

Chicago Tribune



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Man gets new trial in murder conviction

Teen had been found guilty on testimony from a blind witness

By Christy Gutowski
Chicago Tribune

A Cook County judge overturned the murder conviction Tuesday of a man who was found guilty in a fatal shooting at a South Side gas station primarily based on the testimony of an eyewitness who turned out to be legally blind.

Darien Harris was an 18-year-old high school senior with a clean criminal record when prosecutors charged him in an ambush-style shooting that left one man dead and another seriously injured in June 2011.

Now 30, Harris has long maintained his innocence, saying he was at home watching LeBron James play in the NBA Finals between the Miami Heat and the Dallas Mavericks. But a now-retired judge found Harris guilty in 2014 and sent him to prison for 76 years.

More than four years ago, his legal team, family and friends began urging the conviction integrity unit of Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx to take another look at the case. Among other arguments, they said the key witness had failed to disclose to the trial judge that the witness was legally blind because of his glaucoma.

Though those efforts did not yield immediate results, Cook County prosecutors agreed with Harris' post-conviction request to vacate his conviction and sentence, clearing the way for a new trial. On Tuesday, Cook County Judge Diana Kenworthy granted Harris'

Turn to Harris, Page 5

Blockade ends on military nominees

Hundreds promoted after Sen. Tuberville drops his opposition

By Kevin Freking
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate in a single stroke Tuesday approved about 425 military promotions after Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama ended a monthslong blockade of nominations over his opposition to a Pentagon abortion policy.

Tuberville had been under pressure from members of both sides of the political aisle to end his holds as senators complained about the toll it was taking on service members and their families, and on military readiness.

"Thank God, these military officers will now get the promotion they so rightfully earned," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The action came hours after Tuberville said Tuesday he's "not going to hold the promotions of these people any longer." He said holds would continue, however, for about 11 of the highest-ranking military officers, those who would be promoted to what he described as the four-star level or above.

There were 451 military officers affected by the holds as of Nov. 27. It's a stance that has left key national security positions unfilled and military families with an uncertain path forward.

Turn to Promotions, Page 7



Judy Mai dances while celebrating the cancellation of a proposed migrant camp in Brighton Park on Tuesday. Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration moved to officially scrap the plan, citing the land's potential environmental hazards. TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Pritzker nixes migrant camp in Brighton Park

Administration cites 'serious' environmental concerns with site after IEPA review

By Alice Yin, Dan Petrella, A.D. Quig and Nell Salzman
Chicago Tribune

Gov. J.B. Pritzker's administration moved to officially scrap Mayor Brandon Johnson's plan to build a migrant camp on a controversial Southwest Side lot Tuesday, in a scathing rebuke of the city's evaluation of the land's potential environmental hazards.

In a statement, Pritzker's office said an Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

review of the city's environmental report — which was released late Friday evening — indicates "concerns related to insufficient soil sampling and remediation" at the Brighton Park site selected by Johnson's team.

And because the time required for additional testing and remediation would be extensive, the state "will not proceed" with the base camp, Pritzker said.

"My administration is committed to keeping asylum-seekers safe as we work to help them

achieve independence," Pritzker said in a statement. "We will not proceed with housing families on a site where serious environmental concerns are still present. My administration remains committed to a data-driven plan to improve the asylum-seeker response and we will continue to coordinate with the City of Chicago as we work to expand available shelter through winter."

At an unrelated public appearance on Tuesday, Johnson maintained "third-party validators"

found the site to be safe, then pivoted to city efforts to get migrants out of district police stations.

"The state did not provide any additional guidelines or any sort of methodology in which they were requiring us to go by, so we used the standards that were available to us," the mayor said.

Johnson's office later said the state was responsible for kicking off construction last week, and

Turn to Camp, Page 7

INSIDE



ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Berwyn bakery closes its doors

Vesecky's Bakery, a mainstay in Berwyn, closed Tuesday after more than a century of serving up Eastern European baked goods. Customers started lining up at 5 a.m. for the bakery's 6 a.m. opening, and the lines were "out the door," owner Nancy Vesecky said. By 9 a.m. the bakery was sold out. Above, Vesecky waves to longtime customer Joseph Cizek. **Business**

Just follow your nose

The Tribune's food critic shares insider tips on all the best food and drink at Christkindlmarket in Chicago. **Food & Health**

A fitting farewell

With "The Nose," music director Lidiya Yankovskaya departs Chicago Opera Theater. What's next for the company? **Arts & Living**

Burger King exec details uneasiness in Burke chat

Was 'taken aback' by alderman linking permits, tax firm work

By Jason Meisner, Ray Long and Megan Crepeau
Chicago Tribune

The son of a Texas-based fast-food restaurant tycoon told a federal jury Tuesday he was "taken aback" when then-Ald. Ed Burke seemed to draw a direct link between helping with permit issues for their Southwest Side Burger King renovation and hiring Burke's private law firm to do property tax appeals.

Zohaib Dhanani, a vice president for the company founded by his father, Dhanani Group, was the latest witness to paint Burke as wearing two hats, both as the City Council's most powerful and longest-serving alderman and as a private lawyer prowling for business for his firm, Klafter & Burke.

Dhanani was asked Tuesday about a phone call he had with Burke on June 27, 2017, two weeks after he and his father met with Burke at the Burger King site on South Pulaski Road, where they

Turn to Trial, Page 9

