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• **INSIDE:**
Burrow's 525 yards, 4 TDs power Bengals past Ravens 41-21.
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COVID-19 variant disrupts holiday travel

By BRYAN GALLION and PAUL WISEMAN
Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The latest COVID-19 variant is upending holiday plans for tens of thousands of travelers — but it didn't do much damage to holiday shopping.

Airlines canceled hundreds more flights Sunday, citing staffing problems tied to COVID-19, as the nation's travel woes extended beyond Christmas, with no clear indication when normal schedules would resume.

But shoppers shrugged off the omicron variant, and holiday sales rose at the fastest pace in 17 years, according to one spending measure.

Omicron is likely to slow the economy's unexpectedly strong rebound from last year's coronavirus recession by disrupting travel and discouraging some consumers from venturing out.

The variant could also add more heat to already simmering inflation by forcing shutdowns at factories and ports, delaying shipments and driving up prices.

"A full reopening of the U.S. economy will be delayed yet again," said Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, a trade group of financial firms.

But it's not yet clear how deep the hurt will go or how long it will last.

For now, the variant is playing havoc with travel. More than 1,100 flights entering, leaving or flying within the U.S. were called off, according to the flight-tracking website FlightAware.

That figure was up from nearly 1,000 on Saturday. About 130 flights were already canceled for Monday.

Delta, United, JetBlue and American have blamed omicron for staffing shortages that forced cancellations.

"This was unexpected," United spokesperson Maddie King said of the variant's effect on staffing.

Globally, airlines scrapped more than 2,700 flights as of Sunday evening, nearing the more than 2,800 cancellations the day before, FlightAware's data showed. The site does not say why flights were canceled.

JetBlue scrapped 11% of its flights Sunday. Delta and United both canceled 5%, according to FlightAware. The three airlines canceled more than 10% of their scheduled flights on Saturday.

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Outgoing Commerce head getting back to business

By LINDA HARRIS
Staff writer

STUEBENVILLE — Come New Year's Day, Tricia Maple-Damewood knows things are going to be a lot different.

After seven years of brainstorming ways to nurture small businesses in Jefferson County, she's leaving her job as president of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce to focus on her family's own business ventures — husband Dave's company, Maple Manufacturing in Weirton; their first Airbnb, the Inn at Brandywine; and another they're developing, Juanita's Place, as well as doing marketing consults for a small list of clients.

"I still own two small businesses with my husband," Maple said. "I really loved my job with the chamber, it was hard to leave, but I knew I had to get back to my businesses. I kind of took this job to keep us afloat and moving forward when we needed somebody, but I really did love doing it."

Maple was chairman of the chamber board when she took the job as president.



PROUD, THANKFUL — The Outgoing Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce President Tricia Maple-Damewood said she's proud of what she was able to accomplish in her seven years at the helm, but "there's a time to leave and this is my time..."

Pope's 3 key words for a marriage: 'Please, thanks, sorry'

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

ROME — Pope Francis sought Sunday to encourage married couples, acknowledging that the pandemic has aggravated some family problems but urging couples to seek help and always remember three key words in a marriage: "Please, thanks and sorry."

Francis penned a letter to married couples that was released Sunday, a Catholic feast day commemorating Jesus' family. It came halfway through a yearlong celebration of the family announced by Francis that is due to conclude in June with a big family rally in Rome.

Speaking at his studio window Sunday, Francis said he intended the letter to be his "Christmas present to married couples." He urged them to keep having children to fight the "demographic winter" which, in Italy, has led to one of the lowest birthrates in the world.

"Maybe we aren't born into an exceptional, problem-free family, but our family is our story — everyone has to think: It's my story," he said.

"They are our roots: If we cut them, life dries up!"

In the letter, Francis said lockdowns and quarantines had forced families to spend more time together.

Despite supply issues and omicron, holiday sales rise 8.5%

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
AP Business Writers

Holiday sales rose at the fastest pace in 17 years, even as shoppers grappled with higher prices, product shortages and a raging new COVID-19 variant in the last few weeks of the season, according to one spending measure.

Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all kinds of payments including cash and debit cards, reported Sunday that holiday sales had risen 8.5% from a year earlier. Mastercard SpendingPulse had expected an 8.8% increase.

The results, which covered Nov. 1 through Dec. 24, were fueled by purchases of clothing and jewelry.

Holiday sales were up 10.7% compared with the pre-pandemic 2019 holiday period.

