

READER

FREE AND FREAKY SINCE 1971 | OCTOBER 27, 2022



HOW PUNK ADOPTED

THE GODFATHER OF GORE

Herschell Gordon Lewis invented the modern splatter film with *Blood Feast*—and he's inspired two thousand rock 'n' roll maniacs.

By LEOR GALIL 38



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The Malignant Ampersands is a dark, twisty fantasia about cancer and kinfolk, writes Kerry Reid.

Get your UnGala tickets

A museum takeover and art party celebrating the Reader's 50ish anniversary

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Bat Hit Crazy and Bunny Sanders ALEX ANTEAU



Skaters from the Chicago-Style Roller Derby team gather during practice. ALEX ANTEAU



Team members circle the roller rink at the Coachlite Skate Center. ALEX ANTEAU

ROLLER DERBY

‘Existing without question’

The evolution of gender inclusion in Chicago roller derby

By ALEX ANTEAU

“I was just bawling because I didn’t have the right parts to play,” Kaiser said.

Kaiser is trans, but she wasn’t out when she saw her first derby game. However, she still wanted to get involved and joined her local men’s derby team, where she skated from 2011-2014.

Kaiser said she was a good skater, but despite earning the respect of her male coaches and teammates, she felt like she was missing something.

She offered to help her local women’s team prepare for the playoffs and soon started practicing with them.

“Everybody else there was very green and hadn’t played before,” Kaiser said. “So I was getting some really nice compliments from the trainers.”

Once the draft for the next season rolled around, however, Kaiser’s name was the only one missing from the roster.

She later found out that she was excluded for “being too tall,” but at that moment she felt like she needed to train harder—to “become unquestionable,” she said. “I felt like I was unintentionally gaslit by everyone.”

This was the beginning of Kaiser’s entry into the derby world, but she had a long road ahead of her.

A slow evolution

Roller derby has not always been seen as an inclusive space.

Kaiser said 2014 was “a different time” in the derby world. According to her, skaters were still required to have hormone levels “within acceptable female ranges.” Kaiser said that hormone regulations in women’s

derby were a deciding factor when she began hormone replacement therapy.

The Women’s Flat Track Derby Association changed its policy in 2015 to read: “An individual who identifies as a trans woman, intersex woman, and/or gender expansive may skate with a WFTDA charter team if women’s flat track roller derby is the version and composition of roller derby with which they most closely identify.”

Alice Amell, a trans woman who skates for WFTDA member the Windy City Rollers as Tricky Pixie, bought her first skates the day she learned roller derby existed in 2016.

“I came out as a woman a year earlier. I wasn’t sure what teams would accept me. I hadn’t even heard of roller derby,” Amell said. “And then just out of nowhere, I was watching some documentary and one of the people mentioned that she plays roller derby and that in roller derby they don’t care if you’re gay or trans or whatever—they just accept you.”

Meeting the moment

For many participants, the intentionally accepting climate in roller derby is an important refuge.

“School’s hard enough, but having a place [trans kids] can go to where they’re accepted without question is incredibly validating,” said Molly Rix, derby name Estra Gen, a trans woman skater with Chicago-Style Roller Derby (formerly known as Chicago Outfit, also a WFTDA member).

Rix was seeking LGBTQ+ community when she joined the team in March. Since then, she said she’s developed an active social life and has even formed a band with some of

her teammates. On bad days, derby helps her cope.

Rix's experience is a reflection of how inclusive sports can go a long way to help trans players' mental health at a time when gender inclusivity in sports is facing renewed political backlash.

In 2022 alone, 18 states introduced bills banning transgender youth from participating in sports that align with their gender identity, according to the Freedom for All Americans legislation tracker.

Research from the Trevor Project showed that in 2021, trans youth experienced significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety than their cisgender counterparts. Though, according to the organization, "LGBTQ youth who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide than those who do not."

According to the John W. Brick Foundation's Move Your Mental Health Report, 89 percent of studies examining the relationship between mental health and exercise showed that physical activity improves mental health

outcomes.

"I'll be in a bad mood or something like that, or I'll have something on my mind," Rix said. "And then after two hours at derby practice, I'm sweaty and I'm not even thinking about it anymore—it's great for stress relief and movement really helps. . . . Having those spaces to just exist without question is invaluable."

Transformation on the track

"I will say [trans inclusion] has gotten a lot better in recent years," Kaiser said.

Where Amell and Rix found an outlet to express their femininity, a nonbinary Chicago-Style Roller Derby team member who skates under the name Bunny Sanders (and preferred to be identified by derby name only) is also able to express their androgyny.

"Changing my derby name and playing with my gender . . . finding out putting on different outfits and hats gives me gender euphoria, and accepting that and not judging myself for it . . . here is the first place that I could try all that kind of stuff out," Sanders

said.

"Roller derby in and of itself is an accepting and inclusive environment," Sanders added, describing how the sport has evolved around gender inclusivity even in the last few years.

The team has been working to update their own bylaws to be gender inclusive, though Sanders says there is still room for improvement.

Current challenges

According to Grey Noone, a nonbinary skater and one of Kaiser's former teammates, in their experience, roller derby has been a predominantly white sport with limited racial, economic, and cultural diversity.

"Trans rights are an issue we need to hop on, but if people can't afford to have a sports life, if they don't have the time and resources, then their [economic class] is keeping them from roller derby even more than their trans status," Noone said.


While Kaiser stayed involved with the administration of the Chicago derby leagues and helped shape WFTDA's gender inclusion

policy, she said that challenges and trauma that resulted from lack of acceptance sparked her return to playing on a coed Men's Roller Derby Association team.

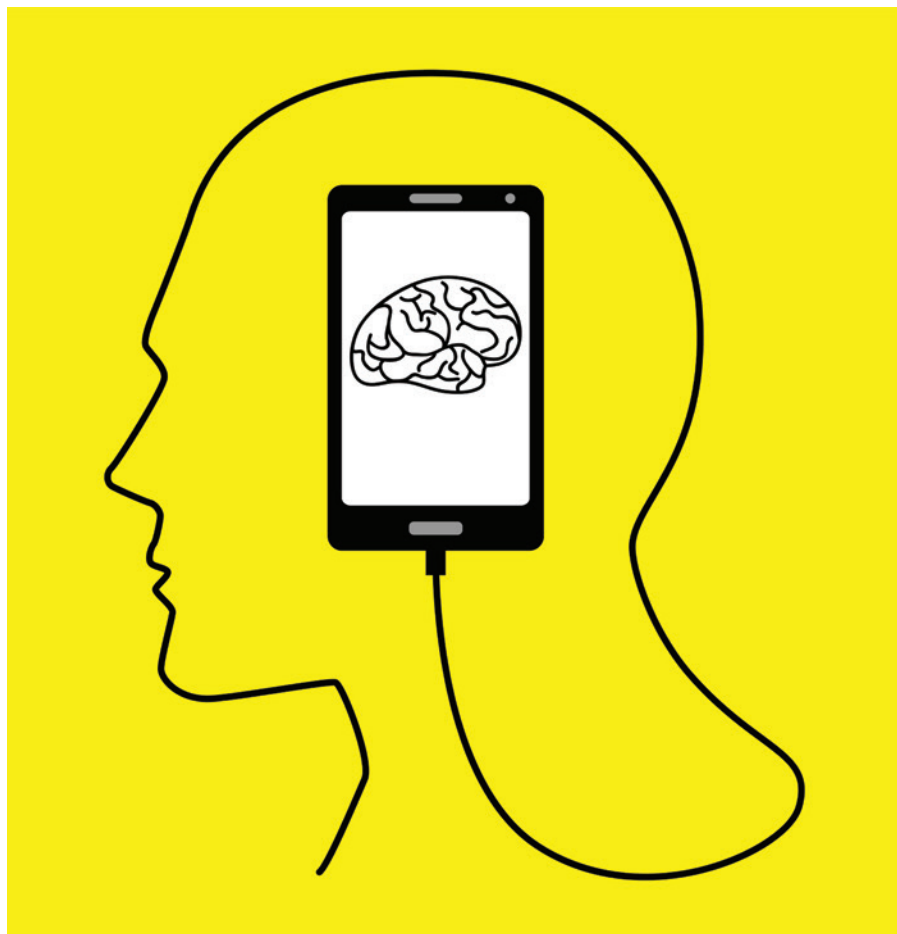
"[At first I thought] I need to play women's to validate my gender, and through the process of getting discriminated against for my gender, I kind of validated my own gender," Kaiser said. "I became a lot more confident in where I belong. . . . I got to the point where I don't want to play women's derby. I want to play derby."

However, according to Amell, Kaiser's work paved the road for future trans skaters in the women's division.

"By the time I joined, there was no question of whether I was going to be allowed to play," Amell said.

"You can look however you want when you show up to practice, and no one's gonna judge you for that," Rix said. "You know [it's] going to be a safer space for you to be yourself. I'm wearing a skirt right now and I would never wear that anywhere else." 

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A sample of Ørkenoy's offerings  RYAN SANDERS

FEATURE

Ørkenoy is deserted no more

Humboldt Park's two-year-old Nordic-inspired brewery has eased into the multifaceted, community-focused island it was always meant to be.

By **MIKE SULA**

There are some 38 uninhabited islands in Norway* and three in Humboldt Park. Of course, there are the two in the Lagoon, but these days Ørkenoy—the two-year-old Nordic-inspired brewery, cocktail bar, and restaurant—is “deserted” in name only. (The word is a rough mash-up of two Norwegian words: ørken, for desert, and oy, for island.)

But at its seemingly ill-timed opening, at the height of the pandemic, the threat that the seats in its bright, open confines—hard

by the elevated Bloomingdale Trail greenway—would remain empty was very real to chef-partner Ryan Sanders. The name, he says, “was in relation to the fact that we are in a space still off the beaten path, the idea of the 606 as a current that would bring things to us. It was the question, ‘If you got to bring one thing to a desert island, what would it be?’ Our answer was beer.”

Sanders and his former partner, brewer Jonny Ifergan, spent a year and a half building out the space in the Kimball Arts Center,

planning to offer an alternative to the hoppy, IPA-dominant brewery scene: Scandinavian-inspired lagers and farmhouse ales to accompany Sanders's nimble menu built around open-faced smørrebrød on dense sourdough rye rugbrød.

“When the pandemic happened, floors were torn out, plumbing was going in,” says Sanders, who'd previously cooked in the taproom at Lagunitas Brewing. “There was no slowing down at that point. We couldn't stop if we wanted to. The bank wants its money. The landlord wants his rent.”

They'd opened in September 2020 with all the precautions and safety measures they could establish: reservations only, QR code

menus, and rigorously minimal contact between staff and guests. “It was, from a service perspective, awful.” Six weeks later, the city shut everything down again, and Sanders and Ifergan had to lay off their entire staff, apart from brewer Briana Hestad.

Still, the space came to life as conditions relaxed. The following June they introduced biannual block parties and pop-up markets for independent, itinerant craft and food businesses, which was always part of the plan. “The very first one, of course, there was, like, a hurricane that day,” says Sanders. “We thought the building was going to flood, but this place was packed to the gills. There were still masks and we were still asking for vax

FOOD & DRINK



Ryan Sanders and Briana Hestad © CARLOS AZUARA

cards and all that stuff, but people just wanted to be out. They just wanted something to do.”

The vibe is much less restrictive these days, though guests still order from their phones, and when Ifergan stepped away at the end of last year to start his own brewery, Hestad stepped up. Both the beer and Sanders’s menu began to evolve, and he’s just introduced a bunch of new fall dishes, highlighted by larger shareable plates and dishes that range far beyond northern European flavors.

Right now he’s braising pork ribs for 36 hours with Mick Klug plums, and shellacking them on the pickup with mezcal barbecue sauce. There’s a dino-sized lamb shank, barely clinging to the bone, drenched in an orange wine-spiked reduction of its braising liquid, its richness offset by a crunchy herb salad.

These augment the portable smørrebrød and small bites core, which now features a dollop of chicken liver mousse atop a tiny apple cider donut with a drizzle of lingonberry glaze, which can serve as a kind of gateway organ for the offal adverse. He’s brought back brussels sprouts, this season seared in brown butter and glazed in cider-gochujang sauce, which ought not deter anyone weary of this menu standard. And some of the open-faced sandwiches have gone pretty far afield from the more traditional mainstays, like the Seitalian Stallion, a vegan riff on Italian beef—a “sacrilege,” jokes Sanders, with mushroom seitan drenched in a caramelized onion bechamel.

The bar is now fully open, serving luminous, fruit-forward cocktails, in addition to the drafts, which Hestad, who has a PhD in Scandinavian language, culture, and history, has scaled back from some of the more challenging smoked beers (though a very approachable one remains), in favor of lighter, refreshing, herbal-kissed brews like a farmhouse ale with lemon verbena and shiso, and a gooseberry wheat with lemon balm and sage.

Ørkenoy continues to evolve into an ever more multifaceted concept, hosting Wednesday oyster nights, art exhibits, and dance parties, and selling a carefully curated selection of packaged goods out of its retail market. Friday, October 28, it’s staging an interactive beer blending dinner with Primary Colors, whose customizable brews are also produced on-site, and its next midwinter market featuring some two dozen-plus independent vendors is set for December 3.

In some ways the long, slow, organic easing out of isolation was good for the brewery. “It’s been an interesting few years for everyone,” says Sanders. “I like the box because then you can bounce off the walls and find something to create with what you have. We don’t have a wealth of resources, but the silver lining was everybody brought something to the desert island and we got to create with what we have.”

*so says Wikipedia 📖

🐦 @MikeSula

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COMMENTARY

ON POLITICS

It worked!

Leasing CHA land to the Chicago Fire is part of a longstanding plan to gentrify the city.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

It was a connect-the-dots moment in Chicago as the following news stories recently broke in rapid succession. Chicago Public School enrollment fell again. It's now down more than 115,000 students over the last 20 years. There are homeless camps in many parks and under viaducts, including Touhy Park on the far north side. That's where a wannabe political candidate tried a stunt out of the Ron DeSantis playbook, luring the homeless out of the park with bogus eviction notices promising them jobs in other parts of the city. And the City Council approved a zoning change that allows Chicago Housing Authority land, intended for low-income housing, to be used as a training center for the Fire soccer team.

I would say the shortage of low-income housing and the falling population are the direct results of planning decisions made over the last 30 or so years to do exactly what they did—encourage people to leave Chicago and make it far too expensive for poor people to stay. We got what we wanted, Chicago. We should be happy.

But, Chicago being Chicago, when the Fire deed was done a chorus of alderpeople rose to say they were doing it on behalf of poor people. Which is what Chicago officials usually

say when the city passes a deal that actually encourages poor people to get out of town.

Time for a brief history lesson on low-income housing in Chicago. Throughout the last century, Chicago faced a housing crisis caused in part by the Great Migration, an influx of Black residents moving north from the south.

Chicago's leaders might have confronted the housing crisis by making sure Black residents were welcomed in every corner of the city.

Except there was fierce resistance in many all-white neighborhoods whenever even a handful of Black families tried to move in.

Actually, resistance is a euphemism for what happened. Riots being the more accurate description of what went down.

In the years after World War II, there were the Trumbull Park riots, the Fernwood Park riots, the Peoria Street riots, and the Airport Homes riots. You can read all about them in Arnold Hirsch's classic book, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

You could name a who's who of prominent Black Chicagoans whose families were confronted by rioters. Starting with Lorraine Hansberry, author of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

After her father, Carl Hansberry, bought a home in then all-white Washington Park, he was greeted not so much by a mob of residents as a mob of lawsuits. They tried to keep Hansberry and his family out of the neighborhood by arguing a restrictive clause in the lease prevented Black people from buying the property.

The "resistance" was still fierce in 1966, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., leading a fair housing campaign, got hit in the head with a rock while marching in Marquette Park.

In the face of the mobs, the powers that be decided the best course of action was to cram Black people into high-rise complexes built in already all-Black neighborhoods.

That decision enjoyed biracial political sup-



A rendering of the future Chicago Fire performance center. COURTESY CITY OF CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

port. White politicians liked it because it kept Black people out of their wards. And Black politicians liked it because it kept Black people in their wards, pretty much guaranteeing their reelection.

Nobody loves segregation like Chicago!

In the 1990s, Mayor Daley decided the high-rises had outlived their usefulness. In conjunction with the Clinton administration, he announced the Plan for Transformation.

The residents would be moved out and the high-rises demolished. Mayor Daley promised that people who were moved out would be welcomed back, once lower-rise buildings were built on the sites.

There were a few critics—like yours truly—who said Daley was clearing out the poor people so he could turn the land over to developers.

But Daley said we, the critics, were just too cynical for our own good. And he was in fact tearing down the high-rises to allow the poor people an escape from the crime and misery of the projects. And that everyone who got moved out would be invited back.

One of the high-rises that got demolished was in the ABLA complex, around Roosevelt and Ashland, where the Fire will build its practice facility.

Years ago, there were about 3,600 families living in ABLA. Now there's less than 100 families. I urge everybody to read my old friend Mick Dumke's stories about the deal. But in a nutshell...

Joe Mansueto, the Fire's owner, has been

looking for a site for his practice center for the last several years.

After his plan to build the site at Hanson Park on the northwest side fell apart, Mansueto opted for the approximately 26 acres near ABLA. And so the CHA agreed to lease it to him. And last month the city council completed the deal by agreeing to change the zoning to allow for the soccer facility.

During the council debate, Alderperson Walter Burnett said the city was turning over the land to the Fire because that's what the remaining ABLA residents wanted. And, it's true, several residents said they did. Of course, no one asked the thousands of residents who were moved out (and remain on CHA waiting lists) what they thought about the deal.

Let's face it, we all know what's been going on. For better or worse, our mayors over the last 30 years have dedicated themselves to a policy of gentrification.

Tear down the high-rises. Move out the poor people. Lease the CHA lands so they can't return. And let rising property taxes make this city too expensive for many people to afford.

No mayor will admit this was the plan. It sounds so, you know, Ron DeSantis-like. But, effectively, that's what they've been up to as the city tries to reverse the Great Migration.

When Dr. King came to town, he said we needed to end poverty. But that was too challenging for Chicago's leaders. So they decided to just move it someplace else. 🗑️

🐦 @bennyjshow

The Illinois Lottery's Carolyn Adams Ticket for the Cure helps combat breast cancer in Illinois

The Carolyn Adams Ticket for the Cure (TFTC) is an Illinois Lottery specialty ticket where 100 percent of profits go toward breast cancer research, awareness, and education in Illinois. Launched in 2006, the ticket was renamed in 2011 in honor of former Illinois Lottery superintendent Carolyn Adams, who helped write the legislation for TFTC before losing her battle to breast cancer. Since 2006, the ticket has raised over \$15 million in grant funding for medical research centers and community organizations across the state, which is distributed by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Tickets cost \$3 and are available for purchase at over 7,000 Illinois Lottery retailers statewide. Visit the Illinois Lottery website for more information, and read on to learn more about two recent grant recipients, Chicago's Anixter Center and Cass County Health Department.

Anixter Center

anixter.org

Navigating breast cancer screenings, physician appointments, and treatment plans can be daunting for anyone, but those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or hard of hearing often face additional challenges when it comes to communicating with their health-care providers or receiving proper care. That reality has been compounded in recent years, partially due to the pandemic. "There's been a shortage of interpreters who work in medical settings and mask use has made communication even more difficult," says Karen Aguilar, vice president of communication access at Chicago's Anixter Center.

Founded as an orphanage in 1919 by a group of friends in honor of a friend who'd lost several children to the influenza pandemic, Anixter currently serves Chicagoans living with disabilities and behavioral health needs, and—through their Chicago Hearing Society division—those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing.



Their Ticket for the Cure grant serves that latter clientele by providing funding for a patient navigator, breast cancer education videos in American Sign Language, community workshops, and other outreach activities.

The program's navigator works with clients from their first screenings through the end of their cancer journey, helping them make appointments and understand terminology while acting as medical advocates. "It's so important that the patient understands their physician," Aguilar says. "That's important for hearing people, but many hearing people are equipped with the knowledge of what's going to happen at a medical appointment. For a Deaf person who might not have that experience of overhearing certain medical terms as they grow up, it can be very new to them."

Anixter's work remains vital, because ultimately, for these patients there's much more than miscommunication at stake. "Poor communication between patients who are Deaf, DeafBlind or hard of hearing and their physicians, nurses, and techs can lead to misdiagnosis, mistreatment, and poor assessments," Aguilar says. "And a lack of communication feeds into misunderstandings that we want to make sure are removed."

Cass County Health Department

casscohealth.org

County health departments play important roles in their communities, but for residents of medically underserved areas, such as Cass County, Illinois, they can be particularly vital resources for personal health care. Located in central Illinois, the county is predominantly farmland and the nearest hospital is a 40-minute drive away.

In 2005, the Cass County Health Department became recognized as a Federally Qualified Health Center, allowing them to address the lack of medical services in the area with the creation of two full-service doctor's offices (which operate on a sliding-scale basis), and a home health and hospice program.

With their Ticket for the Cure grant, the health department has boosted its breast-cancer-related outreach and education for clients of all ages and walks of life. Cass County's population is relatively small—at about 13,000 people, it's roughly the same as Chicago's Armour Square neighborhood—but it's exceptionally diverse. That's partially due to food-processing company JBS USA, which employs many immigrant workers at its Beardstown meatpacking plant.

"Most rural health departments focus solely on rural health, but we're looking at it from the angle of making sure we're able to communicate and provide services in English, French, Spanish, and Burmese, which are the dominant languages in Cass County," says Cass County Health Department director of health education Andrew English.

Their team is also mindful of the varying cultural attitudes toward breast health among the people they serve. They work closely with the local immigration center and respected community leaders on education and outreach initiatives, such as recruiting and training community members to serve as breast health ambassadors and offering women's health-care events in several languages. Additionally, they meet with clients to empower them in navigating the health-care system, and access screenings, referrals, and sometimes—through a partnership with a local transit company—rides to medical appointments in neighboring counties.

"We're here because we have a passion, and we really want people to do things that will increase their likelihood of remaining healthy," English says. "We're putting that message out into the community to get people to not just wear a pink ribbon, but to act."

This sponsored content is paid for by Illinois Lottery.

COMMENTARY

ON CULTURE

You will die. Then what?

The Field Museum's new exhibit

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

Is death life's greatest mystery? Or would we just like it to be? (Therefore, ghosts, devils, heaven, hell, organized religion, and Halloween candy.)

Those are not among the five major questions that serve as an organizing mechanism for the Field Museum's expansive new exhibit, "Death: Life's Greatest Mystery," however much they hang in the air.

The actual questions are these:


What is death?

Answer, more or less: depends on how you define it.

What will happen to my body?

Probably won't be a fossil. Most likely, buried or burned. Ecologically correct but less popular choice: served up as another creature's dinner.



A reproduction of an ancient skeleton ("Magdalenian Woman") at the Field Museum's "Death: Life's Greatest Mystery"  DEANNA ISAACS

Do I have to die?

Um, yes.

How will my death affect others?

Most animals won't notice.

The big question—**What will happen to my spirit?** (And what is the spirit, anyway?)—is posed, but basically ducked.

Designed to be "a safe and welcoming place for visitors to get curious," the exhibit presents "all the different answers offered by the natural world as well as human cultures through time," according to a museum press release.

"Visitors will see that these questions don't necessarily have just one answer, but many," exhibition developer Ben Miller says in the statement.

Translation: there's a lot here about the rituals various cultures have developed to help people cope.

So, anodyne enough for a G or PG rating. Not surprising since museums are fighting their own dinosaur status and school field trips are vital to their survival. Still, there's plenty of interesting stuff, all drawn from the museum's vast collection. The Field, with its 40 million objects and specimens—stuffed, pinned, floating in preservative—is our own spectacular temple of the dead.

The exhibit's scariest element might be the ominous musical soundscape that covers nearly the entire 7,500-square-foot space with

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COMMENTARY

an aura of foreboding. Unlike the few items prefaced by warning signs—a series of illustrations depicting a decomposing body or a chance to sniff the scent of human death—it's not something you can choose to avoid.

Would you rather be buried or cremated? Visitors can tap a touch screen to record their answers for comparison with the hive mind. On opening day, cremation was winning, 56 to 44 percent. This, in spite of a display titled “All about cremation, as told by chickens” that

“DEATH: LIFE'S GREATEST MYSTERY”

Through 8/27/2023: daily 9 AM-5 PM (closed Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day). Field Museum, 1400 S. DuSable Lake Shore Dr., 312-922-9410, fieldmuseum.org

included the sparse remains of said birds after they'd been incinerated, hydrolyzed, freeze-dried, or transformed into a diamond.

According to the exhibit, “Life [though not exactly your life] goes on after death, and could not without it”—a situation illustrated by a model of a “whale fall,” in which a mob of underwater creatures feast and set up house-keeping on the body of a sunk dead whale. The human version of this circle-of-life outcome: a “green burial” pod that turns a decaying former person into tree food.

Some creatures are good at holding off death. Among them, the tardigrade, represented by a blimp-like model 4,000 times its actual size, which is the width of two human hairs. Tardigrades are the most resilient creatures on earth, capable of surviving dehydration

and starvation, able to live underwater and in outer space, and, we're told, klutzy cute.

Unlike tardigrades, human lives are highly dependent on their environment. In one of the exhibit's potentially most interesting sections, the point is made that in the United States, “the best predictor of your life expectancy is where you live.” When I was there, however, its main feature, an interactive map that was supposed to allow visitors to check specific locations, was, well, dead. (At press time, a museum spokesperson said it should be operable now.)

Decomposition can be stopped by processes like mummification, but to get a good look at that, you'd need to exit Death, enter the Inside Ancient Egypt exhibit across the great hall, and descend to the lower level of the museum, where, in an appropriately tomblike environment, actual mummies are displayed.

The Death exhibit does not include any real human bodies.

Speaking of bodies, the immortal Mae West has been given the exhibit's final wall text quote: “You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.” Visitors have a chance to add their own words as they exit, by completing this statement on a blackboard: “Before I die I want to . . .”

Answers I saw included “get a pet snake,” “fall in love with myself,” and “pass the NY bar.”

So, yes, life goes on. Probably still better than the alternative. 📌

🐦 @Deannsaacs

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL!?

The leaves are falling over the Kedzie Inn, and that means it's a new lineup for

Monday Night Football

the Reader's weekly chef pop up series. Follow the chefs, @chicago_reader, and @mikesula on Instagram for weekly menu drops, ordering info, updates, and the stories behind Chicago's most exciting foodlums.

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See chicagoreader.com/food-drink/ for weekly menus and ordering info

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Chicago's Black riders

There's a vibrant Black-led cycling scene on the south and west sides that often rolls under the radar by John Greenfield

For part three of the Reader's series talking with local sustainable transportation advocates, we checked in with a few of the Black-led bike clubs and organizations that are part of the active group-ride scene on Chicago's south and west sides. While those involved in Chicago's group bike ride scene are often stereotyped as white north siders, in truth it's much more diverse. In recent years, growing numbers of Black Chicagoans have been taking part in large recreational and social rides as a way to get physical activity, promote public safety and neighborhood unity—or just to have a good time.

Major Taylor Cycling Club Chicago (MTC3), named for turn of the 20th Century Black bike-racing legend Marshall “Major” Taylor, is the city's oldest Black-led cycling organization. Membership is open to all, and the group's stated mission is to promote good health through rides geared towards cyclists of all ages and abilities, from folks getting back into biking for the first time since childhood to elite road riders.

MTC3 club captain Shawn Conley says MTC3 takes inspiration from Taylor, a man who kept a positive attitude despite facing brutal headwinds in a segregated sport. “We sometimes ride past the Major Taylor murals and gravesite [in south-suburban Glenwood], and we discuss his significance as a person of color who fought oppression and racism,” Conley says. He added that group rides offer members a chance to “enjoy each other's company while combating heart disease and diabetes,” illnesses that disproportionately impact Black Americans.

One of MTC3's key events is its annual Memorial Weekend Grand Prix at Big Marsh bike park on the southeast side. Held over Memorial Day Weekend, this year's festivities included three days of rides of various lengths, including an excursion to an ice cream shop near Whihala Beach in Whiting, Indiana. We Keep You Rollin' is a health and wellness group that centers underserved communities in Chicago.

Read the rest of this story online at chicagoreader.com/transportationseries



Coverage funded by The Darrell R. Windle Charitable Fund and Polo Inn



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ON PRISONS

Legal slavery

People in prison perform essential work, but the 13th Amendment prevents them from being treated with dignity.

By **ANTHONY EHLERS**

Slavery is alive and well in America: it thrives in prisons across the country. There are close to 1.5 million people incarcerated in federal and state prisons; more than two-thirds of them are workers. The jobs that these prisoners perform are in most instances the same jobs many people have on the outside. Imprisoned people are cooks, food servers, dishwashers, painters, janitors, groundskeepers, barbers, electricians, and plumbers. They work in laundries, kitchens, factories, and hospitals. In some states they fight wildfires, clean up debris after floods and hurricanes, and help repair roads.

People in prison manufacture office furniture, mattresses, license plates, dentures, clothing, soap, glasses, traffic signs, and uniforms. They cultivate and harvest crops, work as welders and carpenters, and work in meat processing plants. If you can think of a job, there are prisoners who do it—and generally

do it well. A June report by the ACLU found the prison workforce produces more than \$11 billion dollars a year in goods and services.

But there are stark differences between the workers out there and the people who are workers in prison. Workers out there can unionize and have protections against exploitation and abuse. Workers in prison are often thrown into unfamiliar jobs with little to no training and are under the complete control of their employers. They have no legal protections, and are paid pennies a day, if at all.

Surprisingly, it's the 13th Amendment that makes these wretched conditions possible.

It's ironic that the amendment that outlawed slavery and involuntary servitude explicitly excluded men and women who are convicted of a crime. The 13th Amendment legally allows people in prison to be used as slaves. In many cases that is exactly how we are used. It's not just morally wrong; it's a human rights abuse.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 75 percent of prison workers surveyed report that they are forced to work. Refusal means they could face punishments such as solitary confinement, denial of good time opportunities to reduce their sentence, and loss of family visitation, as well as the inability to pay for basic life necessities like soap.

I had a job where my boss, a prison guard, disrespected and dehumanized me every day, for no other reason than he could. I quit. I refused to keep dealing with the verbal abuse and bullying. As a result, I was written up and had my yard privileges taken away for three months. I wouldn't accept being verbally abused and attacked every day, so I was denied even the basic right of going outside.

In prison, you're told having a job is a privilege, yet you have no right to choose if you want to work or what type of work you do, and you're subject to arbitrary, discriminatory, and punitive decisions by prison staff who select your work assignments.

Some prisoners are assigned dangerous work in already unsafe conditions, without training or protective gear—even when the job requires it. Prison workers are also excluded from workplace protections such as minimum wage laws or overtime. Prisoners are not allowed to unionize and do not have any job safety guarantees.

Several years ago, I had a job in the infirmary. I helped move sick inmates and cleaned rooms of blood and excrement. I was thrown into an unnerving and dangerous situation without having been given any training on how to protect myself while cleaning bodily fluids, just latex gloves, and no supervision.

Prison workers have been burned with chemicals, maimed, and killed on the job. According to the ACLU report, numerous cases were documented nationwide of injuries that could have been prevented with proper training, machine guarding mechanisms, or personal protective equipment. Last month a prisoner here lost half his foot in a grounds crew accident. You get put into dangerous situations with no kind of protection or training to fall back on.

People in prison who are exploited for their labor produce real value for companies and state employees.

Joe Dole, the policy director of Parole Illinois and author of *A Costly American Hatred*, notes that thousands of companies, their employees and stockholders, prison guards and administrative staff have a vested interest in keeping people in prison. Dole writes that outsourcing prison labor turns prisoners into commodities, thus incentivizing more mass incarceration.

As it currently exists, the prison work system does not teach people a vocation or facilitate rehabilitation, despite the fact that Stateville could not run without prison workers. The system serves a purpose, but not one consistent with basic human rights. Prison labor is designed to benefit primarily public entities that capitalize on a vulnerable population that is at once a captive labor force and a captive consumer base.

It's nothing more than exploitation.

We need to end it. Prison policy shouldn't be driven by the desire for cheap labor. The Illinois Department of Corrections cannot be allowed to treat people this way. Imagine if it was your family member that the state was using as a legal slave.

Most prisoners want to work; they don't want to be exploited. Jobs in prison should pay a fair wage and provide skills that transfer to employment in the real world. When people leave prison now, they are given nothing but bus fare. They have worked hard their entire time in prison and have nothing to show for it. The money they earned while working in prison would make a big difference in terms of recidivism.

Society needs to take a close look at how we treat prison workers. No one would respond well to being treated this way. People in prison need to view work as a life skill and have the dignity of being paid for hard work. We know we're viewed as a commodity, as slaves.

How can society expect people released from prison to see others with humanity, dignity, and respect when it's drilled into us that we don't have any ourselves? How can you expect the people who get out of prison to be positive and productive members of society when all they've been is exploited and dehumanized to the point of slavery? 🗑️

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ELECTIONS

Vote!

Early voting for the November 8 midterm election is already open citywide.

By **JIM DALEY**



ZAHID KHALIL

On November 8, the midterm elections will determine whether the Democrats keep control of Congress, setting the stage for next year's political battles. State and Cook County officeholders and political hopefuls will also be on the ballot.

Early voting for the 2022 midterm election is open in all 50 wards as well as at the Board of Elections Supersite (191 N. Clark) and the Board of Elections Office (69 W. Washington). You can find information about where to vote early at bit.ly/ChicagoEarlyVotes.

The following statewide offices are on the ballot: Governor; U.S. Senate; Attorney General; Secretary of State; Comptroller; State Supreme Court 2nd and 3rd Districts; the 6th, 11th, and 14th Congressional Districts; and the Cook County President and Board of

Commissioners.

A number of referendums are on the ballot as well. One will ask voters whether property taxes should be hiked by an average of \$1.50 a month to help fund the Cook County Forest Preserves District. Another will ask voters in three wards whether they think mental health workers should be sent to people experiencing mental health crises instead of police officers (See *"Mental health on the ballot,"* page 15). Voters will also be asked to vote on an amendment that would enshrine workers' right to bargain collectively and organize unions in the state constitution (See *"A team effort,"* page 16).

There are also dozens of judges on the ballot—many of whom are running for retention. The courts have an outsize impact on Chicago communities, and yet judicial races are often

the hardest to make an informed choice in. Fortunately, our friends at Injustice Watch, a nonprofit journalism organization in Chicago that focuses on the criminal legal system, have got that covered. They put together a fantastic guide to all the judges on the ballot, which you can find in this issue (See *"Check your judges,"* middle insert).

Finally, we have an early preview of the February 2023 municipal elections in the form of a special report on the emerging field of candidates for police district councils—and what to do if you're interested in running for a seat (See *"Community oversight of the police: finally a reality?"* page 20).

Read up on the referendums, check your judges, and get out there and vote! 🗳️

🐦 [@jimdaleywrites](https://twitter.com/jimdaleywrites)



RITA LIU

MIDTERMS

Mental health on the ballot

Voters in three wards will vote on a referendum that would send mental health workers to crises instead of cops.

By **MAX BLAISDELL**

On a Sunday afternoon in mid-September, Jackie Harvey stepped out of her home in Woodlawn for a breath of fresh air, only to notice flashing lights from several police vehicles and ambulances filling her street.

She walked down the block to find out what was going on, seeing several of her neighbors amid the swelling crowd. As they looked on, one police officer attempted to resuscitate a young man using CPR. Another young man was being wheeled on a stretcher by EMTs to the open doors of an ambulance. Harvey saw blood suffusing his clothes. He had been shot.

Harvey, an administrative assistant at Cook County Hospital with 29 years of experience, says that witnessing the aftermath of a mass shooting that left two men dead and two seriously injured was traumatic, even for her. So she understood when a relative of one of the victims arrived at the scene hysterical

with grief.

What she could not understand was why a police officer handcuffed the man. The officer took the cuffs off only after other community members explained the familial connection to one of the victims and demanded his release.

