

Sweet sweep

No. 6 Razorbacks take another over No. 12 Volunteers. — Sports, 1C



Fanciful flora and fauna

Melvin's book on plants, animals inspires kids to appreciate nature. — Style, 1D

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

ARKANSAS' NEWSPAPER

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In the news

■ **Pedro Sanchez**, prime minister of Spain, apologized for legislation aimed at increasing protection for sexual assault victims, but allowed convicted offenders to have their sentences reduced, pledging to “find a solution to these unintended effects, because it is the best way to defend the law itself.”

■ **Lindsey Graham**, Republican senator of South Carolina and retired Air Force Reserve colonel, said praising the leak of classified information “because you agree with the cause is terribly irresponsible and puts America in serious danger.”

■ **B.A. Frazier**, a South Carolina Highway Patrol trooper, “was shot on the right side of his face” during a traffic stop in Bamberg County, but his “injuries are non-life threatening,” agency spokeswoman Heather Bianche said in a news release.

■ **Thomas Currao**, assistant chief of the New York City Fire Department, sent a letter requesting to be demoted and put back in the field, amid a lawsuit filed by other demoted chiefs accusing Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh of ageism, according to The New York Daily News.

■ **James White**, police chief of Detroit, asked residents in a statement “to come together and to use its influence to persuade individuals to make better choices.”

■ **Leonid Volkov**, 37, of Medford, Mass., was arrested and charged with murder after the bodies of two men missing since late March were found inside rubber storage bins stowed in a storage unit rented by one of the victims, the Middlesex district attorney's office reported.


■ **Gabe Amo**, who resigned as a special assistant to President Joe Biden, “was the heart and soul of our operation who approached every task,” Julie Chavez Rodriguez, the White House director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, said in a statement.

■ **Amy Klobuchar**, Democratic senator of Minnesota, said on ABC's “This Week” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who has been absent for weeks due to illness, “says she's going to return ... and it sure better happen before the debt-ceiling vote.”

■ **Silvio Berlusconi**, former Italian premier who has chronic leukemia, is “out of intensive care” and was transferred to a regular ward at a Milan hospital, where he is being treated for a lung infection, Milan daily Corriere della Sera quoted his brother Paolo Berlusconi as saying.

WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK
Today Sunny.
High 75.
Tonight Clear.
Low 54,
southwest
winds 5 to 10
mph.



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Preparing for remembrance day



A group of Israeli soldiers look at pictures of Jews killed during the Holocaust in the Hall of Names of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial on Sunday in Jerusalem. The annual Israeli memorial day for the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust of World War II begins at sundown today. More photos at arkansasonline.com/417memorial/. (AP/Tsafir Abayov)

Relic saved



A priest kisses a saved icon after a Russian rocket ruined an Orthodox church in an attack on Easter night Sunday in Komyshevakha in the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine. (AP/Kateryna Klochko)

Judge delays trial for one day in Dominion suit against Fox

COMPILED BY
DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF
FROM WIRE REPORTS

NEW YORK — Without citing a reason, the Delaware judge overseeing a voting machine company's defamation lawsuit against Fox News announced late Sunday that he was delaying the start of the trial until Tuesday.

The trial, which has drawn international interest, had been scheduled to start this morning with jury selection

and opening statements.

The case centers on whether Fox defamed Dominion Voting Systems by spreading claims that the company rigged the 2020 presidential election to prevent former President Donald Trump's reelection. Records produced as part of the lawsuit show that many of the network's hosts and executives didn't believe the allegations but aired them

anyway.

Claire Bischoff, a Dominion spokesperson, said the company would have no comment on the trial delay. Representatives for Fox News and its parent company, Fox Corp., the entities Dominion is suing, did not immediately return requests for comment. In his statement, Delaware Superior Court Judge Eric Davis said

See **FOX**, Page 6A

G-7 vows faster work toward cleaner energy

ELAINE KURTENBACH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAPPORO, Japan — Energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed Sunday to work to hasten the shift toward cleaner, renewable energy, but set no timetable for phasing out coal-fired power plants as they wrapped up two days of talks in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo.

The officials issued a 36-page communique laying out their commitments ahead of a G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May.

