Sunday Edition









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WEST SIDE TIMES

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IDCFS Recognizes Human Trafficking Awareness Month



On Friday, January 28, Illinois DCFS joined advocates and volunteers at a candlelight vigil in Calumet Park, Illinois in recognition of Human Trafficking Awareness Month. The event, organized by Dr. Kisha Roberts-Tabb with Roberts-Tabb & Associates, took place to shine a light on the issue of domestic human trafficking. Packets that include toiletries and information about substance abuse services, shelter care programs and human trafficking referral services were distributed to people in need. Runaway youth, youth in care and homeless youth are especially vulnerable to human trafficking. In Fiscal Year 2021, Illinois DCFS investigated 309 allegations of human trafficking of children, 127 of those in Cook County – a number experts believe is lower than the true number of incidents. Often, victims of human trafficking do not seek help because they are fearful, ashamed of their situation, distrust law enforcement or become dependent on the perpetrator. The Illinois Safe Children Act ensures that all children who are lured or coerced into prostitution/human trafficking are innocent and immune from criminal prosecution; and will be placed in the child welfare system instead of the criminal justice system. Know the Signs:

• Have an adult control

them by speaking for themSeem out of place given the time of day or night

- Look disheveled or dressed in clothes that they could not afford to buy
 Show signs of physical
- abuse such as bruising or red marks
- Not possess any form of identification

• Perform inappropriate work for their age and not

be compensated

To report the suspected human trafficking of a child under the age of 21, call the Illinois DCFS Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (22873). To report the suspected human trafficking of an adult over age 21, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.

Pritzker Administration Awards \$55M to Improve Housing Accessibility, Stability for Vulnerable Residents

resources



finance the creation or preservation of permanent supportive housing across the state. Awarded under Round VIII of IHDA's Permanent Supportive Housing Development Program, the awards will support the construction and rehabilitation of 10 developments containing 259 units of affordable housing for persons at risk of homelessness, residents with physical challenges or mental health needs, and other vulnerable populations. To further support the success of residents over the long term, the housing will be integrated with flexible supportive services designed to help these households maintain

that

will

their housing stability. health, and independence. Developments funded by the program serve individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, persons with disabilities, veterans, and other residents who face barriers to stable housing. A few of the developments approved under Round VIII of the Permanent Supportive Housing Development Program include:

The Covent (Chicago): The rehabilitation of the former Covent Hotel, a former single-room occupancy hotel originally built in 1904 in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Work includes merging and upgrading the 64 single room occupancy (SRO)

units to create 30 studio apartments with private kitchens and bathrooms while enhancing the building's common areas. The project is developed by the NHP Foundation with services provided by Renaissance Social Services.

ReVive Center Cressey House (Chicago): A rehabilitation project led by the ReVive Center to renovate and preserve 28 units of supportive housing. All 28 units will be upgraded with new appliances and finishes while the building's mechanical systems and common areas are replaced and modernized. For more information, visit

www.ihda.org.

The Illinois Housing Development Authority

(IHDA) Board announced the conditional award of in state and federal

more than \$55.7 million

Morton College Joins with Google's HIS Career Readiness Program



On Tuesday, Morton College announced its participation in the Grow with Google HSI Career Readiness Program. The initiative will help Latino students at over 20 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) prepare for the workforce through digital skills training and career workshops. Through a \$2 million investment in the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HAČU), the program will train 200,000 Latino students by 2025. Google. org, Google's philanthropy,

will also provide \$5 million dollars in grants to three Latino-serving workforce organizations-UnidosUS, the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Hispanic Federation-to help workers upskill for in-demand jobs while wraparound providing support.

In partnership with HACU, the Grow with Google HSI Career Readiness Program will provide HSI career centers with funding and a semester-long in-person and online digital skills program. HACU has a track

record of increasing access to education in the Latino community, and two-thirds of Latino college students in the U.S. attend one of its member institutions. The initiative will combine workshops, career counseling, career programming design thinking, and on project management, and professional brand building. The participating schools will also create additional material tailored to student needs. Google is also providing \$5 million in grants to UnidosUS, the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Hispanic Federation to help members of the Latino community prepare for jobs in the digital economy. They will work with local affiliates across the U.S. to reach over five thousand Latino jobseekers with training opportunities to grow their digital skills and access to Google Career Certificates. For more information, please visit Grow.Google.com.