“If I would have gotten involved, because I’m emotional and hysterical too, they probably would have handcuffed me,” Harvey said.

Harvey wondered whether the officer had never received sensitivity training, which could have prepared him to deal with a distraught relative. And why, out of the 20-some emergency responders on the scene, was there not a single person on hand who could offer counseling services after such a horrific event?

One reason such services aren’t yet available has to do with the overall lack of mental health resources available to residents

living in neighborhoods such as Woodlawn. Despite the frequent traumatic instances of violence thereabouts, the city has engaged in decades-long divestment from operating mental health centers.

Back in 2012, Rahm Emanuel closed Woodlawn and Auburn-Gresham’s public mental health clinics as well as four others across Chicago in a continuation of the policies of his predecessor, Richard M. Daley, who had shuttered several before. In all, Emanuel and Daley closed 14 of the city’s 19 mental health clinics.

On November 8, residents of the Sixth, 20th, and 33rd Wards will vote on a nonbinding ballot initiative that asks whether they want to change course on that trajectory and reopen the city-run mental health clinics in support of a new dispatch system to send mental health professionals and EMTs instead of police officers to mental health emergency calls.

In an impromptu interview at the Whitney Young Library in Chatham, community residents Richard Rosario and Brad Redrick indicated their support of the initiative. They said that reopening the clinics and dispatching care workers, not cops, made intuitive sense. Why send cops to deal with situations they’re not trained for?

“This should have been done so long ago it ain’t even funny,” Redrick said. “I used to work in mental health . . . and [people struggling with mental illness] are a vulnerable population that needs that kind of consideration.”

Tynisha Jointer, a former social worker at Deneen Elementary School who lives in Chatham, said that people in her neighborhood avoid calling the police because of fears that they will harm the very people they are called to assist. “Having an [alternative] outlet could definitely be helpful for families . . . supporting folks who are struggling with mental illness,” she said.

Although the referendum is nonbinding, it is part of a sustained effort by a group of community organizations known as the Collaborative for Community Wellness (CCW) to press the mayor and City Council to include funding for the development of a citywide mental health crisis response system in the city’s 2023 budget. In 2020, 33rd Ward alderperson Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez introduced a resolution that would have es-

tablished such a system.

Since September 2021, the city of Chicago began piloting a co-responder program, pairing police officers with mental health workers and paramedics in Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) teams. CARE teams operated in a handful of neighborhoods on the southwest side during weekday hours. The teams were dispatched to over a hundred mental health crisis calls in the past year. In none of those cases was an arrest made or a use of force reported, according to Allison Arwady, Chicago’s public health commissioner.

Although Arwady has insisted police officers’ presence is essential to ensuring the safety of the other responders, in only one case out of 134 did a CARE team member sustain a minor injury. Organizers of the referendum contend that including officers on CARE teams is unnecessary at best and dangerous at worst.

According to Cheryl Miller, a lifelong Chicagoan and former cabdriver who is now the public health organizer for Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), one of the groups that is a part of CCW, officers’ training teaches them to establish control over a situation, using force whenever a person is noncompliant, even if that person cannot readily comply because of their mental illness.

“If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything you see is a nail,” Miller said.

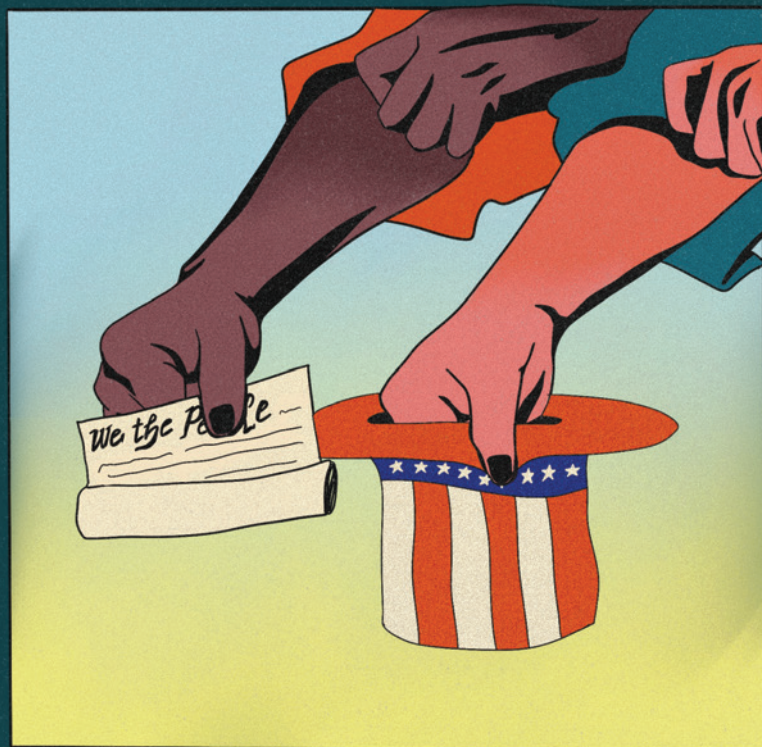
Debates on the 2023 budget begin soon, as does voting on candidates for all 50 aldermanic seats, so the referendum comes at a time when city officials may be more susceptible to public pressure.

And for Kennedy Bartley, the legislative director at United Working Families and who also worked on the referendum campaign, the organizers’ vision is about more than just providing essential mental health services—it is also about getting back the 125 unionized medical worker jobs, most of which were held by Black and Brown people, that Emanuel cut in 2012.

“We believe that we don’t need to privatize our care,” Bartley said. “Governments are responsible for providing for safe and healthy communities.” 

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✍ RITA LIU

MIDTERMS

A team effort

Voters will decide whether to enshrine workers' rights in the state constitution on November 8.

By **AARON GETTINGER**

Aaron Gyrion lives a comfortable life on the southwest side. The 32-year-old Garfield Ridge homeowner makes enough as a heavy equipment operator at the Department of Water Management to support a family of four on his income alone. He changes out sewer pipes and fixes issues with the municipal plumbing.

"Local 150. Every day, show up, get an assignment, go to the job, do the job, go back to the yard at the end of the day," he said. "I do what every four-year-old kid dreams of doing: I play with trucks and heavy equipment."

Gyrion is a steward with the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 150.

"I've been on both sides of the fence—I've had union jobs and I've had nonunion jobs—and head-and-shoulders above it is the union job."

He pointed to pensions and health insurance. When he got laid off after finishing a job for private contractors, he could call the union hall to get put on a list and get a call back when another job opened. That gave him peace of mind.

And he said the wages speak for themselves. Gyrion makes \$53.60 an hour. He's a college graduate who went into trades after earning his degree. He bought his house when he was 25 years old.

Gyrion has been following the only statewide referendum on the November 8 ballot religiously. Illinoisans are being asked whether they want to amend the state constitution to establish a right to labor unionization and collective bargaining. That would prevent Illinois from enacting a so-called right-to-work law, which allows private sector workers to avoid paying dues if they

refuse to join a union at their workplace, even if they enjoy benefits secured by the union.

Gyrion supports the amendment. "I think workers should be free to unionize and the path to unionization should be clear and unobstructed," he said.

The state's powerful Democrats also support it. There is a political committee, Vote Yes for Workers' Rights, advocating for the amendment but not one organized in opposition to it. The state's unions support it.

At the 1970 state constitutional convention, lawmakers considered enshrining labor provisions in the constitution, said Ann M. Lousin, a professor at the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law who authored "The Illinois State Constitution: A Reference Guide." She was a research assistant at the convention, and recalled a ten-minute debate about putting either a right-to-work or workers' rights amendment in the constitution; delegates ultimately left both out.

Union membership over the past decade is higher in Illinois (14.6 percent) and in Chicagoland (13.6 percent) than it is nationally (10.8 percent), according to a recent study by the pro-union Illinois Economic Policy Institute and the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2018 that nonunion public sector workers cannot be compelled to pay union dues because of the benefits they receive through collective bargaining.

While the ruling has impacted dues-paying in public sector unions nationwide, membership has not been hugely impacted; in Illinois, that rate has only declined 2.2 percent since 2018.

NEWS & POLITICS

Meanwhile, Gallup has found that 71 percent of Americans approve of unions—the highest since 1965. There were 58 successful union organizing drives last year, a 60 percent success rate—higher than any other in a decade. Illinois workers under 35 have seen the highest increase in unionization since 2018.

Todd Maisch, the president and CEO of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, opposes the amendment. Maisch disapproves of the foreclosure of Illinois ever becoming a right-to-work state, and he worries that the amendment would expand workers' right to strike.

Maisch also worries about "working conditions" being ill-defined. Over decades, "enterprising unions and their attorneys are going to try to expand the heck out of [working conditions]," he said.

Lousin said that working conditions "have been interpreted pretty broadly in labor laws over the years," and include things like pensions, health-care benefits, hours, and job duties.

At the right-leaning Illinois Policy Institute, a libertarian think tank that has received funding from former governor Bruce Rauner and the Koch brothers, Director of Labor Policy Mailee Smith said the amendment "will drive up taxes and cement Illinois's reputation as one of the worst places in the nation to do business."

Smith said "economic welfare" is a legally undefined term. She is also opposed to the state government being unable to consider right-to-work laws, but acknowledged Illinois becoming a right-to-work state is incredibly unlikely.

Lousin said she is unaware of the term "economic welfare" being included in any existing legislation. She said that people should be thinking about whether they want "some-


thing this broad" in the constitution, but is herself voting in favor of it, calling right-to-work laws "an anathema, a relic of the 1890s Gilded Age." She dismissed concerns about taxes rising because of the amendment.

Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea said "economic welfare" refers to minimum wage protections and unemployment insurance. He acknowledged that the courts could define it, pointing to the centuries-long judicial and legislative debates over what the U.S. Constitution means. He recalled the yearslong state budget impasse, largely because of Rauner's demands for labor law reform, and said the disastrous standoff was "a very, very legitimate threat against labor rights."

"These rights that have been obtained through the years through the hard work and sweat of many, many people—we don't want to just leave them to the whims of shifting political winds," Drea said.

The amendment takes codified labor rights "enacted over lax safety standards in factories, schools, and hospitals," and puts them "in a lockbox and secures them for future generations," Drea said. "You just never know what a politician will do to the rights that we've gained."

Gyrion said the solidarity that comes with being in a union is unparalleled.

"You're part of a team," Gyrion said. "It's people in your local, in your same union, looking out for you the way that people looked out for them. The expectation is we have to take care of ourselves. We have to make sure that everybody is taken care of and nobody's being taken advantage of. And that's not something you get everywhere, and it's refreshing." 

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POETRY CORNER

Poles, Fish, Bulbs on a Persimmon Tree

By Kyle Churney

Warmouth glide between the algaed trees beneath
our kayaks, bigmouths mangle the strategy of war
while warlords calculate what Big Mac to dangle
over the open maw of the Bigmouth, but this
discourse is forbidden him & me, so poles, fish,
the bulbs on a persimmon tree plumpening in sun.
This is fucking beautiful, I hear him mutter when
he thinks I can't, taking in the great ad infinitum
of silhouetted ducks & the first autumnal colors—
he'd never say autumnal, though I know he knows it,
bleeding through the tree-line's green, a gleam
of our only salvation, the sun, on the wavelets like
his eyes when he recounts, again, a pit-bull dragging
a clinking length of chain link—& he brings down
the axe as it sinks its teeth into his leashed collie.
(He ran me first, his toddler, inside.) Triumph must taste
like a glass of this lake water—crisp & teeming
with protozoa. This is beautiful fucking, he says,
cracking another page of the Cheri I find crinkled
behind his pick-up seat, an illicit little raft of respite
floating in the years of abiding love & sacrifice
& bitterness of that sacrifice. Flesh of my flesh,
blood of my blood, x is going to get you but for now,
no. For now, cattails, demagogues & dead dogs,
the sobering view of the free. Call it Heaven's Maggots—
six buzzards gliding in the blue over our heads.

A finalist for the National Poetry Series, Kyle Churney's poetry appears or is forthcoming in publications including the *Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day* and *The Yale Review*, and his work has received a Literary Award from the Illinois Arts Council and a fellowship from the MacDowell Colony. A native of rural Illinois, Churney lives in Chicago and teaches at a community college.

Poem curated by Jacob Saenz. Saenz is the author of *Throwing the Crown*, winner of the APR/Honickman First Book Prize. His poetry has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Memorious*, *PANK*, *RHINO*, *Tammy* and other journals. A CantoMundo fellow, he's been the recipient of a Letras Latinas Residency, a Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship and a Latinx Scholarship from the Frost Place.

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POLITICS

Breaking tradition

Alderman Matt Martin boldly tries to go where few have gone before.

By **KELLY GARCIA**



In a scene from the documentary *Punch 9 for Harold Washington*, former alderman Ed Vrdolyak takes the podium during a city council meeting after the late mayor Harold Washington abruptly walked out. Vrdolyak, over the wishes of Washington's supporters shouting from the chambers, begins assigning chairpersons to the various committees of the council—

breaking the long-standing tradition of the mayor doing so.

Among the grantees were many of Vrdolyak's own allies on the council, including (the recently indicted) Ed Burke, who was handed the powerful finance committee, Frank Stemberk, who was given rules, and Patrick O'Connor, who got education. Asked by reporters about the new committee

chairs, Washington insisted that anything that happened after he quickly adjourned the meeting “had no standing in law.”

Except it did.

As president pro tem, Vrdolyak was able to continue the meeting in the absence of the mayor. He pushed aldermen to approve the committee chairs under Rule 36 of the City Council rules of order. But Vrdolyak

wasn't solely driven by his long-neglected duty as an alderperson.

Along with other white aldermen, Vrdolyak was threatened by a growing Black political force triggered by the election of the first Black mayor of Chicago. Those contentious 1983 City Council meetings would define Washington's first year in office in what later became known as the “Council

City Council chambers  RAED MANSOUR / FLICKR

Wars.” Ultimately, the mayor got enough votes in the council, thanks to the 1986 special election which brought in a wave of fresh Latino aldermen including Chuy Garcia and Luis Gutierrez, to allow him to pick his own committee chairs as is tradition.

There was never again an attempt by the council to appoint their own committee chairs independent of the mayor—that is, until recently.

Last month, 47th Ward alderperson Matt Martin, a young, Black progressive who serves as vice-chair of the Committee on Ethics and Government Oversight, introduced a resolution appointing himself chairperson, a post left vacant by the retirement of longtime 43rd Ward alderperson Michele Smith.

It was a bold move despite the increasingly independent shift in the council—and one that clearly made some people upset.

“There’s a process by which we [pick committee chairs] and the process is the mayor makes the final picks,” Mayor Lori Lightfoot told a flurry of reporters during a press conference after last month’s City Council meeting. “I don’t see any reason to break from that long-standing precedent.”

The committee, which deals primarily with conflicts of interest (nothing the council is short of), was under the Rules Committee before Mayor Lightfoot made it separate at the start of her term. Since then, the committee has reviewed audits from the inspector general’s office, banned former alderpeople from lobbying the city council, and increased fines for ethics violations.

In the City Council, legislation is introduced and approved by its respective committee before being sent to the full council for a final vote. But if legislation is unpopular or frowned upon by the mayor, it’s often sent to “die” in committee, or never be called to a vote.

Legislation also grinds to a halt when committees lack leaders. Last month, alderpeople Michael Rodriguez (22nd) and Maria Hadden (49th) introduced an ordinance to propose that the process to release audit reports fall under the discretion of the inspector general instead of the mayor’s legal team, in response to the city slow-walking the release of a report on the botched smokestack implosion in Little Village in April 2020.


When asked why his ordinance hasn’t been able to pass through committee, Rodriguez put it in simple terms: “There’s no chair.”

Martin says he’d be the first alderperson in recent history to ask the full council for approval to chair a committee. If selected, he vows to continue fighting for ethics

reform. “The ethics committee, because it is ethics and government oversight, plays an indispensable role in ensuring that city departments are operating the ways that we would want them to,” he said.

His appointment could also set a precedent for other City Council committees with vacancies, like the Committee on Education and Child Development, which hasn’t had a chair since former alderperson Michael Scott Jr.’s resignation. That committee has been under fire for meeting only seven times in the past three years (mostly to make routine school board appointments).

Fourth ward alderperson Sophia King, who is the vice-chair of the education committee, expressed support for Martin’s resolution.

“In an ideal situation, there would be a conversation about [picking chairpersons],” said King, who is also running for mayor. “And then the City Council would indeed exert its power to make the final decision.” 

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POLICE

Community oversight of police: finally a reality?

A meeting of the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability drew a mix of Chicagoans, some hopeful, some skeptical.

By **KELLY GARCIA**

On an evening in late September, dozens of people gathered at Malcolm X College on the near west side for the first official citywide meeting to talk about police oversight. The room was packed with community activists, office seekers, journalists, and grieving family members. For many of them, the satisfaction of seeing this long-awaited moment was tempered by the years of neglect preceding it.

On a dais at the front of the room sat the newly appointed interim commissioners of the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability—the result of decades of community organizing efforts to hold police officers accountable. Each of the seven members—a queer pastor, a political strategist, two lawyers, a nonprofit leader, and two activists—were drawn from different corners of the city.

As with many of the city’s committees, commissions, and task forces (the holy trinity of symbolic gestures), the interim members were handpicked by the mayor, who did so more than a year after the ordinance that created the commission passed through the City Council. Until permanent members are selected, they are responsible for making recommendations to the bloated police budget, hiring and firing leadership, and setting goals for the department.

It’s a far cry from the original demands for community oversight of the police pioneered by the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR), which also demanded the commission be given the power to investigate police misconduct, govern the rules of the department, and approve the city’s contract with the Fraternal Order of Police. Nonetheless, for the people of Chicago, establishing some semblance of civilian oversight was a historic win and a chance to do things differently—or at least they hope.

“We take public comment very seriously,” said Reverend Dr. Beth Brown, one of the seven interim commissioners, as she invited

audience members to comment. Like other political circuses in the city, that means two minutes (and nothing more!) for members of the public to express their grievances.

A litany of pleas and words of skeptical encouragement poured into the mike. Some people begged for the return of loved ones wrongfully convicted. Others interrogated the commissioners. Many denounced the terror incited by members of the Chicago Police Department. Sustained applause followed each speaker.

After several people spoke, Frank Chapman made his way to the front of the room with the help of a walker, his signature fedora perched on his head. The decades of leading a movement to stop police crimes has weighed on the 80-year-old activist, as evidenced by his laborious pace. When he spoke, the audience fell silent.

“We’ve come here not just to challenge you . . . but to support you,” Chapman told the commissioners.

As the lead architect of the proposal for community oversight of the police, Chapman reminded the commissioners that he knows very well what they require to function properly: funding and robust staffing. Last week, the *Sun-Times* reported that out of the 14 staff positions in the commission, only one has been filled. At a City Council budget hearing, the commission’s executive director Adam Gross reassured dubious alderpeople that more candidates were in the hiring process, but that there would still be vacancies going into the new year. One alderperson questioned Gross about his near 14 percent salary raise included in the mayor’s budget for next year, to which he denied having any involvement.

“We didn’t do all this organizing to have a lame-duck council,” Chapman went on. His baritone voice sucked the air out of the room. All eyes and ears were on him. He directed his orders not just to the commissioners, but to the rapt audience before him that had made this meeting possible. Whenever Chapman

said “all power to the people,” many in the packed room responded in kind.

Perhaps no one emanated Chapman’s urgency more than Chicago’s “concerned citizen” George Blakemore, a regular at public meetings. Sporting his signature hand-painted attire while waving a pointed finger, Blakemore said that the city has been here before, noting the failures of the Office of Professional Standards, the Independent Police Review Authority that replaced it, and the Civilian Office of Police Accountability that followed. Addressing the audience of nodding heads, Blakemore put his assessment of the interim commission bluntly: “I bet you won’t hold them to it.”

Following the public comments, the commissioners formally fleshed out the commission’s business as the audience patiently looked on. The commissioners elected Anthony Driver as president, adopted rules, and set the next meeting date. They also established committees faster than I could keep count. Oswaldo Gomez, the commission’s interim vice president, noted the lack of a translator and promised to translate materials into Spanish for the next meeting.

Before the meeting came to a close, the commissioners reminded people to run for a seat in the new district councils. In addition to the commission, the ECPS ordinance established these councils, which will be composed of three elected positions in each of the city’s 22 police districts. The councils are charged with fostering a better relationship between police and community members.

With a little over a month before campaign petitions for district council hopefuls are due, interested candidates will have to collect anywhere between 300 to 700 signatures, depending on how many registered voters are in their police district. Candidates for district councils will be on the ballot in next February’s municipal elections.

Once elected, those members will then nominate 14 candidates for the permanent commission. The mayor will choose seven of the nominees for the city council to approve.

After two contentious hours, the meeting finally came to a halt. There was a collective gasp for air. Though skeptical, the crowd was also visibly hopeful and quickly dispersed into chatter. As Chapman headed to the doors, he was accompanied by a flurry of handshakes and thank-yous.

Maybe this time would be different. 

 [@_KellyGarcia_](#)

2023 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Police district council races: a preview

There’s still time to get on the ballot in your district.

By **KATIE PROUT, DEBBIE-MARIE BROWN, AND JIM DALEY**

In the 2023 municipal elections, three candidates will be elected to councils in each of the city’s 22 police districts. Along with the citywide Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability (CCPSA), the councils are the result of decades of work by organizers for community oversight of the police. District Councils are tasked with improving policing and public safety, getting community input on policing, expanding restorative justice programs, holding monthly public meetings, and nominating members of the CCPSA.

On the next page, check out some of the candidates for police district councils who are already gathering petition signatures to get on the February 2023 ballot. Some are running as individuals; others have joined up as slates of three candidates with shared political values and goals.

Want to run for a seat on your police district council? Here’s what’s required.

You must be a registered voter who will have lived in the police district you’re running in for at least one year on February 28, 2023. People convicted of felonies cannot run unless the conviction has been expunged; neither can people who owe the city money.

Candidate filings checklist and web links:

- Statement of organization (State Board of Elections) bit.ly/IllinoisD1
- Nominating petitions signed by eligible voters and submitted November 21-28. Minimum required signatures are below. (Chicago Board of Election Commissioners) bit.ly/PetitionInfo
- Statement of economic interest (Cook County Clerk) bit.ly/EconInterest
- Statement of financial interest; file within five days of qualifying as a candidate (Chicago Board of Ethics) bit.ly/FinInterest
- To accept donations or spend more than \$5,000, file disclosures with the State Board of Elections. bit.ly/SBDisclosure

District	Min. signatures	District	Min. signatures
1st (Central)	277	12th (Near West)	463
2nd (Wentworth)	329	14th (Shakespeare)	420
3rd (Grand Crossing)	244	15th (Austin)	193
4th (South Chicago)	400	16th (Jefferson Park)	657
5th (Calumet)	256	17th (Albany Park)	403
6th (Gresham)	318	18th (Near North)	493
7th (Englewood)	198	19th (Town Hall)	758
8th (Chicago Lawn)	662	20th (Lincoln)	314
9th (Deering)	364	22nd (Morgan Park)	396
10th (Ogden)	236	24th (Rogers Park)	396
11th (Harrison)	229	25th (Grand Central)	519



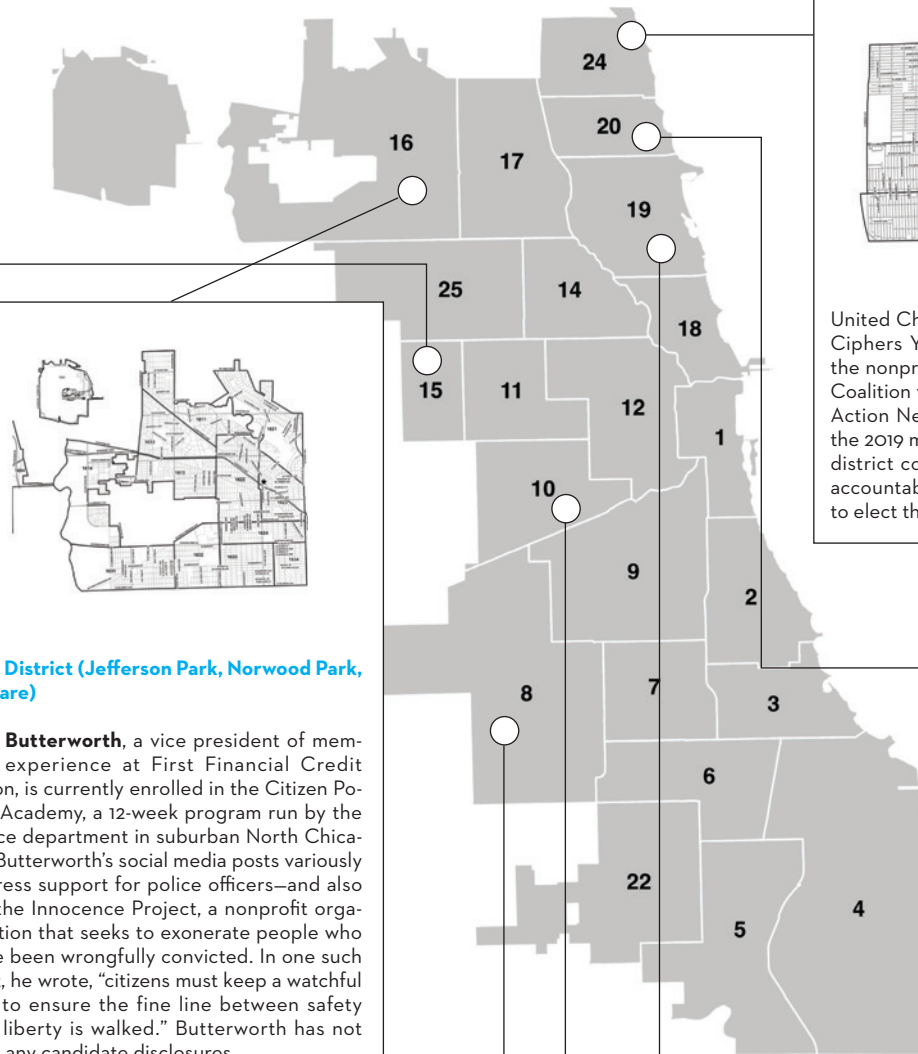
15th District (Austin)

Arewa Karen Winters is a community activist who founded the 411 Movement and has worked with Justice For Families and the Chicago Justice Torture Center. Chicago police shot and killed Winters's 16-year-old great-nephew in 2016. She cochaired Mayor Lightfoot's Use of Force Working Group, which released its report earlier this month. In August, Block Club reported that Winters said CPD needs to "confront its overwhelming tendency to police Black and Brown communities," and that district councils "will afford us the chance to not only speak truth to power, but power to power." Winters has not yet filed any campaign disclosures.



Eighth District (Archer Heights, Chicago Lawn, Garfield Ridge, Ashburn)

Jason Huff, a city worker who supervises car booting for the Department of Finance, runs a neighborhood watch in the Eighth District on the city's far southwest side. Huff's social media pages regularly tout his volunteer work with Chicago Police Department programs such as youth soccer events and catalytic converter anti-theft efforts. Huff established a campaign committee, Friends of Jason Huff, at the beginning of October, and has filed candidate disclosures. His campaign for District Council was endorsed by mayoral candidate and 15th Ward alderperson Ray Lopez. On October 22, Huff posted a photo of himself gathering petition signatures with 23rd Ward alderperson Silvana Tabares.



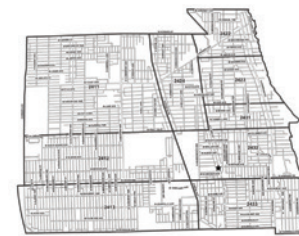
16th District (Jefferson Park, Norwood Park, O'Hare)

Dan Butterworth, a vice president of member experience at First Financial Credit Union, is currently enrolled in the Citizen Police Academy, a 12-week program run by the police department in suburban North Chicago. Butterworth's social media posts variously express support for police officers—and also for the Innocence Project, a nonprofit organization that seeks to exonerate people who have been wrongfully convicted. In one such post, he wrote, "citizens must keep a watchful eye to ensure the fine line between safety and liberty is walked." Butterworth has not filed any candidate disclosures.



Tenth District (Lawndale, Little Village)

Tanya Lozano has been involved in local and national social justice campaigns for immigrants' rights, workers' rights, and against police brutality for her entire life. Her uncle was Rudy Lozano, the assassinated labor and political activist who was an aide to Harold Washington; her activist parents carried on his legacy. At Healthy Hood Chicago, a nonprofit fitness center Tanya founded on the first floor of her family's Pilsen church, the walls are emblazoned with murals of Malcolm X and Angela Davis, and classes are designed to counter the life expectancy gap faced by Black and Brown people in Chicago. Lozano has not yet filed any candidate disclosures.



24th District (Rogers Park, West Ridge)

Three longtime community organizers—**Ed-Vetté W. Jones**, **Reverend Dr. Marilyn Pagán-Banks**, and **Veronica I. Arreola**—have formed a slate running for the 24th District Council. Jones is a trustee of the United Church of Rogers Park and works with the Circles and Ciphers Youth Organization. Pagán-Banks is the director of the nonprofit A Just Harvest and is a founding member of the Coalition to End Money Bond. Arreola founded the 50th Ward Action Network and worked with The People's Lobby during the 2019 municipal elections. The slate's campaign website calls district councils "the most progressive community-led police accountability device in the country" and says "it is important to elect the most progressive voices possible."



20th District (Edgewater, Andersonville)

Violence-prevention outreach worker **Darrell Dacres**, former precinct captain and 40th Ward Office volunteer **Deidre O'Conner**, and Jewish Council on Urban Affairs organizer **Anna Rubin** make up a slate of candidates running for the 20th District Council. The slate's campaign website emphasizes building a community where "every resident is safe, feels safe, and is able to access the services and professionals they need to thrive." Only Rubin has filed candidate disclosures so far. The ONE People's Campaign and 40th Ward alderperson Andre Vasquez have endorsed the slate.



19th District (Lakeview, Uptown, North Center)

A slate of candidates—data analyst **Maurilio Garcia**, parent **Jenny Schaffer**, and attorney **Sam Schoenburg**—are running for the 19th District Council. Schoenburg says policing is the government institution that is "least accountable and most shielded from genuine community input." Garcia says he wants to ensure all residents' experiences with the police are "positive [and] productive." Schaffer says she wants to expand the umbrella of emergency services to include people like mental health care professionals, drug rehabilitation specialists, and homelessness response providers. Garcia and Schaffer have each founded antiracist community groups. All three candidates have filed candidate disclosures. The ONE People's Campaign and 47th Ward alderperson Matt Martin have endorsed the slate.

Chicago police districts
 JIM DALEY VIA FLOURISH



RUBY THORKELSON

CANNABIS

Up in smoke

Black-owned small businesses are still losing out on “social equity” cannabis dispensary licenses.

By **DEBBIE-MARIE BROWN**

In 2020, when Illinois legalized recreational marijuana sales, its process for dispensing licenses included a promise to favor “social equity” applicants—businesses that are at least 51 percent owned by someone who (or whose family member) had a prior cannabis conviction, and businesses that planned to hire people with such convictions. Moncheri Robinson and her family jumped at the opportunity.

Three years and tens of thousands of dollars later, the family still doesn’t have a license.

Robinson and four family members emptied their savings to pay a team of legal writers \$85,000 to craft a competitive application for the first round of applications. They also paid \$2,500 for the application fee. Multiple applicants the *Reader* spoke to also described spending upwards of \$100,000 for similar services.

Robinson and her family felt confident

about their odds. Their writers had recently won other competitive markets in Arkansas and Oklahoma, which are similar to how Illinois is set up, and the family assumed their social equity designation would give them a leg up.

“We’re literally everyday people,” Robinson said. “My aunt was a store clerk; my husband, a school teacher, so I work in student affairs in higher ed . . . my cousin is a nurse, my brother is a nurse.” She said it was understood that if you weren’t able to qualify for social equity, you weren’t gonna win.

Their business concept was designed to resemble a gas station, carrying the items one would expect at a convenience store, plus dank bud. They submitted their application in January 2020, and waited.

“I’ll never forget checking that email every single day,” Robinson said. “And it was September 3, 2020. I’m on the Dan Ryan

. . . and I’ll never forget [when] that email came through. And gosh, I just remember just reading it over and over, I was shaking so bad. Thank God, I wasn’t driving and my husband was. We didn’t see our name on that list. It was just like, ‘Wait a minute. This can’t be happening.’ Like, ‘I know we had a good application.’”

Frustrated, Robinson responded to the email to request her application’s score—the total number of points awarded based on criteria such as the planned facilities, employee training plans, security and product safety, and social equity status, which gave qualified applicants an additional 50 points out of a maximum 250.

Her family’s application hadn’t been allotted the 50 social equity points, nor had it gotten points for being an Illinois-based business. “I’m not a sore loser,” Robinson said, “but it’s another thing to get cheated. . . . It was basic, surface-level mistakes in the grading.”

In February 2021, following litigation and protests, state regulators allowed applicants to submit supplemental information and request their applications be reevaluated. Robinson’s recalculated score was 245 points, a near-perfect application, and qualified for the lottery. When the day of the lottery came, Robinson said that to her confusion, bigger companies were able to submit multiple applications and obtain more chances in the lottery; one such company, Cresco Labs, won three dispensary licenses.

Ultimately, Robinson’s family did not win a dispensary license, and she expressed frustration that this process was stacked against social equity applicants who didn’t have hundreds of thousands of dollars to submit multiple applications. “If you were truly social equity, could you truly afford to stuff the box with essentially 100 applications at \$2,500 a whop?”

On September 27—the first bitterly cold morning of fall—an alliance of social-equity business owners and cannabis advocates held a press conference outside the governor’s West Loop high-rise to demand immediate relief for businesses that were awarded social equity licenses in the past year. Such businesses have 180 days to begin operations, after which the state may revoke their licenses. The social equity license winners described the struggles they’ve encountered in meeting that deadline.

The speakers shivered in the brisk weath-

er as they described feeling unsupported by the state. Licensees floundered to compete with multistate operations (MSOs)—large cannabis companies like Cresco, many of whom profited early from medical marijuana sales and have more cash than small business owners to pay for recreational applications and navigate the state’s expensive and arduous hurdles.

In an interview with the *Reader*, Paul Pearson, who created the first Illinois Cannabis Law program with the City of Chicago Colleges and is currently running for 4th Ward alderperson, explained that MSOs saturate the licensing process by submitting many applications. MSOs can also afford lobbyists to advocate on their behalf. And, under state guidelines, these companies can qualify as social equity applicants if they hire employees from areas disproportionately impacted by cannabis arrests.

Kalee Hoogkirk, a partner at a small business licensed to infuse products with distilled THC, said the state must mandate pricing controls for the distillate MSOs sell to infusers. “The same multistate operators who have lobbied against our interests and delayed this program are the same ones we are being asked to depend on for the very core of our business,” Hoogkirk said. “Infusers are being asked to pay \$20,000 for liters [of distillate] that cost four to \$7,000 in states with similar programs.”

Lisbeth Vargas Jaimes, the executive director of the Illinois Independent Craft Growers Association, said the state’s canopy rules, which limit the square footage of grow operations, “are the reason why there aren’t many financial opportunities afforded to social equity businesses in this market.”

Craft growers currently can only grow a maximum of 5,000 square feet of cannabis; the association is asking for that maximum to be upped to 14,000 square feet. Jordan Melendez, an organizer with the Southwest Side Coalition for Change, said canopy limitations force small business owners to give a large percentage of ownership to financiers.

Debt financing options in the cannabis industry are often punitively priced, Melendez said.

Willie “J.R.” Fleming, representing the Southwest Side of Chicago Couriers, spoke on behalf of those with transportation license grievances. He urged



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the governor to delay the release of new transportation licenses until the current licensees can find business. “The existing multistate operators in Illinois have not produced opportunities in the contract for transporters to be successful,” Fleming said in an interview with the *Reader*. “It is imperative that legislation include a requirement for existing cultivators to contract with a transportation licensee for at least 75 percent of their business.”

