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Popular Spice Triggers Life-Threatening Allergy Attack of Baltimore Times Publisher's Grandson



The Baltimore Times publisher, Joy Bramble and her youngest grandson Cole, who has been diagnosed with a severe tree nut allergy experienced an allergic reaction after eating a dish prepared by his grandmother that contained peppercorns. Food allergies pose a growing health threat to children and adults. Mrs. Bramble sincerely hopes the information shared in this article will spare families from the trauma of a preventable allergy attack and spark a grassroots effort to mandate complete and accurate ingredient labeling that warns consumers about life-threatening allergens. (See article on page 5) Photo credit: Peter Bramble

Planning for the Unexpected and Finding Your Path Forward

By **Tawanna Browne Smith**

Vice President and Banker,
J.P. Morgan Private Bank

When you lose a spouse, you're often left grieving while also trying to figure out how to find a way forward and identify what's next – personally, career wise and financially. Life is a journey with many chapters and with life experiences and lessons learned, we find and deepen our connection with ourselves.

In the aftermath of losing my husband several years ago, I connected with other women who were grieving the loss of their spouse and I also saw many of them struggling with managing their finances. I had a previous career in banking with a good handle on my family's finances. As a result, I found myself to be a resource to other women in a similar situation to educate them on how to manage finances in this new chapter of their life.

It's an all-too-common story for married couples in which one spouse manages the finances and the other has little to no involvement. Shortly after my husband died, COVID-19 hit and I found myself doing little more than just taking care of the house and kids. After months of introspection and a deep desire to find sense for it all, I came to the conclusion that I needed to turn my pain into purpose. My exposure to a network of women facing similar life circumstances provided me with my answer and my next steps: rejoin the banking workforce and work with women to plan for and protect their family's wealth – especially in the face of tragic life events.

Finding a new path

Deciding to rejoin the workforce after a prolonged career break is no easy decision. Aside from the transition of



Photo credit: Pexels

working for yourself, there are a slew of other factors you need to consider. My finding the JPMorgan Chase ReEntry Program was a bit of good timing and divine intervention. Shortly after I applied to the program, I interviewed and was on my way into a new career with the Private Bank in Baltimore. The structure of the ReEntry Program is a nice cocoon for on-boarding a new employee – especially one who has been out of corporate America for over a decade.

That said, if you are planning to rejoin the workforce it's important to give yourself grace and be intentional about the next chapter of your life. Take the time to think about the industry, the company and your personal brand. Be sure you are taking the right next step for yourself and that you are doing it for the appropriate reason – keeping your “why” in mind.

Planning for the unexpected

Because of my journey, I am passionate about helping clients who are facing life-changing circumstances. Below are three key financial tips for individuals no matter where they are on the wealth spectrum.

Identify where your documents are located – Put together a master document that outlines a list of all your bills and how they are paid, usernames and passwords for accounts, and important financial and estate planning documents including bank statements, wills and any other directives. Place them in a safe or lock box that a trusted family member is aware of.

Build your short-term liquidity fund – As a general rule of thumb, setting aside three to six months' worth of your basic essential expenses is key for preparing for a rainy day. When you're just starting out, it's okay to start small and continue building from there. Everyone has a different comfort level for what this fund (a savings or money market account) looks like. The main point is to take a look at your monthly expenses and plan your short-term safety net from there in the event that the unexpected happens. **Make sure estate documents are in order** – For some families, discussions around sickness and death are tough ones to have. Unfortunately, proper estate planning can be overlooked as a result. The negative cost of this oversight can pose



Tawanna Browne Smith,
Vice President and Banker,
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Courtesy photo

a threat to the surviving family's wealth and financial well-being. Ensuring you have a will, powers of attorney (POA), living trust, advanced directives and other important estate documents in place is crucial for protecting assets and outlining your wishes in the event of your passing. Be sure to update these documents as major life events happen over the years.

It's normal to be reluctant about planning for unexpected events – it's personal and complex. Taking control of your finances and thinking ahead about your future is an evolving process. Working with a trusted team can help you ensure your wealth plans support the hopes and dreams you have for your family's future.

Tawanna Browne Smith is a vice president and banker at J.P. Morgan Private Bank in Baltimore. Smith leverages her trading and analysis background to guide successful individuals and their families in taking a holistic view of their wealth management goals and aspirations.



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2023 Key Tax Tips

Disclaimer: Any U.S. federal tax advice contained in the article is not intended to be written or used and cannot be used or relied upon, to avoid tax-related penalties under the Internal Revenue Code, or to promote, market or recommend to another any tax-related matter addressed herein.

Tax season is upon us. The deadline to file 2023 taxes for individuals in Maryland is Monday, April 15, 2024. Xavier Epps, CEO and founder of XNE Financial Advising, LLC provides more tax tips to keep in mind.

