

Science has made us gods
even before we are worthy of being men.
— Jean Rostand

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NEWS OF THE LOOP, STREETERVILLE, RIVER NORTH, NEAR NORTH, GOLD COAST & OLD TOWN

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View from Wolf Point looking east along the main branch of the Chicago River toward the State St. Bridge, visible in distance just east of Marina City.

Chicago River Swim organizer says city permits will follow federal approval

BY STEVEN DAHLMAN
Loop North News

Responding to complaints from an alderman that a planned swim race in the Chicago River for later this year lacks approval from the city, the founder of Chicago River Swim has clarified that City of Chicago permits will be secured after the U.S. Coast Guard [USCG] has finished its work to coordinate the event.

It's been seven years since Doug McConnell, CEO and co-founder of the nonprofit A Long Swim, first announced a plan for 100 brave, vaccinated people to swim in the Chicago River, at that time from Ping Tom Memorial Park on the south branch 2.4 miles to the Clark Street Bridge on the main branch. It would have been the first organized swim in the river in more than 100 years.

That 2016 event did not happen, nor did the race that was announced in 2019.

But on April 2, McConnell announced the Chicago River Swim will happen this year, on Sept. 22, starting at 6:45 a.m. As many as 500 swimmers, meeting eligibility criteria, will participate. Starting near the Dearborn Street Bridge, the swimmers will follow a looped course stretching from State St., west to Wolf Point, and finish around 8:00 a.m. near the Clark Street Bridge.

At the April 10 meeting of the Committee on Special Events,

Cultural Affairs and Recreation, Ald. William Conway [34th] expressed concern to representatives of the city's Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events [DCASE] that his office had not been notified of the event prior to McConnell's announcement.



Doug McConnell, CEO and co-founder of the nonprofit A Long Swim.

"I've gotten many calls from concerned citizens regarding the swim for charity event in the Chicago River set for September of this year," said Conway. "This is not something my office was given a heads up by anybody."

Jennifer Johnson Washington, First Deputy Commissioner of DCASE, told Conway that "nothing is firm" for the event.

"The Chicago River swim announcement came out without any permits or approval from the City of Chicago," said Washington. "So, we are now in talks with that group that is planning that swim and including all our city partners that would have to sign off on any special event permit for the city."

SWIM see p. 12

Docs, nurses blast Ascension's outsourcing decision

Feds probe private-equity greed in health care, staff must reapply to Atlanta firm by June 1

BY BOB ZULEY

In what may be the first major encroachment of private equity into the operations of a major Chicago-area health care provider, Ascension is drawing criticism from the very people that make hospitals work — the doctors and nurses that patients depend upon.

In late January, Ascension medical staffers learned that their positions were being terminated and they should reapply to SCP Health, an Atlanta health care staffing firm by the June 1 takeover. SCP Health is owned by Onex Partners, a Canadian global private-equity firm.

Under the deal proposed for Ascension's Chicago hospitals, workers were asked to sign SCP Health labor contracts by noon on April 4, according to an April 1 internal memo written by Ascension's Illinois Ministry Market Executive Polly Davenport and obtained by Crain's Chicago.

If workers don't sign their new



St. Joseph Hospital [above] is part of Ascension healthcare, along with St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, St. Elizabeth Hospital, St. Mary Hospital, and Resurrection Hospital, all in Chicago.

contract, hospitalists stand to lose their jobs when SCP Health takes over Ascension Illinois hospitalist employment duties on June 1.

The transition is expected to increase patient caseloads while reducing salaries of physicians by upwards of \$25,000 and may adversely impact other medical staffers as well.

Ascension is a behemoth on the national health care front with some 140 hospitals and more than 2,600 health care sites operating

in 19 states.

These include St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, and St. Joseph Hospital, St. Elizabeth Hospital, St. Mary Hospital, and Resurrection Hospital, all in Chicago, among the 15 Ascension hospitals in the greater Chicago region.

Established in 1999, Ascension is owned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, headquartered in St. Louis, and

ASCENSION see p. 12

The fraud of plastic recycling

This Earth Day we should stop lying to ourselves... Plastic recycling is a scam

Earth Day is Monday, April 22, and like many of our readers, we are being inundated with messages about how citizens can help clean up our neighborhoods, parks, schoolyards, our city, state, nation and world.

It's a good-hearted effort at what we should be doing 365 days a year, cleaning up our own front yard.

But this year, how about we offer Mother Earth a new gift, the best gift of all, the gift of telling her the truth: 'Yo ma, plastic recycling is a fraud.'

We need to stop all the virtue signaling and admit that most plastics that we use on a daily basis cannot really be recycled. Even if the manufacturer has placed a recycling symbol on their product. A total of 95% of the plastic used in packaging is disposed of after one use, an estimated loss to the economy of up to \$120 billion annually, concludes a recent 68-page report on a 2024 study by Center for Climate Integrity [www.climateintegrity.org].

That reports claims that underpinning our current plastic waste crisis is a decades-long campaign of fraud and deception about the recyclability of plastics. Despite their long-standing

knowledge that recycling plastic is neither technically nor economically viable, petrochemical companies—independently and through their industry trade associations and front groups—have engaged in fraudulent marketing and public education campaigns designed to mislead the public about the viability of plastic recycling as a solution to plastic waste.

Big Oil and the plastics industry have been deceiving the public for decades about the current plastic waste crisis. We know they're lying, they know they're lying, and they know that we know that they are lying, and yet, the cry still goes out each Earth Day to 'recycle plastic.'

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In 2007, Chicago rolled out Blue Cart recycling to much fanfare. But there were issues from the start, including holdover skepticism from the failed Blue Bag era of recycling. It turned out that

it was the Blue Bags themselves, and plastic in general, that has been contaminating our efforts to recycle for over 20 years now.

The Chicago Dept. of Streets and Sanitation [DSS] is one of the the largest non-emergency departments in government, with over 2,000 hardworking employees, and a near \$300 million annual budget. DSS responds to an average of one million service requests per year making a difference in communities across the city.

DSS and their truck crews are not the problem. They're out all day in all kinds of weather, wrestling with heavy, over-stuffed garbage bins... they are some of the hardest working people in Chicago.

Do yourself a favor and offer them a fresh cup of coffee, then ask "how much of our recycling actually gets recycled in Chicago?" If they like you and your coffee, they'll tell you the truth, it's less than 10%.

The numbers are hard to ignore. Only 9.6% of the city's waste is recycled, and nationwide only about 5% to 6% of plastics are being recycled each year. That's right, well over 90% of the stuff we put into the blue bins becomes trash.

Plastics recycling has been an

PLASTIC see p. 9

Did the eclipse bring a sense of unity to the city?



By Thomas J. O'Gorman

The recent solar eclipse of April 8 will be well remembered. It was an outstanding planetary event in the Chicago skies.

As the heavens had begun to move and the forces of the sun and moon were in motion, I headed over to Bill Kim's Urban Belly for some Asian cuisine. The coconut curry pho was just what the doctor ordered. There weren't many diners indoors as the eclipse began, but Chef Kim was there working on menus. He joined me in his restaurant shade and suggested I try the homemade passion fruit lemonade.

