

You can avoid reality,
but you cannot avoid
the consequences of avoiding reality.

—Ayn Rand

Landmark designation sent to City Council hoping to save two towers

According to Crain's Chicago, a pair of historic State St. towers may yet be saved from the federal government's wrecking ball.

While the federal government is generally not bound by municipal regulations, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks unanimously recommended that City Council protect the Century Building, 202 S. State St., and Consumers Building, 220 S. State St., as historically or architecturally significant.

These structures, built over a century ago and owned by the federal government since 2005,

face potential demolition supposedly to enhance security around the nearby Dirksen Federal Courthouse.

Preservationists have opposed the demolition ever since the plan was announced, after Congress allocated \$52 million to raze the buildings.

The City's recommendation sets the stage for a potential clash with the General Services Admin. [GSA], which is evaluating the demolition proposal. If City Council approves landmark status early next year, it may hinder the GSA's demolition, slated for

the spring.

Ward Miller, executive director of Preservation Chicago, presented more than 23,900 signatures in support of saving the buildings, and the GSA said that it plans to complete an investigation before taking a position or moving forward, noting that a reuse of the properties would have a beneficial impact on the area's economy and historic integrity.

The federal government acquired the buildings in 2005 due to a bomb threat made on a neighboring building in 2004.

Peoples Gas pushes back against state oversight, asks for further rate increase

Local unions worried about safety, job implications

BY ANDREW ADAMS
Capitol News Illinois

Peoples Gas is requesting a multimillion-dollar bump to its already record-high rate increase approved by regulators last month.

In November, the Illinois Commerce Commission [ICC] forced a yearlong pause on the company's controversial pipeline replacement program while it investigates whether the program adequately prioritizes replacing high-risk natural gas pipes throughout Chicago, where the utility serves about 875,000 customers.

The company alleged in a filing with the ICC last week that a "misunderstanding" in last month's ruling will prevent the company from conducting emergency repairs and other "critical" work.

Consumer and environmental advocates have pushed back strongly against the request, saying that it is an attempt to overturn the ICC's decision without going through the proper appeals process.

The company is now seeking "expedited clarification" on what work it is allowed to continue doing and what work must be stopped. Peoples Gas claims that in pausing around \$265 million of work spread over several

years, the ICC stopped the company from conducting critical infrastructure work that is beyond the scope of the program that is under investigation.

Peoples Gas is now seeking an additional \$9.1 million in annual revenue on top of the \$303 million increase that regulators approved in November.

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Last month's ICC decision, which came in the form of a "final order," cut Peoples Gas' initial rate increase request by 25%. That, along with the decision to investigate the company's pipe replacement strategy, drew praise from consumer and environmental advocates.

But the decision to pause some infrastructure spending while the state investigates the company's practices was met with strong pushback from both the company and the unions that represent its workers. They cite both the possible economic and safety impact of the decision.

In a statement, Peoples Gas said that "several hundred jobs will likely be lost" because of the ICC's actions.

Ed Maher, a spokesperson for the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150, said the decision could affect up to 1,000 workers, including 200 members of his union.

"It leaves an entire workforce without a way to feed their families for 12 months," he said.

Maher also said the ICC "overstepped any kind of precedent" and the paused work could create safety risks.

"The commissioners are playing politics with peoples' jobs, peoples' heat and peoples' safety," Maher said.

AFL-CIO President Tim Drea wrote a letter to the ICC commissioners on Monday in which he called their decision to pause the pipeline replacement program "troubling."

Consumer advocates, meanwhile, have pushed back against some of these claims.

Sarah Moskowitz, the head of the Citizens Utilities Board, called Peoples Gas' request "irresponsible."

"It is outrageous for Peoples Gas, which has been rolling in six straight years of record profits and just received a record rate hike, to claim that it suddenly doesn't have the resources to conduct repairs to its system and pay its workers," she said in a statement.

CUB filed a formal response to Peoples Gas' request on Wednesday.

UTILITY see p. 12



Surveillance images show a man suspected of robbing four downtown Chicago banks since Sept. 19.

Serial bank robber strikes again on Mag Mile

BY CWBCHICAGO

an FBI media alert.

A serial robber who has been targeting bank branches along Michigan Ave. struck again on Dec. 8, according to the FBI. We first reported about the guy last month after his third holdup attempt in the Loop.

The feds say he moved north of the river for his fourth attempt, which occurred at Citibank, 539 N. Michigan, around 10:10 a.m. He displayed a gun and demanded cash from a teller, according to

He did not make any money during his first three robbery attempts, which occurred at Citibank, 100 S. Michigan, around 3:30 p.m. Sept. 19 and at Citibank's 180 N. Michigan location at 3:35 p.m. Oct. 11 and 2:50 p.m. Nov. 7.

Tips can be shared with the agency's Chicago field office at 312-421-6700 or online at tips.fbi.gov. They are offering a reward of up to \$1,000 that leads directly to the man's arrest and conviction.

Man spent 20 hours in jail after alderman signed criminal complaint without reading it

BY CWBCHICAGO

So, we requested CPD body cam footage from the incident on Oct. 13. But the police department failed to provide it—a violation of the state's Freedom of Information Act. On Dec. 6, after we asked the Illinois attorney general's office to intervene, CPD delivered the videos.

Newly-acquired Chicago police body camera video shows an Albany Park man being arrested for battering a Chicago alderman at a River North bar, even though the alderman says that's not what happened.

Ulises Ortiz, 33, of Albany Park, spent 20 hours in police custody after Ald. Brendan Reilly [42nd] signed complaints against him outside Boss Bar, 420 N. Clark, on Oct. 7.

The CPD arrest report and criminal complaint in the case court file identify Reilly as the victim who was struck with a belt during a dispute over a game of pool.

