

A good conscience is a continual Christmas.

— Benjamin Franklin

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*Wishing glad tidings to you and yours*

## After North Side church sold, congregation votes to donate \$270,000



615 W. Wellington Ave.

Photo by Eric Allix Rogers, Openhouse Chicago

Earlier this year the congregation of the Wellington Ave. United Church of Christ sold its 100-year-plus-old church building in Lakeview and decided to donate about 10% of the net proceeds - \$270,000 - to non-profit social justice organizations.

In September the church building at 615 W. Wellington Ave., just west of Broadway in the Lakeview neighborhood of Chicago, was sold for \$2.85 million to Chabad of East Lakeview, a local non-profit Jewish community.

Like many congregations, Pastor Ann-Louise Haak says

that church's membership had dwindled over the last few years, and so they decided that they no longer need so much space. "As a community of faith, the members voted to use their resources to help build up their community rather than continue to maintain a building," she said.

Grants totaling \$270,000 have been allocated to 19 non-profit agencies that "feed the hungry, house the homeless, protect the environment, promote racial justice, and aid refugees and immi-

**DONATE** see p. 8

## Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer inspired by visits to Lincoln Park Zoo

BY PETER VON BUOL

Eighty-one years ago, the story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer appeared as a promotional

booklet published by the Chicago-based Montgomery Ward and Company. The story made an immediate impact on Christmas lore as the company operated more than 500 stores and had a highly-successful mail-order business.

The story of Rudolph, the little reindeer who saved Christmas, was introduced as a Christmas story by Robert Lewis May, then a copywriter for Montgomery Ward. Given the assignment while his wife, Evelyn, was dying of cancer, May had made

frequent visits to Lincoln Park Zoo as a way to provide a diversion for their daughter, Barbara.

At the time, May and his family lived at 2734 N. Mildred Ave., less than two miles from the zoo. Then, as now, admission to the zoo was free. Back then, the zoo had two species of deer with spots. Fallow deer from Europe and Axis deer, originally from India.

While Barbara enjoyed seeing all the zoo animals, deer were her favorite. Inspired by his daughter (and Hans Christian Andersen's story, *The Ugly Duckling*), May wrote Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer

**RUDOLPH** see p. 8



Robert Lewis May

## City denies helping metal shredder company move to South Side

BY PATRICK BUTLER

While the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development has reportedly begun preparing to investigate allegations of racial discrimination in General Iron's move from the Lincoln Park area to an area on E. 116th along the Calumet River on the South Side, the company is asking city and federal officials to discontinue any investigation at this point.

City officials deny they're helping the same General Iron metal shredding company that, while now shut down, still exists on Clifton Ave.

"The proposed expansion is not a relocation of General Iron's operation on N. Clifton, but an entirely distinct effort undertaken by an entirely different company," RMG officials recently told HUD. In 2019, RMG bought the assets of Lincoln Park-based

General Iron, a metal recycler and shredder and has folded it into their own operations in the new Southeast Side facility.

Now that General Iron has filed its large recycling facility permit application, the company has just a single bureaucratic hurdle to clear in its bid to shift its metal shredding operation from Lincoln Park to 11600 S. Burley Ave.

RMG - the name of the company building the new facilities - will be mostly enclosed with better safeguards than General Iron's site was. "RMG is seeking to utilize new and advanced technology," according to RMG executive John Hendricks and two city lawyers.

In the meantime, despite pleas to HUD to discontinue the investigation, some local neighborhood advocacy groups have continued

**DENIES** see p. 8

## AIDS Garden completion set for Fall 2021, 'destined to become landmark'

BY TIM HECKE

The new year may bring a long-planned AIDS memorial and park closer to completion on the lakefront near Belmont Harbor, officials said during an online meeting Dec. 21.

"We had hoped to have this project done now, but of course the pandemic took over everything," Willa Lang, executive director of the Chicago Parks Foundation, told an audience of about 50 people who logged in to the Zoom call.

A towering 30-foot rendition of artist Keith Haring's "Self-Portrait" sculpture that will serve as the AIDS Garden Chicago centerpiece was installed in late 2019, but progress on the memorial south of Belmont Harbor slowed when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived.

The state budgeted nearly \$1.5 million for the project in 2020, but funding relied on income from state revenue streams like casino gambling and video gaming that were decimated by the pandemic, said Rep. Greg Harris, the Majority Leader of the Illinois House of Representatives.

"The plan was with the implementation with these new revenue sources during the end of 2019 and the course of 2020 these projects... would be well underway by now," Harris told the group.



The Keith Haring statue "stands as a symbol of life, of survival, of celebration," said Willa Lang.

"But, as we all know, COVID came along."

Funding for the project was re-appropriated for next year's budget.

"Long story short, it's going to take a little longer than people thought to get the funding going that would support this" and similar projects, Harris said.

In a statement, State Rep. Yoni Pizer [12th] said the project is now targeted for completion in Fall 2021.

For now, Haring's statue "stands as a symbol of life, of survival, of celebration," Lang said. Ald. Tom Tunney [44th] noted the

AIDS garden will boost the largest installed copy of Haring's Self Portrait piece.

Lang said organizers plan to include rotating artworks in the garden to incorporate a diverse range of views.

"We know [the Haring sculpture] is not representative of every aspect of art and the emotions that come from within when we see art," Lang acknowledges. "We also know that this AIDS Garden Chicago is on the North Side. We want to make sure this is a garden for all."

**GARDEN** see p. 8

# Consuming bowls of Frango mints and other Christmas memories



By Thomas J. O'Gorman

Is there any place in the City of Chicago that holds some kind of extra special Christmas emotion or spirit for you? Ice skating at Saddle and Cycle?

Does some piece of our local geography contain a unique part of Christmas magic for you? Turtle soup at Binyon's?

Is there one spot that possesses the many Dickensian ghosts of Christmas past? Or is there some happy local crossroads of meaning that still looms to you out of childhood that says 'Here's your Christmas,' or 'Look what I have found.' Cuddling grandmother's chubbiness on her back porch after helping her make stuffing.