Q: What are a few considerations when choosing a tax preparer?

A: Be wary of red flags such as guarantees of large refunds, a self-prepared stamp on your tax return indicating you prepared them and not the professional you've paid (refusal to take responsibility for the prepared return), or requests for a percentage of your refund as a fee. A reputable tax preparer should act professionally and adhere to ethical standards. Additional items to consider when choosing a tax practitioner/preparer include: 1.) Consider the tax preparer's experience and specialization. Some tax preparers focus on specific industries or types of tax returns. Choose someone with relevant experience to your financial situation. Experienced tax preparers are better equipped to navigate complexities. 2.) Check reviews and testimonials from other clients. A positive reputation is a good indicator of a reliable and trustworthy tax preparer. 3.) Understand the tax preparer's fee structure upfront. Some tax preparers charge a flat fee, while others may charge based on the complexity of your tax situation. Beware of hidden fees and ensure you clearly understand the total cost of their services.



Xavier Epps, CEO and founder of XNE Financial Advising, LLC can provide tax service in all 50 states. Courtesy of XNE Financial Advising, LLC

Q: What are items of interest for Maryland tax filers?

A: As a certified licensed tax preparer by the Maryland State Board of Individual Tax Preparers, I've noticed many taxpayers are unaware that Maryland offers some exclusions for retirement income, including Social Security benefits and certain pension income. Please share such with your tax preparer to lower the amount of income that's taxable. Understanding these exclusions can impact your taxable income considerably. Maryland offers specific tax benefits for military personnel, including exemptions for military retirement income. Active-duty military members may also have specific rules regarding income earned while stationed outside of Maryland.

Q: Are there any new tax credits in Maryland?

A: If you or your dependents pursue higher education, you may be eligible for education-related tax credits or deductions. Maryland residents should explore options like the Student Loan Debt Relief Tax Credit and other education-related incentives.

Q: Are there any tax law changes or new laws?

A: Each year, Congress passes new tax laws or amendments, which become part of the existing Internal Revenue Code (the last time the tax code was rewritten was in 2017). For 2023, changes included the credit expansion of new electric vehicles (EV) through 2032, worth up to \$7,500 to taxpayers (credits for used vehicles are up to \$4,000). Another change is the expansion of the Energy Efficient Home Improvement Credit, allowing taxpayers to deduct up to 30 percent of the cost of qualifying green home upgrades from their tax bill, with a maximum credit of \$1,200 per year for the next 10 years (until 2032).

Q: What are a few often overlooked tax deductions to consider?

A: Taxpayers may take a credit or a deduction for income taxes paid to a foreign country. This benefit reduces taxpayers' taxes when the U.S. and another country tax the same income. Another overlooked deduction is military reservist travel expenses. (Armed forces reservists who travel more than 100 miles away from home and stay overnight in connection with service can deduct the cost if they aren't receiving per diem for such). Lastly, regarding the selling costs associated with selling your home, a taxpayer can lower their taxable capital gain by the amount of your selling costs—including real estate agent

commissions, title insurance, legal, advertising, administrative, escrow and inspection fees.

Q: Who should file for a tax extension?

A: File a tax extension if you have a complicated tax situation (This usually involves more than just a W2, such as rental property, businesses, investments, childcare, tuition statements and mortgage information, for example, would qualify for a possible extension). Please note that an extension only gives you extra time to file, but not additional time to pay. So, if you believe you'll owe, it's best to send in a payment as early as possible before you file the extension or with the extension. Take this extended time to present the best tax situation to the IRS and state as much as possible, which could help save a considerable amount of money versus rushing to meet the deadline and reporting inaccurate information.

Q: Why is it important for tax filers to address filing tax returns from any previous years?

A: It's important to address filing tax returns from prior years first because there are potential credits (i.e., carryforward) that you may be able to claim in future years, but you'd only know of such if you file the earlier returns first as opposed to the latest ones now. Another essential reason to address the older returns is that taxpayers have three years to claim tax refunds. If you focus on the latest years now and ignore the older returns, you can risk losing out on refunds that the government will surely keep. In 2019, the IRS issued a notice sharing that approximately \$1.5 billion (yes, billion) in refunds for tax year 2019 would run out to be claimed in a few months if the 1.5 million taxpayers didn't file a return.

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Popular Spice Triggers Life-Threatening Allergy Attack

"I Have Lost Faith in Our Food Safety Laws"

By Jayne Hopson

For the first time in The Baltimore Times' 38-year history, Publisher Joy Bramble speaks publicly about a private family health matter. Food allergies pose a growing health threat to children and adults. She sincerely hopes the information shared in this article will spare families from the trauma of a preventable allergy attack and spark a grassroots effort to mandate complete and accurate ingredient labeling that warns consumers about life-threatening allergens.