The spacious Urban Belly windows provided great panoramas of the activity on Damen Ave. We watched the crowds assemble in small cliques along the streetscape. Outdoor dining was in full bloom at several nearby eateries. The atmosphere was

jumping with friends and neighbors, all seemingly careful to put on their eclipse eyewear while noshing away on their veggie burgers and yoghurts.

The coconut curry pho was outstanding. A bowl of everything we love, chicken, bok choy, bean sprouts, herbs and spices, thin noodles all aswim in a rich, sweet, aromatic spicy coconut broth. I asked for a bigger spoon.

Damen Ave. was thick with 20-somethings who were observing the solar show. This crowd's age proved most spectators hadn't done an eclipse before. But they appeared very analytical, assessing the celestial drama unfolding in the skies.

The assembled crowds definitely felt the haunting solar activity above, and experienced the strange dimming of the brightness of the sun. It wasn't a crazy shift. Just a gentle transition in our sky.

I suppose the crowds swelled all over town. On Damen Ave. more iced passion fruit lemonade arrived to quench sky-gazing thirsts.

The heavens darkened just a bit. Who knew the eclipse would be so tactile and real.

Perhaps it was just a moment to recognize that too often we don't look up enough. But all of us, whether in Mexico, Vermont, Carbondale, Cleveland, Long Island, in Iceland, Norway or China, for a few minutes, we were all looking above us, eyeballing the heavens.

Imagining the geopolitical landscape rearranged and uplifted. Kings, poets, popes and pubkeepers joined hands with anonymous strangers whose hearts and minds were joined for a moment

in experiencing our planetary home in a new way. Sci-fi vulnerable. In a reordered motion within the sky-dome over our earth.

For a brief nano-second we were all freed from the horror of Ukraine, Gaza, girls basketball and the nonsense of the Kardashians. From the bickering of the House of Windsor and the mad delusions of Donald Trump and dementia of Joe Biden. Our earth and our common earthliness were ringing the globe in a strange momentary harmony which I wish could spread pandemic-style.

It actually did a bit for me the next day when I had errands to run. I was off to the old Italian neighborhood along Grand Ave., east of Ashland. Down the two miles that stretch to Halsted St., a landscape rich in the fashioning of true foods like Gonnella Bread and D'Amato's Bakery. Enterprises that still create the crunchy breads they've made for more than a century. It's a charming, but timeless, Chicago neighborhood of favorite foods, historic stories of the Old Country, memorable Chicago characters and a vibrantly stable culture that continues to renew itself.

The lunchtime destination was a favorite: Tony Pirolo and Ciro Longobardo's Piccolo Sogno, "Little Dreams." A superior restaurant, easily Chicago's finest. The cuisine of Italy lifted high by the skill, taste and intelligence of its owner chef.

"Little Dreams" is a classically poignant, poetic name from literature. Though Chicago never seemed to have any little dreams historically. We were always reaching beyond our weight class.

We all love the adventure of "neighbor-hooding" in Chicago, when you traverse the imaginary boundaries that are held in place by the pedigree of a beloved local tavern, or a custom of historic lineage, or the tribal rituals of a local church, neighborhood school or community festival.

Neighborhoods in Chicago are adhered to one another by the sticky tape of history, devotion, political loyalty or commercial achievement. And the invisible threads of human legacy.

Nothing sets in motion a neighborhood's character like its reputation for hospitality, the art of welcoming the stranger. Never better than with the foods that reflect great cultural cooking. That's what we uncover at Piccolo Sogno with a menu of high-end creative Italian preparation. None better than their green gnocchi with wild mushrooms, asparagus, leeks, roasted tomatoes and savory sauce.

Their prosciutto with melon also rivals the tastes of heavier starters. Wander through the menu to be lifted to high affection for the seasoned wits of those who gather these ingredients and create such a pleasing cuisine.

Go see for yourself.

The day after the eclipse brought not only the chance to luncheon, it was also possible to do so out on the sun-drenched patio. A huge, spacious, private patio where dining reaches new heights in Chicago's most charming environment.

We were delighted to be reunited with Miguel, an excellent

young waiter, and acquaintance from my City Hall years when he was starting out at 312, the restaurant across the street. He recognized me and stopped to talk, remembering the days gone by.

Our lunch had invisible threads fastening it to the drama of eclipse day. These two days really lifted my heart and soul to reasons for hope for Chicago, despite the urban chaos with which we currently live.

I wasn't lifted very high seeing "Boss" Preckwinkle and Mayor "ShotSpotter" Johnson lined up to backslap President Biden on the O'Hare tarmac. Real Democrats appear rare in these hazardous times.

These Cook County gadabouts don't seem to "make the deal" happen. Now adding further disaster to gambling in Chicago as the deal becomes dangerously unglued at Medinah Temple. All we're left with is the prospect of further Chicago Teachers Union intrusions "ad interruptus."

Yet the events of Eclipse Day gave a familiar American hope. The open embrace of hands and hearts with civil intelligence. This shall always be the strongest guide through the leafy forests of life and creative citizenship in Chicago.

We will survive, somehow, the disharmony and the unrivaled absurdity of the current incapability of responsible governance. As long as we have green gnocchi and passion fruit iced tea.

Chicago needs more neighborhooding from Hyde Park to Rogers Park to Ukrainian Village, from Logan Square to South Shore. I think we might find hope where we least expect to see it. In the miracle of coconut curry pho or barbecue ribs off the grill.

CSO: Paul Phillips, Chicago Symphony Orchestra violinist for four decades, has died at 77. Mr. Phillips was always the first on stage warming up before performances at Orchestra Hall. His charming virtuosity and integral contribution to orchestral life will be greatly missed.

NEW CSO DIRECTOR: Klaus Makela, the newly appointed music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, showed a stunning, graceful style of conducting to orchestra audiences. His easy-to-follow stick technique, and those abundant signature facial expressions created a subtle movement at the podium. And his very physical body gestures and movements gave the orchestra and audience a graceful familiarity with the composition, but not to distraction.

He laid out a very refined and exciting dose of what we can expect when the very youthful Finn, age 28, takes command of the CSO in 2027.

POETRY AWARD WINNERS: In Illinois this year, 44 high schools and 205 teachers were part of Poetry Out Loud. Over 7,000 students. Sixteen students representing Illinois's eight regions competed at the Hoogland Center for the Arts in downtown Springfield back in March. We congratulate local Chicago regional winners: **Jesus Chavarria** of Mather H.S. and **Gabriel Sakoda**, Von Steuben H.S. Poetry Out Loud finals will



Paul Phillips

be in Washington DC, April 30 to May 2, at George Washington Univ.

HATE: The 43rd Ward office of Ald. **Tim Knudsen** was alerted to an antisemitic flyer that was spread in Lincoln Park (near Geneva Terrace and Belden), some of which were placed in bags including a substance with the appearance of rat poison. We've seen this bigotry in Bucktown and Wicker Park too. We should expect to see a lot more of this antisemitic behavior as summer approaches and all the crazies arrive for the Democrat Convention.

SOLD!: Restaurateur **R.J. Melman** and his wife **Katherine** have sold their Gold Coast mansion for \$4.9 million, reports Crain's. While high priced real estate of late has been languishing, Melman's Bellevue Place home sold relatively quickly, and for his asking price. They listed the property in January, a little more than three years after buying it for \$4.8 million. The buyers have not been disclosed.

