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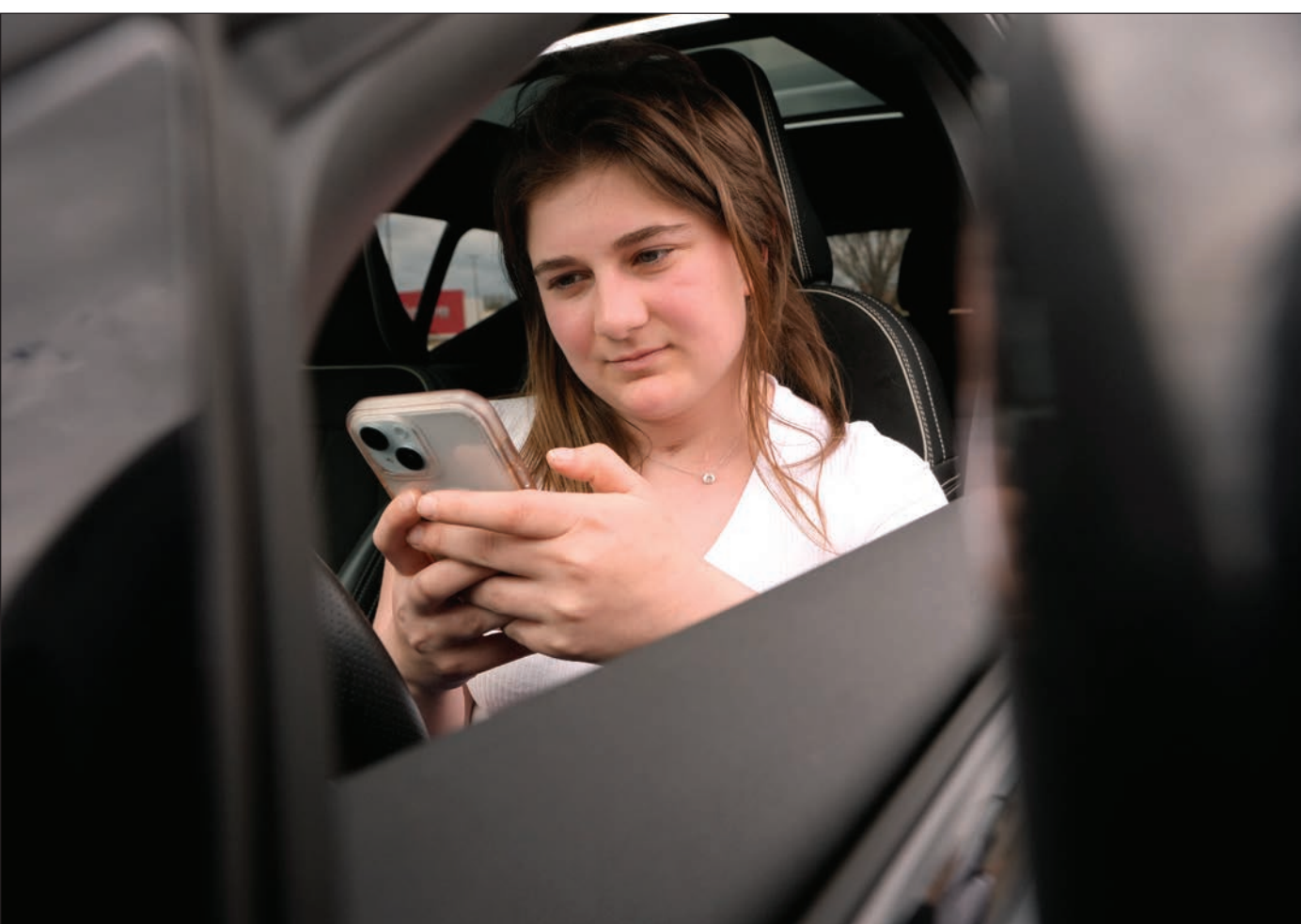
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AP Photo/Steven Senne

Alexis Bogan, whose speech was impaired by a brain tumor, uses an AI powered smartphone app to create a audible drink order at a Starbucks drive-thru on Monday, April 29, in Lincoln. The app converts her typed entries into a verbal message created using her original voice.

