

Happy New Year!

DECEMBER 30 - JANUARY 5, 2021

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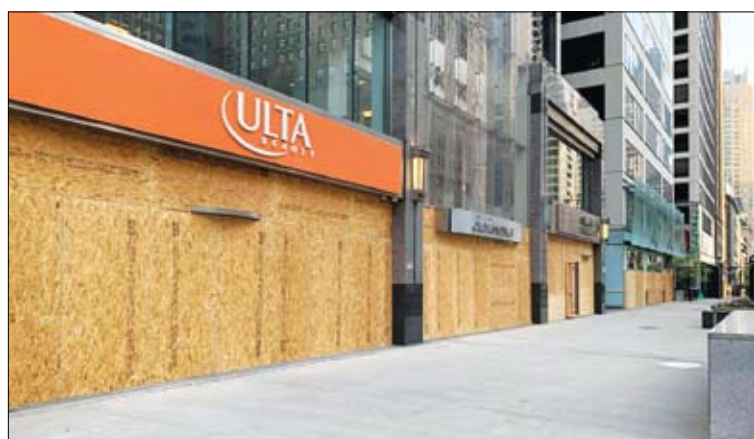
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There's a new girl in town,
Story on page 3

Transit agencies face
'drastic' service cuts
as pandemic ridership plummets,
Story on page 8



Boarded storefronts along Michigan Ave.



Damage along the Magnificent Mile south of Superior St. on May 31.

Photos by Holly Lipschultz

Mag Mile tax district 'merits further discussion,' says alderman

BY STEVEN DAHLMAN
Loop North News

Concern over how fast a special tax levy would be created and how much of its budget would be spent on operating expenses – instead of helping businesses devastated by riots and looting – discouraged Ald. Brendan Reilly [42nd] from supporting the special tax on the Magnificent Mile.

The plan would have increased property taxes on both sides of N. Michigan Ave., from the Chicago River north to Oak St., to pay for increased security. The proposed ordinance, which did not have the support of Ald. Brian Hopkins [2nd], either, stalled in the City

Council's Committee on Economic, Capital, and Technology Development on Dec. 14.

In his newsletter to constituents on Friday, Reilly said the proposal was to create a Mag Mile Special Service Area in five months, much quicker than the usual 12-15 months needed to establish an SSA.

"This process waived a number of crucial checkpoints when creating a new taxing district, including the signature requirement to prove a base-level of support among those being taxed, and a 90-day public comment period," said Reilly.

TAX see p. 8



City gives go-ahead to two more Uptown projects



Plans for 4600 N. Kenmore [L], and 5051 N. Broadway [R].



The Chicago Planning Commission has agreed to allow construction of two more five-story residential developments in Uptown, one at 5051 N. Broadway and a second at 4600 N. Kenmore.

On Dec. 17 they were green-lighted by the city and will now go before the full city council.

The 62-unit development on Kenmore will fill a parking lot next to the Wilson Ave. Theatre that before the economic lockdown was slated for Double Door.

The second proposal is for a large five-story development that will convert a parking lot at

Broadway and Winona which will be converted into two large apartment buildings connected by a walkway bridge. This project is part of the planned development of the former AON building at 5050 N. Broadway

Both developments by being undertaken by Cedar Street Co.

High Ridge YMCA to close Jan 29

There's no more 'staying at the YMCA.' At least not in West Ridge.

The 70-year-old High Ridge YMCA, 2424 W. Touhy Ave., has announced plans to close the facility on Jan. 29, 2021.

YMCA officials have cited financial problems in part due to the economic lockdown resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

The announcement came from a note posted on the front door of the facility, and posted on their website as well.

"Even before the current healthcare crisis, the High Ridge YMCA had been operating at a loss for a number of years, mainly due to declining membership and program enrollment, limited space that has restricted program offer-



The High Ridge YMCA opened in 1952.

Photo courtesy YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago

ings, increased competition in the area, and rising costs," it said.

"Knowing how much the community valued the High Ridge YMCA, we sought to keep the center going despite its losses. Unfortunately, we have reached the point where we cannot identify a path to sustainability, so we have made the difficult decision

to close the center."

The YMCA claims that over the past nine months - like many private gyms - the 'Y' has realized that "we will emerge from the pandemic a very different organization than we were going in. We are focused on the sustainability of operations at centers where we can make the greatest impact."

Taking inventory of simple pleasures and hope for the new year



By Thomas J. O’Gorman

I’ll be honest. It’s good to be simple. But then sometimes it’s perfectly wonderful to open a present and find amid the colored wrapping paper and the tissue six Santa mugs and a box of candy cane spoons to stir future hot co- coas.

And then find the unmistakable golden box that contains a bottle of Veuve Clicquot, my favorite Champagne. Magic.

In an instant the weight of a dreary, cold afternoon passes with light speed. The onerous patina of our pandemic shoved out of the way a bit. And even though the gift giver could only stay a nano-second, just seeing a living soul, even in a mask, lifted an emotional quarantine from my shoulders.

I was delirious with joy when I put the ham in the oven. Prepared the cauliflower bulbs in Irish butter for an afternoon’s sauté and readied the potato wedges in a ramekin with olive oil and fresh rosemary.

Soon the aroma of my kitchen equalled the fragrance of my heart. But then that’s what Christmas is all about. And every 20 years it’s good to test out.

All of a sudden I am conscious of leaving 2020. A year no one, I believe, is willing to repeat. So I am aware of the things that will forever mark the time and space of 2020 as I pack my bag for 2021. As the year draws to a close I am aware that I re-watched “The Crown,” not as a cultural historian or a poet. Or even a gossip monger. But as a clinician. A self-appointed psychologist. Poor Freud. He couldn’t just flip a switch and

then behold the impaired members of the House of Windsor pillaging each other’s humanity that their ancient ancestors worked so hard to acquire. Alas, the family reminded me of the Vikings, so robust and vengeful in “The Last Kingdom.” The Netflix series about Alfred the Great’s dream of uniting the Anglo-Saxons of Britain to form a new nation. England. A haven amid the torture, betrayal, chaotic mayhem of the Dark Ages. If poor old Alfred could have seen the prodigies of the House of Windsor, centuries later, he’d have surrendered to the Danes, right then and there, in their serpentine boats. But none of us can really see the stage or the players as the cast and crew prepare to bring down the curtain in life. We’re lucky we get to see the fall of our footsteps. Bigger pictures often don’t really help. That’s why the French gave us Veuve Clicquot and candy cane spoons. And why the Viennese gave us hot chocolate and Marzipan.