Japan won endorsements from fellow G-7 countries for its own national strategy emphasizing so-called clean

coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to help ensure its energy security.

“Recognizing the current global energy crisis and economic disruptions, we reaffirm our commitment to accelerating the clean energy transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest,” the communique says.

“We call on and will work with other countries to end new unabated coal-fired power-generation projects globally as soon as possible to accelerate the clean energy transition in a just manner,” the document says.

The leaders reiterated the need to urgently reduce car-

See **G-7**, Page 2A

Prosecutor endorses sentencing overhaul

JOSEPH FLAHERTY,
WILL LANGHORNE
AND GRANT LANCASTER
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The expansive criminal justice legislation signed into law by Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders last week will put an end to the practice known as credit bonding and likely contribute to a clearer understanding of sentences, according to the prosecuting attorney for the Little Rock metro area.

In a recent interview, Will Jones, the newly elected prosecuting attorney for the 6th Judicial District, which encompasses Pulaski and

Perry counties, endorsed the idea that the Protect Arkansas Act will improve public safety.

Under the Protect Arkansas Act, people convicted of 18 of the most violent felonies in state code, including rape and capital murder, will have to serve the entirety of their sentences in prison.

The new law will require courts to add a period of post-release supervision in these cases if defendants are not already sentenced to the statutory maximum for their offense.

People convicted of 53 lesser violent felonies such

as second-degree murder, battery in the first degree or sexual indecency with a child will have to serve 85% of their sentence before being eligible for release with supervision.

If a person convicted of a crime that requires them to serve 100% or 85% of their sentence violates their terms of release, they will have to serve the remainder of their previous sentence plus the entirety of the sentence they receive for the violation.

Those convicted of felonies not addressed in the legislation could be eligible

See **OVERHAUL**, Page 4A

Sudan factions battle for control

Fighting leaves dozens dead

COMPILED BY
DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF
FROM WIRE REPORTS

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The Sudanese military and a powerful paramilitary group battled for control of the chaos-stricken nation for a second day Sunday, signaling they were unwilling to end hostilities despite mounting diplomatic pressure to cease fire.

Heavy fighting involving armored vehicles, truck-mounted machine guns and warplanes raged Sunday in the capital of Khartoum, the adjoining city of Omdurman and in flashpoints across the country. The rival forces are believed to have tens of thousands of fighters each in the capital alone.

More than 83 people have been killed and more than 1,126 others injured since Thursday, most of them this weekend, the World Health Organization said. The toll

includes civilians caught in the crossfire and is expected to rise.

The clashes are part of a power struggle between Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the commander of the armed forces, and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the Rapid Support Forces group. The two generals are former allies who jointly orchestrated an October 2021 military coup that derailed Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy.

In recent months, internationally backed negotiations revived hopes for such a transition, but growing tensions between Burhan and Dagalo eventually delayed a deal with political parties.

Volker Perthes, the U.N. envoy for Sudan, said that both Burhan and Dagalo agreed to a three-hour humanitarian pause in fighting in the late afternoon Sunday.

See **SUDAN**, Page 6A

Covid-19 retreats but still a concern

DAN DIAMOND
THE WASHINGTON POST

Millions of Americans gathered maskless in homes and houses of worship this month for Passover, Easter and Ramadan — the latest evidence that coronavirus has retreated from public view as the pandemic winds down.

