

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



‘A PIECE OF HIM IS COMING BACK’

Solving mysteries behind unclaimed Purple Hearts may restore medals to families — and one surviving vet

By Christy Gutowski | Chicago Tribune

They emerged from bloody battles with shattered bones, lost limbs, scars and, for some, emotional wounds that would last a lifetime. All were young but ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

From small towns to bustling Chicago, the men left for war and came home with legacies of bravery, resilience and brotherhood.

Each had earned a Purple Heart, which is awarded only to those who are injured or killed in combat. But, as time marched on, their medals ended up in long-untouched bank safe deposit boxes and, eventually, a government vault for safekeeping.

That didn’t sit well with Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs, whose office is entrusted with billions of dollars in unclaimed property, including military medals. He has returned a dozen Purple Hearts, along with other military medals and paperwork, during his nine years in office. Only one of the 12 men was still alive to accept in person; the other medals went to family members.

In an effort to find homes for the 11 heart-shaped commemorations that remain unclaimed, the Tribune spent about four months this year researching public records and interviewing people with possible connections to the abandoned safe deposit boxes.

Two of the 11 medals remain a mystery. They have been in the treasurer’s vault since 1992 and 2003; the names attached to the safe deposit boxes are Robert Cawthon and David Gorski.

But the Tribune found evidence identifying the veterans in the other nine cases. At the Tribune’s request, researchers with the

Above, a Purple Heart medal, awarded to those injured or killed in battle, is stored in a Springfield vault after it was turned over to the Illinois treasurer’s office as unclaimed property. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

National Archives and Records Administration in St. Louis then unearthed discharge papers verifying their decorated military service. The Cook County clerk’s office, which has a veterans affairs unit, also assisted.

Most of the men were members of the Greatest Generation who fought in World War II and have long since passed away. Their medals became lost over the decades, as generations of their family trees died off. Other reasons such as divorce, family estrangements and new

Turn to Medals, Page 14

ELECTION 2024

Democratic leaders vow to defend rights, rules

Pritzker says he’ll fight any federal efforts that conflict with Ill. policies

By Rick Pearson, Jake Sheridan and Olivia Olander
Chicago Tribune

Illinois’ Democratic leaders promised a vigorous defense — and potential court action — against any moves by President-elect Donald Trump to try to erode personal liberties or withhold federal funds for the state during his coming four-year tenure.

But as Trump campaigned on plans for mass deportation of immigrants, a rolling back of transgender rights and climate change controls, a likely GOP Congress considering a federal abortion ban and elimination of the Affordable Care Act, Illinois Democrats acknowledged they could not predict what the unpredictable former president will do once he’s in office.

“Chaos, retribution and disarray radiated from the White House the last time Donald Trump occupied it,” said Gov. JB Pritzker, a vehement critic of Trump both while he was in office and out of it the past four years. “Perhaps this time may be different.”

But Pritzker vowed in the wake of Tuesday’s election results that he’d fight any federal efforts that

Turn to Election, Page 4

Can America mend after the election?

Clergy, researchers tackle political anxiety and toxic polarization

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
Chicago Tribune

During a Mass held the evening of Election Day, the priest at St. Clement Parish in Lincoln Park asked for God’s blessings for “our world, our church and our nation, and those who need our prayers” during this decisive moment for the country.

“We pray for peace and unity,” said the Rev. Peter Wojcik, shortly before distributing the Eucharist to roughly three dozen faithful dotting the pews.

The church was open all day for services and private prayer, in part to serve as a haven for those plagued by worry, confusion or stress about the election and its aftermath.

“As anytime we feel these emotions, the best answer is to go to prayer,” states an Election Day prayer and resources guide on the church’s website. “By seeking God’s will, we ease the anxiety of the unknown and open our hearts to peace and respect.”

Yet unity and civility might prove difficult to foster for large swaths of the country. Although the election is over — and Republican Donald Trump has begun

Turn to Heal, Page 2



BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE

‘An opportunity to start fast’

Can running back D’Andre Swift revive the Bears’ sputtering offense? **Chicago Sports**



Patriots at Bears Noon
Sunday, Fox-32



LAURYN AZU/TRIBUNE

Keeping a promise to myself

As a first-time marathoner, I didn’t even own a pair of running shoes. How was I going to meet this goal that one family member worried would be the death of me? **Lauryn Azu in Life+Travel**



E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Familiar ... and new

“House on Mango Street” is becoming an opera, with Sandra Cisneros’ help. **A+E**

TODAY’S WEATHER



High **61** Low **47**

Complete forecast on Opinion, Page 12

\$5.75 city and suburbs and elsewhere
177th year No. 315 © Chicago Tribune



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