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LATE EDITION

Today, thunderstorms with flooding, high 81. Tonight, heavy rain, thunderstorms, showers and thunderstorms, high 82. Weather map is on Page 22.



Thomas Joined Elite Club, And Court's Door Opened

Connections to Rich Members, Who Enjoy Access to a Closely Guarded Space

By **ABBIE VANSICKLE** and **STEVE EDER**

On Oct. 15, 1991, Clarence Thomas secured his seat on the Supreme Court, a narrow victory after a bruising confirmation fight that left him isolated and disillusioned.

Within months, the new justice enjoyed a far-warmer acceptance to a second exclusive club: the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, named for the Gilded Age author whose rags-to-riches novels represented an aspirational version of Justice Thomas's own bootstraps origin story.

If Justice Thomas's life had unfolded as he had envisioned, his Horatio Alger induction might have been a celebration of his triumphs as a prosperous lawyer instead of a judge. But as he tells it, after graduating from Yale Law School, he was turned down by a series of top law firms, rejections he attributes to a perception that he was a token beneficiary of affirmative action.

So began his grudging path to a judicial career that brought him great prestige but only modest material wealth after decades of financial struggle.

When he joined the Horatio Alger Association, Justice Thomas entered a world whose defining ethos of meritorious success that anyone can achieve the American dream with hard work, black and a little luck — was the embodiment of his own life philosophy, and a foundation of his jurisprudence. As he argued from the bench in his concurrence to the recent decision striking down affirmative action, the court should be "focusing on individuals as individuals," rather than on the view that Americans are "all inexorably trapped in a fundamentally racist society."

At Horatio Alger, he moved into the inner circle, a cluster of extraordinarily wealthy, largely conservative members who lionized him and all that he had achieved. While he has never held an official leadership position, in some ways he has become the association's

leading light. He has granted it unusual access to the Supreme Court, where every year he presides over the group's signature event: a ceremony in the courtroom at which he places Horatio Alger medals around the necks of new lifetime members. The organizer called it "the closest thing to being knighted in the United States."

At the same time, Justice Thomas has served as the group's best messenger, meeting with and mentoring the recipients of millions of dollars a year in Horatio Alger college scholarships, many



The Horatio Alger Association bestowed its highest honor on Clarence Thomas in 2010.

of whom come from backgrounds that mirror his own.

"The Horatio Alger Association has been a home to Virginia and me," Justice Thomas said, referring to his wife, as he received the group's most prestigious award in 2010. The organization, he added, "has allowed me to see my dreams come true."

His friendships forged through Horatio Alger have brought him proximity to a lifestyle of unimaginable material privilege. Over the years, his Horatio Alger friends have welcomed him at their vaca-

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Rebirth and Lingering Pain in a Ukraine Town

A christening last month in a church where Russians buried over 100 civilians killed during the brutal occupation of Bucha. Page 9.

Signs Emerge Iowa Governor Has a Favorite

This article is by **Shane Goldmacher**, **Jonathan Swan** and **Magde Haberman**.

DES MOINES — When Kim Reynolds, the Republican governor of Iowa, stopped by a donor retreat that Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida held last year, no one paid it much mind.

When she sat earlier this year with Mr. DeSantis onstage, at another donor gathering down the road from Donald J. Trump's residence, people began to notice. When she glowingly appeared with Mr. DeSantis not once, but twice, but at all three of his first visits to her state this year, eye-brows arched. And by the time Ms. Reynolds appeared on Thursday alongside Casey DeSantis, the governor's wife, alarms inside the Trump headquarters were blaring.

Ms. Reynolds has said — including privately to Mr. Trump — that she does not plan to formally endorse a candidate in the presidential race, in keeping with a tradition that the Iowa governor stays on the sidelines, keeping the playing field level for the first G.O.P. nominating contest. But through her words and deeds, Ms. Reynolds seems to be softening the ground in Iowa for Mr. DeSantis, appearing to try to create the conditions for an opening for him to take on Mr. Trump.

For Mr. DeSantis, Iowa is where his allies acknowledge he must first halt Mr. Trump's momentum to prevent him from steam-rolling his way to a third consecutive G.O.P. nomination. For Mr. Trump, it is where he hopes to snuff out his challengers' candidacies, and win where he did not in 2016.

And there is no politician in Iowa with greater sway than Ms. Reynolds. *Continued on Page 20*

Two Americans' Crusade to Save the Elephants

By **RUTH MACLEAN** and **COLLINS CHILUMBA SAMPANA**

NORTH LUANGWA, Zambia — The hunter heard the helicopter coming. He grabbed his Ak-47, he said, and jumped behind a tree. He was on an illegal elephant hunt with a group of men inside North Luangwa National Park in the southern African nation of Zambia. Smoke rose from the butchered meat that lay grilling on wooden racks.

They had been spotted. It was the early 1960s, and men like the hunter, a tall, flinty man named Bernard Mutondo, had decimated the park's elephant population, selling their tusks to feed the world's appetite for ivory.

For years they had hunted in relative peace, at law enforcement's behest, as law enforcement figure in wildlife conservation

Some in Zambia View Acts of Conservatism as Nationalist

and raging rivers — was almost nonexistent. But things had become more complicated. An American couple, Delia and Mark Owens, had arrived in North Luangwa to study lions. Finding elephant carcasses strewn across the park, they vowed to somehow stop the slaughter.

Today, Delia Owens is known as an evocative writer after the success of her debut novel, "Where the Crawdads Sings," published in 2018 when she was in her late 60s, and the movie released last year. But for decades, she was a powerful figure in wildlife conservation

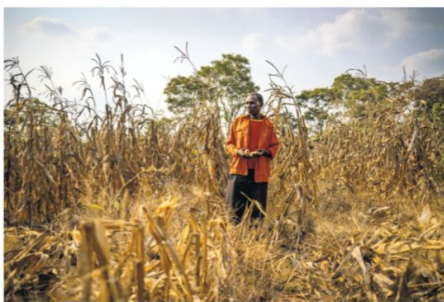
in southern Africa.