For some maybe it's the familiar aisles of the ground floor of the old State St. Marshall Field's (Macy's) that quickly catapults us back to a happy vintage Christmas. Bags filled with boxes of Frango Mints.

Or perhaps it's the candlelit interior of Holy Name Cathedral at Midnight Mass with the Cardinal, and the strains of the opening carol that lifted us towards a cozy warm heaven from our place in the pew.

Maybe it's the feel of clean flannel pajamas and the soothing sip of hot chocolate with a Candy Cane that triggers the deepest of yuletide excitement.

There's nothing quite like the pungent aroma of Christmas tree resin, balsam or pine, to instantly set in motion the opening of everything that Christmas is about. Sights, sounds, smells.

Another powerful memory that also triggers my recollection of long ago Christmas delight is

the image of the old 900 N. Michigan Ave. building, a refined vintage structure of elegance. Once home to many of the city's most prestigious physicians. Ironically, two of Chicago's most famous mayors, Ed Kelly, and Richard J. Daley, both died in the building decades apart during health check-ups. Each told they by their doctors they were just fine.

But this building was also home to the one and only Jacques French Restaurant. Jacques was an endearing place that I always associate with Christmas. Part of a restaurant empire put together by Ray Castro, an immigrant from Cuba who was a busboy at Jacques in 1930. He later was a captain at the Pump Room. With his partner Edison Dick, he turned Jacques into a magical venue, highly popular among the Gold Coast elite, luxuriating in its French cuisine.

At Jacques, in my mind's eye, it's always snowing. We're escorted to our table by the very grand French maitre d'. Everyone is 'dolled up,' a fashion term from the 1950s that meant we looked our best. Blazer jacket replete with silk handkerchief, and a great Brooks Brothers tie.

There was nothing stuffy about Jacques. Just the enchantment from the mysterious garlic and shallots that always seemed to linger in the air. Especially as an order of frog legs or escargot was carried by. It was like having our lunch in Paris, always intensified at Christmas. I remember a great leafy garden at the center of Jacques. It always expressed what a special place this was for me.

Even as a child I knew that the tables held the "Who's Who" of Chicago fame and celebrity. We were always looking for Jack Eigen, our grandmother's favorite. Jacques was homey. There was always a 'Shirley Temple' that had your name on it. My mother was more a Brandy Alexander



Christmas tree by Mrs. Gidwitz.

sipper, my Aunt Marge strictly a Daiquiri girl.

Maybe you didn't find Christmas in the excitement of any local eatery. Perhaps just being out in the cold when snow was fresh fallen, seeing the familiar local sites bathed in the contoured sparkle of the holidays was enough for some.

When I was in elementary school, I would stop in at my grandparents down the street, about 2 a.m., after singing in the choir at Midnight Mass in our parish, for an early morning feast. I can still smell the fragrance of my grandmother's fresh Irish soda bread and big mugs of strong tea. But somehow I just felt

neerer the majesty of Christmas at our holiday lunches amid the starched napkins and tablecloths of Jacques. The crunchy bread and unsalted butter putting a layer of added elegance on our happy feast.

These psychic signposts are important to us. For our mental health. And emotional vitality. We need their roosting in our memories like cousins that never know when to go home. We must have them trundling through im-

ages of the past. Fragrant, tasty and vibrantly alive.

That's how we maintain our memories. Not like some combination to a safe. Or our Social Security number. But rather like the ingredients of a treasured recipe for cassoulet, or the fixins' for a holiday Tom & Jerry. My father loved to make those.

The recollections and memories of Christmas are important. Life saving, in fact. The smaller the brushstroke, the finer the painting. This is important advice. Not from Martha Stewart, but from St. Thomas Aquinas. He wound up giving us the language and syntax to speak about God. How to describe him. And it's good advice from William Shakespeare, Jane Austen and Flannery O'Connor, too. They gave us

the vocabulary to speak of ourselves and articulate a catalogue of who we are.

The details are important. Those ice skates with double blades. That red hat with all the flowers. The time the Christmas tree fell over. Or the sweet potatoes burned. The time the car got stuck in the driveway and everybody walked to church in the snow.

Remembering is a road map on how we got here and an important component on how to complete the return journey. It's a thousand 'Silent Nights,' and a million 'Deck the Halls.' It's a lifetime of Christmas puddings and candy cane soufflés. Repeated stories

and shameful tales. Quick tempers and even quicker getaways.

But our remembering is also the fishing nets of our goodness and our unwillingness to let anything slip away forgotten, unremembered or unloved. It's a bowl of sherry'd trifle and an empty bottle of port. Slabs of stinky Stilton. Crunchy Yorkshire puddings. Vintage champagne. Spicy mince pies. Hot tamales. Turkey drumsticks and drives to grandmother's house. It's clearing the table.



Wilton Cardinal Gregory and his red socks.

Washing the dishes. Soaking the pots. And consuming bowls of fresh Frango mints.

Remembering still sees the buildings long after the wrecking ball has fallen on them. Or the tree goes up in flames. Or the last friend is gone like the last piece of pumpkin pie. Remembering revives the soul. Jumpstarts the heart and will not let up the forensic review until we have all found fresh fingerprints or our way back home. Happy Christmas.

**GREGORY-FEST:** Washington DC's new Cardinal, Chicago South Sider **Wilton Cardinal Gregory**, has always been a fastidious dresser. So no one should have been surprised when he appeared in traditional scarlet socks when getting his red hat from Pope Francis. Some cardinals have discarded the sock tradition of late. But not him. He may have worn a COVID mask, but he also had his red socks on.

**THE CHRISTMAS STAR:** A match made in the heavens, Jupiter and Saturn side by side for the first time since 1623. A happy sign in the cosmos.

**YULETIDE TREES:** Chicago is awash in elegant and creative domestic Christmas trees transforming the everyday urban terrain with grandeur and nobility. Thanks for all your creative efforts transforming the pandemic. They lift our spirits.

**NEW EPISCOPAL BISHOP:** The Reverend Canon **Paula E. Clark** of the Diocese of Washington, DC, has just been unanimously elected the first African American Female Bishop of Chicago. She will take her post in

MEMORIES see p. 4

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# Letting your inner Grinch shine

Handmade Grinch masks are cute as Cindy Lou Who



Heart of the 'Hood

by Felicia Dechter

It's been a horrible, terrible, no good, very bad, year.

