordinary Axl truly is. "I always tell people ... the average thoroughbred racehorse is lucky to make it to 20. Twenty is considered very old for them because of the issues they develop on the racetrack," she said.

see **Axl**, page 8



Army

- These three Iowa Guardsmen aren't just squadmates - they're siblings
- New commander leads school house for Army special operation forces at Fort Liberty
- Army makes it harder for commanders to deny Soldiers leave for abortions
- Fort Bliss Soldier, wife arrested on charges they made a child use a bucket as a toilet, starved her and held a knife to her throat
- 2 Navy Sailors among 3 dead in crash on I-5 near Camp Pendleton
- Amphibious group enters Mediterranean, USS *Eisenhower* visits Greece after hard-fought deployment
- Government attorneys urge judge to award minimal damages to Red Hill plaintiffs
- Naval, air drills signal start of first large-scale exercise by U.S., South Korea, Japan
- Philippine, U.S. military chiefs meet in Manila aboard 7th Fleet flagship

Marine Corps

- Drone crew conducts first all-Marine satellite comms launch, recovery (see front page news bit)
- Marine Corps rolls out new barracks maintenance tracking system with QR codes for reporting issues
- Marine base in Japan moves SOFA driver training online

Air Force

- Air Force Academy prep school welcomes new commander
- Why child abuse lawsuit at Warner Robins base was tossed, how it could affect another case
- Okinawa delivers complaint over sexual assault charge against U.S. Airman, seeks apology
- Rickenbacker should be main operating base for the KC-46, Ohio delegation says
- Air Force releases first video of XQ-67 drone, a CCA prototype, in flight
- Air Force confirms its F-35As were mission capable about half the time in 2023

Space Force

- Space Force faces 'bellicose' PLA willing to risk escalation: RAND
- Calvelli details plans to better 'integrate' Unified Data Library into Space Force ops

Coast Guard

- Coast Guard rescue swimmer dies in surfing accident

Your Military

- Military needs better recipe for feeding troops, auditors say
- Do military families really need to move so much?

Veterans

- A VA medical center in Colorado paused heart surgeries for 13 months - its leaders didn't tell higher-ups
- Lawmakers urge VA to reduce backlog, wait times on veterans' claims for benefits
- Romay Johnson Davis, veteran of Black women's WWII Army unit, dies at 104
- Bataan March survivor posthumously receives Purple Heart
- House lawmakers criticize HUD's annual count of homeless vets as 'imperfect picture of reality'

Education & Transition

- Naval and Air Force academies hold 'I-Day' for new classes with plenty of yelling

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America's newest citizens earn the title Marine

by **Melissa Karnath and Steven Posy**
MCRD, San Diego

For some of the new Marines of Echo Company, the road to joining the Marine Corps was a long one. Pfc. Jonas Hernandez, 34-year-old native of Mexico recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Thousand Oaks, Calif., spent 17 years dreaming of one day becoming a U.S. Marine.

"My mother brought me to the United States, from Mexico when I was only one and a half years old. As a teenager I joined the Los Angeles Police Department Explorer Program, and some of our members went on to become U.S. Marines. When they would return to come speak to us, I was always impressed with their knowledge and discipline. I knew then I wanted to become a Marine one day," said Hernandez.

Hernandez's dream to become a Marine took a detour. When he turned 18 and learned he

did not have legal status in the United States, he put his dream on hold, as he went on to work many physically laborious jobs over the years. Hernandez decided to go to college in 2020 and worked toward an associate degree in Spanish Interpretation and Translation, and transitioned his studies into a Bachelor's Degree program. Despite waiting 17 long years he never let go of his dream of becoming a Marine, and in April of 2024 he enlisted into the Marine Corps.

"I get to see two of my dreams come true at the same time becoming a U.S. citizen and becoming a United States Marine. It's very uplifting, waiting as long as I have. Staying focused on your dreams, you learn that you can make them happen," said Hernandez.

For 23-year-old Pvt. Cristian Martinezescobar, native of El Salvador, and recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Fontana, Calif., his path to the Marine Corps was much shorter.

"I came to the United States when I was 21. I always wanted to be part of the military. I joined the Military Academy in El Salvador, but it was very expensive and the country had become too dangerous with gang violence, so my mom took me to the United States," said Martinezescobar. "I heard that the U.S. Marine Corps was the best, so that's what I wanted to become."

After working with his local recruiter for more than a year, Martinezescobar received a call, letting him know that he was eligible to enlist. Two weeks later, he arrived to MCRD, San Diego for training.

