

TAKING NOVEL APPROACH

Percival Everett's new book, 'James,' revisits 'Huckleberry Finn.' He won't tell you how to read it. **A+E**



TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

'A Chicago cheerleader'

In her quest to effect change in the city, economic development leader Andrea Zopp adds a new twist to her resume: the Chicago Bears.

Going the distance: As the Kentucky Derby turns 150, Black heritage in racing is in the spotlight.

Stories in Life+Travel

Johnson safety plan slow out of gate

As crime remains scourge in city, mayor vows 'root causes' approach will work

By Alice Yin
Chicago Tribune

Inside the Garfield Park field house's cavernous basement, Mayor Brandon Johnson and other city officials spoke bullishly about their mission to tackle Chicago's crime.

Titled the "People's Plan for Community Safety," the strategy outlined by the progressive mayor last Wednesday evening at a community working group event encompassed his signature mantra of "investing in people" rather than relying on traditional law enforcement.

"It is critical that we engage with the victims as well as the perpetrators of violence to reach true safety," Johnson said. "As we prove the effectiveness of our plan, we will grow this work in phases and continue to roll out so that every community in Chicago is safe."

A year after he took office, however, Johnson's plan is still in its early stages, and crime remains a stubborn scourge across the city. And his move away from investing more in policing to address

the problem has further enflamed opponents who have long distrusted his approach.

In the West Side field house, the reality of Chicago's violent streets was reflected in participants' grim tone as they set about brainstorming how to make the mayor's plans reality.

Stephen Robinson, executive director of Northwest Austin Council and a former professor at Daley College, recalled a drug dealer from nearby Hamlin

Avenue who enrolled in one of his classes after getting released from federal prison. That bright young man "was getting an A in my class by midterm," Robinson said, but then disappeared. Robinson thinks he went back behind bars.

The People's Plan is aimed at reaching men just like Robinson's former student — "adults of high promise," as Johnson's office likes to say. Its first step was

Turn to Safety, Page 4



Cost of an American dream

After 25 years in Chicago, a mother in US without legal permission returns to Mexico without her family

By Laura Rodríguez Presa | Chicago Tribune

Claudia Perez's children could count on one hand the number of times they had seen their father cry.

The day their mother left was one of them.

Perez had worked her whole life for a dream that did not come true: Save enough money to take her family back to Mexico and live together in the town where they were all born.

Instead, on a cold February day, she stepped onto a bus in Brighton Park and said goodbye. The day had come to make the difficult choice between her loved ones in Mexico and her family in Chicago.

"Don't leave, my love. *No te vayas viejita,*" her husband yelled as she waved goodbye from inside the bus.

Battling health problems and a ticking clock, Perez, 63, chose to leave the life she'd built for herself and her family over the past 25 years. Though she was a successful street vendor in Little Village, she was in the country without legal permission. And she yearned to return to Mexico to hug her aging siblings, visit her parents' graves and see the houses she'd built for her family using the money she'd earned selling

tamales in Chicago.

Her husband, Seferino Arguelles, tried convincing her to wait so that the two could go back together. "Just a couple more years," he would tell her, urging them to leave the business ready to be passed down. But Perez was afraid that if she waited any longer, she would never return. Not alive at least.

It's a dilemma that scores of families living in the U.S. illegally experience quietly as the community ages. Some


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Above: Claudia Perez walks through the municipal pantheon of Coacoatzintla in Veracruz, Mexico, on Feb. 21. **VICTORIA RAZO/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

INSIDE

Great expectations for next quarterback

How Caleb Williams convinced the Bears he can rewrite their quarterback history. **Chicago Sports**



House passes aid for Ukraine and Israel

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine "grateful" as \$95B package goes to Senate. **Nation & World**

Wind and solar in limbo: Long waitlists to go online

Green projects face delays in getting OK to connect with grid

By Nara Schoenberg
Chicago Tribune

Ninety miles west of Chicago, the corn and soybean fields stretch to the sky, and dreams of the clean energy future dangle — just out of reach.

To the east of Route 52, there's the first phase of the 9,500-acre Steward Creek solar farm, in the works since 2019.

To the west, there's South Dixon Solar, which once hoped to begin construction on 3,800 acres in 2022.

Both projects have been approved by the Lee County Board. But neither can be built, according to a county official, due to PJM Interconnection, a powerful but little-known entity that controls access to the high-voltage electric grid in northern Illinois.

"There isn't anything we can do to help the state move forward

Turn to Energy, Page 11



Open farm fields make up part of what will become the 5,000-acre Steward Creek Solar farm in Lee County on March 27. The project has been approved by the Lee County Board but has been in limbo for years. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**