Illness took away her voice; AI created a replica in her phone

By **MATT O'BRIEN**
AP Technology Writer

NORTH SMITHFIELD — The voice Alexis “Lexi” Bogan had before last summer was exuberant. She loved to belt out Taylor Swift and Zach Bryan ballads in the car. She laughed all the time — even while corralling misbehaving preschoolers or debating politics with friends over a backyard fire pit. In high school, she was a soprano in the chorus. Then that voice was gone. Doctors in August removed a life-threatening tumor lodged near the back of her brain. When the breathing tube came out a month later, Bogan had trouble swallowing and strained to say “hi” to her parents. Months of rehabilitation aided her recovery, but her speech

is still impaired. Friends, strangers and her own family members struggle to understand what she is trying to tell them. In April, the 21-year-old got her old voice back. Not the real one, but a voice clone generated by artificial intelligence that she can summon from a phone app. Trained on a 15-second time capsule of her teenage voice — sourced from a cooking demonstration video she recorded for a high school project — her synthetic but remarkably real-sounding AI voice can now say almost anything she wants. She types a few words or sentences into her phone and the app instantly reads it aloud. “Hi, can I please get a grande iced brown sugar oat milk shaken espresso,” said Bogan’s AI voice as she held the phone out her car’s

window at a Starbucks drive-thru. Experts have warned that rapidly improving AI voice-cloning technology can amplify phone scams, disrupt democratic elections and violate the dignity of people — living or dead — who never consented to having their voice recreated to say things they never spoke. It’s been used to produce deep-fake robocalls to New Hampshire voters mimicking President Joe Biden. In Maryland, authorities recently charged a high school athletic director with using AI to generate a fake audio clip of the school’s principal making racist remarks. But Bogan and a team of doctors at Rhode Island’s Lifespan hospital group believe they’ve found a use that justifies the risks. Bogan is one

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Local student chosen for Future Cancer Scholars program

By **JON BAKER**
jbaker@pawtuckettimes.com

LINCOLN — Kaylyn Woods had been sitting in her Bio-Manufacturing Technology class at Davies Tech one day last month when she received an email that she says will change her life. That’s when the Central Falls resident learned she had been selected to partake in the prestigious Rhode Island Future Generation of Cancer Scholars Program, a distinguished initiative of the Lifespan Cancer Institute, Brown Cancer Center and Papitto Opportunity Connection. “I was so excited; I was just looking through my cellphone during a break in class and I saw an email from Annabelle Neville, the scholars program coordinator,” said Woods, a mere sophomore. “I



Kaylyn Woods

opened it and it said I’d been accepted. I went, ‘Oh!’ out loud, and I was completely shocked. I then called my mom and she said, ‘Honey, I’m so proud of you!’ “The more I thought about it, I still can’t believe it, but I can, too,” she added. “I just signed up one day and hoped for the best. I didn’t know what

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City teen accused of using gun in robbery of vaping device

By **RUSS OLIVO**
Contributing Writer

WOONSOCKET — Police say a 19-year-old threatened another teenager with a handgun just to steal his vaping devices and \$10 worth of marijuana. Hayden Collard of 385 Village Road is now facing charges that include first-degree armed robbery, a serious felony. He’s also

charged with obstructing police and resisting arrest. Collard has been ordered held without bail at the Adult Correctional Institutions after an appearance in Sixth District Court on May 13, the judiciary’s web site says. He’s also held without bail on accusations of violating the terms of his release on

See **GUN**, page A3

Sen. Bob Menendez’s corruption trial begins, his second in the last decade

NEW YORK (AP) — Sen Bob Menendez, a Democrat, went on trial in Manhattan federal court Monday, accused of accepting bribes of gold and cash to use his influence to deliver favors that would help three New Jersey businessmen. Menendez, 70, sat with his lawyers and listened as Judge Sidney H. Stein told several dozen prospective jurors about the charges against Menendez and two of the businessmen. The judge told them the “sitting U.S. senator from the state of New Jersey” had been charged