I must confess that In the final hours that flow from Christmas 2020 I paid Youtube to watch “Home Alone.” Haven’t seen that parable of life in Winnetka in a long time. Once again I watched the film through strange eyes. Much too critical at first. I knew I needed to relax and let Kevin, the McCauley Culkin character, sort out his own way around the knuckleheaded, white bread, thin air of the North Shore. Of course, like in most contemporary police dramas, the invention of the mobile telephone goes far to erase most of the conflicts of life that plague families like Kevin’s. The movie is actually a tribute to the last vestige of imbecility and lack of knowledge among children of North Shore privilege who today would have caught both the movie thieves and the plane to Paris without having to leave their aisle seats. Kevin would have left his siblings home in the dust bowl when computers altered the terrain, even in Winnetka. Some-

thing tells me that while little brainiac Kevin would have excelled at all things Apple, I’m not so sure that the rest of his siblings wouldn’t be probably still be living at home, spending most of their free time at Wrigley Field or Soldier Field.

I realize that You can’t always predict a promised outcome or a successful finish to the everyday realities of life whether we row the boat or command it. But if we build our lives on certain human truths, we just might discover that things are more divinely inspired than we first thought. Isn’t that what every carol we’ve hummed has tried to teach? Isn’t that what every loved wrapped gift beneath the tree attempts to show? Doesn’t that echo loud in each act of understanding we attempt or every kind word we speak to one another?

As we make our journey into a new year full of hope and healing, can we not inventory the full measure of our capacity for survival? We’ve definitely developed some internal strategies for making life have more meaning and purpose as strong as the vaccine for which we have waited. We have had to come face to face with the bitter enemy, COVID-19. Before our eyes it has carried off the famous and the inconsequential. The loved and the unloved. Altered the landscape of our big world and our tiny corner of it. Stretching us and bruising us like all dramatic human moments of great testing have done down through human history. Wars, famines, plagues, floods and catastrophes of climate all have pushed our species to evolve. Mend. Grow. Recalibrate. Change. And live despite the hunger, heartache and the pain. The isolation, quarantine and lockdown of the pandemic may have given us a wider understanding of who we are and what’s important. And who’s important. Can we not enter the invitation to a fresh time more deeply sensitive to the mercy we need both to offer others and receive for ourselves? Can we not find a new vocabulary to speak words of understanding and respect to those with whom we share the planet? Can we not anticipate the reopening of favored places of comfort from Sunday Mass to treasured eateries, and classrooms, museums, kitchens and living rooms of friends where we locate ourselves and find each other like wandering Magi acquainted with the mystery of the world and the survival of star-gazing wisdom?

Promise is once again written wide in mystical graphics of hope for 2021 that in the end pandemic will cease. The cure will work. All face masks will disappear. And social distancing will no longer conduct the world of popes, princes, fresh presidents, female vice-presidents and families who miss each other, their big holiday dinners and fearless opportunities to jump in the car for a drive. Perhaps there’s more to come than simply the everyday routines of taking each other for granted once again. We open treasure



Michael Cusack carries the Special Olympics torch in 1988.

larger than gold and myrrh and pungent incense. They’re those Santa mugs, candy cane spoons. And Veuve Clicquot. Happy New Year.

LET ME WIN: Michael Cusack was just a child with impairing disabilities when he met the Chicago Special Olympics back in 1968. He and his family, especially his mom, Esther, believed in the value and worth of the Special Olympics even before those first games. That was because they loved Michael’s teacher, a young Chicago Park District girl named Anne McGlone. She had some bright ideas about her students with developmental problems. Watching her Chicago Park District students flourish in their

passion for physical achievements and competitive sports was a discovery of enormous contradiction at the time. Back then, the rule of thumb was just hide such young people away. Their success and achievement flew in the face of popular opinion in the field. But Ann McGlone knew otherwise. She watched her students thrive and blossom. So she never let up struggling to get support. Mayor Richard J. Daley was among the first to realize what she knew. Eunice Kennedy Shriver was another. She would carry those ideals globally and internationalize the Special Olympic Games, building on all that Miss McGlone accomplished. So too, did Michael Cusack and his mom, who stayed close to Special Olympics for the rest of their lives. Never missing the chance to say that Special Olympics saved their lives and gave them new purpose for more than half a century. Michael never missed a chance to compete, growing into a talented and sturdy man. He had the medals and trophies to prove it. Michael Cusack died last week. At 64 years of age. A Chicago man transformed by the power of the games and the rules of competition. “Lord, let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.” He never forgot the girl who taught him in the Park District. They were friends for life. He was there the day she was sworn in, decades later, to the Illinois Supreme Court as Justice Anne McGlone Burke. A court she serves as Chief Justice now. Michael Cusack inspired her throughout her life. He will continue to inspire others. For from the very day of his birth, God had made him a Champion. Be at

peace champ. **KENNEDY WEDDING:** Congratulations to Christopher Kennedy, Jr., and Erin Daigle, now Mr. & Mrs. thanks to Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Parents Christopher and Sheila Berner Kennedy are overjoyed to



Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Erin Daigle and Christopher Kennedy.

celebrate these remarkable young peoples’ union. Christopher is the grandson of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy (D. NY) and Ethel Skakel Kennedy.

A THOUGHT FOR THE NEW YEAR: Drinking red wine

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World Traveler sculpture is world-class attraction



Heart of the 'Hood

by Felicia Dechter

Anyone driving down Lake Shore Dr. near Oak St. surely can't help but notice the exquisitely compelling sculpture nestled among the trees near the gazebo, across the street from the Drake Hotel.

Her name is World Traveler, and she is one of dozens of sculptures placed throughout the city thanks to the Chicago Sculpture Exhibit [CSE]. Just when we thought our Gold Coast lakefront couldn't get any more beautiful, along comes the spectacular World Traveler, whose installation was delayed until recently due to COVID-19.

