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MATT KALINOWSKI

The Steward Ralph de la Torre and the fate of a dream

The diverging fortunes
of a medical empire
and the ambitious
surgeon who built it

By Mark Arsenault, Liz Kowalczyk,
Robert Weisman, and Adam Piore

GLOBE STAFF

There was no sugarcoating the financial crisis that had befallen Steward Health Care.

“Let’s face it 2023 was a tough year,” company chairman Ralph de la Torre acknowledged this past January, in a letter to employees of the for-profit hospital chain.

Worse than tough. News stories about its hospitals read like dispatches from a war zone: bat infestations, patients collapsing while waiting for care, shortages of life-saving equipment. The company, which owns more than 30 hospitals across the country, including nine in mostly low-income Massachusetts communities, is on the verge of bankruptcy. State officials are clambering for ways to keep the hospitals open and avert a crisis that could overwhelm the state’s health care system.

How could this have happened? De la Torre’s letter ticked off many reasons: rising interest rates and labor costs; more people on Medicaid, which doesn’t pay hospitals enough; and free care provided to undocumented immigrants.

He left out one: Ralph de la Torre.

A cardiac surgeon who wanted more, de la Torre had never run a hospital when he took command of the six troubled institutions that would form the beginnings of the

DE LA TORRE, Page A14

176 days, 25 officers, 1 killer

Many were
aware of
Robert Card’s
disturbing behavior,
his weapons, and
his paranoia.

So why didn’t
anyone stop the
Lewiston shooter?

By John Hilliard and Randy Vazquez
GLOBE STAFF

Wherever he went, Robert R. Card II thought he heard people talking about him. Behind his back co-workers, longtime friends, people he just met were calling him a sex offender and a pedophile. He could hear them, he said, and he was becoming increasingly angry and paranoid. Also drinking heavily. A trained marksman in the Army Reserve, Card talked of committing a shooting. And he had access to guns. Lots of them.

His son, Colby, a senior at Mt. Ararat High School, was worried. He had watched his father’s mental health spiral down and knew his father had 10 to 15 guns in his bedroom, maybe even one in his truck. Colby and his mother, Cara, shared their concerns first with a school resource officer, and then a Sagadahoc County sheriff’s deputy summoned to the school.

That conversation at the high school last May marked the beginning of a nearly six-month span in which at least 25 police officers were repeatedly alerted to warnings from family and Army colleagues about Card’s erratic behavior and his rantings about shooting people. In one encounter with police, Card chillingly told officers, “I am capable.”

There were at least two opportunities for authorities to take his guns away.

Law enforcement officials, however, never detained him or took away those guns. On the night of Oct. 25, months after his son had asked for help, Card picked up a rifle equipped with a scope and a laser sight, walked into the Just-In-Time Recreation bowling alley in Lewiston, and fired 18

CARD, Page A8

‘There’s no one issue that has more implications for equity than this.’

LARRY CHRETIEN, *executive director of Green Energy Consumers Alliance*

Predatory practices mar energy competition

Complaints prompt lawmakers to rein in — or outright prohibit — third-party electricity suppliers

By Sabrina Shankman
GLOBE STAFF

This story was produced in partnership with WBUR in Boston.

Across Massachusetts, the complaints sound similar: A person discovers their electric bills have spiked, and when they look into it, they find that the company providing their electricity isn’t who they expected — instead of a utility like National

Grid or Eversource, it’s a third-party provider they’ve never heard of.

There was the woman in Chelsea who learned that a door-to-door salesman for a so-called competitive electric supplier allowed her minor son to sign up the household.

There was a Natick resident who was signed up after showing their electric bill to someone pretending to be from Eversource, badge and all, who had knocked on the

door.

There was a blind 77-year-old woman in East Falmouth who swears she never signed up for a competitive electric supply plan because she doesn’t sign things without a friend at her side, but whose name — misspelled — ended up on official documents.

These complaints are among hundreds that The Boston Globe and WBUR received as part of a public records request to the state. And for every example of someone who didn’t knowingly sign up for a competitive supplier, there’s another example of someone who signed up for a plan with a

ELECTRICITY, Page A16



IAN THOMAS JANSEN-LONNQUIST FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE/FILE

Cartoonist Alison Bechdel, pictured at home in Vermont in 2017, introduced the concept of the Bechdel Test in her comic strip “Dykes to Watch Out For” in 1985.

For women in a starring role, a screen test for movies

‘Barbie’ helped revive cartoonist’s checklist

By Brooke Hauser
GLOBE STAFF

The next time you watch a movie, try asking yourself these three questions: Does it feature at least two women? Who talk to each other? About something other than a man?

That simple metric, which is known as the Bechdel Test and first surfaced nearly 40 years ago, reveals a lot about Hollywood’s representation of women onscreen. And in the hot-pink wake of “Barbie,” it’s seeing a resurgence.

On International Women’s Day March 8,

the new 10-screen movie house Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in the Seaport joined the chain’s other theaters across the country in handing out limited-edition Bechdel Test scorecards to moviegoers, who were invited to grade their favorite film — pass or fail. Meanwhile, subscribers to Max, the streaming home of HBO, could choose from a menu of movies touted for “Acing the Bechdel Test” with releases like “Legally Blonde,” “Evil Dead Rise,” and “My Neighbor Totoro.”

No one is more amazed by the test’s endurance than its accidental creator, cartoon-

WOMEN, Page A17

William Delahunt, a seven-term congressman from Massachusetts, died at 82.

While Norfolk district attorney, he created what was considered the nation’s first prosecutorial domestic violence unit. **B1.**



An artist’s tortured past yields glittering traumas in high relief at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. **SundayArts, N1.**

The Ritz-Carlton’s posh yacht is part of the first generation of hotel brands making the leap from land to sea. **SundayTravel, N13.**

The Globe Magazine is not publishing today. The puzzles can be found on **B4.**

Dim sun

Sunday: Clouds and sun. High: 52-57. Low: 39-44.

Monday: Mostly cloudy. High: 47-52. Low: 37-42.

Sunrise: 6:28 Sunset: 7:09

Complete report, **A24.**

Deaths, **A18-23.**

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