At the press conference, speakers also said that the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity loan program created to assist small businesses has yet to release any of the funds. One speaker noted that there are too many stipulations on the money regardless. The funds can only be used to be “operational,” but many businesses need the money for construction or for acquisition.

Former state senator Rickey Hendon and State representative La Shawn Ford spoke last.

“The governor, who I love, needs to know

what we’re going through,” Hendon said. “We wouldn’t be out here freezing our ass off if this wasn’t serious. We’re asking for an additional 180 days for true social equity. . . . Because if you don’t open in 180 days, you’ll lose your license. They set us up for failure, and they don’t even know it.”

“These are not nonprofit entities,” said Ford, who was in his shirtsleeves despite the bracing cold. “These are business people that have put their life savings on the line in order to help the state, reduce unemployment, and rebuild communities.”

Fleming co-owns several cannabis equity companies in Illinois, including Public Square LLC and South and West Side Carriers LLC.

Fleming said he strategically partnered with different cannabis companies and teams to submit multiple applications. He won a dispensary license with Justice Grown, run by two civil rights law partners in Chicago.

He sold weed in his younger days in the Chicago “legacy,” or underground, market. He said he’s been arrested and charged with

multiple counts of possession with intent to deliver cannabis, but never convicted. “That’s the legal way to say I was selling weed,” he laughed. When he heard the state was legalizing medical marijuana in 2013, he started organizing to prepare his people to participate in the market.

Fleming and his teammates were awarded transportation, cultivation, and infusion licenses in Illinois, but he spoke on behalf of transportation because it’s the license he hasn’t been able to monetize. Ironically, these licenses have the lowest application fees and need the least additional infrastructure and partners to monetize.

But Fleming said they’re the least valuable licenses right now because you must transport marijuana from a legal Illinois entity, and the big MSOs will not give anyone a contract to begin. “You’d be a fool to believe that they’re gonna give you a contract,” he chuckled, “You really think these white people gonna let you move these drugs?”

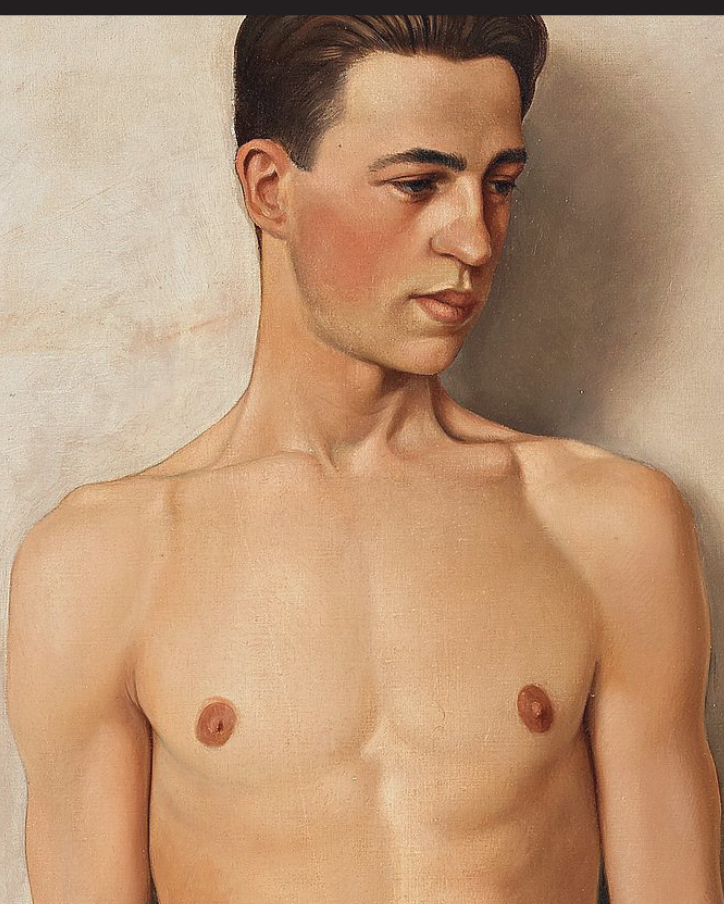
As a social equity business owner, he said that it’s hard to find locations on the southwest side because those facilities don’t exist

there already, and his team doesn’t have the capital to build them. The only people in this industry who would lend money to cannabis start-ups are hedge funds and other financial interests, he said. To try to lessen the widespread dependence on white investors, Fleming has reached out to Black athletes and Black entertainers to invest.

“There should be more opportunities and resources put forth by the government to support social equity winners,” he said. “We feel like the city [and] the state, they should be providing the same resources that they do for big corporations coming to Illinois, to social equity winners.”

Elijah Hamilton is the CEO and Founder of Chummy’s Organix, a Chicago-based cannabidiol (CBD, a legal, nonpsychoactive by-product of cannabis) brand. “That’s the one that’s actually functioning, up and running right now,” Hamilton said. “And then I have Chummy’s Edibles, which was the brand that we attempted to get into the mainstream cannabis market . . . we went through that whole tumultuous pro-

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IMAGE CREDITS: Owe Zerge (1894 - 1983, Sweden), *Model Act*, 1919, Oil on canvas, 135 x 50 cm, Private Collection (detail).

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✦ RUBY THORKELSON

cess back in 2020. You know, going through the rush of trying to get into the game, so to speak.”

Long before being a business owner, Hamilton worked in the consumer packaged goods industry for a decade as a district manager of PepsiCo and Frito-Lay. “That’s pretty much where I got most of my skills from . . . market strategy, direct store delivery, how to IRI data, Nelson statistics planograms, how to structure route delivery.” By the time he considered making a dime off the cannabis industry, he was nearly bankrupt. A former friend showed him how to make edibles, and he started selling those casually to help him get back on his feet.

“I got pretty good at it. And then when

I found Illinois was about to become recreational, we had decided, ‘Hey, let’s go ahead, start out.’”

Hamilton vertically integrated his company with seven others, and Chummy’s was the flagship brand because it already had recognition due to its success in the legacy market. But he said that once he saw how the state was dealing with the first round of dispensary licenses, he decided to pivot and start a CBD brand just in case it didn’t happen.

“Turns out I was right.”

Hamilton ultimately left the dispensary license application process because Illinois kept adding stipulations. He found the cost of writing and submitting a social equity application—which he said could be more than \$100,000—unreasonably high.

He added that commercial property owners have raised rents by thousands of dollars after learning spaces would be used as a cannabis kitchen or for a craft grower. And businesses require aldermanic approval before they can set up a dispensary. As he watched people around him go

bankrupt in hopes of creating generational wealth, Hamilton pivoted to developing his CBD brand.

“I didn’t want to throw all my eggs in one basket,” he said, “and then just kind of be left holding nothing.”


Since applying, both Robinson and Hamilton have become advocates with the Social Equity Empowerment Network (SEEN), which serves the Black community nationally by helping cannabis sellers move from the legacy to the legal market. Robinson has also worked to change state laws to prevent their experiences from being replicated. Hamilton uses his business as a model for other legacy businesses to move into the mainstream market. “The goal is to get [them] above ground,” he said.

Robinson lives in Virginia now. She joined a few fruitless class-action lawsuits against the state of Illinois before moving there. She says the Illinois market is too unstable for her to encourage anyone to get involved now. “They’ve been guessing this whole process,” she said. “They’ve been putting pieces in place in real time instead

of having these things in place prior” to opening the application process.

Sometimes she regrets that she wasn’t able to afford more applications, but she comes back to the fact that her business may not have gotten the necessary governmental support to succeed regardless. “These people still out here having press conferences with the governor, that’s like the fifth press conference that they done had, to petition the governor to do something to continue to fix our open wounds with a Band-Aid.”

The process caused friction between her and her family members, and one of her family members who invested \$20,000 while close to retirement won’t speak to her anymore.

“To not even have a relationship with truly one of my favorite [family members] in the world is hurtful,” Robinson said. “They don’t understand the devastation that they brought to just not only individuals, but families.” 

 @debbiemarieb_

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IMAGE CREDITS: “Codebreaker” painting from Celestial Maze 20-B-D1, Michiko Itatani, 2020, 96” x 78” oil on canvas, courtesy of Michiko Itatani (detail).


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LITERARY ARTS

A vision for revision at Lit & Luz 2022

The festival highlights contemporary art, literature, and music.

By **SANDRA TREVIÑO**

The Lit & Luz Festival of Language, Literature, and Art (Lit & Luz) brings together writers, visual artists, and musicians from Mexico and the United States in an effort to foster cultural exchange. The artistic results of these cross-cultural experiences, from poetry to photography and everything in between, are then presented through a series of bilingual performances. The festival is presented first in the U.S. and is reset for presentation in Mexico the following winter, featuring the same group of collaborating guests.

In Chicago, the festival's ninth edition begins at noon on October 31 with a virtual keynote by California-based poet Anthony Cody. The festivities continue that evening with an artist talk at Logan Center for the Arts featuring guest Balam Bartolomé with Esteban King, while over at the Insect Asylum is the Halloween edition of *Favorite Poems* featuring Kathleen Rooney, Robin Myers, Yolanda Segura, Kailah Peters, and Olivia Maciel, among other readers. The festival runs through November 5 with a final celebration at Chicago Art Department. Among the events are readings, workshops, and artist talks (some offer a virtual option) at venues across the city. The festival's signature celebration,

the *Live Magazine Show*, which features the final performances created by collaborative duos, formed by one artist from the U.S. and the other from Mexico, takes place at Logan Center for the Arts on Thursday, November 3.

Lit & Luz 2022 includes Mexican authors Dolores Dorantes, Mariana Oliver, and Segura, as well as visual artists Bartolomé, Aura Arreola, and Héctor Jiménez Castillo. Chicago-based collaborators include authors Marty McConnell, Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué, and Antonio Díaz Oliva (ADO), along with visual artists Victoria Martinez, Amber Ginsburg, Laleh Motlagh, and musician Andy Slater.

The Lit & Luz Festival is produced by MAKE Literary Productions, a nonprofit established in 2009 after the success of its founding literary magazine, *MAKE*, which was first published in 2004. The Chicago-based publication "seeks to expand the discussion of what it means to make something new from a reality that may look all too familiar, even tired, on the surface."

MAKE issue number 13, titled "Intercambio/Exchange," was the magazine's first as a bilingual edition and featured work by Latin American writers. The bilingual events that

Lit & Luz Live Magazine Show: Structure, November 4, 2021, Logan Center for the Arts BETH ROONEY

were organized that year (2012) to go along with the magazine's release brought to light the need for translated literature. The issue emphasizes the importance of creating a bilingual exchange of literature considering the power of the Spanish language and culture in the U.S.

With help from the MacArthur Foundation, in 2014 the Lit & Luz Festival of Language, Literature, and Art was officially formed. Since then, Lit & Luz founder and managing director Sarah Dodson says that "nearly 50 writers, artists, and musicians have traveled to Chicago for Lit & Luz Festival events, which are created in partnership with local arts organizations and universities."

"Revision" is the theme for this year's iteration. Miguel Jiménez, founder and director of the Lit & Luz Book Club, explains this concept as "an opportunity to think about not just how the pandemic impacted our artistic practices and lives in the 'early days,' but how it 'revised' how we approach art, community, and inclusion. With so much happening in early 2020 and moving forward, we collectively took a deeper look at issues such as access and inclusion."

Jiménez, who was born and raised in Back of the Yards, has always had a passion for Latine literature, music, and art and for sharing the work of artists he feels need to be seen, read, or heard. After university, where he studied creative writing and literature (DePauw University and CSU Fresno), he returned to Chicago and began working with the Chicago Artists Coalition, where he eventually became an editor for the organization's newsletter, *Chicago Artist News*.

At some point, Jiménez's passion for literature led him to the newly formed author-focused festival, Lit & Luz. He says, "I was at these festivals before I was part of the [Lit & Luz] team. At the festival, there were writers I never thought I would see. For example, before Valeria Luiselli was the writer-superstar that she is now, I knew of her work. But I never imagined I'd see her one day because her work wasn't translated. She was only writing in Spanish. I remember when I saw her I was thinking, 'No way! Who brought her? Why is she here?' And not just her, but her partner Álvaro Enrigue, too. I was a big fan of his, and this was before either of their books was

translated. I was in awe."

He began telling his friends about the festival and soon realized many were unaware of the events, so Jiménez did what anyone with a passion for literature must do. He approached Dodson, with the idea of forming a book club. Jiménez proposed that reading the work of a writer, who would later be featured in the festival, might entice more people to attend since they would already be familiar with their work.

The Lit & Luz Book Club was formed in 2018 and partnered with local bookstores to carry books by authors featured at the festival. The book club is currently in partnership with City Lit Books in Logan Square, Pilsen Community Books in Pilsen, and Exile in Bookville at the Fine Arts Building downtown.

In 2020, Lit & Luz had to pivot to a virtual model due to COVID-19 restrictions, and things went better than expected.

"It was really a wonderful experience because we were able to reach out to new audiences in other parts of the world, and maybe audiences that wouldn't have been able to attend. The same goes for the audiences that have never heard of the festival or *have* heard of it but have been unable to attend. It brought a lot of people together virtually. Part of the festival also includes the book club, which is only hosted in Chicago, and because it was virtual we had more participants. People joined in from Mexico, and parts of Mexico where we never get to host the festival, like Chiapas and Oaxaca," says Jiménez.

Although Lit & Luz continues to be a literary-focused event, it is also much more than that.

Jiménez explains, "It progressively has become more. It's still based on literature but it is also finding the intersections between literature, music, and visual art, and other forms of artistic expression. Increasingly, we have more visual artists, more sound artists, and artists in other mediums like dance. There are also multidisciplinary artists that actually work with it all. It's like this infinite intersection of all these different mediums."

As book bannings across the U.S. scorch away the work of voices often left unheard, programming that foment artistic exchange, like the Lit & Luz Festival, are indispensable. They strengthen literary endeavors and encourage sharing cross-cultural experiences, creating seemingly never-ending reciprocity.

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PREVIEW

The theme is love at Pop-Up Magazine

A multimedia storytelling show visits the Athenaeum after pandemic hiatus.

By **SHERI FLANDERS**

On October 28, Pop-Up Magazine will be staged at the Athenaeum Center for Thought and Culture. But what exactly is it? Cofounder and editor in chief Douglas McGray explains.

“The name is inspired by the idea of a pop-up book, like books you may remember from when you were a kid. Sort of flat, you open [it] up, and then all of a sudden it springs to life in this three-dimensional way. . . . We were inspired by the idea of a classic general interest magazine, stories about anything and everything, but performed by writers, filmmakers, audio producers, artists, musicians, and other kinds of performers, with different kinds of media mixed together and live music.”

The event will also offer accessibility features such as ASL interpretation, open captions, and audio descriptions, sponsored by Google. McGray and his friends initially staged the concept in San Francisco a few times for fun, then realized that there was a broader opportunity to take the storytelling show across the country. In 2016 they restaged it as a national touring show. McGray sets the stage for what the audience can expect on a typical night.

“So you’re in this big beautiful venue, the

lights go down, and somebody takes the stage. And they start to tell a story. And maybe it’s a personal story. Maybe it’s something about other people, places, things. As they start to tell that story there’s a band onstage, and the band begins to play underneath them like a movie soundtrack. And then images begin to appear on the screen—we’ve commissioned original film and photography and animation, then the story begins to come to life visually. Sometimes it’s a fast and funny story, sometimes it’s beautiful and epic, and there are typically about seven of those stories in a show.”

Overall, it creates the effect of a multimedia variety show, offering the audience a sampler of artistic genres that would rarely inhabit the same space. Most of the time, the stories shared are disparate, without an obvious connection. However for the Chicago edition of the show, the theme is love. McGray shares:

“The theme is love stories. And that means all different kinds of love stories—you know, everything from first loves, blind dates, and heartbreak and disconnection, but also music and animals, and place and purpose, and all the different ways that you can feel that kind of connection. We’ll see stories that are really funny, and stories that are profound and

moving.”

While some of the guests are unknown, others have a bit of notoriety, and some are downright famous, and the Chicago edition has some interesting characters. McGray shares the lineup.

“There’s Ryan O’Connell (*Queer as Folk*), who is the writer and star and creator of a show on Netflix called *Special*. And Sarah Kay (Project VOICE) is a brilliant poet and performer, Victoria Canal (*Elegy EP*) an amazing musician. Writer Jenée Desmond Harris (Slate’s *Dear Prudence*), advice columnist and contributing writer for the *New York Times*. Rachel Cusick, who’s with *Radiolab*. Filmmaker Nadav Kurtz (*Paraiso*) and comedian Pamela Rae Schuller (*What Makes Me Tic*). And then Ben-Alex Dupris (*Sweetheart Dancers*). A really great filmmaker who has a really beautiful, sweet story.”

While the stories are supposed to be a surprise each night, McGray shares a tantalizing preview.

“Someone discovers a story from her own family. Someone as a teenager discovers a pretty incredible family secret that she never knew about. Everything’s totally out of character for her parents. So she gets to

One of the stories in the Pop-Up Magazine show
 JUSTIN KANEPS

the bottom of this incredible saga from when they were younger, before she was born, that they’d never told her about. There’s another story about this pretty epic secret love affair between an intelligence officer stationed overseas and a famous international actress that had been kept a secret for their entire lives.”

This isn’t Pop-Up Magazine’s first time in Chicago, and during their last visit, before the pandemic, they staged a really unique collaborative story. McGray recalls:

“So you know, we like to figure out all the different kinds of ways that we can tell a story. One example is Jenna Wortham, who is a writer and podcast host for the *New York Times*, who did a story about someone who lost the ability to form memories. She did it in collaboration with the amazing Chicago shadow puppet theater company Manual Cinema. So, she told the story, and Manual Cinema brought it to life in shadows.”

If your instincts are like mine, you love watching someone spin a great yarn and will want to go online and binge-watch past shows—but these are one-of-a-kind experiences meant to be shared communally. McGray explains:

“You have to be there. We won’t be filming the show and putting the stories online. You have to be there.”

@SheriFlanders

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REVIEW

Murder, she wrote

In *The Locusts*, a serial-killer investigation unveils one family's generational trauma.

By **KERRY REID**



The Locusts © SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON

Women love true-crime stories—so much so that *SNL* spoofed the fascination a few years ago with a song about women relaxing alone at home watching their favorite “Murder Show.” Fans of the podcast *My Favorite Murder* (aka “Murderinos”) are overwhelmingly female. When you’re raised from an early age to think that rape and murder are occupational hazards of your gender, maybe morbid laughter and obsessive research are two coping mechanisms—a way of saying to the world, “I’m not afraid, really. They’re just stories.”

Jennifer Rumberger’s *The Locusts*, now in its world premiere with the Gift Theatre, blends a crime procedural with a family drama to explore generational trauma around violence against women. It has its share of mordant humor, as well as a hopeful insistence on the power of reclaiming one’s own story as a survival mechanism. But it’s also a grim reminder that patriarchy is all about controlling women, instilling terror in their daily lives, and killing them for sport or spite on occasion. Sometimes that happens through “lone wolf” men. Sometimes it’s official state policy. (If you think abortion bans aren’t a form of government-sanctioned serial killing, you haven’t been paying attention.)

Ella (Cyd Blakewell) is an FBI special agent who’s been sent back to her hometown of

Vero Beach, Florida, to help the local cops catch a serial killer. Ella left home as soon as she could, in large part because she somehow survived being kidnapped and raped as a teenager. She remembers very little of the attack, but signs of her PTSD are there if you look for them underneath her let’s-get-down-to-business exterior. That standoffish demeanor initially pisses off Layla (Jennifer Glasse), the police chief, who assumes Ella just looks down on the yokels. But young officer Robbie (Patrick Weber) is fascinated—until his first visit to one of the killer’s crime scenes leaves him reeling.

Ella’s pregnant sister, Maisie (Brittany Burch), whose couch she’s crashing on, remembers to string up some Christmas lights in the living room because Ella is still afraid of the dark. By contrast, Maisie’s daughter, Olive (Mariah Sydnei Gordon), writes tales of girls seeking vengeance against their attackers and dreams of being a writer in New York, much to the delight of her senescent grandmother (Renee Lockett), who ends up having quite a story of her own to tell. But then Olive’s friends start disappearing, and just surviving seems like a formidable enough challenge.

Rumberger has noted that part of the inspiration for her play (deftly directed here by John Gawlik) was reading about the early life of Mary Shelley. The author of *Franken-*

stein never knew her mother, feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who died shortly after giving birth to her, and she faced ostracism for her relationship with Percy Shelley, whose first wife killed herself. She turned that personal trauma into exteriorized monsters, much as Olive does with her fiction in the play. (At one point, Robbie refers to the electric chair as a “reverse Frankenstein”—electricity used to end a “monster,” rather than animate one.)

And while the brutal murders happening in town are foregrounded, it’s clear that Ella and Maisie also have unresolved issues around the suicide of their mother and the death by cancer of their father, as well as the existential dread of living in an ever-redder state. Maisie takes it as a personal affront that MAGA people have moved into their old family home in a town that seems to be dying on the vine. (The mall is gone, for one thing.) The decay feels palpable in Chas Mathieu’s set, hung with tattered swathes of cloth and with cartoonish cutouts of orange trees in the background, and in Trey Brazeal’s sickly shadowy lighting.

So there’s a lot heaped on the dramatic plate here, and not everything feels like it gets the development it deserves. The resentments between Ella and Maisie in particular feel like they’re swept away pretty quickly. (Though in fairness, having a killer stalking the streets probably makes old sibling rivalries feel like

small potatoes.) What does stick is the way that each of the sisters has chosen a different way of dealing with their early traumas. Maisie, a nurse, cares for others in a hands-on way, while Ella is more comfortable in an office, analyzing crimes from a distance in order to achieve justice. Blakewell and Burch excel as two women who love each other, but have found it easier (at least in Ella’s case) to express that love from afar.

One thread throughout the play is that our insistence on rewarding girls for being “nice” is a form of grooming them for their own abuse. That guy with the crutches you stop to help with his packages may be setting you up. (Hello, Buffalo Bill!) It’s an interesting observation—being raised with awareness of your vulnerability as a woman, yet also being expected to serve others and put their needs ahead of yours, adds up to an unwinnable dynamic for assessing risk, when even just politely turning down a stranger’s advances on the street can get you battered or killed. (That’s not even taking into account the much higher likelihood of women being beaten or murdered by men who claim to “love” them.)

Rumberger, who has previously written pieces for Chicago’s horror-centered Wild-Claw Theatre (her *Night in Alachua County* from 2017 has some narrative similarities to what she’s doing here) doesn’t sugarcoat much. Blakewell’s monologues as Ella, particularly an absolutely searing *cri de coeur* near the end, sometimes feel as much like the playwright’s own anguished observations as they do the character’s. But Rumberger remains refreshingly unsentimental and steely-eyed in her vision of a world where women have to save themselves and their stories from everyone who reduces them to objects.

At one point, Ella tells Robbie about the women whose murders she’s investigated, and how she mourns for all the things they could have done. Their killers get famous. The women stay dead. So we laugh to scare away the shadows, knowing that the monsters are real. And we wonder if watching one more true-crime documentary will give us the key to survival, or numb us to the point of apathy. **A**

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From left: Alex Abney, David Andrew Greener Laws (DAGL), and Sarah Davis Reynolds of *The Twenty-Sided Tavern* ■ COURTESY THE ARTIST

GAMER SHOW

The Twenty-Sided Tavern offers hundreds of sides to every story

Audiences determine the course of action in this *D&D*-inspired show.

By MATT SIMONETTE

According to head writer David Andrew Greener Laws, who goes by the acronym DAGL, *The Twenty-Sided Tavern*, opening October 27 at the Broadway Playhouse, is “a game and an experience, and set in a sword and sorcery fantasy world that casts the audience as the fourth player.”

Inspired by role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)*, audience members are invited to join the actors on various quests, each of which differs from evening to evening.

“It’s completely unique and different every night, based on how the audience wants to show up,” adds head game designer Sarah Davis Reynolds. “It all depends—do they want to name the bartender ‘Steve’ or ‘Bartender MacRuff?’ That really sets the tone for the night.”

She and DAGL are both fans of role-playing games who met during the pandemic. They still play tabletop and video games together in their free time.

“I have been playing video games my whole life,” Reynolds recalls. “I always did the ones where there were open worlds. I would literally spend hundreds of hours organizing the books that I found [in the games] in alphabetical order by genre. That fed into learning to play *D&D* and other tabletop role-playing games in college. I sunk my passion into that.”

In 2019, DAGL began thinking about the possibility of a hyper-interactive *D&D*-based theatrical show. While he had experienced podcasts and live shows incorporating a certain level of interactivity, it had never been to the extent he wanted. The pandemic forced

him to put his own plans on the back burner, however.

DAGL eventually began working for an online company employing the technology Gamiotics, which now powers *The Twenty-Sided Tavern*, that brought theatrical experiences to Zoom conferences. Reynolds worked for that company as well.

“Sarah went, ‘I want to make a *D&D* show,’ and I went, ‘I want to make a *D&D* show,’ so we put our resources together. We tested it out online and in person at the Philadelphia Fringe a little over a year ago,” he explains. “It just took off. We thought this was the basket that we should put all our eggs in.”

The Twenty-Sided Tavern by its very nature utilizes principles its creators garnered from improv.

“The reason that we are so drawn to role-playing is that it is about storytelling—it gives you this sandbox where you get to say who your character is and what your motivations are,” Reynolds says. “Theater is also about telling stories and it was the core, concrete foundation that we built this on.”

But DAGL and Reynolds were adamant that *The Twenty-Sided Tavern* harness the chaotic energy that can frequently be found in role-playing games. Actors in the show are each familiar with three roles, and don’t know who they’ll be playing until the audience tells them. The company has about 13 actors, five of whom are onstage at a time.

Reynolds notes, “It’s a lot about prepping different characters, knowing different improv skills, [and] asking, ‘How can we get to this moment, knowing a particular character arc, when we don’t necessarily know what’s going to happen?’”

DAGL and Reynolds both appear onstage, always tweaking lines and audience choices to keep the script flowing naturally.

“We learn so much from every night’s audience,” DAGL says. “Between my writing the script and Sarah coding the story, we’re basically doing rewrites each and every night. Our roles behind the scenes are very present.”

Onstage, DAGL acts as Game Master, laying out the figurative map of the adventure the audience embarks on. Reynolds plays the Tavern Keeper, who she describes as “the rules arbitrator. I also run the technology.”

Gamiotics employs a web-based interface so audience members don’t have to download single-use apps to their phones.

“It allows the audience to vote and compete from their phones, and I am actively running that from the stage,” Reynolds explains. “I’m responding to the audience. If they’re solving a riddle, I’m seeing if enough of them got it right for it to count as a success or not. DAGL guides the story and I guide the game.”

The Twenty-Sided Tavern was designed so that audience members have numerous access points during which to engage, according to their own comfort level.

“I always say—in a positive way—that one of the great things about the show is that we always focus on everyone maintaining the capacity to surprise everyone,” Reynolds says. “That means the audience surprising us, us surprising the players, etc. It also means that sometimes the technology surprises us. There are so many interesting elements—huge projections and sound effects. One of the challenges is making sure that everything is telling the story together and recognizing that this is not a linear thing.”

DAGL said that the show appeals to both role-playing enthusiasts and “other parts of nerdness. We have people who come to the show dressed in chain mail, Star Trek uniforms, and Pokémon onesies. There are also people who have never played these games before.”

He considers managing “scope and scale” to be his biggest challenge: “It’s a two-hour production; the audience comes in expecting that. There are audience members who want to follow that expectation—it’s two hours and we’re done. But there’s just so much in the show. Do we want to explore another room? Do we want to play this game longer? Do we want to follow this comedic bit for longer?”

He calls storytelling an innate part of the human experience, adding, “At the end of the day, that’s what role-playing is, whether you’re playing a single-player video game or you’re telling a story communally with a tabletop role-playing game.”

Role-playing also affords participants opportunities to learn much about themselves and their communities, Reynolds adds. “It allows you to say, ‘I want to be this character who is brave, and bold, and goes on daring quests, when in real life I’m an accountant. It allows you to find that part of you that you haven’t talked to since you were a kid.’” ■

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THEATER



Man and Moon © GLENN FELIX WILLOUGHBY

OPENING

RR Unearthing raw passions AstonRep's *Buried Child* is riveting.

Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama about a rural Illinois family beset by delusion and dysfunction is brilliantly brought to life by AstonRep Theatre Company.

Alcoholic patriarch Dodge (Jim Morley, who brought to mind Richard Widmark in a stellar performance) is permanently ensconced on the living room couch yelling to his wife, Halie (Liz Cloud). Few people could be worse caretakers for the ornery Dodge than Halie, who spends most of her days and nights upstairs, wistfully gazing at the fallow fields, remembering (misremembering?) happier days. Characters throughout *Buried Child* turn on a dime, but Halie is especially brutal when she turns on a dime from foggy, wistful reminiscences to acrid denunciations, thanks to Cloud's masterful interpretation.

Indeed, Dodge is also under the care of his and Halie's two sons, the lumbering and highly traumatized Tilden (Robert Tobin) and the psychotic Bradley (Rian Jairell, equally lumbering but electrifyingly terrifying). Halie's warmth is reserved for her and Dodge's late son Ansel, whose heroic athleticism, she maintains, warrants a statue in town. When either Tobin or Jairell are onstage, it's nearly impossible to look away from their characters.

The ghosts of O'Neill, Williams, and Steinbeck are

definitely in the air, but Shepard's thematic preoccupations are front and center as well—decaying family structures, the inherent instabilities within masculine identity, and the expansive emptiness of the American plains. Director Derek Bertelsen and his cast and crew make a complicated drama riveting. —**MATT SIMONETTE**

BURIED CHILD Through 11/19: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, the Edge Theater, 5451 N. Broadway, 773-828-9129, astonrep.com, \$20

RR Medieval love triangle, modernized

Camelot gets some contemporary flourishes with Music Theater Works.

Music Theater Works (MTW) ambitiously takes on some of the problems with Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's formless and dated book, keeping our focus on Arthur (Michael Metcalf), Guenevere (Christine Mayland Perkins), and Lancelot's (Nathe Rowbotham) love triangle. In her program notes, director Brianna Borger explains, "Our *Camelot* envisions a troupe of revelers outside of time and space, who have taken this expansive tale and distilled it into what has always lived at its core: a story of humanist ideals, hope, and love."

The setting is the medieval ruins of a castle. Hurrying on- and offstage, cast members gleefully narrate temporal bridges in the story. Lancelot spends the show in skinny jeans and Doc Martens. Parker Guidry, excellent as the villainous Mordred in act two, spends most of

SWING STATE

BY REBECCA GILMAN
DIRECTED BY ROBERT FALLS

It's hard to know who your friends are
in a world that's more divided than ever.

Recently widowed, Peg tends to the native plants in her 40-acre rural Wisconsin prairie backyard, her solitary days interrupted only by visits from a family friend with a checkered past. When a mysterious theft alerts the authorities, a string of events unfold that forever changes their lives. Pulitzer Prize finalist playwright Rebecca Gilman and her longtime collaborator, Tony Award-winning director Robert Falls, team up again for their sixth Goodman production—a contemporary portrait of America's heartland in a time when it feels like everyone's way of life is in danger of disappearing.

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THEATER

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act one singing and dancing the role of one of Camelot's resident maidens, and they are awesome doing it.

Perkins is an excellent singer, and nicely conveys her character's dismay as she is drawn between Arthur, whom she loves with her heart, and Lancelot, for whom she feels such unbridled passion. Metcalf knows how to belt out his songs, infusing Arthur with a refreshing boisterousness; many actors bring to Arthur their most brooding affects. Rowbotham makes Lancelot more thoughtful and plainspoken—his grand pronouncements seem like humblebrags here. The show, which has undergone some heavy cuts, sometimes feels rushed, but the players and production team know where to find Camelot's real heart. —**MATT SIMONETTE** **CAMELOT** Through 11/13: Wed 1 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, 847-920-5360, musictheaterworks.com, \$39-\$106

RR Adulthood and its discontents

The Cleanup deals with the messiness of parenting, romance, and friendship.

Though it's called *The Cleanup*, Hallie Palladino's new play, now in a world premiere with Prop Thtr under Jen Poulin's direction, is all about messiness in the aftermath of the COVID-19 shutdown. Set at a nursery school co-op established by dedicated community mom Julie (Lynnette Li), the play traces the fallout when two of the parent volunteers, Nicole (Lucy Carapetyan) and Logan (Chad Patterson), begin an affair. He's already separated from his ER doctor wife, and she's been in a loveless marriage with a man whose already low interest in his own kids seems to have turned into outright resentment during stay-at-home. Meantime, Ryan (Brandon Rivera) and his husband are taking their kids to a more upscale day care than the makeshift church basement Julie's been running on financial fumes and holding together with sheer determination. (Alyssa Mohn's set neatly captures the homespun but frayed charms of the day care.)

While the story takes a little while to ramp up dramatically, Palladino shows a deft touch throughout with the small details of parental stress that add up to feeling overwhelmed. Patterson's Logan, who begins his first conversation with Nicole asking that they talk about "substantive stuff," gives early but subtle warnings of his powers of manipulation. But Palladino's shrewd and sometimes aching portrayal of contemporary parenthood (never easy, and rendered so much harder in the past two years) weaves in the palpable uneasiness all the characters feel as balancing work, kids, and everything else starts to feel like a Jenga game with a body count.

Carapetyan's Nicole doesn't make the best choices, but she makes us understand the aching loneliness driving her decisions. "I am done with 'for now,'" she tells Logan early on. "I'm ready for 'next.'" But what comes next in a world that, as Julie observes, "runs on maternal sacrifice?" Palladino's play reminds us that finding the right answers is crucial for the well-being of kids and parents alike. —**KERRY REID** **THE CLEANUP** Through 11/19: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; open caption performance Sat 10/29; Athenaeum Center, 2936 N. Southport, athenaeumcenter.org, \$32 (\$10 students and industry)

RR Catch the Clue bus

Mercury's whodunit comedy is killer fun.

The game *Clue* taught me what "confidential" means, that a conservatory is just a fancy greenhouse, and that Miss Scarlett is always the right choice. Any armchair

detective that could identify those little toy weapons in the dark with their eyes closed will enjoy this new stage adaptation of the 1985 movie based on the 1943 game. Mercury Theater's production of Sandy Ruskin's adaptation of Jonathan Lynn's screenplay (which director Lynn created with John Landis) is goofy, slapstick fun. Under L. Walter Stearns's direction, the 90-minute one-act starts strong, introducing each (literally) colorful character, from Colonel Mustard to Mrs. Peacock, with zany quips and precisely timed comedic physicality. Mr. Green is scared of his own shadow, Professor Plum is predictably pompous, and Mrs. White can't even, thanks to McKinley Carter's droll deadpan.

Central to the plot and the highlight of the show is Mark David Kaplan as the butler, Wadsworth, conductor of the evening's "game" and an all-knowing presence at turns both sarcastic and sinister. Supported by a hilarious Tiffany T. Taylor as French maid Yvette, he eye-rolls and stalks his way from room to room of Bob Knuth's jewel-box set like a puppeteer, reaching peak comedy during his rapid-fire reenactment of the plot points so far, as we approach the show's conclusion. While the movie famously sent alternate endings to different theaters, the play chooses to address all outcomes sequentially, ratcheting back up the momentum after a bit of a lag midway. Like the game, it's a good indoor amusement with just enough intrigue to keep you on your toes. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER** **CLUE** Through 1/1: Wed-Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 1 and 5 PM, Mercury Theater Chicago, 3745 N. Southport, 773-360-7365, mercurytheaterchicago.com, \$35-\$85

RR Democracy under siege

Invictus Theatre's Julius Caesar contains timely warnings.