World Traveler represents travel, contemplation and rest, said her creator, artist Carrie Fischer.

"The concept began while traveling abroad on holiday," said Fischer, a concrete sculptor who owns Fishstone Studio in Crystal Lake. "I developed an admiration for historical figurative sculptures in Europe and South America. I wanted to connect my love of travel with a female figure, and chose to associate the figure concept to a woman I met on two of my trips named Yulia. She was from Russia and loved travel so much she decided to work on a cruise ship so she could work her way around the world."

Fischer worked on the concept for six months. "I sketched different gestures and shapes until I came up with a finished design. Then I made a clay maquette, a miniature 3D version of the sculpture, which I submitted to the CSE call for artists."

World Traveler is 9.5 feet tall, eight feet in length, and four feet wide. She is made out of a high performance GFRC (a combination of fine aggregate, cement, water, polymer, chemical admixtures and glass fiber) concrete with steel reinforcement and weighs just over 1,600 lbs, which is lightweight for the size, said Fischer. If made with solid concrete, her weight would be several tons.

This is Fischer's second year of providing a piece for CSE. Her first sculpture, Lady of the Lake, was exhibited in Greektown in 2019. This year she has two pieces in the annual exhibit, the cool Invertadude at 333 S. Halsted St., and, the stunning World Traveler. Both will be offered for sale when they leave their sites in May.

"The big pieces are the most challenging to engineer and install, but these sculptures are my favorite to make," said Fischer. "These big sculptures drive my mantra now -- think big or go home."

Fischer said it has taken her a few years to be able to make public sculptures. At the age of 56, she came to the sculpting world late and her first public piece was

accepted only three years ago in 2017.

"My love of working with my hands started as a child with ceramics and building simple furniture pieces for my room," recalled Fischer. "I was always redecorating, painting, and repurposing objects."

"When my husband and I began our decorative concrete business in 2006, my new medium became concrete," she added. "Making everything from garden art to furniture I learned the art of making concrete. As the business grew, I was afforded more time to create art instead of running the business day-to-day. One month a year I spend learning from other artists I admire. This month of learning allows me to take my work sculpting to the next level."

CSE began in 2001 as a small program, the Lincoln Park Community Art Initiative, which was created by then-Alderman Vi Daley to beautify the 43rd Ward with a handful of public sculptures. It soon garnered well-deserved accolades and spread to other neighborhoods, and eventually was renamed CSE.



Maquette of final concept used in CSE call for artists.

Today, CSE acquires and places 54 to 60 sculptures in neighborhoods throughout Chicago -- from artists both locally and around the country, said its spokesperson, Kelly McGrath. An entirely independent not-for-profit, CSE is fully funded through a variety of donations and sponsors, and partners with local community groups and chambers of commerce and public officials. Every year the sculptures are rotated out



Pretty woman: World Traveler was recently installed at Oak St.

with new pieces installed in May. "There's no other program like it in the city," said McGrath.

CSE just installed its final sculpture for 2020 and also just wrapped up its calls for artists for 2021 -- its anniversary year, said McGrath. The sculptures are chosen by juried competition, and each participant receives \$1,500.

Next year for the first time, and in honor of its 20th anniversary, CSE has implemented an additional cash prize for the top three submissions: \$1,500, \$3,000 and \$5,000, McGrath said. Those new prizes will begin in 2021 but remain a permanent element. The jury deliberates mid-January and winners are announced shortly after that, said McGrath.

"Our exhibit is an ideal way for people to experience beautiful and inspiring art in a safe way," said McGrath. "With sculptures in so many Chicago communities, many people don't even have to travel to enjoy a fun and educational activity. Perfect, we think, for the holidays and beyond, into spring. This is accessible, public art, in every way."

CSE executive director Barb Guttman, who has been involved with this program since its inception, wanted to be sure I mention that touring the sculptures is a COVID-friendly activity. All sculptures are outdoors



Carrie Fischer's Invertadude sculpture at 333 S. Halsted St.

and viewable all the way around, 360 degrees.

And, Guttman added that Ald. Brian Hopkins [2nd] selected World Traveler's site, so kudos to him because it's only fitting that a world-class sculpture sits in a world-class spot.

"This is his first year participating and he came up with this great site!" Guttman said enthusiastically. "He chose the sculpture and the location. Great taste!"

As for Fischer, she said she has not been able to visit the sculptures this year mainly due to COVID, which has been hard for her.

"The best part of making these large pieces is sitting near them and watching people react to them," she said. "It brings a great sense of purpose when I see they are being enjoyed."

Closing time... My kids were regulars at the High Ridge YMCA at Touhy and Western while growing up and I was a member for many years and the news that the Y was closing was devastat-

ing to our family, and to the community. The Y provided so much for so many people for so many years. It's a huge loss.

What will replace the Y? I'm sure not a place where you knew your children were well-cared for that also offered swim lessons, camp, after school programs, sports, and a variety of other healthy activities for both kids and adults.

This was sad news to hear. Wish it was fake.

And to my readers, many thanks for bringing me into your homes each and every week. I feel privileged and honored to be there. The people of this city never cease to amaze me. We stepped up to help each other during 2020 like nothing I've ever witnessed. Perhaps in 2021, even if COVID dies down, we can still be there for one another and practice kindness on a daily basis.

Here's wishing you and your loved ones good health, strength, happiness and peace in 2021. Stay safe. See ya next year!



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Tim Severin



Myra Reilly and Bobbi Panter.



Macy's holiday cheer snapped by Gardenia Hung.



Jim Kinney, Cynthia Olson and Brian White.



Barb Bailey



Irene Michaels

INVENTORY from p. 2

and eating cheese could reduce cognitive decline.

FATHOM FORTH: **Tim Severin**, the great modern explorer and navigator of the past died in Timoleague, Co. Cork, Ireland last week at 80. His life was given to the tracking of historic sea voyages and then reenacting them with simplicity and accuracy. Careful to the truth of his vessels, his careful course and his rhyming with history. He gave our contemporary world the chance to accompany the heroic sailors of saga, rune and myth. His careful following of **St. Brendan's** voyage in the 6th century to what is now Greenland, Canada and Coastal America remains a spell-

binding tale. He was mourned by the colleagues and adventurers whose lives he challenge with his dramatic sailing the churning waters of the fabled white capped Western ocean.