At this time in 2019, we were still living in joyful and ignorant bliss, with no idea what was lurking around the corner. We were partying hearty, raising our glasses with unbridled holiday enthusiasm and munching on hand-decorated sugar cookies and figgy pudding and all the other goodies that abound.

We could still gorge ourselves at our favorite restaurant. We could take the kids and grandkids to the theater and see enchanting shows like "Eleanor's Very Merry Christmas Wish." And if someone would have mentioned the word Fauci, we would have stared at them, perplexed, and asked, seriously, What's a Fauci?

It's stunning to see how much of what we loved we have lost in the last year, but yet for some of us it's not been the worst of times either. Although we may not be able to celebrate with many of our loved ones and hold them close, others have lost so much more.

Our motto for the New Year should be, "Yes, it could always be worse."

Still, we all could use a pinch of Christmas cheer. But it's at the expense of that hairy green, pot-bellied, feline-faced, cynical Christmas-hating creature with a heart two sizes too small....The Grinch.

Cheer, you may ask? The Grinch is spreading happiness? Huh?

Believe it or not, yes. Well, sort of. Indirectly. It's not exactly the Grinch, but Rogers Parker Noelle Thomas is using the Big Mean Green Machine to put smiles on people's faces with her handmade Grinch masks, which come complete with a furry chartreuse beard.

I bought one (they're only \$18 and all materials are USA made!) to give to my friend of nearly a half-century who has had a lot to deal with lately. On Sunday, I brought it to her house. It put a gigantic, ear-to-ear grin on her face. She can't wait to see the reactions when she wears it out to walk her dogs.

Thomas, a Jefferson Award-winning set and costume designer, studied her craft at Northwestern Univ. and has designed scenery and attire for theaters including DePaul Opera Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, TimeLine Theatre Company, Teatro Luna, and many more. Among other things, she has done assistant designing in New York on international tours and pre-Broadway productions. Once upon a time she created



Noelle Thomas with her handmade Grinch mask.

windows for Marshall Field's.

Thomas has also worked as a product developer for the Bradford Exchange/Ashton Drake. Besides her theatrical work, she also designs and creates floral for large-scale events and that has led to her being magazine and internet featured.

Her introduction to mask making came while working with a group comprised of freshly-unemployed theatre artists. Artists Resource Mobilization (artistsresourcemobilization.org) was organized by Thomas's costume designer friend, and like many similar groups that came together at that time, they began sewing masks for front line workers who faced shortages of PPE.

"Friends and family who saw my work began asking about masks for themselves, and as I sewed masks for them I thought, well, if we have to wear masks, they may as well be fun!" said Thomas. "I invested in fun fabrics, turned our guest room into a cutting and sewing room and my husband built a website for me to help organize the growing popularity of my new found occupation."

So if you must let your inner Grinch out, here's how to do it in style. More info on Thomas -- and the masks -- below. I thank her for making this mad, mad world a little merrier and for taking the time to talk. I know she has been as busy as one of Santa's elves while cranking out masks.

Here's wishing Thomas, the Grinch, and everyone else a peaceful, safe, and very Merry Christmas.

**Q:** How much fun are you having making Grinch masks?

**A:** The popularity of the Grinch mask has been a holiday surprise for me and a fun challenge to assemble.

I usually associate the grumpy character with a pretty negative view on things, but when I thought about how his story ends, not only the joy he finds, but the joy of the people, the Who's, and how they welcomed him into their community, and continue their celebration amid the loss, it seemed a perfect fit for this year. We as a community have gone out of our way to help each other, from a simple wave to a neighbor to running errands for those who cannot and of course wearing masks to keep us all safe.

It has also been fun to meet new people who picked up their masks, have a quick chat and see their smiling eyes.

The line from the animated film that jumps out for me -- especially now that we're all online shopping for just about everything!! -- is, "Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store, Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more."

**Q:** What are the masks made of?

**A:** They're made from materials all sourced from small businesses in the USA.

As businesses shuttered initial-

ly this became very important to me, to find supplies from people who needed the business. They're made of 100% cotton fabrics, with aluminum nose wires and options for adjustable elastic ear loops, cloth ties, or cloth ties with toggles. The green fur is synthetic, (and much like a beloved pet, "sheds" green fuzz everywhere while I'm working with it).

**Q:** Tell me about your background working in the theater?

**A:** I am a set and costume designer, I also teach theatre and film design courses at The Theatre School at De Paul Univ. I have always approached designing sets and costumes with the perspective of how can this space or clothing tell the audience more about the characters without using a single word. The power of imagery and non discursive communication is the essence of stage design and I feel this approach carries over into mask making.

I have always loved sewing ever since my Mom taught me how to use the sewing machine.

**"I usually associate the grumpy character with a pretty negative view on things, but when I thought about how his story ends, not only the joy he finds, but the joy of the people, the Who's, and how they welcomed him into their community, and continue their celebration amid the loss, it seemed a perfect fit for this year," says Noelle Thomas.**

Theatre was one of the first industries to take a hit. In March I was in the midst of the final tech rehearsals for an opera I had designed scenery. It was cancelled just as we concluded our final rehearsal, the night before it was scheduled to open. Everyone I know who is in the entertainment industry had lost their jobs seemingly overnight. We are a resourceful bunch and many of



This columnist's lifelong friend Debbie, and her dogs, can't wait to show off their spirit-lifting holiday fashions.

us transitioned our skills into new employment but our hearts remain in the theatre and look forward to when we can safely return to creating it.

**Q:** We all need some cheer these days. How does it feel to be making something that makes one smile?

**A:** I think this is the best part! This year has brought so many challenges to so many people, the introduction to wearing masks came as quite a shock for most of us who are not used to wearing masks, myself included. As the masks went out to customers, the feedback came in, sometimes accompanied by photos of families, friends, neighbors and strangers fully masked up, and even though I couldn't see it, I know they're smiling. I can see their smiling eyes.