"A city alderman was struck in the face and refused medical attention on the scene," said a preliminary notification to CPD's Crime Prevention and Information Center shortly after Ortiz's arrest. "It is not believed the alderman was targeted due to the alderman's position with the city."

Reilly has consistently denied that he was battered since this reporter first asked him about the incident two months ago. He called the allegations made in the police report and criminal complaint "totally inaccurate."

Around 9:45 p.m., a Chicago police officer stationed near Boss Bar got out of his squad car and walked across the street because someone had Ortiz pinned on Hubbard St.

In the video, a man says Ortiz hit "security" with something.

Another says, "He hit Jose with a belt."

A third person who walks up to the officer mentions the alderman, but the full conversation cannot be understood.

After receiving confirmation that someone wanted to sign complaints, the officer puts Ortiz in the back of his squad car.

Less than a minute later, Ald. Reilly and another man walk across Clark St. to speak with the cop.

"Hey, alderman," the officer says.

"It's a felony, by the way, and, uh, I'll sign it," Reilly begins, shaking the cop's hand.

COMPLAINT see p. 12



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Survival is the ultimate surprise



By Thomas J. O'Gorman

I first met Peggy Guggenheim in Venice back in 1974. She had a doughy face and crazy nose. And she loved to be rowed over the canals by Beppo her oarsman. And slept in an Alexander Calder bed.

She was wealthy. Looney. Lonely. And her father went down on the Titanic. Victim of the berg.

Life often comes packaged in the unpredictable, unplanned for, and the shock of discovering it's all bigger than we think.

But there's always more than we think. Like a stack of Russian Matryoshka dolls that fit so easily inside one another, they are the perfect place to hide.

I suspect that's always been the deeper meaning that unfolds in the drama and turmoil of Advent. In the season of wild anticipation, "open your eyes and take a look around."

My father, Mossy O'Gorman, a talented man of Irish airs and dances, always lived on the edge of life. The result of too much time spent in the South Pacific with a helmet and a rifle.

Many 18-year-olds were forever altered with the prospect of Guadalcanal in your dashboard and Iwo Jima in your rearview mirror. Fol-

lowing such life-stretching teenage travels, there wasn't much left to rattle your expectations of what the planet had to offer.

However, I was always grateful that my father had the comfort of his Catholic faith that equipped him to embrace the world as he found it. Broken. Hurting. Angry and alone. A world deeply frayed at the edges. But hungry for hope. For that crust of bread. That sip of water. That endearing piece of piazza that signaled survival and rebirth.

A world he knew was in desperate need for a good surprise. An exploding cigar of faith. A sacred banana peel on a sidewalk. Surprises, he knew, come in many ways. Not necessarily in their guise of slapstick comedy.

In the weeks leading up to a full declaration of war between the United States and Germany during World War II, American philanthropist, Guggenheim, was determined to protect a wide tradition of French Modernism's Jewish painters from the slaughter of Nazi Germany.

She worked tirelessly to find ways to protect Europe's leading Jewish painters whose contribution to Modernist painterly style had no equal.

The Guggenheim fortune had long been at work collecting documents and travel visas on behalf of France's most dynamic artists. The large travel group relocated several times to accommodate their dangerous and highly political works. From Southern France they were forced to remain in fascist Spain until it was safe to proceed to Portugal, where the mostly French painters, boarded aircraft for travel to New York. Very Casablanca-like.

It is said that Guggenheim paid more than \$1200 a seat for travel to the States, making that expenditure exceed \$1 million.

Fourteen Modernist painters journeyed to New York where they transformed the artistic sidewalks of New York. Guggenheim was relentless in her efforts to organize efforts to display the revolutionary work of these painters. The sheer scale of her efforts altered the flora



Peggy Guggenheim in Venice.

and fauna of Modernist painting in America.

In March 1942, a special exhibit opened in New York City, European Art at Pierre Matisse. One piece each from the artists of who had come to New York with Guggenheim.

The exhibition was the first fruits of that undertaking of rescuing Europe's Jewish Modernist painters. They would survive.

Artists Matta Echaurren, Ossip Zadkine, Yves Tanguely, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Fernand Leger, Andre Breton, Piet Mondrian, André Masson, Amdeé Ozenfant, Jacques Lipchitz, Pavel Tchelitchew, Kurt Seligmann, and Eugene Bermann from nations across Europe, each working in contemporary modern styles. You know, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, and De Stijl, all gathered in one great exhibit for the beginnings of a great moment in art.

The aesthetics of the event themselves were a shock that grounded the artists to the pavements of New York.

Against the horrors and the bloodshed of Nazi aggression, a whole new world of artistic enterprise began.

New York was reborn as an artistic world capital. And the terror of Nazi aggression was artistically rejected. They replaced the shocking values of nihilist nationalism with the flowering of modernism's humanist expression.

Guggenheim lifts herself high as a shocking expression of Advent humanism. Her surrender to the

landscape of the human heart and soul. Those edge places of human living where the dynamic passage of the Divine fills the humanity of those open to the familiar, but often unheard voice of God.

It is good to stand beside the artist and sculptor whose own hands calibrate the hidden face of God. Artist's themselves often feel the invitation to such intimacy, fearing too much life and too much living. An all too frequent response to discipleship.

The face of New York City must be reimaged following the crescendoed encounter with the Divine. A sight familiar to the artist of sepulcher, stable, madonnas and magi. Often the single spectacled sight of wonder and promise.

So we hover 'round the mystic noise of Divine invasion and constant interest in breaking in. Like monkeys in the treetops or leaf-eating giraffes. Remember, survival is the ultimate surprise.