Invictus Theatre Company delivers a solid, sometimes stirring, and strikingly relevant rendition of William Shakespeare's 1599 tragedy. It's the story of Marcus Brutus (played by Invictus artistic director Charles Askenazer, who also directed), a well-intentioned aristocrat in the waning days of the ancient Roman Republic, who joins a plot by his fellow senators to assassinate the political and military leader Julius Caesar (Chuck Munro), who Brutus fears is becoming a tyrant. Rather than calming Rome's political polarization, the murder backfires when Caesar's loyal friend, Marc Antony (Mikha'el Amin), rouses the people's rage against the self-proclaimed "liberators" with an impassioned funeral oration. Mob violence escalates into civil war; the result, after all the blood is shed, is the establishment of the very imperial system of government that Brutus kills—and dies—trying to prevent.

The 16 non-Equity actors in this intimate storefront staging mostly handle the dense, rigorously rhythmic text skillfully, bringing both clarity and musicality to the long-phrased verse. Particularly good are Askenazer as Brutus, Daniel Houle and Joseph Beal as his coconspirators Cassius and Casca, and John Chambers as Caesar's nephew and heir Octavius, shrewdly allying himself with Antony in order to position himself to become the first Emperor of Rome.

With the U.S. Capitol insurrection of January 6, 2021, clearly in mind, this three-hour modern-dress production features "Hail to the Chief" played when Caesar enters and people chanting "Lock them up!" and waving the star-spangled banner and a "Don't Tread on Me" flag. Sometimes (especially at the end), this directorial commentary gets a little too obvious, to the detriment of the drama—but I won't challenge the accuracy of the analogy between the dangerous demagogic politics of

44 B.C. and 2022 A.D. The tragedy of *Julius Caesar* is not just Caesar's or Brutus's, but democracy's, and we ignore that at our peril. —**ALBERT WILLIAMS** **JULIUS CAESAR** Through 11/20: Mon, Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Reginald Vaughn Theater, 1106 W. Thorndale, invictustheatrecoc.com, \$35 (seniors and students with valid ID \$30)

RR Luminous storytelling

Man and Moon gets a stellar premiere with 16th Street.

Siena Marilyn Ledger's brand-new two-person play, being produced here with 16th Street Theater and Drag-only Theatre as part of the National New Play Network rolling world premiere program, is based on a deceptively simple premise. Luna, a quirky and precocious tween whose mother is undergoing cancer treatment, befriends Aaron, another cancer patient, also in the midst of a gender transition, undergoing treatment at the same clinic. In the wrong hands such a premise could be painfully sentimental or, worse, deadly dull. But Ledger is too clever a writer to fall into either trap. Their characters are fresh and interesting, and the story that unfolds in this tight, intermissionless 90-minute play is absorbing without being forced or unreal.

It helps that the lead actors—indeed, the play's only actors—Clare Wols and Peter Danger Wilde work so well together. Over the course of the play we see these two grow together as they face the harsh realities of their lives. (Though we never see Luna's mother, we come to realize just how desperately ill she is.) Under Hayley Procacci's direction, Wols and Wilde deliver the kind of performances that grab an audience from the get-go, and never let us go. Wols in particular brings a remarkable energy, intelligence, and depth to her part. In lesser hands this role could have been played as a mere middle-school version of manic pixie dream girl—the eccentric free spirit who teaches another character to love life again—but 12-year-old Wols possesses acting chops way beyond her years. —**JACK HELBIG** **MAN AND MOON** Through 11/13: Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat 4 and 8 PM, Sun 2 PM; no performance Thu 11/3; Madison Street Theater, 1010 Madison, Forest Park, 708-795-6704, 16thstreettheater.org, \$25 (virtual performances \$10)

RR Displacement and determination

A Honduran refugee and a rancher connect in Theo Ubique's latest.

Refuge, the wrenching portrait of a Central American woman's effort to reach the U.S. receiving its midwest premiere at Theo Ubique, is less a play than a ritual with music enacting displacement, loss, and fear—but also love and the determination to go on. So my not understanding the two-thirds of the dialogue delivered in Spanish didn't interfere with my grasp of the experience, but I did find it alienating, which was no doubt the point: among the first words in English were, "We must not fear what we cannot understand." It was clear that "Girl," disguised as a boy, stumbles across the desert border onto the ranch of a man mourning the death of his daughter at the hands, as he thinks, of a migrant. Once he penetrates her disguise, though, he begins to treat Girl as the daughter he lost, despite his friendship with the Border Patrol officer tracking her. Every character struggles with conflicting loyalties, so there's no easy resolution. And, like every artwork concerned

with justice, the people who really need to see it will never do so.

Having said that: the piece, cowritten, codirected, and music directed by Satya Jnani Chávez (they collaborated with Andrew Rosendorf on the story, and with Valen-Marie Santos on direction), is stunningly beautiful both visually and aurally. As the Girl, Tatiana Bustamante is appealing without being saccharine, and Bill Kalinak likewise gives the Rancher complexity so we see his humor and his rage as well as his tenderness. The puppets created by Adolfo Romero representing the dog, the wolf, the vulture, and the snake seem as real as any person. (Aida Palma Carpio is credited as the snake puppeteer, while the ensemble shares the work of animating the others.) And the voices are breathtaking. If I left this fine work feeling unsatisfied, that's probably because the situation being portrayed is so far from satisfactory. —**KELLY KLEIMAN** **REFUGE** Through 11/13: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 6 PM, Howard Street Theatre, 721 Howard, Evanston, 773-939-4101, theo-u.com, \$45-\$55 (optional dinner from Taco Diablo available for \$30 per person; must be ordered with reservation)

RR Seeking sanctuary

A British play about immigrants speaks to current U.S. issues.

Nearly a decade after it debuted at the Royal Court Theatre in 2013, Rachel De-laahay's *Routes* has landed at Theater Wit for its American premiere. Presented by Remy Bumpo, *Routes* is a story of progressively intertwined, mirrored vignettes of two characters and the handful of people who will determine their respective fates. Olufemi (Yao Dogbe) is a Ghanian immigrant who, after running afoul of British law, is deported with a near-guarantee to never reenter the country, effectively separating him from his family for life. Bashir (Terry Bell) is a barely 18-year-old Somali refugee, orphaned young, who is completely unaware of his precarious status in the only country he's ever known.

"Routes" and "roots" are homophones (at least in the typical British "Received Pronunciation" accent), and this subtle duality speaks to the play's underlying theme. How do you chart a new route that is in conflict with your roots?

You can't watch this play today without considering the impact Brexit has had on the efficacy of the European Court of Human Rights, an already dubious protective measure in the lives of asylum seekers (as the play demonstrates). But the timing of *Routes*'s American premiere is especially relevant with regard to the rampant inhumanity of current immigration policy in the U.S., as well. Mara Zinky's scenic design casts these issues into the literal box they are often shelved in by politicians and cozy constituents alike. The entirety of the production, directed by Mikael Burke, takes place inside a sparse, glass-walled structure. The audience views the action through a sharper-edged fishbowl perspective while the six-person cast orbit each other fluidly and gracefully. Helming this choreography the night I attended was Lucas Looch Johnson, understudy for Bashir's boisterous, tenderhearted, and unexpected ally, Kola, who was a joy to watch. —**KAYLEN RALPH** **ROUTES** Through 11/20: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Sat 10/29-11/12 2:30 PM and Thu 11/17 2:30 PM; audio description and touch tour Sat 10/29 2:30 PM (touch tour begins 1 PM), open caption performance Sat 11/5 2:30 PM; Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont, 773-975-8150, remybumpo.org, \$32-\$40 (\$15 industry, \$10 student) **FI**



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REVIEW

After 42 years, *Halloween* finally ends

Still, the Ballad of Laurie Strode feels all too familiar.

By CATEY SULLIVAN



James Jude Courtney as the Shape and Jamie Lee Curtis as Laurie in *Halloween Ends* © UNIVERSAL PICTURES

After John Carpenter’s *Halloween* was released in 1978, my small tribe of suburban teenage babysitters became terrified to go to work. My favorite family kept me only by doubling my rate. For \$2 an hour, I’d manage that fear and keep the knives handy. It was an early lesson in the intersection of the U.S.’s two fundamental engines: capitalism and horrific violence.

It was a lesson that eluded me for years because Michael Myers was so clearly an aberration, like evil itself. When *Halloween* opened, I’d been sweating over a social studies report on former president Richard Nixon’s secret bombing of Cambodia, an act so monstrous I couldn’t wrap my head around it—and also clearly an aberration. This I knew to be true: facts, reason, and compassion were the dominant guiding ethos of the world. Or at least, we could all agree they should be.

Directed in its original incarnation by Carpenter and produced by Debra Hill, *Halloween* remains a groundbreaking movie on many levels, from the voyeuristic opening tracking shot that pays homage to *Touch of Evil* (and rivals it in terms of taut storytelling) to its creation of the Final Girl trope, from its haunting score to its closing images of empty rooms steeped in unseen menace. It was bloodless until the final quarter: Carpenter and Hill knew that fear is as much about the anticipation of evil as about its manifestation.

The original in the 13-movie *Halloween* franchise was scary for a lot of reasons, not the least of which was this: most previous horror movies (*The Exorcist*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Jaws*, *Horror Hotel*, and *Nosferatu* loom large in my 1978 memory as formative) all either had supernatural monsters or locales far removed from my boring life.

Carpenter was among the first to create a blockbuster wherein evil invaded a place as mundane and midwestern as Haddonfield, Illinois. The town was fictional. But for the odd palm tree Carpenter failed to shoot around on location in Pasadena, California, Haddonfield deeply resembled Wheaton, where I lived during high school. Moreover, the targeted women here weren’t damsels in a murky far-off castle or mad scientists howling in vaguely Eastern European accents. Instead, the Shape (as Myers is referred to in the credits) was all about killing babysitter Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis in her film debut) and her friends.

Still, *Halloween* was the good kind of scary because Michael Myers wasn’t real once the lights came up. He was so unreal there weren’t even words for him: the term “serial killer” didn’t exist in 1978. “Stalking” was something to do with deer hunters.

The real monsters that had defined the headlines of my wandering youth (the Zodiac Killer in San Francisco, Son of Sam in New York, Gacy in the Chicago area) were no longer threats. They were vanquished or at least gone, just like Richard Nixon, who everyone knew was the scariest thing that would ever happen to the White House.

Now, as I watch silver-haired AARP and red carpet headliner Curtis reprising a role she created as a teenager, I’m struck by how innocent we were when the Shape showed up the first time. How did we ever believe that real monsters didn’t stalk our actual everyday lives? Why did we ever believe that when monsters did manage to surface, the world would be sane and united about killing them or least punishing them?

At sixtysomething, Laurie Strode has spent her life fighting. In the latest installment, *Halloween Ends*, she has three speeds: Too

Depressed to Move, Physically Exhausted, and Time to Stab That Motherfucker. It’s relatable—even in a mediocre addition to the franchise.

Also relatable: the part where Laurie literally spends years trying to warn people about the encroaching chaos and everyone tells her to stop being so dramatic. In 1978, the town sheriff all but patted Laurie’s head and told her to go have a glass of warm milk when she voiced concerns about being followed by a strange man.

Sheriff Brackett didn’t take Laurie seriously until his own daughter turned up butchered. “Haddonfield” attitudes haven’t changed much over the generations—not in Laurie’s world nor ours—and now she’s viewed as a crazy old lady rather than the dramatic young one.

Here are my mini reviews of the three *Halloween*s that matter.

The first *Halloween* was brilliant. Carpenter saved the bloodshed and gore for the final quarter, and reportedly shot the entire production for under \$200,000, of which Curtis got about \$8,000.

Carpenter ratcheted up the tension not by violence but by the harrowing terror leading up to it. He composed a score that had the ruthless simplicity of *Jaws* and the insistent violence of *Psycho*. Carpenter put Easter eggs (the term didn’t exist then) dealing with death everywhere: Laurie’s English teacher droning on about fate. Blue Öyster Cult’s “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper” on the car radio after school. The old Myers place, the porch a gaping mouth with pillars for fangs.

Carpenter is a master at tapping into the lizard portion of the brain where fear lives, sometimes subtly, sometimes with staccato, arrhythmic stabs.

Director David Gordon Green’s 2018 *Halloween* was fairly entertaining and a fitting sequel in contextual terms: the violence was at least triple the original in quantity and quality. Thematically, the #MeToo movement hung large over Michael’s crimes. Which brings us to *Halloween Ends*, where the Shape is still getting away with murder.

Halloween Ends (also directed by Green) is notable mainly for its cockamamie plot and its reverence for the original. Shot after shot—curtains blowing in an empty room, Laurie in a closet with a coat hanger, Laurie on the couch with a knitting needle, a backyard

seen through a bedroom window—calls back to 1978.

The screenplay is bollocks. Michael, ridiculously, takes on a young protege, who looks and acts like Clark Kent until he goes super-villain rogue.

SPOILERS AHOY! Stop reading now if you don’t want any more details about the end of *Halloween Ends*.

This time around, the fate of Michael Myers does finally seem about as final as that of a cow that has completed its duties in the stockyards. If they bring him back again, I’m out. I do not want to see Laurie Strode at 70, still sleeping with a butcher knife because some asshole without a face has decided her life—like that of all the women in her family—doesn’t mean shit.

Trash reboots aside, the moral of the *Halloween* franchise is enduring: Myers has evolved from seasonal tentpole villain to metaphor. He—and everything he stands for—simply won’t die.

He’s been shot, stabbed through the neck, locked in a burning cellar, and pushed from multiple windows. Myers is the looming embodiment of every femme’s worst nightmare: a tireless, unstoppable man who decides they are disposable.

If the years between 1978 and *Halloween Ends* taught me anything, it’s that *Halloween* was always about more than some guy in a William Shatner mask that you were fairly unlikely to encounter in actual life.

In 1978, Nixon’s resignation was fresh in memory. I took it as proof that adults in the room could be trusted to deal with the monsters. I knew that as surely as I knew we’d never go back to the pre-*Roe v. Wade* days, because laws were laws. Abortion became legal when I was 11. Young as I was, I knew that nobody with a functioning brain stem would ever send us back to the medieval days of coat hangers and babysitters dying of “anemia.” That was as likely as a vampire showing up at your castle.

There is nothing new under the sun about horror movies with underlying social themes. *Halloween* is good, scary fun. But it is also more than that. As the movie’s producer in an era when female producers in Hollywood were all but unheard of, Debra Hill understood the threat of Michael Myers and all that he represents.

I miss the days when I thought of him as just another scary story. 📺

🐦 @SullivanCatey

NOW PLAYING

RR *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Everything was fine in Inisherin yesterday. And there's no reason to think that this remote island off the Ireland coast changed overnight. Especially for Pádraic, played by Colin Farrell, who we first meet as he strolls down the country roads to meet his best friend Colm, played by a brooding Brendan Gleeson, before heading to the pub. But when the good-hearted Pádraic finds a cold Colm, there's no denying the island is different. Pádraic, confused by Colm's distance, leaves for the pub with his head down, and even the bartender notices something awry. Once Colm finally arrives at the pub, he insists that Pádraic leave him alone (forever), saying, "I just don't like you no more."

The fallout between the former best friends is amplified by the orbiting cast of eclectic islanders, including Dominic, played by Barry Keoghan, and Pádraic's sister Siobhan, played by Kerry Condon. This brutal, bleak depiction of friends drifting apart consumes the small community, rendering Inisherin unrecognizable by the end. This is typical director Martin McDonagh, and it works once again.

The Banshees of Inisherin is an elegy to friendship. McDonagh masterfully crafts this grim reflection on the

most cutting form of heartbreak, finished with furnishings of whimsical dark comedy and unrivaled banter between Gleeson and Farrell. (This film gifts us another look at the explosive chemistry between the two men, who starred in McDonagh's beloved directorial debut, *In Bruges*.)

Farrell delivers a career-defining, heart-wrenching performance as Pádraic, chronicling not only a dissolving friendship but also capturing the character's budding despair. And this despair steadily consumes the two characters and the island as heartbreak is mangled into resentment and bitterness. But Pádraic refuses to abandon this friendship, and in retaliation to Pádraic's appeals, Colm threatens to cut off his fingers with garden shears. And he means it, giving Pádraic the finger. Told in isolation, *The Banshees of Inisherin* is a momentous fable that's tethered to a familiar agony, and in the end, there are astonishing consequences. —MAXWELL

RABB R, 109 min. Limited release in theaters

Black Adam

During the Rock's promotional tour for *Black Adam*, a fan sent their baby toward him, through the hands of many strangers. Everyone cheered as the baby, swaddled in pink, landed in his massive arms onstage. Such is the cult that has formed around the man born Dwayne



The Banshees of Inisherin SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Johnson, now peaking with the cinematic scale-up of a DC Comics side character.

Johnson previously rejected a Black Adam cameo in *Shazam! 2*, despite the character being canonically familiar as a Shazam villain. It would be an "incredible disservice" to the character, he said, oozing the same hijacking side-quest energy as when he entered, then exited, the *Fast and Furious* world with an odd, bloated spin-off, *Hobbs & Shaw*. That movie made big money, and *Black Adam* will too. The Rock is very popular.

Is his new cult chapter any good, though? Not really. Somehow one of its major problems is that the Rock isn't in it enough. When he is, he doesn't speak enough, and when he speaks, he's doing a stoic fish-out-of-water ancient-man bit that's a worse version of Dave Bautista

in *Guardians of the Galaxy*. The CGI set pieces of the fictional, vaguely Middle Eastern city of Kahndaq are dreary and boring. There's a political parable in there somewhere—something about strongman fascism that maybe, accidentally or not, suggests that there's a good version of the stuff, but it isn't cooked well enough to come through. The action occasionally entertains.

The rest is a muddle of virtually nameless side characters doing exposition and failed gags. Pierce Brosnan is wasted in what feels like a lot of scaffolding for future DC movies, or TV shows; rarely do we feel like we are experiencing the thing itself, but rather a setup for a different, later event, which will probably not be the real thing either. —JOHN WILMES PG-13, 124 min. Wide release in theaters

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Left: Mal Arnold and his eyebrows play Fuad Ramses, the killer in *Blood Feast*. Right: One of Ramses's victims, played by Astrid Olson, can't believe what's happened to her tongue.

📷 COURTESY SOMETHING WEIRD VIDEO



Herschell Gordon Lewis invented the modern splatter film with *Blood Feast*—and he's inspired two thousand rock 'n' roll maniacs.

By **LEOR GALIL**

In 1987, Michael Bishop was invited to join an underground band in Richmond, Virginia, whose trashy, theatrical collision of sci-fi, fantasy, and horror made them subversive standouts in the city's punk scene. Bishop already had a reputation as a gifted bassist, and he was still in high school when he joined Gwar.

The band's obscenely violent onstage personas were part of an ever-evolving backstory too incoherent and ludicrous to summarize here—suffice it to say they played bloodthirsty intergalactic conquerors, and Bishop wore oversize gladiator gear and called himself Beefcake the Mighty. In a mythos-building 1989 interview for *Maximum Rockroll*, his

bandmate Sexecutioner claimed that Beefcake had “invented music by stretching dinosaur entrails across the freshly carved Grand Canyon.”

Even back then, Gwar's stage show involved a phalanx of costumes and props. The band had several nonmusical members, many of whom had studied art at Virginia Commonwealth University, and they fabricated removable body parts, bloody entrails, and alien creatures. For much of 1987, the band's headquarters—nicknamed the Slave Pit—was in the Richmond Dairy Company building, a dilapidated four-story complex with milk-bottle turrets.

“I think the first time I ever saw a Herschell

Gordon Lewis movie was on one of the televisions at the Slave Pit,” Bishop says. “I would come and hang out with the artists who were making props and costumes, and they'd watch it while they were working.”

During his early years in Gwar, Bishop got to know a handful of Lewis's horror movies. Lewis had run production companies based in Chicago, and between 1960 and 1972 he amassed a wild, lurid, slapdash filmography, making more than 30 movies. (He would direct only two more, plus parts of an anthology, before his death in 2016.) He sometimes worked as a director, producer, screenwriter, cinematographer, and composer on a single project, though often he'd make it hard to tell by using

pseudonyms in the credits.

Lewis didn't just make horror movies. His first features were “nudie cuties,” exploitation films that papered over their salaciousness with a cheeky, disarming layer of comedy. In the late 1960s, he even took a shot at children's movies. But Lewis is celebrated primarily as a horror pioneer. His debut in the genre, 1963's *Blood Feast*, is widely believed to be the first horror film that showed (simulated) human guts, and it earned him his sobriquet: the Godfather of Gore.

Lewis's reputation in the film world is well documented. He influenced horror auteurs Wes Craven and John Carpenter. He's the subject of at least four books, including Randy

Palmer's comprehensive 2000 treatise, *Herschell Gordon Lewis, Godfather of Gore*, which shares its name with a 2010 feature-length documentary. One of that documentary's directors, B-movie auteur Frank Henenlotter, dedicated his 1982 debut, the cult classic *Basket Case*, to Lewis.

Henenlotter adores Lewis, but he might have to settle for second place behind John Waters, who paid homage to Lewis in 1970's *Multiple Maniacs*, 1994's *Serial Mom*, and 2000's *Cecil B. Demented*. Waters included a Q&A with Lewis in his own autobiography, 1981's *Shock Value*, and introduced his hero thusly: "His films are impossible to defend; thus, he automatically becomes one of the all-time great directors in film history."

Lewis's oeuvre isn't to all tastes, to put it gently, and not just because he liked to throw around bathtubs of fake blood. He approached filmmaking as a businessman first, emphasizing speed, efficiency, and frugality. He was a marketing genius but at best a workmanlike director. Palmer's book claims Lewis and his team shot *Blood Feast* in nine days for \$24,500. When his actors weren't on camera, they sometimes pulled double duty by slating scenes with clapboards or holding boom mikes. His crew used all matter of animal parts—chicken skin, fish eyeballs, lox, a sheep's tongue—for gore effects.

Lewis's films can be rough going, clogged with awkward pacing, unnatural dialogue, and even worse acting; the framing is bland, the editing choppy. But as is so often the case with cheap, trashy movies made with more energy than skill, these failings contribute to their strange charms.

Those charms might as well have been engineered to win over Bishop and his bandmates. "Gwar valorizes the low—like, the sort of things people look at culturally and want to dismiss," Bishop says. (Today he's back in Gwar after many years, and now fronts the group as Blöthar the Berserker.) "Gwar's always been interested and motivated in finding the value in that, and using that as the basis of our mode of expression. That's how Gwar makes meaning. Herschell Gordon Lewis is a part of that formula."

Punk history is lousy with horror hounds who share Bishop's love for Lewis's movies. "The films were outsider, notorious, abrasive, and over-the-top—all things one often associates with punk rock," says artist Lisa Petrucci, owner and operator of Seattle mail-order movie company Something Weird Video.

Petrucci's late husband, Mike Vraney,

launched Something Weird in 1990, naming it after a 1967 Lewis film. Vraney had developed his taste for B movies and exploitation fare while working in punk. In the late 70s, he co-founded Modern Productions, which booked punk and new wave at the Showbox, across from Seattle's Pike Place Market. In the 80s, he managed punk bands, including the Accused, T.S.O.L., and the Dead Kennedys—and sometimes turned them on to Lewis's films.

Two of the most enduringly influential groups in the history of punk, the Misfits and the Cramps, waded up to their eyeballs in horror—and they were obvious fans of Lewis. The Misfits' 1983 album, *Earth A.D. / Wolfs Blood*, includes the song "Bloodfeast." In 1986, the Cramps released a cover of "Get Off the Road," a song Lewis wrote for his 1968 biker exploitation movie *She-Devils on Wheels*. When California label Birdman released a compilation of music used in Lewis's films in 2002, Cramps front man Lux Interior contributed artwork, drawing the director's name on the cover in letters shaped like lengths of intestine.

"The Cramps were the bridge between 60s pop culture and late-70s punk," says cult film expert Zack Carlson, coauthor of the 2010 book *Destroy All Movies!!! The Complete Guide to Punks on Film*. "For whatever reason, their whole rockabilly thing incorporated Herschell Gordon Lewis more than any other filmmaker—along with all this other stuff they adopted as they picked and chose the stuff that they thought represented them."

Carlson has programmed for Austin's Alamo Drafthouse and its annual Fantastic Fest. He's the guy who bought a 35-millimeter print of long-lost 1987 martial-arts caper *Miami Connection* listed for \$40 on eBay, launching it into the canon of endearingly incompetent Z movies. He grew up before you could find everything on the Internet, so he learned about punk rock and fringe films the old-fashioned way.

As a teen Carlson worked at a record shop in Oxnard, California, and befriended an older couple who educated him in cult movies. They gave him a copy of the 1986 book *Incredibly Strange Films*, which opened his eyes to an entire constellation of directors who shot for the moon on shoestring budgets. "Clearly at the top of the heap was Herschell Gordon Lewis," Carlson says. "He was the originator, and he was so prolific. And he was such a huge personality on his own."

Film distribution company Severin recently hired Carlson to write a companion book for a new box set of films by Ray Dennis Steckler,

another director he encountered via *Incredibly Strange Films*. Carlson has noticed a lot of 1960s cult moviemakers getting a third wind. "I don't know exactly what's prompting this—these guys were rediscovered in the 80s and early 90s," he says. "It's happening again, thanks to Severin and Arrow. It's exciting. I'm wondering, like, how many lives do they get?"

In 2016, Arrow released *The Herschell Gordon Lewis Feast*, packaging 14 of the director's films on seven discs; on the set's cover, which is illustrated like a cereal box, the silver-haired director eats from a bowl of viscera. Lewis appreciations continue to come out to this day. Last month Georgia-based outfit Terror Vision (run by Ryan Graveface, owner of the new Odd Obsession in Bucktown) released the documentary *Blood, Guts & Sunshine*, a history of Florida horror movies that directly links the state's modern output to Lewis's work.

It's not hard to find mash notes to Lewis from horror fiends, but the connections between his work and punk rock have been less thoroughly examined. When I decided to write this story, my idea was to collect as many of those links in one place as I could. Lewis's gore movies hit the same sweet spot as lots of early punk.

"These are all the cave paintings—punk records and Herschell Gordon Lewis movies," Carlson says. "It's, like, the caveman in everybody."

Herschell Gordon Lewis was born in 1926 in Pittsburgh; he died in 2016 in Florida. He helped run a TV station in Oklahoma, taught at a college in Mississippi, and maintained a career more than 50 years long in ad copywriting (including for a commemorative plate company in Minnesota). But Chicago is where Lewis based his activity as a filmmaker. Even when he shot in Florida instead, Chicago provided the reason. "Every year when it got cold, we'd do another picture in Miami," Lewis told biographer Randy Palmer.

Lewis earned degrees in journalism at Northwestern University, and in the 1950s he learned the ropes of the industrial film business. He worked in TV commercials and public relations, and he and a man named Martin Schmidhofer became co-owners of a Chicago production studio they called Lewis & Martin Films (get it?). In 1960, Lewis founded Mid-Continent Films to get into the features game—he thought that was the only way to make real money in the business.

The company's first movie, 1960's *The Prime Time*, was filmed locally (Lewis produced

but didn't direct) and featured the cinematic debut of Karen Black. Production mistakes allegedly inflated its budget to a disastrous \$100,000, and by all accounts it bombed. Mid-Continent folded after one more film.

Lewis worked on his own after that, and this taught him an important lesson: namely, that with a skeleton crew and no oversight, he could do the work better and cheaper.

Leaving aside Lewis's hostility to the expense of union labor, that attitude is pretty punk. "I love the aesthetic of having a vision and not stopping to figure everything out, and not having a budget, but being so motivated with your idea that you're going to make it happen," says Detroit musician Amy Gore, who named her first band after Lewis's 1972 horror comedy *The Gore Gore Girls*. "Film was expensive, and making a film was expensive, and that just didn't seem to bother HG at all. And I love that about him."

Gore and her Motown-influenced all-female band broke into the Detroit garage-rock scene in the late 90s with the same sort of DIY ingenuity. They created matching outfits by making their own iron-on shirts and spray-painting their shoes. "I didn't know what the hell I was doing," Gore says. "But I got myself, I got some girls to back me up, and we got in the studio, and I got someone to pay for a recording. I made a record and got to go to Europe and tour the world. I think that ethos is definitely an HG inspiration."

Lewis had his breakthrough with his third film, 1961's *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre*, a dirt-cheap nudie cutie made with producer David Friedman that played at Tom Dowd's Capri theater in the South Loop for around two months the following spring—it was the largest-grossing picture Dowd had shown to date. By 1963, though, Lewis was running out of funny ways to film topless women, so he and Friedman found another way to be provocative: gore.

"We could either do a film that was so loaded with sex as to be almost unfilmable, or we could do a picture that was so loaded with horror as to be equally unfilmable," Lewis told Palmer. "And since there was an overabundance of nudie pictures, we opted for the horror angle." *Blood Feast* came out that same year, and it's since inspired generations of punks.

"The only reason the Herschell Gordon Lewis films got made, distributed, and seen, regardless of the creators' intention, was because they didn't have any regard for the rules—if Herschell Gordon Lewis had had

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Hyperventilating advertisements for four Herschell Gordon Lewis splatter films: *The Wizard of Gore* (1970), *Color Me Blood Red* (1965), *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964), and *Blood Feast* (1963)

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regard for the rules, he would have been doing very, very different kinds of films,” says Screeching Weasel front man Ben Weasel. “He wanted to do something that was shocking and went beyond and all that. But in order to even get to that place, you have to be willing to step over a line.”

Weasel found Lewis’s movies in the mid-80s, around the same time he got into punk. Lewis became one of the personal heroes who shaped his music. “I liked the rule breakers,” Weasel says. “I liked the ones who didn’t allow other people to tell them what they could and couldn’t do. The result of that, for me, ended up being—for one thing, I was at odds, and still am, with an awful lot of people. But I think it just dovetailed, at that time, with a sense of freedom.”

Lewis’s gore was never especially convincing—no one will ever mistake a mannequin arm for an actual severed human limb. But it’s compelling, even repulsive, because he lingered on it so discomfitingly. In *Incredibly Strange Films*, Lewis told contributors Andrea Juno and Mark Pauline about seeing audiences at *Two Thousand Maniacs!* react to the first sign of blood: “The audience doesn’t know what to do! We have them! How many films are there where the production keeps the audience in such an unsettled state that the audience literally doesn’t know what to do,” he said. “They’re afraid to leave their seats

because that’s a sign of cowardice. They’re afraid to watch because they’re afraid of what they’ll see.”

“It’s hard to fuckin’ watch,” says Seattle graphic artist Art Chantry, who shaped the visual identity of the city’s grunge and garage-rock scenes. Mike Vraney helped Chantry establish himself in the city by hiring him to do posters for the Showbox, and they shared a love for trash. Chantry has mixed feelings about Lewis: “I think what he did was cynical and nasty and a big middle finger,” he says. “And it also changed everybody’s life in our culture. . . . In the circles that I ran in, Herschell Gordon Lewis was as well-known as John Waters is in the general population today. He was a central figure. But then, I tended to hang out in pretty dented circles.”

Any town with a punk scene seems to have had at least one of those dented circles. Writing about the Cleveland scene for the *Guardian* in 2013, UK music critic Jon Savage credited regional TV horror host Ghouliardi, aka Ernie Anderson, as an early influence. Bob Richey, who drummed for the Pagans and currently plays guitar for Les Black’s Amazing Pink Holes, grew up watching Ghouliardi’s *Shock Theater* and going to horror conventions, where he met Herschell Gordon Lewis. He also pulled off something that very few other punks did: he got Lewis into a recording session with one of his bands.

“A lot of bands have done covers of his

stuff—to my knowledge, anyway, the closest anybody got was Lux from the Cramps doing art for an actual Herschell Gordon Lewis record,” Richey says. “I think we were the only ones that got him, really got him, to be on a record and do it.” Lewis had flown to Cleveland in the early 2000s to attend a Cinema Wasteland convention, and Richey talked him into staying an extra day to record vocals with the Amazing Pink Holes.

“We only kept him working four or five hours, tops,” Richey says. “We got a video and two songs out of him. He was so professional.” In 2004, Smog Veil Records released those two tracks—covers of theme songs from the Lewis movies *Two Thousand Maniacs!* and *Moonshine Mountain*—on a translucent, blood-splattered six-inch record. Richey didn’t talk to Lewis again after that recording session.

“I don’t think he knew punk,” Richey says. “I think punk found him.”

Lewis filmed *Blood Feast* from a 14-page script, working in Miami after wrapping up a nudie cutie called *Bell, Bare and Beautiful*. Writing *Blood Feast*’s timpani-and-organ score allegedly took Lewis longer than shooting the movie. The plot, such as it is, concerns an Egyptian caterer named Fuad Ramses who dismembers people to make a lavish meal—and to sacrifice them to the goddess Ishtar. Lewis paid Florida’s Barfred Laboratories to

concoct a new stage blood that could be safely swallowed. Made from Kaopectate, it cost Lewis \$7.50 per gallon, according to Palmer’s book. In the film’s most infamous scene, Ramses yanks out an unsuspecting woman’s tongue—actually a sheep’s tongue.

Blood Feast opened in summer 1963 at a Peoria drive-in owned by one of the film’s producers, Chicagoland movie-exhibition mogul Stan Kohlberg. When Lewis and Friedman drove down to check out the reaction on the second night of the run, they hit traffic a mile from the theater. As Lewis said in the 1975 anthology *Kings of the Bs*, “*Blood Feast* I’ve often referred to as a Walt Whitman poem—it’s no good, but it’s the first of its type and therefore it deserves a certain position.”

Outdoor theaters in Los Angeles were still playing *Blood Feast* nine years later, in 1972, which is how musician and movie producer Jimmy Maslon came across it. “I was blown away,” Maslon says. “I went again the next night and recorded the dialogue with a cassette recorder—and brought it to school the next day and played it for all my friends.”

Later in the 1970s, Maslon started playing rockabilly as Jimmie Lee Maslon. A fan of his named Eric Caidin introduced him to the Cramps, who had collected Maslon’s records. Maslon says the Cramps covered Lewis’s “Get Off the Road” after he jokingly suggested that guitarist Poison Ivy sing it.

Ivy loved *Blood Feast* as much as Maslon

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did. “*Blood Feast*, even though it’s funny, is also still horrifying if you think about it, even though you can look at it and say, that looks like ketchup and it’s unrealistic,” she said in an early-90s *Ghastly* magazine interview. “The idea of it all is horrifying. The guy who thought it up first, just the notion of what’s going on, makes you horrified of the guy who made it, even. Yikes! Who set him loose?”

In the early 80s, Maslon and Caidin scrounged up the money to acquire the rights to *Blood Feast* from Kohlberg, who outright owned several of the director’s films after a bitter falling-out in the mid-1960s. “We bought the rights together pretty inexpensively,” Maslon says. *Blood Feast* turned out to be the first of many Lewis films he bought, and initially he figured he’d rent them to universities for screenings—but then the rise of cable TV and home VCRs provided him with an unexpected opportunity.

The average price of a VCR in November 1984 was \$500, according to a *New York Times* report that year. When Sony introduced its first home VCR in 1975, it cost \$1,400. An RCA vice president told the *Times* that in fall of ’84, one in seven homes had a VCR. This led to the rise of video rental stores, which needed more than just new movies to fill their shelves. “I had these infamous horror films,” Maslon says. “So basically, I was getting flocked by requests.”

Underground director and set designer Steve Hall began renting movies from a stereo store in San Diego in the early 1980s, before he was old enough to drive. The store didn’t carry much variety, but he could get some of Lewis’s films.

“Nobody from my demographic would have ever known him,” Hall says. “Those movies would have been completely gone, no one would have seen them, unless it was for VHS, and hitting us all at that time—like, 14-year-olds, like little sponges, looking at that because it’s the only tape that’s available.”

Lewis’s films inspired teenage Hall to shoot his own movies on video, using inflatable dolls he’d bought at a local sex shop instead of actors. “Me and my friends, in my parents’ garage, started making these movies on Hi8,” he says. “With all, like, animated blow-up dolls in full scenarios. I have two hours of movies of them.” In the 90s, Hall began screening his films (by then cast with live humans) at the I-Beam in San Francisco and the Casbah in San Diego. “I knew all the band people,” he says. “So we would use our movies to open up for the bands.”

