

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



A cyclist rides through Sauk Trail Woods in Chicago Heights on Nov. 29. The Forest Preserves of Cook County are able to use money from a tax hike approved by voters last year for projects and improvements. **EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Forest Preserves burning and buying with new cash

Influx of taxpayer-approved dollars funding restoration, other efforts

By A.D. Quig | Chicago Tribune

Tucked among the factories and plants dotting south suburban Ford Heights is Sauk Trail Woods, a forest preserve where Cook County taxpayers are bankrolling an effort to beat back a pernicious invader.

On a crisp, sunny Wednesday in late November, Troy Showerman, resource project manager for the Cook County Forest Preserve District, points to one of the few short trees that still is holding its leaves.

It's buckthorn, one of the invasive woody species, or "woodies," choking out growth of Sauk Trail's native trees, grasses and wildflowers. Buckthorn (which grows here in the "common" and "glossy" varieties) has no natural predators. It grows before other plants in the spring and its

leaves hang on late into the fall, cutting off sunlight and energy that native plants and trees like oak and maple need to grow.

"It just eliminates the whole native understory," Showerman said.

But thanks in part to Cook County voters, the district is embarking on an

ambitious restoration program that is unparalleled in the Midwest, Showerman said, including efforts to fight back on invasives and restore native plants to woods and grasslands scattered mostly across the suburbs.

A year ago, voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum to raise their own property taxes, yielding more than \$40 million in additional funding each year to forest preserve coffers.

Long-maligned for damaging headlines about mismanagement, neglect, and politically motivated hiring, the district's turnaround agenda in recent years convinced even some of its harshest critics it was

Turn to Preserves, Page 2

Effect of pension changes uncertain

Consolidations of police, fire funds were expected to reduce property taxes

By Dan Petrella
Chicago Tribune

Four years after Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a landmark consolidation of police and firefighter pensions with a promise of delivering property tax relief across Illinois, the measure's effect on taxes remains murky while the constitutionality of the law itself is under challenge.

The legal question is now before the Illinois Supreme Court, which is expected to rule shortly on whether the law violates a state constitutional guarantee that public employee pension benefits "shall not be diminished or impaired."

Whether the consolidation of hundreds of suburban and downstate police and firefighter pension funds reduces the property tax burden for homeowners and businesses, however, may take longer to become clear, and would depend on a host of political and economic factors.

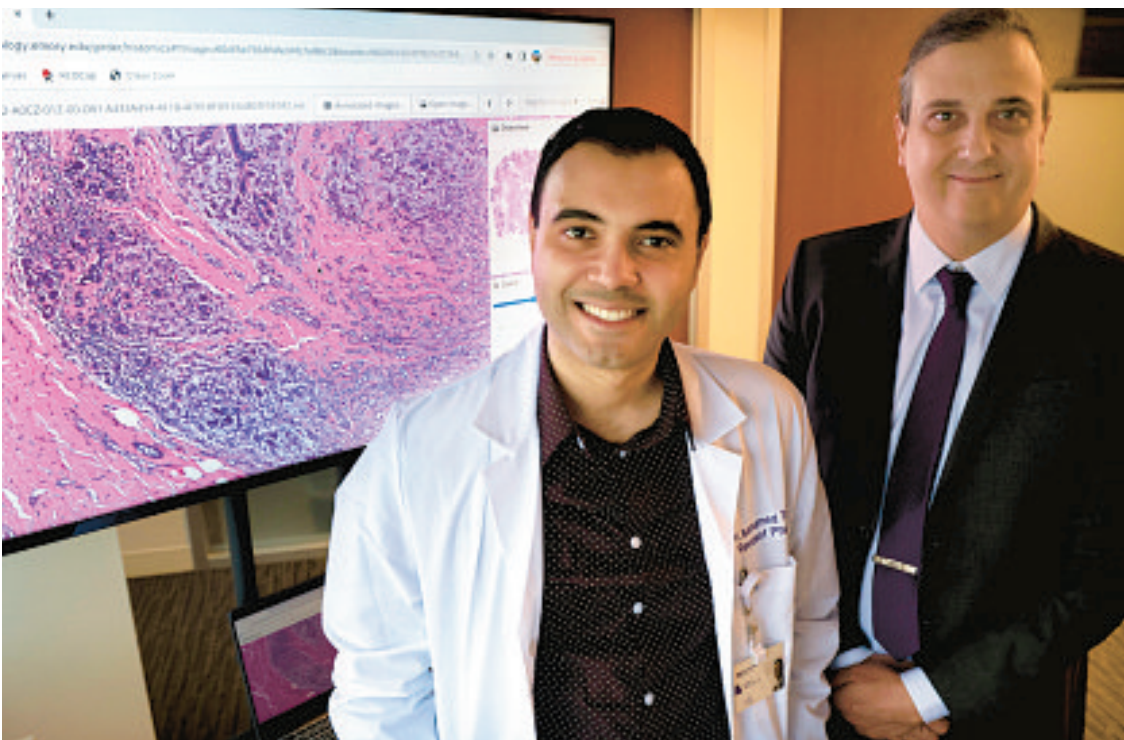
"Required pension contributions could go up, even with the benefits of consolidation, because funding levels deteriorate because of other factors — because people are living way longer than expected, because actuaries' assumptions are totally off," said Amanda Kass, a public finance and pensions expert at DePaul University.