By category, clothing rose 47%, jewelry 32%, electronics 16%. Online sales were up 11% from a year ago and 61% from 2019. Department stores registered a 21% increase over 2020.




After omicron hit, some consumers stayed home and shifted their spending to e-commerce -- but sales stayed strong. "I feel really good about how the season played out," said Steve Sadove, senior adviser to Mastercard and former CEO of Saks Inc. "When people feel a little bit uncomfortable, you'll see a little bit of a pickup in online and a little bit of a slowdown in store performance."

A broader picture will be revealed next month when the National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, comes out with its combined two-month results in mid-January.

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A friend, indeed
Prior to the holidays, members of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department loaded toys, bicycles and other Christmas gifts into a truck for distribution to local children in need. The items were collected by members of Crossroads North River Church as part of its Toys for Toronto program.

<p>INSIDE TODAY</p>  <p>Space telescope launched on daring quest to behold 1st stars Page 2A</p>  <p>Tutu, South Africa's foe of apartheid, dies at 90 Page 3A</p>	<p>SOUND OFF</p> <p>Today's question is: Is your voter registration up to date?</p> <p>Sunday's question: Have you donated blood during the holidays?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 4% No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 96%</p> <p>Log onto heraldstaronline.com before 9 p.m. today to cast your vote.</p>	<p>INDEX</p> <p>12 pages, 2 sections</p> <p>Classified 5-6B Police 2A Lotteries 3A Obituaries 3A Opinion 4A Sports 1-2B</p> <p>Serving Steubenville and the Tri-State Area since 1806</p>  <p>7 48445 73010 5</p>
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Travel

Mason Herlocker waited Sunday at Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey to pick up his girlfriend, who was coming in from Paris. Her flight was delayed for four hours.

It took her five hours to get a COVID-19 test the day before to enter the U.S. She's visiting for three weeks, and Herlocker said he fears that she will get stuck here if she doesn't have a negative test result before trying to return home to France.

Worried about his parents getting sick, Herlocker recently got a booster shot and encouraged others to get theirs, too. He said he doesn't believe an end to the pandemic is in sight.

"I'm of the opinion that this is the new normal," Herlocker said. "I don't foresee (the virus) going away any time soon."

Aneesh Abhyankar flew in from Atlanta on Sunday and was waiting for a flight to India.

Neither of his flights was delayed or canceled, but he said news of the omicron variant encouraged him to push up his travels to ensure he could get to his destination. He said face masks and vaccines are likely to become ingrained in everyday life for the foreseeable future.

"I don't think we have much to worry about if we take all the precautions, and I think we will be entering a situation where we just live with" the virus, he said.

Despite omicron, American



Associated Press

DELAYS — Travelers queue up for shuttle buses to rent a car lots at Denver International Airport Sunday in Denver. Airlines cancelled hundreds of flights Sunday, citing staffing problems tied to COVID-19 to extend the nation's travel problems beyond Christmas.

consumers appeared undaunted. Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all kinds of payments, including cash and debit cards, reported Sunday that holiday sales had risen 8.5% from a year earlier, the biggest annual gain in 17 years. Mastercard SpendingPulse had expected an 8.8% increase.

The results, which covered Nov. 1 through Dec. 24, were fueled by purchases of clothing and jewelry. Holiday sales were up 10.7% compared with the pre-pandemic 2019 holiday period.

After omicron hit, some consumers shifted their spending to e-commerce, but sales stayed strong.

"I feel really good about how the season played out," said Steve Sadove, senior adviser to Mastercard and former CEO of Saks Inc. "When people feel a little bit uncomfortable, you'll see a little bit of a pickup in online and a little bit of a slowdown in store performance."

Sadove said consumers are "learning to live" with what COVID-19 throws at them.

"You're coming out of 2021

with quite a bit of consumer momentum," he said.

Also Sunday, the nation's top infectious disease doctor acknowledged that he was frustrated with the limited supply of COVID-19 tests.

Demand for tests has risen amid the omicron surge. "We've obviously got to do better," Dr. Anthony Fauci said in an interview that aired Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

"I think things will improve greatly as we get into January, but that doesn't help us today and tomorrow," Fauci said.

Fauci said he was pleased with evidence that omicron causes less severe illness for most people. But he warned against complacency because the rapid spread of the disease could "override a real diminution in severity," because so many more people could get infected.

There are still many questions about how bad the omicron surge will be in the U.S., Johns Hopkins infectious disease specialist Dr. Amesh Adalja said Sunday.