Comcast Rise Applications Now Open to All Women-Owned Small Businesses

Comcast announced that its Comcast RISE program is open to all women-owned businesses in its Greater Chicago Region, which includes Illinois, Northern Indiana and Southwest Michigan. The expansion of Comcast RISE to women-owned businesses furthers the company's efforts to advance digital equity and help provide underrepresented small business owners with

access to the digital tools and funding they need to thrive. In its first year alone, Comcast RISE has provided more than \$60 million in grants, marketing and technology services to more than 6,700 small businesses owned by people of color - including Black, Indigenous, Hispanic and Asian Americans in Comcast's national footprint, including nearly 550 in the company's

Greater Chicago Region. Of the 6,700 Comcast RISE recipients to date, nearly 70 percent have been businesses owned by women of color, spurring Comcast to take a deeper look into the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. More information and the application to apply for marketing and technology services are available at www.ComcastRISE.com.



First Installment Property Tax Bills in Mail to Cook County Property Owners

Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas has mailed nearly 1.8 million Tax Year 2021 First Installment property tax bills. Payments are due March 1, 2022. The First Installment is 55 percent of the previous year's total tax. Exemptions that can reduce a property owner's taxes are applied to the Second Installment bill. Since Pappas posted the bills on cookcountytreasurer.com on December 7, 2021, almost 13,000 property owners have gone to the website to pay their property taxes. "Paying property taxes through cookcountytreasurer.com is quick, easy and secure," Pappas said. "Think about how many other things you do on the web. "If you've never paid your property taxes online. I urge to do so. You'll receive an electronic receipt that will come in handy when you prepare your income tax return."

To make a payment online, visit cookcountytreasurer. com and follow these steps: • Select the blue box labeled "Pay Online for Free"

• Enter your address or 14-digit Property Index Number (PIN)

There is no fee if you pay online from your bank account. The Treasurer's Office accepts partial payments but First Installment taxes must be paid by March 1 to avoid a late charge of 1.5 percent per month, as mandated by Illinois law. You can also use cookcountytreasurer. com to:

• Search \$84 million in available refunds.

Check if you are missing out on \$34 million in property tax exemptions, which lower your tax bill.
Read the Pappas Studies, a series of research projects that includes a 20year history of Cook County property taxes.



City Officials Announce 'Readiness Summit' for Cook County Businesses

Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker announced their partnership to host the first ever joint 'Readiness Summit" on Friday February 4, 2022. The virtual summit will help ensure that non-profits, community organizations, and vendors throughout Cook County are aware of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other economic recovery funding opportunities, and better

understand what they need to do to be eligible for these opportunities. This summit will walk community stakeholders and small business owners through the process of how the City of Chicago, Cook County, and the State of Illinois are working collaboratively to streamline the public's access to these historic opportunities, in order to expand the impact of these once-in-a-lifetime federal investments. The virtual summit will open at 9a.m., on Friday, Feb.

4. Following opening remarks there will be three plenary session helpful to any organization regardless of their area of focus. Additional details on the Readiness Summit Agenda will be made available in the coming days. The event will also be recorded and posted on City, County, and State websites. Participants can register at https:// www.eventbrite.com/e/ joint-readiness-summittickets-253291671207





Back 2 School Illinois Launches 'We Appreciate Teachers' Statewide Contest



Back 2 School Illinois (B2SI), a Chicagobased nonprofit that provides tens of thousands of deserving kids from lowincome families with free school supplies each year to help them succeed in the classroom, is pleased to announce the launch of its 2022 *We Appreciate Teachers* contest, beginning this week. The statewide initiative is designed to celebrate and support Illinois educators, particularly during COVID-19, by rewarding fifteen winning teachers with 30 Back 2 School Illinois kits (full of vital school supplies) for their entire classroom of students. The winners will



also receive gift baskets and will be treated to a luxurious evening of champagne and hors d'oeuvres at a Chicago reception on May 2nd. Anvone can submit a contest application on behalf of a teacher, including the teacher himself/herself. The teacher must be currently employed by a school in Illinois. To participate, interested parties should complete the online We Appreciate Teachers contest application, or print out and complete the application form off the B2SI website, and then mail it in to B2SI. All applications must be completed no later than April 1st, 2022 and include an essay (250 to 500 words) explaining how the nominated teacher goes above and beyond to positively impact their students' lives. Winning teachers will be notified by April 11th.