In 1998, Hall befriended Jim Rota, who was about to found Los Angeles heavy metal band Fireball Ministry, and hired him to edit some of his underground films. Rota had a similar personal history with Lewis, discovering the director’s movies as a teen in the 1980s through a rental spot called Castle Video in his native New Jersey.

“There was a guy at that video store that would always put stuff aside, because he knew me and my friends would come in,” Rota remembers. “That was where I first saw *Blood Feast*, because that guy was like, ‘This is the first movie that showed organs. It’s the gore milestone.’”

Rota has remained a dogged horror hound, and he recently produced a horror film of his own: the Foo Fighters’ *Studio 666*, which came out this past February. “Dave [Grohl] wanted to make a horror movie,” Rota says. “Dave came up with the story. My partner, John [Ramsay], and I called Tony Gardner, who’s all our favorite special-effects guy.”

Gardner has had a long career in horror effects. His most famous early production is the hilariously bleak 1985 punks-and-zombies black comedy *The Return of the Living Dead*, and he’s also worked on the 1988 remake of *The Blob*, *Army of Darkness*, *Hocus Pocus*, and *Zombieland*, among many others. “He’s a fucking wizard,” Rota says. “I asked Tony, ‘Can you come up with five or six ways you’ve always wanted to kill somebody onscreen?’”

VCRs let consumers record or copy almost anything, and when people love a movie, they want their friends to see it. As videotape trading emerged, both in person and by mail, it often went hand in glove with cassette-tape trading in punk and metal.

“Herschell Gordon Lewis, amongst trading movies like that, that was one of the absolute top names,” says *Roctober* editor and *Reader* contributor Jake Austen. “Getting a gore film that you hadn’t seen was absolutely amazing. It felt like, in garage-rock zines, you would talk about films like that the same way you would talk about bands. Like, you should know this Australian punk band and you should know this movie. It was an expectation, but not elitist—just go find it.”

“I had some friends across the country who were often people who were in punk rock bands, who were into tape trading,” says Ben Weasel. “The one guy for me was Chris Barrows from the band the Pink Lincolns down in Tampa; he was just constantly sending me weird shit. ‘Oh, have you seen this? Have you

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heard of this director?’ It wasn’t just films; it was weird videos that people made that were talked about but really hard to get. And I loved that kind of stuff.”

When Mike Vraney managed punk bands in the 80s, he devoured exploitation movies on VHS. Blaine Cook, front man of the Accused, remembers Vraney’s skill at recording movies from his TV at home. “He’d have that magic finger, and he would be able to hit pause when a commercial came on,” Cook says. “We were with him just as he was starting to collect all those VHSes. We’d go over to his house, and he’d let us take stacks of tapes.”

Maslon first learned of Vraney by reputation—and because he was releasing movies that Maslon owned. “Mike Vraney was actually pirating me,” Maslon says. After Vraney launched Something Weird Video, he set up a meeting. “He came to me very apologetic, and said, ‘Look, I know I did this, but I want to come clean and I want to pay you—I want to make a real deal with you,’” Maslon says. “We became very good friends.”

Lewis filmed the 1972 horror whodunit *The Gore Gore Girls* in Old Town and elsewhere on the north side at the behest of money man Bob Dachman. Dachman knew comedian Henny Youngman, who played a strip-club owner in the movie, and he bankrolled the production because his son Alan had written the script. The plot follows private eye Abraham Gentry as he tracks a mysterious killer terrorizing go-go dancers. The film emphasizes Lewis’s black humor; in an early scene, the killer mutilates a woman’s butt with a meat tenderizer, then sprinkles her with salt and pepper.

The Gore Gore Girls would be Lewis’s final film until he came out of retirement in 2002 for *Blood Feast 2*. Lewis could see the industry getting crowded, and he didn’t think it’d be good business to try to compete with better-funded filmmakers: “Now the sex-film producers are turning to horror,” he told the *Chicago Tribune* magazine in January 1972. “The next couple of years will see a glut, with each guy trying to out-gore the other. What they don’t realize is that this kind of picture is show biz. Fantasy. If you treat it with too much reality, it will revolt the audience.”

Lewis’s films didn’t tend to screen within big cities—they were almost exclusively drive-in fare—and often they didn’t make it out of the midwest and south. The New York City premiere of *The Gore Gore Girls* wasn’t

till November 11, 1982, when horror zine *Gore Gazette* presented a showing at Club 57, a sub-cultural hot spot in the basement of a Polish church on the Lower East Side. It also hosted theatrical performances, punk concerts, art exhibitions, and the occasional female wrestling match.

In May 1979, Club 57 creators Tom Scully and Susan Hannaford had begun programming a Tuesday series called the Monster Movie Club. The series had run its course by the time of the *Gore Gore Girls* premiere, but it made a space at the club for screenings of the drive-in trash beloved by artists in the scene. Those artists included the Ramones and the Misfits—and the latter played the first annual Monster Movie Club Costume Ball at Irving Plaza on Halloween 1979.

“Everything that was going on at Club 57—and that was just one night—everything that was going on, it was giving permission for people to express whatever idea they had, in any form they chose to express it in,” says performance artist, actor, and musician Ann Magnuson, who managed Club 57 for most of 1979 and 1980. “There was a sense of freedom, that each event, each encounter you had with people down there and their creative expressions, encouraged you to do the same.”

Club 57 brought in a who’s who of artists across scenes, including Keith Haring, Klaus Nomi, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. And the Monster Movie Club attracted key underground cinematic players, among them Frank Henenlotter, original *Fangoria* editor Bob Martin, and *Sleazoid Express* editor Bill Landis, who’d distribute his zine from Club 57.

“The appeal of people coming to the Monster Movie Club, of course, was because of the audience participation,” Magnuson says. “Everybody was encouraged to really revert back to being a nine-year-old, or a 12-year-old, or a 16-year-old—I would venture to say a great deal of the membership never really progressed, emotionally, past those ages. But there was a lot of screaming out loud, a lot of talking back to the film—and there was a tremendous amount of that when the Herschell Gordon Lewis stuff was played.”

Magnuson enjoyed the cathartic screenings,

but only to a point. “When I became exposed to the graphic violence towards men or women, but predominantly women, I got really turned off and I stopped watching any horror films made after a certain era,” she says. “Because it became very cruel and sadistic.”

Club 57’s film culture reverberated across the horror underground. In San Francisco, horror fanatic Jim Morton, who hung around punk clubs, launched a zine called *Trashola* after reading *Sleazoid Express*. *Trashola* caught the eye of RE/Search Publications editors V. Vale and Andrea Juno, who recruited Morton to help edit what became *Incredibly Strange Films*.

That book reached a visual artist in Florida named Charles Pinion, who fronted a Gainesville punk band called Psychic Violents in the mid-80s. He was taping local shows on a camcorder, and *Incredibly Strange Films* encouraged him to recycle some of that footage into a shot-on-video feature. Pinion and a couple friends began working on *Twisted*

video movie. Pinion packaged VHS copies with a cassette soundtrack of Gainesville bands, and I especially love how the film captures the city’s punk scene in its infancy. I like to think it’s fate that the Fest, a multiday blowout that’s been bringing punks from around the country to Gainesville since its founding in 2002, falls on Halloween weekend.

Other punks who are fans of Lewis have given filmmaking a shot too. In 1990, Ben Weasel made a teen vampire flick called *Disgusteen* with around \$50 and a camcorder. (“I’m embarrassed by it,” he says. “It was terrible.”) A couple years later, Bob Richey filmed *This Is Elvis’ Birthday ’92 With Mike Hudson*, which he recut and re-edited during the pandemic; the new version premiered at Cleveland’s Beachland Ballroom this past July. Gwar are perhaps one of the biggest successes in this regard. The group’s 1992 music video-slash-movie, *Phallus in Wonderland*, earned them a Grammy nomination.

Every Gwar concert feels a little like a Lewis production—with the important difference that Gwar’s fake blood might actually end up on you. “We’ve got three 33-gallon tanks,” says Matt Maguire, who works on Gwar’s props, costumes, and stage shows. “It’s roughly 100 gallons that go out on the crowd, if we’re lucky. Usually we drain all the tanks.”

Maguire’s coworker Bob Gorman elaborates: “It’s really like pro wrestling—it’s about things being big, and over-the-top, and being seen from the back row, as opposed to being quote-unquote good,” he says. “It’s about the idea being stronger than the execution.”

A movie doesn’t have to look great to be powerful, not any more than a band has to play perfectly. Lewis proved it in cinema just as punk proved it in rock ‘n’ roll. “I don’t listen to punk rock at home,” Gorman says, “but I like shows. I like to see a band live, because it’s about the spirit and the energy.”

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In *Two Thousand Maniacs!*, Shelby Livingston plays Bea Miller, seen here at the end of her visit to Pleasant Valley. COURTESY SOMETHING WEIRD VIDEO

Issues (which he calls a “psycho-punk splatter comedy”) in November 1987, and it debuted in April 1988. “I feel like I’ve assimilated Herschell Gordon Lewis’s stuff so much that it’s just in there in these bloody pools,” Pinion says. “That’s splatter.”

Earlier this year, fringe film site Bleeding Skull (Zack Carlson is a contributor, naturally) named *Twisted Issues* the 12th-best shot-on-



Healing, music, and love

Freddie Old Soul credits music with helping her heal and find God.

By **ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ**

Healing is often a long and winding process. Try as we might to pretend that we have it under control, healing is usually messy and nonlinear. But even when all seems lost, there are moments that remind us that the light at the end of the tunnel is still worth venturing toward.

South side rapper Freddie Old Soul's healing process began when she picked up a pen and expressed herself creatively. She also credits music for helping her find God. That discovery led to digging deeper into spirituality, following a West African tradition known as Ifa, and becoming a trained healer.

"I started to go to herbal school with an organization called Gold Water Alchemy, and I just naturally became a woman healer before I knew it. I was doing healing circles to help women get through very traumatic experiences that have happened to them," she said with pride. "When I say I help heal women, it's more so about 'what are the tools that God gave

you? And how can you best utilize those tools to be the best version of yourself?' So that's my gift back to the community."


Freddie's healing work goes hand in hand with her music. She refined her craft as a spoken word poet at the Young Chicago Authors program Louder Than a Bomb (LTAB, since renamed the Rooted & Radical Youth Poetry Festival). That later translated into musical projects. Her lyricism invokes messages of inner work and self-love over mellow boom-bap production. It's smooth and easy to listen to, allowing you to truly absorb every word she spits. The end result is alchemized gold.

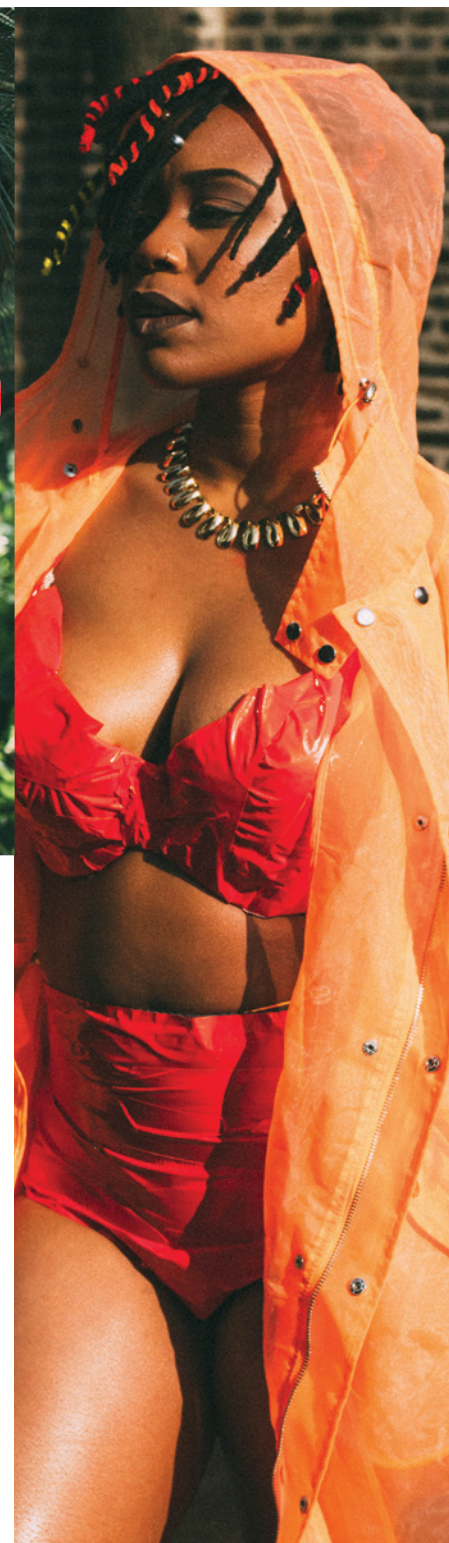
"Writing poetry, being a part of LTAB, and literally sometimes even locking myself up in my room until I just got the words out of me—I would discover more about myself," she said. "That's why music is so important to me, because without it I just wouldn't be able to self-reflect the way that I do. A lot of the times I rap about something and then like three

months to a year later, it's literally happening to me. I had to get through it because I wrote about it. So it's magic, kinda, in a way."

Freddie's upcoming album *Water, Music, and Love* focuses on the transitional period of her life as a mother and her journey to rediscover herself as a musician. The title represents the three things that she says are essential to her well-being. The project's genesis came from making music every day in her living room with her close friends and collaborators JazStarr and _Stepchild, which was a healing process in and of itself.

With the album, Freddie Old Soul looks to claim her place among Chicago's pantheon of great rappers, something she humbly but firmly believes she's worthy of already.

"I think the people have been waiting on me to realize how much of an impact I truly make. I think when we name people like Mother Nature, Semiratruth, and Brittney Carter, these are my friends," she says with earnest. "These people are reflections of me and they've come into my life and reminded me, like, 'Freddie, you the coldest.' I feel the community, and the people are waiting on me to be the impact that I know that I always have been." 



Freddie Old Soul  THOUGHTPOET

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CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

DJ Intel, aka Jason Deuchler, co-owner of horror-themed coffee shop the Brewed

“That 7 AM opening shift can be real difficult when you’ve DJed till three, but you make the best of it. I’m doing what I love.”

As told to LEOR GALIL



I met DJ Intel in 2010 at *Bad Meaning Good*, a monthly trashy movie night at the Burlington that he hosted with fellow DJ Jarrett Spiegel. In the years since, I’ve frequently run into Intel (real name Jason Deuchler) at hip-hop shows and horror movie screenings, and I’ve ended up at plenty of concerts and festivals where he performed. He seemed so ubiquitous that I sometimes wondered if I’d hallucinated him! Since *March*, there’s been another way to see Deuchler on the regular: he and Bric-a-Brac Records owners Jen Lemasters and Nick Mayor opened the Brewed, a horror-themed coffee shop in Avondale.

I guess I’ve always been a B-movie, Godzilla, Universal monsters fan since I was a kid, through my dad, who used to show those to me. My dad is also a music fan, but it’s weird, it’s more on the musical-theater side of things—I grew up listening to musicals and that kind of stuff. And then my brother got turntables when he was in junior high, and I gravitated from my interest in movies and music into DJing.

My brother got turntables, and I used to get home from school before him—it was one of those, like, “Hey, don’t touch my turntables. Stay out of my room.” I would go into his room and DJ until I heard the back door open at the

house; I would quickly shut everything down and go back into my room and pretend I wasn’t in his room DJing. Eventually, I started buying my own records, and he was like, “Oh, you can use them, it’s fine.” Then I found a pair of turntables—which I still have to this day—at a pawn shop, and the rest is kind of history.

A couple of my friends and I formed a crew called Chicago Tribe—we used to throw parties for 17-and-over kids, and the first one was in Forest Park at this place called the Playhouse, which is no longer there.

We used to throw hip-hop jams out in Forest Park, and all these kids would hop on the CTA or buses and come out from the city to the Forest Park, Oak Park area. And then we slowly moved into the city—Chicago Tribe was a thing, and then that went away. Spryte from that crew and I formed Platter Pirates, which was a turntablist crew, and then did that for a few years. I’m still DJing to this day.

In the 90s, a majority of the parties we threw in the city were in Humboldt Park or Logan area—it was a much different time back then. I had a full-time job at a bookstore out in Oak Park, and other friends in the crew had jobs too. We would take our money, walk into a banquet hall, and be like, “How much to rent this place on a Friday night?” And they’d be like, “\$400.” “Great, here’s \$400, cash.”

We would have a date, we’d make a bunch of flyers, and then we’d bring our own sound equipment and DJ equipment. They’d unlock a door. We’d charge money at the door and throw a hip-hop party. We did that successfully for many, many years. That’s how I know a lot of people in the Chicago hip-hop scene.

Jesse de la Peña was still doing that kind of stuff. DJ PNS from the Molemen—the Molemen in general were throwing parties. Kanye and those guys from the south side, all the Nacrobats and all those dudes. I know them all from doing underground hip-hop parties.

I had friends who were also in the rave scene—I was going to underground raves at the same time. So we’d do a hip-hop party on a Friday or Saturday and then go to a rave afterwards. People responded pretty well. The people from our starting scene—the Forest Park, Oak Park area, the Schiller Park area, that kind of thing—some of them migrated into the city, some of them did not. We were definitely the outside kids coming into the city, but we started throwing enough parties where people just didn’t care anymore, and we became a cohesive thing.

[In the early 2000s] the anti-rave act was passed, and they started shutting down doing illegal or banquet-hall style parties. That’s when I kinda started doing more legal venues

that had actual proper licensing.

Abbey Pub was a big home for a lot of shows, over on the northwest side. Threw a lot of shows there. SubT was definitely a good spot. We did the original Lava Lounge on Damen and then also the second home of Lava Lounge on Milwaukee. We did Rodan for a long time. Just wherever we could find spots that would let us do it, we would do it.

Horror was always in the background. *Fangoria* magazine used to have a thing called Weekend of Horrors, so I was going to those conventions. Svengoolie has always been a part of my life since I was a kid. People always tend to think horror is a rock ‘n’ roll, heavy-metal kind of scene, but there’s also the Gravediggaz, Flatlinerz, and some of that—I guess, for lack of a better term, “horrorcore rap.” I’ve always been a fan. Dr. Octagon, that sort of stuff.

[Whether somebody’s part of the horror fandom is] one of those things that you don’t really know until you start talking to [them]. But DJ Risky Bizness, he’s a Chicago guy, he’s a huge horror fan—he’s definitely into it. Matlock is a local rapper who’s into horror. The more you talk to people, the more you find out.

A little-known fact, but I also went to film school at Columbia College Chicago; I’m a real Columbia College four-year graduate with a

MUSIC

The coffee at the Brewed is almost never served with a severed limb, even if you ask for one.  STEVEN PIPER FOR CHICAGO READER

concentration in film and cinematography. So I do cinematography work. I've also shot some horror shorts and some horror films.


I worked on *The Unborn*—I was a camera PA. I've done some stuff for First Jason, which is Ari [Lehman]—if you've ever seen *Friday the 13th*, Ari is the Jason who jumped out of the water at the end of the movie. He lives in Chicago, and he has a band called First Jason. I've done some music videos for him. I worked on a pilot for a Chicago ghost show with him that's still in marketing or whatever they're trying to do with it. I've done some horror shorts with One Tear Productions with my friend Kevin Epperson as the director. I'm always looking to do new things I haven't done before.

I was working at this place called Creepy Company, which is a Chicago-based horror-themed [brand]—they do T-shirts and home goods. Jen [Lemasters] from Bric-a-Brac was also working there, and we became pretty good friends. We used to carpool together. We would stop for coffee on the way to the old office, and she would always say, "Hey, I always

wanted to open a coffee shop that's monster themed." I was like, "That's totally awesome—whatever happens, I will be your barista. I will work there."

Once lockdown happened, DJing stopped. Jen had left Creepy Company at that point. She was doing merchandising for bands—like, working at venues selling T-shirts—and that shut down. Nick [Mayor] was working for a restaurant, and that closed, so he lost that job. We decided, "Hey, if this ever goes back to normal and the world opens up again, we should do that coffee-shop thing." So while we were in lockdown, we put into motion a plan to open up this horror-themed coffee shop. And that's the Brewed.

It's been about six months, and I enjoy every day I go in there. I hadn't worked a person-to-person retail sort of job in a really long time, so I really enjoy having regular customers and talking to random strangers on a daily basis. I still love coffee, and I love making coffee drinks. Somehow it's magically worked out.

It gets a little hectic sometimes. That 7 AM opening shift can be real difficult when you've DJed till three, but you make the best of it. I'm doing what I love, so you do what you gotta do. 

 @imLeor



The Brewed's decor is steeped in horror—Jason Deuchler is standing in front of a re-creation of a mural from Candyman's lair in the original film, and he's checking out a sandworm from *Beetlejuice* built for the shop's Halloween party earlier this month.  STEVEN PIPER FOR CHICAGO READER

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TUE NOV 08
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WED NOV 09
DEATH FROM ABOVE 1979
+ The OBGMs



WED NOV 16
WILD NOTHING
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SATURDAY OCT 29 / 10:30PM / 18+

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HOLLY HUMBERSTONE
+ Allison Ponthier

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NOV 08 BLU DETIGER
NOV 09 DEATH FROM ABOVE 1979
NOV 10 MEN I TRUST
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PICK OF THE WEEK

Mohawk Johnson makes his big return to live music behind the fiery single “Outside”



Mohawk Johnson in 2021. ISIAH "THOUGHTPOET" VENEY AND JADE LANDON FOR CHICAGO READER

ELIY ORCKO, MOHAWK JOHNSON, DAVIS THE DORCHESTER BULLY

Fri 10/28, 7 PM, the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West, \$20, \$15 in advance. 18+

FROM AUGUST 2020 TILL JUNE 2022, after being arrested at a Loop protest to defund CPD and abolish ICE, Chicago rapper Jeremy “Mohawk” Johnson was subject to the torments of Cook County’s buggy electronic monitoring system and its Kafkaesque bureaucracy. During that same period, he released music that’s boisterous, funny, and vulnerable. The bulk of it came out in the first half of 2021, ending with the intense single “Villainous”; then he was silent till the searching EP *Trash* on Valentine’s Day 2022, which closes with a soliloquy about a toxic relationship, victimhood, and community. Four months later, a Cook County judge released Johnson from electronic monitoring, and a few weeks ago the rapper released his first piece of new music in eight months: the big-footed, acerbic single “Outside.” The song pairs Johnson with producer Naughta, who collaborated with him on his very first single (2018’s “Hush”). Naughta expanded Johnson’s taste in dance music, and you can hear that all over “Outside”—the instrumental stokes the rapper’s exuberant performance with clusters of minimalist, blown-out bass, an ascending staccato percussive loop, and a sample of what sounds like a siren. Johnson switches his flow between ironclad and butter-smooth while taking aim at the broken justice system and gassing himself up. “Outside” commands everyone in earshot to get on their feet and move, which bodes well for Johnson’s gig at the Promontory; this will be his first in-person concert since the start of the pandemic. —LEOR GALIL

CONCERT PREVIEW

THURSDAY 27

PATRICK SHIROISHI See also Fri 10/28 and Fri 11/4. *Shiroishi improvises in a quartet with Mai Sugimoto, Lia Kohl, and Avreeayl Ra. 8:30 PM, Elastic Arts, 3429 W. Diversey #208, \$15.*

Identity, versatility, and productivity intertwine in the music of Patrick Shiroishi. Best known as an alto saxophonist, the Los Angeles-based musician plays five different saxophones, guitar, and keyboards. His ever-growing discography includes 65 album-length releases with his name on the cover, and that number balloons to more than 100 if you count records where he’s a sideman or band member.

Shiroishi’s approach varies according to context. He’s waxed smooth with the ambient-oriented virtual ensemble Fuubutsushi; played convoluted, stentorian prog with Oort Smog; wielded scything feedback opening for experimental metal outfit Sumac; engaged in hard-edged, fleet-footed free improvisation with the likes of Jessica Ackerley, Thom Nguyen, Kyle Motl, or Vinny Golia; and explored delicate acoustic timbres on *Yellow* (Dinzu Artifacts), a superb new LP with kotoist Kozue Matsumoto and shakuhachi player Shoshi Watanabe.

While no less diverse, his solo recordings are more personal. *I Shouldn’t Have to Worry When My Parents Go Outside* (Distant Bloom, 2021) uses poetic recitations and elegiac piano-and-synth sketches to grieve the corrosive influence of racism. *Hidemi* (American Dreams, 2021) expresses the resilience and transcendence he found in his grandfather’s life story with intricate ensembles of overdubbed saxophones.

Shiroishi will play in typically diverse settings during his first visit to Chicago. For his local debut on Thursday, he’ll improvise with three local musicians whose collective experiences include performance art and free jazz: saxophonist Mai Sugimoto, cellist Lia Kohl, and drummer Avreeayl Ra. The next night, he’ll play with violinist and vocalist Macie Stewart as part of the one-year anniversary celebration for the Pleiades Series, whose concerts seek to create welcoming opportunities for femme and nonbinary artists to improvise. And on Friday, November 4, Shiroishi will play in Jordan Reyes’s ensemble Ark of Teeth to celebrate the release of Reyes’s LP *Everything Is Always* (American Dreams).

—BILL MEYER

FRIDAY 28

MOHAWK JOHNSON See *Pick of the Week* at left. *Eliy Orcko headlines; Mohawk Johnson and Davis the Dorchester Bully open. 7 PM, the Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West, \$20, \$15 in advance. 18+*

PATRICK SHIROISHI See *Thu 10/27*. *Shiroishi performs an improvised duo with violinist and vocalist Macie Stewart as part of the one-year anniversary of the Pleiades Series, which also includes a set from Robbie Lynn Hunsinger and*

an open jam session. 8:30 PM, Elastic Arts, 3429 W. Diversey #208, \$15. [🎫](#)

CLAUDIO SIMONETTI'S GOBLIN *The band perform their score to Suspiria. (They'll play the same show at the same venue Thu 12/15.) 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport. General admission tickets sold out; box seats available for \$390. 17+*

Being a fan of Italian horror prog rockers Goblin can be massively rewarding and profoundly confusing. Famous for mind-bendingly complex tunes as well as their scores for late-70s films by the likes of Dario Argento and George Romero, Goblin dissolved in the early 80s, and since they began re-forming a couple decades ago they've existed in multiple parallel versions and under several names. When they played onstage in 2009, using the handle Back to the Goblin, it was the first time they'd done so in 32 years. Goblin's studio lineup shifted radically and often, and their various latter-day touring incarnations have been similarly protean, led by different original members or newcomers. This can lead to unpredictable quality in Goblin-associated performances.

These various versions of Goblin arose from the band's initial 2000 reunion, which reopened some old wounds. In 2001 keyboardist Claudio Simonetti began touring with his horror-music tribute band, Daemona (later called Claudio Simonetti's Goblin), which he'd formed in the late 90s. I saw this incarnation of Goblin in 2013, and I wasn't fully satisfied by the nu-metal edge that the newbies in the group brought to its sound. In 2017 I saw my fave modern Goblin show so far, which included the entire original lineup minus Simonetti and added the band's second organist, Maurizio Guarini—he'd come into the fold in the mid-70s, right after they recorded their classic score for Argento's *Profondo Rosso*.

Sadly, original Goblin guitarist Massimo Morante—a crucial part of their heavy, fuzzy sound—passed away earlier this year. Herculean bassist Fabio Pignatelli and jazzy drummer Agostino Marangolo have carried on as Goblin Rebirth (with the help of some new recruits), and Simonetti is once again touring as Claudio Simonetti's Goblin, this time backed by members of Portuguese band Black Mamba. In live footage from 2019, this configuration looks a bit like your uncle and auntie after an embarrassing industrial makeover, and to my ears they still overdo the thrashy guitar tone and conventional shredding (as much as Goblin are beloved by metalheads, they never really did that back in the day). All that said, Simonetti is in fine form, dueling with himself on multiple keyboards—his equipment sounds more modern than the gear he used in the 70s and 80s, but it still generally evokes the right feel.

For this show, Claudio Simonetti's Goblin will perform their score to Argento's 1977 masterpiece *Suspiria*, a beloved flick saturated with florid evil—the perfect sort of spookiness we all crave around Halloween. I saw the Daemona lineup do the same show at Metro in 2014, and their sound was improved over the previous year's gig—they even helped me get past the awkwardness of standing for an entire film, and I didn't mind that they were louder than the dialogue. It was amazing to experience such cinematic synesthesia live.

I'll always secretly wish that the surviving original members of Goblin would make peace and

join forces to play *Suspiria* again. But that day will probably never come, so this Goblinophile will take what he can get and love it—even if (in true *Suspiria* fashion) it's somehow the musical equivalent of wriggling around in a room full of barbed wire.

—STEVE KRAKOW

YESTERDAYNEVERHAPPENED *This release party for The Demon at Dusk includes an interactive art installation. Ayeeyo, Swami Sound, El Brujo, and Marceline Steel open. 5 PM, Congruent Space, 1216 W. Grand. [FREE](#) [🎫](#)*

Angel Day makes freewheeling underground pop as Yesterdayneverhappened, and their new second album, *The Demon at Dusk* (Loveshock/Daybreak), zips around with such restless energy you might think they never sleep. The Chicago producer and vocalist has a knack for bricolage and an ear for the cutting edge, evident in the album's effusive collision of dance music, hip-hop, and R&B; their local Daybreak parties book Black and Black trans artists working to reshape nightlife around the country. Day blends an ocean of sounds with great care, steering their songs into joyful abandon and stopping just short of unrestrained chaos. On “Brimstone Jujū,” Day raps with unbothered cool over a craggy landscape built from jackhammer bass, a cyclone of drum 'n' bass percussion, and reversed synth notes that sound like a haunted organ. It's an impressive feat to maintain equanimity amid such pandemonium, and throughout *The Demon at Dusk*, Day provides a demonstration of how liberating it can be to ride out a tornado of your own creation. It's often a great way to have fun too. —LEOR GALIL

SATURDAY 29

JOHN MCCOWEN 3 PM, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago Rooms, second floor north, 78 E. Washington. [FREE](#) [🎫](#)

John McCowen has made a career of transforming the contrabass clarinet into an instrument all his own. Born in Carbondale and now based in Reykjavik, Iceland, the composer got involved with music as a hardcore vocalist in the mid-2000s, then spent several years playing saxophone and flute with stoner outfit Tweak Bird before turning his focus to the clarinet. In 2009, he was introduced to Eric Mandat, a professor at Southern Illinois University who specializes in extended clarinet techniques, and they started a musical relationship that extends to this day. McCowen would bring recordings of his own playing to private lessons with Mandat, who would then notate them. McCowen's formative musical education began there, and would continue when he attended Mills College to study with avant-garde jazz luminary Roscoe Mitchell, an experience that has bolstered his constant desire to innovate.

Some of McCowen's best early recordings can be heard on 2017's *Solo Contra* (released by Chicago's International Anthem label). Its three tracks act as a dialectic: “Fur Korv” is a contemplative drone, with every breath and key press deeply felt, “Chopper HD” is a noisier exploration of multiphonics, and “Berths 1-3” traverses both modes. Even when McCowen performs with another musician, as he



Patrick Shiroishi
[📷](#) AMBER NAVRAN



John McCowen
[📷](#) BERGRÜN
[📷](#) SNÆBJÖRNSDÓTTIR

did with Madison Greenstone on 2018's *Mundana I-V* (Edition Wandelweiser), his restraint highlights their instruments' full capabilities rather than the musicians' individual contributions. That album's five tracks demonstrate mesmerizing patience and rigor while methodically showcasing the different tonal colors that the clarinet can provide. Last year's *Robeson Formants* (Superpang) feels similarly educational; McCowen merges his contrabass clarinet with sine tones, and the composition becomes an exercise in hearing how the emerging sounds overlap.

McCowen's most recent album, September's *Models of Duration* (Astral Spirits/Dinzu Artefacts), is also his most accomplished. Two “Duration” pieces home in on his clarinet's rumbling rhythmic pulses, while “Foggd” and “Hoskin” are blistering in their quietly abrasive multiphonics. McCowen will play works from the record at this Chicago Cultural Center performance, presented by local arts organization Lampo. After experiencing their striking austerity in a live setting, concertgoers might

just walk away with a wholly new impression of the contrabass clarinet. —JOSHUA MINSOO KIM

SUNDAY 30

KING LOUIE *Do or Die headline; King Louie, DaWreck, and Psycho & Pazzo open. 7:30 PM, the Forge, 22 W. Cass, Joliet, \$30, \$70 reserved balcony. 18+*

Last month drill giant and Chicago rap royal King Louie dropped his first full-length in six years, *Life With Louie* (Man Up Band Up/Machine Entertainment Group). I hadn't really reckoned with what that long gap might mean for the world of rap. Louie's string of early-2010s mixtapes gave rappers around the city (and the world) something to aspire to, and 2014's *Tony* in particular will go down as one of the best full-lengths from the first wave of drill, a move-



Yesterdayneverhappened ANNA CLAIRE BARLOW



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 Chicago Blues Guide)



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continued from 47

ment that's since inspired some of the most exciting MCs to emerge from the UK and NYC. *Life With Louie* hit me like I'd been stumbling through the desert and finally had my first sip of fresh water from an oasis. Louie saunters through smoky samples ("Mind Yo Business"), bass-heavy collages ("Si Si Señor"), and twilight-calm synth melodies ("Restless") with the same nonchalant flair. The way he tosses off his neat, blunt verses will convince you that these tracks were built from the ground up to hang on his every syllable. The 25 minutes of *Life With Louie* fly by, and the King makes the most of that brief run time. Atop the clobbering, spiky bass of "Kisses," Louie claims he can persuade a car to buy an ignition or sell the ocean to fishes, surreal boasts that in a brief moment light up an already hot track. He's impressed me plenty of times already, but on *Life With Louie* he wins me over again and again. —LEOR GALLI

MIGHTMARE 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*, 1035 N. Western, \$15 (\$12 in advance). 21+

Sarah Shook is best known as the singer and guitarist for rowdy country band Sarah Shook & the Disarmers, but *Cruel Liars*, the debut album from their latest project, the darker and more intimate *Mightmare*, proves that pigeonholing them would be a grave mistake. Shook grew up in a fundamentalist Christian household where their exposure to music was limited to classical and religious styles, but in their late teens a friend turned them on to secular music and they became enamored with indie rock. After relocating from the northeast to North Carolina, they found their stride as a country musician, naming their first band Sarah Shook & the Devil as a tongue-in-cheek nod to their pious upbringing. By then, they were a divorced, single parent in

their early 20s, working several jobs to make ends meet while gigging on the side. With the Disarmers, launched in 2014, Shook has poured their rebellious spirit and hardscrabble wisdom into three albums of effusive, outlaw country music that elicits a smile as often as a tear in the proverbial beer—most recently with *Nightroamer*, which came out on Thirty Tigers in February.

If it weren't already clear that Shook has a knack for reinvention, *Cruel Liars* provides ample evidence. They began working on the material in the pandemic lockdown of early 2020 and wound up writing, recording, and producing the record at home, playing all the instruments (with the exception of a handful of bass tracks by Aaron Oliva). More bedroom than barroom, *Cruel Liars* grapples with heartache, loss, and self-discovery in intricate tunes that merge Shook's indie-rock influences with dark, stripped-down Americana and pop. While the record is most powerful in its most intense moments, such as the driving, shadowy "Enemy," the whole thing is made more compelling by Shook's characteristically sharp lyrics and richly layered vocal harmonies. *Mightmare* doesn't sound like the Disarmers, but Shook's ability to mine something universal from intimate thoughts and tales connects them at their core. The strength of this first release already makes an urgent question of where Shook will take the project from here. —JAMIE LUDWIG

FRIDAY4

JORDAN REYES'S ARK OF TEETH *Reyes leads an ensemble that includes Travis, Ambre Sala, Patrick Shiroishi (see Thu 10/27), and Eli Winter.* 7:30 PM, *International Museum of Surgical Science*, 1524 N. Lake Shore, \$22. 18+

Experimental musician Jordan Reyes has dipped his fingers into many genres. His early works display his devotion to the modular synth, but he's increasingly branched out in unpredictable directions, like flood waters overflowing a creek. The Chicago-based musician (and occasional *Reader* contributor) delved into dark ambient on 2020's *Fairchild Soundtrack + Border Land* (a score for a disturbing indie film combined with an unrelated but similar-sounding EP), while his 2020 full-length *Sand Like Stardust* is a masterpiece of western gothic.

