

COLUMN
Hiring in a
**tight labor
market**

PROFILE
**Dubuque
Clothing Co.**
has customers
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Mentorship in the new year

On the cover: Sara Klostermann (from left), Hunter Preston and Lizzie Gifford, Cottingham & Butler

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Photo by Dave Kettering

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Mentors, mentees and the 2-way road

Mentorship is a two-way road that supports both the mentee and mentor, as well as the organizations that might help facilitate the relationship. And, it's a resource that can benefit both newcomers to a field and those who are looking for a fresh perspective.

We talked with some people and organizations who help support mentorship in the Dubuque area and its starts on page 4.



Megan Gloss



Anthony Frenzel

NEXT MONTH

Black-owned businesses have a long, proud tradition in the tri-states and we're taking a look at some of that history.

Have a story idea? Interested in writing for BizTimes? Email megan.gloss@thmedia.com and tony.frenzel@thmedia.com.

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Seeking mentorship in the new year



Dave Kettering

Director of Organizational Development at Cottingham & Butler Sara Klostermann (left) chats with intern and soon to be full-time employee Hunter Preston and campus recruiter Lizzie Gifford.

Area organizations provide opportunities for mentors, mentees

IN HER WORDS

“Students who are interested, eager and intelligent will have meaningful work during the internship. If they are looking for careers and want to learn the culture, they acclimate quickly.”

Sara Klostermann



BY ANGELA JONES

January means fresh, tangible goals, preferably that stick beyond the first cold months of the new year. But beyond typical wellness goals that young adults might make, setting a specific career-related goal for an internship or mentorship is one that many young adults should also consider.

Cottingham & Butler, one company that recognizes the (direct) value of internships for college students, expends many efforts to maintain an effective program.

Brian Davis, assistant vice president of human resources, explained that “two parts work together to attract and prepare interns”: recruiting efforts, led by Maddie Andrews, and the intern program itself, led by Sara Klostermann.

Klostermann, director of organizational development, stresses that interns can have any major; the main factor involves students’ goals.

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Brian Davis



Maddie Andrews

Continued from page 5

“Students who are interested, eager and intelligent will have meaningful work during the internship,” Klostermann said. “If they are looking for careers and want to learn the culture, they acclimate quickly.”

A talent acquisition specialist, Maddie Andrews explained that when students attend recruiting events, students’ character stands out as much as their track record up to that point.

“Students learn about the intern program on-campus, at career fairs and at Cottingham & Butler events, including a rooftop event,” Andrews said. “They might also fill out applications directly (from company’s website).”

Davis emphasized that Cottingham & Butler makes tremendous efforts to locate individuals.

“We hold 70 to 80 campus events each year where students meet with multiple people to find the right fit,” Davis said. “About 90% of them accept the offer.”

Davis points out that the internship is essentially a 10-week interview during which time the interns can become clear with their long-term goals.

For those interns hired on full time, the new work experience is paired with mentoring possibilities.

Klostermann said that employees “foster opportunities to create relationships with formalized training” and also with a less formal approach of “see one, be one, teach one” in efforts to prepare the next generation.

Davis confirms that the mentorship approach is unique at Cottingham & Butler. For instance, his own mentors have depended on his roles, and that

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since a "first role is different than the 15th, which is different than the seventh," it is valuable to have "a diverse group of talented folks."

"When surrounded by the right people, it's a community effort," Davis said.

Mentorships form from work-related tasks and goals that also involve company culture, the specific team, and meaningful work to acclimate quickly, Klostermann said.

Mentors receive training on how to foster open communication through weekly one-on-one meetings where mentees can be comfortable sharing ideas or have the opportunity to change direction, if needed.

"We learn from (interns and mentees), too," Klostermann said. "It's a two-way street that acknowledges different ways of thinking."

Davis adds that the company wants to empower people to reach out, "to lean in and help others."

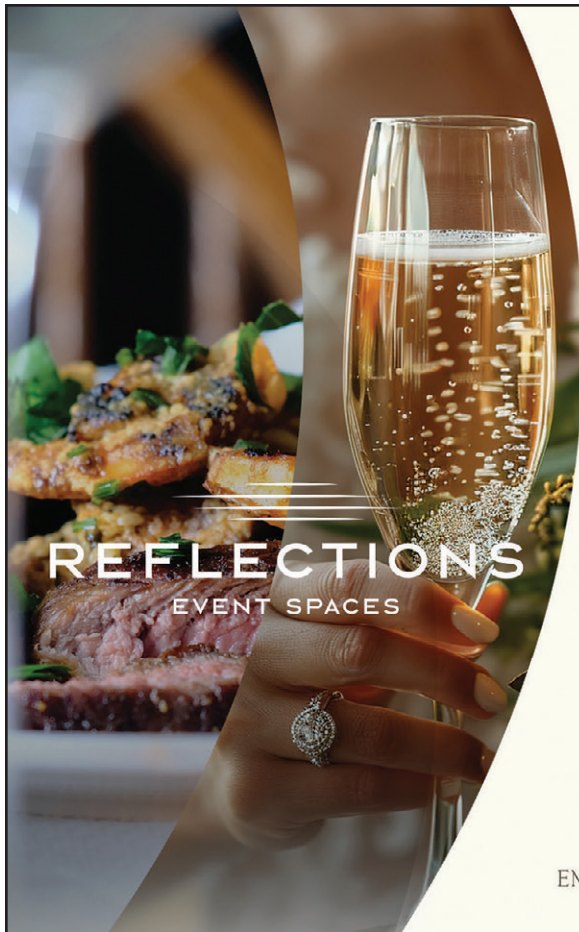
For those in other companies or industries that might not offer a mentorship