"Potentially, you could have a situation where taxpayers don't see true property tax relief, but their property taxes aren't as high as they would have been had there not been consolidation," Kass said.

That scenario is unlikely to appease residents in a state with some of the highest property taxes in the country, she said, given "the expectation that's been sold ... that people are going to see a decrease."

The promise of tax relief was an essential part of Pritzker's sales

Turn to Pensions, Page 5



Dr. Mohamed Tageldin, left, a resident physician at Northwestern University's McGaw Medical Center, and Lee Cooper, associate professor of pathology at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine, show an image of an AI model they designed that can better predict outcomes for breast cancer patients. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

AI model could suggest better breast cancer treatment plans

By Alysa Guffey
Chicago Tribune

Mohamed Tageldin has worked at the intersection of artificial intelligence and pathology, the study and diagnosis of diseases, for six years.

Tageldin, a resident physician at Northwestern University's

McGaw Medical Center, is part of a team of researchers that has developed an artificial intelligence model to more precisely predict long-term outcomes for breast cancer patients.

At a time when some industries are shying away from and questioning the use of AI in daily work, those in the medical field are lean-

ing into the support the technology can provide to doctors.

"There's almost too much excitement," Tageldin said of attitudes toward AI in the medical field.

The team hopes the new model, designed specifically for breast

Turn to AI model, Page 3

Peace plan offered to Israel, Hamas

Foes fighting in Gaza appear cool to Egypt proposal

By Samy Magdy,
Najib Jobain and
Josef Federman
Associated Press

CAIRO — Israel and Hamas on Monday gave cool public receptions to an Egyptian proposal to end their bitter war. But the longstanding enemies stopped short of rejecting the plan altogether, raising the possibility of a new round of diplomacy to halt a devastating Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

The Egyptian plan calls for a phased hostage release and the formation of a Palestinian government of experts to administer the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, according to a senior Egyptian official and a European diplomat familiar

with the proposal.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the proposal, said the details were worked out with the Gulf nation of Qatar and presented to Israel, Hamas, the United States and European governments. Egypt and Qatar both mediate between Israel and Hamas, while the U.S. is Israel's closest ally and a key power in the region.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited troops in Gaza on Monday, did not comment directly on the proposal. But speaking to members of his Likud Party, he said he was determined to press ahead with Israel's offensive, launched in response to an Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 240 others hostage.

"We are expanding the fight in the coming days and this will be

Turn to Plan, Page 9



The disappearing sports movie

With sports movies an endangered species, a movie critic and sports writer look back at memorable offerings of decades past. **Arts & Living**