SIDEWALK HOLIDAY SNAP: Macy's Sidewalk Santa Claus drawn with holiday cheers and bright colored chalk on State and Randolph Sts., downtown and snapped by the redoubtable **Gardenia Hung**.

OLD WORLD ART: Cleveland's **Michael Brosko** sending vintage Christmas Cards designed by beloved artist **Josef Lada**. Many beautiful heritage pastoral scenes of the young "CzechoSlovakia" nation from days gone by.

BARB BAILEY AND FRIENDS: It's cold out, but I'm cozy. Thanks to **Barb Bailey** and the gang, musical director **Bobby Schiff**; singers **Arturo Andonaegui**, **Irene Michaels**, **Judy McLaughlin Rossignuolo-Rice** and **Bernard Rice** plus celebrity guest singer, **Sonia P. Oyola**. The toast of Chi-town, following their stunning show at **Chad Willett's** Le Piano zoomed Sunday evening. Many words of thanks for all the work and effort that went

into this year's birthday show. Sabotaged left and right thanks to COVID-19. But in the end every tune, every emotion, every note lifted Chicago from the abyss of pre-Christmas lockdown gloom. As the show, "What the word needs now is Love," unfolded I found myself calming and breathing easier. Hearing those rich, evocative "Bailey Tones" fill the air, I felt a peace fill me. The gloom really began to raise. I ate a chocolate chip cookie and knew that thanks to Barb it was all going to be alright. "Over the Rainbow" brought some wet stuff to my eyes. Michael Schiff's styling was brilliant and first rate. He brought an air of old-fashioned glamor to the keyboard. And I've got to say that my pal Irene Michaels really surprised me with "Lean on Me." Woke me up, emotionally. Brilliant. Genteely sassy. Arturo Andonaegui of the Chicago Police Dept. was dyn-o-mite. Powerful, but controlled. And like Barb, introduced me to a tune I've never heard before. When was the last time that happened? Judy McLaughlin Rossignuolo-Rice and Bernard Rice echoed a vibrant and familiar Chicago sound. Sonia P. Oyola, was battling 1000. The show was uplifting. You never know what's going on inside of people. We've been cooped up. Campused. Confined to barracks. And many Chicagoans are climbing the walls.

FIRST BOOTH BY THE FIRE: Just when **Bobbi Panter** thought birthday festivities were all over, her beautiful and dear friends **Karin Carlson** and **Wynnis Mackie** rolled up their sleeves for one last really fun celebration at the birthday girl's favorite spot. Ralph Lauren Bar & Grill.

ELEGANCE AND ELAN: **Jim Kinney** and **Brian White** were guests at another wonderful dinner party with **Julie Haran**. Jim Kinney representing condo buyer and seller on this one deal. So nice to see famed rugman **Oscar Totassian** there, too, and two new friends, **Andy** and **Laurie**. Closing the chic diners' circle, lovely **Jessica Dunne LaGrange**.



Nena Ivon's book club.

UNDER BETTE DAVIS EYES: Yes, that was **April Schwartz**, **Julie Barrish**, **Nancy Resnick** and **Toni Di Meola** laughing 2020 away in the **Bette Davis** booth at Ralph Lauren Bar & Grill.

CALENDAR DAY: Honorary Old Town Mayor **Shelley Howard** putting his noggin together with the legendary server **Mohammad, aka Mo**, recalling Gibsons Steakhouse's anniversary, congratulating **Steve** and **Peggy Lombardo** and the steakhouse family, cheering on their Chicago spirit during the pandemic.

WHO'S WHERE: Attorney **Dan Balanoff** at the Ritz Hotel in Cancun, Mexico...**Nena Ivon's** fashion bookclub is Literary Soiree, and is itself a grand Who's Who's of Chicago's well-tailored reading population...restaurants **Kean** and **Megan Addington** worked overtime to ensure their customers had robust vittles for the holidays...**Cynthia Olson** with **Jim Kinney** and **Brian White** at the Yacht Club looking very festive...just-days-apart birthday girls **Barb Bailey** and **Lauren Lein Cavanaugh** celebrate their big day at Ralph Lauren Bar & Grill with festive red lamp shades...looks like **Sherry Lea Fox** and **Julie Barrish** behind those masks at La Colonial...architect **Lucien LaGrange** surveying the Christmas decorations at his Waldorf Astoria build-



Dan Balanoff

ing on Walton...**Candace** and **Chuck Jordan** looking really festive having a hot chocolate and visiting the Belmont Ave. small version Cristkindlmarket and finding a perfect mug...**Myra Reilly** and **Bobbi Panter** oogle the chocolate cake ...Chicago writer **Sherrill Bodine** welcomes the new year in great style...**Stephanie Leese Emrich** and mother, **Georgia Leese**, hobnob while helping put order into the chaos of the holidays...**Sean Es-haghy** and **Mamie Walton** lunch away the school vacation bundled up for a outdoor feast ... London shoppers were treated by an indelicate word of Dickensian English challenging the mean-spirited season with promise.

At a dinner party one should eat wisely but not too well, and talk well but not too wisely.

-- W. Somerset Maugham

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Architectural drawing of the Hanno Weber Court Home design.



A typical affordable tiny house.

Should vacant land be used for tiny houses and tree farms?



The
Home
Front

by Don DeBat

What is the city of Chicago and Cook County going to do to rid itself of more than 51,300 vacant and abandoned properties currently inventoried by the Land Bank?

Home Front column readers have offered some creative ideas, from building thousands of “tiny houses” and multi-family “court homes” to transforming blocks of vacant land into urban “tree farms.”

Developers and small renovators often bid but generally do not close on the vacant lots and abandoned properties because of burdensome bureaucratic red tape, according to a new report by Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas.

Bids on 80% of the properties do not make it through a complex, lengthy 75-point process involved in Cook County’s 81-year-old Land Bank’s “Scavenger-Sale” program. Nearly 7,300 properties have had delinquent taxes for two decades.