in a conspiracy in which he allegedly “agreed to accept bribes and accepted bribes.” After he warned them that the trial was expected to last up to seven weeks, Stein let jurors raise their hands if they believed they could not serve for that length of time. Then, he took them one at a time into a separate room to ask them why. Menendez, wearing a suit with a red tie, was dropped off in front of a Manhattan federal courthouse at 8:15 a.m., forty minutes before former President Donald Trump’s motorcade passed by

on its way across the street to state court, where he is on trial for allegedly falsifying business records to hide hush money payments to a porn actor before the 2016 election. He did not speak to reporters who were kept behind barricades as he entered a security pavilion where everyone entering the courthouse is scanned. Menendez is on trial with two of the businessmen who allegedly paid him bribes — real estate developer Fred Daibes and Wael Hana. All three have pleaded not guilty. A third businessman

has pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against the other defendants. The senator’s wife is also charged, but her trial is delayed until at least July. Opening statements were possible, but unlikely, before Tuesday for a trial that has already sent the senator’s political stature tumbling. After charges were announced in September, he was forced out of his powerful post as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The three-term senator has announced he will not be seeking reelection on the Democratic

ticket this fall, although he has not ruled out running as an independent. It is the second corruption trial for Menendez in the last decade. The previous prosecution on unrelated charges ended with a deadlocked jury in 2017. In the new case, prosecutors say the senator’s efforts on behalf of the businessmen led him to take actions benefitting the governments of Egypt and Qatar. Menendez has denied doing anything unusual in his

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Americans getting more sleep
Most of us are getting more sleep but it may not mean quality rest
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POLICE LOG

WOONSOCKET – The following arrests were logged by the Woonsocket Police Department, May 10-13:

- Jamie L. Robinson, 261 Wood Ave., shoplifting, May 10, 12:56 p.m., 574 Diamond Hill Road
- Angel Narciso Aquí, 4 Northwest St., Milford, obstructing police, driving without a license, May 10, 1:57 p.m., 178 South Main St.
- Hayden Collard, 385 Village Road, first-degree robbery, disorderly conduct, obstructing police, May 10, 2:29 p.m., 234 Rathbun St.

- Alan Arthur Ferreira, 347 Grove St., disorderly exposure, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, May 10, 8:08 p.m., 17 Shove St.
- Melissa A. Forcier, 123 Second Ave., disorderly conduct, May 10, 8:25 p.m., 17 Shove St.
- Kristin Cataldo, 59 Pichette Blvd., domestic assault, May 10, 11:16 p.m. 59 Pichette Blvd.
- Michael J. McCoart, 81 Taunton Ave., East Providence, duty to stop resulting in damage to attended vehicle, May 11, 6:41 p.m., Dollar Tree, Park Avenue

Gun

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a prior charge of breaking and entering that occurred in April.

The alleged vape stickup occurred on May 4, according to police reports, but Collard ran from police as they were investigating the crime and wasn't picked up until May 10 by Officer Stephen Burrell, who recognized him as he was responding to an unrelated call.

Police reports say an 18-year-old male was walking home via East School and Rathbun streets shortly before 9 p.m. on May 4 when he ran into Collard, an ac-

quaintance he'd known since high school. The victim told police Collard asked for a hit on his vape, which he allowed.

Collard then put the vaping device in his own pocket, the victim told police, and the next thing he knew Collard removed a black gun from a fanny pack he was carrying, and pointing it at him. Wielding the handgun, Collard allegedly demanded another vaping device the victim had in his pocket and his bag of marijuana.

"Just keep walking," Collard allegedly told him.

The victim told police he went home and explained what happened to his mother. She called the police.

Follow Russ Olive on X @russolivo

Voice

Continued from page A1

of the first people — the only one with her condition — who have been able to recreate a lost voice with OpenAI's new Voice Engine. Some other AI providers, such as the startup ElevenLabs, have tested similar technology for people with speech impediments and loss — including a lawyer who now uses her voice clone in the courtroom.

"We're hoping Lexi's a trailblazer as the technology develops," said Dr. Rohaid Ali, a neurosurgery resident at Brown University's medical school and Rhode Island Hospital. Millions of people with debilitating strokes, throat cancer or neurodegenerative diseases could benefit, he said.

