

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

How a single migrant mom built a home for the holidays with the help of three Chicago women



A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

By Laura Rodríguez Presa
Chicago Tribune

December had never felt jovial for Yohana Moreno and her two sons despite the colorful bright lights adorning the streets and Christmas trees all around them. The single mother first ran away with her children from a turbulent relationship, then they ran away from poverty and misery in their native Venezuela.

Last year, she said, Christmas Day was bittersweet, maybe a little sorrowful when the family made it to the U.S. southern border after several months of travel. They were hungry and felt lost, the mother recalled. But more than

Above: Venezuelan migrant Yohana Moreno, center, decorates the first Christmas tree in her new Homan Square apartment with friends Cynthia Nambo, from left, Maureen Kelleher and Corina Pedraza on Dec. 3.
BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

anything, she was desperate. Immigration authorities took her oldest son to a different detention center, separating them without communication for days.

"The hours and days felt endless," Moreno said.

That pain, she said, has been compensated through the good people she credits God with putting on their

path upon arriving in Chicago after New Year's Day. They were among the hundreds of buses sent by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, as a political stunt to draw attention to strained resources in border cities handling surging numbers of migrants.

For the first time in years, her heart feels at peace, the mother said. The family is together now and has created a home in a small apartment in the Homan Square neighborhood. The two boys are enrolled in school, including one in a private school.

But more than anything, she said, they have found an extended family made up of Chicago residents who have made this December feel warm

Turn to Migrant, Page 4

Congress faces hurdles near, far

Its debate on aid for Ukraine, Israel waits on 2024, border plan

By Stephen Groves
and Seung Min Kim
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Senate wrapped up its work for the year, Sen. Michael Bennet took to the floor of the nearly empty chamber and made a late-night plea for Congress to redouble support for Ukraine: "Understand the stakes at this moment."

It was the third time in recent months the Colorado Democrat has kept the Senate working late by holding up unrelated legislation in a bid to cajole lawmakers to approve tens of billions of dollars in weaponry and economic aid for Ukraine.

During a nearly hourlong, emotional speech, he called on senators to see the nearly 2-year-old conflict as a defining clash of authoritarianism against democracy and implored them to consider what it means for Ukrainians to fight "on that freezing front line and not know whether we're going to come through with the ammunition."

Yet Congress broke for the holidays and is not expected to return for two weeks while continued aid for Ukraine has nearly been exhausted.

The Biden administration is planning to send one more aid package before the new year but says it will be the last unless Congress approves more money.

With support slipping in Congress even as conflicts and unrest rattle global security, the United States is again struggling to assert its role in the world. Under the influence of Donald Trump, the former president who is the Republican Party front-runner, GOP lawmakers have increasingly taken a skeptical stance toward U.S. involvement abroad, particularly when it comes to Ukraine.

Leaders of traditional allies Britain and France have implored Western nations to continue their

Turn to Congress, Page 10



CycloPure materials scientist Raigen McGahey dislodges bubbles from a filtration medium on Nov. 16. The company invented a process to purify water. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Life sciences providing boost to city's economy

Growth continues even as office market is in the doldrums

By Brian J. Rogal
Chicago Tribune

Chicago's life sciences industry could in 2024 be one of the few bright spots in the city's struggling office market. A flurry of new leases signed by expanding research firms, along with record-setting amounts of federal grants flowing to local biotech startups, has developers anticipating strong growth in the sector, enough to kick-start new towers dedicated to life sciences.

"Chicago to me is a really

vibrant, fresh place," said Frank Cassou, CEO at CycloPure Inc., which just agreed to relocate its headquarters from the suburbs to 2430 N. Halsted St. in Lincoln Park, the former Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute. Developer Sterling Bay purchased the site in 2018 and revamped it into laboratory space.

CycloPure sells water test kits and created a chemical process that removes cancer-causing "forever chemicals" from drinking water. It plans to greatly expand its workforce and needed new, up-to-date lab space in a location that employees, including many Chicago

Turn to Sciences, Page 4

Chicago has planted about 23,000 trees in 2023

Officials: 8,600 have gone to neighborhoods that need them most

By Rebecca Johnson
Chicago Tribune

Growing up on Chicago's Southwest Side, Rolando Favela lived across from a factory. Loading docks were his playground, he said, whereas trees and green spaces seemed to only exist in other parts of the city.

Favela is now helping tackle this disparity as an environmental justice steward with the Southwest Collective. About seven volunteers from the nonprofit are tree ambassadors, part of the city's \$46 million Our Roots Chicago initiative.

"It's not just aesthetics — trees are pretty, but it's also flood alleviation, erosion control, stormwater management," he said. "This is a green infrastructure coming to the front of people's homes, which is great."

In 2023, the second year of Our Roots Chicago, the city planted 23,000 parkway trees, with about 8,600 planted in neighborhoods with the highest need. More than 41,000 trees have been planted in the past two years, according to data from the city.

The city is on track to meet its goal of planting 75,000 parkway trees by 2026, according to

Turn to Trees, Page 2



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

'Twas a win before Christmas

Bears quarterback Justin Fields, top, celebrates with Lucas Patrick after scoring a touchdown during the first quarter against the Cardinals at Soldier Field on Sunday. The Bears jumped out to a big early lead and then held on for a 27-16 victory. **Chicago Sports**

A joyful and jazzy reinvention

"Sugar Hill: The Ellington/Strayhorn Nutcracker" at the Auditorium Theatre is the familiar ballet with a glitzy twist. **Arts & Living**

War rages as 68 die in Gaza strike

A Gaza Health Ministry spokesman said the toll was likely to rise. Fifteen Israeli soldiers were killed over the weekend. **Nation & World**

TODAY'S WEATHER High 54 Low 43

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 12

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