PAY UP: The Sun-Times reports that new records show Chicago Teachers Union President **Stacy Davis Gates** was \$5,100 behind on her water, sewer and garbage services before starting a payment plan in July 2023. She almost immediately defaulted on that plan - in September - despite making more than \$289K a year. Really Stacy?

MOTHER JONES: The comments and commentary on **Mother Jones** and her Water Tower memorial are reaching new levels of concern which should also concern our mayor. Committees are forming to disestablish the questionable logic and Chicago loyalties involved in permitting Mother Jones to be the first Chicagoan to receive selective attention because she was a victim of the Great Fire of 1871.

Many people lost all they had when the fire raged through the city. Mother Jones's championing American labor deserves attention and a suitable space. Just not at the beloved spot where all the victims are honored.

MR. JONES: 50 years ago, on Dec. 21, 1973, a skinny, stage-frightened 13-year-old kid walked upon a makeshift stage in the gym at a now nonexistent West Side middle school, to play the role of Mr. Jones in that Chicago Public School's holiday play for students and staff. By the end of the second performance (after receiving ample laughs and applause), the kid knew he wanted to be a professional actor, and **Darryl Maximilian Robinson** has achieved that goal. Robinson was named a winner by Allevents of a 2022 Making The World Happening Award for his many theatre-related offerings.

HOLABIRD AND ROCHE: Plans to renovate the Holabird and

Roche State St. edifice known as the Waterman Building (1919) seem to have fallen through. Sad.

ALSO SAD: Security removed **George Blakemore** from City Council chambers last week as new rules limiting time for public speakers kicked in. There is no way Mayors Daley or **Emanuel** would have done that.

CHRISTMAS "L" TRAIN: The

CTA has let loose its most glorious locomotive carrying Santa and his friends around Chicago in holiday comfort and dramatic Chicago festive garb. The train runs regular routes and fans out across the skyline. Tie the child together and



George Blakemore. Photo by Isa Giallorenzo

SURVIVAL see p. 8

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Following murder, alderman puts mayor's office on blast: 'eminently foreseeable that someone was going to get killed'

BY CWBCHICAGO

"It shouldn't have come to this, but it was eminently foreseeable that someone was going to get killed," Ald. Bill Conway [34th] said Dec. 7, hours after a man was murdered beneath the Clinton 'L' station in the West Loop.

On Nov. 8, a 39-year-old man was shot at the same location. Two weeks before that, a man was shot about two blocks away in the 600 block of W. Fulton.

Conway has been working for months to get a nearby homeless camp cleaned up, saying it is fueling violent crime and narcotics activity in the neighborhood.

"Based on the clear trajectory of violent crime in the area, this tragic fatal shooting was inevitable and likely avoidable," lamented Ald. Conway.

"For months, I've been relentlessly trying to get the Mayor's Office to see that this site was no longer a peaceful encampment but rather a magnet for violent crime and drugs," the freshman alderman continued in an email sent to media outlets.

Conway recently accused Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration of withholding city services that could clean up a homeless camp under the Clinton train station on Lake St. A top Johnson aide said the city could do more but would only act if Conway agreed to vote in favor of two of the mayor's pet projects.

Last week, Chicago police arrested a 19-year-old man after he allegedly sold drugs to an undercover cop just a few yards from the homeless camp and murder scene. Prosecutors said police went into a tent Tailon Appleton sold drugs from and found nearly three-quarters of a pound of heroin worth \$52,875 and \$8,610 worth of crack. They also recov-

ered a loaded handgun with an extended ammunition magazine attached inside a backpack inside the tent, officials said. They also seized \$1,188 in cash from Appleton.

Prosecutors asked Judge Maryam Ahmad to keep Appleton in jail as a public safety threat, but she refused, deciding instead to put him on electronic monitoring. Ahmad supported her decision by saying the arrest was Appleton's first as an adult, that he cares for his mother, who has cancer, and that he was "very compliant [with] officers."

"Any number of recent events, including [Dec. 8's] major arrest, should have been sufficient to warrant their response. It is unfortunate that it has come to this, but I hope it finally results in action," Conway continued.

The alderman's media statement claimed Johnson's office

sent residents a "stock letter" after the Dec. 8 arrest that included a "misrepresentation" that the tent city was "merely a peaceful encampment" and noting that

Conway thanked the Chicago Police Dept. and other city agencies that have partnered with his office to address the camp's challenges.

Ald. Bill Conway recently accused Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration of withholding city services that could clean up a homeless camp under the Clinton train station on Lake St. A top Johnson aide said the city could do more but would only act if Conway agreed to vote in favor of two of the mayor's pet projects.

"homelessness is not illegal."

"The unfortunate response also disregarded the fact that for some time now, the Dept. of Family and Support Services hasn't been able to get [residents of the camp] to accept their offer for rapid rehousing and has been referring cases to CPD—because it isn't safe, for anyone," the statement said.

"I also want to assure my community that as Alderman and a father who walks his young daughters through these viaducts each day, I will continue to do everything possible to address this dangerous situation," Conway stated. "Everyone has the right to live in a safe community and deserves to have their concerns addressed by the Mayor's Office without condition."

CPS kicks off city planning meetings in January

The Chicago Public Schools will host 16 roundtables across the city from mid-December through February to discuss its Educational Master Facilities Plan [EMFP]. The EMFP Roundtables are a version of capital/ facilities engagement to improve the District's strategy for an optimal student experience.

Only three meetings are taking place on the North Lakefront, they include:

- Roberto Clemente Academy, 1147 N. Western Ave., Jan. 16, 2024, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
- Lincoln Park High School, 2001 N. Orchard St., Jan. 18, 2024, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
- Peirce Elementary School, 1423 W Bryn Mawr Ave., Jan. 23, 2024, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

While these are public meetings, and in-person attendance is available, registration is required. Visit cps.edu/fiveyearplan.