Home Front column readers offered several ideas to reduce the vacant-lot glut:

Affordable tiny houses

One viable option could be encouraging developers to build affordable tiny houses and container homes, suggested North Side reader Bill Hagglund.

A tiny house generally is defined as a residential structure consisting of less than 500 square feet of space. Most tiny houses sleep four people and measure less than 400 square feet. The floor plan typically includes a living room, kitchen-dinette, a shower/bath, two sleeping lofts, a through-the-wall heating/cooling system and maybe a solar panel or two.

The average cost for a do-it-yourself-built tiny house is about \$23,000, but retail cost typically is \$75,000 or more. If the buyer of a 500-square-foot tiny-house priced at \$100,000 placed a 20%



Hantz Woodlands tree farm in Detroit.

down payment and obtained a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage at the going 2.66% interest rate, the monthly payment for principal and interest would only be \$406 a month.

Water, sewer, garbage fees, plus gas and electric utilities would only add about \$150 to the total, so the gross monthly tiny-house “nut” could be approximately \$656 plus real estate taxes.

Bids on 80% of the properties do not make it through a complex, lengthy 75-point process involved in Cook County’s 81-year-old Land Bank’s “Scavenger-Sale” program.

Developing outside the box

Shipping-container homes are another option for developers willing to think outside the box. A 480-square-foot tiny studio residence could be created by joining three shipping containers placed on a concrete slab and bringing in utilities.

In addition to residences, commercial developer Jake Goldstein is utilizing a pair of shipping containers to build 320-square-foot “gym pods” erected on vacant land in the Fulton Market District. These “pop-up” health clubs are designed to fill the gap existing between big-box gyms and specialized workout boutiques.

Urban in-fill homes

Urban architect Hanno Weber co-designed the innovative “Court House” concept for vacant city in-fill lots. Weber, principal of the Chicago-based Hanno Weber & Assoc. Architecture/Urban Design, created the Court House

several years ago for the city’s Dept. of Housing and Dept. of Environment. The plans likely are gathering dust at City Hall.

Ideally designed to be developed in groups of four units on two side-by-side 25-by-125-foot city lots, Weber said the Court Houses can be built today at a cost of about \$200,000 each, not including the land.

Each 3-bedroom, 2½-bath Court House would have 1,400 square feet of living area configured two rooms deep on three levels. Each unit could be marketed to home buyers for a retail price of \$240,000 to \$250,000.

Designed as slab-on-grade construction, the garden level of the home features a foyer with closet, kitchen, dining room, powder room, laundry and mechanical room. French doors open from the dining room to a spacious and private terrace walled with recycled brick.

A central stairway leads to the second level of the home featuring the living room, the master bedroom, a linen closet and two full baths, which are built in a separate module “back-to-back” with the baths of the house on the rear of the lot. Two additional bedrooms are in the attic, or loft level of the home.

View a site plan for a cluster of Court Houses, and you’ll see four attached single-family homes with steeply pitched roofs each built on an outside corner of the two lots, like Medieval carriage houses grouped around a protected 30-by-30-foot interior courtyard.

Access to the traditional-styled stucco homes is through a six-foot-wide gated court way that is shared by four homeowners. Parking for four cars is provided at the rear.

What trees do they plant?

The city of Chicago and the Land Bank should team up with

the Hantz Group of Detroit to develop urban tree farms on vacant land on the South Side and West Side, suggested Old Town homeowner Dan Baldwin.

John Hantz, a 23-year Detroit native, was inspired to plant trees on vacant inner-city land to improve neighborhood morale, safety and value, while returning part of the city’s 40 square miles of barren acreage back to tax rolls.

“For a start, the Hantz Group purchased 1,000 vacant lots in Detroit for about \$30 to \$100 each to create Hantz Woodlands, an urban tree farm,” Baldwin said. “The lots measure 30 by 150 feet. The trees were planted at a cost of less than \$1 and grew in value to \$35 in three years.”

However, affordable housing critics say the 1,970 vacant properties in the Hantz Woodlands’ bargain-priced land portfolio eventually will be flipped to market-rate developers at a substantial profit, and generate hefty real estate tax dollars for Detroit.

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.

Brother can you spare a book?

Residents at the Balmoral Nursing Home, 2055 W. Balmoral, are in need of donated reading materials. Drop off new and gently read magazines, books or other periodicals in their lobby between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Lincoln Yards Town Hall meeting Jan. 7

The Sheffield Neighborhood Assoc. [SNA] and 2nd Ward office are co-hosting a virtual Town Hall meeting about the status of the Lincoln Yards development project 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021. The meeting will be moderated by SNA President Brian Comer.

An RSVP is required to attend, and attendees may submit questions ahead of time through the registration form.

The meeting will be conducted via Zoom only. Space in this meeting is limited to the first 500 registrants. The Zoom link will be distributed to registered attendees 24 hours in advance of the event. To register call 312) 643-2299 or write to Ward02@cityofchicago.org.

Brown Line Elevated track repairs

Starting Friday, Jan. 1, the Chicago Transit Authority will be performing maintenance on the Brown Line Elevated Track over N. Franklin St., between Hubbard St. and Grand Ave. Work will occur from 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. during the weekdays and from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. on the weekends.

Throughout the project, the following will be closed intermittently: Curb lanes and parking, Franklin St., between Hubbard St. and Grand Ave., alley and sidewalk access.

All work may be completed at the end of March.

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2800 N Lake Shore Drive, Unit 308
Immaculate modern one bedroom with walk-in closet, hardwood floors throughout, large open concept, hardwood floors throughout, walk-in closet, master bedroom, and fantastic storage space. Building features 24-hour door staff, fitness center, outdoor pool, rooftop deck and party room.

3550 N Lake Shore Drive, Unit 2211
This condo features beautiful gray wood floors throughout, a cook's kitchen with white shaker soft-close cabinets, white & gray tile backsplash, LED under-cabinet lighting, undermount sink & a full range of stainless steel appliances, along with a breakfast bar. Gorgeous bathroom with new floor & wall tile & vanity.