Montserrat-born Joy Bramble has very quietly and effectively worn several different hats, since coming to America 50 years ago, then newlywed to Yale grad Peter Bramble. Among her many career accomplishments, she is proudest of publishing The Baltimore Times for nearly 40 years, overcoming the fate of scores of large and small newspapers no longer in print.

Today, the paper is stronger than ever, beta testing an exclusive, innovative suite of Artificial Intelligence (AI) software designed to make Times' written content accessible to poor or non-readers.

Founded on the steadfast belief that Baltimoreans needed "positive stories about positive people," the Times quickly became a widely-read, family-oriented paper distributed weekly to churches, barber shops and hair salons, grocery markets, colleges and libraries.

Years before the expression, "thinking outside of the box" became a cliché, Joy solidified the paper's reputation as a trusted champion for underserved and marginalized populations. Under her astute leadership, The Baltimore Times received national attention for its groundbreaking support of



Pink peppercorns are listed on the ingredient labels of all these bottles. However, only the Walmart brand carries the warning that pink peppercorns may not be suitable for people with tree nut allergies. Photo credit: Jayne Hopson

free preventive health screenings for uninsured populations.

Joy Bramble is fearless. Over the years the paper has identified and brought attention to business practices proven to cause harm to readers. At the risk of ruffling a few municipal feathers, she holds executive board memberships on what local stakeholders refer to as Baltimore's "Fed, Meds, and Eds," shorthand for federal government agencies, medical institutions and universities, respectively.

Collectively and individually, the Fed, Med and Ed trifecta, fuels Baltimore City's mammoth economic engine. Mrs. Bramble has earned her place among the city's most influential leaders and decision-makers. She can be counted on to be at the table advocating for readers who rarely have a say in policy-making that will have a direct impact on their lives.

And this is where the story goes from macro to micro, from one businesswoman's tireless efforts to improve the lives of Times' readers to a matriarch's frantic search for answers to why a common spice, potentially

sent her beloved grandson into anaphylactic shock.

"I have lost faith in our food regulation safety net to protect us from incorrect, inadequately labeled foods and spices," said Mrs. Bramble after discovering she had unwittingly served a meal that proved toxic to her grandson Cole, who is known to be highly allergic to tree nuts.

It was a simple, frequently prepared dish with only five ingredients, one of which sent Cole to the emergency room. Untreated, his severe allergic reaction could have claimed his life.

Anyone who knows Mrs. Bramble will tell you she values her family far above the prestige and perks of publishing a successful newspaper. She is the mother of a son and a daughter and grandmother to five young children. Like millions of women, she enjoys cooking food for her grandchildren. Cole's meals require special attention to ensure all ingredients are free of tree nuts.

Peppercorn

Continued on page 9

Epic PAW Patrol Live! Comes to Baltimore

By Tyler Alexander Stallings,
The Baltimore Times Jr Reporter

Tyler Stallings, 12, The Baltimore Times' Junior Reporter, had an opportunity to interview a PAW Patrol®Live! spokesperson about the live show.

Mark your calendar for January 26-28, 2024! PAW Patrol®Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure" is an action-packed, music-filled production that will be coming to the Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore, Maryland. The show is based on the top-rated animated preschool series PAW Patrol. It airs on Nickelodeon.

Jenna Barricklo, a spokesperson for PAW Patrol®Live!, answered questions about "The Great Pirate Adventure."

"It's a really fun show. It has lots of good music and dancing, and you get to help the pups solve clues and go on their adventures. They need lots of audience participation, so even if you've never seen the Paw Patrol before, it's a new show entirely. So, you don't need to be familiar with it. You can come as a brand-new Paw Patrol fan, or a Paw Patrol fan who has been around for years," said Barricklo.

What is PAW Patrol®Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure" about?

It is pirate day in Adventure Bay. Mayor Goodway has decided that it's going to be pirate day, so everyone dresses as a pirate. They get fun costumes.

"But while this is happening, Cap'n Turbot has fallen into a cave. So, the pups have to go rescue Cap'n Turbot with the help of Ryder and Mayor Goodway. While rescuing Cap'n Turbot, they discover a secret



*Tyler A. Stallings,
The Baltimore Times Junior Reporter
Courtesy photo*

pirate treasure map. So, they must find the treasure on the treasure map before Mayor Humdinger finds it first. Mayor Goodway goes on the pirate adventure with them to find the treasure," Barricklo divulged.

Ryder is the pup's leader. He helps them go on their missions. All the pups are rescue dogs. They all have different jobs. For example, Marshall has his fire truck. Each pup all has different skills that they use to help save people and rescue them. We would tell you more, but we don't want to spoil the show.

What ages are recommended to attend the show?