"The first two weeks were difficult. I had to adapt to the military and a new country, and not speaking English well; I had to rely on the other recruits to know what was going on. It feels great now, and I am very excited. I am so proud to be able to accomplish this," said Martinezescobar.



Marines with Echo Company pose with their sponsors after a naturalization ceremony at MCRD, San Diego, June 27. The naturalization ceremony took place during family day to recognize Marines who became U.S. citizens by completing bootcamp. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Yvonna Guyette

In addition, five more new Marines of Echo Company joined Hernandez and Martinezescobar by earning the title Marine along with becoming a U.S. citizen. Pfc. Gheorghe Ermurachi, originally from Moldova and recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Emerald City; Pfc.

Junyoung Kim, originally from South Korea and recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Granada Hills; Pfc. Priscila Sanchezantilian, originally from Mexico and recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Escondido; Pfc. Samuel Valdeguiriz, originally from Mexico and recruited from

Recruiting Sub Station Boise; Pfc. Jiang Xinnian, originally from China and recruited from Recruiting Sub Station Pasadena.

"These young Marines have already shown their commitment to this country by joining the military and supporting this great nation, making them a United States citizen is a great reward for their sacrifice. It also opens their opportunity to more jobs in the military," said Sahba Rahmani, recruit naturalization manager at MCRD San Diego.

Following graduation, June 28, 2024, these seven new Marines will enjoy 10 days of leave with their loved ones and then report to School of Infantry – West at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton for additional initial training.

For more information about becoming a Marine visit your local recruiting station or marines.com.

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Local Military

15th MEU ACVs go ashore in Okinawa during *Harpers Ferry* port visit

by Capt. Brian Tuthill
15th Marine Expeditionary Unit

OKINAWA, Japan - The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted the first overseas ship-to-shore operations with amphibious combat vehicles June 24, at White Beach Naval Facility here.

Elements of the 15th MEU, embarked aboard amphibious

dock landing ship *Harpers Ferry*, arrived at White Beach June 18 for a port visit and to conduct sustainment training.

During the training on June 24, Marines and Sailors embarked ACVs as they splashed from the well deck of *Harpers Ferry*. Safety boats assigned to the 3rd Expeditionary Operations Training Group then pulled alongside the ACVs to transfer personnel

to their boats and back to the pier, simulating a situation that required personnel to execute safety egress procedures.

Following the transfer of all embarked personnel, the ACV platoon then transited through the nearby boat basin to come ashore at the White Beach area to conduct maintenance.

"This was fairly standard



Marine Corps amphibious combat vehicles conduct waterborne operations at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, June 24. USS *Harpers Ferry* and embarked elements of the 15th MEU are conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Peyton Kahle

training for us, but I'm proud it also represented the first overseas ship-to-shore employment of ACVs," said Marine Corps Lt. Col. Nick Freeman, commanding officer of BLT 1/5, 15th MEU.

"We'll continue to train at other locations in the months ahead, using a deliberate approach, capturing useful data and lessons learned, and ultimately sharpening our understanding of how to best employ the ACV in its intended environment--embarked with our forward-deployed ARG/MEUs."

In the days prior to the ACV amphibious operations, commanders from III Marine Expeditionary Force, 3rd Marine Division, 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Task Force 76, and Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade of the Japanese Self Defense Force, to name a few, visited 15th MEU aboard *Harpers Ferry* on June 20.

This visit included a tour of the amphibious combat vehicles

staged aboard *Harpers Ferry*, the ship's well deck, the ACV simulator, and a demonstration of an unmanned hydrographic sensor. Some of the VIPs also returned to observe the ACV egress training.



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2 Navy Sailors who died in crash on I-5 near Camp Pendleton identified

They died at the scene of the accident along with one of the other motorcyclists. The third rider's name has not been released

Two of the three motorcyclists killed in the early morning on June 27 were Navy Sailors.

On June 28, a spokesperson for Navy Region Southwest publicly identified two Navy men who were killed along with a third person in a crash on Interstate 5 near Camp Pendleton.

Jess Davis, 38, of Tennessee, and 37-year-old Stephen Williams of Texas were among a group of four motorcyclists whose two-wheelers crashed into one or more vehicles that had collided and become disabled in the southbound lanes of the freeway in the area of Las Pulgas Road at about 3 a.m., June 27, according to the Navy and the California Highway Patrol.

Williams and Davis died at the scene of the accident along with one of the other motorcyclists. The third rider's name has not been released.