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Free COVID testing event Jan. 9

A COVID-19 testing event is being held 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 9, at the St. Josaphat School Gym, 2245 N. Southport. The testing is being done by reservation only, visit <https://bit.ly/3nUgABj> to schedule a test. The event is being sponsored by Near North Health Service Corp. and the 2nd Ward Alderman's Office. There will be no out of pocket

costs, and your insurance provider will be billed directly. For more information call 312-643-2299. There are approximately 165 community health centers throughout Chicago where no patient will be turned away because of an inability to pay. To find the nearest community health center visit findahealth-center.hrsa.gov.

Spare a coat?

The Night Ministry is in need of new or gently used coats in larger sizes, dark or neutral colors preferred. They also accept new winter gear such as hats, scarves, gloves and thermal socks, as well as new or gently used tents.

Donations can be dropped off at 1735 N. Ashland Ave. The office isn't fully staffed, so donors should schedule drop-offs ahead of time by emailing Miranda@thenightministry.org.

Users seeking Winnemac Park dog friendly area

Neighbors, dog owners and park visitors who are seeking support for establishing an off-leash dog area at Winnemac Park are holding a virtual meeting Jan. 13, 2021. Starting a dog park is largely a community-driven enterprise, and requires support from a large

group of city officials and bureaucrats. Those interested in more information are asked to sign up to be added to an email list to receive updates, and register for a meeting on 6 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 13, can call 773-654-1867 or write to info@40thward.org or Jessica@40thward.org.

Registration open for Oz, Warren parks baseball little leagues

Those interested in playing Little League Baseball this spring at Oz or Warren Park need to sign up now. Spots are available for boys and girls players of all levels ages 4 – 16. Divisions are filling fast and

space is limited, so don't wait. Prices increase March 1, 2021. The season will kick off May 10. Sign up for Oz Park at www.leagues.bluesombrero.com, or for Warren Park at www.warrenparkyouthbaseball.org.

Rogers Park refugee mission relocates to St. Jerome

In anticipation of major growth in demand for its services, a Rogers Park nonprofit serving refugee families is moving to a new home. Madonna Mission is opening a new and larger facility in the former St. Jerome Catholic school building, 1706 W. Morse Ave. The new facility offers expanded space for the mission's English language program for refugee mothers and its after-school tutoring and summer programs for K-8 children. Enrollment in all of the mission's programs has doubled over the past five years, says Peggy Forbes, Madonna Mission's Executive Director. This has led to overcrowding at its former Sheridan Rd. space. With the Federal government planning to increase the number of refugees accepted into the U.S., numbers are sure to grow. Founded in 2011, Madonna Mission currently serves 50 English-as-second-language women, as well as 70 K-8 students in the after-school program and 80 during the summer. They are funded by private donors, grants, and foundations, and more than 200 volunteers work with the students. Almost half of the summer staff are high-school refugee students who have come through other Madonna Mission programs. The idea for the mission originated with Lynn Gordon, who, while tutoring refugee children,



English as a second language is the flagship service offering of Madonna Mission.

came to see how their mothers' English skills often lag behind those of their children, who quickly pick up the language at school. "Parents need to communicate with teachers, first responders, store personnel, and potential employers," says Gordon. "Resettlement agencies provide wonderful initial support, but after a few months, many of these newly settled families are on their own." Madonna Mission tries to help refugee women by teaching English in a safe, supportive atmosphere, while also meeting new friends and escaping the isolation of caring for children in small apartments in a new city. The after-school tutoring program is staffed by volunteer tutors from Loyola Academy and

Loyola Univ. Chicago as well as other community members, and offers youngsters reading support and homework help. Kids also have access to an extensive library of books, math manipulatives, iPads and computers, flashcards, games, and learning activities. Tutors coach middle schoolers on writing essays for scholarships and high school entrance applications, as well as explaining the CPS high school application process. Mission staff have helped families access the temporary free internet available for children's remote education during the pandemic lockdown, and have acted as tech liaisons between families and schools when language barriers made things difficult.

Letter to the Editor

No fighting

Your article "Golden Gloves on the Gold Coast" [Dec. 9] is a misrepresentation as to what is happening in Newberry Plaza. You are giving the impression that there exists an organization called the Newberry Plaza Community Coalition (NPCC) who represent a large percentage of us as owners, and they are leading a knock down fight with the condo board who are pursuing their narrow interests to our detriment. This is simply not true. Since July, our Association has been considering a major renovation. During the summer, there were presentations made and revisions to the original plans were made in response to owners' feedback. The process of providing feedback is still underway. This is a large project that is complicated by the fact that the condo association does not own the entire building or the garage, so we have to negotiate with the owners of the

rest of the building as our building is governed by both our condominium documents as well as reciprocal easement agreements. There are parts of the proposal that I like and parts I do not. I have my option to cast my proxy ballot either for or against it. We have a board made up of owners with one half elected every year. They meet monthly and listen to the comments of any resident. The NPCC says that not raising our assessment for the last 11 years "is simply bad business." Our financial records are available for all residents to see and the annual debate on our budget is open for all to attend. In 11 years of those debates, I am aware of no one that has said we need to raise the assessments because we need more funds. It is usually the exact opposite. We are in good shape financially and the building is well-maintained. This is in part that we have a Condo Board that works

hard and takes their fiduciary responsibility seriously. It is silly to even imply that we are distressed and will be forced to sell our units against our will. There are many residents who are opposed to the renovation. NPCC does not "represent" them. [NPCC is], as far as I can tell, two or three residents who are raising many issues about the proposal by sending out emails to whom-ever they think agrees with them. At the same time they are making irrelevant and untrue statements about such things as our finances and implying the board is not working in good faith. About 70% of our owners have cast proxies that they are voting for the project, while approximately 20% are opposed. The rest have yet to commit. I myself have not yet cast a proxy. The current plan is to count the proxies in January. Most of our residents on both side of the issue are participating in a fair discussion of the merits of the project. Anyone on either side of the project who makes personal attacks on any of our residents because of their position, is following the style of made acceptable by Donald Trump and we do not need that here in Newberry Plaza.