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File photo

People listen to keynote speaker Laurie Guest during the Young Professionals Symposium.



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SCAN TO BOOK
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program (either formal or informal), the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce coordinates Young Professionals Dubuque.

Justine Paradiso, the vice president of events and programs, explains that the Chamber hosts meet and greets, luncheons and other events for college students and young professionals younger than 40 to establish mentoring relationships with local professionals.

“The best time to find a mentor is before you think you need one,” Paradiso



Justine Paradiso

said. “Young professionals are matched with mentors based on interest, and (mentors meet mentees) where they are in their professional development.”

Discussions range from practical questions and specific job-related topics to more general professional topics, both types allowing for mentees to learn more about themselves and their capabilities.

Whether young adults plan to apply for

an internship at a specific company or to seek a less formal mentorship through an organization like the Chamber of Commerce, the new year is a good time for making professional development plans, and now is as good a time as any to fill out an application.

While applying for an internship might be a plan for young adults, establishing a mentoring relationship can be beneficial in any career, or even in a volunteer or artistic pursuit. The vital part about mentorships or internships is taking that first step to connect.



Attendees applaud during the Young Professionals of Dubuque awards luncheon at Hotel Julien, in Dubuque.

File photo

BY KONRAD STRZALKA

Dubuque Clothing Co. might have only recently launched as an official brand, but the idea behind it was a long time coming.

Graphic designer Adam Zalaznik and Matt Folstad, CEO of Dubuque screen printing company FGC Creative, met at a bar about eight years ago. It was an appropriate place for an initial meeting, Zalaznik said, given the extensive collection of throwback bar and restaurant shirts to come from the duo's partnership.

Folstad, whose company mostly focused on nationally marketed band merchandise, said it was also around that time when somebody asked him to make a T-shirt for Rings, a Dodge Street restaurant that closed in the 1990s.

"(After that), we just looked into licensing and trademarks and the rules," Folstad said. "Once we figured that out, Adam came in and we started (making more) throwback shirts."

Even then, Folstad said, the idea for Dubuque Clothing Co. started as a "novelty thing" around the holidays.

"That's when we came up with about

half of the designs — two Christmases ago. Last Christmas, we did it again," Folstad said. "We decided at the beginning of this year, maybe we just change the name of the whole business, or at least the local side ... to Dubuque Clothing Co."

Folstad and Zalaznik, both Dubuque residents, now have a brick-and-mortar location at 3224 Dodge St., Suite 15. They also

IN HIS WORDS

"The fish fly logo ... seemed to get people's attention. Everybody's disgusted with fish flies. (They're) iconic ... very Dubuque-ish."

Adam Zalaznik

started selling at Hartig Drug locations this summer — and it was Hartig's idea.

"I saw (the) designs on social media and loved (them)," said Gretchen Steines, director of purchasing and merchandising at Hartig.

Steines said the nostalgic and local aspects to the clothing are "perfect" for Hartig's customer base. She also said Zalaznik and Folstad have impressed her with their

Continued on page 11

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Adam Zalaznik (left) and Matt Folstad recently began Dubuque Clothing Co.

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creativity.

"We're always looking for additions to the line," she said. "Dubuque Clothing (Co.) has been really good about trying new things."

The company pays homage to Dubuque even with its logo — a fish fly.

"The fish fly logo ... seemed to get people's attention," Zalaznik said. "Everybody's disgusted with fish flies. (They're) iconic ... very Dubuque-ish."

Old Dubuque businesses featured on Dubuque Clothing Co. shirts include Sandy's, Peppermint Patties, Choo Choo Charlie's, Cock 'n' Bull and Easy Street, among

several others.

Recent additions to the company's lineup are more broadly Iowa-themed clothing, hunting and fishing apparel. Its merchandise also highlights some of Dubuque's tourist attractions, such as Mines of Spain and Eagle Point Park, which Folstad said is the most popular design.

Zalaznik said the customer base leans toward older Dubuquers.

"Our stuff is nostalgia-based ... so obviously it's going to be an older crowd," Zalaznik said.

However, Folstad said expanding beyond the throwback apparel has helped grow the company's young customer base.

"The stuff that's more touristy, like Eagle

Point Park ... that's pretty much all ages," Folstad said.