In addition to his own musical projects, Reyes runs the eclectic American Dreams label and performs as a member of long-running, brilliant Chicago avant-garde band Ono. In recent years, he's also battled anxiety that's left him with a crippling dread of death—just in time for a lethal global pandemic. Reyes's struggles to regulate and direct the impulses and phantasms of his own mind led him to explore Zen, and that practice infuses his new release, *Everything Is Always*. Though he usually records solo, this album features a large ensemble, including cellist Lia Kohl, pedal-steel guitarist Sam Wagster, and vocalist Ambre Sala (who's married to Reyes). "The Tide" introduces the album's themes with a rhythmic, repetitive chant that recalls the mindful breathing that can calm a panic attack while also suggesting the torment of experiencing one.

On the long-form spoken-word piece "Tralineaation," Ono cofounder and front man Travis takes center stage among mounting drones as he shares a campfire story of Black resistance to violent industrialization and capitalism set in a metaphoric landscape. "Kraken" is a massive, metallic incantation to primal fears of the unknown—and to how fear itself can lead to enlightenment. "Maybe I'm the Dust" is a quieter, more intimate song of acceptance. In the haunting world of *Everything Is Always*, fear must be confronted, and the record suggests that some-

MUSIC

times the best way out is through.

For this concert at the International Museum of Surgical Science, Reyes will play with an ensemble billed as Jordan Reyes's Ark of Teeth. It includes Travis, Sala, Will Ballantyne, Patrick Shiroishi (see Thu 10/27), and Eli Winter, though Reyes says the lineup will shift for future performances. Their set will consist of material from *Everything Is Always* as well as some new songs, and Reyes tells me that they've created a theatrical production, complete with handmade art, that will enhance the atmosphere of the already dramatic setting. —**MONICA KENDRICK**

ALBUM REVIEWS

BRUTUS, *UNISON LIFE*

Sargent House

wearebrutus.bandcamp.com/album/unison-life

Brutus have entered their "ambitious third album" phase, and it's really working for them. The Belgian trio made waves with their second record, 2019's *Nest*, which showcased their posthardcore-meets-postrock chops. Anchored by the soaring vocals and complex rhythms of singer and drummer Stefanie Mannaerts, their dynamic, aggressive songs swerved between emo introspection and over-the-top epic climaxes. All the elements that made Brutus so irresistible on their first two albums are back on the brand-new *Unison Life*—and this time they're dialed up to 11. The hooks are bigger, the guitar riffs are more surgical, the bass is heavier than hell, and the songs feel louder and more layered than ever. Brutus have always had a flair for the dramatic, which can be felt in their heart-wrenching vocals and expansive arrangements, but here Mannaerts has unquestionably stepped into her position in the spotlight. She's more than just a singing drummer—she's an emotional powerhouse with a massive set of pipes. With *Unison Life*, Brutus are clearly operating on a new level. It's catchy, it's heavy, it's fun, and the combination has me coming back to it over and over. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

CLOUD RAT, *THRESHOLD*

Artobject

cloudrat.bandcamp.com/album/threshold

Michigan trio Cloud Rat have grown steadily from their solid grindcore foundations into one of the most boundary-pushing outfits in a generation of heavy punk-driven bands. They've put out more than 20 releases since forming in 2009, but this prolificacy hasn't been accompanied by a holding pattern in their songwriting—their records feel increasingly packed with fresh ideas. That's especially clear on their latest, *Threshold*. Cloud Rat made it during the pandemic, and ear-splitting vocalist Madison Marshall told *Invisible Oranges* that the band's creative process started from a "point of spiritual breakdown." Tracks such as "Aluminum Branches" and "Inner Controller (Lucid Running Home)" feel as saturated with urgency, rage, and dread as that nauseating moment during lockdown when you realized that COVID wasn't going to be tamed in a few weeks or even months—and that you'd have to make it through the duration, however long that was, without going out of your mind. Mercifully,

Cloud Rat infuse *Threshold* with plenty of catharsis too. The brooding "12-22-09" satisfies with doomy, post-hardcore atmospheres, while the shimmering "Kaleidoscope" drips with dismal beauty thanks to its serene guitars, uplifting synths, and rotating rhythmic patterns. Even at 30 minutes, it feels like it's over in the blink of an eye. You'll want to keep your finger near the "play" button so you can hear it all over again. —**JAMIE LUDWIG**

FIELD MEDIC, *GROW YOUR HAIR LONG IF YOU'RE WANTING TO SEE SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN CHANGE*

Run for Cover

fieldmedic.bandcamp.com/album/grow-your-hair-long-if-you-re-wanting-to-see-something-that-you-can-change

You can arguably predict the mood of a Field Medic album by the look of Kevin Patrick Sullivan's hair in the cover art. On the front of 2017's cheeky, joyful *Songs From the Sunroom* the lo-fi folk singer-songwriter's red curls are big and bouncy; on 2020's more somber *Floral Prince*, they're closely cropped and hidden beneath a blue cap. The title of Field Medic's new record, *Grow Your Hair Long If You're Wanting to See Something That You Can Change*, is cryptic enough that it might suggest optimism, but the photo of Sullivan on its cover dashes that hope. He sits on a bed, shirtless and hunched over, with matted locks and a sleepy, despondent expression, as if he's deciding whether to shower for the first time in days or put it off until tomorrow.

Neglect of self-care can be a subtle sign of depression, but Sullivan is anything but subtle about the gut-wrenching personal suffering that drives the album. "I wanna fall off the face of the Earth / And probably die," he sings to start opener "Always Emptiness." Taken out of context, those lyrics could sound like a cry for help, but Sullivan, who's been releasing music as Field Medic since 2013, has increasingly used his project to process struggles with addiction and mental illness. Encouraged by the positive feedback he received for his work on *Floral Prince*, including the confessional "It's So Lonely Being Sober," he's taken *Grow Your Hair Long* as a chance to delve deeper into his psyche while employing bleaker, blunter language. Throughout the record, harrowing lyrics rub up against gentle percussion and silky guitar, harmonica, and banjo in a collision of punk angst and tender, folksy melodies. While Sullivan's characteristic kitschiness peeks through at times, every glimpse of levity is underpinned by darkness. On "Noonday Sun," he rhymes "Feels like I'm riding in a hearse" with "Everything went from bad to worse," and he's said that early album single "I Think About You All the Time" is a love song not to a partner but to alcohol.

Sullivan typically records on his own—sometimes using his phone or a four-track—but he departed from his usual solitary process for *Grow Your Hair Long*, enlisting Nate Lich on drums and Chicago-based multi-instrumentalist Nick Levine (who makes music as Jodi) on steel guitar. The resulting sound is richer than Field Medic's previous lo-fi stylings, with plenty of breathing room in its more upbeat moments. But even in those spots, a closer listen reveals an underlying anguish. Internal torment can be all-consuming, and Sullivan is no longer afraid to acknowledge that. —**DORA SEGALL**

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Advance Base, Spencer Radcliffe 11/28, 8 PM, Hideout
Alter Bridge, Mammoth WVH, Red 2/18/2023, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre **🎫**
Archers of Loaf, Weird Nightmare 1/13/2023, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge **🎫**
Jor'dan Armstrong 1/11/2023, 8 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Yerin Baek 12/11, 8 PM, Chop Shop **🎫**
Balkan Bump 12/16, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Chris Barron 1/11/2023, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Bayside, I Am the Avalanche, Koyo 2/26/2023, 7:30 PM, Metro, 18+
Bled Tape, Harvey Waters, Stalled 11/28, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **🎫**
Bodeans 11/25, 8 PM; 11/26, 7 and 10 PM; 11/27, 7 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Bonelang, Aaron Day 12/29, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Bonelang, Kweku Collins 12/30, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+
Cancer Bats, War on Women 12/5, 7:30 PM, Cobra Lounge, 17+
TC Carson 1/20/2023, 8 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Chicago Soul Jazz Collective featuring Yvonne Gage 12/20, 8 and 10 PM, Jazz Showcase **🎫**
Gustavo Cortiñas 12/15, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Dangerous Summer, Like Pacific, My Kid Brother 11/26, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Delta Rae 4/28/2023, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
DKV Trio 12/29-12/30, 8:30 PM, Elastic **🎫**
Dwllrs 11/15, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Mark Farina 11/26, 10 PM, Smart Bar

Flostradamus 1/14/2023, 10 PM, Sound-Bar
Andy Frasco & the U.N., Little Stranger 12/9, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Freddie Gibbs 12/17-12/18, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Frenship, Kate the Dreamer 12/7, 7 PM, Subterranean **🎫**
Robbie Fulks with Howard Levy, Nora O'Connor, Robbie Gjersee, Gerald Dowd, and Laura Orshaw 12/30, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Robbie Fulks with Redd Volkaert, Dallas Wayne, Paul Carestia, and Gerald Dowd 12/31, 9:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Jake Xerxes Fussell, James Elkington 12/10, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
Robert Glasper 11/29-12/2, 7 and 10:30 PM, City Winery **🎫**
DJ Ashina Hamilton, DJ Paul Caston 11/19, 9 PM, Punch House **🎫**
Heavy Sounds 12/18, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Erwin Helfer, Lluís Coloma, Cliff Dubose, Richard Gibbs, Bishop Dwayne Mason 11/19, 7 and 9:30 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
Kristin Hersh, Ernie Hendrickson 11/20, 7 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Hot Sardines 12/11, 4 and 7 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
iLe 3/8/2023, 9 PM, Metro, 18+
Illanoize presents Issa New Wave Concert featuring Casasia Tae, Emperious, Diego Da God, Nina B, Nut G & Ju Jilla, YK Supe 12/13, 8 PM, the Promontory
Infamous Stringdusters, Armchair Boogie 11/18, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+

Interesting Bricks, Conan Neutron & the Secret Friends, Ghost Forest, Fresh Hell 12/30, 9 PM, Reggies Music Joint
Ivy Lab, Oakk, Nikki Nair, Lake Hills 2/10/2023, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
J.I.D, Smino 3/21/2023, 6:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom **🎫**
John Walt Day: Five Year Anniversary featuring Saba, MFNMelo, Joseph Chilliams, Frsh Waters, DaedaePivot 11/26, 7 PM, Metro **🎫**
Dermod Kennedy 6/7/2023, 7:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion **🎫**
Kenny Mason 12/13, 7 PM, Subterranean **🎫**
Denny Laine 2/19/2023, 7 PM, City Winery **🎫**
Albert Lee 1/7/2023, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Livwutang, Magin (live), Cae Monãe, Ariel Zetina 11/12, 10 PM, Smart Bar
Lorna Shore, Aborted, Ingested, Angelmaker, Ov Sulfur 11/15, 6:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Mãneskin 11/17, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom **🎫**
Meechy Darko 12/1, 8 PM, Metro, 18+
Miss Monique 12/3, 10 PM, Prysm Nightclub
Modern Club, They Are Gutting a Body of Water 11/25, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Nicole Moudaber, Will Clarke, Juliet Fox 12/9, 10 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+
Movement, Mike Love 12/1, 7:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
New Junk City, Two Houses, Permanent Residue 11/18, 9 PM, Gman Tavern
Odd Mob 12/3, 10 PM, Spy Bar
Oddisee & Good Company 12/8, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Aoife O'Donovan performing Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska 4/13/2023, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Otnes, Carlile, Kasia 11/23, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Over the Rhine 12/4, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **🎫**
Party'z, Rust Ring, Hi Ho 12/16, 9 PM, Gman Tavern
Joel Paterson 12/9, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
John Petrucci, Meanstreak 11/13, 7:30 PM, the Vic **🎫**
Poi Dog Pondering 1/27/2023-1/28/2023, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Margo Price, Lola Kirke 2/21/2023, 7 PM, the Vic **🎫**
Przmaty, Strange Lounge Music, Mehve 11/22, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Rebirth Brass Band 1/13/2023, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Rebirth Brass Band 1/14/2023, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Ike Reilly Assassination 12/15, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Dave Rempis, Jim Baker, Joshua Abrams, and Avreeayl Rai 1/15/2023, 9 PM, Hungry Rain
Maggie Rogers, Del Water Gap 2/17/2023, 7:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom **🎫**
Jeff Rosenstock, Laura Stevenson, Gladie 12/9, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Josh Rouse 12/1, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Bobby Rush 11/25, 8 PM, Buddy Guy's Legends
Siamés 12/15, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Claudio Simonetti's Goblin perform the score to Suspiria 12/15, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Slaughter Beach, Dog 11/16, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Sosa 11/26, 10 PM, Spy Bar
Sounds of the Street Festival featuring Lower Class Brats, Get Dead, Rotten Stitches, Doc Rotten, Fear City, Subversives, Decayed, Shitizens, and more 2/10/2023, 3 PM; 2/11/2023, 2 PM, Reggies Rock Club **🎫**
Spun Out, Valebol, Hazel City 12/2, 10 PM, Empty Bottle
Sunn O)))'s Shoshin Duo 12/13, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Taco 11/26, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Tommy Four Seven, DJ Hyperactive, Brenda 11/25, 10 PM, Smart Bar
Umek 12/3, 10 PM, Sound-Bar
Undeath, 200 Stab Wounds, Enforced, Phobophilic 12/15, 7:30 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+
Ken Vandermark/Tim Daisly Duo 11/12/2023, 8:30 PM, Elastic **🎫**
Vnssa 12/9, 10 PM, Prysm Nightclub
Gerald Walker, Sledgren 11/19, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

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Wallace 11/30, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
War on X-Mas night one featuring Brendan Kelly with Neil, Josh Caterer as Hermy the Misfit Elf 12/2, 9 PM, Reggies Music Joint
War on X-Mas night two featuring Falcon, Dopamines, Tightwire, Won't Stay Dead 12/3, 9 PM, Reggies Rock Club, 17+
Webb Wilder & the Beatnecks 2/4/2023, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Westerman 5/17/2023, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Derek Worthington's Lossy Codelcs 11/26/2023, 8:30 PM, Elastic **🎫**
Yam Haus 1/14/2023, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+
Yonder Mountain String Band 2/3/2023-2/4/2023, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **🎫**
Yot Club, Toledo 12/7, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Yungmanny 12/6, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

UPDATED

Riz La Vie 3/7/2023, 8 PM, Subterranean, rescheduled, 17+

UPCOMING

Beabadoobee, Lowertown 11/29, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre **🎫**
Black Lips 11/16-11/17, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Collie Buddz, Shayway 11/10, 9 PM, Bottom Lounge, 18+
Dark Star Orchestra 11/11, 8 PM, the Vic, 18+
Steve Dawson & the Lucid Dreams, Course 11/11, 8 PM, FitzGerald's
Dream Syndicate 11/11, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall
Henhouse Prowlers with Allie Kral, Old Shue 11/25, 7:30 PM, Park West **🎫**
Demi Lovato, Royal & the Serpent 11/10, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont **🎫**
Meat Wave, Stuck, Stress Positions 11/12, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Noso, Josephine 11/17, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Off!, Zulu 11/17, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall
Beth Orton, Heather Woods Broderick 11/10, 7:30 PM, Irish American Heritage Center **🎫** **📍**



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

GOSSIP WOLF CAN BE a little fuzzy when it comes to math, but bassist and vocalist **Jon "Necromancer" Woodring**, guitarist **"Carcass" Chris Svoboda**, and drummer **Joe "Apocalyptic Warlord" Schaeffer** of local death-metal trio **Bones** have been raising an unholy ruckus together for decades. (Bones formed in 2011, and in the aughts they all played together in Usurper, a blackened thrash band that Woodring and Schaeffer joined in the 90s.) On Friday, October 28, Bones drop their fourth album, **Vomit**, via Indianapolis metal label **Disorder Recordings**. This wolf is happy to report that the record is chockablock with the kind of putrid vocals, gristly guitar tones, and sinewy, sludgy rhythms that can only be mastered by old hands who seriously know what the fuck they're doing! On Saturday, October 29, Bones celebrate by opening for fellow death-metal legends **Autopsy** at **Reggies Rock Club**; also on the bill are local metal mafiacs **Cardiac Arrest** and **Molder** as well as comedian **Dave Hill**.

Long-running annual underground hip-hop and beat-scene party **Boombastic** takes over the **California Clipper** on Sunday, October 30. **"Boo!bastic"** features DJ sets from **Large Professor**, **Rude Onederful**, **Doc West**, **Supreme Court**, **Shon Dervis**, and more! The free party starts at 8 PM, and Uprise skate shop sponsors a midnight costume contest.

Thursday, October 27, is the 40th birthday of **Prince's** album **1999**. To celebrate the same way people did when it came out, you'd have to party like it's 2039, but luckily there's a better option! That night, Metro's new media and civic events producer, **Jill Hopkins**, teams up with music critic **Jack Riedy** (who's written about the Purple One for the *Reader*, including a 2019 story about 1999 and house music) to DJ hours of Prince material at a free **Gman Tavern** night called **"Life Is Just a Party."** It kicks off at 8 PM, and Gman will pour Purple Rain cocktails for the occasion. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or email gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

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SAVAGE LOVE

QUICKIES

A threesome is probably safer than a shower

Nonmonogamous dads, swapping holes, and more

BY DAN SAVAGE

Q: Can someone be both homosexual and asexual? I can't wrap my brain around this one.

A: Sure, a person can be asexual while also being homosexual . . . because asexuality is a spectrum, and that spectrum is broad and vast and includes people who experience sexual attraction and sometimes choose to act on their sexual attraction. Basically, some asexual guys want boyfriends but don't wanna fuck 'em at all, other asexual guys want boyfriends but don't wanna fuck 'em much. It's really not that confusing . . . unless you happen to be dating a guy who either doesn't know he's asexual or knows it and hasn't told you, in which case you're likely to be as confused as you are frustrated.

Q: I'm a recently divorced 53-year-old bi-curious woman living on the East Coast. I was with my ex for most of my life and he never mentioned this, but since I have begun dating, each new partner has told me how tight I am. You would think this was a good thing! I recently began dating a man who says he loves how tight I am. However, he also says it is making him come quickly. His marriage recently ended too, so he hasn't had a lot of sexual experience either. So, I don't know if he just comes quickly or if it's because of me. Do you have any suggestions?

A: Maybe it's you—maybe it's that you're tight (which most men regard as a good thing)—

or maybe he's a premature ejaculator and he'd rather blame you than admit to it. Either way, don't let him stick his dick in you until after he's made you come at least once.

Q: Why do all the gay guys in my age group—guys I like—not want me? And why do only a few men above my age group—guys I also like—want me?

A: It's a mystery—a mystery best pondered sitting on the dick of an older guy who wanted you and got you.

Q: Any tips for safe sex during threesomes? Thinking about having a MFF threesome!

A: There's no such thing as safe sex, there's only safer sex. To be completely safe, skip the threesome, stay home, and take a nice, long, relaxing bath instead. Or not. According to the CDC, every year a quarter of a million people wind up in the emergency room after a fall in the bathroom and thousands more never make it to the ER because they DIED naked, wet, and alone after falling out of their tubs. Meanwhile, fewer than 50,000 people are diagnosed with primary and secondary syphilis annually. So, you're probably safer at that threesome—provided you don't shower before or after it. Or ever again. (Full disclosure: Almost 700,000 people got gonorrhea in 2020 and 1.5 million people got chlamydia.)

As for making the sex safer, get tested, share your STI statuses, and use condoms. (Condoms, when correctly used, will protect you from syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, HIV, and pregnancy.) Basically, follow the same risk-reduction strategies you would follow for a twosome—with one addition: if M wants to fuck both Fs, he needs to change condoms each time he swaps holes. And to make your threesome emotionally safer, all three of you should be clear about what you do and don't want, and everyone should agree—out loud—that if someone feels left out, unsafe, or uncomfortable, they can call a time-out without the other two pouting about it.

Q: Newly nonmonogamous and dating after 16 years of monogamy. How to lighten the “let down” feeling when a date I've been looking forward to is over and I have to go back to my “regular” life?

A: Your marriage, aka your “regular” life, will fall apart if fun (going out, doing things, having adventures) is reserved for dates and stress (paying bills, doing chores, raising kids) is reserved for your spouse. New-relationship-energy-infused dates are effortless fun (usually), whereas keeping things fun with a spouse requires thought, effort, and MDMA.

Q: You always say that a new dad has to be willing to go with little or no sex for a long time and

can't bring up nonmonogamy. Does the same go for the mom if she's the one who wants it more?

A: Women who've just given birth are usually less interested in (or capable of) sex for all the obvious reasons (physical trauma, physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion), but studies have shown that men's testosterone levels dip after becoming fathers, which can tank their libidos. Regardless of who wants it more, the best time for two people to discuss nonmonogamy is BEFORE they've scrambled their DNA together, not after. If you didn't have that conversation before becoming parents, you should wait a year—at least—before bringing it up.

Q: In college my boyfriend found out his girlfriend was cheating on him with a friend. He told his friend he didn't care, since he was planning to break up with his girlfriend at the end of the semester, and they both kept fucking her. She didn't know they both knew. What she did was wrong (cheating), but I think my boyfriend and his friend did something worse, as she didn't know she was being “shared” like this. How do I get my boyfriend to understand?

A: Sharing your boyfriend . . . ❌

To read the entire column, go to [Savage.Love](https://www.savagelove.com).
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An Evening With Author

PEMON RAMI

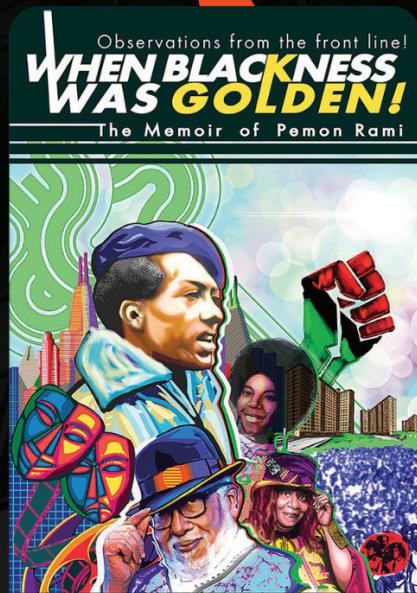
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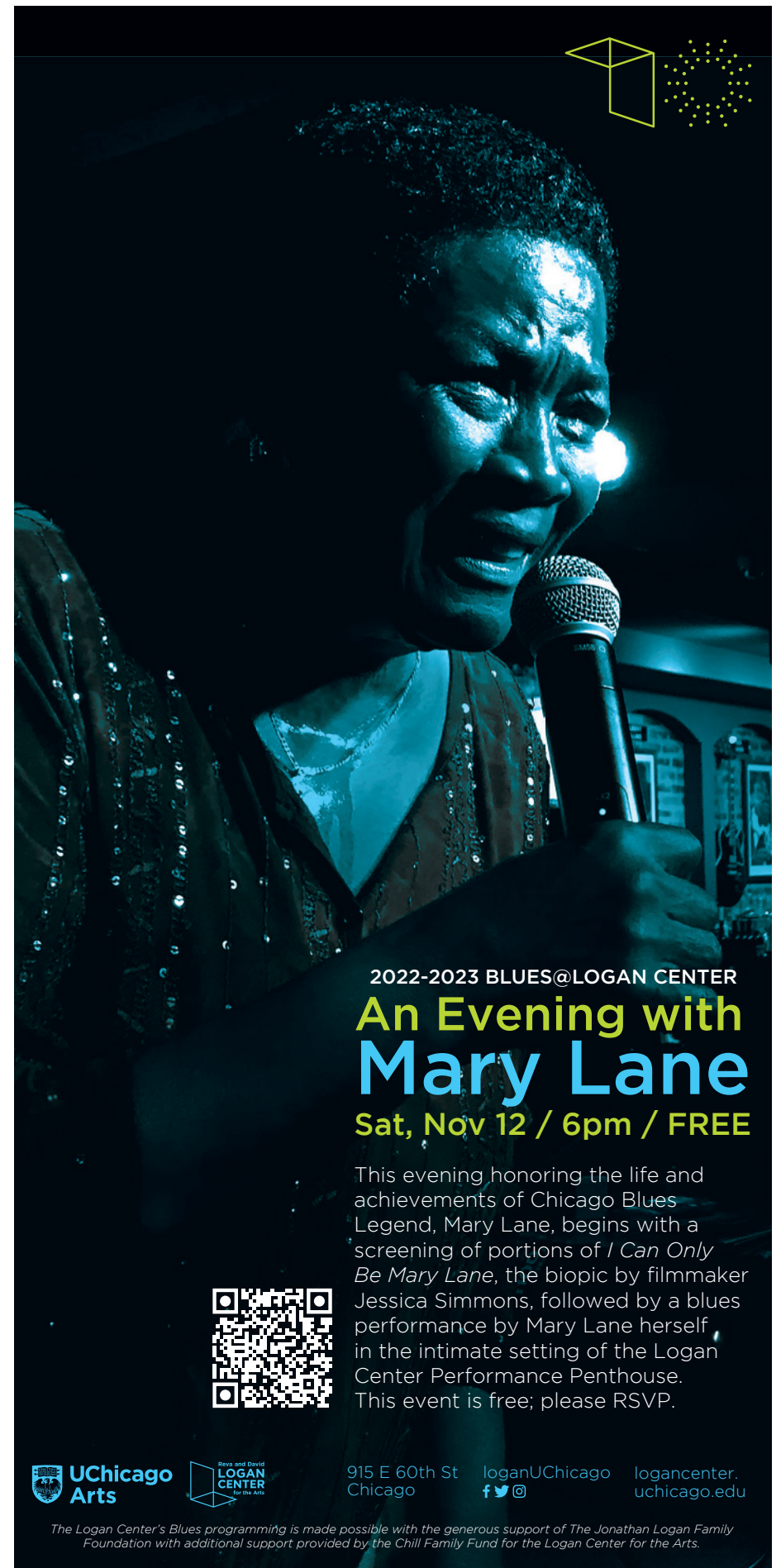
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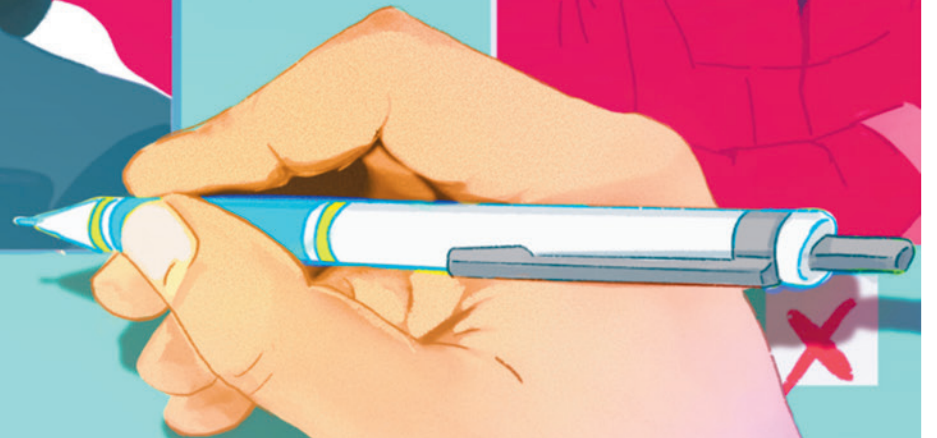
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CHECK YOUR JUDGES

Your guide to Cook County's November 2022 judicial elections



InjusticeWatch 



◀ EN ESPAÑOL: Escanea el código QR para ver nuestra guía de elecciones judiciales en español o visita injusticewatch.org/jueces.

For a digital version of this guide, visit injusticewatch.org/judges.

Why you should check your judges

Judges are powerful officials whose choices on the bench touch many aspects of life, from traffic tickets to divorces, lawsuits, evictions, and criminal cases. They have the power to take someone's freedom, enforce or overturn state laws, and correct or perpetuate injustices. Yet there are few places to get information about the people running for judge. That's why Injustice Watch created this guide to the Nov. 8, 2022, Cook County judicial elections.

This year, 61 judges are running for retention in Cook County. Voters will be asked whether each judge should remain on the bench. A judge must receive 60% "yes" votes to keep their seat. (Voters in the northwest Cook County suburbs also will choose between a Democratic and Republican candidate for a vacant circuit court seat. All other candidates running for judicial vacancies are unopposed.)

Our team spent months researching each judge's legal experience, community involvement, political connections, conduct, and controversies. We sent every judge a survey asking how they've worked to counteract the disparities in the court system. And we collected recommendations from bar associations, groups of lawyers who interview and rate judicial candidates.

A condensed version of our findings, edited for space and clarity, appears here. For more detailed candidate profiles, visit injusticewatch.org/judges.



▼ For more information about each candidate, scan the QR code or visit injusticewatch.org/judges.

In English:



En español:



WHAT TO KNOW

Illinois' general election is Nov. 8.

Early voting in Chicago's 50 wards and sites around suburban Cook County starts Oct. 24 (or earlier in downtown Chicago). To find your polling place:

City residents: www.chicagoelections.gov

Suburban Cook County residents:
www.cookcountyclerkil.gov/elections

Who can vote?

Voters must be at least 18 years old, be a U.S. citizen, and reside in their precinct for at least 30 days prior to Election Day. People with felony convictions can vote in Illinois as long as they are not serving a felony sentence in prison or jail. People in jail pre-trial and people on mandatory supervised release are eligible to vote.

13th subcircuit voters will see additional race on their ballots

In Cook County's 13th subcircuit, which covers Palatine, Schaumburg, Barrington and Hanover townships and parts of Arlington Heights and Buffalo Grove in the far northwest suburbs, voters will choose between Republican Gary Seyring and Democrat Joe Gump, who won their respective primaries in June. For their profiles, see **Page 15**. Not sure if you live in the 13th subcircuit? Check your voter registration online or find it on your voter registration card.

About the court system

COURT LEVELS

Illinois has three levels of courts. **Circuit courts** are the front line of the legal system. Circuit court judges hear a variety of cases, from traffic tickets to personal injury to child welfare to criminal cases. They serve six-year terms. **Appellate courts** hear appeals of cases initially decided by the circuit courts, usually in panels of three judges. Appellate judges serve 10-year terms. Circuit court judges also can be temporarily assigned to the appellate court by the Illinois Supreme Court. The **Illinois Supreme Court** is the highest court in the state. Its seven justices serve 10-year terms, with three of the justices chosen by Cook County voters. In addition to ruling on cases appealed from the lower courts, the Supreme Court appoints judges to fill vacancies, creates rules that courts must follow, and oversees attorney licensing and discipline.

DIVISIONS OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

The Cook County Circuit Court is made up of three departments, which oversee a total of 16 divisions, based on case type and geography.

County Department

Chancery division: Handles lawsuits in which one party sues another to force them to stop or engage in a specific action. Cases involving mortgage foreclosures, contracts, and other matters also are heard here.

County division: Hears cases involving elections, adoptions, mental health proceedings, and real estate taxes.

Criminal division: Presides over felony cases, which are those that could result in a prison term of at least a year. This division also handles issues related to felony trials, including record expungement and petitions to review prior criminal convictions and sentences.

Domestic relations division: Hears cases involving divorce and family or child support matters.

Domestic violence division: Handles matters involving orders of protection, no-contact orders, and certain criminal cases related to domestic violence.

Law division: Focuses on lawsuits for monetary damages larger than \$30,000 in the city and larger than \$100,000 in the suburbs. Examples of cases include personal injury, medical malpractice, and property damage.

Pretrial division: Handles initial proceedings in criminal cases, such as bail hearings and applications for search warrants. This division also oversees some specialty programs, including the deferred prosecution court. This is the newest division of the court, created in 2017 when Chief Judge Timothy Evans issued an order reforming bail practices.

Probate division: Hears matters involving wills, estates, and guardianship of minors and/or those with disabilities.

Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Department

Child protection division: Hears cases involving child abuse and neglect, termination of parental rights, and orders of protection concerning children.

Juvenile justice division: Conducts trials for minors charged with crimes and proceedings for minors addicted to alcohol or drugs and those who are runaways. Matters in this division are confidential.

Municipal Department

The Municipal Department is divided into six geographical districts. Judges new to the bench are usually initially assigned to a municipal post, typically traffic court.

First municipal district (Chicago): This district handles felony preliminary hearings, misdemeanor cases, evictions, small claims, traffic, lawsuits seeking damages under \$30,000, marriages, and civil unions within the city.

Second through sixth municipal districts: These suburban districts handle the same types of cases as the first district, but also oversee felony criminal cases and juvenile justice cases, orders of protection, some specialty courts, lawsuits seeking damages under \$100,000, and name changes. These courts are located in Skokie, Rolling Meadows, Maywood, Bridgeview, and Markham.

Understanding the candidate icons



Former prosecutor



Former public defender



Notable reversals



Past controversy



Negative ratings



Highly qualified ratings

Former prosecutor: This candidate has served as a prosecutor in criminal or quasi-criminal (such as traffic court) cases at the city, county, state, or federal level.

Former public defender: This candidate has served as a public defender, representing clients in criminal court who can't afford a private attorney.

Notable reversals: Notable cases exist where the candidate's decisions have been reversed by a higher court.

Past controversy: The candidate has been involved in some kind of personal or professional controversy.

Negative ratings: At least one bar association has said this candidate is not recommended or not qualified to be a judge. When available, we include information about why the bar association issued these ratings. Bar associations automatically rate candidates who don't participate in the ratings process as not recommended.

Highly qualified ratings: One or more bar associations have rated this candidate "well qualified" or "highly qualified." Not all bar associations give out ratings higher than qualified. But those that do have suggested that this candidate is particularly well-qualified for retention.

Glossary of court and legal terms

Administrative law judge: Lawyers hired by city or state agencies to conduct hearings on administrative issues, such as municipal code violations or decisions made by agency representatives. May also be called "hearing officers." These are not judicial positions but are often a stepping stone for attorneys who want to gain quasi-judicial experience before running for judge.

Appointment: When a judge resigns, retires, or is removed from office, it creates a vacancy on the court. The Illinois Supreme Court appoints a replacement to serve until the next election.

Assignment: The Illinois Supreme Court can assign a circuit judge or retired judge to the appellate court for an indefinite term. There are currently six Cook County circuit judges assigned to the appellate court.

Associate judge: These judges serve the same roles as circuit judges, but they are selected by a vote of the circuit judges, rather than by the public.

Assistant public defender: Attorneys who represent criminal defendants who cannot afford an attorney and parents accused by the state of child abuse or neglect.

Assistant state's attorney: Attorneys who prosecute state crimes in the county and represent county departments and officials in civil lawsuits.

Post-conviction: Petitions filed by someone who has been convicted of a crime asking a judge to overturn their conviction or change their sentence. The bar for successfully filing a

post-conviction petition is extremely high and usually requires petitioners to show they have access to new evidence that could not have been available to them at the time of the original trial. Post-conviction petitions are different from appeals, which focus narrowly on challenges to judges' procedural decisions and interpretation of the law during a hearing or trial.

Presiding judge: Judges assigned by the chief judge to oversee administrative matters in each division and each municipal department. In some divisions, presiding judges are responsible for assigning cases to other judges. In other divisions, cases are assigned randomly by a computer. The presiding judges, along with Chief Judge Timothy Evans, are known as the Executive Committee and meet regularly to discuss courtwide matters.

Pro se: Latin for "on one's own behalf," pro se litigants appear in court without an attorney. Although people charged in criminal court are entitled to an attorney, litigants in civil lawsuits and people challenging their criminal convictions are not always entitled to representation.

