

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Clocked in 12 hours a day, 7 days a week

How staffing bills for migrant shelters swelled with overtime

By Joe Mahr, Nell Salzman, Alice Yin and Dan Petrella
Chicago Tribune

When a security guard clocked out of a Streeterville migrant shelter one Friday in March, he'd just logged his 84th hour at work that week.

His bosses told the city it was at least his 56th day in a row work-

ing a 12-hour shift, according to invoices they filed with the city — invoices whose sizable overtime helped contribute to tens of millions in city payments to the firm staffing the city's migrant shelters.

The security guard was employed by Favorite Healthcare Staffing, a national employment firm that has become the city's

biggest contractor to handle the growing migrant crisis. Under the deal, the city hired the firm to provide case workers, security guards, janitors and many other employees for the migrant shelters — at initial base rates ranging from \$60 to \$150 an hour.

Invoices reviewed by the Tribune show that hundreds of Favorite Staffing workers logged

84-hour workweeks — with the overtime, paid at a 50% premium, helping balloon bills that topped at least \$56 million. At a Woodlawn shelter in early February, for example, two-thirds of the 50 staffers logged working at least 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

At the Streeterville site one week in March, roughly 8 in 10 workers logged the same hours.

The detailed invoices help explain how costs to shelter migrants have swelled this year

amid a growing debate about how well the city has managed the crisis.

Exactly what happens inside Chicago's nearly two dozen migrant shelters has largely been a mystery to the public because the city has chosen to keep the media and even volunteers out.

Yet what's becoming more clear — from a Tribune investigation of city records — is how costly the

Turn to Staffing, Page 10



Noor Ali prepares breakfast with her children, Idrees Odeh, 7, left, and Ethar Odeh, 5, at their Willow Springs home Friday. Husband and father Eyaad Odeh is at left. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

2 freed US hostages prepare to fly home

Details still scarce about son of Chicago natives, others taken by Hamas

By Ilana Arougheti
Chicago Tribune

After 14 dark days, Uri Raanan expects the best day of his life to be about a week away.

Raanan's daughter Natalie Raanan and her mother, Judith Raanan, Uri's ex-wife, were released into Israel Friday after two weeks spent as hostages of the terrorist group Hamas.

Natalie and Judith plan to fly back to Chicago in about a week, Uri Raanan told reporters from his home in Bannockburn, near Deerfield, Friday evening, hours after the first news reports of their release.

"I've been waiting for this moment for a long time," Uri said. "I haven't been sleeping for two weeks."

Hamas operatives kidnapped Judith and Natalie at gunpoint from the Nahal Oz kibbutz in southern Israel, where they were visiting family, on Oct. 7. While they were held at an undisclosed location in Gaza, their family received no proof of life.

The Raanan family will celebrate Natalie's birthday as soon as she is able to travel from Israel to Chicago, Uri said. Natalie turns 18 on Tuesday.

Turn to Hostages, Page 15

INSIDE: Supplies begin trickling into the besieged Gaza Strip.

■ U.S. urging Israel to avoid strikes against Hezbollah.

■ Workplaces grapple with fallout from violence in Israel and Gaza.

Stories in Nation & World

ECHOES OF 9/11?

Local Palestinian Americans, Muslims face violence and backlash amid Israel-Hamas war

By Caroline Kubzansky, Angie Leventis Lourgos and Shanzeh Ahmad
Chicago Tribune

Noor Ali has been leaning on her Islamic faith as the Chicago area faces a surge in crimes targeting Muslims and Palestinian Americans in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war.

"We are not safe anywhere," said the Willow Springs woman, who is Palestinian American.

For many local Arab Americans

and Muslims, the recent backlash has been reminiscent of violence and discrimination following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, which included hate crimes, unprecedented surveillance and widespread Islamophobia in Chicago and across the nation.

"I think it's triggering people's reaction back to 9/11, and folks are explicitly making that comparison," said Eman Abdelhadi, assistant professor of comparative human development at the University of Chicago, who

is Palestinian American. "Now we're back to that place where it feels like ... walking around isn't quite safe. Voicing your opinions isn't quite safe. That's definitely the feeling in Muslim and Arab communities right now."