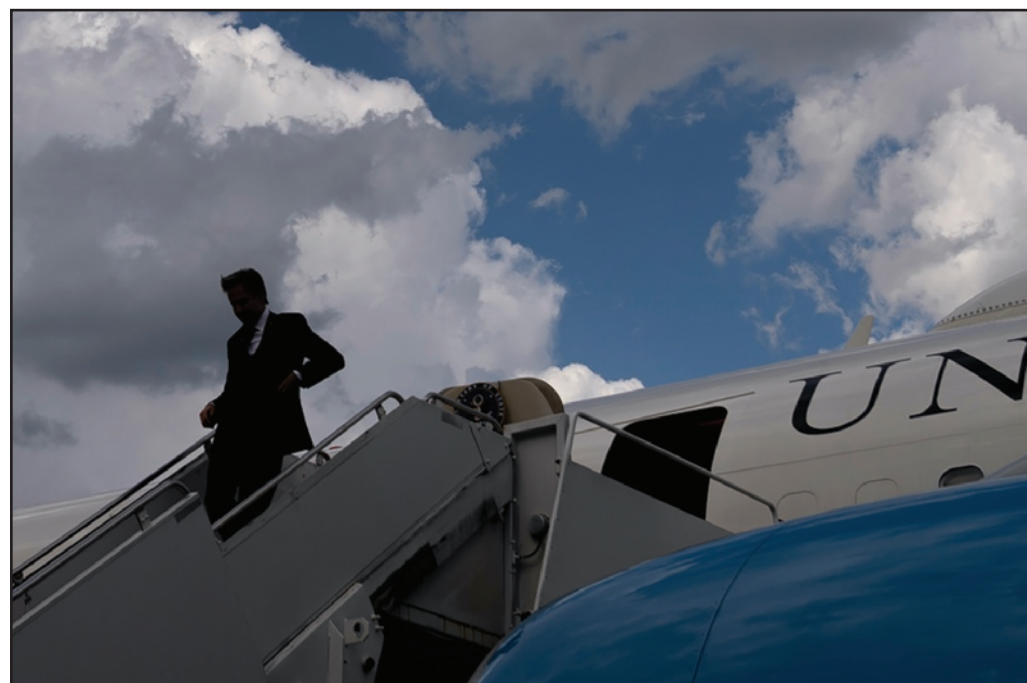
But retreat is not the same thing as eradication: Federal health officials say that covid remains one of the leading causes of death in the United States, tied to about 250

deaths daily, on average, mostly among the old and immunocompromised.

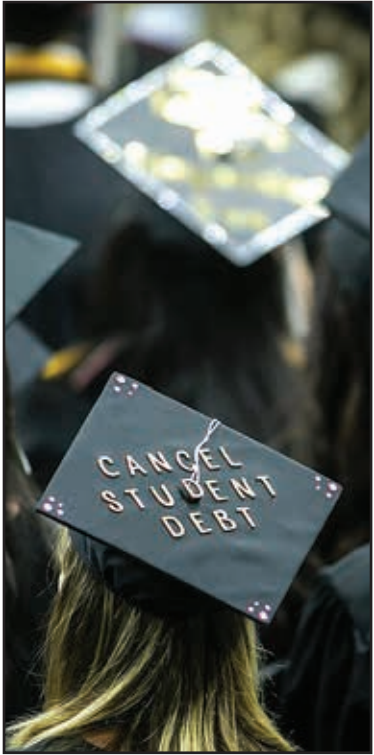
Few Americans are treating it as a leading killer, however — in part because they are not hearing about those numbers, don't trust them or don't see them as relevant to their own lives.

“We're not presenting the data in a way that resonates with the American people,” said Deborah Birx, who served as the first White House coronavirus coordi-

See **COVID-19**, Page 4A



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives Sunday at Yokota Air Base in Fussa, on the outskirts of Tokyo, en route to Karuizawa, Japan, for a G-7 foreign ministers' meeting. More photos at arkansasonline.com/417g7/. (AP/Andrew Harnik)



The cap of a University of Iowa graduation candidate reads "Cancel student debt" during a commencement ceremony for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in May 2022 in Iowa City, Iowa. (Iowa City Press-Citizen file photo via AP/Joseph Cress)

New grads needn't fear a recession

TREA BRANCH
NERDWALLET (VIA AP)

In 2023 alone, there have been more than 118,000 U.S. tech layoffs, according to Crunchbase News, a business publication. That's in addition to two major bank collapses and two federal rate increases. The class of 2023 will graduate into this economic upheaval while facing another variable: student loan payments.

This can be an overwhelming and confusing time for those set to begin repayment of student debt, says Barry Coleman, vice president of program management and education at the National Foundation for Credit Counseling.

Coleman cites the expected end of a three-year pause on federal student loan payments, legal challenges to federal student debt relief programs and the potential effect of inflation on the job market as reasons new graduates could feel uneasy.