According to Barricklo, children who are ages 2 to 6 years old are suggested to come to the show. However, it is fun for any age, whether you are 99 or if you're a baby.

"Everyone has a lot of fun at the show," she said.



*PAW Patrol®Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure" cast
PAW Patrol®Live!*

Are there any chances for the attendees to get up close and personal with the actors and characters?

"After the show, we have a VIP experience. Kids can go meet the pups and meet Ryder and a pirate. They can sit really close to the stage. They get to see the pups up close and personal," according to Barricklo.

The VIP package can be bought from the show's website.

Is there a message in the interactive live stage show?

"Ryder always loves to remind the pups that no job is too big and no pup is too small. We say that a lot. That is our main message to remind kids that no pup and no kid is too small to get a job done. Anything can be achievable if you set your mind to it," stated Barricklo.

PAW Patrol®Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure" will be held at the Hippodrome Theatre located 12 N

Eutaw Street in Baltimore, Maryland 21201. Tickets start at \$31.50. Tickets for performances in Baltimore may be purchased at pawpatrollive.com and www.ticketmaster.com. Prices are subject to change. Each adult and child (regardless of age) must have a ticket.

Going to this live event would be an amazing bonding experience, treat, or even just fun in general for your family or friends. Live shows can be entertaining to watch. You should consider going to the show! If you do, have a blast!

For more information about the show, or to join the Tail Mail mailing list for presale and other exclusive offers, visit www.pawpatrollive.com. Follow PAW Patrol®Live! on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at @pawpatrollive, and the hashtag #pawpatrollive.

Popular Nick, Jr. Cartoon Takes to The Stage

Nothing Is 'Impawsible' When It Comes To PAW Patrol

By Ursula V. Battle

Puppies rescuing everything and everyone you can imagine including a lost gold miner, wacky scuba divers, a rocket skater, a cat in a tree, or a train that derails off the tracks. Nothing is “impawsible” when it comes to these cute pups!

Led by 10-year-old Ryder, they are the mighty canines of PAW Patrol! When trouble strikes Adventure Bay, they're there to save the day! Rescue dogs in training, each pup is inspired by a real-world job like fire fighter and construction worker. In August 2013, PAW Patrol began airing on Nickelodeon and has been delighting millions of preschoolers since its debut.

The television show presents an entertaining and educational way for youngsters to learn about bravery and heroism, with exciting stories that never get too scary. Moreover, Ryder and the pups also teach lessons about caring for animals, a message that is reinforced through PAW Patrol's real-life partnership with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Soon, these brave pups will be bringing their heroics to the area Broadway-style! *PAW Patrol Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure,"* runs at the Hippodrome Theater, 12 N. Eutaw Street Friday, January 26, 2024 through Sunday, January 28, 2024.

The performance is an interactive live stage show, encouraging audiences to help the pups follow the treasure map and solve picture puzzles throughout their mission. Chase, Marshall, Rubble, Skye, Rocky and Zuma save Cap'n Turbot and discover a secret pirate treasure map that leads them on an epic adventure.



Jenna Barricklo is performing as Skye in the live stage production of PAW Patrol.

Courtesy photo

Jenna Barricklo is performing as Skye in the production.

“It is a super fun, upbeat show,” said Barricklo who also serves as spokesperson for the tour. “It’s a musical so there’s also lots of singing and dancing. There’s tons of opportunities for kids to show the pups need their help solving clues and mysteries and getting the job done. And they’ll see characters they will know from the TV show.”

She added, “It’s also an all-new plot. The pups must find treasure in the pirate treasure map before Mayor Humdinger or their arch nemesis finds it first. It’s recommended for kids ages two to six. But it’s fun for the whole family. We have kids all the way through adulthood coming. It’s a great outing for the whole family no matter what age.”

Barricklo’s theater credits include portraying Wednesday in The



PAW Patrol Live! "The Great Pirate Adventure," brings the popular Nickelodeon cartoon to the stage. The production runs at the Hippodrome Theater Jan. 26, 2024 through Jan. 28, 2024. Courtesy photo

Addams Family with the Charleston Stage Company. She is a K-8 theater and dance educator, and a graduate of Shenandoah University, earning a BFA in Musical Theatre.

“Kids love their favorite characters, but now it’s right in front of them,” she said. “There are lots of special effects and the pups are live on stage. It’s cool for kids to get to see that come to life, and the creators did an excellent job of making it feel very similar to the TV show. But at the same time, it’s a completely unique experience that kids get to have.”

She added, “We don’t need kids to sit in their seats, we want them up out of their seats, participating, dancing, and singing along. It’s a great way for kids to be introduced to theater because it’s super participatory, and not like traditional theater where kids must sit nicely and

be quiet. We are excited to perform at the Hippodrome. It’s a beautiful, iconic space and so many other amazing tours have come through.”