"We should be conscious of the risks, but we can't forget about the patient and the social good," said Dr. Fatima Mirza, another resident working on the pilot. "We're able to help give Lexi back her true voice and she's able to speak in terms that are the most true to herself."

Mirza and Ali, who are married, caught the attention of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI because of their previous research project at Lifespan using the AI chatbot to simplify medical consent forms for patients. The San Francisco compa-

ny reached out while on the hunt earlier this year for promising medical applications for its new AI voice generator.

Bogan was still slowly recovering from surgery. The illness started last summer with headaches, blurry vision and a droopy face, alarming doctors at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence. They discovered a vascular tumor the size of a golf ball pressing on her brain stem and entangled in blood vessels and cranial nerves.

"It was a battle to get control of the bleeding and get the tumor out," said pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Konstantina Svokos.

The 10-hour length of the surgery coupled with the tumor's location and severity damaged Bogan's tongue muscles and vocal cords, impeding her ability to eat and talk, Svokos said.

"It's almost like a part of my identity was taken when I lost my voice," Bogan said.

The feeding tube came out this year. Speech therapy continues, enabling her to speak intelligibly in a quiet room but with no sign she will recover the full lucidity of her natural voice.

"At some point, I was starting to forget what I sounded like," Bogan said. "I've been getting so used to how I sound now."

Whenever the phone rang at the family's home in North Smithfield, she

would push it over to her mother to take her calls. She felt she was burdening her friends whenever they went to a noisy restaurant. Her dad, who has hearing loss, struggled to understand her.

Back at the hospital, doctors were looking for a pilot patient to experiment with OpenAI's technology.

"The first person that came to Dr. Svokos' mind was Lexi," Ali said. "We reached out to Lexi to see if she would be interested, not knowing what her response would be. She was game to try it out and see how it would work."

Bogan had to go back a few years to find a suitable recording of her voice to "train" the AI system on how she spoke. It was a video in which she explained how to make a pasta salad.

Her doctors intentionally fed the AI system just a 15-second clip. Cooking sounds make other parts of the video imperfect. It was also all that OpenAI needed — an improvement over previous technology requiring much lengthier samples.

They also knew that getting something useful out of 15 seconds could be vital for any future patients who have no trace of their voice on the internet. A brief voicemail left for a relative might have to suffice.

When they tested it for the first time, everyone was stunned by the quality of the voice clone. Occasion-

al glitches — a mispronounced word, a missing intonation — were mostly imperceptible. In April, doctors equipped Bogan with a custom-built phone app that only she can use.

"I get so emotional every time I hear her voice," said her mother, Pamela Bogan, tears in her eyes.

"I think it's awesome that I can have that sound again," added Lexi Bogan, saying it helped "boost my confidence to somewhat where it was before all this happened."

She now uses the app about 40 times a day and sends feedback she hopes will help future patients. One of her first experiments was to speak to the kids at the preschool where she works as a teaching assistant. She typed in "ha ha ha ha" expecting a robotic response. To her surprise, it sounded like her old laugh.

She's used it at Target and Marshall's to ask where to find items. It's helped her reconnect with her dad. And it's made it easier for her to order fast food.

Bogan's doctors have started cloning the voices of other willing Rhode Island patients and hope to bring the technology to hospitals around the world. OpenAI said it is treading cautiously in expanding the use of Voice Engine, which is not yet publicly available.

A number of smaller AI startups already sell voice-cloning services to entertainment studios or

make them more widely available. Most voice-generation vendors say they prohibit impersonation or abuse, but they vary in how they enforce their terms of use.

"We want to make sure that everyone whose voice is used in the service is consenting on an ongoing basis," said Jeff Harris, OpenAI's lead on the product. "We want to make sure that it's not used in political contexts. So we've taken an approach of being very limited in who we're giving the technology to."

Harris said OpenAI's next step involves developing a secure "voice authentication" tool so that users can replicate only their own voice. That might be "limiting for a patient like Lexi, who had sudden loss of her speech capabilities," he said. "So we do think that we'll need to have high-trust relationships, especially with medical providers, to give a little bit more unfettered access to the technology."