Crain's says the sale was a victory for the area, selling quickly without a big price reduction. Big price reductions for Gold Coast luxury homes have become common in recent years, with many homes listed for months without

ECLIPSE see p. 8

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The fight for freelancers

How the new USDOL rule can affect your 'gig' job

Are you a ride share driver? An artist, musician, painter, maid, landscaper or writer making your own way in the world? Look out, the hammer may be coming down. Don't be surprised if someday soon you wake up and suddenly find all your clients gone without a trace.

Three months ago this newspaper published a plea from the Independent Writers Of Chicago [IWOC] warning about the consequences of proposed new legislation that they claimed will damage part time gig work for Independent Contractors. On Jan. 10, the US Dept. of Labor [USDOL] published a final rule on whether your 'gig work' classifies you as an employee or independent contractor. This law went into effect on March 11.

With its launch on March 11, the USDOL's controversial Classification of Independent Contractors and Employees Under the Fair Labor Standards Act [FLSA], means that America's freelance workers are looking at troubles down the road, as the final rules apply to workers in any and all industries.

There are estimated to be 72-million-plus Independent Contractors working in America today. That's almost 45% of the U.S. workforce. In America Independent Contractors have been freely choosing how they work and live ever since the Declaration of Independence was penned. Now the government has decided they know better, and you can no longer make that choice to be a gig worker. For some, the nightmare of finding the 'gig' way of life being ripped out from under Independent Contractors is about to become a reality, under the FLSA.

Prior to the Trump administration, the

USDOL utilized a totality-of-the-circumstances test to determine whether a worker should be classified as an employee or an independent contractor. The Trump administration sought to streamline this test, an effort that culminated in rules that allowed workers to be classified as independent contractors based upon just two core factors: (1) the nature and degree of the individual's control over the work; and (2) the individual's opportunity for profit or loss.

Given more choice, it was widely believed that workers were more likely to be deemed independent contractors under this test than the prior economic realities standard.

Shortly after taking office, the Biden administration sought to withdraw the rule, reducing workers choices, arguing that it departed from longstanding judicial precedent and did "not fully comport with the text and purpose of the FLSA as interpreted by courts." In response, in 2022, the USDOL issued a Proposed Rule that would return to a totality-of-the-circumstances interpretation of the economic realities test, with no one factor being dispositive.

And what is the totality-of-the-circumstances test?

The following six factors are part of the totality-of-the-circumstances test, and are used as a guide of whether a worker is an employee under the FLSA or an independent contractor in business for themselves:

- Opportunity for profit or loss depending on managerial skill;
- Investments by the worker and the employer;
- Permanence of the work relationship;
- Nature and degree of control;
- Whether the work performed is integral to the employer's business,
- And skill and initiative

The final rule states these six factors are not exhaustive and that no single factor is

determinative.

Under FLSA, whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor is determined by looking at the economic realities of the worker's relationship with the employer. Basically, if the economic realities show that the worker is economically dependent on the employer for work, then the worker is an employee. If the economic realities show that the worker is in business for themselves, then the worker is an independent contractor.

The FLSA regulations are modeled after California's AB5 law, passed in 2019. As a result of AB5's reclassification of Independent Contractors in California as employees, the careers of 4.5 million Independent Contractors and entrepreneurs were destroyed – despite a hastily created rescue plan of numerous carve-outs that was not enough to stave off the destruction of jobs.

California's AB5 used a strict version of regulatory language to determine who is an independent contractor, and who is an employee. California's Gov. Gavin Newsom said the stricter test would "help reduce worker misclassification — workers being wrongly classified as 'independent contractors' rather than employees, which erodes basic worker protections like the minimum wage, paid sick days and health insurance benefits."

As of 2024, Gov. Newsom's claim has proved patently false. California has seen no reported increase of misclassification prosecutions; no widespread reports of companies reclassifying all their independent contractors as employees; and zero new unions formed as a result of the law.

The California law was the start of a nationwide rollout of copycat bills in other

FREELANCERS see p. 10

Online Park Dist. registration now open

Summertime in the Parks is mere months away, and the Chicago Park District is ensuring families can get a head start on their plans. Registration for the District's six-week day camp session opened up on Monday.

In-person registration begins on Saturday, April 20, 2024, or Monday, April 22, 2024, however dates will vary by park location.

Options are now open for children ages 6 to 12 to connect through fun, safe, and inclusive activities.

The day camp session runs from June 24 through Aug. 2. For a full checklist of important dates, financial assistance, and registration information, visit <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/programs-memberships/programs-overview/day-camp>.


Options are available for early and extended camps to help families in need of additional services. Summer programming have been restored at parks that served as migrant shelters, including for Broadway Armory.

Offerings vary by park location, however Chicagoans of all ages and abilities can find traditional sports, swim opportunities and other activities throughout the summer.

The CPD is also sponsoring a Summer Food Service Program that provides breakfast or lunch and a snack. Under this program, the CPD provides 41, 000 meals a day to the youth at 230 locations. This is a federally funded program that is administered through the Illinois State Board of Education and the USDA.

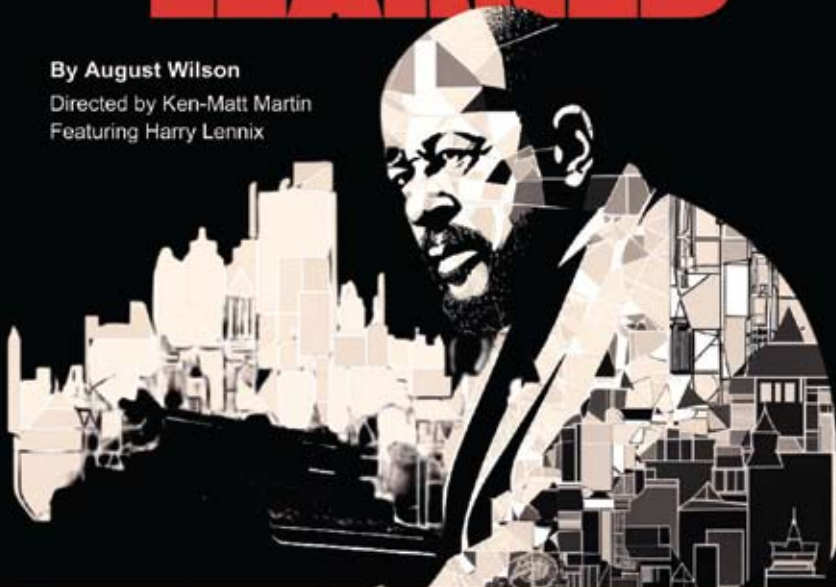
District programs are among the most affordable summer activity options available for families, and the CPD offers financial assistance for those who cannot afford to pay the full price. No child will be turned away for inability to pay.

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North Side market takes a nose-dive in March



The Home Front

by Don DeBat

After three consecutive monthly increases of home sales on Chicago's North Side, historically low inventory levels caused the real estate market to nose-dive in March.

Combined March 2024 home sales for the Near North Side, Lincoln Park, Lakeview and North Center dropped by -15% compared with March of 2023, according to the April North Side Market Analysis, co-authored by Realtors John Irwin and Jackie Lafferty of Baird & Warner.

"The main issue is that there are simply not enough homes for sale to meet buyer demands or last year's numbers," said Irwin. "However, there still are positive

indicators, and while the economic news varies, we seem to be moving in the right direction."