Edgewater Artists in Motion holiday sale and show Dec. 14

Edgewater Artists in Motion Holiday sale show pop-up will be at Whiskey Girl Tavern, 6318 N. Clark St., 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. tomorrow night. The event will include more than 20 local artists and music by Cassandra Kaczor. Stop in, no reservation is required.

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Home buyers looking forward to lower loan rates



The Home Front

by Don DeBat

It's time for home buyers to do some crystal-ball gazing on the outlook for where mortgage interest rates are headed in 2024.

"With interest rates on a downward slide for six consecutive weeks, there should be optimism entering 2024 for a better market," said Jessica Lautz, deputy chief economist for the National Assn. of Realtors [NAR].

On Dec. 7, Freddie Mac's Primary Mortgage Market Survey reported that benchmark 30-year fixed home loan rates averaged 7.03% nationwide, down from 7.22% a week earlier. A year ago, the rate was 6.33%.

Fifteen-year fixed mortgages averaged 6.29% on Dec. 7, down from 6.56% a week earlier. A year ago, 15-year loans averaged 5.67% nationwide.

Khater said although lower rates remain a welcome relief, "it is clear they will have to further drop to more consistently reinvigorate buyer demand."

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

Mortgage-rate crystal-ball

Local crystal-ball gazers have optimistically predicted that interest rates could decline another 125 basis points in the next 12 months. That action would push benchmark 30-year fixed mortgages to 5.75% from the current 7%, and likely create a home-buying surge in early 2025.

A recent Mortgage Bankers Assoc. [MBA] forecast sees mort-

However, Fratantoni said a looming recession in early 2024, tighter credit, and dwindling pandemic-era savings could spell trouble and trigger an economic downturn.

NAR economists, forecasting for the Realtor group, see mortgage rates averaging 6.8% in 2024, then declining to 6.5% by year's end.

Both interest-rate creep, and a shortage of resale home listings have put upward pressure on home prices, NAR said. "In October of 2023, it required 39% of the average household paycheck to buy a typical for-sale home with a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage after placing a 20% down payment," NAR analysts reported. "This income figure has typically ranged around 21%, so it is well above historical average."

Moves of necessity—for job changes, family situation changes, and downsizing to a more affordable market—are likely to drive sales in 2024, NAR said.

"Although mortgage rates are expected to ease throughout 2024, the continuation of high costs will mean that existing homeowners will have a very high threshold for deciding to move," NAR predicted.

Many families likely will choose to stay in place, especially if they are lucky to have an existing 3% mortgage, experts say.

FHA Loan limits rise

As part of their annual requirement to keep pace with the change in housing prices, the Federal Housing Finance Agency [FHFA] and the Federal Housing Admin. have increased the amount buyers can borrow for loans backed by the federal government.

For FHFA, the single-family loan limit will increase to \$766,550, a \$40,350 jump over the 2023 threshold of \$726,200.

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.



"When rates began to rapidly drop, purchase applications for mortgages initially rebounded, but this improvement in loan demand diminished in the last week," Sam Khater said.

Just six weeks of rate decline eases the bite on prospective home buyer's wallets. For a buyer purchasing a \$400,000 home, the typical mortgage payment drops to \$2,135—a monthly savings of \$166, Lautz said.

"The average 30-year fixed-rate mortgage declined to nearly 7% last week, down from nearly 7.8% just six weeks ago," noted Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist.

"When rates began to rapidly drop, purchase applications for mortgages initially rebounded, but this improvement in loan demand diminished in the last week," Khater said.

gauge rates ending 2024 at 6.1%, then dropping to 5.5% at the end of 2025.

MBA chief economist Mike Fratantoni said the rate decline is expected as the economy slows, inflation lowers, and the spread between mortgage and Treasury rates narrows.

"The Fed's rate-hiking cycle is likely nearing an end, but while Fed officials have indicated that additional rate hikes might not be needed, interest cuts may not come as soon, or proceed as rapidly as previously expected," he said.

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Hire-A-Refugee job fair

Misericordia Home, 6300 N. Ridge Ave., will be hosting a Hire-A-Refugee job fair 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 25, 2024, Refugees are now legally authorized to work in the USA and do not require sponsorship.

Employers may benefit from the skills and experiences refugees bring to the workplace, and refugees can gain valuable work experience to help rebuild their lives in the USA.

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GENERAC



Teams may flee, but Illinois stadium authority bonds win an upgrade

BY CAITLIN DEVITT
Illinois Bond Buyer

Both the Chicago Bears and White Sox play in rented space, and you're the landlord. The Bears have made known their desire to vacate Soldier Field, while the Sox seem to be mulling over what life would be like for them in Nashville.

So what becomes of their former home fields if they leave? And just as important, what about all the money we borrowed to provide both of those homes?

The legal structure backing debt issued by the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority [ISFA] outranks risks posed by the possi-

bility of its two professional sports teams leaving town, persistent shortfalls in its primary bond payment source and an escalating debt service schedule, according to rating analysts and investors.

The ISFA, which issued bonds for the two Chicago stadiums where Major League Baseball's White Sox and National Football League's Chicago Bears play, won a two-notch upgrade Aug. 29 from S&P Global Ratings.

That's right, the two teams potential departure has oddly improved the financial outlook in the eyes of one Bond Ratings firm.

The move boosted the authority's out-

standing debt to BBB-plus from BBB-minus, lifting it higher into investment grade territory three years after the ratings agency knocked it to junk.

About \$416 million of debt is outstanding, nearly all of it for Soldier Field's 2003 renovation.

S&P's upgrade reflects the management's decision to request the full annual state hotel tax advance — the so-called "chairman's certificate" — to cover debt service and hotel taxes returning to an up-

ward trajectory following the pandemic-related decline, S&P said.