Reversal: When a party in a case believes the judge made the wrong decision, they can appeal to a higher court. If the higher court believes that the judge misapplied the law or abused their discretion, it can reverse the judge's decision and send the case back with instructions. Usually cases get sent back to the same judge for corrections, but in rare circumstances higher courts order the cases to be transferred to a new judge.

Mary Jane Theis



Judge since: 1983

Judicial experience: Theis was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court in 2010 and elected in 2012. Theis takes over as chief justice on Oct. 26, following the retirement of Chief Justice Anne Burke. Theis became a judge in 1983, when she was selected as a Cook County associate judge. In 1988, she was elected as a circuit judge, where she served in the criminal and chancery divisions. She was appointed to the appellate court in 1993 and elected the following year.



Previous experience:

- Cook County assistant public defender (1974-1983)

Law school: University of San Francisco, 1974

Notable: Theis raised more than \$1.4 million in her 2012 campaign for the Supreme Court, more than double what her two competitors raised combined. She had the backing of then-Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who raised \$100,000 for her in a single fundraiser, according to the Chicago Tribune. Theis' father, Kenneth Wendt, was an Illinois state senator and Cook County circuit judge.

Theis has written several noteworthy decisions in her 12 years on the Illinois Supreme Court. In 2016, she wrote a unanimous decision striking down a Cook County tax on guns and ammunition. In 2014, she wrote a solo dissent arguing that the state's automatic transfer law, which requires teenagers charged with certain crimes to be tried as adults, should be abolished. "Illinois should be a place where youth matters, and we work to tailor punishment to fit the offense and the offender, as required by our federal and state constitutions," she wrote. However, in two separate cases since then involving juveniles who were given life sentences or de facto life sentences, she wrote decisions denying them resentencing hearings, saying that the trial court had properly considered the defendants' age when sentencing them. In 2018, Theis wrote a unanimous decision upholding a state law that bans people convicted of sex offenses involving children from any public park.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated her "highly qualified." The Illinois State Bar Association said she is regarded as "an outstanding jurist who knows civil and criminal law in great depth, asks thoughtful questions, and writes detailed opinions."

James Fitzgerald Smith



Judge since: 1989

Judicial experience: Fitzgerald Smith was selected as an associate judge in 1989 and elected as a circuit judge in 1994. He served in the Skokie courthouse, hearing both civil and criminal cases, and in the law division, hearing civil lawsuits seeking large monetary damages. He was elected to the Illinois Appellate Court in 2002.

Previous experience:

- City attorney and prosecutor for the city of Des Plaines (1979-1989)
- Assistant corporation counsel in the Chicago Law Department (1977-1979)
- Legal director, Rockford (1975-1977)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1975

Notable: Fitzgerald Smith served in the U.S. Army Reserves for 27 years, retiring in 1996 with the rank of colonel. As a circuit court judge, he received negative ratings from bar associations over issues with his temperament, but he has received positive ratings ever since joining the appellate court.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he "is widely praised for his legal ability and enjoys a reputation for having an excellent grasp of the issues coming before him."

Terrence J. Lavin**Judge since:** 2010

Judicial experience: Lavin was appointed to the Illinois Appellate Court in 2010 and won election to his seat in 2012. Unusually, he did not serve as a circuit court judge before the Illinois Supreme Court appointed him to the appellate court.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice at several law firms, focused on personal injury, wrongful death, and medical negligence cases (1983-2009)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1983

Notable: Last year, Lavin wrote an appeals court decision reinstating a \$1 million award for the family of David Strong, a 27-year-old Black man who was killed by Chicago police officers as he tried to flee a robbery in 2011. Although a jury had awarded damages to Strong's family in their wrongful death lawsuit against the city, the circuit judge nullified the award based on the jury's answer to two special interrogatories, which are questions posed to the jury about the facts of the case. Lavin wrote that the special interrogatories were "vague and confusing." The appellate court also said that John W. Givens and Leland Dudley, who suffered life-altering injuries in the police shooting and were charged with Strong's murder under the state's felony murder rule, could proceed with their civil lawsuit against the city. Attorneys for the city appealed the appellate court's ruling to the Illinois Supreme Court. The Supreme Court took up the city's appeal in January, and oral arguments on that appeal could take place as early as November.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he "has an even-keeled temperament, high integrity, and issues well-reasoned opinions in a timely manner."

Maureen E. Connors**Judge since:** 1988

Judicial experience: Connors was selected as an associate judge in 1988 and was elected as a circuit judge in 1994. She spent most of her time on the circuit court in the probate division hearing adult guardianship cases. She also served briefly

in the domestic violence division and the Bridgeview courthouse. She was appointed to the appellate court in 2010 and won election in 2012.

Previous experience:

- Assistant general attorney, Chicago Park District (1983-1988)
- Associate at Klafter and Burke, former law firm of Chicago Ald. Ed Burke (1979-1985)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1979

Notable: Connors has written a number of notable decisions during her time on the appellate court. In 2014, she wrote a decision in a lawsuit by journalist Jamie Kalven against the City of Chicago, affirming that records of police misconduct investigations are subject to the Freedom of Information Act. In 2017, Connors, writing for a unanimous appellate panel, overturned a rule by Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart forbidding sheriff's office employees from affiliating with any current or former gang members, saying the sheriff needed to negotiate the regulation with the union representing deputies and correctional officers. The panel upheld a separate regulation prohibiting social media posts that were discriminatory, violent, harassing, or otherwise brought discredit on the department. Earlier this year, Connors dissented — without explanation — from an order releasing actor Jussie Smollett from jail while he appealed his conviction for faking a hate crime against himself. Connors said she couldn't comment on the Smollett case because it is still pending in the appellate court.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Irish Fellowship Club Educational and Cultural Foundation, a nonprofit that provides scholarships to Irish students at Catholic schools

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said, "She is praised overall for her judicial temperament and for the quality, thoroughness, and fairness of her written opinions."

Mathias William Delort**Judge since:** 2007

Judicial experience: Delort was selected as an associate judge in 2007 and served in the chancery division of the Cook County Circuit Court, where he presided over mortgage foreclosure cases. He was elected to the Illinois Appellate Court

in 2012.

Previous experience:

- Worked in private practice on election law cases and represented local governments, pension boards, and public school districts (1985-2007)
- Served as an administrative hearing officer for several suburban villages and for the Chicago Board of Elections, Illinois State Board of Elections, and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (1987-2007)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1985

Notable: In 2016, Delort was part of a three-judge panel that overturned an injunction that had blocked the release of decades of citizen complaints against Chicago police officers. Delort and the two other appellate judges ruled that the Freedom of Information Act superceded the Fraternal Order of Police's collective bargaining agreement, which specified that complaints over 4 years old should be destroyed.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers found him well qualified for retention and said he is "a highly respected jurist who is considered to have excellent legal ability."

Nathaniel Roosevelt Howse, Jr.**Judge since:** 1998

Judicial experience: Howse was assigned to the appellate court in 2009 and elected in 2012. He was first elected to the Cook County Circuit Court in 1998 and served primarily in the county division, hearing real estate tax and election cases.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice focused on civil rights and election cases (1976-1998)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1976

Notable: As an attorney, Howse represented the Harold Washington Party in their efforts to fight ballot challenges and worked on lawsuits about voting rights and ballot access. Howse ran unsuccessfully for the Illinois Supreme Court in 2020, placing last in a seven-way race. Many of his top donors in that race were personal injury attorneys and firms.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated him well qualified and said, "His written opinions are praised

as being well written, well reasoned, and thorough."

Jesse G. Reyes**Judge since:** 1997**Judicial experience:**

Reyes first joined the bench as a Cook County associate judge in 1997. He was elected as a circuit judge in 2008. He primarily served in the circuit court's chancery division, hearing mortgage foreclosure cases. Reyes was elected to the appellate court in 2012.

Previous experience:

- Assistant attorney, Chicago Board of Education (1996-1997)
- Assistant corporation counsel, City of Chicago Law Department (1985-1996)

Notable: Reyes was the first Latino man elected to the Illinois Appellate Court. He came in second place in a seven-way race for an Illinois Supreme Court seat in 2020, losing to Justice P. Scott Neville Jr.

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1982

Community involvement:

- Advisory board member, A Safe Haven, an organization that serves people experiencing homelessness

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he's known "to be well prepared at oral argument, and his opinions are reported to be well written and well reasoned."

▼ For more information about each candidate, scan the QR code or visit injusticewatch.org/judges.



Sophia H. Hall

Judge since: 1980

Judicial experience: Hall was elected to the circuit court in 1980. Since January, she has been the interim acting presiding judge of the chancery division. She is also the administrative presiding judge of the resource section of the juvenile justice and child protection department of the circuit court. This section does public outreach on issues related to juvenile court. Previously, Hall was the presiding judge of the juvenile division and served in the criminal division.



Previous experience:

- Attorney at two firms focused on civil matters, including personal injury, divorce, and civil rights cases (1967-1980)

Law school: Northwestern University, 1967

Notable: Hall was the first woman to serve as a presiding judge in Cook County when she was appointed presiding judge of the juvenile division in 1992. In 2020, Hall upheld a decision by the Chicago Police Board to fire officer Ricardo Viramontes for lying about details from the night Laquan McDonald was murdered. In 2021, Hall ruled that the Trump hotel in Chicago violated environmental laws by sucking too much water out of the Chicago River, killing too many fish.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she has “an excellent judicial demeanor” and “demonstrates a devotion to diversity, inclusion, and equity.”

Timothy C. Evans



Judge since: 1992

Judicial experience: Evans was first elected to the bench in 1992. He served as the presiding judge of the domestic relations and law divisions before being elected chief judge by his peers in 2001. In 2022, he was re-elected as chief judge for a record eighth term.



Previous experience:

- Chicago alderman, 4th Ward (1973-1991), including floor leader for Mayor Harold Washington
- City of Chicago assistant corporation counsel
- Attorney in private practice

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1969

Notable: Evans’s historically long tenure

as chief judge, overseeing a court system of some 400 judges and more than 2,600 employees, has been marked by both progress and controversy. Since his last retention election in 2016, Evans has overseen the creation of restorative justice courts and ordered bond court reforms that require judges to account for someone’s ability to pay when setting bail. More recently, Evans responded to advocates’ calls to make emergency restraining orders available to victims of domestic violence 24/7, and worked with legal aid groups to implement a legal assistance program for people with eviction and debt cases.

However, Evans also has continued to oversee a court bureaucracy marred by a lack of transparency and accountability, particularly within its probation department. His administration has been in the crosshairs of lawsuits by former employees over workplace discrimination as well as by probationers alleging staff misconduct. Most notably, the county paid more than \$100,000 to settle two federal civil rights lawsuits filed by men who alleged that a group of probation officers had teamed up with Chicago police and the FBI to illegally raid their homes. In the wake of the lawsuit, Evans dismissed a probation department supervisor who is continuing to wage a legal battle over his termination. In a statement, Evans said, “In no such case filed by a former employee has a judge or jury found that the chief judge committed acts of unlawful employment discrimination.”

Evans also has overseen a juvenile detention center in which kids have increasingly been confined to their rooms. In recent months, a committee of experts hand-picked by Evans issued a report that called the juvenile jail “isolating and deprivational” and recommended that it be dismantled. The committee also bemoaned the fact that recommendations it made to Evans about the detention center in 2016 had apparently not been implemented. In a statement, Evans said he “supports the meritorious proposals to replace the JTDC or provide suitable, community-based detention alternatives.”

In 2021, Evans’s office also allowed a contract with a private company that has provided alcohol-monitoring devices to hundreds of Cook County defendants and probationers to lapse while judges continued to order people to wear, and pay for, the devices. Evans said he welcomed suggestions from some county commissioners at a recent hearing that the county should pay the fees for the device for defendants who can’t afford it.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated him highly qualified. The Illinois State Bar Association said

he “was praised for his efforts to improve diversity on the bench and for his support of diversion courts, like the restorative justice programs and drug, mental health, and veterans courts.”

Charles Patrick Burns



Judge since: 1998

Judicial experience: Burns was elected as a circuit judge in 1998. He is currently assigned to the criminal division, where he hears felony cases and presides over the Rehabilitative Alternative Probation (RAP) drug court programs. He previously heard criminal and traffic cases in the Maywood courthouse.



Previous experience:

- Cook County assistant state’s attorney, including eight years as a supervisor in various units (1981-1998)
- Adjunct professor, Lewis University (2008-present)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1981

Notable: *This section contains graphic content that some may find disturbing.*

In recent years, Burns’ stewardship of the RAP court programs has won him wide-ranging praise and has earned a mentor court designation from the National Drug Court Institute. Local media has noted that he gives out his personal cell phone number to program participants and has initiated partnerships with local organizations to connect participants with rental subsidy vouchers, expungement of past criminal records, credit repair, and job placement.

From 1994 to 1997, Burns was the supervisor of the felony review unit of the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office. In this role he oversaw the prosecutors tasked with approving felony charges against people arrested by Chicago police and other local law enforcement agencies. In 2017, the Chicago Tribune published accusations that Burns pressured his staff attorneys to “give the detectives whatever they wanted.” The accusations came from an FBI interview with a disgraced former subordinate of Burns who accepted false confessions made by the ultimately exonerated Englewood Four. In a statement, Burns said the allegations published by the Tribune were “singular and uncorroborated” and that the former assistant state’s attorney was a “terminated, discredited former ASA who is a convicted felon sex offender.”

Since his last retention election, Burns has presided over several high-profile cases, including that of ex-Northwestern University

professor Wyndham Lathem, whom Burns sentenced to 53 years for the 2017 murder of Trenton Cornell-Duranleau. Burns’ decisions have been reversed by the appellate court in whole or in part 40 times since 2016, significantly more than other judges in the criminal division. Most recently, the appellate court reversed his denial of a post-conviction petition filed by Kimberlyn Bolaños, whom Burns allowed to plead guilty to the stabbing murder of her infant son even though she had a documented history of mental illness. Bolaños also had inflicted dozens of stab wounds on herself on the day she killed her baby. She gouged out her own eyes shortly after beginning her 38-year prison sentence. In 2019, Bolaños filed a pro se post-conviction petition, saying her mental illness prevented her from making an informed decision about the plea deal. Burns rejected the petition, but the appellate court reversed his decision and ordered him to hold a hearing to consider the petition.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said nearly all their attorneys “praised his knowledge of criminal law and the rules of evidence and procedure.” However, a few attorneys said, “He could at times be irascible, and several female attorneys raised concerns over what they perceived to be inadequate attention to sensitivity.”

John Patrick Kirby



Judge since: 1998

Judicial experience:

Kirby was elected judge in 1998. He currently serves in the law division and previously presided over felony cases in the criminal division.



Previous experience:

- Cook County assistant state’s attorney, prosecuting felony and misdemeanor cases

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1983

Notable: Kirby started two diversion programs aimed at addressing underlying conditions veterans and young people charged with crimes face. He began the Veterans Treatment Court in 2009 and started a virtual high school in the Cook County Jail for young people to attain a high school diploma.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is well qualified and highlighted his efforts in his previous assignment to use alternative sentencing for young defendants.

LeRoy K. Martin, Jr.**Judge since:** 2002

Judicial experience: Martin was appointed to the circuit court in 2002. He was first elected in 2004. He served in the domestic relations and chancery divisions before Chief Judge Timothy Evans made him presiding judge of the criminal division in 2015. In that role, he was responsible for assigning felony cases, hearing motions for expungements and certificates of innocence, and setting policies and practices for the criminal court. The Illinois Supreme Court assigned Martin to the appellate court in 2021.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice focused on criminal defense and civil cases (1987-2002)
- Cook County assistant public defender (1985-1987)

Law school: North Carolina Central University, 1984

Notable: Martin is the son of LeRoy Martin Sr., who served as Chicago police superintendent from 1987 to 1992. His son, LeRoy Martin III, is a Cook County assistant state's attorney. Martin was the first Black presiding judge of the Cook County Circuit Court's criminal division.

In 2019, Martin denied former Chicago detective Dante Servin's request to expunge his criminal record. Servin was charged and later acquitted of manslaughter in the off-duty killing of Rekia Boyd, after the judge in that case determined that murder charges would have been more appropriate. That same year, he expunged the record of detective David March, who was acquitted on charges of filing a false report in the Laquan McDonald shooting.

In another noteworthy decision, Martin denied certificates of innocence to several people who were framed by disgraced former Chicago police Sgt. Ronald Watts, saying they did not qualify because they had been sentenced only to probation and had not served time in prison. In handing down his decision, he said he would "be OK with the appellate



court reversing" his ruling, which it later did.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is well prepared and "is a well-respected jurist both as a trial judge and as an appellate justice."

Robert "Bob" Balanoff**Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Balanoff was elected judge in 2004. He has served in the child protection division for most of his judicial career and, since 2020, has been the presiding judge of the division.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice focused on bankruptcy, probate, real estate, and Social Security Disability matters (1982-2004)

Law school: DePaul University, 1982

Notable: Balanoff is part of a progressive political family from Chicago's Southeast Side with roots in the labor movement. His mother, Miriam Balanoff, is a former Cook County circuit judge and state representative. His brother, Clem Balanoff, is a former state representative and political consultant, and his first cousin, Tom Balanoff, recently retired after a lengthy tenure as president of SEIU Local 1. Bob Balanoff's son, Dan Balanoff, ran unsuccessfully for a judicial vacancy this year.

As presiding judge of the child protection division, Balanoff created a special court call for foster care children who are being held in psychiatric facilities or the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center past their recommended discharge date solely because the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services can't find a placement for them. He also extended a program allowing those children to receive court-appointed child advocates.

Community involvement:

- Monitor for elections in Eastern Europe, including Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Ukraine, the Republic of Georgia, and Moldova,



through the U.S. State Department and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he was "highly praised by attorneys and judges for his legal knowledge and his technology skills during the transition to Zoom hearings during the pandemic." The Chicago Council of Lawyers said as presiding judge, he "is praised for listening to advocates for reform ideas."

Kathleen Marie Burke**Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Burke was elected judge in 2004. She currently serves in the Bridgeview courthouse, hearing a variety of matters. She previously served in the child protection division.

Previous experience:

- Cook County assistant state's attorney, representing county-run hospitals in medical malpractice cases (1993-2004)
- Attorney at a mid-sized law firm focused on medical malpractice cases (1989-1992)
- Adjunct faculty at Loyola University Chicago School of Law (2000-present)

Law school: University of Notre Dame, 1989

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said she "makes thoughtful decisions" and is "considered to be a fair person who treats all with respect."

Thomas J. Kelley**Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Kelley was elected to the circuit court as a Republican in 2004. He currently serves in the domestic relations division in the Rolling Meadows courthouse.

Previous experience:

- Attorney at his family's Schaumburg-based



law firm of Kelley, Kelley, and Kelley, focused on divorce cases (1984-2004)

Law school: DePaul University, 1984

Notable: Before becoming an attorney, Kelley was a certified public accountant. Kelley's brother, Martin C. Kelley, is also a Cook County circuit judge in Rolling Meadows.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is praised for his courtroom management. "He has a patient demeanor, allows the parties to have their say but controls his call," the council wrote.

Clare Elizabeth McWilliams**Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: McWilliams was elected to the circuit court in 2004. She is currently assigned to the law division, where she presides over civil trials. She also has supervised the county's asbestos case docket since 2013.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice, specializing in family law.

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1988

Notable: In 2014, McWilliams was subpoenaed to serve as a character witness for Robert M. Voltl, a former real estate lawyer, who had been disbarred after he was convicted of mortgage fraud. McWilliams told a panel that was deciding whether to reinstate Voltl's law license that she had known him for 25 years and that, when she was a lawyer, she had found him to be honest and trustworthy.

In 2016, McWilliams ruled that plaintiffs in sexual abuse lawsuits against former Chicago-area priest Daniel McCormack could pursue punitive damages against the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys find her "well prepared with excellent legal knowledge, and they praised her well-reasoned decisions in complex matters."

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Mary Lane Mikva **Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Mikva was elected to the Cook County Circuit Court in 2004. She served in the chancery and child protection divisions. She has been assigned to the Illinois Appellate Court since 2016.

**Previous experience:**

- Partner at a small law firm focused on employment law (1991-2004)
- Attorney with the City of Chicago Law Department focused on appeals (1987-1991)
- Attorney at several small firms focused on employment and civil rights law (1982-1987)
- Law clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr.

Law school: Northwestern University, 1980

Notable: Mikva is the daughter of Abner Mikva, a former U.S. representative and federal appeals court judge, who died in 2016. She is part of a group of judges working on making recommendations about how to implement the Pretrial Fairness Act, which will abolish cash bail across Illinois starting in January.

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Mikva Challenge, the nonprofit started by her parents that focuses on youth civic education and participation.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers found her to be well qualified and noted that “she is respectful to those appearing before her, and her written opinions are considered thoughtful and well reasoned.”

Patrick T. Murphy**Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Murphy was elected judge in 2004. He currently serves in the child protection division, hearing cases related to abuse and neglect. He previously served in the domestic relations division.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County public guardian, an appointed position overseeing the office of attorneys that represent children in custody or abuse and neglect cases, and people with disabilities in guardianship proceedings (1978-2004)

- Assistant director, National Legal Aid and Defender Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing defense to low-income people accused of crimes
- Attorney in private practice focused on criminal defense, mental health, and civil rights cases
- Adjunct professor, University of Chicago law school, IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, DePaul University, and Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies

Law school: Northwestern University, 1964

Notable: Murphy has a record as an outspoken critic of the child welfare system. This year, he has held the director of the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services in contempt of court at least 12 times between January and September for the agency’s failure to meet court-ordered deadlines to relocate children in its care from psychiatric hospitals and shelters to more permanent and supportive living situations, CBS Chicago reported. He has written two books documenting the failures of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

In 1971, Murphy successfully argued a case before the U.S. Supreme Court challenging Illinois’ guardianship statute, which at the time said that children of an unmarried mother were automatically deemed wards of the state when the mother died, even if their father was present in their lives. The ruling established that a hearing on the fitness of another parent is required before children are deemed wards of the state.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said Murphy is “exceptionally knowledgeable about abuse and neglect law” and is “well respected for trying to find ways to return a child to the family with safeguards.”

Jim Ryan  **Judge since:** 2004

Judicial experience: Ryan was elected to the circuit court in 2004. He currently serves in the first municipal division, hearing jury trials.

Previous experience:

- Director of operations and general counsel, Cook County Sheriff’s Office (1995-2004)
- Cook County assistant state’s attorney (1993-1995)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1992

Notable: In 2005, Ryan gave a deposition in a civil lawsuit related to mass beatings by guards at the Cook County Jail in 1999. A

special grand jury had determined that there was evidence that jail guards had beaten inmates and that higher-ups in the sheriff’s office had covered it up. Ryan pleaded the Fifth Amendment to almost every question asked of him, including factual questions about the date he was elected judge, the Chicago Tribune reported. Ryan declined to comment to Injustice Watch.

In 2010, an investigation by Fox 32 Chicago and the Better Government Association claimed that four Cook County judges, including Ryan, were stealing time and going home early. In the first episode of the four-part series, the station showed Ryan’s alleged car in the driveway of his alleged home before the end of the workday. Ryan called Fox to tell them that wasn’t his home or car. The following night, Fox issued an on-air correction, saying that they watched Ryan leave the courthouse early three separate times, but that the house and car belonged to a neighbor, not him. Ryan subsequently filed a defamation suit against Fox 32 and the BGA, which was settled in 2014 for an undisclosed amount.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he is regarded to run “a very tight and efficient court,” and that he is “impartial, ethical, and diligent.”

Thaddeus L. Wilson  **Judge since:** 2007

Judicial experience: Wilson was appointed judge in 2007 and re-appointed in 2008 after losing that year’s election. He was elected to his first full term as a circuit judge in 2010. He has spent the majority of his time on the bench in the criminal division but moved to the chancery division in December 2021.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in a private practice with Chicago Ald. Howard Brookins Jr., representing clients in criminal, civil, and bankruptcy cases (1994-2007)
- Adjunct professor at John Marshall Law School (2010-2011, 2014-2016)

Law school: Northern Illinois University, 1994

Notable: Attorneys who spoke to Injustice Watch said Wilson is widely regarded as knowledgeable on the law and meticulous in running his courtroom, and they praised his leadership in transitioning to virtual court proceedings at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. But some attorneys

also said that he can be excessively punitive, temperamental, and inflexible. Notably, at the start of the pandemic, he was criticized for jailing a man charged with probation violations for a low-level felony on a \$475,000 bond, the Chicago Tribune reported. In a statement, Wilson pointed out that the man had a years-long history of probation violations by the time he jailed him in February 2020. “The record shows that I was more than fair and patient in trying to get him the treatment that he needed and to get him to comply with the terms of his Intensive Drug Probation,” Wilson said. He eventually released him on electronic monitoring in May 2020.

In 2016, he imposed a 100-year sentence on a man convicted of felony murder and attempted murder for providing his teenaged niece with the gun she ended up firing during a fight, killing a 14-year-old and injuring another teenager. The appellate court later reversed the conviction, saying that Wilson improperly allowed prosecutors to misrepresent to the jury what was needed to prove a felony murder conviction. The man ultimately pleaded guilty to a reduced charge and received a 20-year sentence. In a statement, Wilson said that the original sentence he imposed was within the sentencing range for murder and attempted murder and that he was required by law to impose consecutive sentences. He also noted that the appellate court found that there was sufficient evidence to convict the man.

The attorneys who spoke with Injustice Watch said they welcomed Wilson’s reassignment last year to the chancery division. In his statement, Wilson wrote, “It should not be a shock or news flash to any judge that there are some attorneys who don’t like them for some reason or another. Just like it should come as no surprise that there are school teachers, professors, and news reporters that some people just don’t like and wish were gone.”

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he “is described as fair, diligent, and sensitive to diversity,” and that “attorneys consider him to be very knowledgeable on the law and as someone who stays up to date on current law.”

Daniel James Pierce

Pierce retired from the bench in September and withdrew from the retention election, but due to the timing his name may still appear on some ballots. Votes for or against Pierce will not be counted.

William H. Hooks**Judge since:** 2008**Judicial experience:**

Hooks was appointed to the bench in 2008 and was elected to his first term as circuit judge in 2010. He is currently assigned to the criminal division, where he hears felony cases at the George Leighton Criminal Courthouse and also presides over a veterans specialty court.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice focused on criminal defense and civil litigation (1996-2008)
- Hearing board chair and commissioner, Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission (1994-2007)
- Attorney at several firms focused mainly on insurance defense cases (1985-1996)
- Judge advocate with the U.S. Marine Corps (1981-1985)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1981

Notable: Hooks has a record as a critic of police and prosecutorial misconduct. Prior to becoming a judge, as the head of the Cook County Bar Association, Hooks had advocated for the removal of Associate Judge John “Jack” Hynes from the bench. Hynes, a former assistant state’s attorney, had failed to disclose that two convictions in murder cases he had prosecuted had been reversed because the appellate court found that he had discriminated against African Americans during jury selection. In 2016, Hooks was featured in a Chicago Tribune story for taking a strong stance in several cases against police officers whom he believed were lying in their testimony in front of him. He has presided over the postconviction proceedings of three men who alleged that they were tortured at the hands of Jon Burge and detectives working under him. Hooks threw out the coerced confessions that had originally led to the murder convictions of Eric Caine, Anthony Jakes, and Jackie Wilson.

Hooks has handled other high-profile cases in recent years, including that of four young people charged with hate crimes and kidnapping for an assault on a disabled classmate that was live-streamed on Facebook. He was criticized for giving a 10-day jail sentence to the driver who killed cyclist Bobby Cann in 2013. In an email, Hooks said that he accepted a plea deal that was agreed to by prosecutors and the defense, and that he didn’t recall Cann’s family opposing the sentence. “The

disposition included some period of jail time, a fine higher than one I have ever before imposed, and a long period of probation which was ended successfully without any violations whatsoever,” Hooks wrote.

Hooks has been criticized for his temperament. In October 2018, he was referred to anger management and removed from his felony court call for three months for behaving “in such a manner that created a hostile work environment for another judge,” according to the Office of the Chief Judge. The chief judge’s office did not provide details about the incident that led to his reassignment. In an email, Hooks noted that the Judicial Inquiry Board, which hears complaints of judicial misconduct, did not take any action against him in this case.

In 2009, during his first run for the circuit court, Hooks received a \$10,000 campaign donation from International Profit Associates, a company that had been sued earlier that year by the Illinois Attorney General’s Office for alleged fraud and was embroiled in a years-long federal sexual harassment lawsuit by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. A federal judge later ordered the company to pay an \$8 million settlement to 82 women who faced persistent workplace sexual harassment by the company’s senior executives. While other Illinois public officials who had received donations from the company (including former Gov. Rod Blagojevich and former comptroller Dan Hynes) returned them, Hooks did not. Asked why, Hooks referred Injustice Watch to a former campaign committee member who said Hooks was not informed at the time of his campaign donors’ identities.

Community involvement:

- Mentor, University of Chicago’s Office for Military-Affiliated Communities, which supports veterans affiliated with the university

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by most bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said Hooks is praised for his legal knowledge, has a reputation for being a mentor to lawyers and other judges, and said “most lawyers praise his judicial temperament.” But the Illinois State Bar Association said some attorneys said Hooks “could be disrespectful and arrogant at times, especially towards women attorneys.”

Thomas V. Lyons**Judge since:** 2008**Judicial experience:**

Lyons was appointed to the circuit court in 2008 by the Illinois Supreme Court, and elected in 2010. He currently serves in the law division, hearing jury trials seeking large monetary damages.

Previous experience:

- Attorney at a personal injury law firm concentrating on aviation accident cases (2005-2008)
- Cook County assistant state’s attorney, both as a prosecutor in criminal cases and as an attorney defending the county and elected officials in civil cases (1986-2005)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1986

Notable: Lyons’ father, Thomas G. Lyons, was a longtime Illinois state senator, 45th Ward Democratic committeeperson, and chairman of the Cook County Democratic Party.

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Misericordia Heart of Mercy, a nonprofit dedicated to providing housing and services to people with developmental and intellectual disabilities
- Volunteer, Blessed Sacrament Youth Center, a club providing after-school tutoring and activities for youth in North Lawndale

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers found him well qualified and said he is described as “hardworking” and is “patient and fair to all parties.”

Daniel Malone**Judge since:** 2009**Judicial experience:**

Malone was appointed to the bench in 2009 and elected a circuit judge in 2010. He is currently the presiding judge of the probate division, where he handles pretrial hearings and all mediation for the division.

Previous experience:

- Practiced at a private firm specializing in personal injury matters, product liability, and medical negligence cases

Law school: DePaul University, 1986

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago

Council of Lawyers said he is “praised for being prepared and for being fair to all litigants.”

Geary W. Kull**Judge since:** 2009**Judicial experience:**

Kull was appointed to the circuit court by the Illinois Supreme Court in 2009. He was elected in 2010. He currently serves in the Maywood courthouse hearing felony cases.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice at his own firm, focused on criminal defense and civil rights cases (1981-2009)
- Cook County assistant public defender (1975-1981)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1974

Notable: Kull has been reversed by the appellate court seven times since 2018. In at least two of the cases, Kull’s faulty memory of presented evidence was at issue. In a 2020 appellate decision, the court overturned Kull’s conviction of a man for first-degree murder that was based solely on an isolated statement the man made to detectives — which Kull believed proved that he had advance knowledge of a shooting — but in fact was about his determination afterward that a shooting had taken place. In a second 2020 case that involved a defendant’s claim for ineffective assistance of counsel, the appellate court found that Kull relied on a mischaracterization of the evidence and then later admitted to not remembering the evidence altogether. “We find this to be incredibly dismissive and incredulously disingenuous on the part of” Kull, the court wrote. In a third 2020 appellate decision, the court reversed a man’s murder conviction after finding that Kull should have allowed the defendant’s lawyer to question a Maywood detective about the department’s policy on preserving notes in a murder investigation after the detective testified that he had destroyed his field notes in the case after they were subpoenaed by the defense. Kull said he couldn’t comment because two of the cases were still pending.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated him well qualified. The Illinois State Bar Association noted that attorneys “gave him high marks for his legal knowledge and ability, his sensitivity to diversity, fairness, and diligence.”

Steven James Bernstein**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Bernstein was elected in 2010 and currently serves in the juvenile justice division, hearing cases of minors charged with crimes or addicted to drugs or alcohol.

**Previous experience:**

- Acting general counsel for the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, a state agency that administers grants and conducts research on criminal justice issues (2006-2009)
- Evanston Township assessor (1991-1997) and Fourth Ward alderperson (1997-2009)
- Worked in private practice with his wife, former Circuit Judge Jeanne Cleveland Bernstein, specializing in criminal defense, civil rights, zoning, and real estate cases. (1974-2006)

Law school: DePaul University, 1971

Notable: In 2016, an appellate court panel found that Bernstein had failed to press prosecutors for race-neutral reasons for excluding four Black potential jurors from a case involving a Black 17-year-old charged with residential burglary. The appellate court sent the case back to Bernstein, who held a hearing and determined that prosecutors had a sufficient race-neutral reason for excluding the jurors. The case went back to the appellate court, which determined that the state's reason for excluding one of the jurors was pretextual and ordered a new trial. Bernstein declined to comment on the case.

Community involvement:

- Advisory council member, Northlight Theatre

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said, "He is praised for being empathetic to juveniles who appear before him, even when he is stern with parents or representatives of government agencies appearing in his courtroom."

Bonita Coleman**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Coleman was elected judge in 2010. She serves in the domestic relations division, hearing divorce, child custody, and domestic violence cases in the Markham courthouse.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice focused on divorce and child custody cases as well as criminal, probate, and real estate law (1992-2010)
- Hearing officer, Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission

Law school: University of Iowa

Notable: Coleman was found not qualified by the Chicago Council of Lawyers in 2010 and 2016. In 2016, the council said "many lawyers question Judge Coleman's knowledge of the law" and noted "there was a mixed response to whether she is fair to both men and women who appear before her." But this year, the council found her qualified for retention.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said, "She has a good temperament and is particularly patient with self-represented litigants." But the council also noted that "some lawyers say she can be dismissive of domestic violence allegations — that she requires an excessive amount of evidence before she will order protections for alleged victims of abuse."

Ann Finley Collins**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Collins was elected judge in 2010 and retained in 2016. She currently serves in the Maywood courthouse, hearing misdemeanor, traffic, bond court, and some felony cases. She previously served in the chancery division.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant public defender (1985-2010)
- Teacher in Oakland, California (1970-1981)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1985

Notable: From 2013 to 2020, prosecutors asked to substitute Collins as the judge in drunken-driving cases more than a dozen times, according to reporting by Injustice Watch and the Better Government Association. The moves came after a court-watchers group appealed to the chief judge following several acquittals and pretrial rulings favorable to defendants by Collins in drunken-driving cases. In a 2016 case, Collins granted a man's motion to quash his traffic stop during a DUI enforcement roadblock, saying the seizure and arrest violated the Fourth Amendment because a press release sent out before the roadblock did not include the precise date and time it would occur.

But an appellate court reversed her decision, saying it was "erroneous as a matter of law" because the Illinois Supreme Court had previously ruled that providing the precise location of a roadblock beforehand was not required. Collins declined to comment.

Bar association ratings: Collins did not participate in the bar association evaluation process, so she was found not recommended. In an emailed statement, she said she was planning to retire at the time of the evaluations but later changed her mind.

Daniel J. Gallagher**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Gallagher was elected judge in 2010 and currently serves in the first municipal district, hearing misdemeanor cases on the West Side of Chicago.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant public defender for 13 years

Law school: University of Notre Dame, 1993

Notable: In 2018, Gallagher acquitted Chicago police officer Robert Rialmo of battery charges related to a bar fight. Rialmo was already on paid administrative leave for the 2016 shooting of Quintonio LeGrier and Bettie Jones. He was fired the following year. In 2022, Gallagher acquitted a woman of two misdemeanors after she was accused of driving over a neighbor family's garden and damaging a car in retaliation for their criticisms of northwest side Ald. Jim Gardiner.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys praised Gallagher for his "thorough understanding of the legal process" and his "ability to manage his court call."