An official with the Chicago office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations described the current tenor as even worse than the post-9/11 environment.

"The level of blind hatred and depravity we are witnessing should not be on us to condemn

and prevent, that's on our nation's leaders on whose watch this America is emerging," said Ahmed Rehab, CAIR-Chicago's executive director, in a statement.

At the same time, Abdelhadi said there's greater internal strength today within these communities, which have developed more means of advocacy and empowerment over the past two decades.

Some of that strength

Turn to Palestinian, Page 14

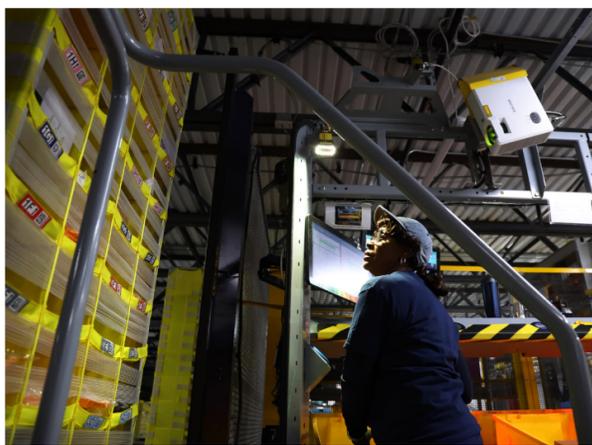
INSIDE

How does your garden grow?

Along a path less traveled at the Chicago Botanic Garden, plants are being evaluated on beauty and brawn to see which are best suited to the Upper Midwest. **Life+Travel**

The present and future at Bears QB

Tyson Bagent rose from zero-star recruit to Bears rookie QB. And as the team grows likelier to move on from Justin Fields, it may have a shot at top pick. **Chicago Sports**



Tammy Adams works in the fulfillment area filling pods at the Matteson Amazon facility on Wednesday. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Amazon facilities may boost south suburbs

Distribution centers in Matteson, Markham opened 2 years ago

By Brian J. Rogal
Chicago Tribune

Commercial real estate developer Keith Lord thinks Chicago's south suburbs, which have seen an exodus of jobs, manufacturing and retail stores in recent decades, are on the verge of a turnaround.

Lord's own company is getting

ready to break ground on the next phase of Market Square Crossing, a mixed-use development taking shape on the former Lincoln Mall site in Matteson.

A lot of factors are at play in bringing towns in the south suburbs back, Lord said, but one stands out: the 2021 opening by Amazon of a pair of mammoth distribution facilities in Matteson and nearby Markham, by far the largest in the Chicago region.

"It put Matteson on the map,"

Turn to Suburbs, Page 13

TODAY'S WEATHER



High 58 Low 45

Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 14

\$5.75 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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Hamlet evokes Spain at its rustic best



Rick Steves
Tribune Content Agency

Perched on a high ridge, the impossibly quaint hobbit hamlet of O Cebreiro welcomes visitors to Galicia — a hilly, damp, green region in northwest Spain that feels vaguely Irish. O Cebreiro is a time-warp connection to an uncomplicated, almost prehistoric past, when people lived very close to nature, in stone igloos with thatched roofs. With sweeping views across the verdant but harsh Galician landscape, O Cebreiro is constantly pummeled by some of the fiercest weather in Spain.

O Cebreiro smells like wood fires, manure and pilgrim B.O. The village is shared by two groups: a few simple townspeople, who cock their heads quizzically when they see an iPhone, and weary Camino de Santiago pilgrims on an adrenaline high after finally reaching Galicia. O Cebreiro marks the final stretch of their month-long, 450-mile pilgrimage to the city of Santiago de Compostela, along the Camino de Santiago (or Way of St. James). The town's dogs bark at each other territorially from across the street, completely ignoring the backpackers who regularly trudge through town.