All because of a mask with a fun fabric that reflects their individuality, brightened their day and gave them a reason to smile, even if just for a moment.

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## Takeout from The Walnut Room, a new Chicago holiday tradition?

BY CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM

The Marshall Field & Co. department store (now Macy's) has always gone big for the holidays, and in 2020, things will continue with the 113th annual Great Tree, the 53rd annual animated holiday windows, and the 42 trumpets along State St.

Along with the decor, a visit to their Walnut Room is normally part of a Chicago holiday tradition, but this year with the pandemic, it might be takeout only.

The Walnut Room is the flagship restaurant of what is now Macy's at State and Washington streets. The building opened in 1907, and the Walnut Room existed from the start, though it was initially named the South Grill Room.

Eventually, the restaurant was renamed for its Circassian walnut paneling, though the exact date of the switch is unclear. For decades, hungry shoppers have enjoyed favorites such as millinery clerk Mrs. Hering's chicken pot pie, which she started serving in an earlier Field's restaurant in 1890.

At the turn of the 20th century, restaurants and other leisure spaces in high-end department stores became acceptable places for middle and upper-class white women to spend time outside of the home and meet and dine with friends and family. Furthermore, department stores served as "respectable" employment for women, giving them an opportunity to become wage earners, though as the opening chapters of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* point out, employment was still limited to white women with certain clothes and manners.

Still, the growing popularity of the Walnut Room and Marshall Field & Co. allowed a degree of economic freedom for certain women and social freedom for others. The special atmosphere and food have ensured the Walnut Room remains a nostalgic favorite for generations of Chicagoans, especially during the holidays.

## MEMORIES from p. 2

April and is making history.

**THE 21 CLUB:** My favorite NYC eatery at 21 W. 52nd St. Mythic. Expensive. Luscious. New York City's iconic 21 Club restaurant is closing down after 90 years of good food, strong drinks and even better celebrity intrigue. Steak sandwich, steak tartar, vichyssoise, martinis and pie. All classic. Sat across from **Jackie O** once. A favorite haunt for **John Steinbeck**, **Ernest Hemingway** and **Frank Sinatra**, and a dining spot for nearly every president since **FDR** — has shuttered its jockeys-guarded doors indefinitely. I was there the night of **JFK Jr.'s** bachelor party too. This is an American tragedy. So too is the announced closing of the Cliff House in San Francisco, long a local treasure and now gone. Goodness, look at what we have done to ourselves, on purpose?

**BEGORRA, MADAME:** Word around the U.S. State Dept. is that President-elect **Joe Biden's** sister, **Valerie Biden Owens**, is on the short list for U.S. Ambassador to Ireland. She's the brainiac that has successfully managed every political campaign of her bro's. And she has a remarkable, well-respected reputation in the field of international relations and foreign affairs. And big time Democratic juice. She has the president-elect's total confidence. And the Irish are beaming that they could once again have a U.S. presidential sibling as our nation's ambassador in Dublin.

**THE GAP EXODUS:** America's casual clothes experts, the GAP, is closing its Michigan Ave. flagship location. Thanks **Mayor Lightfinger**. Soon you won't have to worry about police protection. And thanks for reminding us that no conventions or trade shows are scheduled for McCormick Place in 2021. Our once vibrant downtown is going to be down and out for a while.

**WHO'S WHERE IN BUSINESS:** Starbucks has named Chicagoan **Melody Hobson** Chair of its corporate leadership... Congratulations to Peter Exley, 2021 President of the American Institute of Architects. Good luck wrangling those 95,000 cats.

**OLD ST. PATRICK'S:** Join them for a beautiful candlelit Christmas concert 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 18. "Deck the Hall" has been an Old St. Pat's tradition for over 25 years. "This year we will be Decking your Hall with our virtual Deck the Hall Christmas Concert." Enjoy music by the **Metropolis Symphony Orchestra**, **JoAnn Daugherty Jazz Trio**, **Irish Trad band**, **Old St. Pat's**



Jim Kinney, Julie Harron, Brian White and Peggy Snorf.



Joyce Selander, Irene Michaels, Barb Bailey and Karen Williams.



Melody Hobson



Valerie Biden Owens



Chicago Yacht Club carolers.



Nate Beuscher

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**STAR MEDIA:** Debuting social newsie, **Candace Jordan**, asks, "How much fun did I have with **Sylvia Perez** on Fox 32 Chicago this morning? Omy-goodness!"

**WHO'S WHERE:** Celebrating her birthday, **Barb Bailey** with **Irene Michaels**, **Joyce Selander** and **Karen Williams** at Gibsons Bar and Steakhouse. Friends make growing older really not so bad... **Whitney Reynolds** with birthday-girl **Bobbi Panter** celebrating birthdays, friendship and the holidays at their favorite neighborhood spot **Ralph Lauren Bar & Grill**... Chicago actor **Nate Beuscher** has graduated from his famed **Tiny Tim** role at the **Goodman** and is a cool, young man about town these days getting ready for giving and getting, but making sure no one is left out... Tartan bedecked trio of carolers on hand safe and sound singing up a festive storm in front of the **Chicago Yacht Club** where they filled the winter air with song and beauty... **Brian White** and **Jim Kinney's** dinner at the Yacht Club with a red theme going on with **Ronald Sears**, **Julie Harron**, **Susie Forstmann Kealy** and **Peggy Snorf**... **Edmund Lester**, **Jim Kinney** and the **Colonial Warriors** gathered in full historic battle mode for dinner. Good to get together rather than Zoom... **Mary** and **Allen Carter** at their club hosting dinner with **Jim Kinney** and **Brian White**... there's been a **Brian Relph** sighting, in a 400-year-old Salvadoran town, as colorful as he is, on his second year driving through the America's and he makes **Old Blighty** proud... **Sherry Lea Fox** looking positively stunning in her newest gown

for the holidays. Who created this gorgeous dress? It's a stunning **Minotti Couture** design. Fabulous fabric... Stunning Christmas tree in the lobby of the **Benjamin Marshall** designed building on the park at 1550 N. State Pkwy.