Experts say upward mortgage-rate creep continues to cloud the market. On April 11, Freddie Mac's Primary Mortgage Market Survey reported that average benchmark 30-year fixed loans rose to 6.88% up from 6.82% a



John Irwin and Jackie Lafferty.

week earlier. A year ago, the 30-year fixed loans averaged 6.27%.

"Mortgage rates have been drifting higher for most of the year due to sustained inflation and the reevaluation of the Federal Reserve's monetary policy

path," noted Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist.

"While newly released inflation data from March continues to show a trend of very little movement, the financial market's reaction paints a far different economic picture," Khater said.

Since inflation decelerated from 9% to 3% between June of 2022 and June of 2023, the annual growth rate of inflation has remained effectively flat, ranging from 3.1% to 3.7% and averaging 3.3%.

"The March estimate of 3.5% annual inflation growth is in the middle of that range. However, the stock market's reaction was dramatically different, as illustrated by a significant drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average after that announcement," Khater said.

"It's clear that while the trend in inflation data has been close to flat for nearly a year, the narrative is much less clear and resembles the unrealized expectations of a recession from a year ago," he said.

Fifteen-year fixed mortgages averaged 6.16% on April 11, up



A year ago, the 30-year fixed-rates mortgage loans averaged 6.27%.

from 6.06% a week earlier. A year ago, 15-year fixed-rate mortgages averaged 5.54%.

The Freddie Mac survey is focused on conventional, conforming, fully amortizing home-purchase loans for borrowers who place a 20% down payment and have excellent credit.

Baird & Warner's April monthly market analysis detailed the following real estate comparatives in four neighborhood areas—the Near North Side, Lincoln Park, Lakeview and North Center.

• **Listings.** Combined active listing inventory levels dropped

-8.2% in March 2024, compared with March 2023. This is on top of a -27.5% drop in March 2023 vs. March 2022. Lincoln Park, Lakeview and North Center have between 1.5 and 2.3 months of inventory supply which are historically low levels.

"The most dramatic inventory decreases occurred in homes priced between \$500,000 and \$1 million, which dropped -23.6%, and homes in that bracket in Lakeview which plummeted -34.5%," Irwin noted.

• **Home sales.** The number of home sales in all four neighborhoods dropped in March 2024 vs. March 2023. Sales declined from -3.8% on the Near North Side to a whopping -40% in North Center.

• **Under contract.** Homes that went under contract in March 2024 dropped -11.7% vs. March 2023. "This is significant in that these homes usually close within 30 to 45 days, and are an indicator of what direction home sales will trend in April," Irwin said.

• **Home prices.** In March 2024 home prices rose by 8.9% over March 2023 with Lincoln Park prices rising a solid 22.9%. Three of the four neighborhoods reported increases with only the Near North Side reporting a decrease of -19.6%. Homes priced between \$500,000 and \$1 million showed increases, while prices on homes priced under \$500,000 and over \$1 million dropped.

"Traditionally, low inventory levels significantly drive-up prices, but this has not been the case on Chicago's North Side," Irwin said.

"Despite low inventory levels, buyers are still very price conscious and would rather wait for new homes to come on the market than overpay because of low inventory levels," Irwin said. "Pricing must reflect the true value of the home."

• **Fussy buyers.** Showing requests and attendance at open houses in the past three months remained strong. However, many buyers are looking for homes in "turnkey" condition.

"Updated kitchens, bathrooms, flooring and paint colors are very important, as many buyers do not want to do the updates themselves," Irwin noted.

Gazing into Baird & Warner's crystal ball, Irwin said: "The market is improving but the turn around could be a slow one until inventory levels rise. Buyers and sellers should do their homework before moving forward."

For more housing news, visit www.dondebat.biz. Don DeBat is co-author of "Escaping Condo Jail," the ultimate survival guide for condominium living. Visit www.escapingcondojail.com.






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Target's anti-shoplifting camera program is illegal, local attorneys claim

Lawfare parasites seek \$1K to \$5K damages per visit for Illinois customers

BY CWBCHICAGO AND JONATHAN BILYK, COOK COUNTY RECORD

Target stores risk losing a small fortune in a newly filed lawsuit because the company uses facial recognition technology to identify shoplifters in Illinois. Using the increasingly popular technology may seem like a natural way to combat theft, but the lawsuit claims Target's practice violates Illinois' Biometric Information Privacy Act [BIPA].

The law, one of the strictest biometric data regulations in the country, bars companies from collecting or keeping anyone's biometric information without first informing the individuals and getting their written permission.

And the law, and corresponding lawsuits, is now making some lawyers very rich. A report from the Chamber of Progress [COP], which represents companies in the tech sector, estimated trial lawyers have received, on average, \$11.5 million in fees per BIPA lawsuit. In all, the COP report said the lawsuits allowed in Illinois courts under BIPA have resulted in the transfer of at least hundreds of millions of dollars from employers and other Illinois business to trial lawyers in the form of legal fees.

The class action suit, filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County, claims that "Target's stores in Illinois are outfitted with cameras and advanced video surveillance systems that—unbeknownst to customers—surreptitiously collect, possess, or otherwise obtain Biometric Data."

"Target does not notify customers of this fact prior to store entry, nor does it obtain consent prior to collecting its customers' Biometric Data," the suit continues.

The suit claims Target has operated 14 "investigation centers" and two "forensic labs" and maintains a camera system that, among other things, detects people who linger in front of merchandise.

A woman named Arnetta Dean is the lead plaintiff in the suit. Her lawyers claim she "has entered Target's stores on numerous occasions," and each location she visited is believed to be equipped with facial recognition video surveillance systems. Yet, she claims she was never notified, nor did she give Target permission to collect her biometric data.

If Dean proves her allegations, Target should award her and every affected Target customer who joins the suit "\$5,000 for each and every intentional and/or reckless violation" of the state's law and "statutory damages of \$1,000 for each and every negligent violation," the suit claims.

According to the filing, "thousands" of Target customers might be eligible for payouts. Illinois courts have found that the biometrics law allows aggrieved parties to receive \$1,000 to \$5,000 for every violation within five years.

Whether Target uses biometric

data to track thieves is something the courts may have to decide. However, the company appears to be very good at keeping track of repeat offenders.

Target is not alone in its biometric troubles. Amazon is being sued in Illinois because it offers a "virtual try-on tool" that allegedly uses biometric information to allow customers to see how they would look if they used certain cosmetics, the Cook County Record recently reported.

Renard Smith, a 53-year-old who got charged with shoplifting from Target stores in Lakeview and Lincoln Park three times in February, told police he was "surprised" the company kept track of dozens of other thefts he alleg-

edly committed. Target subsequently accused him of shoplifting six more times while on pretrial release.

Target is not alone in its biometric troubles. Amazon is being sued in Illinois because it offers a "virtual try-on tool" that allegedly uses biometric information to allow customers to see how they would look if they used certain cosmetics, the Cook County Record recently reported.

Employers who use fingerprints or other biometric tools for security access, timekeeping, and other purposes have also been sued for allegedly failing to comply with the state's prickly law. Sen. Bill Cunningham has introduced a bill that would combine all employer-related violations into a single claim rather than a series of violations.

Cunningham said employers currently face "annihilative" payouts for violating the law, and a large portion of those settlements land in the pockets of trial lawyers.

