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Rend Lake College students will be introduced during halftime of the men's basketball game on Feb. 11 as part of Homecoming 2015 celebrations. A king and queen will be crowned during the coronation and a dance will take place after the game. Queen candidates, FROM LEFT, are Rowdee Sanders (Carterville), Denise Bruns (Pinckneyville), Deborah Loucks (Sesser), Brooke Docherty (Benton), Sarah Carlson (Pinckneyville), Danara Jones (Scheller), Jennifer Carroll (Woodlawn) and Claire Pytlinski (Waltonville). King candidates, FROM LEFT, are Matt Loucks (Sesser), Dustin May (Woodlawn), Tyler Crawford (Dix), Richard Clemons (Louisville), Dallas Adkins (Louisville), Eli Liske (Okawville) and Nathan Liszewski (Waltonville). NOT PICTURED are Abbie Braden (McLeansboro) and Tierre Harris (Mt. Vernon). (Photo by Nathan Wheeler / RLC Marketing)

Les Mis tickets go on sale March 9

BY BILLY MCPHERSON

CLOCKTOWER CHRONICLE STAFFWRITER xcitement and intrigue are brewing on the Rend Lake College campus. Nothing nefarious. It's all for the much awaited debut of "Les Misérables.'

Thursday, April 9, will feature the premiere of RLC's annual spring musical. And none other than the classic tale of "Les Misérables" is to be the featured entertainment. The show starts at 7 p.m., with repeat showings scheduled for April 10 and 11, also at 7 p.m., and an early afternoon showing at 2 p.m. April 12.

Tickets will be available for purchase beginning March 9 for \$12. Call (618) 437-5321, Ext.

The musical is based on the famous French historical novel of the same title, which was written by Victor Hugo in 1862 and has inspired several popular film versions in the past century. (These will be reviewed in an upcoming edition of the Chronicle.) The story follows events and characters beginning in 1815 climaxing with the 1832 June Rebellion in Paris, showing the political aftermath of the original French Revolution from the late 18th century. The lead protagonist of the book is

ex-convict Jean Valjean, however many other classic characters are featured in the story such as Javert, Fontine, Cosette, Marius Pontmercy, and Eponine.

The spring musical is being directed by Sara Alstat, with set design being done by Therese Melena.

Theatre enthusiast and RLC student Matt Crawford is just one of the many students that are looking forward to this upcoming Spring Musical. "I'm going to see 'Le Mis' because of the interesting plot, which depicts the conflict between the people of

France and their government. "It should be a very interesting play," added Crawford.

"The talent is the best reason to catch a RLC Musical Production," said Melena. "There was a team of us during auditions last week. On the night of call backs, we were here until midnight. The people who auditioned were phenomenal! It actually made the job of selecting leads and the ensemble very difficult." Melena, along with Alstat, helped supervise auditions.

"It's a fantastic show," declares Alstat. She said audiences will enjoy the familiar songs, made even more popular by recent movie adaptations of "Les Mis." Alstat encouraged students to

see it and compare the differences between the Hollywood version of the story and the stage version. According to Alstat, this version will be close to the recent 2012 movie adaptation in that it will have "...some of the same songs, some of the same characters, as well as the same plot, but some of the songs have changed in different parts of the show compared to the actual movie."

To order tickets to any of the scheduled showings of this year's Spring Musical, students are encouraged to call the RLC Box Office at (618) 437-5321, Ext. 1467.

Designing "Les Mis"

BY BILLY MCPHERSON

RLC CLOCKTOWER CHRONICLE STAFFWRITER espite a small budget for resources and manpower, RLC theatre productions always look amazing. This is all thanks to the hard work, passion, and dedication of a creative dream team that gets its spark from a small firecracker known as Therese Melena.