Paramedics took the fourth motorcyclist to a hospital for treatment of serious trauma along with at least four other people who suffered injuries of varying degrees of severity in the wreck, the CHP reported.

Davis served aboard Point Loma-based attack submarine USS *Alexandria*, and Williams was assigned to Southwest Regional Maintenance Center in San Diego, Navy spokesman Brian O'Rourke said.

"The Navy family mourns the loss of two shipmates in Thursday's traffic accident. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Sailors' families, friends and coworkers, and we ask they be afforded privacy during this difficult time," O'Rourke said in a media statement.



NAVFAC volunteers help spruce up national park visitor center

OJAI, Calif. - Teams of volunteers from Naval Facilities Engineering and Expeditionary Warfare Center (NAVFAC EXWC) worked to restore degraded facilities and trail conditions at a visitor center in the Los Padres National Forest throughout May and June 2024.

The Wheeler Gorge Visitor Center, the first visitor center constructed in the 100-year history of the national forest, needed help with fixing and improving building interiors and exteriors, cleaning up grounds areas, and building a section of rock wall to address a water drainage issue near the building.

"Our volunteer team demonstrated outstanding dedication and skill in various tasks, significantly enhancing the facility's functionality and appearance," said NAVFAC EXWC Commanding Officer Capt. Scott Raymond.

"Our volunteers did great work to help our local community," said volunteer coordinator David Rich, who is NAVFAC EXWC's high risk safety manager. "This was a great opportunity for EXWC to say thank you to the Los Padres Forest Association, a wonderful organization that does so much for our local community and youth programs."

The visitors center hadn't had proper maintenance because of severe rains, road closures, wild fires, and COVID over the

past several years, said Terry Wright, a volunteer who works for the Wheelers Gorge Visitors Center.

"David came here to the visitors center one day and said, 'What do you need done?'" said Wright. "I said, 'Come with me,' and we started walking and talking about projects. He set up three Saturdays in May and June with groups of people from EXWC to come and work on various projects. We're very grateful to have had them."

Projects included installing a new butcher block counter top and sink in the kitchen area, a new toilet in the bathroom,

building four new log benches outside, painting of much of the facility, clearing brush around the buildings, and building a new rock wall outside the building.

"This comprehensive effort is a testament to our commitment to serving our community beyond our civilian and military duties," said Raymond. "Each member of our organization played a vital role in these projects, and their hard work and dedication have made a lasting impact. I am honored to lead such a capable and selfless team, and their contributions to the Wheelers Gorge Visitor

Center will be appreciated by the community for years to come."

NAVFAC EXWC Command Master Chief Martin Laurie said, "It's just great to give back and make things better than we found."

Established in 2012, NAVFAC EXWC is headquartered at Naval Base Ventura County, Port Hueneme, whose more than 1,000 federal civilian employees, contractors, and military personnel provide research, development, test, and evaluation, and in-service engineering to deliver specialized facility and expeditionary solutions to the warfighter.

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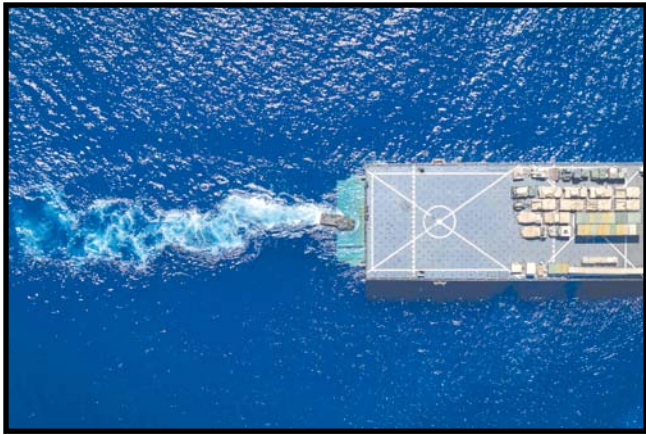
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AMPHIBIOUS APPROACH An amphibious combat vehicle conducts operations with USS Harpers Ferry at White Beach Naval Facility in Okinawa, Japan, June 26, 2024. Sailors are conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific region. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Sang Kim



RAINBOW MAKIN Sailors attend a LGBTQ+ observance on the mess decks of amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island (LHD 8), June 25, 2024. Makin Island is a Wasp-class amphibious assault ship currently homeported in San Diego. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Joshua Martinez

Axl
continued from page 4

“To make it to 30 is really exceptional,” Julie continued. “To make it to 35, there’s probably only a couple of dozen in the world. And to make it to 38, there’s three.”