Barricklo talked about some of the show’s life lessons.

“Each pup has their own unique skill set. They have unique personalities and each one is so different from one another. I think kids really can find a path that they relate to.”

She added, “The show really talks to kids’ strengths and what they can achieve as kids. The show’s motto is ‘No job’s too big, no pups too small.’ Kids really relate to that and makes them feel they can achieve anything they set their minds to.”

For show times, tickets, and other information visit www.ticketmaster.com or www.pawpatrollive.com.

Shining the Spotlight on a Progressive Inventor

Mother Invents Life-Saving, Innovative CPR Tool

By Andrea Blackstone

Felicia Jackson reflected on a serious medical emergency that inspired her to start CPRWrap, Inc.

“In 2002, while driving with my family in Chattanooga, Tennessee, my 2-year-old son Markel faced a life-threatening choking incident. He was turning blue and slipping into unconsciousness. Despite my annual CPR training from working in a hospital, fear paralyzed me, leaving me unable to assist my child,” Jackson, founder and CEO of CPRWrap, Inc. recalled. “I conceived the concept for CPRWrap in 2002 following the harrowing incident.”

After Jackson’s husband saved their son from the choking event, Markel was taken to the hospital and discharged the same day. Today, he is a thriving young man with a child of his own. Although the outcome was positive for Markel, the unsettling incident remained etched in Jackson’s mind. She was able to extract a bigger purpose from the experience. Jackson transformed into an inventor. CPRWrap is a first of its kind, user-friendly tool. Jackson conceived it to simplify and empower any non-medical bystander, during cardiopulmonary resuscitation(CPR). CPRWrap is meant to provide individuals with a clear guide for proper hand placement and compression technique, ultimately empowering anyone to be lifesavers, according to Jackson.

She added, “CPRWrap is used by placing the template over the victim’s chest, which then provides users with a visual guide for proper alignment.”

COVID-19 left many people feeling squeamish when it comes to evaluating the risk of spreading germs. Rescuers and health providers were already concerned about transmission of infections while administering CPR, according to an article published by



*Felicia Jackson, founder and CEO of CPRWrap, Inc.
Chris Shaw*

National Library of Medicine.

“Among those risks, transmission of an infectious agent has been one of the most compelling triggers of reluctance to perform CPR among providers. The concern for transmission of an infection from the resuscitated subject may impede prompt initiation and implementation of CPR, compromising survival rates and neurological outcomes of the patients. Infections during CPR can be potentially acquired through airborne, droplet, contact, or hematogenous transmission. However, only a few cases of infection transmission have been actually reported globally,” the article informed.

Jackson’s product addresses this valid concern.

“CPRWrap Resuscitation Kits have a one-way valve mouth shield to protect the user from any fluid contaminations...,” Jackson said.

The wife, mother and grandmother further explained that the kits are tailored to meet the specific needs of different age groups. Versions for adults (8 years and up); children (1 to 8 years old); and Infants (newborn to 1 year old) are available. Additionally, each CPRWrap is now equipped with



instructions in both English and Spanish. Another helpful attribute is that CPRWrap’s compact design allows for convenient storage in cars, purses, and emergency kits, allowing users to effectively respond to (CPR) needs anytime, or anywhere.

The product has been well received. “To date, we have successfully sold over 80,000 CPRWrap Resuscitation Kits globally,” Jackson said.

Jackson’s story also needs to be told because when Markel experienced a medical emergency, Jackson froze, instead of initiating CPR on him. She forgot everything that she knew.

Jackson was moved to create a simplified, foolproof CPR guide, after considering that countless individuals worldwide never had CPR training. They too could also come face-to-face with the need to help someone who experienced a medical emergency someday. Jackson had a non-working prototype by 2010, then subsequently filed for the patent in 2016.

“I was able to transition from my role as a physical therapist assistant to focus solely on growing CPRWrap, dedicating myself full-time to advancing our mission and expanding our life-saving impact,” Jackson said.

She was dedicated to taking several years to navigate the complexities of

the patent process for CPRWrap. Jackson also needed to learn about materials, manufacturing expertise, proper packaging, and seek invaluable insights from esteemed leaders in cardiology, respiratory care and CPR instruction to ensure the product met the highest standards of efficacy and safety. Jackson succeeded.

Her dedication to her goals also led to financial boosts.

“In 2023, I achieved significant milestones by securing victories in prominent pitch competitions across the country,” Jackson said.

She won \$50,000 at the New Voices Foundation Power Pitch during the Global Black Economic Forum Stage at the ESSENCE Festival of Culture in New Orleans; another \$50,000 at the Black Magic Reimagined Summit Pitch Competition in Dallas, Texas; and \$25,000 at the 2023 USAA Pitch Competition, powered by Bunker Labs, in San Antonio, Texas. Jackson obtained several grants amounting to \$125,000 in 2023 significantly propelled Jackson’s business forward.