'Annihilative' payouts faced by business under biometrics law

BY JONATHAN BILYK
Cook County Record

Enacted in 2008, the Illinois BIPA law was ostensibly designed to safeguard the so-called unique identifying biometric information of consumers and employees, such as their fingerprints, retinas or facial geometry, among others. It was inspired by the collapse of

the company known as Pay by Touch, which had been among those pioneering the ability of consumers to pay for goods and services by linking their banking information to one of the unique biometric identifiers, in that case, their fingerprints.

Since 2015, however, the BIPA law has been used by a

PAYOUTS see p. 7

On April 11, The Illinois Senate voted 46-13 to advance legislation [SB2979] intended to mitigate the potential financial harm to Illinois businesses and the state economy from the BIPA. The legislation would specifically address concerns raised by judges, attorneys, business advocates and others for the potential for "annihilative" payouts faced by Illinois

employers and other businesses under the BIPA law.

"We are a true outlier in this country," State Sen. Curran told the Center Square. "This is not a [biometrics] law that other states are saying Illinois got it right and we are going to follow suit and model the Illinois law."

SHOPLIFTING see p. 7



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Driver intentionally struck two people in River North, pinning one against a gas pump

BY CWBCHICAGO

A woman intentionally ran over two people with her car in River North, chasing one down, then pinning another against a service station gas pump, before being pinned to the ground by a witness and held for Chicago police, officials said.

The details emerged as prosecutors charged the driver, 55-year-old Rolanda Wilder, with two counts of attempted murder in a detention hearing before Judge Charles Beach.

In a media statement released shortly after the incident, Chicago police said a driver “lost control of her vehicle” and struck a woman on the sidewalk before striking the man “who was standing outside of a gas station” around 3:53 p.m. Saturday, April 6.

But that’s not what happened, according to Wilder’s arrest report and prosecutors.

Wilder first struck a 29-year-old River North woman on the sidewalk in the 200 block of W.



The BP station at 750 N. Wells, where Rolanda Wilder (inset) assaulted a woman and a man.

Chicago Ave., the arrest report said. The woman told police she tried to get out of the way, but Wilder steered her Toyota RAV4 directly at her, according to the report.

After striking the woman, Wilder drove across Chicago Ave. to the BP station at 750 N. Wells. There, she got out of her SUV and punched a 19-year-old Bloomington woman in the face “multiple times,” prosecutors claimed.

She “exchanged words” with a 58-year-old man outside the sta-

tion, returned to her SUV, and plowed into the man, pinning him against a gas pump with the vehicle, the police report said. He suffered two broken ribs.

After pinning the man, Wilder got out of her SUV and started to walk away from the scene, according to police. A witness grabbed her and pinned her to the ground.

Beach, the judge, detained Wilder as a safety threat at the state’s request.

SHOPLIFTING from p. 5

While welcoming the potential changes to the law, business groups said the changes fall short of what is needed to align the law’s purposes with its negative effects on the Illinois economy.

Since SB2979 advanced out of a Senate committee this spring, a coalition of business advocacy groups lodged opposition, particularly noting the measure does

nothing to protect retail businesses already facing lawsuits.

The coalition includes the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, Illinois Hotel & Lodging Assoc., Illinois Manufacturers’ Assoc., Illinois Railroad Assoc., Illinois Retail Merchants Assoc., Illinois Trucking Assoc., and the National Federation of Independent Business Illinois.

“Though SB 2979 will place

some limits on financial exposure for companies that have yet to be targeted for business-ending judgements under the existing law, it is not retroactive and therefore fails to help the thousands of businesses still fighting against massive judgments even though there is no proof that harm ever occurred,” the coalition said in a statement released earlier this year.

PAYOUTS from p. 5

growing cadre of trial lawyers to target businesses of all types and sizes with more than 2,000 class action lawsuits, with more BIPA-related class actions piling weekly into Cook County Circuit Court, other courts in Illinois, and even in other states, including California.

Some of the lawsuits have famously targeted social media giants, like Facebook-parent Meta and Google, resulting in headline grabbing settlements worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

The overwhelming bulk of the lawsuits to date, however, have pursued employers, accusing them of violating the law for scanning workers’ so-called biometric identifiers, such as fingerprints, faces, retinas, voices or other unique identifying physical characteristics, without first obtaining express consent or providing notices concerning how a business might use, store, share or destroy the biometric scans, among others of the law’s technical provisions.

Typically, those lawsuits have asserted employers have improperly required workers to scan their fingerprints to punch in and out of work shifts or to access secure or sensitive areas in a workplace, such as patient medication lockers in hospitals, cash rooms in retail stores, or rail yards, which operate under federal security mandates.

A growing number of BIPA class actions, for instance, have

targeted trucking companies for using so-called biometric cameras to scan truck drivers’ faces to monitor their activities in real time.

Under a series of Illinois Supreme Court decisions, a broad interpretation of the law has empowered trial lawyers to use those provisions as a battering ram to secure relatively quick and easy settlements, often worth millions of dollars.

To coerce compliance with the law, BIPA included language allowing both a so-called private right of action - meaning individuals can file suit without permission from the state - and steep potential payment demands of \$1,000-\$5,000 per violation.

However, under a series of Illinois Supreme Court decisions, a broad interpretation of the law has empowered trial lawyers to use those provisions as a battering ram to secure relatively quick and easy settlements, often worth millions of dollars.

In 2019, the state ruled plaintiffs don’t need to prove they were ever actually harmed by the collection of the biometric data. The court said it is enough for them to only assert a business may have violated the law’s technical provisions.

Letter to the Editor

Cooking with gas and creating compounds

Regarding your April 10 story on Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance [CABO], a minor correction: CO2 (carbon dioxide) is a compound, not a chemical element.

I’m all in favor of going electric, but am not a supporter of the Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance. It’s too mandatory. And yes, we need to improve our electric grid a lot. And to bring in more microgrids and onsite battery storage.

Recently I ran across something about the possibility of changing the design of transmission lines themselves to something much different, which would be safer and carry more electricity.

Electric power outages remind us of the need to keep packaged food on hand which doesn’t need to be refrigerated or cooked. Canned fish and bread are two examples. I have a camp stove using liquid fuel, which I could use outdoors for simple, quick cooking. Most people don’t have these. It’s also desirable to keep ice in your freezer to help keep the food cold during an outage.

But I also think it’s good to have a way to burn wood for heating and cooking in case of a power outage, and even a disruption in the supply of natural gas.

Aside from a Weber grill, I recommend Tulikivi [https://www.tulikivi.com/en/tulikivi/Why_Tulikivi] for a variety of environmentally friendly wood-burning soapstone heaters and cooking devices, including stovetop cooking and bake-ovens.

My father insisted on an electric range in his co-op while the default was natural gas. I learned to cook with electricity from an early age, and roll my eyes at the highly paid chefs who claim they can only cook with natural gas. I can cook with gas, too.

If I were building a new garage for myself or on spec, I’d include the wiring and power supply as well as the conduit for an EV charging station. It’s cheaper to do all this in new construction. But I don’t want an EV for myself, and wouldn’t try to persuade anyone else to get one.

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Chicago Cabaret Week begins May 10 with performances at 16 venues

Now in its third year, Chicago Cabaret Week 2024 runs from May 10 to May 19 — with events in 16 venues throughout Chicagoland.