The ISFA owns, operates and issued \$150 million of bonds in 1989 for Guaranteed Rate Field where the White Sox play, and issued \$400 million of 2001 bonds that financed the renovation of the Chicago Park District-owned Soldier Field, home of the Bears.

About \$416 million of debt is outstanding, nearly all of it for Soldier Field's 2003 renovation.

The bonds enjoy a complex but strong legal structure that analysts and bondholders

TEAMS see p. 7



Wreaths Across America is again coming to Rosehill Cemetery to honor veterans this Christmas. The wreath-placing will take place at 10:30 a.m. Dec. 16, immediately following a ceremony at 5800 N. Ravenswood.

Wreaths Across America helps to remember and honor veterans by laying Remembrance wreaths on the graves of America's fallen heroes, including one of the two Revolutionary War veterans buried in Cook County, hundreds of Civil War Union soldiers, and veterans of more recent conflicts.

Each veteran will receive a wreath during the ceremony. Community members are invited to join in the wreath-laying, and are encouraged to sponsor wreaths. Wreaths are \$17 each, and for every two sponsored, a third is given to Rosehill for free.

Rogers Park mail thief targeted master key during robbery of a postal worker

BY CWBCHICAGO

A mail thief busted in Rogers Park last week was found standing about 15 feet away from a U.S. Postal Service master key that had been taken from a mail carrier in an aggravated robbery, according to a Chicago police report.

Officers responding to a burglary in progress in the 6700 block of N. Lakewood around 1 p.m. Dec. 6 saw a suspicious man walking out of an apartment complex, the report said.

He was wearing a City of Chicago baseball hat and an orange and yellow safety vest, but he didn't have municipal credentials, according to CPD. The man ran

when the cops got out of their car, but they arrested him nearby.

The officers allegedly found bulk mail inside his canvas bag, all addressed to different people. They found the postal service master key lying nearby and recovered a blade tool that could be used to break into buildings and vehicles, the arrest report said.

U.S. Postal Inspectors determined that the master key, also known as an "arrow key," was taken by robbers who targeted a mail carrier.

Prosecutors charged Michael Valentine, 37, with burglary and possession of burglary tools.



Michael Valentine

Judge Charles Beach released him on electronic monitoring. The report said an investigation into the robbery is ongoing but did not say when or where it occurred.

Organized mail theft has become part of the "new hustle in urban America," a law enforcement source told us in January.

One arm of the operation is responsible for stealing U.S. Postal Service master keys from mail carriers, often at gunpoint. Those keys are passed on to "jobbers," who use them to open banks of mailboxes in residential buildings and steal the contents. The stolen mail is passed on

to another arm of the organization specializing in financial crimes like identity theft and check washing.

Check fraud reports are up 104% since 2021 in Illinois, with mail theft being one of the contributing factors.

Since 2020, the U.S. Postal Service's police force has been limited to protecting the agency's physical assets rather than going on patrol to help protect the system as a whole and mail carriers in particular.

The change was a direct order from Postmaster General Louis DeJoy in 2020. Courts have upheld DeJoy's authority to limit the police force mission.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin is

Since 2020, the U.S. Postal Service's police force has been limited to protecting the agency's physical assets rather than going on patrol to help protect the system as a whole and mail carriers in particular.

introducing legislation that he hopes will put the postal police back on the street.

TEAMS from p. 5

said they believe will prevail despite headwinds facing the credit. Crucially, the bonds are not dependent on stadium activity for repayment.

Under the legal structure backing the bonds, the state of Illinois "advances" up to 60% of a 5% statewide hotel tax to the ISFA a few months ahead of the annual debt payment, an amount that's sized in the chairman's certificate. After making the debt payment, the agency must repay most of the state advance, using a local 2% tax on Chicago hotels as well as \$5 million annual subsidies from the state and from the city.

If Chicago's hotel tax revenue falls short — which it has the last two years — the state is allowed to automatically withdraw the amount needed from the city's share of income tax revenues that flow to cover the gap.

That means Chicago remains ultimately on the hook for the bond payments, a deal that former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley struck in 2001 to win support for the renovation of Soldier Field.

The city's hotel revenue proved sufficient in all years but 2011, until the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and drove a nearly 90% fall in local hotel revenue.

In 2020 and 2021, the authority dipped into its own \$39 million special reserve and pushed off debt service through a debt restructuring to spare Chicago from having to cover the gap.

In 2022 and 2023, local hotel revenue fell short again, but the ISFA declined to refinance, leaving Chicago to cover the shortfall, which totaled nearly \$30 million in 2022 and \$9 million in 2023.

The fiscal 2024 budget included a chairman's certificate advance request of \$76.5 million, which covers the full debt payment.

The debt is set to mature in 2032. A current refunding is expected next year using existing state authority to push out the final maturity by one year to 2033, but new authority is needed for a more comprehensive solution, said ISFA Chief Executive Officer Frank Bilecki.

"If you look at the payments going forward and how they ramp to just over \$90 million toward the end, versus where the hotel tax revenue estimates might be, we need to consider how we can solve for that issue so the (state income taxes) won't get hit each year," Bilecki said. "We have a number of bonds callable in 2024, so if there's an opportunity to work with the General Assembly through the city and our partners on some kind of restructuring,

If Chicago's hotel tax revenue falls short — which it has the last two years — the state is allowed to automatically withdraw the amount needed from the city's share of income tax revenues that flow to cover the gap.

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that's something that we would consider."

Asking state lawmakers for the authority to stretch debt payments by five years or another type of restructuring would be a lobby-

ing effort led by the city, Bilecki added.

With interest, ISFA owes \$743 million of debt through 2032. Debt service this year totals \$53.5 million and rises to \$56.8 million

next year. It hits \$60 million in 2025 and \$64 million in 2026 before holding steady at \$67.5 million for three years.