On April 9-12, RLC theatre students will perform the musical "Les Misérables." The set design and all show-related artwork are the original work of Professor Melena, who has a Master's Degree in Theatre Set Design. Assisting Melena in the design and conceptualizing of the show are Architectural **Technology Professor** Kevin Weston and Beth Mandrell, who most Ina campus students will recognize as the head librarian of the Learning Resource Center. Mandrell oversees costume design for all RLC theatre produc-

Melena can spend anywhere from 50 to 100

hours in research alone before she even begins the design process.

"Kevin Weston and I will meet to discuss ideas," Melena explained. "From there, we all come back to the next meeting and brainstorm ideas. From those ideas I make up sketches, paint plans, and models. When the final set design is chosen, Kevin and I get the tech class working on

The tech class — Melena loves working with the tech class. She co-teaches it with Weston and a good portion of the class is made up by performers in the musical itself this spring. Making a show go takes a cast of lead characters itself, with Sara Alstat as the director.

...Beth Mandrell, Kevin Weston, and Sara Alstat are a dream team," added Melena. "They are all extremely talented and dedicated to the production. We have a wonderful, symbiotic relationship with each other as artists and as instructors."

Melena talked about challenges indwelt into locally producing the

globe's longest-running musical.

"Something as wellknown as 'Les Mis' will bring in its own baggage," she said. "The public has

preconceived ideas about how actors should dress and how sets should look."

Designers continues on page 2



On a mission

Therese Melena's Theater Tech students Laci Zeidler and Tyler Bourland prepare the stage for this year's spring musical "Les Miserables." (Photo by Taylor Blankenship / Clocktower **Chronicle Staff Photographer)**



KING FEATURES

BY SAMANTHA WEAVER

• It was British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who made the following sage observation: "All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice,

honor, duty, mercy, hope." Though an electric eel is born with the ability to see, by the time it becomes an adult it is blind. This lack of sight is not a hindrance, though; the fish uses electricity to create an image of its surroundings in much the same way that we use radar. The electricity is also how the electric eel kills its prey, producing a 600-volt shock — five

times more powerful than a shock from a household outlet.

 For reasons unclear today, in 18th-century England, bumblebees were commonly known as "foggy-toddlers."

 You might be surprised to learn that in 2011, a man by the name of Ignacio Marc Isperas was granted a U.S. patent for "apparatus facilitating the building of a snow man/woman." According to the abstract, "the spherically shaped body and adhesion surface form a building component for facilitating the construction of the snow

Strange continues on page 2

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CONSUMER REPORTS

11 steps to rehab vour credit score

BY CONSUMER REPORTS

UNIVERSAL redit-scoring models are like snowflakes: There are a lot of them, and no two are exactly alike. FICO alone sells 65 versions.

Because of that variation and because a lender might not use the same credit scores you obtain --Consumer Reports suggests that you be aware of the range of your scores and follow their trend over time. John Ulzheimer, a credit expert at the website Credit Sesame and formerly of FICO and Equifax, recommends these other points when managing your score:

1. Pay your bills on time. Payment activity accounts for 35 percent of a FICO score and 40 percent of a VantageScore. At least pay the minimum each month rather than fall behind.

2. Check your reports by requesting one free credit report from a different reporting agency every four months through AnnualCreditReport.com. "Hard pull" credit inquiries — from a potential lender and others with permission from you can lower your scores slightly. But there's no penalty for checking for yourself; that's called a "soft pull." Creditscoring companies consider multiple inquiries by lenders within 45 days as only one inquiry because the timing suggests that you're shopping for interest rates for one

loan, not multiple loans.

3. Don't apply for multiple credit cards at once. Unlike applying for a mortgage, auto or student loan, applying for several credit cards generates multiple hard pulls. Instead, carefully read prospective cards' terms and conditions, and apply for just

4. Don't cancel plastic you don't use, unless it carries an annual fee. Stick the card in a drawer instead. Part of your score depends on the ratio of the credit you use on your credit cards to the total value of your open credit lines. Eliminating a card reduces your credit line and can raise the ratio, which is a negative.

5. Don't open too many new credit accounts at once. By doing so, you lower the average "age" of your accounts, which can lower your credit score.