The 10-day event showcases the diversity of the local cabaret community and the growing number of venues offering cabaret performances throughout the year.

Cabaret Week highlights renowned cabaret performers as well as emerging artists — and presents a range of musical styles found in the cabaret: blues, Broadway, Burlesque, Jazz, R&B, American Songbook, French chanson, and World music.

Most venues are located in downtown Chicago, the North Side, South Loop, and South Side. All the venues are small, intimate spaces, including clubs, theaters, and restaurants — and many regularly feature cabaret throughout the year.

According to Claudia Hommel, a founder of Cabaret Week, “Cabaret has been a part of the music scene in Chicago for over 100 years and the cabaret community is one of most vibrant in the world. Every night you can find cabaret shows throughout the city and suburbs, with artists constantly developing new, exciting, innovative shows.”

Discounted tickets are available for \$30 or less, excluding fees, for 17 featured events. Reservations are strongly recommended. A schedule of concerts is available at www.chicagocabaretweek.org.

Chicago Cabaret Week is produced by four leading cabaret organizations: Chicago Cabaret Professionals, Working in Concert, Acts Of Kindness Cabaret, and The Cabaret Projects with support from Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs (DCASE), Choose Chicago, Illinois Arts Council, and WDCB 90.9 FM radio.

ECLIPSE from p. 2

drawing buyers. Gold Coast area homes now sit for sale on the market for about 13 months, with homes priced over \$6 million taking even longer to sell.

The Melman's Gold Coast mansion was built in the 1960s, and has housed well-known former owners including White Sox executive **Kenny Williams**, TV news anchor **Zoraida Sambolin** and TV personalities **Bill** and **Giuliana Rancic**.

GOAAAAAL!: The Chicago Red Stars soccer team revealed that they are set to host Bay FC at Wrigley Field on Saturday, June 8. This marks a historic occasion as it will be the inaugural National Women's Soccer League match to grace one of our most iconic landmarks. Tickets on sale now.

JOFFREY BALLET: The Joffrey Ballet boldly closes its 2023-24 season with the return of *Midsummer Night's Dream* by internationally renowned Swedish choreographer **Alexander Ekman**. Premiered by The Joffrey Ballet to North American audiences in 2018 with critical acclaim, Ekman's rendition is a mind-bending trip to a surreal realm of unearthly delights. Far from a Shakespearean tale, this fully immersive theatrical experience pays homage to the summer solstice and the Scandinavian Midsummer holiday—a time of uproarious celebration, mystery, adventure, and love. At the Lyric Opera, beginning April 25.

BIRTHDAY: Brookfield Zoo is preparing to celebrate the 90th anniversary of its summer concert series, featuring performances from renowned artists. On June 22, **The Fray** will kick off the series, followed by **Barenaked Ladies** on July 12. The **Gin Blossoms** will wrap up the series on July 27.

SUMMER: In a sure fire sign that winter has passed, it's only about a month to the first festival of the summer, the Belmont Sheffield Music Festival, starting on May 24. They're looking for volunteers, email them at info@lakevieweast.com to sign up.

WHO'S WHERE: **Ethel Kennedy** celebrated her 96th birthday April 11th surrounded by her family in Hyannis Port,

INSIDE PUBLICATIONS



Whitney Reynolds, Dan Ackroyd.



Jeff and Stephanie Reese Emrich.



Catherine Johns



Alexander Ekman



Ben Wysocki, Dave Welsh and Joe King of The Fray.



Klaus Makela



Chris Berg and Leroy Gilbert Cogle.

MA. The widow of the martyred statesman and New York Senator, **Robert F. Kennedy**, Mrs. Kennedy is a living historic landmark and patriot... **Sam** and **Honey Jacobs Skinner** proved they'll do anything to sweeten life for their pooch, even in toasty Bocca Grande, FL... **Dean Richards**, the esteemed film critic at WGN, with the eponymous agent **Joey Majumdar**... **Candace Jordan** and **Veronica Beard** brought the party to Fox 32, thanks to **Sylvia Perez** for the upcoming Wings Fundraiser honoring Candace

and supporting the victims of domestic violence... **Bobbi Panter** was “eclipsed,” so were **Jeff** and **Stephanie Reese Emrich**, **Todd S. Davis** and **Catherine Johns** who joined countless Chicagoans observing the solar eclipse... Chicago acting legend **Dan Ackroyd** joined **Whitney Reynolds** for the seventh season of her show, the laughs never stopped, he even did a shout out to her kids... Chicago Cuts **David Flom** was at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, AZ for the NCAA Men's Championship... **The Knitwits** were out

in full force for lunch at Cooper Hawk's Winery in New Lenox with artist **Rosemary Fant** and her sweet mother, **Dolores**... **Sherry Lea Fox** with her son in Laguna Beach, CA... this newspaper's art director **Sheila Swann** sheltered with many other electricity/heat/Internet refugees at the Sister Bay, WI, public library, after power went out in a big storm... **Paul R Iacono** splashing in the pool in Vegas with **Kadmiel Christmas**... **Dr. Rose Gomez** and **Lilli** have survived their long travels and are back in Switzerland with good wines and alpine vittles... Remarkable Dutch artist **Chris Berg** left Chicago after 10 years to return to his native Holland. He has already welcomed a Chicago pal, **Leroy Gilbert Cogle**, to Holland.

CROWN CURATOR: The Whitney Museum in New York has promoted **Kim Conaty** to the role of Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator. She succeeds **Scott Rothkopf** in the role, who was promoted to serve as the director of the Whitney, a post he has held since November.

NO VALUE: The US Postal Service is raising First Class stamps to 73¢? It's like the 10th price increase in the last two years. If they're trying to kill off the business then why not just make it a full dollar? Sheesh. And for the extra money they'll still lose your mail-in ballot this fall.

Astronomy compels the soul to look upwards and leads us from this world to another.

- Plato

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PLASTIC from p. 1

abysmal failure in the United States. Plastics are nearly impossible to recycle because of the many different types of polymers that cannot be recycled together.

Residents receiving City garbage collection are charged the \$9.50 per month garbage fee for each dwelling unit. This fee is billed as part of a unified utility bill that includes water, sewer, and garbage charges. (Senior Freeze eligible residence: \$4.75 per month.)

There is no extra charge for recycling by City garbage collection [private garbage collection companies may charge].

Per the City's Municipal Code, the DSS is the exclusive provider of garbage collection at residential properties with four units or fewer. Larger residential and commercial buildings are not eligible for City garbage collection.

The same companies, special interest groups, NGOs and government functionaries that created the plastic pollution crisis are - even on this Earth Day - primarily motivated to keep the public from believing that their product needs to be phased out.

A closer examination of the city's (and nations's) plastics situation can be shocking. What is collected but doesn't get reused or recycled does not chemically degrade but rather becomes a permanent part of our world by breaking apart to form micro-plastics, pieces smaller than five millimeters in diameter.

In the past few years, scientists have found significant quantities of micro-plastics in our water... all water. Oceans, lakes, streams, in the snow and rain, and coming out of your kitchen faucet. Some 95% of all drinking water worldwide is believed to have micro-plastics in it.

It's in the air we breathe, and in your body. It's in your blood, colon, lungs, veins, it is found in breast milk, placentas and fetuses.