Jackson stated that she is gearing up to launch the very first CPR Kit designed specifically for dogs later this year.

“A key piece of advice I’d give to budding product creators is to maintain unwavering belief in your vision, even when faced with naysayers. Let your sense of purpose drive you, ensuring you remain resilient in the face of challenges,” Jackson said.

Visit <https://cprwrap.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/CPRWrap/> to learn more about CPRWrap Resuscitation Kits.

Peppercorn

Continued from page 5

Mrs. Bramble did not realize that within the warm comfort of her kitchen, there is a silent danger. One of the ingredients is not what it is advertised to be. The imposter ingredient masquerades as a pink peppercorn, improperly labeled and packaged in bottles with black, white and green peppercorns.

Fact: pink peppercorns are not peppers, nor peppercorns; they are hardened, dried fruit, a member of the tree nut family. For individuals who are allergic to tree nuts, pink peppercorns are equally toxic and known by researchers and allergists to trigger a dangerous allergic reaction.

Heeding the precise food preparation guidelines passed down by Cole's parents, Joy crafts each of his meals with an attentiveness that showcases her culinary expertise. A single misstep, a minor oversight in the ingredients list, can turn a family dinner into a grim medical urgency. The stakes? Consuming even the slightest hint of tree nuts can initiate an unforgiving bout of anaphylactic shock.

With a keen, practiced eye — one that oversees the weekly publication of *The Baltimore Times* and *The Annapolis Times* — Mrs. Bramble meticulously reviews every ingredient listed on food labels. Yet, even with the family's measured precautions, Cole recently suffered an unexplained allergy attack. Since that harrowing episode, Mrs. Bramble has paid even closer attention to his food preparation, leaning towards dishes comprised of five or fewer ingredients.

One such dish, her homemade macaroni and cheese, became Cole's favorite meal. With its simple, basic ingredients — flour, water, butter, cheese, a pinch of salt, and a sprinkle of cracked peppercorns — it seemed like an allergen-free meal.

Nevertheless, within minutes of eating the macaroni and cheese, Cole's eyes began to swell. His father rushed him to the hospital. Because he has a serious allergy to tree nuts, Cole has an EpiPen. An EpiPen is an auto-injector that contains epinephrine, a medication that

can help decrease your body's allergic reaction by relaxing the muscles in your airways to make breathing easier; helping to reverse the rapid and dangerous decrease in blood pressure; and relaxing the muscles in the stomach, intestines and bladder. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bramble began her search for the culprit, re-reading all the ingredient labels. She would be shocked by what she eventually discovered.

Based on an examination of six different brands of peppercorn medleys found on local grocery store shelves, pink peppercorns are not sold as a standalone spice. They were packaged as part of a medley of black, white, and green peppercorns. Contrary to their name and the company they keep in spice bottles, pink peppercorns are primarily used as a colorful garnish on soups and salads.

While the other peppercorns in the medley come from the *Piper nigrum* plant, pink peppercorns are from the same botanical family as cashews and pistachios, two popular nuts widely recognized as dangerous to people allergic to tree nuts.

In the process of trying to understand why pink peppercorns, a known allergen, is sold without a warning for people who are allergic to tree nuts, several supermarkets were visited to review the ingredient labels of six different brands. Mrs. Bramble was surprised to learn there were no tree nut warnings on any of the peppercorn medleys.

Confirmation that the pink peppercorns triggered Cole's attack came in a roundabout fashion. After painstakingly eliminating all the ingredients from the homemade macaroni and cheese dinner, Mrs. Bramble cast a more discerning eye on the seemingly innocent peppercorn blend she had sprinkled on Cole's meal. The culprit was found. Hidden in plain sight, in a tiny, whispering font, was the warning and its grim revelation: "Pink peppercorns may not be suitable for individuals with tree nut allergies."

The aftermath of the missed warning label was every grandparent's worst fear realized. "His eyes were swollen shut, and he had difficulty breathing shortly after eating the macaroni and cheese," Mrs. Bramble recounted, her voice quivering with guilt and disbelief. "I could have

killed my grandson!"

She called *The Baltimore Times* health writer who ruefully dubbed the disturbing incident "pink peppercornate."

Despite Mrs. Bramble's typically reserved nature concerning her personal life, she felt compelled to share her family's experience and bring wider attention to the danger of inadequate food labeling and the importance of carefully reading the ingredient list of all food served.

"This is a story that must be told. I would not want another family to experience this nightmare. I looked at the container, saw the multi-colored peppercorns inside, and sprinkled them on his dinner," she said unaware the pink spice could trigger an allergic reaction.