Zalaznik said the customer base is at least 70% female, although for now, products are generally unisex.

"We're trying to do women's apparel, but that's another beast," Zalaznik said. "Two older men don't know exactly how to pick the ... things women want."

Dubuque Clothing Co. also has an option to help organizations with fundraising, at dbqclothing.com/page/fundraise-dubuque.

They design custom shirts, build and launch a website to help with sales and

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promotion, then print and deliver the shirts. The fundraiser receives 100% of campaign profits.

“There’s always somebody doing a fundraiser. We thought we’d provide that service,” Zalaznik said. “We help Dubuque, as well as push sales, at the same time.”

Zalaznik said goals of Dubuque Clothing Co. include growing by selling apparel in more stores and adding to its current staff of six.

He also hopes to grow the inventory, which is currently not keeping up with high demand, and expand the retail part of the brick-and-mortar store.

While FGC Creative is still largely focused on band merch, Folstad hopes to grow the local aspect of the company.

“We’d like to definitely increase our local presence,” Folstad said. “Anything Iowa and Dubuque related, we’ll do that.”

To him and Zalaznik, Dubuque Clothing Co. fulfills a dream that provides both with independence and a creative outlet.

“I’ve always been in the design world,” Zalaznik said. “(But) I realized I wanted to do my own thing.”



Folstad tags shirts at Dubuque Clothing Co. on Wednesday.



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Hodge, 7465 Chavenelle Road.

Ribbon Cuttings



Island Social, 1855 Greyhound Park Road.

Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce



World Earth Minerals Super Store, 555 John F. Kennedy Road, No. 300.

Her Night Out



Stephen Gassman

Girlfriends of Jo Leiser enjoy Her Night Out at Five Flags Center in Dubuque.



Attendees shop at the Riddle's Jewelry booth during Her Night Out on Nov. 21.



Models show fashions from area retailers during Her Night Out at Five Flags Center in Dubuque.

Her Night Out



Stephen Gassman

Nashville artist Maddie Poppe performs during Her Night Out.



Models show fashions from area retailers during Her Night Out at Five Flags Center in Dubuque.



Nashville artist Maddie Poppe performs during Her Night Out at Five Flags Center in Dubuque.



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Where are stocks and the economy going? Ask bonds

ALLISON SCHRAGER

Bloomberg Opinion

She is a columnist covering economics for the publication

Some of us have been waiting for the other shoe to drop in financial markets since at least 2022. And yet they keep going higher, while bond prices tick lower.

Will 2025 be the year there is a correction — or do high asset prices reflect a growing real economy that is on the verge of a major productivity boom because of AI, corporate tax cuts and a wave of deregulation?

No one knows for sure. But I will be looking at a few indicators in 2025 to tell me where financial markets are going. Most of them relate to the bond market because it is both a window into the overall economy and an important component of how stocks and other risky assets are valued. Bonds can give a sense of where everything is headed, including government policy.

THE TERM PREMIUM

In my opinion, this is the single best gauge of the direction of the macroeconomy: The difference between the yield on long- and short-term bonds.

Unlike shorter-term bonds, which are highly influenced by monetary policy, longer-term bonds reflect the economic outlook. What happens to the term premium next year will be a good sign of whether markets are buying President Donald Trump's growth agenda, or see it being stymied by the threat of tariffs, debt and high inflation. If the term premium increases, the 10-year rate will stay high — and higher for longer really means higher forever, which may cause some problems.

The term premium captures inflation risk and the worry that bond prices will fall further because of rising debt, a smaller population and what happens to the dollar because of possible tariffs. If the term premium continues to rise, it suggests more economic risk and uncertainty, and that the U.S. is truly in a new economic era, marking the end of the halcyon low-rate days of the 2010s.

Because so many borrowers locked in low rates, higher rates have not been too damaging to the economy so far. But that could change fast. There are already cracks in the private credit market, with borrowers missing payments; homeowners are taking out variable-rate mortgages; and the prospect of unfunded tax cuts suggest this could all get worse. If the term premium continues to rise, 2025 might finally see the high-rate reckoning we've all been fearing. If it flattens, Trump will have much more space to enact his agenda.

FRENCH AND GERMAN BOND SPREADS

Long-term, the European economy is in trouble. Many eurozone countries are plagued with high debt, an aging population and low productivity. In the near term, however, the bigger challenge comes from the structure of the eurozone economy, which appears to offer an implicit subsidy to the bond market of more profligate European economies such as France, enabling them to punt on issues like pension reform.

The Greek debt crisis showed the limits of this kind of promise. Rising spreads suggest markets are getting shaky and might be starting to doubt how much they can count on Germany to keep things stable.

ARGENTINE BOND YIELDS

Argentina is conducting an important economic experiment: Whether it is possible to both lower inflation and produce growth by being more fiscally responsible and stabilizing its currency.