The Art of the Brick Makes Chicago Debut at MSI

The Art of the Brick, a captivating exhibition, featuring over 100 incredible works of art made from millions of LEGO® bricks, is set to make its Chicago debut at the Museum of Science and Industry on February 10, 2022. Tickets are currently available for this critically acclaimed collection of creative and inspiring pieces by renowned

contemporary artist Nathan Sawaya. "*The Art of the Brick* reimagines famous artistic masterpieces into LEGO form," said Chevy Humphrey, President and CEO, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago. "Visitors of all ages will witness art in a whole new way, while celebrating an imaginative and creative medium." To celebrate the exhibition's Chicago

debut, Nathan Sawaya has created several new pieces including a replica of Chicago Artist Hebru Brantley's "Flyboy". *The Art of The Brick* at the Museum of Science and Industry will be on display from February 10, 2022, through September 5, 2022. Tickets are not included in Museum Entry. For more information and tickets, visit: msichicago.org/visit/ tickets









Experian Go[™] Program Will Allow Millions of Credit Invisibles to Start Building Credit in Minutes



To further financial inclusion across the United

States, Experian® launched Experian GoTM, a free, first-

of-its-kind program to help "credit invisibles," or peo-

ple with no credit history, begin building credit on their own terms. Experian Go is the only program available today that helps consumers establish their financial identity by creating an Experian credit report. Nearly 50 million consumers have a nonexistent or limited credit history. Without an existing credit report, lenders can't verify a consumer's identity and consumers are unable to access credit at fair and affordable rates. Often, these consumers are caught in cycles of predatory lending; can't cover emergency expenses; and face limited housing options, higher insurance premiums and interest rates, employment

challenges, larger deposit requirements and more. The launch of Experian Go is a continuation of Experian's mission to help consumers everywhere get access to fair and affordable credit. Within minutes, credit invisibles can have an authenticated Experian credit report, tradelines and a credit history by using Experian BoostTM, and instant access to financial offers through Experian Go. The program can help consumers build credit and

become scoreable without going into debt. In fact, early analysis shows 91 percent of consumers with no credit history who connect to Experian Boost, a free feature that allows users to contribute their on-time cell phone, video streaming service, internet, and utility payments directly to their Experian credit report, can become scoreable in minutes with an average starting near-prime FICO® Score of 665.



Two-Thirds United Stands in Solidarity Against Violence about Two-Thirds United



Courtesy of Two Thirds United

Melissa Ortega was walking alongside her mother on a Saturday afternoon, but she never returned home because she was caught in a shooting intended for someone else. Ortega's story is one that repeats itself much too often in our city, especially in Latino and African American communities,

and we need action now to prevent these types of stories from repeating themselves. We, members of Two-Thirds United, a coalition of organizations and individuals from the African American and Latino communities of Chicago, present a united plea to community organizations, government leaders, and fellow Chicagoans to redouble efforts that will bring

lasting peace to our children, families and neighborhoods and end the continued cycle of violence in our communities. Two Thirds United:

- •Casa Central
- •Children's Advocates for Change
- •Dr. Rosita Lopez
- •Instituto del Progreso Latino
- •La Casa Norte
- •The Chicago Community Trust

•YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago

profits serving African American and Latino communities, endeavored to commit their time and resources to discuss and

begin the healing process racism has created in our lives and communities, and work together to implement solutions for change. To learn more

and its mission, visit www. In June 2020, a group twothirdsunited.org or of leaders from area non-

follow us on all social media platforms a) twothirdsunited.





Shedd Aquarium Reveals Plans for Exterior Enhancements



On the heels of announcing its significant new 2030 Centennial Commitment, Shedd Aquarium today unveiled more details about proposed exterior improvements within its planned 4-year, onsite transformation and restoration project. "Shedd Aquarium's interior has long been a gateway to nature, bringing guests eye-to-eye with animals first programming to spill out beyond our doors – experiences that will be made available to anyone visiting Museum Campus." The aquarium's exterior adjustments set the stage for nature play, greater physical accessibility and the much-needed restoration of Shedd's historic terraces. The plan is set for input by the City's Committee on Design on will enable new interior circulation pathways that will significantly improve Shedd's accessibility by reducing the number of transitions between the various levels and areas of the aquarium. Beyond providing guests with multiple options regarding where they can start their journey, these changes are intentionally focused on making navigation



from across the globe, and we have an opportunity to bring that same wonder and excitement outside of our walls," said Meghan Curran, Chief Marketing and Experience Officer at Shedd Aquarium. "Our Centennial Commitment includes updates to our entryway, terraces and natural spaces, all of which will enable vibrant, animal-

Wednesday, Feb. 9. The new features will include: •Guests headed inside for a visit will enjoy new improvements to the entryway that will create a more seamless and streamlined start to their visit, including automated security and an expedited ticket-scanning process. •The enhanced entry easier and more efficient for guests with strollers, wheelchairs and other mobility needs.

•Shedd plans to add a four-season glass pavilion over the existing Sick Family Lakeside Terrace, providing year-long access to unobscured views of Lake Michigan and the city skyline. Aside from making Lake Michigan more accessible, even during inclement weather, the pavilion would nearly double the seating capacity for school visits, events and more. The proposed enclosure will increase dining space for patrons by 7,700 square feet

to accommodate peak seasons.

For more information, visit www.sheddaquarium.org/ centennial-commitment











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