

PEOPLE

CREATIVE ‘BEACON’



PROVIDED

Author Jeffrey Hallett holds a copy of the first book in his “Beacon of Hope” series next to the book’s illustrator, Jessica Nagel, who holds samples of graphics in the book.

Southern Cayuga alum to publish third novel in series

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It was in Patrick Armstrong’s English class at Southern Cayuga High School that Jeffrey Hallett found his first love: writing. A director for the school’s drama club that Hallett belonged to, Armstrong was a beloved instructor for the support he gave students to follow their dreams. “He had a way of finding which kids had that creative sense in them,” Hallett recalled to The Citizen. “And he was good at helping them get in tune with that.” Hallett, 61, is now the author of two published science fiction novels, and a third installment in the same series is in

the works. A software engineer by trade, Hallett used his extensive background in technology to build the world for his series “Beacon of Hope” and its protagonist, a strong-willed female scientist who gains supernatural powers after an experiment gone awry. “I drew from my knowledge of physics and biology to create a kind of realism,” he told The Citizen over the phone from his home in Livermore, California. “The books are set a few decades in the future, so it’s enough to keep things interesting while still being contemporary and relatable.”

The first book was a result of going to

Comic-Con. The idea came to him in the middle of the night after visiting the convention in San Diego. Hallett awoke in an inspired fervor to write down as much as he could. His hundreds of notes became the first “Beacon of Hope,” which was released in 2024. The book became popular across social media, with fellow Southern Cayuga alumni finding Hallett’s work on Facebook. “I’ve had writing a book on my bucket list for a long time,” he said. “There was a lot of positive support and encouragement online.”

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POLITICS

Sheriff’s deputies endorse Chris Valdina for judge

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The union representing Cayuga County sheriff’s deputies endorsed Chris Valdina for Cayuga County Court judge. The Cayuga County Deputy Sheriff’s Police Association Local 9820 announced its endorsement in a letter provided to The Citizen. The union is supporting Valdina, the chief assistant district attorney, to succeed Cayuga County Court Judge Thomas Leone. Mathew Temple, the union’s president, wrote that Valdina has “consistently exhibited commitment to fairness, integrity and the impartial application of the law.” “These qualities are essential for a



Valdina

district attorney in 1998. He was promoted to chief assistant district attorney by then-Cayuga County District Attorney Jon Budelmann in 2008, and continues to serve in that role under current District Attorney Brittany Grome Antonacci. Valdina’s prosecutorial experience

includes more than 50 jury trials and numerous convictions in serious criminal cases. He is also the county’s lead appellate prosecutor and has defended more than 100 convictions against appeals. That experience, Temple noted, reflects a “clear understanding of the challenges that law enforcement faces, respect for due process and constitutional protections.” “Our members work daily to uphold public safety,” Temple continued. “A judge who respects that work – while maintaining independence and balance – is vital. Chris has shown unwavering professionalism in his interactions with our deputies and our community.” Valdina, who has been endorsed by the

Cayuga County Republican and Conservative parties, and Auburn attorney Ben Susman are vying for Cayuga County Court judge. Susman has been endorsed by the Cayuga County Democratic Committee. Leone is in the final year of his second 10-year term as Cayuga County Court judge. He announced in January that he would not seek another term. He is approaching his 70th birthday, which is the mandatory retirement age for New York judges. Government reporter Robert Harding can be reached at (315) 282-2220 or robert.harding@lee.net. Follow him on X @RobertHarding.

Historical documents start road trip across US

8 stops planned as part of nation’s 250th

SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press

Some of the United States’ most important historical documents began a first-of-its-kind journey this week as part of the country’s 250th anniversary commemoration.

Typically housed in highly controlled vaults under the watch of preservation experts at the National Archives, documents such as the 1783 Treaty of Paris that formally ended the Revolutionary War and the 1774 Articles of Association that urged colonists to boycott British goods are rarely moved.

But those documents, signed by George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and other American revolutionary leaders, will be making their way across the country and put on display for free at local museums.