If it succeeds, it will be a big win for neoliberal economic policies — despite President Javier Milei's reputation as a populist. The measure of success will be whether the long-beleaguered

Argentine bond market continues to inspire enough confidence that foreign investors come back, causing yields to fall. And if the Argentine bond market has a comeback, then maybe neoliberalism will too, and the world will see more trade and fiscal discipline.

INFLATION EXPECTATIONS

The best indication about where inflation is going, which might be the most important economic fact of 2025, is what markets and individuals expect it to be. The Federal Reserve pays attention to expectations when it sets policy, of course, and they can also be self-fulfilling: If you expect 3% inflation, that might affect what kind of raise you ask for. Market expectations also can be self-fulfilling, and they have a big influence on bond prices.

Expectations are also a good indicator of whether the Fed has credibility and has truly licked inflation or a higher rate of inflation is now a permanent feature of our economic lives.

When the Fed says, "expectations are anchored," it is normally referring to expectations from the bond market. And while the bond market does not have a great track record when it comes to predicting inflation, what it thinks might happen is still important.



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Hiring in a tight labor market



**KARLA
WALDBILLIG**
Stonehill
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She works in
human resources
for the Dubuque
organization

In the past few years, the number of jobs nationwide has steadily increased, with 3.1 million jobs added in 2023. Unfortunately, the United States does not have the workforce to fill those jobs. As of November 2024, there was a deficit of 1.2 million workers. This workforce shortage can make hiring more challenging.

During this time of fewer applicants, some have said if the applicant “fogs the mirror,” the person should be hired. But would a leader purchase equipment for their department with no investment and research? Hiring a team member is a significant decision that requires time and energy. Leaders might feel the pressure for a quick fix, but it is important to remember the potential impact on the team and customers. It is crucial to uphold your hiring qualifications and maintain standards for entry into your organization.

Being a member of your organization is an honor and a privilege, and not all candidates earn that privilege. Remember, one bad apple can spoil the bunch, and we are all responsible for maintaining the culture and quality of our team. Every new hire influences the culture of your team. If their values are not aligned, all team members will feel the impact, especially our high-performing employees. We must be mindful of this when making hiring decisions.

Review your interview process and be willing to invest the time and resources for your interviewing team members. Boosting your interview skills will help you find the best applicant matches for your organization. When done effectively, hiring managers can assess not only whether an applicant’s skills, experience, values and attitude meet the requirements but whether an applicant would fit in with the culture.

While ensuring you are hiring qualified candidates, it is more important than ever to put aside any biases and assumptions. Wait to write off an applicant. Do not allow first impressions to make

your decision. Sometimes, it takes candidates time to get in their stride for the interview. Making a knee-jerk reaction might result in losing out on qualified individuals.

KARLA SAYS

During this time of fewer applicants, some have said if the applicant “fogs the mirror,” the person should be hired. But would a leader purchase equipment for their department with no investment and research? Hiring a team member is a significant decision that requires time and energy. Leaders might feel the pressure for a quick fix, but it is important to remember the potential impact on the team and customers.

In a tight labor market, an applicant’s attitude can be more important than their skills and experience. You can train someone with a good attitude and a willingness to learn. If specialized training is necessary, investing in your employees by funding their education can be a powerful strategy for both recruitment and retention. If the employee feels valued, they might commit to staying for an agreed period following their education.

As an interviewer, remember you are a salesman of your organization. Even if you are not interested in the candidate, you must protect the reputation and brand of your organization and complete the full interview. One of the goals of interviewing should be that candidates leave feeling good about your organization regardless of whether they are hired. Word-of-mouth advertising about your organization and culture is invaluable. Your organization is likely to receive more applicants if the word on the street is positive.

In today’s competitive labor market, hiring the right candidates is both a challenge and an opportunity. While the pressure to fill open positions quickly might be intense, maintaining high standards and a thoughtful approach to hiring is essential for preserving your organization’s culture, team morale and overall performance. By prioritizing alignment in values, investing in training and fostering a positive candidate experience, leaders can build a workforce that not only meets immediate needs but also supports long-term success. Hiring is more than filling a vacancy — it is about shaping the future of your organization, one person at a time.

Waldbillig has more than 30 years experience in human resources in multiple industries, including 28 years in health care. She is responsible for the employee experience of a team of 400 at Stonehill Communities.

Should the U.S. increase immigration levels for highly skilled workers?

PHILLIP MOLNAR

San Diego Union-Tribune

He writes about residential real estate and other business issues for the publication

Some tech industry leaders are pushing the incoming Trump administration to increase visas for highly skilled workers from other nations.

The heart of the argument is, for America to remain competitive, the country needs to expand the number of skilled visas it gives out.

The previous Trump administration did not increase the skilled visa program, instead clamping down on visas for students and educated workers, increasing denial rates.

Not everyone in corporate America thinks the skilled worker program is great. Former workers at IT company Cognizant recently won a federal class-action lawsuit that said the company favored Indian employees over Americans from 2013 to 2022. A Bloomberg investigation found Cognizant, and other similar outsourcing companies, mainly used its skilled work visas for lower-level positions.