6. Keep credit balances relatively low. Maintaining a revolving credit balance under 10 percent of your total credit line is wise, experts say. A higher ratio indicates an elevated credit

7. Beware of points-driven high balances. If you charge everything on your rewards card for the points, switch to cash or a debit card for a couple of months before applying for new credit. Lenders can't tell from your score whether you zero-out your balances every month. They'll see your credit score, a snapshot in time, showing

that you're charging a lot relative to your credit limit, which is a negative.

8. Maintain a variety of credit types. Successfully paying an auto loan, a student loan and credit-cards bills over the same period, for instance, shows that you're able to juggle different types of credit — a plus. That contributes 10 percent to your score.

9. Get a personal loan to pay off your credit-card debt. You can improve your credit score by paying off the score-damaging "revolving" debt of credit cards with the score-benign "installment" debt of a personal loan. And Consumer Reports notes that the interest rate on the loan is likely to be lower than the credit-card interest rates.

10. Pay off debt in collections. It's always better to have zero balances on collections, but soon you might also see a much higher credit score as a result. The most current versions of VantageScore and the FICO credit score ignore collections with a zero balance.

Get a secured credit card after a bankruptcy. If you've been through one, start populating your credit report with good credit. Secured credit cards may be an effective way to rebuild your credit. A bankruptcy will have less impact on your score over time, as long as you aren't defaulting on new loans. But Chapter 7 and 13 bankruptcies stay on your credit report for 10 years.







Sudoku

	2 /2	1			2			3
	4		5					
2	5 31		6		7		8	5
				9	6		1	
		6				4		
	3		7	2				
9	1		4		3			2
					8		7	
5			1			6		

Solution to Sudoku puzzle printed on page 5.

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Designers continued from page 1

She says her job is to take all of this into account while still providing a showcase that is "sensitive to the cultural needs and sensibilities of the audience that we serve."

Working on a small, intimate scale forces Melena and the dream team to implement their creativity in order to work around stage and budget limitations. "We work with a very limited budget, but are blessed with an amazing wealth of talent. It is my job as a set designer to take all of those factors into consideration." Larger productions have the liberty of employing tricks such as rotating stages, trap doors, and other big special effects. These elements aren't possible at RLC. But, if past results

are any indication, Melena and the team are up to the challenge.

For her, originality and creativity are as crucial to the design process as the performance itself.

"We don't want to merely repeat, scene-forscene, what has been done on Broadway or a bigger venue. We want to play to the strengths of our actors, our audience, and our stage, while still giving the public what they expect and want."

Interested in set design? Melena can be contacted at (618) 437-5321 Ext. 1747 or by emailing melenat@rlc.edu.

"Les Misérables" opens April 9 at RLC. Showtimes are 7 p.m. April 9-11 with a final 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, April 12. Tickets are \$12 and can be purchased, starting March 9, by calling (618) 437-5321, Ext. 1467.

Strange

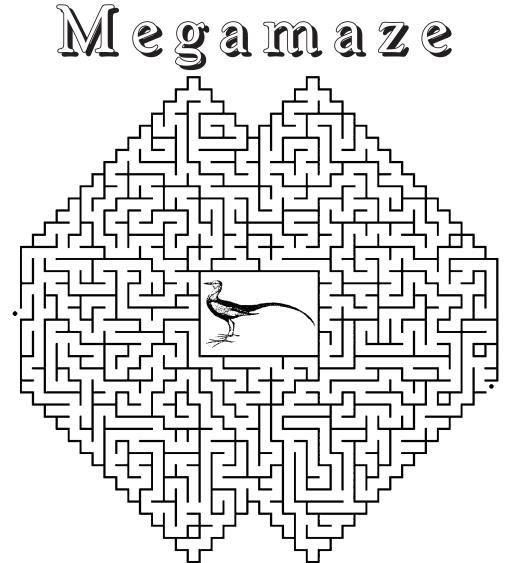
continued from page 1 man/woman."