"There are multiple signals showing decreased severity. But the problem is, we have many high-risk individuals that are not vaccinated in some parts of the country. And there are hospitals in those regions that already are dealing with a lot of delta patients," Adalja said.

Meanwhile in Europe, France recorded more than 100,000 virus infections in a single day for the first time in the pandemic. COVID-19 hospitalizations have doubled over the past month as omicron complicates the French government's efforts to stave off a new lockdown. The country's overall death toll stands at more than 122,000.

President Emmanuel Macron's government planned emergency meetings for Monday to discuss the next steps. Some scientists and educators have urged delaying the post-holiday return to school or suggested re-imposing a curfew.

Business

"Nonprofits don't have a big budget to pay people so it's always tough," she said. "We didn't get a lot of applicants."

She'd been involved with chambers of commerce before, and when she came back to Jefferson County in the 1990s served as membership coordinator for about five years. She also chaired the special events committee for about 10 years as a volunteer, working a lot on the golf outing, annual dinner and investor-to-investor trade fair. After that she served as board chair for two years before accepting the president's job.

"Dave and I have always been small business owners, so it was always a good fit," she said. "I've always been passionate about the chamber because I've always been a small business owner."

As president, Maple said she "saw a lot of potential. I thought we could be doing a lot more, maybe be a little more trendy and more relevant."

"I created a lot of the work, because me, the volunteers and staff were just so excited, just thinking of new things all the time, from little things like networking to things

we'd never done before, like having a theme at our annual dinner. I was lucky to always have a staff that was passionate" about small business.

"When I started, I had two people new to the chamber world — Joy Grimm and Janet McLaughlin — and they were just as excited as I was, excited to get things extremely organized, extremely streamlined, and create a fun, informative, enjoyable chamber for our business community. It was a lot of work, but I like to think we got a lot done."

Maple said she "honestly can't say enough" about the two of them: Grimm started a couple of months after she did, McLaughlin was there when she took over but still relatively new.

"The three of us were determined to make the chamber fun and interesting and a useful business tool," she added. "A lot of things still in place were born during those years."

Because she's a small business owner, Maple has always been extremely passionate about promoting "buy local and shop where you live."

"One of the things we've focused on is the

whole 'shift-your-shopping' campaign, we've done so many events to educate people about how important it is to spend money locally," Maple said. "We started a whole list of things that happen at the holidays — the receipt contest, Small Business Saturday activities, social media campaigns pertaining to holiday shopping, our parade float encouraging people to support the 'Buy Local' efforts."

But buying local isn't just important at the holidays, she said.

"Last year we launched ohiovalley.shopwhereilive.com (to) let our members sell online," she said. "Often what happens in the small business community is they're so busy running their businesses (they don't have time to grow their own websites) so it's a really big perk for a lot of our members. Even businesses that have their own website can put up a storefront with links to their site, it lets them put up a storefront and links to that site and shows the community what they have to offer. To me, Shop Where You Live is what the chamber is all about — it lets local businesses promote

themselves easily, affordably and efficiently."

She's also proud of the workforce training and education committee they created, which brings together people from business and education "so that we can work on finding quality employees and getting students on the right career paths and ensuring that they can get the education and training that our local employers need."

"The chamber board room was literally almost standing room only for some of these meetings pre-COVID and now we are back on track with one of our big goals being a countywide job fair in the fall of 2022," she added.

Maple's been working with the chamber's next president, Kate Sedgmer, for the past month.

"It's a really good transition, we think a lot alike," Maple said. "But it's like I'm handing my baby, my puppy, off to somebody. It's tough, mostly because there was a lot we couldn't get done before I left. I had a lot of ideas, but all you can do is tell yourself, 'I did my best' and hand it off. Obviously, the new person can do their thing. All you

can do with a non-profit is leave it in a little better shape than you found it and hope the next person can build on what you got done, because you're not going to have the same goals."

Maple said she's leaving Sedgmer with an organization that's "very organized, and I'm proud of that, and, financially, it's in good shape. I'd hand those two things off to anybody in any organization."

But she admits she's

"really, really going to miss the people, the friendships and the business relationships, from the giant employers to the little mom-and-pops."

"I still didn't get everything done I wanted to get done," she concedes. "You just have to eventually pick a day and say, 'I'm going to be done' and walk away. I have a new idea every day of the week and that's not good. There's a time to leave and this is my time to leave."