Of those three, Axl is the only one still living. “If he makes it to September, he will surpass one of them,” she said. “And if he makes it another year and a half, he will be the longest living racehorse of all time.”

The distinction recently earned Axl and his caretakers some recognition in an industry publication, the Thoroughbred Daily News, which sent a reporter and photographer out to their farmstead to document the surprisingly spry equine elder statesman in an article this past April.

“It’s been a neat journey,” Julie said. “I’ve met a lot of people because of Axl, because of the story of him and just owning him. We’ve made a lot of really great friends.”

Before settling on their 9-acre property in 2010, the Izzos found themselves on the move quite regularly with Axl over Carmine’s 21-year Army career as a biomedical equipment specialist. The couple spent multiple tours in Texas, installations

on the East Coast and overseas, as well as in Colorado, Missouri and Washington state.

In total, they had to execute about a half dozen different moves that involved one or more horses, which adds quite a bit of com-

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Julie Izzo is pictured with her thoroughbred, Axl, the world’s oldest known living former racehorse at 38 years old. Izzo and her husband, Carmine, a retired 21-year Army veteran, have owned Axl since he was 7 years old. Photo courtesy Sarah K. Andrew/Thoroughbred Daily News

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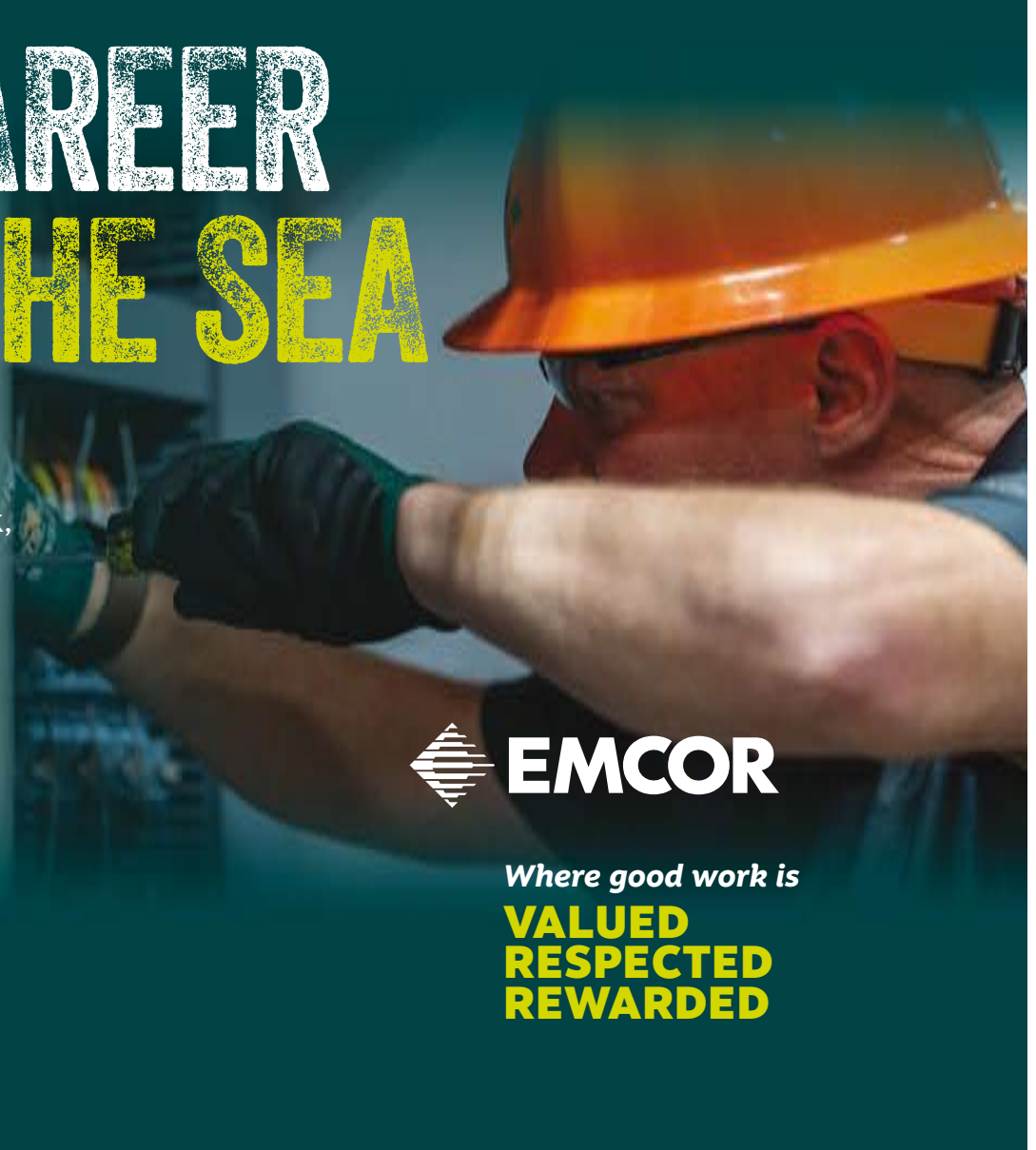
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Movie review: Despicable Me 4