**Sneed Griffin**, **Mike Sneed**, **Rose O'Neill**, **Ingrid Loguidice**, **Pat Arbor**, **Peggy Lombardo** and **Mark O'Malley**. Yours truly read "The Night Before Christmas."

**CHRISTMAS DINNER:** I may just have one guest. My landlord. So to keep things festive I ordered a cake from **Laduree** in Paris. Overnight delivery. Orange cake like no other. And maybe ordering either a pheasant or a great rack of lamb. Adding *creme l'onions a la Julia Child*. Spinach soufflé. Whipped potatoes and roasted pears with brandy.

**ETNA'S ALIVE:** Smoke plumes now billow above the Sicilian sky as the infamous Mt. Etna regurgitates the melted earth and announces that she's itching to revive. A natural wonder of fresh horror for our mystic times. Her blasts go back more than 2000 years. You can hear her noisy fits in Calabria. Lava flows.

**TRAVELING?** Three wondrous Christmas spots: The shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage destination in the world. Mexican Christmas is devout.

In Paris, **Notre Dame** remains closed. But creche figures ranging from small to life-size are featured in the nativity displays in churches throughout Paris.

The Cathedral of Cologne is the most visited site in Germany with 20,000 tourists per day. Within the stunning architectural wonder of the cathedral rests the Tomb of the Magi, the three Kings from the gospel. The givers of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

**What I don't like about office Christmas parties is looking for a job the next day.**

- *Phyllis Diller*  
tog515@gmail.com

### An Advent Poem

by T.J. O'Gorman

Face to face with our limits,  
Blinking before the frightful  
Stare of our frailty,  
Promise rises  
Like a posse of clever maids  
Who do not fear the dark  
Because their readiness  
Lights the search.  
Their oil  
Becomes the measure of their love,  
Their ability to wait—  
An indication of their  
Capacity to trust and take a chance.  
Without the caution or predictability  
Of knowing day or hour,  
They fall back on that only  
Of which they can be sure:  
Love precedes them,  
Before it  
No door will ever close.

"Clever Maids," is a poem based on the parable in Matthew 25:1-13. It appears in the *Advent Sourcebook* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1988) and the *Loyola Univ. Prayerbook*, 2005.

All the festive elegance is the work of **Christina Gidwitz**, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, **Ronald Gidwitz**. Madame Gidwitz takes loving care of the vintage public interiors of their Chicago pad... and nostalgically we remember the late **Ruth O'Brien O'Connell**, elegant mom of **Bondgirl Diane O'Connell** on her near to Christmas birthday, still delighting in her 88th birthday celebration some years ago at the **Westin Grill** orchestrated by Diane with so many Chicago characters in attendance and with "Happy Birthday" led by **Patrick**

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# City plan expands affordable housing in target areas



The Home Front

by Don DeBat

Affordable housing opportunities in the Windy City received a boost with the City Council's overwhelming approval of five Chicago target areas for new construction of coach houses, basement and attic apartments.

Last spring, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot introduced an innovative ordinance to expand housing access to thousands of residents across Chicago by permitting additional housing units—also known as accessory dwelling units (ADU).

The ordinance, which repeals Chicago's 63-year ban on illegal over-the-garage coach houses, or "carriage houses," so-called basement "garden" apartments and attic units, allows owners to add moderate-cost rental units in those spaces under a special pilot program.

A 1957 rewrite of the Chicago building and zoning codes

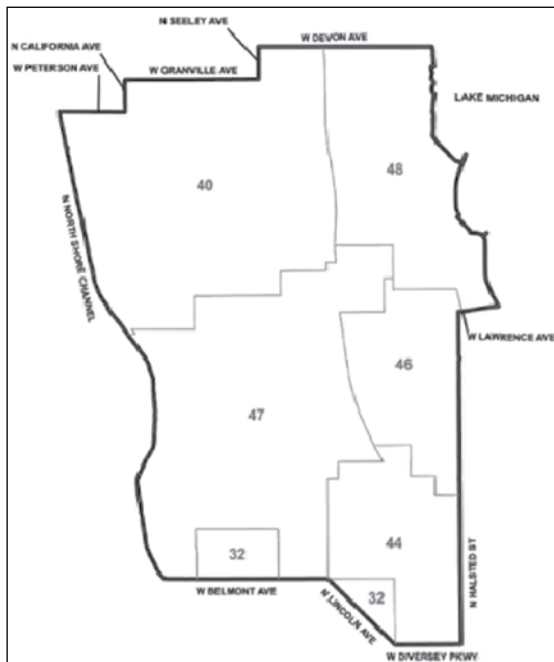
"grandfathered" such existing dwelling units built prior to 1948 due to the after-effects of the 1930s Great Depression and the severe post World-War II 1940s housing shortages.

Since then, thousands of existing, but officially unauthorized apartments, were affordably rented in ethnic and gentrified neighborhoods alike.

After the war, some North Side three-flats were split into six rental apartments often with a seventh unit in the basement, and that was legal. These small, 500-square-foot apartments rented for as little as \$20 a month, and included shared bathrooms, ingress and egress. Of course, most blue-collar tenants were earning \$50 a week during that era, but those apartments were truly affordable housing by today's standards.

Following decades of policy

decisions that limited their construction, the ordinance amends the city's Municipal Code to lawfully permit ADUs in five target areas, creating cost-effective housing options in many Chicago's neighborhoods, while providing a financial boost to owners



with existing ADUs.

Here are details on the city's gerrymandered map covering neighborhood pilot zones allow-

**AFFORDABLE** see p. 6

# Report: 1 in 5 Chicago families unsure about next rent payment

BY NADIA RAMLAGAN  
*Illinois News Connection*

At least 20% of Illinois families with children said they had only "slight or no confidence" they'd make their next rent or mortgage payment on time, according to a new report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Bill Byrnes, Kids Count project manager at Voices for Illinois Children, said along with triggering unprecedented levels of housing insecurity, the pandemic has pushed the most vulnerable Illinois residents over the edge when it comes to meeting basic needs.

Some now fear an unprecedented wave of homeless families and individuals may soon be cast out onto the streets due to Covid related job losses and unpaid rents, in that the federal eviction moratorium is due to expire Dec. 31.