But new grads don't need to panic. Experts say they can weather a potential recession and the financial uncertainty that might come with it.

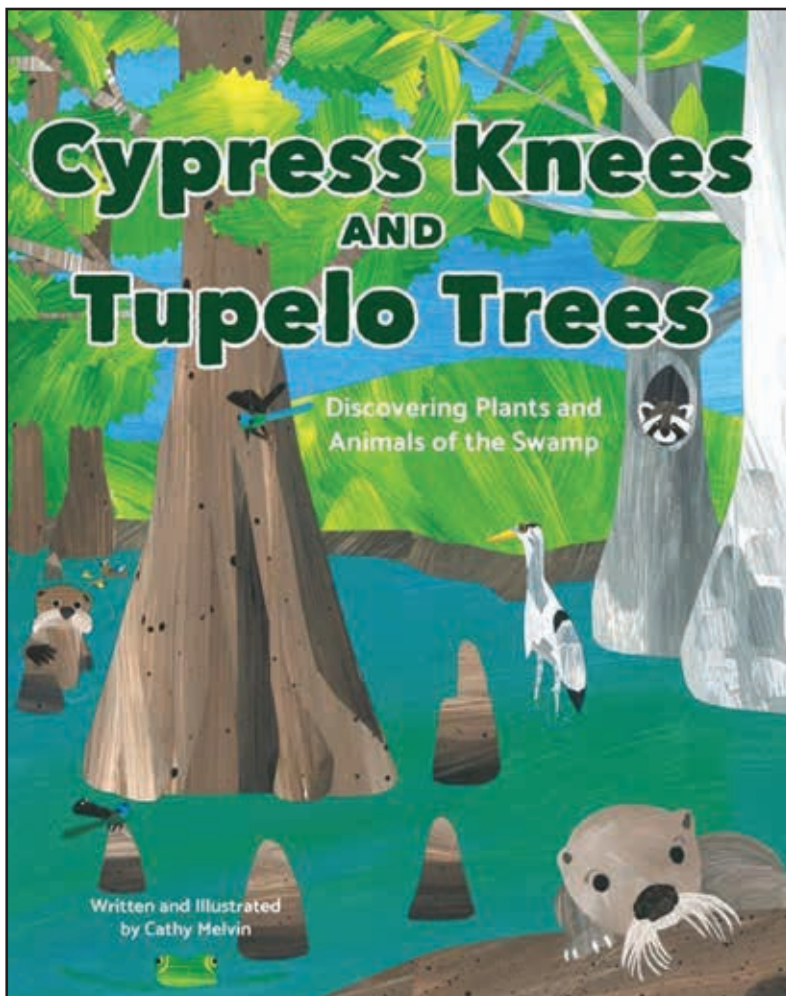
Understanding your student debt is one of the best strategies to stay on top of your loans, regardless of how the economy is performing, says Betsy Mayotte, founder of The Institute of Student Loan Advisors.

There is typically a six-month grace period after graduation before you're required to make your first student loan payment. Before this first payment is due, gather details like the types of loans you have and who holds them, Mayotte advises.

See GRADS on Page 6D



Cathy Melvin checks out a tree that interests her at Lorance Creek Natural Area. Melvin's children's book, "Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees: Discovering Plants and Animals of the Swamp," will be published Saturday by Et Alia Press of Little Rock. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Sean Clancy)



"Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees: Discovering Plants and Animals of the Swamp" by Cathy Melvin (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Cathy Melvin, Et Alia Press)

Fanciful FLORA and FAUNA

Cathy Melvin's 'Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees' born of the pandemic, inspiring young readers to appreciate nature

SEAN CLANCY
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

"I think cypress knees are magical," says Cathy Melvin as she points out a smattering of the distinctive, knobby extensions of a cypress tree's root system poking up from the dark, shallow waters of Lorance Creek.

It's a cloudy, chilly, Thursday morning earlier this month and Melvin is strolling along the trail that winds through the Lorance Creek Natural Area near Hensley. This is the place that helped inspire "Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees: Discovering Plants and Animals of the Swamp," Melvin's charming and fun debut children's book that will be published Saturday by Little Rock's Et Alia Press.