• If you're a pickle-maker in Connecticut, you should know that your product cannot legally be considered a pickle unless it bounces when dropped.

 Philadelphia brand cream cheese was originally made in New York.

 According to a recent survey by the National Association of Convenience Stores, 11 percent of adult Americans have at some point in their lives worked at a convenience store or gas station. For 3 percent of adults, that was their first job.

Thought for the Day: "Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into nothing that is something, wearing stripes with plaid comes easy." — Albert Einstein



Solution to Megamaze puzzle printed on page 5.

Crossword

52

Across

- 1 Decayed, like metal
- 7 Catty comment
- 11 Bar obligation
- 14 Actor Peter
- 15 European volcano
- 16 "Open, sesame" speaker
- 17 Cheesy film starring Marlon Brando? (with "The")
- 19 Huge amount
- 20 Downs or salts
- 21 Lane of Metropolis 22 Something to plant
- 23 Formal wear
- 24 Group of nations
- 25 Don't go straight 26 Bummed, say
- 27 Animation or spirit
- 28 Athlete
- 30 Ascends to a height
- 32 Paces 33 Cheesy film starring Michael J. Fox?
- 36 Knock off the track
- 37 Certain locks 38 "Let's Stay
- Together" singer 40 Vicious fellow?
- 41 Typing test stat.
- 44 One using Elmer's
- 45 Silly Sandler
- 47 Storage structure
- on a farm
- 48 Tiffany merchandise
- 49 Feeling superior
- 50 Old fishing tool
- 51 "WALL-E" love interest
- 52 Cheesy film starring
- **Humphrey Bogart?** 54 Series, in cards

56 Some navels

- 55 Cast forth
- 10 Kind of chest

11 Deep-fried mouthful

- 7 Tagalong's cry

57 Spot for a scene

59 Canine categories

1 Popular thesaurus

3 Drunk as a skunk

4 Minor errands

5 Jack of old

westerns

6 OED offering

2 More perfect world?

58 Round specks

- 8 Morals
- 9 Dollar bills
- 33 City near Seattle 34 Debater's activity

35 Gives it a shot

36 Cloaks' partners

31 Pig abode

12 Medicinal juice

13 Some school

the league

22 Billows

18 Among the best in

24 "Revolver" musician

25 Styled in the salon

29 Undercard match,

27 More dawdling

for short

supplies

- 30 Gives the willies to
- 52 Abbr. in a math
- big guys

49 Wrestling with the

39 "Your wish is my

housecleaning task

command"

41 Frank

42 Arranged

43 Quagmire

46 Does a

47 Flurry

- 50 Speak thickly
- textbook
- 53 Try for an apple

Solution to Crossword puzzle printed on page 5.

The royal 'we'

 $Id{m i}$ ot $_{ ext{by: JimMullen}}$

BY JIM MULLEN

Ihe Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited America recently. Maybe you heard about it. If you didn't, I'm

sorry to hear about your coma and hope they can wake you up soon.

The only thing that could have possibly gotten more publicity would have been Kim Kardashian waking up in a Macy's store window. Naked. Or has she already done that?

Reporters who, just a few weeks ago, were talking about Ebola, racial unrest and the sudden drop in gasoline prices were suddenly talking about Kate's "baby bump" and earnestly speculating on the sex of her unborn child as if it were the most important event not just in the last two weeks, but in the last 2,000 years. There is no way that Kate and Will could possibly spend as much time talking about her pregnancy as the morning show/infotainment complex does. The only thing that could possibly be more interesting than talking about the duchess's pregnancy would be to have a doctor examine Kate on live TV. I'm sure they asked. "But first, let's cut to this live picture of Edward R. Murrow spinning in his grave. Wow, look how fast he's going. That's quite a lot of dust he's kicking up! It's like watching a mini-torna-

Pundits wondered whether William's father, Prince Charles, should just go away and let his son take over whenever Queen Elizabeth decides to retire and spend the rest of her life letting people wait on her hand and foot. (Oh, right, I forgot, she lives that way now. Why quit?)