Samuel Williamson
Unit owner/resident
at Newberry Plaza

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This sale is to be held on Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at 2:00PM. Cash payments only.

Notice of Public Sale

East Bank Storage, located at 429 W. Ohio St, Chicago IL (312/644-2000), is opening lockers

2707X (Malcolm Kelley)
3613X (Natalia Barrera)
4611X (Patricia Patel)
3547X (Lauren Vallortigara)
2713X (Tyra Peterson)
4504X (Freshii)
6633X (David Wimsatt)
5553X (World Wide Realty)
1638A (Adrienne Meachum)
2719A (Barbara Broadhurst)
3523X and 6619X (Edward Lahood) for public sale on January 26, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. Cash only.

Real Estate For Sale

TENNESSEE LAKEFRONT \$34,900 BANK ORDERED SALE MASSIVE LAKE Dockable acreage on Kentucky Lake. Way under market value. RV ready. 888-386-9446 <https://tnlandings.com/> Offered by Waters Edge Properties Inc - Broker

Recycling

Interested in helping the environment, those less fortunate? Recycle Plus, operating since 1990, offers recycling service as well as: Used plastic buckets (food grade) various sizes & shapes, cardboard boxes, old lumber, furniture, reusable shopping bags made in Chicago from repurposed fabric. Contact Recycle Plus Inc Gary Zuckerman 773-761-5937 or 773-858-1210 Email: recycle_us_chicago@yahoo.com

Training/Education

AIRLINE CAREERS FOR NEW YEAR - BECOME AN AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECH. FAA APPROVED TRAINING. FINANCIAL AID IF QUALIFIED - JOB PLACEMENT ASSISTANCE. CALL AIM 800-481-8312

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FREON WANTED: We pay \$\$\$ for cylinders and cans. R12 R500 R11 R113 R114. Convenient. Certified Professionals. Call 312-598-1758 or visit RefrigerantFinders.com

OLD SLOT MACHINES WANTED BY COLLECTOR. ALSO BUYING OLD JUKEBOXES, 10 CENT COKE MACHINES AND SMALL ANTIQUE SAFES. I PAY CASH AND PICK UP. 314-707-0184.

Paying Cash For Comics! Top national comic buyer will be in your area, paying cash for vintage comics (1970 & earlier). Call Will: 866-461-0640

Wants to purchase minerals and other oil and gas interests. Send details to P.O. Box 13557 Denver, Co. 80201

Christmas tree recycling

Chicago's Christmas tree recycling program runs from January 9-23 at dozens of parks across the City. Trees can be dropped off anytime during normal business hours.

Only live/natural trees without flocking are accepted (no garland or wreaths). Because the trees are mulched, all tinsel, ornaments, lights, and stands must be removed. Plastic bags used for transport should also be removed before putting trees in the stalls.

Locations in or near the North Side include:

Grant Park

900 S. Columbus Dr.

Clark Park

3400 N. Rockwell St.

Lincoln Park,

Cannon Dr. at Fullerton Ave.

(East of Cannon Dr.)

Margate Park

4921 N. Marine Dr.

Warren Park

6601 N. Western Ave.

Sheridan Park

910 S. Aberdeen St.

Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, 'It will be happier.'

— Alfred Lord Tennyson

Transit agencies face ‘drastic’ service cuts as pandemic ridership plummets

BY CLAUDIA MORRELL AND
MICHAEL PUENTE
WBEZ

On a recent weekday morning at Chicago's Jefferson Park Blue Line station, Bobby Patel manned a magazine stand from behind a plastic screen. A sign at the door reads, "one customer at a time."

On an average weekday before the pandemic, thousands of commuters would pass through the Jefferson Park Transit Center on the city's Northwest Side. It's home to the Blue Line, 9 CTA buses, several suburban PACE buses and a METRA commuter rail stop.

But on that weekday morning — though it was technically rush hour — the station was nearly empty.

"Business is going super down here, like before we were super busy," Patel said, adding that his boss has already reduced his hours because business is slow. Outside the shop, city buses appeared to outnumber the few customers who were waiting to board them.

For many workers and students in the Chicago area, the morning commute feels like a distant memory. And that's dealt a huge financial blow to the transit agencies who rely on fares to balance their budget, raising questions about how quickly they'll be able to help the economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CTA, the nation's second-largest public transit operator, reported an 80% drop in ridership during the early months of the pandemic. For METRA, which runs commuter trains between the city and the suburbs, the drop was 90%.

These staggering losses in ridership have been happening in cities across the country. Many have responded with cuts to service. But Chicago has been the only major city to continue providing normal service on trains and buses — all while spending more money than budgeted on cleaning supplies and protective gear for workers.

The CTA's \$1.6 billion budget for next year relies on a second round of federal COVID-19 relief that's still not a sure thing. Without that money the agency faces a nearly \$400 million deficit for next year if ridership levels remain this low.

"We could be looking at drastic cuts to CTA service," said CTA spokesman Brian Steele. "These would be cuts that would impact both bus and rail service and would impact routes and lines across the city."

Steele wouldn't specify which routes could be cut, or for how long. The last time the CTA faced a major budget crunch was 10 years ago, when more than 1,000 transit workers were laid off. And in 1997, faced with a ballooning deficit and a decline in ridership, the agency eliminated 15 bus lines to avoid a fare hike.

"Simply put, there is no way we can continue to offer the level of service that we are now without additional federal funding," Steele said.

But U.S. Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, says transit must stay afloat, despite the financial pressures. He represents neighborhoods that have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic.

A recent mobility study from the Active Transportation Alliance found low-paid, essential workers who didn't have the benefit of working from home or other means of transportation made up a majority of public transit riders during the pandemic.

"And they've kept our people moving, especially frontline workers, and they kept our economy afloat during the most uncertain times," Garcia said during a recent



The CTA, the nation's second-largest public transit operator, reported an 80% drop in ridership during the early months of the pandemic. Train cars now frequently run empty.
Photos courtesy CTA

virtual event hosted by the ATA, which advocates for public transit and more pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets. "Nurses heading into work on the front lines of this pandemic, grocery store workers going to work to stack the shelves, janitors and homecare workers keeping our workplaces and our loved ones safe."