The book is filled with Melvin's colorful, creative collages that are

reminiscent of Eric Carle, the author and illustrator of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," "From Head to Toe," "The Grouch Ladybug" and others. Her text takes readers on a journey into a happy swamp and introduces them to the flora and fauna found there in a style that combines the whimsical and educational.

Under the water are the swift-swimming shadows of the slender Blackspotted Topminnows

Look out for mud critters with two claws and a tail, like Red Swamp Crayfish who snacks on aquatic snails.

Melvin lives about 10 minutes away from the natural area and started visiting there with her son,

See KNEES on Page 6D

REMEMBER WHEN, ARKANSAS?



Anyone recognize the scene in this vintage photo from the Democrat-Gazette archives?

Hint: The year was 2002. For some answers, see Remember ... ? on Page 3D.

OLD NEWS/OPINION

Billy joins picketers; gets arrested

CELIA STOREY
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

True story: I had no clue in February — when I rashly decided it would be fun to paraphrase Bernie Babcock's "Billy of Arkansas" — that, 10 columns later, I'd still be paraphrasing the exploits of Billy Camelton.

Or that the nubile and wealthy Little Rock deb would be getting herself arrested in New York.

As I have explained nine (9) times already, the old Arkansas Democrat serialized Babcock's story as 25 installments in 1922. That's how this novel qualifies as old news.

But newspapers published a lot of fiction back in the day. In the first decades of the 20th century, they printed fiction along with advice columns, instructables, recipes, fashion reports, society and club news, children's school news and sewing projects. All this was seen as woman fodder and meant to attract advertisers who wanted to reach female consumers. (Media historian Julie Golia explains this in "Courting Women, Courting Advertisers," a report for The Journal of American History published in 2016; if you have JStor access, see arkansasonline.com/417fem.)

arkansasonline.com/417fem.

The same issues of the Democrat that included daily installments of "Billy" also served up Burgess' Bedtime Stories about Jerry Muskrat, Old Man Coyote and other anthropomorphic woodland critters; installments of Adele Garrison's "My Marriage Problems," a sequel to her novel "Revelations of a Wife," also ran daily. Sunday editions included long romances and murder mysteries.

Something similar was happening in the Arkansas Gazette, although its editorial page remained, to my eye, staunchly masculine, with C.T. Davis' poems making fun of his wife and the most frequent fictional feature being the immigrant antics of William Kirk's "Little Bobbie's Pa." Lists of new library books showed up on the editorial page, though. And Gazette daily editions had womanly featurettes scattered about them as well as specific women's pages, especially in the society and club-politics departments. Its Sunday editions also included

See OLD NEWS on Page 3D



(Democrat-Gazette illustration/Carrie Hill)

MASTER CLASS

Assisted stretching feels great, improves flexibility

MATT PARROTT

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Stretching is my new favorite fitness activity, and I'm not alone. Stretching studios are populating the suburban landscape across the United States, as many Americans struggle with maintaining flexibility and muscular balance.

This week, I will share my insights on the "stretch boom" and present a few tips for improving your flexibility at home. I also have a great seated stretch that's perfect for almost anyone.

It's 2023, and stretching has been around a long, long time. Stretching is not a new idea, and yet one of the fastest growing segments of the studio fitness business is focused exclusively on assisted stretching. The first time I ran across one of these studios, I'll admit, I was skeptical. How could someone justify paying a monthly fitness membership to just ... stretch?

After my first session, I quickly changed my position. I think of my stretching sessions as 50% rehabilitation and 50% relaxation. I wouldn't consider it a fitness activity, per se. But it feels great and has a lasting impact on my flexibility.

My back pain decreased, workout performance improved, and I started to really look forward to each stretching session. Like a personal trainer, my stretch therapist



Maria Rogers, youth program director for Little Rock Racquet Club, demonstrates the Seated Torso Stretch. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Celia Storey)



understands the goals I'm trying to achieve, and how to get there.

For someone who has spent his entire career in the health and wellness field, it felt a little odd paying for a fitness-related service provider. I'd always been self-reliant in this area, but life is

a little different these days. I sit much more than ever before, and my expertise has shifted. My stretch therapist is working on her doctorate in physical therapy, so she's far more familiar with recent techniques and research than I am.