One of the oddest things that happens when British royalty visits our shores is that "royal watchers" start popping up out of the woodwork. As if royalwatching was something you needed to get a college degree for, like lawyering or doctoring: something that takes much study and long hours of memorization before one can share their wisdom with the royally ignorant

But it turns out, all you have to do to become a

royal watcher is to say you are one. It's like being a birdwatcher. Except that birdwatchers actually seem to know something about their subject. Royal watchers are not so con-

strained. They don't have

royals, except that they are

unclear if they know exact-

ly what makes a person

royal, because they often

talk about Kate's and Will's

popularity, as if they were

voted in. They also seem

to think the more photo-

genic you are, the more

Kate Middleton: queen

thing abnormal about

Queen Elizabeth being

make her grandson the

Royal watchers don't

seem to think there's any-

able to pick a name out of

a hat — Cambridge — and

duke of it. As if any parent

could do the same thing if

child an unused title and

send him off to private

the Marquis of Peoria.

seem properly embar-

rassed when crowds on

Not that any of this is

Will and Kate's fault. They

the street scream for them

know they have done noth-

started having kids. What's

your block, who have done

the same thing. No one is

outside their houses bow-

ing, screaming and scrap-

ing at the mere sight of

them. They're not on the

nightly news; they're not

the famous.

mingling with the rich and

You hear stories all the

time about celebrities act-

somebody who waits on a

and hours just to get a sin-

gle glimpse or a photo of a

sound normal to you? Isn't

There's a name for that

demented person. They're

royal person? Does that

that acting weird?

kind of strange and

called TV reporters.

ing weird. Really? What

cold sidewalk for hours

would you say about

like rock stars when they

ing to deserve it. They

were born, married and

all the screaming about?

There are people on my

block, and probably on

they wanted. Just give your

school where he can hang

out with his peers — Lord

North Dakota, the Duke of

Biloxi, Lady Las Vegas and

Charles: borderline royalty;

roval vou are. Prince

material.

to know anything about

royal. Sometimes it's

BY ANTHONY L. KOMAROFF, M.D.

UNIVERSAL **EAR DOCTOR** K: I recently had a very painful kidney stone. What can I do to prevent another?

DEAR READER: First of all, my sympathies: Pain from passing a kidney stone can be as bad as any kind of pain.

Kidney stones are hard, chemical deposits that form inside the kidney chambers where urine is collected. Urine passes from the kidney down a narrow tube (the ureter) and into the bladder. If a stone gets carried into the narrow ureter, it can get stuck. This can cause severe pain, bloody urine, nausea and vomiting.

If you've had one kidney stone, you're at increased risk for another. That's because you probably have a tendency (based on your genes, your diet or both) to form kidney stones.

New guidelines say the best way to prevent a second kidney stone is to drink lots of water every day. Keeping your urine diluted makes it harder for stones to form.

The guidelines are based on clinical trials of treatments and diet changes that doctors commonly recommend to help prevent second kidney stones. The researchers found enough evidence to say that drinking lots of fluids reduces the risk of a second kidney stone.

They did not find enough evidence to recommend other treatments or diet changes — but that's not the same as finding evidence that other treatments don't work.

I still plan to recommend the following steps to help prevent even a first kidnev stone. These are all healthy suggestions,

whether or not they actually prevent kidney stones:

Best prevention for kidney

stones is to drink lots of water

 Drink enough water. If you have had a kidney stone, drink enough liquids to pass two quarts (8 cups) of urine a day. Include citrus drinks, such as lemonade and orange juice. The citrate in these beverages helps to stop stones from forming.

 Eat calcium-rich foods. Most kidney stones contain calcium, which usually hooks up with a chemical called oxalate. The calcium in foods and drinks binds to the oxalate inside the gut and passes out of the body in a bowel movement. As a result, less calcium goes out in the urine. This reduces the chance that stones will form.