Workers alleged Cognizant preferred Indian workers because they could be paid less and were more willing to accept inconvenient or less-favorable assignments.

Question: Should the U.S. increase immigration levels for highly skilled workers?

ECONOMISTS

Caroline Freund, University of California-San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy

Yes: Innovation is our superpower and it relies on people. Sourcing talent from 8 billion people in the world instead of 330 million here makes sense. Nearly half our Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children. Growing them also relies on expanding our skilled workforce. The cap on skilled-worker visas has hardly changed since the computer age started. With AI on the horizon, attracting and building talent is more important than ever.

Kelly Cunningham, San Diego Institute for Economic Research

Yes: After years of openly allowing millions of undocumented entrants into the country, why is there controversy over legally increasing somewhat the number having desirable skills? Undocumented immigration significantly impacts lower skill level jobs and wages competing with domestic workers at every skill level. Why should special cases be made against those having higher skills? Could they just not walk across the border anyway, why make it more inconvenient to those with desirable skills?

James Hamilton, University of Califor-

nia-San Diego

Yes: Knowledge and technology are key drivers of the U.S. economy. Students come from all over the world to learn at U.S. universities, and their spending contributed \$50 billion to U.S. exports last year. Technological advantage is what keeps us ahead of the rest of the world. Highly skilled immigrants contribute much more in taxes than they receive in public benefits. The skills immigrants bring to America can make us all better off.

Norm Miller, University of San Diego

Yes: According to Forbes, the majority of billion-dollar startups were founded by foreigners. I've interviewed dozens of data analysts and programmers from Berkeley, UCSD, USD and a few other schools and 75% of them are foreign. There simply are not enough American graduates to fill the AI and data mining related jobs now exploding in the U.S. If we wish to remain a competitive economy, we need highly skilled and bright immigrants to come here and stay.

David Ely, San Diego State University

Yes: Being able to employ highly skilled workers from a larger pool of candidates would strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. companies by increasing their capacity to per-

form research and innovate. This would boost the country's economic output. Skilled workers from other nations that cannot remain in the U.S. will find jobs working for foreign rivals. The demand for H-1B visas far exceeds the current cap of 85,000, demonstrating a need to modify this program.

EXECUTIVES

Phil Blair, Manpower

Yes: Every country needs skilled workers, at all levels, to grow its economy. We should take advantage of the opportunity these workers provide our employers who need these skills. It should be blended into our immigration policies allowing for both short and long term visas.

Gary London, London Moeder Advisors

Yes: San Diego is a premiere example of how highly skilled workers from around the globe enrich a community and its regional economy. Of course Visa levels need to be increased. But let's go further. Tie visas and immigration with a provision that those who are admitted and educated at a U.S. university be incentivized, or even required, to be employed

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Black spatulas and mystery drones: Your guide to the unfounded panics of the season



MICHAEL HILTZIK
MICHAEL HILTZIK

He is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

The “silly season” of news coverage used to refer to the dog days of summer, when there was so little of importance happening that newspapers and cable channels filled the vacuum with fluff.

Not this year.

Starting in October and gaining intensity through the season, Americans have found themselves awash in panicky health and safety warnings about previously unappreciated threats.

It started with warnings about your black plastic spatulas and other such implements. Spurred by a study and press release issued Oct. 1 by the Seattle nonprofit Toxic-Free Future, news organizations from coast to coast — including The Los Angeles Times — posted articles advising consumers to ditch their black food utensils and children’s toys with black plastic pieces.

The black spatula panic was soon outrun by the drone panic, which has Americans scanning the skies for menacing aircraft.

As is typically the case, both of these panics springs from a nugget of truth. It’s true, for example, that chemicals that could theoretically harm people’s health at high exposure levels can be found in some household products — chiefly chemical flame retardants in black plastic electronic devices that have been banned from new uses but have been getting recycled into the consumer stream.

It’s also true that drones, ranging in size from the lightweight models deployed by hobbyists to large commercial models, are becoming a pain in the neck, with the largest craft posing a real danger to commercial aircraft.

But the distance between those nuggets of reality and the level of public hysteria is so great that the latter can be explained mostly by two factors: the desire for clicks on news sites and to fill newspaper columns, and the impulse of preening politicians to show they’re attentive to constituents’ concerns, no matter how dubious.

Let’s take these panics in order, starting with the black utensils. For a time, press advisories that people ditch their black spatulas were impossible to ignore. The most alarmist

was probably an offering from The Atlantic, which was headlined: “Throw Out Your Black Plastic Spatula/It’s probably leaching chemicals into your cooking oil.”

The piece ran under an illustration of a black spatula dripping sinister goblets of melting plastic, against a background of bilious green. It gave prominent space to the Toxic-Free Future study, as well as to research papers by the British scientist Andrew Turner, who has been studying the contamination of household goods by those electronic flame retardants for years.