This coming batch of new homeless may include many who will be cast out at perhaps the worst time, just as Winter takes hold. This wave could overwhelm the city of Chicago and state of Illinois when they lift their eviction and foreclosure moratorium, similar to how the wave of newly unemployed overwhelmed the Illinois Dept. of Employment Security this summer.

According to a recent LendingTree / U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse survey, Illinois is ranked 10th among states where renters have fallen the most behind on payments.

The survey shows that 19.7%

Illinois of renters are behind on payments, while 24.4% of Illinois renters doubt they'll be able to cover next month's rent. In total, by Oct. 1, renters in Illinois were over \$414,422,940 past due in unpaid back rent.

**Housing insecurity is closely tied to hunger. The report found 14% of Illinois households with children said they "sometimes or often" did not have enough to eat.**

"Poverty, food insecurity, unemployment; Illinois had those problems before the pandemic started," Byrnes observed. "And now that we're nine months into it, the pandemic has only exacerbated and accelerated the problems that were already here in the state."

He said housing insecurity is closely tied to hunger. The report

found 14% of Illinois households with children said they "sometimes or often" did not have enough to eat.

Broken down by race, the report shows how current and historic policies continue to drive deep inequities in families' access to resources. And for many who lost their jobs due to the state's forced economic shutdown, they may now face homelessness for the first time in the new year at the state and federal eviction moratoriums end.

Leslie Boissiere, vice president of external affairs for the Casey Foundation, said food insecurity is nearly twice as high among Black households with children compared with white households nationwide.

"We have to get back to the basics," Boissiere urged. "We have to make sure that the poorest and most fragile families in our economy are taken care of and that we're funding those programs

**RENT** see p. 6



## Invasion of the Giant Doilies

Some 39 hand-crafted snowflakes line the property fence of Edgewater Beach Apartments, 5555 N. Sheridan Rd.



Residents of the Edgewater Beach Apartments (EBA) looking to spread holiday cheer with Edgewater neighbors installed 39 hand-crafted snowflakes on the property fence along Sheridan Rd.

"It's an opportunity to create holiday memories during a year that has been so very challenging," said Jessica Roble, Head Yarnbomber at Edgewater Beach Apartments, 5555 N. Sheridan Rd.

Roble said the EBA team used more than five miles of acrylic yarn to make the 39 snowflakes, which range from 12 to 59 inches in width.

This isn't the first time that yarn enthusiasts have decorated this fence. Previous installations included a bunch of balloons during the summer, and giant bat wings for Halloween.

"It makes me smile every time I walk past," said Dan Stanzel,

Director of EBA, "They're so happy."

The effort is called "Yarnbombing," or also as "Fiber Graffiti." Intrepid crocheters and knitters cover (or bomb) permanent structures with yarn. The artwork softens the urban landscape and presents an element of surprise in what would normally be an unyielding environment. The installations vary from being whimsical to seasonal to political.

The EBA's snowflakes are definitely seasonal with a nudge to Mother Nature to bring some of the real white stuff.

Built in 1928, the Edgewater Beach Apartments is the only remaining structure from the Edgewater Beach Hotel complex. It was designed and built by Benjamin Marshall, and its pink color and cross shape make it an iconic landmark in the Edgewater neighborhood.



### 3110 N Sheridan Road, Unit 702 1st OFFERING

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### 2800 N Lake Shore Drive, Unit 308

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### 3550 N Lake Shore Drive, Unit 2211

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## Victory Gardens Theater postpones remainder of 2021 Season

The bad news for local theater just keeps coming no matter what the season.

Victory Gardens Theater in Lincoln Park has announced the further postponement of the 2021 Season, which included the Chicago premieres of *cullud wattah* by Erika Dickerson-Despenza and *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* by Will Arbery.

Victory Gardens, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave., hopes to produce these productions, along with the previously postponed productions of *Poor Yella Rednecks* by Qui Nguyen, *In Every Generation* by Ali Viterbi, and *Exit Strategy* by Ike Holter, in a later season.

“Even with the recent positive news of potential vaccines, there is not yet a clear timeline on when we will be able to welcome audiences back,” said Acting Managing Director Roxanna Connor.

“We are not at the point that we can guarantee safe working conditions for our practitioners and staff” in order to bring anything to stage in 2021.

“Live theater, no matter how important to our well-being, is not worth the potential loss of a single human life,” she said. “For now, that means keeping our stages dark.”

Upcoming online events include the First Friday Open Mic Series, which begins January 1, 2021. This monthly open mic will feature 3-5 minute performances that focus on a central theme or group of performers.

Since its founding in 1974, the company has produced more world premieres than any other Chicago theater. For more information visit [www.victorygardens.org](http://www.victorygardens.org).

### RENT from p. 5

that can have an impact and can ensure that everybody’s basic needs are met in this country.”

Byrnes added the state’s Black and Brown families in particular are working on the front lines in industries hardest-hit by the pandemic.

“Things like food service, food preparation, public transportation, and in many cases these are jobs that don’t have access to paid sick leave, health insurance,” Byrnes

outlined.

He pointed to the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] program, which allows states to provide short-term cash assistance to low-income families with children, as a stopgap solution.

According to the report, the program is long overdue for improvement. In 2019, only 23% of families with kids in poverty received TANF assistance, down from nearly 70% at the program’s inception in 1996.

# CPS watchdog to investigate emergency computer deal with Lightfoot donor

Office of Inspector General opens investigation over questions about computer purchase

BY MILA KOUMPILOVA  
*Chalkbeat Chicago*

The Chicago Public Schools’ in-house watchdog is reviewing a \$1.6 million deal to buy used computers from a campaign donor to Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who personally vouched for the company’s CEO as he sought to provide devices to the district last spring.

The district’s Office of Inspector General opened the investigation after a report by Chalkbeat and the Better Government Assoc. broke last week raising questions about the purchase.

The district bought laptops and older-model tablets from Meeting Tomorrow last spring as part of a larger push to quickly get devices into the hands of students who needed them for remote learning amid national computer shortages. The company’s CEO, who had contributed \$30,000 to Lightfoot’s 2019 election bid, reached out to her office, which forwarded his email to the district. Lightfoot also wrote schools chief Janice Jackson to put in a good word.