It then ramps to \$78.6 million in 2030, \$86.5 million in 2031 and \$90.5 million in 2032.

The repayment schedule is tied to the 2033 expiration of the Bears' Soldier Field lease. The team in 2022 announced it would leave the venue, and reportedly can break its lease as early as 2026 for \$84 million.

Since the announcement, the team's talks with potential hosts, like the suburb of Arlington Heights, seem to have cooled, and its future home remains unknown.



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SURVIVAL from p. 2

head out on a journey that will delight you.

COUNTRY: And Western. **Mark Guarino** told the tale of the times before the Grand Ole Opry, when Chicago was a nexus of country music with its "National Barn Dance" program on WLS Radio, during a talk at the Edgewater Library. By the 1940s we had the largest concentration of country musicians in the entire US. His new book would be a great Christmas gift, look for it.

HELLO VALHALLA: There are cheers in our streets here, Mirai, theme of exquisite sushi closed, but we just discovered that Chef **Stephen Gillanders** is moving his fine dining restaurant, Valhalla, to Wicker Park (Mirai's former Division St. home). Goodbye old friend, Mirai.

THE IRISH FELLOWSHIP CLUB: A Christmas Lunch crowd of close to 1,300 set a new record of holiday feasts at the Hilton. It's a generational thing. With four generations of **Daley's** approaching historical proportions outlining the faith of generations as the club move towards the 125th anniversary of it founding.

AL MENOTTI & DON'S CHRISTMASSMASH: Nowhere is Christmas better celebrated than at Al and Don's. A fragrant delight for friends and neighbors. Holiday elegance every inch of the way with tables of exhaustive delights and vittles of unmatched refinement. A chic array of chatty Chicagoans blended voices on carols and holiday favorites with the lovely

Sherrill Bodine, Barb Bailey, Denise Tomasello, Jolanta Reuge, Irene Mojica, Kim Duda, Sharee Schwimmer, Debi Catenacci and Lauren Lein Cavanaugh.

WHO'S WHERE: **John and Myra Reilly** off to walk the boulevards of Paris hunting for great art and great food at Au Moulin à Vent... Sculptor **John David Mooney's** foundation reception for French Tourist Board, wine and cheese from the Loire Valley... ooohh la-la... **The Mednicks, Ben, Stacey and Jacky** are off to



Jane LePauw

Paris to see **Anna** for Christmas... **Cynthia Olson** having a grand time at the Benjamin Marshall Society with Poland's Consul General **Patel Zyzak**, she says, praising **Jane LePauw** is a marvel as she made everyone aware of all the fabulous buildings Zyzak designed in Chicago, her passion is awesome... Concert violinist, **Patricia Anne Traacy** in her kelly green sari in Goa, Southern Goa, India with husband, **Mark O'Malley**... **Paul Hansen** and daughter **Holly O'Connell** at **Jay White's Neil Diamond** Tribute Concert... **Deborah McCabe** and **Lisa Mariano** at Butch McGuire's for the annual **Steve Kromie** bash... Cook County Judges **John Curry** and **Brendan O'Brien** also at McGuire's... WGN's **Pete McMurray** at the 23rd Annual Brothers' McMurray bash at House of Blues... **Julie Nye** with **Cheryl Keane** and friends welcoming them to a Christmas soiree at home... **Hector Gustavo Cardenas** and **Marius Morkvenus** say farewell to Asia, a journey from Hanoi to Bangkok altering the tilt of the world.

UND: The Univ. of Notre Dame's Board of Trustees has selected the **Rev. Robert Dowd** to serve as the school's 18th president, the university announced Monday. His term



Patel Zyzak



Darryl Maximilian Robinson



Debi Catenacci and Sherrill Bodine.



Julius DeBruhl Lewis



Patricia Treacy



Irish Fellowship Club

will begin July 1.

ELAINE SAYS: I finally learned from **Elaine Fishbein** of the death last year of an amazing person, true original and dear friend for decade, was one of a kind; from his fabulous flamboyant style (oh, those amazing Deco pins, silk ascots, bow ties and signature cologne) to his unique artistic talent, panache and fortune telling skills. He was fiercely loyal to **Mark, Perry** and I. He was a force to be reckoned with and the epitome of class. **Julius DeBruhl Lewis**, you had a heart of gold and are dearly missed. Farewell my friend.

RIP FRIEND: This column also mourns the death of **Fr. Bernie Pieterzak**, pastor of St. Anne's in Barrington.

STUDIO SALE: Dec. 16 and 17, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. **O'Gorman** studio, 1059 N. Winchester. Enter

through garden. Paintings, botanicals, equine, sailing regattas, 18th century Irish architecture, rural Irish landscapes, Irish Christmas trees, Dublin cityscapes.

SOLO FEST: The annual Fillet of Solo Festival, Chicago's premiere storytelling and live lit festival will take place Jan. 12 to 21 at Lifeline Theatre, 6912 N. Glenwood Ave. and South of The Border, 1416 W. Morse Ave., in Rogers Park. This year they're featuring a dozen storytelling collectives and numerous solo artists, including those by **Jonathan Pitts** and **Nestor Gomez**. A free kick-off event will take place on Jan. 10 at Rhapsody Theater where **Ilesa Duncan** and **Dorothy Milne** will guide an evening of performances and conversations with storytellers. Free parking is available at at Sullivan High School, 6631 N. Bosworth Ave.

GREEK HEAD: The National Hellenic Museum in Greektown is extending two vibrant exhibitions by Greek American artists through early next year. Exemplifying Greek history, art, culture and the Greek American story, the touring sculpture exhibition **Hellenic Heads** by **George Petrides**, features six larger-than-life busts inspired by key periods in Greek history spanning 2,500 years. Nearby **Diane Alexander White's** **Gather Together:** Chicago Street Photography shows off more than

80 historic photographs showcasing Chicago's Greek American celebrations alongside other ethnic and cultural festivals and parades.