Sometimes, for adults and children alike, it is important to just get away from it all and enjoy some lighthearted, family-friendly comedy. Few movie franchises do more to make that possible than Illuminations Minions movies. I love the Minions. Whenever I visit Universal Studios Hollywood I try to spend some time with the Minions (as well as paying a visit to “The Secret Life of Pets” attraction). I have probably seen all of the Minions movies and have several of them at home.

In what was a complete no-brainer, therefore, I jumped at the chance to attend an advance screening of their latest movie: Despicable Me 4. Admittedly, my bar for enjoying these movies is not very high. Give me plenty of Minions, Gru, an evil villain and his followers and a silly story and I’ll be a happy camper. Despicable Me 4 does not disappoint.

I attended an advance screening at a local AMC movie theater. Members of the press were there, as well as lots of enthusiastic children and their families, many of whom were there for what looked to be a promotion for a local radio station. The theater was alive with excitement.

“In the first Despicable Me movie in seven years, Gru, the world’s favorite supervillain-turned-Anti-Villain League-agent, returns for an exciting, bold new era of Minions mayhem in Illumination’s Despicable Me 4.”

“Following the 2022 summer blockbuster phenomenon of Illu-

mination’s Minions: The Rise of Gru, which earned almost \$1 billion worldwide, the biggest global animated franchise in history now begins a new chapter as Gru (Oscar® nominee Steve Carrell) and Lucy (Oscar® nominee Kristen Wiig) and their girls — Margo (Miranda Cosgrove), Edith (Dana Gaier) and Agnes

(Madison Polan)—welcome a new member to the Gru family, Gru Jr., who is intent on tormenting his dad.”

“Gru faces a new nemesis in Maxime Le Mal (Emmy winner Will Ferrell) and his femme fatale girlfriend Valentina (Emmy nominee Sofia Vergara), and the family is forced to go on the run.”

“The film features fresh new characters voiced by Joey King (Bullet Train), Emmy winner Stephen Colbert (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert) and Chloe Fineman (Saturday Night Live). Pierre Coffin returns as the iconic voice of the Minions and Oscar® nominee Steve Coogan returns as Silas Ramsbottom.”

Gru is the central character in Despicable Me 4. Maxime Le Mal is the villain. Along the way, Gru endures his challenging relationship with his baby boy (Gru Jr.), who seems to take out all of his frustrations on his poor dad. Nevertheless,

Gru suffers through and never stops trying to win him over. Will he succeed? You’ll have to see the movie for the answer to that question.

I am also a huge fan of Stephen Colbert. He has a relatively small role in Despicable Me 4 as Perry Prescott — Gru’s arrogant next-door neighbor. Perry lives in a Hamptons-esque neighborhood filled with mansions. However, Gru’s AVL (Anti Villain League) safehouse is anything but mansion-like. Clearly, Perry is not impressed. Perry is the father of Poppy Prescott, who plays a pivotal role in the movie.

Perhaps the most memorable characters in Despicable Me 4 are a group of ever-bumbling super-charged Minions called the Mega Minions. Will they ever get their act together? Again, you’ll have to see the movie to find out. Be ready to laugh!

To see the official Illumination trailer for Despicable Me 4 on YouTube, visit: https://youtu.be/qQ1r9-rF32A?si=dCRHy-1db5Og8U_N or go to the Despicable Me 4 website at <https://www.despicable.me> for trailers, ticket information and lots of fun information about this action-comedy film.

To explore a wide variety of content dating back to 2002, with the most photos and the latest text, visit “AutoMatters & More” at <https://automatters.net>. Search by title or topic in the Search Bar in the middle of the Home Page, or click on the blue ‘years’ boxes and browse.