A few points about the Toxic-Free Future paper, which spurred all that news coverage. First, it’s based in part on a massive mathematical error. The paper calculates that users of “contaminated kitchen utensils” would have a median intake of BDE-209, one of the common flame retardants, of 34,700 nanograms per day. (A nanogram is a billionth of a gram.)

The paper states that this daily exposure “would approach” the reference dose set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of 7,000 nanograms per kilogram of body weight per day, which the paper says pencils out at 42,000 nanograms per day for a 60-kilogram adult. Pretty good ground for concern, since the EPA uses the reference dose to measure the level of health risk from exposure to a toxin.

Except: 7,000 times 60 isn’t 42,000; it’s 420,000. The median intake for a 60-kilogram adult, in other words, isn’t anywhere close to the EPA’s reference dose.

Toxic-Free Future has issued a correction to its paper, acknowledging that the daily intake it calculated doesn’t “approach” the EPA reference dose but is one-tenth of the reference dose. (The Times has followed up with an article about the correction; several other publications that went to town on the black utensil threat have also done so.) But it also says “the calculation error does not affect the overall conclusion of the paper.”

Megan Liu, the paper’s lead author, told me that it wasn’t

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Continued from page 19

in the U.S. in exchange for their admittance.

Bob Rauch, R.A. Rauch & Associates

No: While attracting high-skilled immigrants can fill critical gaps in sectors like technology, health care and advanced manufacturing, increasing high-skilled immigration could displace American workers and drive down wages in certain industries. There are already many qualified American workers available for some of these jobs. We should balance the need for specialized skills with the impact on the domestic workforce. I believe we can begin to increase the number of visas after a careful review of abuse.

Austin Neudecker, Weave Growth

Yes: We should expand skilled visas to drive

innovation and economic growth. Individuals who perform high-skilled work in labor-restricted industries or graduate from respected colleges with relevant degrees should be prioritized for naturalization. We depend on immigration for GDP growth, tax revenue, research, and so much more. Despite the abhorrent rhetoric and curtailing of visas in the first term, I hope the incoming administration can be persuaded to enact positive changes to a clearly flawed system.

Chris Van Gorder, Scripps Health

Yes: But it should be based upon need, not politics. There are several industries that have or could have skilled workforce shortages, especially if the next administration tightens immigration as promised and expected. Over the years, there have been nursing shortages that have been met partially by trained and

skilled nurses from other countries. The physician shortage is expected to get worse in the years to come. So, this visa program may very well be needed.

Jamie Moraga, Franklin Revere

No: While skilled immigration could boost our economy and competitiveness, the U.S. should prioritize developing our domestic workforce. Hiring foreign nationals in sensitive industries or government-related work, especially in advanced technology or defense, raises security concerns. A balanced approach could involve targeted increases in non-sensitive high-demand fields coupled with investment in domestic STEM education and training programs. This could address immediate needs while strengthening the long-term STEM capabilities of the American workforce.

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really designed as a risk assessment, but chiefly as a study of how much of these contaminants has entered the consumer economy through kitchen utensils, children's toys and other products. "Flame retardants shouldn't even be in these products at all," she says, which is true.

Yet the issue for the average consumer is how dangerous are these products, really? The answer is, not very.

In a study cited by Liu's paper, researchers found that some chemicals leached from a black spatula into cooking oil.

The Atlantic's take on this was that the paper "found that flame retardants in black kitchen utensils readily migrate into hot cooking oil." Not so readily, however: The researchers cut a black spatula into small pieces and basted them in 320-degree cooking oil for 15 minutes. Who does that? As epidemiologist Gideon Meyerowitz-Katz points out, "most people don't leave their spatulas in the fryer and walk away for a quarter of an hour."

More issues are related to this paper. One is that 60 kilograms, or about 132 pounds, isn't the average weight of American adults. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention places the average weight for an adult male at about 200 pounds, and for a female about 171.

Using those weights would have shown that the potential for health effects is even more remote than the overheated news coverage of the paper suggests. In any case, the evidence for long-term human health effects from the normal exposure to these chemicals is scanty. It comes almost entirely from experiments on lab mice and rats subjected to doses unlikely to occur in the real world, and to an experiment on human cells also in the laboratory.

Of course, if you're inclined to eliminate all artifacts of modern commerce from your life, no one is stopping you. Liu and her colleagues observe that kitchen implements made from wood or stainless steel are widely available. They've also properly noted that among the real problems with the recycling of plastics in consumer goods is that we don't know anything about how much goes into which products and where they've come from.

Some legislatures have moved toward requiring more disclosure, which is to the good. But if you spent the last few weeks or months doing a hard target search for black implements in your house, you probably didn't have to.

Now on to the drones. When I first heard of New Jersey residents expressing panic over mysterious lights overhead, I flashed on the Firesign Theatre line, "Big light in sky slated to appear in East." Except that the Firesign Theatre was a satire troupe of the 1960s and '70s, the line originated in their parody of a post-apocalyptic news broadcast, and the game was given away by the title of their best album, "Don't Crush that Dwarf, Hand Me

MICHAEL SAYS

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the Pliers." The current panic appears to be for real.