One research paper estimated that the average person consumes 21 grams of plastic every month—mostly from water [see sidebar]. You hipsters... sorry, micro-plastics are also widely found in craft beers and coffee, and other human foods. According to Nature Magazine, humans have created around 11 billion metric tons of plastic. This volume surpasses the biomass of all animal and marine life.

Behind the plastic waste / recycling campaign is fraud and deception. Big Oil and the plastics industry have deceptively promoted recycling as a solution to plastic waste management for more than 50 years, despite their long-standing knowledge that

plastic recycling is not technically or economically viable at scale.

And we fell for it. We're still falling for it.

Recycling plastic today is more corporate propaganda than any real Earth-saving measure.

Now that we know, why are we still playing along? This Earth Day, why not vanquish the lies from our quest to recycle.

The same companies, special interest groups, NGOs and government functionaries that created the plastic pollution crisis are - even on this Earth Day - primarily motivated to keep the public from believing that their product needs to be phased out.

They claim to care about the environment while presenting the false solution to the problem of plastic pollution. It is a solution that removes the onus of responsibility from the plastic manufacturing companies themselves and placing it on the consumer, leaving us scolding friends, neighbors and family for not recycling.

We believe that if we just toss that empty Coke bottle into the blue recycling bin, then Shazam! We've recycled.

What we should be asking is if we need to recycle plastic at all? It's beyond time we all stopped pretending. We can all start at home. If you use plastic containers, toss your plastic recycling into the regular garbage. The fact is that the vast majority of it is going from your blue bin into landfills. If we use it, and dispose of it in the regular trash, it will end up being buried in landfill or burned.

The truth is that only specific recycled plastics can be ground up and mixed in with virgin plastic. Even then, the regrind percentage you can add to virgin material is about 7-10%, depending on the polymer. Over 90% of that next bottle of Coke we reach for is contained in newly created plastic.

Meanwhile, this Earth Day, we amateur environmentalists will cheer the effort, and post photos on social media, virtue-signaling that we're "saving the planet." Well we're not. Not even close. Scientists estimated that only about 9% of plastics produced from the 1950s (when plastics were first mass produced) up to now have been recycled.

Despite what industry, environmental activists and government are telling us, plastic is not designed to be recycled.

If you talk to your garbage man, they'll tell you that burning plastic is the right way to dispose of it. The environment can deal with carbon dioxide way better than it can with micro-plastics that don't break down. Plants eat carbon dioxide, and convert it to oxygen. But like humans, the plants really don't need the plastics either.

So what happens to all of our 'recycled' plastic? Much of it is shipped from the Global North to the Global South, with waste haulers often dumping and openly burning plastic in foreign lands without re-

gard to environmental laws.

People who live near the burn sites live in a degraded environment and face a lifetime of health risks. Those who earn incomes by picking waste make the least from cheap plastics, and because of constant exposure to plastics in their line of work, they face elevated risks of cancers, infectious diseases (which cling to plastics), respiratory problems and other serious health issues.

This dark end of the road for our used plastics seldom gets shared on Instagram or Facebook.

Even the plastics that do get reused now may be doing harm. Manufacturers mix in a large portion of freshly made plastic and other additives to melted down recycled plastic waste to restore some of its desirable properties. Even if plastic recycling rates were higher, recycling alone would not solve the wide-ranging health and envi-

Vast majority of Great Lakes litter is plastic

According to a new analysis and report from the Alliance for the Great Lakes - 86% of litter collected on Great Lakes beaches is composed either partially or fully of plastic.

The report is based on 20 years of data collected from more than 14,000 Adopt-a-Beach cleanups on all five Great Lakes. The new analysis details the most common types of plastic items found on Great Lakes shorelines and outlines potential solutions to reduce plastic pollution. In the environment, plastics never go away.

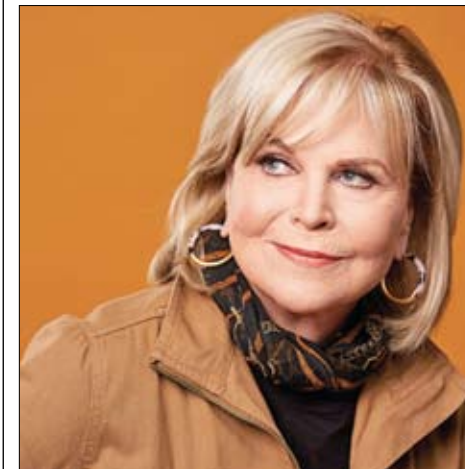
Instead, they break down into toxic microplastic particles that make their way into the Great Lakes, a source of drinking water for 40 million people.

ronmental problems caused by our plastic production and pollution.

Ghana and several other countries worldwide are now working to establish a country-level circular economy for plastic. This will involve gradually banning single-use plastics that have little reuse value, such as the thin plastic films used in food packaging.

We actually know what to do. Many existing waste management techniques, such as incineration, pyrolysis [hot steam], or bioremediation [the use of microbes], have already been shown to reduce plastic pollution and demand for plastic in the first place. But they can be energy and time intensive. This Earth Day, how about we stop the lying, and start removing plastics from our daily use? America has always had a consumer-driven economy. If consumers stop using these plastics, industry will stop creating so much of it.

Public invited to honor Carol Marin for Older Adult Month



Carol Marin. Photo courtesy of Kate Schleicher

Chicago's award-winning journalist and news anchor Carol Marin will be honored 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 7, at the Northside AARP Community Group Meeting at Third Space in Lakeview Presbyterian Church, lower level, 716 W. Addison St. .

This hybrid meeting is both in person and on Zoom with registration at northsideaarpcommunitygroup@gmail.com prior to May 6 when ZOOM connecting information will be sent out. The in-person location is elevator accessible.

Marin, a television and print journalist, has been working in Chicago since 1978. In 2016 she and long-time producer Don Moseley formed an independent documentary company Marin Corp Productions housed at DePaul Univ. Here they co-direct a select program for DePaul students at the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence.

Broadcast affiliations have included NBC-WMAQ-TV; a CBS News network correspondent and investigative reporter; WMMB-TV; WTTW contributor.

A print media political columnist for the Sun-Times since 2004, this graduate of the Univ. of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana also often moderates political panels.

Marin will examine "the good, the bad, and the ugly" during this event, for both the honorees and the audience. Questions from the audience will also be taken.

POLICE BEAT from p. 6

The 1400 block of W. Morse remained closed midday while police conducted their investigation.

Ten people have been shot in Rogers Park so far this year, up from nine at this point in 2023. Six people were shot in the area as of this date in 2022, one of whom was shot by a person acting in self-defense, according to officials. There were two victims at this point in 2021.

— Compiled by CWBChicago.com

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ASCENSION from p. 1

is the largest nonprofit and Catholic health system in the United States.

The move is intended to cut costs for Ascension, but in the process it is leaving affected employees concerned about working conditions and patient safety.

According to its 2022 annual report, Atlanta-based SCP Health provides staffing in more than 400 hospitals and health systems across more than 30 states, employing more than 7,500 clinicians to treat more than 8 million patients, including 2.1 million tele-med conferences.

“This practice is part of the Ascension playbook that looks very familiar to us,” the INA said in an April 3 statement. “We have experienced these increased workloads and decreased accountability as private equity takes over more and more of the healthcare industry. It is unacceptable.”