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by Jan Wagner

The Meat & Potatoes of Life



by Lisa Smith Molinari

This time of year always conjures memories of one particular summer’s night in July when I was a teenager. With our family vacation a whole month away and school not starting until September, I was dying for excitement.

After cutting grass, supplemented with an hour of laying out coated in tanning oil, I was released by my parents to find whatever fun was available in our little town.

I called my best friend, Patti, like I always did, except for that boring summer when she had a boyfriend. I talked on my retro candlestick telephone, a sixteenth birthday present from my parents, while lying across my yellow bedspread.

First, I confirmed with Patti that neither of us had been invited to a party or had a date.

“Nope,” was Patti’s response. Next, task: borrowed my father’s enormous 1977 Chevy Blazer for transportation.

I met at her house and—after applying copious amounts of lip gloss and teasing our bangs—we headed out to cruise the town.

We drove by the local arcade, Games 101, a hangout of sorts. Although Patti and I didn’t give two shakes about Asteroids or Ms. Pac-Man, the arcade was a veritable

A Midsummer Night’s Scheme

command center where information on teenage social events was collected and disseminated. Sometimes we’d receive word of a bonfire in Bennett’s woods or a party at the house of a classmate referred to as Meatball,” but on this night, the arcade was empty. Rather than driving around glossed up and looking desperate, we decided to scrape together a few of our girlfriends to go check out the drive-in movie theater.

However, the Palace Gardens wasn’t cheap. Rather than spending our hard-earned grass-cutting and ice-cream-scooping money, we schemed a plan to enter the drive-in on the cheap.

Previously, we’d stuffed two of our friends, big hair and all, into the plywood dog crate my father had built into the back of the Blazer, and tried to keep straight faces while driving by the ticket booth. But on this night, we hatched a more daring—and cheaper—plan. We’d all sneak through the woods around Palace Gardens, and crawl over the fence to get in for free.

The six of us met up at Patti’s house, which was within walking distance of the drive-in. We’d heard rumors that Palace Gardens management was cracking down on sneak ins by lacing the fence with a foul concoction made from watered down cow manure. Knowing that nothing could ruin the chances of getting a boyfriend like stepping in manure, we were particularly cautious that night.

Using hand signals as if conducting a special-ops raid, we snuck through the woods, giggling and squealing, and breached the fence without incident. Or so we thought.

The double feature included the new hit, “Porky’s,” but we bypassed the risqué scenes flashing on the jumbo outdoor screen and headed straight for the teens loitering near the concessions pavilion.

Just before reaching the group, Peggy whispered, “What’s that smell?”

Had one of our comrades been hit? Our noses quickly found the source of the pungent odor—’s had been tainted by the enemy’s foul biological weapon. As teenage girls, our moral codes didn’t compel us to retrieve our wounded, especially after such a successful secret mission. Besides, Andrea was no diva. Refusing to spoil our fun, she headed home to change and meet up with us later, while the rest of us mingled among the cars under the stars on that balmy summer night.

The next night, and the nights after that, were filled with more of the same: Patti and I and our goofy girlfriends scanning the perimeters of our meager summer realm for whatever excitement could be had. Sometimes we found it at Games 101, at Buttermilk Falls, at Meatball’s house, in Bennett’s woods, at the Palace Gardens, and on very rare occasions, on a date. But many nights, we just drove around, glossed and teased, for hours, searching, planning, scheming.

Decades later, I watched as my own teens foraged for excitement on lazy summer nights, and I smiled, realizing what they’d understand someday, too — it’s the scheming itself that’s the most fun of all.

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SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

I'm working after age 65; Why aren't I exempt from Medicare Part B premium?

Dear Rusty: Why, as I continue to work after age 65 and have FICA taxes taken from my check, am I - or anyone - also compelled under the threat of penalties, rate increases, etc. to immediately take Medicare Part B? Am I not then effectively paying into the system twice? As more and more people over 65 continue to work, isn't that a consideration that should be evaluated by Congress - if one is working past 65, above a specific level of income and paying FICA taxes, the Medicare Part B premium is waived?

Signed: Working Senior

Dear Working Senior: FYI, 6.2% of the FICA payroll taxes you pay while working goes to Social Security, and another 1.45% goes to fund Medicare Part A (hospitalization coverage, which is free to you). None of the FICA payroll tax you pay from your work earnings goes to fund Medicare Part B (coverage for outpatient services), which is the part of Medicare for which you must pay a premium.