DRUMS: Asian Improv Arts Midwest, directed by multi-instrumentalist and media artist **Tatsu Aoki**, presents its "Taiko Legacy 20th Anniversary" Concert at the Edlis Neeson Theater at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 220 E. Chicago Ave., 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 17.

This performance celebrates two decades of Asian Improv Arts Midwest's most anticipated event of the year, "Taiko Legacy," one of the largest taiko presentations in the Midwest. It is a conceptually diverse and dynamic musical performance full of original arrangements that pay homage to ozashiki (geisha chamber music), ohayashi (classical/folk/theater music), and matsuri taiko (festival taiko music).


"Taiko Legacy" is a perennial celebration of heritage forms by leading contemporary performers. Literally meaning "drum," taiko is known for its thunderous sound and stylized choreography.

My motto was 'Buy a picture a day' and I lived up to it.

- **Peggy Guggenheim**


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(L-R) Chef Sean Sherman, author of *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* and chef at Owami, a full-service indigenous restaurant in Minneapolis. Crystal Wahpepah, owner of Wahpepah's Kitchen in Oakland, California. The festival at the oceanfront setting overlooking the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel's Kauna'oa Bay, among the top beaches in the state of Hawai'i.

Bloomin' onions, were we wrong all along?!

Chicago's wild 'smelly' onions a 'gift' - a harbinger of spring, prized by Native Americans

BY PETER VON BUOL

It's one of Chicago's most venerable tales, surely told millions of time, on how Chicago got its name. You may have even been taught that in school.

And now this writer has discovered that that tale may have been misunderstood all along.

More than 340 years ago, the French explorer Robert de LaSalle recorded Checagou as his version for the indigenous place name for what today is the city of Chicago. Since then, the exact meaning of Chicago has been debated. Some believe the name meant wild onion/wild garlic and others thought it simply meant place of the bad smell.

Accompanying LaSalle had been Henri Joutel, who noted in his diary that "wild garlic" grew abundantly along the shores of the Chicago River. Interestingly, the indigenous Miami-Illinois word for this local member of the onion family is shikaakwa, which is known scientifically as *Allium tricoccum*.

Despite the similarity between the Miami-Illinois word and phonetic spelling by LaSalle, many scholars continued to debate if the name meant the plant or the area's distinct smell.

A definitive answer to the question was recently provided to this reporter by Chef Crystal Wahpepah, owner of Oakland's Wahpepah's Kitchen, and who was among those who had participated in a culinary event held Oct. 20-21 at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, as a part of the 13th Annual Hawai'i Food and Wine Festival.

What this reporter heard changed his perspective of the tale of the stinky onions.

Wahpepah grew up in California and is an enrolled member of the Kickapoo Nation. She is also Sauk/Sac and Fox (Meskwaki). All three are closely related nations which had originated in northern Illinois. For Wahpepah, going to Oklahoma in the



The Mauna Kea Beach Hotel in Hawai'i was the location of this year's Annual Hawai'i Food and Wine Festival.

springtime as a child remains one of her favorite childhood memories.

"That's one of my best memories from [when] I was a child. And I still keep those memories dear to me. For me, the smell is special. It is a sign of spring. It is a sign of what we have to look forward for the rest of the year," said Wahpepah.

During this time period, said Wahpepah, the wild onion can be found along the banks of a river but you really have to look. Recognizing its distinct aroma is one of the ways to locate it.

"It is almost like a wild garlic. But it is much more mild. It is not so much like a green onion or a chive. It is in between the garlic and the others," said Wahpepah.

According to Wahpepah, the plant has long been prized for its positive connotations.

"It is delicacy for Oklahoma native Americans. It's always something we are happy to share with the elders. When we go out to forage for them, we always make sure to gather some for the elders. It is a beautiful gift," said Wahpepah.

"Prized?" "Special?" A "gift?" Like not offensive or "stinky?" Are Chicagoans today filled with a misperceptions?

Today, many Sauk/Sac, Fox (Meskwaki) and Kickapoo live in Oklahoma. The three speak similar Algonquian languages and had lived together in northern Illinois, until 1830.

When collecting them, Wahpepah said special care has to be taken when pulling them out of the ground.

"You'll have to carefully pull on these little bulbs. You don't want to leave them behind. Afterwards, I will normally keep them in the refrigerator. They also can be turned into an onion powder," said Wahpepah.

Shortly after their harvest, Wahpepah enjoys making a soup from the fresh onions.

"Right when you harvest them, they make an excellent soup. If I am very fortunate to have a lot of it, then I will dry the rest. They make an excellent powder," said Wahpepah.

"I got started at a very young age. I was always cooking. My family has always been community-oriented. Cooking comes naturally to me. It's time for our foods to be recognized [as something special]. To be recognized on a plate. I want others to see the beauty as I see it. Here in Hawai'i, right

For me, the smell is special. It is a sign of spring. It is a sign of what we have to look forward for the rest of the year," said Chef Crystal Wahpepah.

now, we have this beautiful ocean. I want others to see the beauty of our traditional foods and to see the same things I do.

Wahpepah feels fortunate to have been raised in a traditional family and knows about hunting and harvesting. "I find it beautiful to be here at this event and to present our foods at events such as this," she said.

Fittingly, the Indigenous World Cuisine Festival was held at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, a masterpiece of Mid-Century Modern architecture that had been designed by

ONIONS see p. 11

Beloved classic Christmas movie reading fundraiser Dec. 17

Theatre Above the Law is doing a holiday reading of the classic Christmas movie "Die Hard" 5 p.m. Dec. 17 at the Jarvis Square Theater, 1439 W. Jarvis. Cookies, milk and hot cocoa will be provided.