All the worrying got me thinking about the interview I conducted in September with Sean M. Kirkpatrick, who had recently retired as the Pentagon's chief investigator of UFO reports. As he had written in a *Scientific American* op-ed, he and his team had been overwhelmed by a "whirlwind of tall tales, fabrication and secondhand or thirdhand retellings of the same," producing "a social media frenzy and a significant amount of congressional and executive time and energy spent on investigating these so-called claims."

Sound familiar?

The claims of an invasion of the Eastern seaboard by swarms of drones has every marker of a groundless social media frenzy. This started with some truly baroque partisan speculation; on Dec. 11, Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-N.J.) cadged himself some airtime on Fox News by claiming that his home state was under attack from Iran.

"I'm going to tell you the real deal," he said. "Iran launched a mother ship that contains these drones. It's off the East Coast of the United States of America. They've launched drones."

Three days later, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, declared "this has gone too far," grouching that mystery drones had closed down a metropolitan New York airport. The bare-bones reporting on this event might have made people think that JFK or LaGuardia had been attacked by mystery drones. In fact, the airport was Stewart Airport, which is 60 miles from Manhattan, is served mostly by the ultra-low-cost Allegiant Airlines with routes to Florida, and was closed for one hour.

My favorite performance was that of former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, who reported via X that on Dec. 12 he "personally witnessed (and videoed) what appeared to be dozens of large drones in the sky above my residence ... (25 miles from our nation's capital). I observed the activity for approximately 45 minutes."

It didn't take long for Hogan to be inundated with responses from astronomers and meteorologists that what he had videotaped weren't drones flying over his house, but the constellation Orion, which as meteorologist Matthew Cappucci informed him crisply, is "made up of

stars between 244 and 1,344 light years away."

Since then, neighborhood groups in New Jersey have organized "sky watches" to track the invading swarms and traded reports via their Ring doorbells. Donald Trump advised people to shoot the drones down, which is a good way to make things worse.

Some people conjecture that the drone hysteria is the product of the public's mistrust of government. That doesn't explain much, since a large share of the hysteria has been promoted by elected officials themselves. Politicians are naturally averse to calling their constituents idiots, so they have been responding by demanding more transparency from government officials at the Pentagon and other agencies. It's always safe for politicians to assure voters that they'll hold bureaucrats' feet to the fire.

The problem here is that government agencies have been very clear about what's happening overhead. The "drone" sightings, they say, are of commercial or U.S. military aircraft, helicopters, and perhaps drone flights by hobbyists wanting to get in on the fun. Most of it is surely the product of ignorance. How much more do we need federal agencies to explain?

"Most people don't look at the sky," notes Cheryl Rofer, a retired nuclear scientist. "They don't know what airplanes look like up there, particularly at night, and they don't know what the stars and planets look like. They can't estimate distance — which is tricky in the sky — and they aren't aware of how things can seem to move. They aren't aware of how to check if those objects in fact are moving."

There might be one other explanation for why there are so many purported drone sightings in New Jersey. As the blogger Kevin Drum writes, there are a lot of drones in New Jersey, in part because a state law "indemnifies drone fliers against lawsuits from New Jersey landowners for use of their property for drone overflights."

So, sure. New Jersey loves drones, which nobody noticed until a local congressman decided to blame Iran.

That should cover the hysterias of the moment. Black spatulas won't kill you, and the lights in the sky aren't alien spaceships or Iranian bombers. Any questions?

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Martin

THEISEN'S HOME, FARM AND AUTO

HIRED: August Portz as a buyer for the sporting goods and grills and accessories departments.

IOWA KIDSIGHT MEDICAL ADVISORY BOARD

APPOINTED: Tim Daley, a pediatric ophthalmologist with Medical Associates Clinic.

COTTINGHAM & BUTLER

HIRED: Tyler Shepherd and Haven Wilsey as IT support analysts.

HIRED: Amanda Schwager as a client consultant.

HIRED: Alec Thomas as an inside sales executive.

HIRED: Zachary Talbot as an account administrator.

HIRED: Nicole Ames as a paralegal.

HIRED: Jessica LaCombe as an executive assistant.

BOYD GAMING CREATIVE SERVICES

PROMOTED: Luke Renner and Tia Ernst to account services managers for its Dubuque corporate offices.



Pifer



English



McDermott



Evans



Bashey

HONKAMP, P.C.

PROMOTED: Shawna Taber and Meg Lovelady to staff accountants.

PROMOTED: Haley Brockway to tax manager.

PROMOTED: Jackson Mulgrew to senior state and local tax associate.

PROMOTED: Klementyna Cichocki to assurance senior.

PROMOTED: Trendi Kampstra to senior administrative coordinator.

PROMOTED: Kurtis Martin to accounting manager.

PROMOTED: Mark Pifer and Kelly English to tax associate II.