Said another way, your FICA payroll taxes do fund Medicare Part A, which is free to you, but do not provide any funding for Medicare Part B. Part B is funded from two primary sources - the premiums paid by beneficiaries, and the federal government from the general Treasury. Premiums from enrollees pay for about 25% of Part B healthcare expenses and the remaining 75% of Part B operating expenses are paid from the general U.S. Treasury (not from Social Security money).

So, it's necessary to separate Part B from your thinking about the payroll taxes you pay while working - you're not paying anything to fund Part B through your FICA taxes. You aren't compelled to enroll in Part B (it's optional), but if you don't enroll during your initial enrollment period (3 months on either side of the month you turn 65) and don't have other equivalent "creditable" coverage from an employer, and you enroll in Part B later, a late enrollment penalty will apply (10% additional premium for each full year after age 65 you go without creditable healthcare coverage).

So, your premise in suggesting that Part B be free (the premium waived) if you're working over a certain age or after an amount of time contributing to the program isn't valid, because no one contributes to Medicare Part B through FICA payroll taxes - Part B beneficiary contributions are only made through premiums paid by those enrolled in it. And you don't need to enroll in Part B if you have "creditable" healthcare coverage from an employer. The Part B non-enrollment penalty only applies if you enroll after your initial enrollment period has expired and didn't have "creditable" healthcare coverage after you turned 65. "Creditable" is a group plan with more than 20 participants.

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MCRD Command Museum & Historical Society. Museum focusing on Marine Corps history from the 19th century to today is also a research library. https://www.mcrdmuseum.org/
Free admission • The Pass and ID Center may issue day passes to visitors who wish to visit the museum and do not possess military ID-call (619) 524-4200 for information on base access.
1600 Hochmuth Ave, San Diego, 92140 • (619) 524-4426
Hours: Mon 8am-3pm, Tue-Fri 8-4; Family day 8-5:45; Sat 10:30-5, • Closed Sunday

Marine Corps Mechanized Museum Camp Pendleton. Managed under the auspices of Camp Pendleton's Museum Division Office, the collection of over 50 vehicles ranges from World War I to the first Gulf War. It includes Patton tanks, armored wheeled and tracked vehicles, trucks, jeeps and amphibious vehicles. When coming aboard Camp Pendleton, please ensure that you have a valid photo ID for every vehicle occupant along with current registration and proof of insurance. https://www.themech.org/

24194 Vandegrift Blvd, Oceanside, CA 92058. (760) 725-5758
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USS Midway Museum. The USS Midway Museum is a maritime museum located in downtown San Diego at Navy Pier. The museum consists of the aircraft carrier Midway. The ship houses an extensive collection of aircraft, many of which were built in So Cal.
FREE-Children 5 & under, Active Duty military including reservists (w/ valid ID). Adult \$34 (ages 13+). Youth \$24 (ages 4-12). Veterans (w/ID) \$24*Must show ID at entrance.
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The Ranch House Complex at Camp Pendleton. Listed as the Santa Margarita Ranch House Nat'l Historic Site and as a California State Historical Landmark. Docent-led tours are available by appointment; masks required. Please email your request to: MCBPCAMPEN_history@usmc.mil or phone (760)725-5758 The Camp Pendleton Historical Society is a 501(c)3 organization in support of the base's History and Museum's programs. Go to: www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org/ for information. Hours: Open daily 10am-5pm • Last admission at 4pm

Exercise timing conundrum: Optimal workout timing

by Rick Thiesse

It's a long-standing discussion for all who want to get into shape. When is the best time to exercise? According to Future Member, about 41% of workouts take place between 7-9 AM or 5-7 PM.

"The debate is intriguing with proponents of both morning and evening workouts citing various benefits," says Andrew Jagim, M.D., director of sports medicine research at Mayo Clinic Health System in Onalaska. "From increased energy levels to enhanced performance or greater weight-loss benefits, health experts delve into the science behind exercise timing to shed light on the optimal approach for achieving fitness goals."

For morning exercisers, the allure of starting the day with a workout is undeniable.

"Getting your workout in and completed before you even begin your day can provide a sense of accomplishment and set a positive tone for the day ahead," explains Dr. Jagim. "The post-workout release of endorphins and the satisfaction of accomplishing something before 9 a.m. can serve as a powerful ego boost."

Perhaps most importantly, morn-

ing workouts eliminate the need to worry about finding time for exercise later in the day because it's often the only time of the day that hasn't been previously committed to work, social events or family activities.