For young Cole, and all youngsters who carry allergies to tree nuts, cashews, and pistachios, the ingestion of pink peppercorns can be a perilous game of Russian roulette. Research by health organizations such as the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) and the Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) indicates tree nut allergies are one of the most common food allergies in the United States.

Although Mrs. Bramble unwittingly served her grandson pink peppercorns, the spice she used was distributed by Walmart, the only brand that included a tree nut warning on its labeling. To her knowledge, Walmart no longer sells peppercorn medleys containing pink peppercorns. It should be noted that it is Walmart's proper labeling that helped Mrs. Bramble correctly identify the spice that caused Cole's allergic reaction.

Consumers and families continue to have reason to be concerned about inadequate food warning labels. When McCormick Company, the world's largest



Bottle on the right, Walmart's Member's Mark brand does have a warning label.

Photo credit: Jayne Hopson

importer and manufacturer of spices and seasonings was asked if there are plans to change its labeling policy to better protect the health of people who are allergic to tree nuts, they said the company was in full compliance with Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requirements that its spices containing pink peppercorns be listed on the ingredient label, issuing the following statement: "*McCormick takes allergen labeling seriously and our product labeling practices are consistent with federal regulatory requirements (Food Allergy Labeling Consumer Protection Act.) Pink peppercorns, however, are listed in the ingredient statement for all McCormick products where they are present.*"

Yes, pink peppercorns are listed on the ingredient labels of their products, but without any warning of the potential danger they pose for people who are allergic to tree nuts, and by extension pink peppercorns.

This is a matter where a large corporation is following the letter of the FDA regulation, but not the spirit of the law. It seems if the company is truly concerned about the health of its customers, it would give serious consideration to adding a simple warning that pink peppercorns are botanical members of the tree nut family and may trigger an allergic reaction.



By Rosa Pryor

Hello, my dear friends,
Happy New Year to you all. I am hoping with all my heart that this year will be better for you than last year. I am doing better. I am now using a walking cane, and I threw away the walker. I am still in therapy three times a week. I will be ready in a few more weeks to jump up and down and do the “James Brown.” So, if you are like me, under the weather and not feeling well, just shake it off, smile and say “I feel better already.”

When you read this column, you might think, I have started an obituary column. I am so sorry about that; I hate having my headline about the loss of another musician, but I know you would want to know. Many of you would know this gentleman, if you were in any way connected to the music world. Carl Grubbs, alto, soprano and tenor saxophonist as well as a composer helped so many children with their music career and was a master in the jazz field. The music performed by the Carl Grubbs Ensemble is rooted in the traditions of the jazz art form. His greatest influences were Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. Carl was the co-founder of Maryland Center for Creative Music from 1987-1989, co-founder of Contemporary Arts Inc. since 1997 and Cam Director and Instructor Summer Activity Extraordinaire (SAX) Music & Dance since 1997. Carl will be truly missed. Condolences to his wife and family.

Now for some happy thoughts. I am hoping that you get this information in time to go to City View Bar & Grill, 6700 Security Blvd. in Gwynn Oak,

CARL GRUBBS, ANOTHER ONE OF OUR MUSIC GREATS HAS PASSED AWAY



Carl G. Grubbs, another one of Baltimore's master musicians has left us. The alto, soprano and tenor saxophonist passed away January 5, 2024.

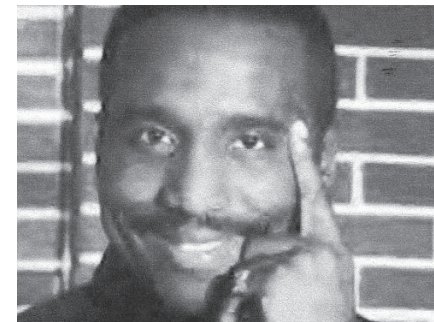
Maryland on Sunday, January 14 from 5-9 p.m. for the “COLOR PURPLE DAY PARTY.” The special guest host is Ms. Maybelle alongside DJ “Cool Brother Jazz.” Check this out! The first 30 ladies get free purple roses. The buffet is free for everyone, free parking, free admission, and free entertainment. Just make sure you wear all purple. I just might check this out myself if I can get this cane to act right.

Now this one sounds like fun, and I love to shop. Check this out! “The Black Mall.” It’s a Marketplace filled with all kinds of vendors. The best Black-owned businesses all come together in one place for the event, it is like “Love and Joy in a building” and the premiere day party. Go and support two floors of Black Baltimore excellence in a day of fun networking, and community. There will be paintings, artwork, sculpture, jewelry, clothes, crafts, books, fabric, bags, candles, African items, comics, lots of treats, natural hair care, vintage ware, cultural items, gift items, desserts, lots of food-vegan as well as non-vegan and so much more. I am not finished!!! We must not forget that this event while shopping includes live entertainment and free



Ricky Shackelford and Howard G.

