

'The color of wealth'

Financial security in Chicago's Black and brown communities was eroded intentionally by predatory and discriminatory policies, a study finds. **Life+Travel**

Urban rebound

As workers return to the office, residents are moving back to Chicago and other cities, driving up home prices. **Real Estate**



Devin Hester and his mom, Juanita Brown, unveil his Hall of Fame bust. **JOHN J. KIM/TRIBUNE**

CHICAGO SPORTS
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Bears greets Devin Hester and Steve McMichael join the Pro Football Hall of Fame in a Chicago-tinged induction ceremony on Saturday.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Misclassifications, missed millions

Luxury home? Vacant lot? Cook County assessor regularly undervalues properties

By Alex Nitkin, A.D. Quig and Cam Rodriguez

This story is a collaboration between the Illinois Answers Project and the Chicago Tribune.

Denise Gilmore feels like she's being taxed out of Humboldt Park. She and her husband, Willie, have lived on Pierce Avenue since 2010, but in 14 years their prop-

erty tax bill has ballooned more than 60% to \$3,319 even though they haven't renovated their brick workers cottage. Taxes could hit even harder next year after Cook

County Assessor Fritz Kaegi's office increased the home's valuation by \$60,000 to \$250,000. But some of the Gilmores' neighbors — whose homes are significantly newer and worth much more — haven't felt the same pain. That's in large part because Kaegi's office regularly misclassifies and undervalues properties throughout Cook County, an Illinois Answers Project and Chicago Tribune investigation found. Across the street from the Gilmores, an \$843,000 two-story farm-

house built in 2021 continues to be categorized by Kaegi's office as vacant land worth only \$44,280. The new homeowners' 2024 tax bill is only \$750. Halfway down the block, the owners of a sleek, gray \$695,000 two-story home purchased more than a year ago were charged just \$1,315 in taxes this year because the assessor's office continues to classify the property not as a house but as a residential garage at the back of a vacant lot valued at just \$73,900.

The assessor's office did much the same for a two-story home that recently sold for \$800,000 a few blocks away on Lawndale Avenue. For years, the office has assessed the home as vacant land worth only \$35,710. The homeowners' most recent tax bill? Just \$756. And about a half-mile east on Crystal Street, another farmhouse-style residence that sold for \$875,000 in early 2022 is still classified by Kaegi's office as vacant

Turn to Assessments, Page 6



'Chemical trespassing'

By Michael Hawthorne
Chicago Tribune

Patsy Hirsch and her husband moved to an Elgin subdivision nearly three decades ago, drawn by a backyard thicket of oak, hickory and cherry trees so dense the canopy blotted out the sun. During her free time, Hirsch replaced much of their lawn with native plants and grew vegetables in a sunny spot on the side of the house. She studied to become a master gardener, cultivating a network of fellow enthusiasts devoted to sustainable growing methods. At first glance it appears Hirsch's property is an idyllic refuge on the edge of suburbia. But her training didn't

Illinois trees and plants suffering widespread damage from renewed use of decades-old weedkillers on farms, studies show

Above: Students play at the Bluestem Hall Nature School in Urbana, which is often hit by herbicides drifting from nearby farmland, on April 22. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

prepare her for an onslaught of weed-killers drifting from nearby farms and neighboring yards — a scourge spreading throughout Illinois as chemical companies revive volatile herbicides from generations past. Trees are slowly dying after being hit for years by weedkillers. Their once-robust canopy has thinned. Many of the leaves are cupped or deformed. So are the Hirsch family's flowers and vegetables. "Once you learn how to identify herbicide damage, you can't unsee it," the retired nurse said during a recent tour. "Nobody is doing anything to stop it from happening, though."

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PARIS OLYMPICS

Chicago's Little helps relay team take silver

Athletes with Illinois ties earn medals on the water, on the court

By Stacy St. Clair
Chicago Tribune

PARIS — There are several reasons why Shamier Little could be disappointed with her silver medal in the Olympic mixed relay. The Chicago native had built a comfortable lead for the U.S. team with her blazing second leg Saturday evening on a rain-soaked track in the Stade de France. She and her teammates also had been the heavy favorites to win gold, having set the world record the previous evening. And everything seemed to be going the Americans' way, until the team from the Netherlands passed them just a few feet from the finish line. Shamier Little, however, knows what disappointment is. And this — a silver medal and a world record in her Olympic debut — is not it. Little, 29, fell short of making the

Turn to Olympics, Page 11



Shamier Little celebrates her silver medal in the mixed 4x400-meter relay on Saturday. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

INSIDE: Minutes after Simone Biles won her seventh Olympic gold of her career on Saturday in a vault final, she played coy when asked if the event marked the final time she would compete. Plus, the U.S. men's basketball team wrapped up the No. 1 seed going into the medal round. **Chicago Sports**

'This was never a pitch to Black people'

Donald Trump sought to pit Black Americans against migrants in Chicago. It's part of an ongoing GOP tactic. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

Blue Angels in the blue skies

The Chicago Air and Water Show is Aug. 10-11. Check out our annual guide for more on where to watch and all about the performers. **A+E**

TODAY'S WEATHER



High 91 Low 73

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 18

\$5.75 city and suburbs and elsewhere
177th year No. 217 © Chicago Tribune



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