PROMOTED: Shannon McDermott to accounting supervisor.

WOODWARD COMMUNICATIONS INC.

HIRED: Tom Evans as chief financial officer.

MEDICAL ASSOCIATES CLINIC

HIRED: Jaffer Bashey as a urologist.

HIRED: Allie Thornburg to the gastroenterology department.



Thornburg

UNITYPOINT HEALTH-DUBUQUE

APPOINTED: Anne Johnston to vice president of operations for the Dubuque market.



Johnston

MI-T-M CORP

PROMOTED: Jason Moeller to director of fabrication.

EXECUTIVE MOVES

A.Y. MCDONALD ANNOUNCES NEW CFO, VICE PRESIDENT OF FINANCE

A prominent local company has announced leadership moves in its finance and accounting team.

Beginning Jan. 3, Andy Wickham will serve as Chief Financial Officer of A. Y. McDonald Industries, according to a press release.

He replaces John Schmidt, who will retire on that date after serving as CFO for more than 11 years. The release states that Schmidt will continue as a director and corporate secretary on the A.Y. McDonald board of directors, of which he has been a member since 2014.

Wickham has worked for A.Y. McDonald for 11 years, most recently serving as vice president of finance.

Replacing him in that role is Matt Havertape, who joined A.Y. McDonald on Nov. 4. Havertape previously worked as CFO at Muenster Milling Co.



Wickham



Havertape



Schmidt

PodcastOne launches podcast service

GLOBE NEWSWIRE

OS ANGELES — PodcastOne, a publisher, podcast sales network and a subsidiary of LiveOne, has launched PodcastOne Pro, a full-service solution that specializes in transforming podcasts into polished on-air productions for brands and professionals.

PodcastOne Pro offers customizable services, with à la carte options to meet production needs. Services include access to top-of-the-line podcasting studios and equipment (audio and video), strategy, program production, editing, guest booking, distribution, paywall options and promotion across PodcastOne’s existing network of podcasts.

With global podcast listeners expected to surpass one billion by 2027 according to MIDiA Research, PodcastOne is ranked 13th in Podtrac’s Podcast Industry Top Publishers Rankings for November.

“As the only public pure-play podcast company in the United States, PodcastOne is uniquely positioned to help brands, busi-



nesses and content creators reach their target audiences more effectively while keeping loyal podcast listeners entertained and engaged,” said Jim Lally, head of business development for PodcastOne. “Branded podcasts are financially and logistically challenging for many companies to produce in-house. With the official launch of PodcastOne Pro, we’re able to offer a tailored podcast production solution to our clients that leverages our current infrastructure, which ultimately, drives higher margins, diversifies our revenue streams and lowers costs for clients.”

PodcastOne Pro services brands such as MotorTrend, Boost Mobile, Microsoft and LoveSac, which leverage podcasts to build brand loyalty and connect directly to consumers through the U.S.’s fastest growing medium. Numerous studies have proven that podcast audiences connect with products on a level not seen in traditional advertising and marketing mediums.

Coinciding with the launch of PodcastOne Pro, PodcastOne is set to debut its new podcast production studio in Beverly Hills. The fully equipped facility offers industry-leading technology, ensuring top-tier production quality for both audio and video content.

“The production behind podcasting has evolved rapidly in the last several years with the incredible uptick in consumer consumption of the medium,” said Stacie Parra and Alistair Walford, heads of production for PodcastOne and PodcastOne Pro.

For more information, visit www.podcastonepro.com.

Jeff Webb Shares journey from entrepreneur to visionary on ‘Insights with Ben Segal’ podcast

BUSINESS WIRE

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Rubenstein Public Relations has announced that Jeff Webb, the founder of modern cheerleading and a trail-blazing business entrepreneur, is featured in the latest episode of “Insights with Ben Segal,” the podcast from UBS.

Webb recounts his journey of building Varsity Spirit from humble beginnings to leading a multi-billion dollar global company that revolutionized cheerleading, expanding it from a spirit-raising sideline activity into a competitive sport celebrated worldwide.

In the discussion, hosted by financial expert Ben Segal, Webb opens up about the challenges he faced and the innovative strategies that drove his success. From organizing Varsity Spirit’s first cheerleading competitions to navigating the complex

path of gaining global recognition for the sport, Webb shares the pivotal moments that defined his career and shaped the cheerleading industry as we know it today.

“When I first started Varsity Spirit, cheerleading was primarily seen as a supportive activity,” Webb said. “I envisioned something far greater — an opportunity for these athletes to showcase their incredible talent and be celebrated for their achievements. It’s been an honor to build a community and an industry that inspire millions of people around the world.”

Beyond his legacy in cheerleading, Webb discusses his ongoing work as a business entrepreneur. As the author of the Amazon best-seller “American Restoration: How to Unshackle the Great Middle Class” and, the publisher of “Human Events and The Post Millennial,” Webb offers insights into leadership, innovation



and restoring the American dream.

The podcast is available on all major podcast platforms.

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