Some of the computers did not meet the district’s technical standards, and a small number were not equipped for virtual learning. About a third have remained in

a district warehouse even as the district has since bought more devices from its established vendors.

District officials said the Ravenswood Manor-based Meeting Tomorrow, 2901 W. Lawrence

“We want to determine whether the prices were fair and whether CPS appropriately evaluated its need for devices and the opportunity to purchase them from Meeting Tomorrow,” Fletcher said.

He said the investigation might take several months.

Earlier this week, Lightfoot said she forwarded the note from Meeting Tomorrow President Mark Aistrophe at a time when “everybody and their brother” were approaching her office with offers to help with the city’s coronavirus response. She said she had simply wanted to steer the offer to the right people.

“He reached out and said ‘Hey, I know that CPS is struggling to find devices; can I be helpful?’ So I passed on that email,” she said when asked about the

report after an event to administer the city’s first coronavirus vaccines to healthcare workers.

“I have no regrets about forwarding that information on,” she added.

Lightfoot said she assumes the district properly vetted the purchase.

*Kiannah Sepeda-Miller of the Better Government Assoc. contributed to this report.*



Meeting Tomorrow, 2901 W. Lawrence Ave., whose CEO contributed nearly \$30,000 to Lori Lightfoot’s mayoral campaign in 2019.

Photo courtesy Madison Hopkins/BGA

Ave., was the only local vendor with readily available computers at a time when the district faced an urgent need to help low-income students access remote learning. They said the vast majority of devices were well equipped for that purpose.

The inspector general’s office will look into how the sale came about and whether the district got a reasonable deal during a challenging time to secure computers for students, Inspector General Will Fletcher said.

### AFFORDABLE from p. 5

ing affordable accessory units under the ordinance, which goes into effect on May 1, 2021:

- **North Side:** The zone covers parts of the Lake View, North Center, Lincoln Square, Uptown, Edgewater and West Ridge neighborhood. Rough boundaries of the district run from Halsted St., north of Diversey and Belmont, and Lake Michigan north of Lawrence, up to Devon, and west to the North Shore Channel.

- **Northwest Side:** This narrow, gerrymandered district west of the North Shore Channel covers sections of West Town, Logan Square, Hermosa, Avondale, Albany Park and Irving Park. It also includes parts of the Near West Side and East Garfield Park neighborhoods.

- **West Side:** The Far West Side district covers parts of East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park, North Lawndale and South Lawndale neighborhoods.

- **South Side:** This expansive district covers parts of Ashburn, Auburn Gresham, West Lawn, Chicago Lawn, Washington Heights, Roseland, Chatham, Greater Grand Crossing, Englewood, West Englewood, Washington Park and Woodlawn neighborhoods.

- **Southeast Side:** The district

covers parts of South Chicago, East Side, South Deering and Hegewisch neighborhoods.

Supporters of ADUs say easing restrictions on construction of coach-house, basement and attic units will increase the supply of affordable living spaces, let long-term homeowners earn income from rents, and help multigenerational families stay together with the addition of in-law apartments and “granny flats.”

### Supporters of ADUs say easing restrictions on construction of coach-house, basement and attic units will increase the supply of affordable living spaces.

Under the ADU ordinance, if units are added to an existing apartment building, a percentage of the new residences must include rent restrictions to make them affordable. Tenants can earn up to 60% of the area’s median income. That’s \$54,600 per year for a family of four.

Also, affordable units could not be rented on AirBnB or other “vacation home” platforms unless they have city approval. In the West, South and Southeast zones, the city placed a limit of two ADU permits per city block per year.

The City Dept. of Housing’s Low-Income Housing Trust Fund also will be empowered to offer

vouchers and establish grant programs to assist low- and moderate-income renters who occupy the new affordable units.

An existing example of coach-house living can be seen on the 1700 block of N. Fern Court in the Old Town neighborhood. There, dozens of 1880s buildings feature residential apartments above what once were turn-of-the-century carriage houses.

Housing experts say it is likely that basement or garden apartments are affordable because they usually are studios or small one-bedroom units. Renters may have to deal with lack of light issues, and relatively low seven-foot ceilings.

However, the rent usually is quite affordable, sometimes only \$500 or \$600 a month in some neighborhoods. Even in affluent neighborhoods such as Old Town and Logan Square, garden apartment rents typically are 25% to 30% less than above-grade units in the same building.

Of course, every new accessory living unit would have to meet requirements of the current Chicago Building Code, contain at least two exits, have a kitchen and bathroom along with proper air ventilation and heating.

For more housing news, visit [www.dondebat.biz](http://www.dondebat.biz). Don DeBat is co-author of “Escaping Condo Jail,” the ultimate survival guide for condominium living. Visit [www.escapingcondojail.com](http://www.escapingcondojail.com).

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**RUDOLPH** from p. 1

about the heroic young deer who used a glowing red nose to guide Santa's sleigh on a foggy Christmas Eve.

According to California-based journalist Nate Bloom, who interviewed members of the May family, executives at Montgomery Ward had wanted a "cheery Christmas story" that could be given away to shoppers to generate good will.

Upon completion, May was convinced his tale would become a hit. Company executives, however, had not been so sure. The success of vaudeville comedian W.C. Fields, who suffered from a skin condition that had turned his nose red, had caused many to associate a red nose with heavy alcohol consumption. In a 1990 interview published in the Chicago Tribune, May's daughter Barbara said her father refused to change his heroic deer.