 Decrease sodium (salt) in vour diet. A highsodium diet can trigger kidney stones because it increases the amount of calcium in vour urine. If you have had a kidney stone, limit daily sodium to 1,500 milligrams (mg).

 Limit animal protein. Eating too much animal

protein increases the amount of uric acid in the urine. This can cause uric acid stones. It can also trigger formation of stones that contain calcium. A high-protein diet also reduces levels of citrate, which helps prevent stones from forming.

 Limit stone-forming foods if you have had kidney stones. If you were able to collect the stone in your urine after it was passed, and your doctor examined it and said it was a calcium oxalate or calcium phosphate stone, limit oxalate- and phosphate-containing foods like beets, chocolate, spinach, rhubarb, tea, most nuts and colas.

Fortunately, I've never suffered from a kidney stone. But if I had — based on what my patients have told me - I would do anvthing to avoid a second.

(Dr. Komaroff is a physician and professor at Harvard Medical School. To send questions, go to AskDoctorK.com, or write: Ask Doctor K, 10 Shattuck St., Second Floor, Boston, MA 02115.)

Music bothers downstairs neighbors extra noise. You could try

BY HARRIETTE COLE

UNIVERSAL

EAR HARRI-ETTE: Just some months ago, I moved into my apartment building on the fourth floor. Recently settling in, I have installed my surround sound speakers for my living room. I've watched movies and played music at different levels to test what is appropriate. My next-door neighbors haven't complained, but the couple below my apartment has complained about the lowest volume level. It has become harassing. I have repeatedly adjusted the volume and subwoofer level because I wouldn't want anyone to be uncomfortable in his or her own home. Some possibly important factors: My roommate and I are African-American, the people living below are a homosexual Caucasian couple and they're about 20 years older than us. They

have banged on my door

with a rude tone while I have

had company over, and it's

embarrassing. I'm thinking I

should call the cops for

harassment the next time

they come to my door. What

do you think? — Too Loud, Brooklyn, New York

DEAR TOO LOUD: As conscientious as you are trying to be, know that sound travels fast, particularly bass sounds. One way to muffle sound is by putting rugs on your floor. They will help to absorb the sound. This is a wise choice for someone who enjoys playing music in an apartment building.

Regarding the potential racism or ageism to which you have alluded, I recommend that you not allow yourself to be overcome by those thoughts. You and your roommate should stay focused on being calm and

If they continue to bang on your door and behave rudely, speak to the super first and ask for help to dispel the drama. If it continues, call the police in the moment that it's happening. They will need proof of the offense in order for it to make a difference.

What some people do when they are having parties is to alert their neighbors in advance so that they are aware that there may be a number of people and

that as well. Also, as a rule, turn the music down or off on weeknights after 11 p.m.

DEAR HARRIETTE: My sister was doing really well losing weight last year, but it seems she has stopped trying. I was so proud of her and want to motivate her to start up her routine again. How can I address this without hurting her feelings or making her feel uncomfortable? — Sister Motivator, Racine, Wisconsin

DEAR SISTER MOTIVA-TOR: One of the best ways to reignite someone's interest in fitness is by engaging in fitness activities yourself. If you aren't already physically active, start a routine and tell your sister. Point out that she inspired you last

Breese, IL 618-526-7612

618-395-4670

year when she was all-in with her fitness activities. Invite her to join you this year so that you both can claim wellness.

(Lifestylist and author Harriette Cole is president and creative director of Harriette Cole Media. You can send questions to askharriette@harriettecole.c om or c/o Universal Uclick,

1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64106.)