BWT Productions Comedy Jam will be held Saturday, January 20, 2024, 7 p.m. at the Café 12, 5627 Reisterstown Road, hosted by Ricky Shackelford and Howard G. Comedy. Acts such as Freddie Harvey & Queen Star; Dawn Renee; Crazy Eddie; Ed Roy; Cirahah Perry and Michelle Mapenzi, just to name a few, will be featured. For ticket information, call 443-226-9157.



The Birth of Jazz Exhibit is January 12, 2024 starting at 6 p.m. with a round-table conversation featuring Jamal Moore at the Eubie Blake Center, located 847 N. Howard Street in Baltimore, Maryland and it is FREE!



Warren Wolf on vibraphone; Sean Jones on trumpet; Tim Green on saxophone; Obasi Akoto on bass; and Eric Kennedy on drums are performing at SPARX Celebrating the Max Roach Centennial from Friday, January 12 - Sunday, January 14, 2024, located at the Keystone Korner, 1350 Lancaster Street in Baltimore, Maryland.

Community Open Mic, hosted by Grace of Poets for Dinner. I will see you there walking cane and all. HONEY CHILD, I AM ON THIS! MUSIC WHILE I SHOP, HONEY CHILD I AM IN HEAVEN!

Well, my dear friends, this is all I have for you now. Hopefully I will see you soon somewhere. You can still email your events directly to me at rosapryor@aol.com. I do not get

information off Facebook, so if you invite me to your event, you must email me. Remember if you want to talk, you can call me at 410-833-9474, I said call not TEXT! I DO NOT DO TEXT! I have to go now; may God continue to bless you. UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, I'M MUSICALLY YOURS.

Ravens Wait for Division Round Playoff Opponent

By Tyler Hamilton

The 2023 Baltimore Ravens started the season with a goal of bringing a third Super Bowl title to the city. The Ravens got one step closer by securing the AFC North division title and setting themselves up for the top seed on the conference.

The road to the Super Bowl now runs through M&T Bank Stadium, but there will be a brief pause this week as they have the first-round bye. Whoever is the lowest seed that survives Wild Card Weekend will be rewarded with a visit to Baltimore in the Divisional Round.

The first round in the AFC features matchups between the Miami Dolphins and Kansas City Chiefs, Cleveland Browns and Houston Texans along with the Pittsburgh Steelers and Buffalo Bills.

No matter what happens, the Ravens won't have to face the Bills who hold the #2 seed. Buffalo will likely beat the Steelers, but if Pittsburgh somehow pulls off the upset, the Ravens will host their division rivals.

The Browns vs. Texans clash is intriguing. Cleveland's defense is a well-coached unit with Jim Schwartz at the control and Myles Garrett leading the way on the field.

Houston is on fire offensively with Bobby Slowick and rookie CJ Stroud leading the way. New head coach Demeco Ryans has turned the tide quickly in Houston, leading them to an AFC South division title.

The Dolphins travel to Kansas City to face a Chiefs team that is more vulnerable than previous years. So, an upset could be in play. It's very possible that Miami ends up back at M&T Bank Stadium, where the Ravens blew them out 56-19 in Week 17.



John Harbaugh
Jared Wickerham/Getty Images

Miami is the most likely opponent as the sixth seed who matches up well with the Chiefs.

Whoever comes to Baltimore in the second round can't be taken lightly. The 2019 Ravens are an excellent example of how a lower seeded team can come in and ruin playoff plans.

Lamar Jackson's MVP season fueled that team to a 14-2 record. The 9-7 Tennessee Titans rolled into Baltimore and jumped on the Ravens early en route to a 28-12 win. The shocking loss bounced the Ravens out of the playoffs.

There aren't many players left from

those Ravens on this year's team, but they need to take heed from the upset loss to the Titans.

The key will be getting off to a fast start and looking to put the game away early.

An early lead that forces the opponent to pass is perfect for Baltimore's suffocating defense as one of the best in the NFL. They lead the league in sacks. Putting pass rushers Kyle Van Noy and Jadeveon Clowney in position to pin their ears back and rush the quarterback is advantageous.

Meanwhile, the Ravens rushing

attack is tops in the NFL. They're set up to protect a lead and bleed the clock. The Ravens are three wins from fulfilling their goal. It all starts in a couple of weekends when the Divisional Round kicks off.

Ravens coach, John Harbaugh, was in Houston to witness his brother Jim lead Michigan to a National title on Monday. Defensive coordinator Mike McDonald, general manager Eric DeCosta and former GM Ozzie Newsome were on hand as well. They'd like nothing less than to repeat what Michigan did, just on the pro level.

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