“It’s tangible history, and tangible history inspires,” said Jim Byron, senior adviser to the acting archivist of the United States. “These documents have not traveled, and they’ve certainly not traveled collectively, ever. They are here in vaults.”

The Boeing 737 “Freedom Plane” transporting the documents is just



JOHN MCDONNELL, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two guards stand their posts at the cases containing the United States Constitution at the National Archives on Jan. 29 in Washington.

one of many events and activities planned across the country to mark America’s upcoming 250th anniversary celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. A congressionally chartered commission, America 250, and a separate White House-led initiative, called Freedom 250, are both coordinating events, an overlap that has faced some criticism in Washington.

Among the planned activities are a fleet of mobile museums driving across the country, a story collection initiative and a Great American State Fair on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. President Donald Trump has even announced plans for a “Patriot Games” sporting event featuring high school athletes and a UFC mixed-martial arts fight at the White House.

The first stop for the “Freedom Plane” is Kansas City, Missouri, where the documents will be displayed at the National WWI Museum and Memorial. The records include a rare original engraving of the Declaration of Independence printed in 1823 from a copperplate of the original; the Oaths of Allegiance signed in 1778 by George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and other officers of the

Continental Army; and a rare draft copy of the U.S. Constitution that includes handwritten notes by the delegates.

Other planned stops will be in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Houston, Denver, Miami, the Detroit suburb of Dearborn and Seattle.

“The reality that these documents are leaving D.C. and coming to the heartland is fantastic,” said Matt Naylor, president and CEO of the National World War I Museum and Memorial, where the documents will be on display for a little over two weeks starting Friday. “There’s a lot of excitement about that and a lot of talk in and around the city about what that means.”

Naylor said the early response has been overwhelming. Local schools have already booked visits for more than 5,000 schoolchildren.

“That’s indicating that there’s a lot of enthusiasm for this,” he said.

The “Freedom Plane” tour was inspired in part by the “American Freedom Train” that toured 48 states in 1975 and 1976 as part of the country’s bicentennial celebration.

It carried various pieces of American history, including the original Louisiana Purchase documents, Judy Garland’s dress from “The Wizard of Oz” and Jesse Owens’ gold medals from the 1936 Olympic Games.

Attacks on Iran threaten US economy with more uncertainty

Rising oil prices could lift prices at the pump this week

CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran add yet more question marks around a U.S. economy already buffeted by on-and-off tariffs, weak hiring, and lingering inflationary pressures.

The war already raised oil prices and could lift prices at the pump as early as this week, but the ultimate effect on the economy and inflation will depend on the length and severity of the conflict, economists say.

Should it wind down in a week or two, its economic effects would be minor and short-lived. Yet a longer war that pushed oil past \$100 a barrel for an extended period would worsen inflation, at least temporarily, while slowing growth and intensifying Americans’ unhappiness with the cost of essentials.

After almost five years of rising prices, concerns around affordability undercut President Donald Trump’s support in polls and bolstered Democrats in recent elections.

On Tuesday, oil prices soared again and raised more alarms. The price for a barrel of Brent crude,



SETH WENIG, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gas company logos are displayed Tuesday on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

the international standard, briefly leaped above \$84 before settling at \$81.40, up 4.7%. That’s up from close to \$70 less than a week ago.

A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 4.7% to \$74.56.

A longer-lasting conflict, particularly one that closed down the Strait of Hormuz at the edge of the Persian Gulf, through which about 25% of the world’s oil passes, could push oil past that \$100 a barrel mark. Gas prices in the U.S. could then reach \$3.50 a gallon, up from just under \$3 on average nationwide Monday.

Such price jumps would accelerate inflation in the U.S. and slow growth, economists said.

“Markets are right now really under-pricing the tail risk of a sustained engagement and an operation that does not wrap up quickly, restore travel through the Strait of Hormuz and get everything back to de-escalation and normal in a timely manner,” said Alex Jaquez, chief of policy and advocacy at the Groundwork Collaborative and an economic adviser to the Biden White House.