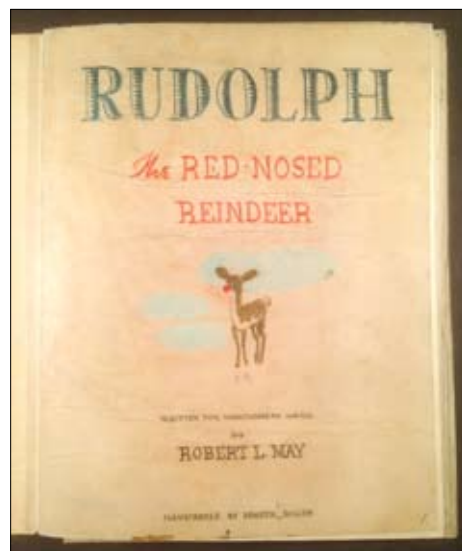
To help sell his concept, May convinced artist Denver Gillen, a friend who worked in the retailer's art department, to visit the zoo in order to sketch the zoo's deer. When Gillen showed May his images, he believed his friend had captured the essence of the zoo's playful deer and used the images to sell his concept to company executives. Some of Gillen's images included deer with spots. These may be a clue as to what species of deer had inspired Gillen.

In 1939, Montgomery Ward gave out more than two million copies of the free booklet and May became an instant celebrity. By 1947 (no books were printed during World War II), more than six million copies had been given away. Shortly afterwards, as a token of appreciation, May was given the copyright and a successful spoken word record album was created in time for Christmas sales.

In 1948, May's brother-in-law, songwriter Johnny Marks, wrote Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. The following year, Gene Autry, the singing cowboy, recorded the song and it became a national hit. Autry had gotten his first big break in show business while performing as a regular on Barn Dance, a national radio program hosted by Chicago's WLS AM 89 radio station.

Songwriter Marks would revisit the story of Rudolph on numerous occasions. Marks also wrote Run, Rudolph Run for Chuck Berry as well as additional songs for the 1964 Rankin/Bass Rudolph television special that remains an annual children's favorite.

In December 1975, May wrote a column for the Gettysburg Times newspaper and described the impact the story of Rudolph



In 1939, Montgomery Ward gave out more than two million copies of the free booklet and May became an instant celebrity.

had on children.

For May, Rudolph's story had been somewhat autobiographical. As a youngster, May had been academically successful and had skipped grades. However, this also made him feel socially awkward. He always found himself to be the youngest and smallest of his peers.

"Today, children all over the world read and hear about the little deer who started out in life as a loser, just as I did. But they learn that when he gave himself to others, his handicap became the very means through which he achieved happiness. My reward is knowing that every year, when Christmas rolls around, Rudolph still brings that message to millions, both young and old," May wrote.

At the age of 71, May died on Aug. 10, 1976 and is interred at St. Joseph Cemetery in River Grove, IL.

**DENIES** from p. 1

arguing that local minority groups – mostly Hispanics – are living with a "polluted nuisance."

The Midwest Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, which is part of HUD, have requested that the city of Chicago refrain from issuing the final permit required by General Iron, pending their investigation of a Fair Housing Act complaint filed by Southeast Side residents.

"The city needs to come to terms with the racism that has hurt communities of color for decades," said Peggy Salador, di-

rector of the Southeast Environmental Task Force. "Our neighborhood continues to accumulate toxic industry that is dumped in our laps while more affluent white neighborhoods experience a very different type of development."

As of last week at least, the final city permit still hasn't been issued.

HUD officials have asked the city to hold off on issuing that permit pending more information on the discrimination allegations.

General Iron and RMG's business operate critical metals recycling services to Chicagoland.

**GARDEN** from p. 1

Ald. Tunney said the garden is located on the lakefront where the gay community gathered for decades on the "Belmont Rocks," until the Army Corps of Engineers replaced the piles of limestone boulders that lined the lakefront with the current cement revetment shortly after he became alderman in 2003.

"We wanted to memorialize that this was a gay gathering place," Tunney said,

**"We wanted to memorialize that this was a gay gathering place," Ald. Tom Tunney said, "and the fact that we lost so many of those individuals who used to be there."**

"and the fact that we lost so many of those individuals who used to be there."

Looking ahead, Pizer said the AIDS Garden is "destined to become a true Chicago landmark."

**DONATE** from p. 1

grants," Pastor Haak said. "The Coronavirus pandemic and the economic recession have made their work more difficult and stressed their shrinking budgets. They need the money now and we know it will quickly be put to good use. Several of the recipient agencies, we were happy to learn, will use the Wellington funds as matching grants in their year-end fund-raising campaigns."

Three examples of some of the charity work being undertaken include:

- North Side Housing and Supportive Services (NSHSS) operates a shelter, under COVID-19 conditions, for 40 homeless men in Uptown and provides case management services, and clothing, meals and supplies for many more. NSHSS also provides apartments for 194 formerly homeless persons. Other homeless programs that received grants from Wellington were Deborah's Place, Sarah's Circle, the Night Ministry, and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

- Lakeview Pantry, one of the oldest and longest serving food pantries in Chicago, is on track to provide a total of four million meals to more than 100,000 clients this year. In addition to food it provides mental health and social services to many clients. Grant recipients, A Just Harvest, CROP Walk, and Bread for the World, also work to feed the hungry.

- Faith In Place runs five environmental programs with 359 faith partners throughout Illinois, and by the year's end it will have planted tens of thousands of trees in

the state. The organization advocates for a healthy environment and engages in energy conservation, sustainable agriculture, and water preservation projects.

The congregation also made grants to Christian Peacemaker Teams, One Northside, Circles & Ciphers, Equal Justice initiative, READI Chicago, Greater Chicago Broadcast Ministries, Eco-Justice Collaborative, Immigrant Justice Task Force, and Hello Baby.

In 1909, The Lincoln Park Congregational Church and the Evanston Avenue Congregational Church merged to become the Wellington Avenue Congregational Church. The first worship service in its newly constructed church building was held on January 1, 1911. In 1910 a woman, Lily McDaniel Merrill, became an associate pastor. The senior pastor, Dr. Edward Williams, ministered to an African-American regiment during the Civil War and taught the soldiers to read and write.

During World War II women made bandages for the Red Cross and the youth sent gifts and cards to the Japanese-Americans detained in U.S. prison camps.

A Spanish congregation began services in the church in the early 1960s. A teen center was opened and the Chicago City Players performed plays in the church's Baird Hall. From 1999 to the present, the award-winning TimeLine Theatre presented its plays there. In 1968, Students for a Democratic Society members, protesting at the Democratic Convention, slept in the basement. A draft counseling center was established in 1968 and it lasted until the end of the Viet Nam War.

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