NEW AT THE LIBRARY

New books on CD available at the Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County include:

- **Forgotten in Death** by J.D. Robb — The body had been left in a dumpster like so much trash, the victim a woman of no fixed address, known for offering paper flowers in return for spare change and for keeping the cops informed of any infractions she witnessed on the street. But the notebook where she scribbled her intel on litterers and other such offenders is nowhere to be found. Then Eve is summoned away to a nearby building site to view more remains — in this case decades old, adorned with gold jewelry and fine clothing—unearthed by recent construction work.
- **Dear Santa** by Debbie Macomber — Lindy Carmichael isn't feeling particularly joyful when she returns home to Wenatchee, Washington, for Christmas. The man she thought was the one has cheated on her with her best friend, and she feels completely devoid of creativity in her graphic-design job. Not even carolers or Christmas cookies can cheer her up but Lindy's mother, Ellen, remembers an old tradition that might lift her daughter's spirits.
- **No One Goes Alone** by Erik Larson — A group of researchers sets sail for the Isle of Dorn in the North Atlantic in 1905 to explore the cause of several mysterious disappearances, most notably a family of four who vanished without a trace after a week-long holiday on the island. Led by Professor James, a prominent member of the Society for Psychical Research, they begin to explore the island's sole cottage and surrounding landscape in search of a logical explanation.
- **Last Girl Ghosted** by Lisa Unger — Believing she had found true love on a dating app, a young woman is shocked when her lover intentionally disappears and she discovers many other girls who also thought they were in love with the same man.

BOOKMOBILE

Here is this week's schedule for the Bookmobile operated by the Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County:

- Today**
Bridgeview Apartments, 11 a.m.
Sienna Skilled Care
- Tuesday**
River's Landing Apt., Brilliant, noon
- Wednesday**
In-service day
Mingo Senior Center, 1:30 p.m.
- Thursday**
December 30, Library Closed
- Friday**
December 31, Library Closed

Marriage

But he noted that such enforced togetherness at times tested the patience of parents and siblings alike and in some cases led to real difficulties.

"Pre-existing problems were aggravated, creating conflicts that in some cases became almost unbearable. Many even experienced the breakup of a relationship," Francis wrote.

He offered his closeness to those families and reminded parents that the breakup of a marriage is particularly hard on children, who look to their

parents as a constant source of stability, love, trust and strength.

"The breakdown of a marriage causes immense suffering, since many hopes are dashed, and misunderstandings can lead to arguments and hurts not easily healed," he said.

"Children end up having to suffer the pain of seeing their parents no longer together."

He urged parents to keep seeking help to try to overcome conflicts, including through prayer. "Remember also that

forgiveness heals every wound," he said.

He repeated a refrain he has often used when meeting with families and married couples, listing the three most important words in a marriage: "Please, thanks and sorry."

Picking up the theme in his remarks to tourists and passers-by in St. Peter's Square, Francis said a failure to make peace before going to bed at night can lead to a "cold war" the next morning.

"How many times, unfortunately, conflicts

originate within the domestic walls due to prolonged periods of silence and from unchecked selfishness!" he said. "Sometimes it even ends up in physical and moral violence. This lacerates harmony and kills the family."

He urged families to put down their cellphones at the dinner table and talk. "It's sad to see a family at lunch, each one with his or her own cell phone not speaking to one another, everyone talking to the mobile phone," he said.

Sales

The results will be based on an analysis of the November and December sales figures from the Commerce Department.

Analysts will also be dissecting the fourth-quarter financial results from different retailers that are slated to be released in February.

Overall, analysts had expected a strong holiday season, fueled by early shopping that started

back in October in anticipation of a product shortage. Consumers were also determined to celebrate the holidays after a muted one a year ago. Still, November saw a slowdown in retail sales, in part because of the early shopping. And omicron, which has fast become the dominant version of the virus in the United States, has now spoiled holiday plans for many Americans who have had

to cancel gatherings last minute.

The National Retail Federation said early in December that holiday sales were on track to beat its already record-breaking forecasts for an increase of 8.5% to 10.5% compared to the year-ago period.

Holiday sales increased 8.2% in 2020 when shoppers, locked down during the early part of the pandemic,

plunged on pajamas and home goods, mostly online.

The group expects that online and other non-store sales, which are included in the total, will increase between 11% and 15%.

The numbers exclude automobile dealers, gasoline stations and restaurants.

Holiday sales have averaged gains of 4.4% over the past five years, according to the group.

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