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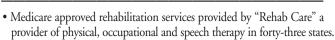
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Welcome to the Warriors

INA, III. (Feb. 9, 2015) — Massac County High School senior Addie Gray signed a national letter of intent to play for the 2015-16 Rend Lake College Women's Golf team last week. She is pictured with, FRONT, FROM LEFT, her father Darin Gray, Addie, and her mother Lori Gray; BACK, FROM LEFT, RLC Head Coach Cindy Corn, Massac County Athletic Director Parker Winhorst, and Massac CountyGolf Coach Kim Futrell. (RLC Sports Information)



Dakota Head, SITTING, CENTER, signed a national letter of intent last week to play for the RLC Warriors Baseball team. Also pictured is, FRONT, FROM LEFT, his father Chris Head, Dakota Head, and his mother Tammy Head; BACK, BCHS Varsity Head Coach Brett Blondi, RLC Head Coach Tony **Etnier, and BCHS Athletic Director Ryan Miller. (Submitted photo)**

Benton native Dakota Head joins RLC Baseball team

BY REANNE PALMER RLC SPORTS INFORMATION

NA, III. (Feb. 2, 2015) — The Rend Lake College Baseball team signed Dakota Head of Benton last week. The right-handed pitcher is the son of Chris and Tammy Head.

He started off his athletic career in his freshman year at Benton Consolidated High School (BCHS) with a win over Harrisburg in an extra inning game as the relief. He's received All-Conference and All-South awards with a .416 batting average as both shortstop and pitcher. He also played baseball in junior high with the Southern

Storm of Pinckneyville. "Dakota Head has played a big role in the success of the Benton Ranger baseball program for the past three years," said Brett Blondi, Varsity Head Coach at BCHS. "He will be a tremendous addition to the Rend Lake baseball program in many ways. He is a great student, talented and hardworking baseball player, and a positive teammate. His real strength lies in his character. Dakota's best baseball is ahead of him and we are proud that he gets an opportunity to continue his baseball career at a quality baseball program at Rend Lake College."

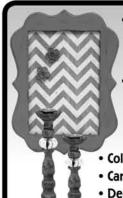
The BCHS senior is active in National Honor Society, FFA, Art Club,

and Pep Club, in addition to his part-time job as a maintenance worker for the Benton Community Park. As one of the top 10 students academically in his class, Head also has a number of awards to his name, including the Lion's Club Outstanding Academic Leadership Award, the High Honor Roll, the IHSA (Illinois High School Association) Scholastic Achievement Award, and the 2014 Finalist for the Triple Impact Scholarship by Positive Coaching

Alliance. RLC Head Coach Tony Etnier said he's looking forward to having a strong athlete - both academically and physically — on the roster for next year.

"We are excited that Dakota has decided to continue his baseball career with us here at Rend Lake College," said Etnier. "He is a special athlete that we think has the ability to be a two-way player. He is an excellent student and an outstanding person. We think he will be a great fit here and are very happy to have him on board."

For more information, contact Etnier at (618) 437-5321, Ext. 1282. For all things athletic at the Lake, visit www.rlc.edu/warriors.



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by the Roll

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Say chees for a cold winter's night



BY MARIALISA CALTA

f you were stranded on a desert isle, what is the food vou would most dream about? Chocolate? Ice cream? A slab of beef, grilled rare? For Ben Gunne, the fictional character who was "marooned three years agone" on Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island," it was cheese.

"You mightn't happen to have a piece of cheese about you now?" Gunne hungrily asks young Jim Hawkins, the hero of the tale, when the two first meet. Gunne has survived on wild goats and berries and oysters, but "Many's the long night I've dreamed of cheese — toasted mostly — and woke up again, and here I was."

Cheese — toasted mostly — is indeed the stuff of dreams, and the reason why so many cultures rich in dairy have fabled versions of cheese served hot and melting: Think fondue and raclette and nachos.

Some, like the French, have institutionalized the toasted cheese sandwich, pairing it with ham and coating it with bechamel sauce for the delicious Croque Monsieur. This

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sandwich (which loosely translates as "Crunchy Mister") originated as Parisian bar food around the turn of the 20th century, and was immortalized — along with the butter cakes known as madeleines — by none other than Marcel Proust. England has its grilled-cheeseand-ham "toastie," which is called a "tosti" in the Netherlands.