For a taste of the local culture, get a snack or drink at one of the half-dozen very humble pub/restaurants, which feed pilgrims and other visitors hearty Galician cuisine in a smoky atmosphere. One local specialty is caldo galego, a traditional soup that originally came from the leftover stock used to prepare an elaborate Sunday feast (cabbage or turnip greens, potatoes, and so on). It's not too exciting, but it does provide comfort on a



The humble palloza, a round stone hut with a peaked thatched roof, dates to Celtic times about 1,500 years ago. CAMERON HEWITT

rainy day.

If you hear something that sounds like, but isn't quite Spanish, it's Galego — the distinctive language of Galicia. A mix between Portuguese and Spanish, Galego has gradually evolved to sound more like the latter. The most apparent difference is the change in articles: el and la become o and a — so the big Galician city La Coruña is known as "A Coruña" around here. The Spanish greeting buenos días is bos días in Galego. If you want to impress a local, say gracias — a super-polite thank you.

To see how local villagers used to live, visit the pallozas. From Celtic times 1,500 years ago, right up until the 1960s, the townspeople of O Cebreiro lived in these humble, round, stone huts with peaked thatched roofs. Three of

the nine surviving pallozas have been turned into a loosely run museum, where visitors can learn about the lifestyles of the people who lived in the huts.

Upon entering a palloza, which typically housed a dozen people (and their animals), you'll find two simple rooms: the only "private" room in the house, belonging to the parents, and a living area around a humble fire. Surrounding the fire are clever benches (which were also used as very hard beds) with pull-down counters so they could double as a table at mealtime. Cooking was done over the fire using a chain hanging from a big beam, while giant black-metal spirals suspended from the ceiling were used to smoke chorizo sausage.

Attached to the living area is a miniature "barn,"

where animals lived on the lower level and people — kept warm by all that livestock body heat — slept on the upper level. Thanks to the ideal insulation provided by the thatch, and the warmth from the fire and animals, it was toasty even through the difficult winter.

In O Cebreiro, all roads lead to the village church. Founded in the year 836, Royal St. Mary's Church (Santa María la Real) is supposedly the oldest church on the entire French Road route of the Camino de Santiago. The interior of this pre-Romanesque building is surprisingly spacious, but very simple. The building is embedded in the ground, with sunken floors that added protection against winter storms. At a desk, a clerk stamps pilgrims' credentials and

sells votive candles.

As dictated by ancient tradition, the baptistery is separate from the main part of the church, with its giant and very rough font used for immersion baptisms. In the chapel is a much-revered 12th-century golden chalice and reliquary, which holds items relating to a local miracle: A peasant from a nearby village braved a fierce winter snowstorm to come to this church for the Eucharist. The priest scoffed at his devotion, only to find that the host and wine had physically turned into the body and blood of Christ, staining the linens beneath them — which are now in the silver reliquary.

To get way off the beaten track, enjoy Spain at its rustic best by "playing pilgrim" for a few hours here in hauntingly beautiful

O Cebreiro.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

GEOQUIZ ANSWER

New Mexico. Located in the Chihuahuan Desert in the southeastern part of the state near the Texas border, the park includes more than 100 caves. The main attraction is Carlsbad Cavern, which can be explored on your own. Ranger-guided tours are also available.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Xikers looking forward to traveling US on world tour

By Jae-Ha Kim
Tribune Content Agency

Less than seven months after xikers debuted, the 10-man Korean pop group has already released two EPs: "House of Tricky: Doorbell Ringing" (which hit No. 1 on Billboard's Emerging Artists chart) and "House of Tricky: How to Play."

Now on the group's first headlining world tour, nine of the members participated in this interview, which was conducted in Korean and translated into English. (Junghoon, who's taking time off to recover from an injury, isn't touring with his bandmates.)

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Many fans first saw xikers before your official debut when you opened for your labelmates, Ateez, in 2022. What did you learn from them?

Jinsik: There were so many things that we learned as guest performers at our seniors' concerts. Among all of those, I watched how they performed, especially in terms of their expressions, actions and movements that mesmerized the audiences. We learned to reflect that expressionism into our own performances.

Q: Was the Ateez tour your first time in the United States?

