

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



A photo of Mohammed al Hijoj is seen on the back window of driver Omar Assaf's vehicle in the Uber Black staging lot near O'Hare International Airport. **TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Driver's death rattles colleagues, friends

Shooting raises concerns about safety on the job for livery workers

By Caroline Kubzansky
Chicago Tribune

Chicago livery drivers knew that they could count on Mohammed al Hijoj to bring them coffee and a snack if they were in between clients in an area near him. If some-

one needed help registering a vehicle or pointers on conduct with passengers, al Hijoj made sure they had the information they needed.

He'd been driving in the Chicago area for 15 years and was generous with his knowledge and time, they said.

"He was always helping everybody," driver Fil Moscusa said. "He was a mentor in the community."

When al Hijoj was shot and killed while driving the evening of Dec. 3,

the WhatsApp group chat of more than 1,000 livery and ride-share drivers in Chicago lit up with the news.

Working drivers across Chicago have long worried about potential dangers while on the job. Just Friday, a taxi driver was stabbed by a female passenger overnight on Michigan Avenue in the Magnificent Mile, Chicago police said.

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Rabbi Mendy Weg, right, high-fives freshman Yehuda Zilberstein after giving him some chocolate gelt coins for Hanukkah on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston on Tuesday. **EILEENT. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Hanukkah celebrations 'add light to the world'

But many Jews are fearful of displaying their faith amid rise in antisemitism

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
Chicago Tribune

In preparation for Hanukkah, Rabbi Mendy Weg drove around the campus of Northwestern University in his "HannuKart" — a golf cart outfitted with a large menorah on a flatbed in the back — to deliver dreidels and chocolate gelt coins to students.

The menorah, which lights up, is a very public display of Weg's Jewish faith at a time when

antisemitic incidents have spiked nationwide and internationally amid the Israel-Hamas war.

Some Jews around the country have reported a fear of lighting menorahs in their home windows this holiday season or wearing items that might identify them by their faith, such as a Star of David or yarmulke, due to concerns over backlash.

Various Hanukkah celebrations in the United States and around the globe have recently

been canceled or nearly nixed in the wake of the war, which has stretched on for more than two months following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel that killed roughly 1,200.

Yet Weg believes celebrating Hanukkah — an eight-day festival of lights that began at sundown Thursday and ends Dec. 15 — is particularly paramount this year in the face of recent antisemitic attacks and the ongoing war.

"It's a really important time to add light to the menorah and add light to the world and be proud of our Judaism," said Weg, campus rabbi at Northwestern Chabad in Evanston.

"As much as we need to be vigilant and be responsible and care for each other, if we bow and say that because of what's going on we're going to stop being proud Jews, then we're letting ... the

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Burke's jury hears recording with Chico

Heavyweight Chicago pols discuss fundraising pressure on trial tape

By Jason Meisner, Ray Long and Megan Crepeau
Chicago Tribune

A federal jury on Friday heard wiretapped calls between then-Ald. Edward Burke and former mayoral candidate Gery Chico where the two longtime Democratic heavyweights talked about a 2017 fundraiser and a local builder apparently slow to get on the Burke bandwagon.

The calls were played by prosecutors in Burke's corruption trial to underscore the then-powerful alderman's alleged use of his official duties to try to squeeze private benefits for himself.

On June 6, 2017, Chico, former chief of staff to Mayor Richard M. Daley and onetime head of the Chicago Board of Education, called Burke to talk about the fundraiser to be held that night at RADA architects on North Michigan Avenue.

"Hey, Ed, how you doin'?" Chico asked at the outset of the call. Burke responded, "Good, Gery, welcome back to, uh, action."

Chico told Burke that the fundraiser was going to be attended by Bulley & Andrews, a construction company that had worked on the newly built Mansueto High School in Burke's 14th Ward.

Chico said Bulley & Andrews were "OK" but didn't seem to quite get the fundraising game.

"Yeah, they're OK. They're not perfect," Chico said. "They're just pretty naive on this stuff, so we've had to drag their asses along the way, but we'll have a nice event."

Burke answered, "Well, maybe if they don't have any access to the property because the driveway isn't legal, they might get the message," prompting Chico to laugh.

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JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Grand jury indicts Hunter Biden

A federal grand jury has charged Hunter Biden with a scheme to evade federal taxes on millions in income from foreign businesses, the second indictment against him this year. **Nation & World**

FDA approves 2 sickle cell disease therapies

Decisions offer dose of hope to patients with blood disorder

By Gina Kolata
The New York Times

On Friday, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first gene-editing therapy ever to be used in humans, for sickle cell disease, a debilitating blood disorder caused by a single mutated gene.

The agency also approved a second treatment using conventional gene therapy for sickle cell that does not use gene editing.

For the 100,000 Americans with the disease, most of them Black, the approvals offer hope for finally

living without an affliction that causes excruciating pain, organ damage and strokes.

While patients, their families and their doctors welcome the FDA's approvals, getting either therapy will be difficult and expensive.

"It is practically a miracle that this is even possible," said Dr. Stephan Grupp, chief of the cellular therapy and transplant section at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Grupp, who consults for Vertex Pharmaceuticals of Boston, said his medical center was hoping to begin treating sickle cell patients next year.

But, he added, "I am very realis-

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Nkem Azinge, a government project manager, gets a checkup Tuesday at National Hospital in Abuja, Nigeria. Azinge has been saving to pay for a bone-marrow transplant in India. **TAIWO AINA/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