"By completing your workout in the morning, you free up your afternoons and evenings for other activities, such as cooking dinner, socializing or simply relaxing," Dr. Jagim notes. "This sense of freedom and flexibility can alleviate stress and enhance overall well-being."

For people embarking on morning workouts, strategic pre-exercise nutrition can make a significant difference in energy levels and performance.

"Starting the day with a balanced breakfast containing carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats can provide the necessary energy to power through a morning workout," Dr. Jagim advises. "Opt for whole-grain cereals, Greek yogurt with fruit, and allow sufficient time for digestion to prevent discomfort and optimize nutrient absorption. Or, if you're not hungry in the mornings or don't have time, something simple like an energy bar can suffice."

However, for some people, waking up early to exercise is the last

thing they feel like doing, and, therefore, the case for evening workouts is more appealing.

"Your body's ability to perform peaks in the afternoon and early evening, with optimal muscle function, strength and endurance," states Jake Erickson, D.O., sports medicine, Mayo Clinic Health System in Onalaska. "During this time, your body has time to wake up a bit by moving around throughout the day, you've likely gotten a meal or two in to ensure adequate energy available to use during the workout, and you may be more mentally alert."

Additionally, oxygen uptake kinetics are more favorable in the evening, allowing for more efficient utilization of resources during exercise. "Your body is primed for performance in the late afternoon and early evening, making it an ideal window for high-intensity activities like interval training or speed work," Dr. Erickson explains.

Conversely, people opting for evening workouts face unique considerations in balancing time commitments and mental energy.

"After a long day at work or shuttling around the kids all day, it can be hard to muster the motivation to go to the gym and put forth a lot of

physical effort during a workout," adds Alecia Gende, D.O., sports medicine and emergency physician at Mayo Clinic Health System in Onalaska. "Additionally, intense physical activity in the evening may trigger a stress response and cause difficulty falling asleep or waking in the middle of the night if your cortisol is disrupted and released at an inopportune time. If you have to get a workout in before sleep it would be best to be lower intensity such as a walk or lighter lifting session. If that's the case moving the workout earlier in the day might be more beneficial for them."

Lastly, if you choose to work out later in the day, it's important to ensure you are getting adequate nutrients throughout the day to make sure you have enough fuel available to support the workout, in addition to eating a well-balanced meal after the workout.

"After a long day, it's essential to refuel the body with carbohydrates and protein," Dr. Jagim suggests. "Consuming a nutrient-rich meal within two hours of your workout can facilitate muscle recovery and enhance adaptation to training. Consider options such as grilled chicken with quinoa and vegetables, or a protein-packed stir-fry to refuel and replenish after an evening workout."

Whether working or at home, most people hit the dreaded afternoon slump around 3 p.m. A study of more than 90,000 people recently found working out in the afternoon reduces the risk of heart disease or early death more than physical activity in either the morning or afternoon. The benefits of afternoon exercise for longevity were most pronounced for men and the elderly.

"Morning workouts may not be ideal for shift workers or those working late or staying up later in the evening," says Dr. Gende. "In that case, it may be more prudent to allow more sleep in the morning and perform a mid-day workout or early afternoon workout before your next evening shift or late night."

According to a OnePoll survey, the most effective activity for people for an afternoon workout is getting up and going for a walk, which is a great way to perk up both your mind and body.

For those who just say I don't have any time available, there's always time. "I suggest scheduling a 'snack competing' activity," says Dr. Erickson. "This can be a good excuse to flip the script and for people who know they may choose to sit on the couch and snack in the evenings. They can use that time to grab a

workout of some kind instead. This can lead to a big swing in people's fitness as they consume less calories by avoiding the typical snacking time and burn more calories by the workout."

For people engaging in prolonged or intense exercise sessions (more than 90 minutes), mid-workout nutrition can play a pivotal role in sustaining energy levels and preventing fatigue. Dr. Jagim recommends incorporating carbohydrate-rich snacks during extended workouts to maintain endurance and performance.

So, what is the best time to exercise? There are even benefits to splitting up a workout into short 10-minute mini-sessions throughout the day if you don't have time to get a full 60-minute session in. One thing is clear; even though science may seem contradictory, the importance of regular physical activity cannot be overstated.

"Ultimately, the best time to exercise is the time that fits into your schedule and aligns with your energy levels and preferences," concludes Dr. Jagim. "Consistency and adherence to a regular exercise routine are key and far more important regardless of the time of day you choose to workout."

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