"Public transit is not an option, public transit is a lifeline," Garcia said earlier this month while speaking to a virtual event hosted by the Active Transportation Alliance, a group that advocates for public transit and more pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets. "CTA trains and Pace buses are the arteries of this city."

Commuter rails optimistic, despite huge drop in ridership

Before the pandemic, Metra provided about 281,000 rides each weekday. But since March, ridership on the nation's largest commuter railroad system, has collapsed.

Still, it's a necessity for the riders who are still using it, says Wendy Brown, of Wood Dale. She's been commuting for eight years in mostly packed train cars.

But since March, they've been almost empty.

"There were many days that I was completely alone in a car and didn't even see a conductor," Brown said. "They didn't collect any tickets for about two months. I'm not really sure how long Metra or any business for that matter can continue to survive when they go from a booming business to 10% of their revenue. I honestly don't know how anyone can survive that."

For her part, Brown said she plans to do what she can to be a "constant commuter."

"I need Metra," she said.

Like the CTA, Metra had been expecting to have a booming 2020, with ridership on the rise. But when society shut down last March, Metra was forced to suspend service on about half of its nearly 700 trains each weekday.

Last Spring, the federal government moved quickly to provide emergency funding to Metra and other transit agencies across the country to make up for the loss in ridership.

Metra received close to \$480 million dollars from the CARES Act, much of it

going to make up lost fare revenues in this year's and next year's budgets.

But even with that, Metra says it still needs to cut some \$70 million from its 2021 budget if Congress doesn't come through with additional money.

Metra CEO James Derwinski told WBEZ the agency expects to start next year with less than 20% of its pre-pandemic ridership — even less than it had expected.

"So we're going to start off the year, a little bit behind the curve," he said.

Metra's 2021 operating budget is \$127 million less than its 2020 budget, according to Metra officials. The estimate revenue from passengers will be \$239 million less in 2021 than in 2020.

Still, Derwinski said Metra is committed to providing service to its 11 lines and 242 stations in a region that covers 3,700-square-miles.

And, he said, Metra plans to do it without raising fares.

That's why Derwinski is hopeful additional federal stimulus money comes through by mid-year.

"Definitely, the earlier the better," he said. "If we don't see that money coming in, we're going to have to start making strategic decisions based on, you know, the reality of what the budget is."

Those decisions involve finding other ways to cut expenses or raise revenue — without raising fares, Derwinski said.

But recovery is also dependent on Chicago employers bringing their workers back downtown — and getting those workers to feel safe commuting on the train with frequent cleaning, social distancing and a mask mandate.

Like Metra, the South Shore Train Service from Northwest Indiana has seen its ridership plummet. But the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, or NICTD, should survive next year without making any drastic cuts or layoffs, said Chief Operating Officer Michael Noland.

The NICTD operates the South Shore train, which runs between Chicago and South Bend. It received \$73 million in CARES Act funds, according to officials.

And like Metra, having South Shore riders feel safe is an ongoing priority.

"Our trains have never been cleaner,"

their tenants. "To suggest that this SSA would pull the Magnificent Mile out of this difficult economic situation, is disingenuous. We are suffering through a global pandemic and economic recession. People are spending less money, tourism is down significantly, and many restrictions are still in place. The proposed SSA did not provide a nickel of direct relief to these businesses."

Relief may be sorely needed for many of these businesses but Sen. Dick Durbin said that the city and state should not look to the federal government for a bailout. The Mag Mile will need a great deal of help to recover from the looting and rioting from this summer and to help weather the government-imposed lockdown.

"As we've seen before, commercial

Noland said. "We're using ultraviolet lights. We've got fogging systems, electro-static sprayers. It's going to be a safer environment when we finally get through COVID and there's a vaccine."

Steep reductions at PACE

Pace Suburban Bus, the Chicago area's regional bus service, is expecting a \$53 million budget deficit heading into 2021. But that hole is projected to grow to \$60 million in 2022, said Pace executive director Rocky Donahue.

"That's assuming if nothing changes, meaning ridership doesn't come back, the economy doesn't come back, we would have a problem in 12 to 14 months," Donahue.

Prior to the pandemic, 100,000 people used Pace every day. The pandemic cut that by 70,000 when it hit, Donahue said.

"We've suspended or reduced service on 98 routes in our system," he said. "We only have 220 routes in the whole system so we've taken corrective action on almost 50 percent of them."

He says the bus system is facing more than \$100 million in lost revenue in this year's and next year's budgets. Donahue said CARES Act funds from Congress will cover some of its deficit heading into 2021 — but not for 2022.

And while the pandemic continues to keep ridership down, Donahue said 40,000 people continue to take Pace every day — many heading to those lucrative and expanding packaging jobs at Amazon and UPS.

Like Derwinski over at Metra, Donahue doesn't want to increase fares.

"When you raise fares, you also lose riders. Right now, we're trying to attract ridership back to the system," Donahue said.

But he says his primary commitment is to keep the bus service running. "If we're not here when people need to get back, it's just going to slow down the economic activity," Donahue said. "So there's a distinct advantage to keep us propped up for when the region is ready to recover that we're here for them."

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Another issue was how the SSA's 2021 budget would be spent. Reilly says "a significant portion" of the \$742,033 budget would pay operating expenses of the Magnificent Mile Assoc., which would manage the SSA, instead of helping with infrastructure improvements needed to increase security.

Another \$100,000, he says, would be spent on pedestrian counters — employed in the State Street SSA, but, says Reilly, "is not a good investment right now."

Reilly says the SSA as proposed would not benefit businesses along the Mag Mile directly, and property owners would simply pass their higher property taxes on to

property owners can absorb the increase in taxes by raising rents on tenants, many of which are already struggling to pay the rent. An unintended consequence of a new tax may be that established retailers along [Michigan Ave.] could be forced out."

The proposal, however, "merits further discussion" in 2021, Ald. Reilly says, between him, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Ald. Hopkins, and the Magnificent Mile Assoc.

"I think there is a way for us to build greater consensus and, frankly, a more responsible budget if we take the time that is necessary when creating an SSA," says Reilly. "Taxpayers deserve better than a rushed proposal."