My stretching "home-

work" has also been incredibly valuable. I perform a handful of stretches each day, and the entire group takes about 3 minutes.

My stretches are specific to the areas I need to address, but I've learned quite a few others along the way. One of my favorites is the Seated

Torso Stretch, and it's one that can be performed with or without a stretch therapist.

1. Sit on an exercise bench and place your left foot on your right knee.

2. Allow your left knee to drop down so the left leg is parallel with the ground.

3. Place your right hand

VIDEO ONLINE

Start or end the work day with this Seated Torso Stretch.

arkansasonline.com/417sit



on the outside of your left knee and twist your torso to the left.

4. Use your right hand to increase the stretch until you feel a mild discomfort.

5. Hold in this position for 10 seconds, breathing slowly and rhythmically.

6. Return to the starting position and switch sides by placing the right foot on the left knee and twisting to the right.

7. Hold for 10 seconds.

8. Repeat two or three times on each side.

I love this stretch because it's not a movement I perform often throughout the day. Twisting the torso feels great in the lower back, and having one leg crossed helps with hip flexibility. It's a great way to start the day or end the day, or both. Let's get to work!

Director of business development and population health solutions for Quest Diagnostics, Matt Parrott began this column Jan. 6, 2003, at Little Rock. He has a doctorate in education (sport studies), a master's in kinesiology and is certified by the American College of Sports Medicine.

vballtop@aol.com



Art from two pages of "Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees: Discovering Plants and Animals of the Swamp" by Cathy Melvin. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Cathy Melvin, Et Alia Press)



Cathy Melvin, author of the children's book "Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees: Discovering Plants and Animals of the Swamp," walks along the trail at Lorraine Creek Natural Area. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Cary Jenkins)

Knees

• Continued from Page 1D

Patrick Gentry, in early 2020. Through a program with the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, Melvin and her family, also including husband Marc Gentry and daughter Cate Gentry, adopted the area about a week before the pandemic hit in March 2020.

"Part of our responsibilities as adopters of this area is to pick up trash and document vandalism or anything else that needs to be addressed," Melvin says.

She learned more about the creek from Ryan Spotts of the Natural Heritage Commission.

"She brought us out here and we explored the area," says Melvin, who retired from the U.S. Public Health Service in 2019. "She would point out things like the dogwood trees and cypress trees, and it got Patrick really excited. It was in the midst of the pandemic, school was virtual and I

had two teenagers at home, and this gave us a place to go when it was time to get out of the house."

When they encountered a plant or tree they weren't familiar with they would snap a photo and research it via iNaturalist, a plant-identification app. They were also recording the sounds of birds and frogs.

Over time, Melvin began developing an idea for a children's book about some of the things that live in swamps.

"The title came to me first, 'Cypress Knees and Tupelo Trees,' and I thought it would be a real cute children's book. By the end of 2020 we had discovered so many things out here, things that I thought might be interesting to people who visit here or other swamps."

★ ★ ★

Melvin is originally from central Oklahoma. Her father worked in the oil industry, and that career took the family to Singapore, Venezuela,

Colombia and Spain. This peripatetic life continued until they returned to the U.S. when Melvin was in the sixth grade.

She always had an interest in art but was also into science.

"Art could have been a potential career path," she says. "My art teacher said that I should be an illustrator for textbooks and marry the sciences with art. I loved art, but I just didn't know if that would be the right path for me. I felt more strongly about the sciences."

She earned a degree in marine science and biology from Jacksonville University in Florida and a master's degree in molecular biology at the University of California, Irvine. Art was put aside as work and family took precedence. But when her children were young, Melvin helped them and other students at Little Rock's East End Elementary and Intermediate schools write and illustrate their own picture books; the

urge to make things began creeping back into her life.

"I always knew I'd do something with art. Helping them with their creative process planted a seed in me that maybe I could tap into my own creativity to produce something."

She had also signed up for classes at the former Arkansas Arts Center in pastels and watercolor painting.

"I've taken some adult workshops and that gave me a creative outlet, too. I hadn't practiced routinely, but if the opportunity arose and I could fit something into my schedule, I would certainly do that."