In the United States, we dip the ham-and-cheese sandwich in an egg batter, fry it, and call it a "Monte Cristo." Historians do not seem to know the origin of the name, but it will probably surprise no one that it is first thought to have been served, in the 1950s, in Southern California. It is often paired with a small

side of jam for dipping. A Vermont dairy company, the Cabot Creamery Cooperative, celebrates the dish with the "Ver-Monte Cristo." Cabot, owned by the 1,200 New England and upstate New York farm families of the Agri-Mark Cooperative, produces a line of butter, yogurt, cottage cheese and sour cream, but is probably best known for its cheese, including its award-winning Cheddar.

This recipe calls for sharp Cheddar, but you can take your pick from mild to "seriously sharp"; it will all be good. Aside from the Cheddar, the recipe declares its New England roots with the use of apples and, as a twist on jam, an optional

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drizzle of warm maple syrup.

This is a sandwich to dream of — a sandwich to answer Ben Gunne's dreams. A sandwich to eat by a roaring fire on a cold winter night. It simply proves what Avery Aames, author of "The Long Quiche Goodbye" and other books in the "Cheese Shop Mystery" series, once wrote:

"Life is great. Cheese makes it better."

VER-MONTE CRISTO Yield: 2 sandwiches

INGREDIENTS

1 large egg

1/2 cup half-and-half 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

4 slices favorite local bread, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons butter, divided

1/2 Granny Smith apple, cored and sliced

1 whole shallot or very small onion, thinly sliced 1 teaspoon apple cider

vinegar 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded sharp Cheddar

2 cooked sausage patties or thick slices of ham

Pure maple syrup, warmed, for drizzling (optional)

Whisk together the egg, half-and-half and vanilla in a shallow bowl. Add bread slices, turning to coat with mixture, and set aside to soak.

Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a small skillet set over medium-high heat; add apple slices and shallot or onion, and cook until tender, stirring occasionally, about 7 to 9 minutes. Add vinegar and cook 1 minute longer. Set aside.

Melt the remaining 1 tablespoon butter in a large skillet set over medium heat. Remove bread slices from egg mixture (discard remaining mixture) and cook 2 minutes on one

Take the skillet off heat. and flip two of the bread slices so that the uncooked sides face down. Sprinkle each with 1/4 cup Cheddar; then add sausage patty or ham slice topped with half

of the apple mixture. Top each with an additional 1/4 cup Cheddar and a second slice of bread, cooked side

Place the skillet back over medium heat and cook about 2 minutes or until golden on underside. Turn sandwiches over, and cook 2 minutes longer or until golden on second side and cheese is melted. Cut in half, and serve warm, drizzled with warm maple syrup, if desired.

Variation: For a simpler and lighter version called Cheddar Cheese Dreams, make sandwiches first with your choice of bread spread lightly with mustard and topped with thinly sliced Cheddar of your choice and smoked turkey breast. Press sandwiches together firmly. Whisk together 2 eggs with 1/3 cup milk (enough for 4 sandwiches), and briefly soak each side of sandwich in the mixture before cooking in skillet as described above.

(Excerpted from "The Cabot Creamery Cookbook: Simple, Wholesome Dishes From America's Best Dairy Farms." Copyright 2015 Time Home Entertainment Inc. Reprinted with permission from Time Home Entertainment Inc., a division of Time Inc. New York, N.Y. All rights reserved.)



A pile of warm, melted-cheese sandwiches with ham and apples make a tasty, satisfying treat on a cold winter night. (Photo by Metro)

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Solution to page 2 Megamaze puzzle.

Solution to page 2

Sudoku puzzle.

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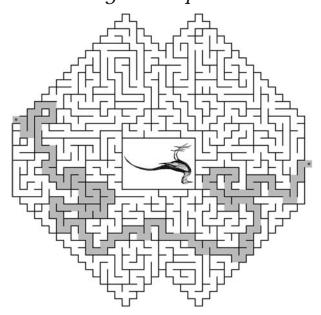
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Solution to page 2 Crossword puzzle.

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