Linzey D. Jones**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Jones was elected judge in 2010. He currently serves in the Bridgeview courthouse.

**Previous experience:**

- Partner at a small law firm focused on labor and employment law (2003-2010)

- Village president, Olympia Fields (1997-2010)
- Associate and partner at Sidley Austin, a large law firm (1982-2003)

Law school: University of Illinois, 1982

Notable: Jones is the son of Linzey D. Jones Sr. and Dianne Ruth Jones, who were involved in the civil rights and labor movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Dianne Jones led efforts to desegregate Chicago's Rainbow Beach and, as a teacher in Harvey, helped establish one of the first teachers unions in Illinois. Linzey Jones Sr. led sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters in Urbana-Champaign, was the first Black person elected to serve as the chair of the grievance committee for the United Steelworkers of America Local 65, and went on to become a lawyer representing injured workers.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he's able "to handle his call with good court management skills and is respectful to those appearing before him."

Susan Kennedy Sullivan**Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

Sullivan was elected judge in 2010. She currently serves in the probate division, hearing cases involving estates of people with disabilities. Sullivan previously heard cases involving guardianship of juveniles and elder law cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice specializing in elder law and probate cases (1994-2010)
- Adjunct professor, DePaul University College of Law, teaching an elder law course (1998-2017)
- Registered nurse in Washington, D.C.; New York; and Chicago (1974-1992)

Law school: DePaul University College of Law, 1994

Notable: Sullivan ran unsuccessfully for the appellate court in 2014. She is married to retired Circuit Judge Daniel J. Sullivan.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart, an all-girls Catholic boarding school in Lake Forest, Illinois

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she is "praised for showing empathy toward litigants," and her rulings have been described as "thoughtful."

Terry MacCarthy **Judge since:** 2010**Judicial experience:**

MacCarthy was elected to the bench in 2010. He is currently assigned to the domestic violence division in the Maywood courthouse, where he hears civil orders of protection and criminal domestic violence cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant public defender, including seven years as a supervisor in the felony trial unit (1991-2010)
- Adjunct professor, DePaul University College of Law and University of Chicago Mandel Legal Aid Clinic

Law school: DePaul University, 1990

Notable: MacCarthy's father, Terence F. MacCarthy, was the longtime head of the federal public defender's office in Chicago.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys praised him for "his knowledge, fairness, patience, and diligence."

Sandra Gisela Ramos  **Judge since:** 2010

Judicial experience: Ramos was elected judge in 2010. She currently serves in the law division trial section, hearing lawsuits seeking large monetary damages. Ramos previously heard criminal cases in the first municipal district.

Previous experience:

- Attorney in private practice, specializing in criminal defense
- Cook County assistant state's attorney, prosecuting felony cases

Law school: DePaul University, 1986

Notable: Ramos ran unsuccessfully for the Illinois Appellate Court in 2020. Her campaign chair was former Circuit Judge Gloria Chevere, who was reassigned from the criminal division in 2014 for jailing people for contempt of court for wearing their pants too low. Ramos also unsuccessfully challenged Timothy Evans for chief judge in 2016. Earlier this year, an appellate court panel took the rare step of reversing a decision by Ramos and reassigning the case to a different judge. The case involves Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, who sued a former employee and his wife for defamation in 2018 over emails they allegedly sent anonymously to media

organizations claiming Dart had had an extra-marital affair and had physically attacked his wife. Ramos threw out the case against the employee's wife, saying that because her husband had admitted to sending the emails, she was no longer liable. The appellate court disagreed and said Ramos should have allowed the case to proceed. They did not explain why they reassigned the case — and one of the appellate panel's judges said she did not think doing so was necessary. In a statement, Ramos said she couldn't comment on the case because it is still pending.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys speak highly of her, noting that "she does the right research when needed, is patient, and diligent."

Daniel Patrick Duffy **Judge since:** 2014

Judicial experience: Duffy was appointed to the bench in 2014 and elected in 2016. He currently serves in the law division, hearing tax and workers' compensation appeals.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice at several small firms doing general civil litigation (1993-2014)
- Member of the Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission Review Board, which reviews complaints of attorney misconduct (2004-2013)

Law school: University of Notre Dame, 1993

Notable: Duffy is married to Sheila O'Grady, a former chief of staff to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. In 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit found that Duffy had filed a "clearly frivolous" appeal to avoid paying back a \$300,000 loan he personally guaranteed for a failed kitchenware business. The appeals court determined that the lawsuit was so frivolous that monetary sanctions against Duffy and his business partners were appropriate. It was the second time Duffy was sued over a business loan he had failed to pay back. In 2009, Duffy and then-business partner Victor Reyes, a longtime Daley aide and Chicago powerbroker, were sued by Bank of America for failing to pay back a business loan they had guaranteed. The case ended in a settlement in 2012, the Chicago Sun-Times reported. In a statement, Duffy said, "I hope my last eight years on the bench have provided a sufficient track record by which voters can evaluate me on my own merits for retention."

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "Attorneys reported that he is diligent, fair, even-keeled, and sensitive to diversity." The Chicago Council of Lawyers noted that he "appears to have improved his judicial temperament substantially" since his last evaluation in 2016.

Anna Maria Loftus**Judge since:** 2014

Judicial experience: Loftus was appointed to the circuit court in 2014 and elected in 2016. She currently serves in the general chancery section of the chancery division. Previously, she heard mortgage foreclosure cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Partner at a midsize law firm focused on medical malpractice cases and appellate work (2003-2014)
- Associate at an insurance law firm focused on employment cases (2000-2003)
- Law clerk for Illinois Appellate Judge Michael J. Gallagher (1998-2000)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1998

Notable: Earlier this year, an appellate court panel reversed Loftus' decision in the case of former Chicago police officer Anthony Abbate, who was convicted of aggravated battery for physically assaulting a bartender in 2007 and was fired from the department. The police pension board denied Abbate's application for annuity benefits, but Loftus overturned that decision, saying the assault was not related to his job. The appellate court reversed her decision, agreeing with the board that Abbate's actions on the night of the assault and attempted cover-up were related to his employment as a police officer. Loftus declined to comment on the decision.

Community involvement:

- Mentor, Adoption Center of Illinois, a local adoption agency
- Volunteer, Friendship Center Food Pantry (2013-2018)

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "Attorneys praised her thoroughness, thoughtful opinions, fairness, high integrity, and temperament."

Aleksandra "Alex" Gillespie **Judge since:** 2014

Judicial experience: Gillespie was appointed to the circuit court by the Illinois Supreme

Court in 2014. She won election in 2016. She currently serves in the Skokie courthouse, hearing criminal and traffic cases. She also has presided over the Cook County Drug Court Treatment Program since 2017.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant state's attorney (1994-2014)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1993

Notable: Gillespie sentenced a man to two years' probation and 200 hours of community service after he was convicted of a felony hate crime for a racist rant against a Puerto Rican woman in a Cook County forest preserve in 2018 that was captured on a viral video.

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Total Link2 Community, a Northbrook-based nonprofit for young adults with disabilities, since 2002

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. Attorneys interviewed by the Illinois State Bar Association "overwhelmingly reported that she has a good command of the law and knows how to apply it. She is described as being professional, fair, efficient, and even-tempered." The Chicago Council of Lawyers notes that she is "very invested in the drug court that she runs in the second (municipal) district."

Eve Marie Reilly **Judge since:** 2014

Judicial experience: Reilly was appointed to the circuit court in 2014 and elected in 2016. She currently serves in the chancery division.

**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant state's attorney (1997-2014)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1997**Community involvement:**

- Volunteer, Misericordia Heart of Mercy, a nonprofit dedicated to providing housing and services to people with developmental and intellectual disabilities

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she "is praised for being prepared and for being willing to do her own research to understand all issues." The Illinois State Bar Association said, "While most attorneys praised her temperament, a few found her to be impatient at times."

Freddrenna M. Lyle **Judge since:** 2011

Judicial experience: Lyle was appointed to the circuit court in 2011 and elected the following year. She is currently the supervising judge of the court's surety section, which deals with companies that guarantee bonds in civil lawsuits. She also hears cases in the probate division. Previously, she heard mortgage foreclosure cases and elder law matters.

**Previous experience:**

- 6th Ward alderperson in the Chicago City Council (1998-2011)
- Attorney in private practice at several small firms focused on a variety of cases, including criminal defense, election law, business disputes, domestic relations, and municipal finance (1980-1998)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1980

Notable: Lyle served as alderperson of the 6th Ward, covering parts of the Englewood, Chatham, and Greater Grand Crossing neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side for 13 years. In 2011, she lost a tight race for re-election to Roderick Sawyer. In a 2015 interview, she said being alderperson sometimes felt like "being on a treadmill — no matter how fast you run you're going nowhere" because as the needs of her community increased, the resources being provided to the community decreased.

Community involvement:

- Member, South Side NAACP
- Member, Rainbow PUSH

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated her well qualified and said she is "praised for her knowledge of the law and for her courtroom management." The council said in foreclosure cases, she is praised as "one of the judges who doesn't automatically assume the bank is right."

Jerry A. Esrig **Judge since:** 2013

Judicial experience: Esrig was first appointed to the circuit court by the Illinois Supreme Court in 2013. In 2014, he lost a bid for election and was subsequently re-appointed by the Supreme Court before being elected in the 9th subcircuit in 2016. Esrig currently serves in the law division, hearing lawsuits for large



monetary damages. He previously heard jury trials for smaller amounts at the Richard J. Daley Center.

Previous experience:

- Partner at small private firms, handling personal injury and commercial litigation (1978-2013)

Law school: University of Chicago, 1978

Notable: Esrig is married to Judge Deborah Thorne, a bankruptcy judge in the Northern District of Illinois. Last year, in a case that had stretched on for years, Esrig ruled mostly in favor of Lyons Township High School District 204 after it was sued by the Township's Trustees of Schools for unpaid fees and expenses in its bid to separate finances from the trustees' office. The trustees said the school district owed more than \$4 million, but Esrig ordered them to pay just over \$750,000.

Community involvement:

- Mentor at Evanston Youth and Opportunity United as part of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers rated him well qualified. The Illinois State Bar Association said lawyers "described him as being very smart and intelligent, with excellent legal knowledge and ability, and as being professional, impartial, and patient."

Alison C. Conlon**Judge since:** 2015**Judicial experience:**

Conlon was appointed to the circuit court by the Illinois Supreme Court in 2015. She won election the following year. She currently serves in the chancery division.

**Previous experience:**

- Worked at two mid-sized law firms focused on commercial disputes and representing municipalities in civil cases.
- Worked for less than two years in the Chicago Law Department, handling policy and commercial cases.
- Clerked for U.S. District Judge Charles P. Kocoras.

Law school: Duke University, 2000

Notable: In 2020, Conlon ordered the city of Chicago to turn over four decades of police misconduct files in response to a years-old Freedom of Information Act lawsuit. The city appealed her decision, and the appellate court overturned it last year, saying that at the time the FOIA request was denied the

city was under a separate court injunction that prohibited it from releasing the records. In September, the Illinois Supreme Court agreed with the appellate court, saying that FOIA requests should be evaluated by courts based on the circumstances at the time of the request, and overturned Conlon's decision.

Community involvement:

- Former board member, Debate It Forward, a nonprofit that teaches debate skills to kids
- Former advisory board member, Catholic Charities of Chicago

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers describes her as "well prepared and thoughtful" with a "calming influence in the courtroom."

Rossana P. Fernandez **Judge since:** 2015**Judicial experience:**

Fernandez was appointed to the bench in 2015 and elected the following year. She currently hears domestic relations cases in Rolling Meadows. Previously she was assigned to the domestic violence division.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in a number of small firms and eventually her own practice, focused on civil lawsuits, personal injury cases, and immigration (1997-2015)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1996

Notable: Several attorneys told Injustice Watch that Fernandez is often unnecessarily harsh on litigants and lawyers and makes unusual and unreasonable procedural demands. These temperament issues were reported during her time in the domestic violence division and since she has moved to domestic relations. Attorneys noted that while she is knowledgeable about the law, her lack of flexibility is especially stark when cases involve victims of domestic abuse, pro se litigants, and other marginalized individuals. But other attorneys noted that she is committed to making sure everyone plays by the same rules and was "relentless" in pushing for increased legal resources and expedited case processing at the domestic violence courthouse and for a legal help desk to be created for pro se litigants in Rolling Meadows.

In a statement, Fernandez said she has worked with legal aid organizations to help people navigate the often-confusing court

process. "I am keenly aware how judicial rulings affect families profoundly." In her current assignment, she said, "I ensure that the code of civil procedure is adhered to, particularly with issues of 'notice' so that no one loses their home, their children, or their liberty without due process and that all parties work together with an eye on equitable division of assets."

Community involvement:

- Volunteer with Chicago Cares, a nonprofit that connects volunteers with service projects
- Member, expungement committee, Fiesta del Sol, a four-day Latino festival in Pilsen

Bar association ratings: Four bar associations found her not recommended for retention. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "While attorneys agreed that she knows the law, writes well-thought-out opinions and is hardworking, substantial concerns were raised about her judicial temperament and demeanor." The Chicago Council of Lawyers recommended her for retention but noted that "reports of problems with Judge Fernandez's handling of her call are credible and concerning."

William B. Sullivan**Judge since:** 2015**Judicial experience:**

Sullivan was appointed as a judge in 2015 and elected the following year. He currently hears mortgage foreclosure cases in the chancery division.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice specializing in real estate and business transactions (1993-2015)
- Worked as a real estate broker (1998-2015)

Law school: DePaul University, 1992

Notable: In 2018, Sullivan created a judicial exchange program between Lebanese judges and the Cook County judiciary.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Oak Park Area Arts Council (2019-2022)

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys praised him for his "broad legal knowledge and ability" and said some specifically cited his "exceptional patience with pro se litigants."

John Fitzgerald Lyke, Jr.**Judge since:** 2015

Judicial experience: Lyke was appointed to the circuit court in 2015 and elected the following year. He currently serves in the criminal division hearing felony cases. He previously served in felony bond court.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice focused on criminal defense, civil rights and personal injury cases (2000-2015)
- Administrative hearing officer for the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, where he adjudicated violations of Chicago municipal codes (2006-2011)
- Cook County assistant state's attorney, prosecuting felony, homicide, and juvenile cases (1994-2000)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 1994

Notable: In 2017, the Cook County Assessor's Office placed a lien on a Calumet Park property owned by Lyke and his wife, Denise, saying they owed more than \$6,000 in back taxes for four years in which they erroneously claimed that it was their primary residence and received tax breaks for it. Records show the Lykes have claimed a homeowner exemption in recent years on a different house in Matteson that they bought in 2007. Lyke said he wasn't aware of the lien until Injustice Watch brought it to his attention, and he has since paid the taxes.

As a defense attorney in 2012, Lyke represented Tarance Etheredge, a man who was charged with aggravated assault of a police officer in an incident in which officers shot him in the back, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. He ultimately pleaded guilty to a gun-possession charge. In 2020, Etheredge accepted a \$10 million settlement from the city (Lyke was not involved in the civil lawsuit).

In 2017, Lyke's son was shot while attending a funeral for a friend. In an interview with the Chicago Tribune after the shooting, Lyke said he was praying for both his son's recovery and for the shooter. "The shooter, I want him to understand that I love him — I'm just disappointed and upset with him — because we're all God's children," Lyke said.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said, "Some advocates questioned his application of the law when he was assigned to central bond court, but as a

judge in the criminal division, he is reported to be well prepared, fair to all parties, and does well in managing his courtroom."

Carrie E. Hamilton**Judge since:** 2015

Judicial experience: Hamilton was appointed to the circuit court by the Illinois Supreme Court in 2015. She won election in 2016. She currently serves in the Markham courthouse, hearing civil cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Assistant U.S. attorney, Northern District of Illinois (2001-2015)
- Worked in two Chicago-based law firms as an associate focused on commercial litigation (1996-2001)
- Adjunct professor at Northwestern University School of Law, teaching seminars on human trafficking and trial advocacy

Law school: Northwestern University, 1996

Notable: During her time as a federal prosecutor, Hamilton served as deputy chief of the public corruption section and was one of the lead prosecutors in the corruption trial of former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich. Other notable cases include the prosecution of former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, the fraud and attempted bribery case against political fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko, a corruption case involving Chicago's red light camera contracts, and the prosecution of members of the terrorist organization Hamas.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Heartland Alliance Human Care Services, which focuses on providing holistic services to end poverty through jobs, justice, housing and health care
- Advisory council member, Reclaim13, an organization that provides holistic services to survivors of human trafficking
- Past board member, James B. Moran Center for Juvenile Advocacy, which provides free legal and social services to underprivileged youth in Evanston

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers praised her "for her courtroom management and for her temperament."

Patricia "Pat" Spratt**Judge since:** 2015

Judicial experience: Spratt was appointed to the circuit court in 2015 and elected the following year. She currently hears mortgage foreclosure cases in the chancery division. One day a week, she presides over the North Lawndale Restorative Justice Community Court.

**Previous experience:**

- Associate and partner at two mid-sized law firms practicing civil litigation (1992-2015)
- Adjunct law professor, Loyola University Chicago (2001-2008)
- Law clerk, Judge William J. Bauer, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit (1991-1992)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1991

Notable: Spratt is married to William J. Bauer, a former chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit. She had previously been his secretary and, after graduating law school, was his law clerk. Bauer was appointed to the federal district court by President Richard Nixon and had previously served as the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. Although Spratt ran for judge as a Democrat, several other Republican-appointed former U.S. attorneys were top donors to her campaigns for judge, including Dan K. Webb, Anton Valukas, Samuel Skinner, and former Illinois Gov. Jim Thompson, all of whom worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office under Bauer.

In 2018, the Illinois Appellate Court found that Spratt had committed "plain error" in a case involving tenants who had sued their former landlord. At trial, after the tenants had presented their case, they filed a motion for a directed verdict, asking Spratt to rule in their favor before the defense presented its case, which she did. The appeals court said that under Illinois rules only defendants can make those types of motions. The appeals court noted that a finding of plain error by an appellate court in a civil case should be "exceedingly rare" but that this case qualified. Spratt declined to comment.

Spratt was assigned to the North Lawndale Restorative Justice Community Court in 2019. The court provides an opportunity for young adults accused of nonviolent crimes to have the charges against them dropped after participating in a restorative justice process and committing to a repair of harm agreement. Spratt told Block Club Chicago the court was "a place I've wanted to be ever since I got on the bench."

Community involvement:

- Board member, BUILD Chicago, a nonprofit violence prevention and mentorship organization
- Volunteer and development board director, PAWS Chicago, a no-kill animal shelter

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said, "She understands and implements the concepts of restorative justice" in her assignment to the North Lawndale Restorative Justice Community Court. The Illinois State Bar Association said lawyers "praised her legal knowledge and ability, thoroughness, sensitivity, temperament, and integrity."

James L. Allegretti**Judge since:** 2016

Judicial experience: Allegretti was elected judge in 2016. He currently serves in the Skokie courthouse, hearing eviction and small claims cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice, focused on personal injury, workers' compensation, DUI and traffic cases (1989-2016)
- Fourth Ward alderman in Park Ridge (2005-2011)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1978

Notable: Allegretti ran for judge as a Republican and was elected from the 12th subcircuit. Attorneys who spoke to Injustice Watch raised concerns about Allegretti's courtroom demeanor, saying he was especially harsh to people without attorneys and had a pro-landlord bias in eviction cases. During one court hearing in September, an Injustice Watch reporter observed Allegretti mute an unrepresented tenant repeatedly before kicking them off of a Zoom hearing. On the same day, Allegretti lectured a different pro se tenant who had failed to comply with an earlier order. "The orders of the court must be complied with. If the orders aren't complied with, then they have no teeth. Then we would be like the police: They can't shoot you, they can't chase you, they can just say, 'Thank you, sir, can I have another?'" Allegretti, through a spokesperson, could not be reached for comment.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said some attorneys noted that Allegretti "can be demeaning with tenants in eviction proceedings," but most lawyers said he is "even-keeled and respectful."

Eulalia “Evie” De La Rosa **Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:** De La Rosa was elected judge in 2016. She currently serves in the Maywood courthouse hearing criminal cases.**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant public defender (2005-2016)
- Court coordinator, Cook County Circuit Court Child Protection Division (2004-2005)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 2003**Notable:** De La Rosa joined a class-action lawsuit of female assistant public defenders and law clerks who worked for the Cook County Public Defender’s Office between 2015 and 2019. The plaintiffs alleged that they suffered a hostile work environment caused by persistent sexual misconduct of male detainees in the Cook County Jail and that the office’s higher-ups didn’t do enough to stop the behavior. The county board approved a \$14 million settlement in the case in 2020.**Bar association ratings:** Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she is reported to have good temperament and is “both punctual and diligent on the bench.”**Carolyn J. Gallagher****Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:** Gallagher was elected as a circuit judge in 2016. She is currently assigned to the probate division, hearing decedent estate cases.**Previous experience:**

- Worked at two private firms and then opened her own solo practice focused on commercial litigation (1982-2000, 2004-2016)
- Taught legal research and writing at

DePaul University College of Law (2000-2004)

- Law clerk, Illinois Appellate Judge Helen F. McGillicuddy (1982-1985)

Law school: DePaul University, 1981**Notable:** Gallagher unsuccessfully ran for an appellate court seat in 2020. In the run-up to that election, she got into a public dispute with her former circuit court campaign consultant, Mary Kay Dawson. In 2019, Gallagher sent a three-page letter to judges and Cook County Democratic Party leaders accusing Dawson of misrepresenting her relationship with the party and slandering her. Dawson denied Gallagher’s claims, and the judge was criticized by some for airing these grievances. Gallagher declined to comment.**Community involvement:**

- Volunteer, Harry Chapin Food Bank
- Former board secretary and volunteer general counsel, New Health Foundation Worldwide, a nonprofit focused on affirming health care for transgender and gender nonconforming people

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers commended her courtroom management skills. “She is reported generally to be respectful to the parties before her, and she is praised for her temperament.”**Maureen O’Donoghue Hannon****Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:** Hannon was elected to the circuit court in 2016. She currently serves in the county division hearing real estate taxation, adoption, mental health commitment, election, and other cases.**Previous experience:**

- Cook County assistant state’s attorney, representing the county and individual officials in various civil lawsuits, including six years as a supervisor in the division of the office that handles cases with multiple county agencies (1991-1995, 1998-2016)

- Associate attorney at a boutique law firm representing both plaintiffs and defendants in employment, commercial, and other civil lawsuits (1995-1998)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1991**Notable:** In her role at the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, Hannon represented the Cook County sheriff’s merit board in a case filed by a former sheriff’s deputy who claimed that his firing should be voided because Sheriff Tom Dart had improperly appointed some of the board’s members. The appellate court ultimately ruled in the deputy’s favor, leading to other lawsuits and several fired sheriff’s employees getting reinstated with back pay.**Bar association ratings:** Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association noted that “attorneys uniformly praised her legal knowledge and command of the law, fairness, professionalism, and temperament.”**D. Renee Jackson****Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:** Jackson was elected judge in 2016. She currently serves in the domestic relations division.**Previous experience:**

- Worked in private practice focusing on commercial litigation (2006-2008, 2010-2016)
- Staff attorney, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, primarily dealing with land use and real estate (2008-2010)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 2005**Community involvement:**

- Mentor, Rainbow PUSH Oratorical Society

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said attorneys and colleagues said, “she is a hard worker who understands the legal issues well and treats all with respect, though sometimes her

conferences tend to run long due to allowing both parties a lot of time in an effort to be fair and make sure both sides are heard.”

Daryl Jones **Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:** Jones was elected to the circuit court in 2016. He has primarily served in the juvenile justice division.**Previous experience:**

- Member of the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, which makes parole decisions and sets conditions for people being released from prison (2015-2016)
- Chief of intergovernmental affairs and senior legal adviser at the Illinois Department of Corrections (2012-2015)
- Cook County assistant state’s attorney (2005-2012)

Law school: Southern Illinois University, 2005**Notable:** Jones is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran. When running for judge in 2016, he said he had always aspired to be a juvenile court judge because of his experience growing up in a neighborhood with gangs and other social issues. Jones ran unsuccessfully for 37th Ward alderperson in 2007. One of his opponents was a former alderperson who had resigned after being convicted on corruption charges in the 1990s. When asked about it, Jones told the Los Angeles Times, “There are a lot of people who either have served time in prison or have a family member who’s been convicted of a crime. How can you criticize a candidate for going to prison, if you’ll alienate the voters at the same time?”**Bar association ratings:** Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is “reportedly impartial on the bench and treats everyone with respect” but noted that “some respondents say he can be slow to rule,” while others said, “He takes the time necessary to come to the right conclusion.”**MORE ONLINE****Check out our digital judicial election guide**To read more information about each candidate, scan the QR code or visit injusticewatch.org/judges.

Steven A. Kozicki**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

Kozicki was elected judge in 2016. He currently serves in the Rolling Meadows courthouse hearing misdemeanor cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice handling criminal and civil cases (1998-2016)
- Trial attorney at a small firm focused on defending municipalities in civil lawsuits, including defending police officers in civil rights cases (1989-1998)
- DuPage County public defender (1986-1989)
- DuPage County assistant state's attorney (1985-1986)

Law school: Loyola University of Chicago, 1985

Notable: In 2019, Kozicki personally vouched for then-associate judge Richard Schwind, who had reportedly told a Black defendant who was on trial for hitting a man who had used a racial slur against him, "You were never a slave." Kozicki sent a letter to his fellow circuit judges urging them to vote to retain Schwind for another four-year term, Injustice Watch reported. "I urge you to trust my 33 years of direct evidence of Judge Schwind's qualifications to remain an associate judge of Cook County," Kozicki wrote. The circuit judges ultimately voted not to retain Schwind. In a statement to Injustice Watch, Kozicki said that he "in no way condoned Judge Schwind's inappropriate and insensitive comment in open court." But he felt that the comment was isolated and not representative of Schwind's time on the bench. "I felt that this single comment, during a career of more than 30 years, should not cost him his career."

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he "gives clear rulings, is sensitive to all, and has high integrity."

Matthew Link**Judge since:** 2016

Judicial experience: Link was elected judge in 2016. He currently serves in the domestic relations division, hearing divorce, child support, and custody cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Legal counsel and policy director, Chicago

City Council finance committee (2007-2016)

- Associate at a small law firm focussed on civil litigation defense (2005-2007)

Law school: DePaul University, 2004

Notable: Link ran unopposed for a 14th subcircuit vacancy in the 2016 election, winning despite having no campaign website or fundraising committee and not participating in the bar association evaluation process. He had spent most of his career working for the Chicago City Council finance committee under longtime Ald. Ed Burke.

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Special Olympics

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he has good legal ability and is regarded for "his sensitivity to cultural differences among the litigants who appear before him."

Mary Kathleen McHugh**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

McHugh was elected to the circuit court in 2016. She currently serves in the Bridgeview courthouse, hearing civil jury cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Partner in a small law firm working on personal injury defense and insurance cases (1993-2016)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1993

Notable: McHugh was a passenger in a car driven by Associate Judge Mohammed Ghouse, when he crashed it into a parked car in Hinsdale in 2019. McHugh refused to speak to police investigators, according to records obtained by WBEZ. The car Ghouse was driving was registered to McHugh, WBEZ reported. Ghouse eventually pleaded guilty to driving under the influence and was assigned to administrative duties. In a statement to Injustice Watch, McHugh said she was being treated for a head injury and did not refuse to cooperate with police.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she "presides over high volume calls and is reported to be organized and fair to all litigants."

Leonard Murray**Judge since:** 2007**Judicial experience:**

Murray was selected as an associate judge in 2007 and elected as a circuit judge in 2016. He is currently the acting supervising judge in the housing section of the first municipal district, hearing cases involving municipal code violations.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice focused on tax law and litigation (1974-2007)

Law school: Northwestern University (1974)

Notable: Murray is a U.S. Army veteran. The Illinois Supreme Court suspended Murray's law license in 1999 over his neglect of seven clients over a seven-year period. His initial suspension was for 15 months, but after three months the remaining suspension was stayed and he was permitted to return to practice on probation. The Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission found that for at least two of the seven clients, Murray was dealing with the murder of his sister. Murray could not be reached for comment.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Africa International House USA, an African arts and culture organization

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by most bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said he "has good legal knowledge in his current assignment." LAGBAC, the LGBTQ+ Bar Association, rated Murray not recommended for retention.

Brendan A. O'Brien**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

O'Brien was elected to the circuit court in 2016. He currently presides over jury trials in the law division.

**Previous experience:**

- Partner at a large national law firm, focused on defense against medical malpractice and construction injury cases (1999-2016)
- Associate at two firms specializing in railroad defense and motor vehicle injury cases (1996-1999)
- Appropriations and research analyst for Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan (1991-1992)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1996

Notable: Several members of O'Brien's family have served in the judiciary. Both his father and grandfather were judges. O'Brien's wife, Jessica A. O'Brien, was also a judge until she resigned in 2018, after a jury found her guilty of mortgage fraud for lying to lenders in a \$1.4 million scheme in which she pocketed \$325,000. In a statement, a spokesperson for O'Brien noted that he was not accused or involved in this matter.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is a "well-respected jurist who is exceptionally knowledgeable" and is "praised for his temperament."

Kevin M. O'Donnell**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

O'Donnell was elected judge in 2016. He currently serves in the Rolling Meadows courthouse hearing civil, parentage, misdemeanor, and traffic cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice focused on estate planning, real estate, corporate transactions, and business disputes (1992-2016)

Law school: DePaul University, 1988

Notable: O'Donnell was found not qualified or recommended by the majority of bar associations in 2016. The Illinois State Bar Association said there were concerns about "his limited trial experience and lack of recent complex litigation."

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS), an overnight emergency homeless shelter

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said he is regarded as having "thoughtful and well-reasoned opinions," as well as having "good legal ability."

Susana L. Ortiz**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

Ortiz was elected judge in 2016. She currently serves in the pretrial division, hearing initial proceedings in criminal cases. Ortiz previously heard domestic violence and felony cases in the Markham courthouse.

**Previous experience:**

- Staff attorney, IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, specializing in criminal defense litigation and supervision of law students in the school's criminal defense legal clinic (2003-2016)
- Worked at a small criminal defense and DUI firm (2001-2002)

Law school: IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, 2000

Notable: In 2019, Ortiz set a \$300,000 bond for a man arrested after a shooting at a house party in Englewood that injured 13 people, despite the fact that prosecutors did not present any evidence that the defendant was responsible for the shooting. Advocates for bail reform criticized the decision, saying it violated Chief Judge Timothy Evans' 2017 order directing judges to set bond in amounts that people could afford to pay. Ortiz declined to comment on her decision. In 2008, Ortiz and students from IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law successfully petitioned to overturn the conviction of Herbert Whitlock, a man wrongfully convicted of murder.

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said Ortiz was "especially praised for her impartiality and temperament in her previous assignment presiding over domestic violence cases."

Jesse Outlaw**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

Outlaw was elected as a circuit judge in 2016. He is currently assigned to the probate division, hearing adult guardianship cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Associate at a small law firm focused on real estate and municipal law (2012-2015)
- Attorney in private practice specializing in bankruptcy, divorce, and other civil cases (1981-2015)

- Court-appointed representative for adults with disabilities

Law school: Texas Southern University, 1977

Community involvement:

- Volunteer, Branch Family Institute, a nonprofit that provides culturally relevant counseling services to families affected by poverty and racism (2017-2018)

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "Attorneys highly respect him for his expertise in guardianship law and for his professionalism and fairness."

Patrick Joseph Powers**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

Powers was elected judge in 2016. He currently serves in the domestic relations division.

**Previous experience:**

- Attorney in private practice focused on family law, divorce, estate planning, and residential real estate (1988-2016)

Law school: John Marshall Law School, 1987

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "Attorneys praised his legal knowledge and ability, his sensitivity, and efficiency in running his courtroom, especially during the transition to Zoom hearings."

Marguerite Ann Quinn**Judge since:** 2007**Judicial experience:**

Quinn was selected as an associate judge in 2007, after running unsuccessfully for the circuit court in 2006. She was elected as a circuit judge in 2016. She currently serves in the law division trial section. She previously served in the criminal division and the Skokie courthouse.

**Previous experience:**

- Worked in private practice, focusing on real estate taxation (1999-2007)
- Cook County assistant state's attorney (1986-1998)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1985

Notable: In Skokie, Quinn presided over specialty courts, which are designed to offer treatment and alternatives to incarceration

for veterans, people charged with misdemeanors, and people struggling with mental illness. She presided earlier this year over the first trial against Sterigenics, a medical-device sterilization company that has been sued by over 700 people for health complications that allegedly arose from the company's now-closed Willowbrook facility. That trial ended in September with a \$363 million jury verdict for the plaintiff, Sue Kamada. Quinn ran unsuccessfully for the Illinois Appellate Court in 2012.

Community involvement:

- Board member, Lawrence Hall Family Youth Services, a nonprofit dedicated to providing trauma-informed education and housing to address childhood trauma
- Board member, Mobile Care Chicago, a no-cost asthma and dental care nonprofit partnering with underserved elementary schools in Chicago
- Former mentor for the Schuler Scholars program for first-generation college students

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Chicago Council of Lawyers said she is praised for her rapport with juries and is "impartial and respectful to those who appear before her."

Catherine Ann Schneider**Judge since:** 2016**Judicial experience:**

Schneider was elected to the circuit court in 2016. She currently serves in the law division, hearing pretrial motions for civil lawsuits. She previously served in the first municipal district, hearing civil cases.

**Previous experience:**

- Supervising attorney at CARPLS, a legal aid organization (2008-2016)
- Attorney in private practice focused on commercial debt collection and real estate cases (2006-2008)
- Worked in Career Services at Loyola University Chicago School of Law (2004-2006)
- Legal counsel and vice president of a mortgage company (2002-2004)

Law school: Loyola University Chicago, 1994

Bar association ratings: Recommended for retention by all bar associations. The Illinois State Bar Association said, "Attorneys praised her legal ability and her commitment to eliminating bias."

The 13th subcircuit in the far northwest suburbs covers Palatine, Schaumburg, Barrington, and Hanover townships, and parts of Arlington Heights and Buffalo Grove.

**Gary William Seyring (Republican)****Experience:**

Law Offices of Gary W. Seyring

- Attorney in private practice (2010-present): Focused on real estate, contract disputes, domestic relations, contested estates, and personal injury cases.



Seyring, Watson & Galvin

- Attorney in private practice (2000-2010) Flynn, Murphy, Ryan & Seyring
- Attorney in private practice (1978-2000)

Notable: Seyring is running for judge in the 13th subcircuit for the fifth time. He lost in the Republican primary in 2014 and 2016, and lost in the general election in 2018 and 2020. In addition to his law practice, he also has served as an arbitrator with the Cook County Arbitration Program. Before becoming a lawyer, Seyring was an accountant for several years.

Bar association ratings: Rated qualified or recommended by all bar associations.

Joe Gump (Democratic)**Experience:**

Law Offices of Joseph M. Gump

- Attorney in private practice (2020-present): Focused on real estate transactions and misdemeanor criminal cases.



Cook County Public Defender's Office

- Assistant public defender (1989-2020): Started in the appeals division. Spent 17 years representing defendants in felony cases at the Rolling Meadows courthouse.

Notable: Gump ran unsuccessfully for judge in 2020. His parents served time in federal prison in the 1980s for participating in nonviolent, nuclear disarmament protests on federal property, which Gump has said inspired his career in public defense.

Bar association ratings: Rated qualified or recommended by all bar associations.

Endorsements: IVI-IPO, Personal PAC



InjusticeWatch



Injustice Watch is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization in Chicago. Our work focuses on justice and equity in the court system. This judicial election guide is the result of a year of extensive research and reporting about Cook County judicial candidates. We offer the guide as a resource to voters. We don't make endorsements or recommendations.

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