

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



Jesus Rega, 22, watches out the window for his mother to return from work Dec. 5. Rega has not fully recovered after being shot in the head in January 2023. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

‘A LONG TIME TO RECOVER’

Autistic man shot in head still healing one year after Back of the Yards attack

By Jake Sheridan | Chicago Tribune

When Jesus Rega got his high school diploma, he didn’t get to walk across the stage. He couldn’t. As classmates donned caps and gowns, he was bedridden after being hospitalized for a blood clot and too afraid to get in the car — more complications in a long recovery after being shot in the head and stomach while waiting for the school bus outside his Back of the Yards home last January. Instead, Jesus, an autistic and nonverbal 22-year-old, celebrated with teachers and loved ones at the clubhouse of the southwest suburban neighborhood his family moved to after the Jan. 18 shooting. His parents ordered chicken and pizza, “everything he likes,” said his father, Philip Rega.

In spite of the savored day Jesus’ recovery has been bittersweet. The healing process was slow for the young man who can’t speak but is quick to smile, hug and reach for a hand. After the shooting, crippling fears of essential everyday activities overwhelmed Jesus. The dread has largely faded, leaving something close to normalcy for the family. Still, among many small changes, Jesus paces around the house more than he used to, said his mother, Anna Rega. “There’s nothing wrong with it,” she said. “I think it’s just remembering what happened. He doesn’t understand.”

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Weed facility proposal dropped

State regulators had rejected cannabis plan at Rainforest Cafe site

By Robert McCoppin
Chicago Tribune

A clouded cannabis partnership has dropped its controversial plan to open a store at the former Rainforest Cafe in downtown Chicago. State regulators had rejected a previous proposal by Progressive Treatment Solutions LLC, or PTS Corp., to move its Consume dispensary from Norwood Park to the old Rainforest Cafe at Clark and Ohio streets. The site is within 1,500 feet of three existing dispensaries, in violation of state law. So PTS formed a partnership with Bio-Pharm LLC, claiming they could locate within the exclusion zone because Bio-Pharm qualified as a social equity licensee, meant to diversify the white-dominated industry. But two lawsuits challenged the legality of the proposal, delaying the business from opening. In response to recent Tribune inquiries, Mara Georges, an attorney who represented PTS and was the city of Chicago’s long-time corporation counsel, wrote, “The development of the former Rainforest Cafe site was delayed by litigation and the uncertainty and additional costs it brings. As a result, PTS and Bio-Pharm have decided to forego this site and pursue other options. They remain committed to ensuring the success of their companies and of the cannabis industry.” Nearby resident Robert Brown had filed a lawsuit claiming that the city illegally approved zoning for the site. Brown also objected that the River North neighborhood had so many dispensaries that it was becoming the city’s unofficial marijuana district. GRI Holdings, the owner of the

Turn to Cannabis, Page 2



Dr. James LaBelle, left, examines Lyric Porter at the University of Chicago’s Comer Children’s Hospital in Hyde Park on Dec. 20. Porter is the first person in Illinois to be part of a clinical trial using CRISPR gene editing to treat sickle cell disease. **TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Revolutionary gene therapy could help patients battling sickle cell

By Robert McCoppin
Chicago Tribune

Lyric Porter wanted her life back. Born with sickle cell disease, she had a fever at age 5 that scarred her lungs and required her to roll an oxygen tank to school. When she was growing up, clogged blood vessels racked her body with stabbing sensations and forced her to

be hospitalized again and again. When she learned of a new experimental treatment at the University of Chicago Medicine to alter her genes and possibly cure her, she decided to take it. The process itself was an ordeal, but more than a year later, at age 27, Porter is feeling better, has more energy and has stayed out of the hospital.

“I had to take the risk,” she said. “I wanted a better quality of life. And I lost so many friends who had sickle cell disease.” Now, other patients may benefit from a similar new treatment. Federal regulators recently approved a groundbreaking protocol that has the potential to relieve

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Key Hamas official killed in Beirut

Apparent Israeli strike could spark escalation of war

By Bassem Mroue,
Tia Goldenberg
and Wafaa Shurafa
Associated Press

BEIRUT — An apparent Israeli strike in the Lebanese capital of Beirut killed Hamas’ No. 2 political leader Tuesday, marking a potentially significant escalation of Israel’s war against the militant group and heightening the risk of a wider Middle East conflict. Saleh Arouri, who was the most senior Hamas figure killed since the war with Israel began, was also a founder of the group’s military wing. His death could provoke major retaliation by Lebanon’s powerful Hezbollah militia. The strike hit an apartment in a building in a Shiite district of Beirut that is a Hezbollah

stronghold, and Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has vowed to strike back against any Israeli targeting of Palestinian officials in Lebanon. Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire almost daily over the Israeli-Lebanese border since Israel’s military campaign in Gaza began nearly three months ago. But so far the Lebanese group has appeared reluctant to dramatically escalate the fighting. A significant response now could send the conflict spiraling into all-out war on Israel’s northern border. Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency said the strike was carried out by an Israeli drone, and Israeli officials declined to comment. Speaking to reporters, Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not directly mention Arouri’s death but said, “We are focused and remain focused on fighting against Hamas.”

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Cook County’s 1st marriage of 2024

Tuesday morning, Alfonso Arroyo, 28, and Angelica Rodriguez, 30, became the first married couple of 2024 in Cook County. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