Tickets are pay-what-you-can and every \$10 donation will be given a raffle ticket for a \$50 gift card to Lost Girls Vintage. Tickets are available at theatreatl.org.



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Nothing says Christmas like Nanotech and exploring Neuron-like devices

The Illinois Science Council [ISC] is hosting a free talk on revolutionary materials shaping the future of computing, during an event 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 13, at Le Rendez-vous Pop Up, 875 N. Michigan Ave.

Co-hosted by the French Consulate in Chicago, the presentation will feature Dr. Fanny Rodolakis, a physicist at Argonne National Laboratory who will discuss her work on shaping the future of computing.

A major focus in modern physics is exploring new materials with unique electrical and magnetic properties for their potential to revolutionize the computing industry. While silicon remains the workhorse in most electronics used today, at small nanoscale dimensions it generates too much heat, which limits growth of this industry.

The solution to ever-increasing computational demands is not necessarily packing more transistors into devices, but in enhancing their power efficiency.

Rodolakis' research centers on neuro-

morphic devices, which are designed to emulate the way neurons in the human brain function, like synapses firing between neurons to transfer information.

The devices can change in response to electrical signals and can even demonstrate the ability to learn, like habituation and sensitization. Learning more about their underlying mechanisms and capabilities is a key area of cutting-edge research.

There will be questions taken after the talk followed by a public reception. Tickets are free but registration is required at www.tickettailor.com/events/officeforscienceandtechnologychicago/1069530.

ISC is also hosting a holiday hang out with other fans of science for drinks, food, and casual conversation, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday Dec. 19, at Cork Lounge, 1822 W. Addison St. There is no agenda, no program, and no registration required, just pay for your own food and drinks while chatting and with people in the science community.

COMPLAINT from p. 1

"No problem," replies the cop.

"So what do I gotta do?" asks Reilly.

As a backup officer arrives, the first cop briefs him: "He threw a belt at the alderman. He wants to sign a complaint..."

"How are ya?" Reilly asks the backup officer, extending his hand for a shake.

"I'll show up to court, too," Reilly says moments later, as he signs two complaint forms against Ortiz.

Asked about the situation on Dec. 7, Reilly said he signed the complaints without reading them.

"I signed the report having not read it," he said. "I signed it quickly because the

guy was belligerent, violent and needed to be removed from the neighborhood so he wouldn't try to hurt anyone else."

He added that he learned "after the fact" that there were "a few inaccuracies" in Ortiz's arrest report and the criminal complaint.

"Like the claim the incident stemmed from a dispute over a pool game (I don't play pool) and getting hit with a belt—I wasn't hit with a belt. He tried to hit the bar manager and security staff with his belt—not me—the offender said he was going to kill me and tried to punch me but didn't connect," Reilly explained.

Police records show CPD officers pursued the matter as a felony charge of ag-

UTILITY from p. 1

day, along with several other entities that were involved in the case leading up to last month's decision. This includes groups like AARP Illinois and the Illinois Attorney General.

In a response filing to Peoples Gas' motion, the staff of the ICC criticized the utility on procedural issues as well as on its claims that it can't perform critical repairs without the additional rate hike.

"Not only is the company's interpretation of the final order incorrect, the company also fails to acknowledge that it is, in fact, obligated pursuant to statute to ensure both public safety and reliability," ICC staff wrote Wednesday.

Another filing, submitted on behalf of several other advocacy groups, criticized Peoples Gas for withholding the evidence the company is now citing when it went through the formal rate case proceeding.

The groups, which include the Environmental Law and Policy Center and Illinois PIRG, further argue that last month's or-

der does not prevent the utility from conducting safety-related work and that the company's motion is an "unprecedented attempt to coerce" the ICC into modifying its decision.

Abe Scarr, head of Illinois PIRG and a longtime critic of Peoples Gas' pipeline replacement program, echoed other advocates' critiques and called ICC's recent decisions a "rude awakening for the utilities."

Last month, the ICC issued decisions in four gas rate cases, cutting each utility's requests by 25% to 50%.

"There has clearly been a major shift in how the ICC operates," Scarr said. "You can tell in all of the rate cases."

In addition to potentially responding to Peoples Gas' latest motion, the ICC is expected to issue a decision in two ongoing electric rate cases next week. Those cases have the potential to increase bills for Ameren Illinois and Commonwealth Edison customers by hundreds of dollars per year over the next four years.

gravated battery in a public place. Ortiz remained in police custody for 20 hours as investigators tried to contact Reilly, according to the arrest report.

At 5 p.m. the next day, some 19 hours after Ortiz was arrested, a detective determined that they could not pursue felony charges because they could not get in touch with the alderman, the report said. Ortiz, who had never been arrested before, was released about an hour later, charged only with a misdemeanor.

His first court date is slated for Dec. 20. We'll let you know how it goes.

Reilly, 51, was battered by a man outside Boss Bar in Feb. 2021. He did not immediately file a police report, but Mayor Lori Lightfoot "instructed police to investigate" after the press picked up the story.

"These guys came out of the middle of the street, out of Hubbard St. and were yelling unintelligibly," Reilly said at the time, according to a Block Club Chicago report. "I had no idea what they were trying to say, I was trying to hear what they were saying. I said 'What are you saying' and kind of walked away because it looked like they were getting aggressive."

Police later determined that only one person was involved in the 2021 attack, a CPD spokesperson said at the time.

Antonio Palazzi, 35, turned himself in to police more than a month later to face a misdemeanor battery charge. He pleaded guilty in December 2021 and received a sentence of six months of court supervision, according to court records.



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