To create the images in her book, Melvin would paint construction paper with a nontoxic tempera and then cut the paper into shapes that she used to create the vibrant creatures and plants of the swamp.

"I just used what I had on hand at the time," she says.

The brushstrokes she made on the paper give a distinctive texture to her

renderings of flowers, poison ivy, a graceful heron, a cute otter, tadpoles, birds, frogs and more

★ ★ ★

Melvin was mostly finished with the book when she contacted Et Alia owner and publisher Erin Wood for a consultation. Melvin knew Norman and Cheryl Lavers, whose book, "100 Insects of Arkansas and the Midsouth: Portraits and Stories," was published by Et Alia.

"I thought that I would get Erin's opinion, get some editing figured out and find out what I would need to do if I wanted to get this book that I had written and illustrated published. I had no clue how to do it."

She made an immediate impression.

"As soon as I opened the files with her artwork, I was obsessed," Wood says. "The level of detail, there is something special about even the simple-seeming eyes the animals have. I felt a real con-

nection."

Wood decided to do more than consult; she wanted to publish the book.

"It was really easy to work with Cathy," she says. "The feedback was going well, and it seemed like it would be a good partnership, and I asked her if she would publish with Et Alia, and here we are."

With her first book about to be released (on Earth Day, by the way), Melvin says she has a couple of other children's books in the works. She's hopeful that her stories and art will inspire young readers to pay more attention to nature.

"Literacy and being curious about the world around you is so important," she says, standing at the end of the wooden boardwalk in the Lorraine Creek Natural Area. "Creating children's books about things that kids can see in nature is exciting. I'm hoping that out of this, maybe they will stop, look and listen to the world around them. You can learn a lot of things."

Grads

• Continued from Page 1D

Then, know your expected income, your expenses and how your student loan payments will fit into your budget, Coleman says. This will limit any surprises once repayment begins.

IF YOU HAVE A JOB

If you land a job, you have more flexibility. A steady income gives you the opportunity to explore putting more money toward your student loan debt — if you're already contributing to your retirement and emergency savings.

For borrowers who have the capacity to make more than the minimum payment

on their student loan, this is the chance to get rid of student debt as quickly as possible, says Coleman, while saving as much money as they can on interest.

And don't overlook your employer.

Twenty-one percent of employers offer company-paid financial services as part of their benefits package, explains Jim Link, chief human resources officer for the Society for Human Resource Management. Programs can include access to financial advisers at no cost to the employee, or even student loan repayment programs — both of which could offer additional protection in a slow economy.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A JOB

Graduating without a job offer can be terrifying, especially if the economy is expecting a downturn. But with low or no income, you can take steps to stay on top of your student debt, even in a recession (see arkansasonline.com/417help).

Start with your loan servicer, the company that manages your loans. Let them know as early as possible that you're not employed, Coleman says. Ask what your options are to avoid delinquency — which is missing a student loan payment.

There are many repayment options for federal student loan borrowers, Mayotte says. You can lower your payments — even to zero dollars

— with an income-driven repayment plan, or temporarily stop payments through student loan deferment (see arkansasonline.com/417stop).

Just note that interest can still accrue while in deferment, and this increases your total student loan balance. Once you land a job and you're in a position to repay your student loan, do so as soon as possible so you're not facing a significantly larger debt down the road, Coleman says.

And while conducting your job search, it may be worth considering a career with a nonprofit organization or government entity if you have federal student loans. These positions could qualify you for Public Service Loan

Forgiveness — where your remaining student loan balance is forgiven after 10 years of qualifying payments (see arkansasonline.com/417forgive).

GET FREE HELP

Even in a slow economy, you can get student loan help from organizations like The Institute of Student Loan Advisors and the Student Borrower Protection Center that won't charge anything.

Whether you're exploring how to pay your loans off faster or how to afford the monthly payments, nonprofit organizations like those available through the National Foundation for Credit Counseling can connect you with counselors and help you

create an action plan, Coleman says.

However the economy unfolds, these experts say, new graduates can create a strong plan for their student loans that will serve them both in tough and robust economic times.

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