The Owens said they tried everything they could think of to stop the killing. Ms. Owens was convinced that offering local people an alternative livelihood was key. Her husband flew over the park, looking for the smoke from poachers' fires, and dropping scours off for patrols.

Mr. Mutondo said that when his cooking fire was spotted that night, he fired at the helicopter. Mr. Owens, he said, fired back. Mr. Owens, in an emailed response, denied ever firing a gun from his helicopter.

Mr. Mutondo had slaughtered more elephants, rhinos and buffalo than he could count. But the kill he wanted was Mark Owens. "I really tried to bring him down," he said.

Three decades later, we drove *Continued on Page 12*



Bernard Mutondo was a "notorious poacher," the future "Crawdads" author Delia Owens wrote.

For North Koreans in China, Path to Freedom Is More Perilous Yet

By **CHOE SANG-HUN**

SEOUL — The North Korean software engineer was desperate.

He had been sent to northeastern China in 2019 to earn money for the North Korean regime. After working long hours under the constant watch of his minders, he found an email address on a website and sent a harrowing mes-

sage in 2021: "I am writing at the risk of losing my life," pleaded the engineer.

A young woman who had been smuggled by human traffickers from North Korea into China in 2016 contacted the owner of the same website early this year. She had planned to defect to South Korea, but instead was being held captive in a Chinese border town and forced to make money

through cybersex. "Please help us escape this house," she wrote.

The website belonged to the Rev. Chun Ki-won, a Christian pastor in Seoul who is widely known for aiding North Korean refugees fleeing through China, the route almost all defectors take. He has often been condemned by Pyongyang and was once imprisoned in China for helping hundreds of North Koreans reach

South Korea or the United States.

But now, the job of aiding North Korean defectors in China has become "all but impossible," Mr. Chun said.

China imposed strict limits on border crossings and even internal travel during the pandemic. When those restrictions began to ease in recent months, Mr. Chun and other aid workers received a *Continued on Page 8*

In Sweltering South Florida, The Succulent Mango Is King

By **PATRICIA MAZZEI**

MIAMI — The air gets thick with humidity as summer arrives in South Florida. Evening thunder murmurs. The tropics begin to stir.

Then, something magical happens: The **ACROSS** mango trees bear fruit. In good years, they produce so much that strangers give away mangoes on their lawns. Neighbors pack them in boxes to mail to loved ones. "Friends offer homemade pies. This has been a very good year."

During the month of June, Zak Stern, the founder of Zak the Baker, his bakery in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood, invited customers to bring in six local mangoes in exchange for a loaf of bread. He started taking in about 200 a day.

"I think we've got enough mango jam for, like, the next five years," he said.

The Miami summer scares off tourists and part-timers who only care to experience the glorious winter. The road is empty. The days get slower.

The reward for hardy locals who remain year-round, sweating and suffering through hurricane season, comes in the form of seductive mango, blushing from trees in yards, streets and



JAMES ARNOLD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Every sweaty Miami summer brings a bounty of mangoes.

strip malls.

"This," said Mr. Stern, who grew up in suburban Kendall, "is a gift to the folks who stay."

What he and other South Florida mango evangelists cherish most about the peak June-to-August season is being sharing a beloved fruit brings people together in a relatively quiet, multinational city with few widely shared traditions. Mangoes remind immigrants of the places they left — and help them feel Miami, with its hodgepodge of cultures and languages, is home. *Continued on Page 15*

INTERNATIONAL 4-13

Paying to See the Pantheon

Exploring the ancient monument in Rome now costs 5 euros, a new fee that has led to long lines, confused tourists and hours of ticket scalping. *PAGE 4*

Ukrainian Doctors' Dilemma

Those who fled Russia's invasion are forced to see their skills go unused, or return to a country at war. *PAGE 10*

NATIONAL 14-23

Ruling on Transgender Care

For the first time, a federal court has allowed a law banning transition care to go into effect, in Tennessee. *PAGE 23*



SPORTS 27-29

Wimbledon's Killer Grass

The most prestigious tournament now has some of the world's best players feeling "bad" at tennis. *PAGE 27*

Rapinoe's Final World Cup

The politically outspoken matriarchy of the U.S. women's soccer team may she would retire at year's end. *PAGE 28*

METROPOLITAN

Communicating Offline

Direct messages are all over the city, in the subway, on light poles and inside cabs, as New Yorkers struggle to make themselves heard. *PAGE 8*

From Prison to Politics

Yusef Salaam's victory in a New York City Council primary is a poetic correction, Gina Bellante writes. *PAGE 3*

SUNDAY BUSINESS

Heavy Mental

In 1973, Uri Geller claimed to bend metal with his mind on British T.V. Now his skeptics are on board. *PAGE 4*

ARTS & LEISURE

Enter the Hot Mess

An Asian American actor, in shows like "Beef" and films like "Shercollminger," explore broader slices of life, including the weird and the raunchy. *PAGE 8*

SUNDAY OPINION

Richard D. Kalenberg

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SUNDAY STYLES

Hilarious and a Heartthrob

A year after reluctantly posting a video to TikTok, the stand-up comic Matt Rife is selling out venues. His appearances are often raucous, more "Magic Mike" than Comedy Central. *PAGE 8*

Jens, Armer and Cardì B

In a Paris run-off by tumult, the escapist fantasies of the couture shows were jarring, though they might have been any: Some takeaways. *PAGE 1*

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