The Chicago Medical Society [CMS], representing more than 17,000 local physicians, including some at Ascension Illinois, is seeking a meeting with Ascension leadership to discuss the decision after hearing from hospitals about their worries.

“Our purpose is to make sure, even if a third party gets involved, patient safety and high quality is never compromised,” said Dr. Tariq Butt, president of CMS.

The involvement of CMS in the labor transition could intensify pressure on Ascension Illinois to rethink portions of its deal with SCP Health and more observers and lawmakers may weigh in.

The Illinois Nurses Assoc. [INA] is also speaking out against nonprofit health sys-

tem Ascension’s decision to outsource clinicians to a staffing company owned by a foreign private equity firm.

The powerful union called the move a “private-equity scheme” and said it has the potential to harm patient care if patient caseloads are increased in the process.

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The INA described hospitalists as being overwhelmingly concerned about SCP Health’s private-equity ownership, a fact they believe will lead to larger patient caseloads proposed by SCP’s contracts as it seeks to grow revenues.

“Our hospitals are not an investment portfolio. They are public health necessities,” says Kaitlynd French, an INA board member and nurse at Ascension St. Joseph Medical Center (Joliet).

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin did not condemn Ascension’s outsourcing decision but told Crain’s in a statement that, “We rely on our health care providers for top-notch care, but when they face significant strain and burnout, patients can suffer. Hospitals anchored in Illinois should maintain their commitment to their providers, patients, and communities.”

However, a Wisconsin senator was far less sanguine. Sen. Tammy Baldwin accused nonprofit system Ascension of “operating like a private equity fund” for aggressively pursuing investment opportunities while staffing and services falter at its hospitals, according to a 2023 letter to Ascension CEO Joe Impicicche.

Baldwin wrote that the St. Louis-based system has for-profit investment opportunities dwarfing what it provides in annual charity care as a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, according to a 2023 report in



Ascension Saint Francis Hospital, 355 Ridge Ave., Evanston.

Healthcare Dive.

Ascension has been the subject of several recent reporting investigations, including a Dec., 2022 New York Times article alleging it spent years making its workforce leaner to boost profitability — leading ultimately to its detriment when the pandemic hit.

Baldwin’s letter followed reports in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Milwaukee Magazine alleging the system recently experienced disruptions to patient care,

long wait times, surgery delays, and staff concerns about safety at one hospital, and after it announced plans to close a labor and delivery unit at another facility.

In an unusual development, the Federal Trade Commission [FTC], the Dept. of Justice, and the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services jointly launched a cross-government public inquiry into private-equity and other corporations’ increasing control over health care.

“Private equity firms and other corporate owners are increasingly involved in health care system transactions, and, at times, those transactions may lead to a maximizing of profits at the expense of quality care,” the FTC said in a written statement.

“The cross-government inquiry seeks to understand how certain health care market transactions may increase consolidation and generate profits for firms while threatening patients’ health, workers’ safety, quality of care, and affordable health care for patients and taxpayers.”

The federal agencies are seeking public comments. The public will have 60 days to submit comments at Regulations.gov, no later than May 6. Once submitted, comments will be posted to Regulations.gov.

SWIM from p. 1

McConnell responded on April 11, explaining that because the Chicago River is a federal waterway, they are working “closely” with the USCG, as well as various City of Chicago departments.

“Because of its jurisdiction, we are working under the auspices of USCG,” said McConnell, “and – at their request – [we] are allowing USCG to coordinate with the city to execute the event. That process is ongoing. Based on that, we believe we have taken all the approval steps necessary to date. When we are told that the coordination step is completed, we will file all necessary documents with the city.”

McConnell says the idea is “pretty novel” and planning the Chicago River Swim has been “a real education process” for his organization, the Coast Guard, and the City of Chicago.

“The changes in the Chicago River over the past decades are nothing short of incredible,” said McConnell. “What was once unimaginable is now possible. We are committed to conducting a safe event, backed by the latest in water quality technology and a thorough safety plan.”

Water quality, says McConnell, will be monitored “constantly” up to the day of the swim, using data from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and H2NOW, a water quality monitoring system administered by Current, a Chicago-based nonprofit.

The river will be closed to commercial and recreational vessels during the event. McConnell says there will be more than 100 safety personnel, including lifeguards,

spotters, kayakers, and emergency responders.

The event has the support of Friends of the Chicago River. According to the 6,000-member nonprofit, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has approved swimming in the Chicago River for 13 years.

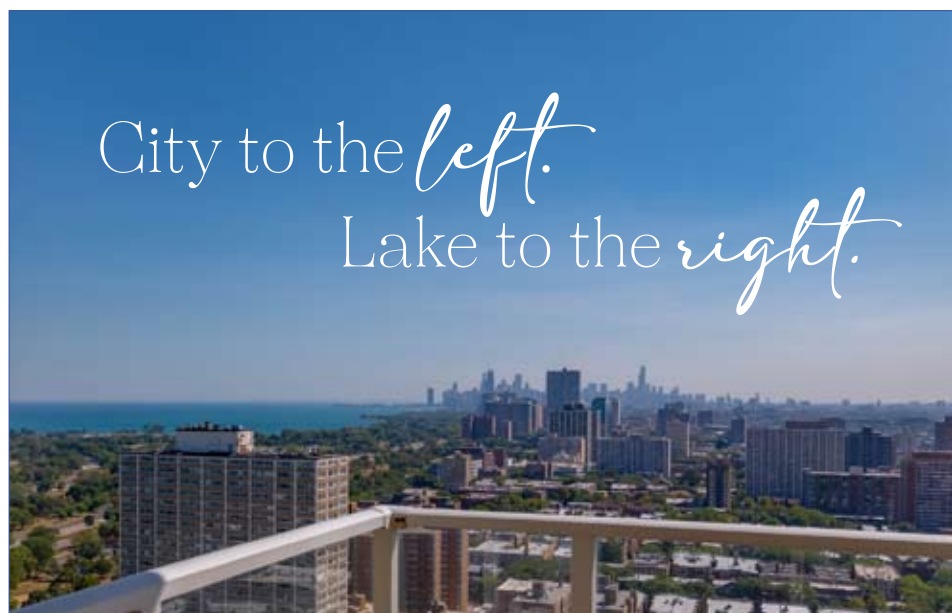
“This monumental open water swim event is emblematic of all the work so many good people have put into transforming this wonderful waterway,” said Margaret Frisbie, Executive Director of Friends of the Chicago River. “Today, on an average day it really is cleaner than it used to be, and it is clean enough for swimming in most places.”

McConnell, an investment banker from Barrington, is an open water swimmer himself. In 2016, he swam 32 miles from Molokai island to Oahu, including 27 miles over ocean 2,300 feet deep, with steady trade winds, 15-foot swells, whales, dolphins, jellyfish, and sharks.

When he swam the English Channel in 2011, it took him 14 hours in heavy waves and pitch darkness.

Also that year, he founded A Long Swim with his sister, Ellen McConnell Blake-man, following the death of their father from ALS, the neurodegenerative disease also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease, and Ellen’s subsequent diagnosis with ALS. McConnell says events like the Chicago River Swim have raised nearly \$2 million for ALS research at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine.

The September event will also raise money for local programs to help at-risk youth learn to swim.



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