Here are some ways the war could affect the economy.

Inflation lingers

While some measures of inflation cooled in recent months, the Federal Reserve’s preferred

measure has been stuck at close to 3% for about a year. That is above the central bank’s 2% target, and occurred even as gas prices fell steadily last year.

Should gas prices rise significantly, airfares also could rise as airlines face bigger fuel costs. Shipping also would become more expensive, which could add to grocery prices.

Natural gas prices also jumped Monday, as about 20% of the world’s gas travels through the Strait of Hormuz and a liquid natural gas plant was shut down in Qatar. That could raise heating prices in the U.S. Natural gas already grew 10% more expensive in the past year, thanks in part to spiking energy use by data centers powering artificial intelligence.

Still, economists noted the U.S. economy is not as oil-dependent as it was in the past, with most Americans now working in services, rather than manufacturing.

Other factors could help keep oil price increases relatively limited. Rory Johnston, founder of Commodity Context, an oil analytics firm, pointed out that oil inventories were quite high before the conflict, which helped keep prices in check.

Trump acknowledged Tuesday that oil and gas prices rose as the U.S. remains engaged in the conflict, but argued that prices would drop once the war ends.

With inflation potentially headed higher, the Fed could delay additional interest rate cuts.

On Tuesday, Neel Kashkari, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and one of 12 voting members of the Fed’s rate-setting committee, said that before the war he supported at least one interest rate cut this year as inflation slowly cooled, but now he isn’t so sure.

“With the geopolitical events that we talked about, I just need to see,” he said at a conference in New York City, referring to the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran. “We need to get a lot more data in.”

Businesses could pull back

If the Iran war drags on for months, it could torpedo business confidence, which could lead companies to invest and hire less, said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide Financial.

“When there is an injection of new uncertainty into the business environment ... that’s a hit to confidence,” she said.

The result could be similar to the impact of Trump’s tariffs, which did not raise prices as much as many economists feared, but did appear to weigh on job gains. Hiring in 2025 was the weakest, outside of a recession, since 2002.

Author

From A1

“Convergence of Destiny: Beacon of Hope, Episode III,” the final installment of his trilogy, is set to be published in August. Protagonist Dr. Tricia Carling will be tested more than she’s ever been to save her city of Crystal Bay as her alter ego, Beacon — but not without the help of fellow heroes she’s met throughout her journey in the first two books.

“There’s a convergence of many

themes throughout the books,” Hallett said. “On power, and the abuse of it, and when that line is crossed in the pursuit of the greater good.”

Hallett graduated from Southern Cayuga High School in 1982 and raised his three children in Wisconsin. They then moved to California for his engineering career, settling down in the Bay Area in 1994.

Hallett’s oldest daughter, who graduated with a minor in literature, helps her father with his editing and review process.

“She was my gut check,” he said with a laugh. “In the beginning I asked her if this was worth my time or if I should just give up, and she was adamant that I don’t.”

The series’ full-page illustrations, designed by Jessica Nagel, are loosely based on the comic books Hallett grew up reading.

“Working with my illustrator has been one of the joyful parts of doing these book projects,” he said. “The illustrations really make the books special.”

While sci-fi is his favorite genre to read and write, Hallett is also

interested in fantasy literature. He’s already toying with the idea of a novel focused on dragons.

“I love dragons,” he said, referencing Dragon’s Trove Press, the online brand he cofounded with a family friend. It features a mythical webpage where his works are listed for sale on multiple platforms.

“We wanted to create something unlike commercial publishers,” Hallett said.

The website’s motto is “for the passionate, not necessarily the professional.”

Hallett said the passion he still has for writing — the same feeling he pursued in his adolescence — is what has led him to become a published author.

“My advice to any kid who’s thinking about writing a story, but doubts if it was worth it, is to write for yourself and about what inspires you,” Hallett said.

“If you write something authentically, audiences will find it.”

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