Bogan has impressed

her doctors with her focus on thinking about how the technology could help others with similar or more severe speech impediments.

"Part of what she has done throughout this entire process is think about ways to tweak and change this," Mirza said. "She's been a great inspiration for us."

While for now she must fiddle with her phone to get the voice engine to talk, Bogan imagines an AI voice engine that improves upon older remedies for speech recovery — such as the robotic-sounding electrolarynx or a voice prosthesis — in melding with the human body or translating words in real time.

She's less sure about what will happen as she grows older and her AI voice continues to sound like she did as a teenager. Maybe the technology could "age" her AI voice, she said.

For now, "even though I don't have my voice fully back, I have something that helps me find my voice again," she said.

Chosen

Continued from page A1

my chances were because obviously there are a lot of highly-motivated students out there, but then I figured, 'Hey, I've worked hard, too.'"

The RIFGCS program is a highly-competitive, mentored, six-week summer internship designed to cultivate the next generation of cancer scholars. Woods will have the opportunity to shadow leading cancer clinicians and scientists at renowned institutions such as Rhode Island, The Miriam and Hasbro Children's hospitals.

Additionally, she will gain hands-on experience in cutting-edge laboratory research facilities at the Lifespan Cancer Institute.

Selected students, including Woods, will be employed by Lifespan and will receive an hourly wage throughout the duration. This premier opportunity was extended to only 20 students in the Providence area, making Woods' acceptance a special — and remarkable — achievement.

"One of my goals in this program is to gain more experience," she said. "I want to see the process of how advances are made in cancer research. I want to discover how they have optimized the process."

Woods explained she developed an intense interest in medicine back in middle school because of

her mom, who is a nurse at Brigham's & Women's Hospital in Boston.

"It all starts with her; whenever she came home, she would tell me about the kind of patients she had and what she did to help them, and I found that really interesting," she said.

"She definitely seemed to be a health care worker who cares, and she still is. She treats her patients like they're really people. I like how she makes her job not one standard role of patient-doctor.

"With her, it's more like the relationship is two people and one trying to help solve the issues of another," she continued. "I want to be someone who can help solve someone's problems, but still form a bond with them. I want to make sure they know they're not alone in what they're doing."

"I want to be not only their doctor but also nurse, friend, listener, helper; I think that's what a good nurse does. Mom tells me about her interactions with certain patients, and that she forms really good bonds with them. She talks to them as if they were family, especially if they don't have family of their own. She's there for them through and through, and I really admire that."

"I've noticed some health professionals who keep it at one level, the bond, where you really feel uncomfortable telling a doctor things, like you're just another patient.

It's like they're saying, 'You're just the patient. I'm the doctor.' My mom isn't like that, and I definitely wouldn't be, either."

The funny thing is, Woods isn't majoring in Health Careers at Davies but Bio-Manufacturing Technology, so she's on the science side of medicine right now. That doesn't mean she's not up for learning more about research or doctoring/nursing.

Woods' selection into this program reflects her merit and underscores Davies' commitment to fostering innovation and excellence in its students, Neville said. She is the third Tech student to be selected in the past two years, as Olga Payne and Seoanne Almada — also Bio-Manufacturing Technology majors — will complete their second year in the program this summer.

Woods doubled her pleasure last week, when she discovered she also had been accepted into the Brown Pre-College Program. She had applied to Summer@Brown earlier, and now has qualified to take up to two simulta-

neous Summer@Brown courses. They will be able to self-enroll in online courses from the time courses open for enrollment until two weeks before its start date.

Jax Adele Ventura, Marketing & Communications Specialist at Davies, said Woods is currently enrolled in an AP Psychology course on-line in addition to taking a host of pre-AP classes in school.

As for the FGCS program, the orientation was scheduled for April 18, while the official start date is set for July 8; the following day, there will be a special ceremony where Woods and other selectees will receive their white lab coat and stethoscope.

"She's an outstanding young student, and we're thrilled to see Kaylyn's dedication and hard work recognized through her acceptance into the RIFGCS Program," said Davies' Principal Dr. Jose Libano. "This prestigious opportunity is a testament to her exceptional abilities and commitment to academic and professional excellence."


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