Sumin: Yes, that was actually my first time visiting the U.S. There are so many wonderful memories from that time. The hamburgers are so good! Texas was one of the most memorable. It was supposed to be pretty cold in Texas when we were there, but the weather worked out beautifully and the temperature outside was just perfect for



The 10-man Korean pop group xikers is on its first headlining world tour. KQ ENTERTAINMENT

me. I went out for walks in the park and it was just so peaceful.

Q: What did performing at (the Korean culture convention) this past August mean to you?

Junmin: It was such an honor to be at KCON Los Angeles. I was very excited, because the audience's cheers were so loud and energetic even during our song cover performance. It made me really want to have our own concert in the United States, so I'm ecstatic that we now have the chance to do so!

Q: How was it kicking off your world tour in Japan?

Yujun: The fans seemed to enjoy it and cheered for us a lot. So throughout the concert, I was extremely happy and had so much fun. After the Coke Studio SuperPop Japan 2023 event, we went out and I got to eat my favorite okonomiyaki (savory pancake). It tasted so good!

Q: Do you have a bucket list of things you'd like to do while you're on tour in the United States?

Hunter: There's so many places I'd like to go! Just to name a few though,

it would definitely be amazing to experience the atmosphere of Times Square, visit the Empire State Building and see the Statue of Liberty in New York. In Los Angeles, I want to take a dance class and then have fun at Universal Studios. In Chicago, I think it'd be amazing to go on a boat tour, but there are honestly so many places I'd like to go and so many things I'd like to do or see that it's hard to list them all.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?

Yechan: I actually have fun memories as a child playing with my cousins in the U.S.

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?

Minjae: Cup ramyun and kimchi!
Hyunwoo: I always take a mini humidifier and a neck pillow around with me.

Q: What is your best vacation memory?

Seoun: It was my first time eating barbecue (in Texas). It was so delicious!

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Breeze Airways lost our bags. Can you help us find them?

By Christopher Elliott | King Features Syndicate

Breeze Airways lost my family's checked luggage on a flight from Los Angeles to Jacksonville, Florida.

It has been four days, and we haven't received an update from Breeze. Plus, there's no way to get in touch with the airline. We're missing two large suitcases and a car seat.

We would like to receive our lost luggage and be fully compensated for the clothes and necessities that we have had to purchase since losing our checked luggage.

We would also like to be refunded the full amount of our airfare for this hardship.

— Benjamin Wallis, Los Angeles

A: I'm sorry that Breeze lost your luggage.

Most airlines have sophisticated tracking systems that are supposed to ensure your luggage gets delivered to you at the end of your flight. And considering that you're paying Breeze a fee for your luggage, you should expect your bags to show up on the carousel promptly after you land.

But the system isn't perfect. Airlines lose or misplace one or two bags every flight, and unfortunately, yours were the unlucky ones this time.

If an airline loses your luggage on a domestic flight, federal regulations require it to compensate you for "reasonable, verifiable and actual incidental expenses" you incur while your bags are delayed. The expenses are subject to the maximum liability limit of \$3,800 per passenger.

However, Breeze is

under no obligation to refund you for your tickets.

Normally, I can't help readers track down lost luggage, but your case gave me pause. You said you could not reach Breeze. That's troubling. Breeze claims that it's reachable by messaging, text and email.

I also publish the names, numbers and email addresses of the Breeze customer service executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. Breeze is also one of the most responsive airlines in the business.

So, as I read your case, I thought to myself, "What could have possibly gone wrong?"

The answer is — nothing.

Breeze appears to have responded to your questions in a timely manner.

But it did not provide any updates on your luggage, and it should have.

In fairness to the airline, your luggage loss happened during one of the busiest weeks of summer, and the airline was probably straining under a heavy load of lost luggage complaints.

That's no excuse, but it probably explains the lack of information.

Next time you fly, I would recommend buying a tracking device like an AirTag. That way, you'll always know where your bags are. (Better yet, don't check in any bags.)

I contacted Breeze on your behalf. It found your bags and reunited them with you a week after your flight.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.