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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



Enrollment plummets at regional universities

The schools are facing significant challenges with no easy solutions

By **Jeremy Gorner**
Chicago Tribune

MACOMB, Ill. — Swinging their pompoms in sync, the Westernettes danced in the sun on a recent Friday morning as the Marching Leathernecks played their traditional tune “Let’s Go ‘Necks!” in the shade.

Three days before classes were to start, the dance team and marching band performed before a large crowd outside the College of Fine Arts and Communication Recital Hall on Western Illinois University’s main campus. This was a celebration of sorts, warranting an appearance by Ray, the school’s beloved English bulldog mascot clad in a WIU sweater of purple and gold.

Inside the recital hall, the school’s president, Kristi Mindrup, took the stage with other university administrators and mentioned the school’s enrollment figure in 1973 of 15,469 — three times the roughly 5,100 estimated enrolled this school year. But she urged attendees not to dwell on the past, quoting former President Theodore Roosevelt: “Comparison is the thief of joy.”

“WIU will be successful at any size because of our people and our dedication to our mission,” Mindrup said during the Aug. 22 event. “There is one question: Are we ready to let go of what we were and to lift up where we are now in order to evolve into what we will be?”

With enrollment dropping drastically over the last two decades, WIU is in the same company as many Illinois public regional universities. Sometimes called directional universities, the schools representing geographical areas of the state, including Eastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University and Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, are facing some of their most significant challenges in modern times in attracting students.

The enrollment drop is part of

Turn to Schools, Page 14

‘A seed that can bear fruits of justice and peace’

Pope Leo XIV launches Vatican’s groundbreaking ecology project directed by a Chicago priest

Above: The Rev. Manuel Dorantes walks the grounds of Borgo Laudato Si’ on May 20 outside Rome. Dorantes moved from serving in Chicago to Italy after being appointed by Pope Francis as the administrative management director of the Laudato Si’ Center for Higher Education in 2024. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

During the dedication, the Holy Father reaffirmed his commitment to ecological preservation and education, carrying on the legacy of his predecessor Pope Francis, whose writings inspired the Borgo Laudato Si’.

“What we see today is a synthesis of extraordinary beauty, where spirituality, daily life and technology dwell together in harmony,” the pope said during his visit according to Vatican News. “It is a place of closeness and convivial proximity, and a seed that can bear fruits of justice and peace.”

The inauguration featured a performance by renowned Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli and his son Matteo. The Holy Father toured the project grounds, fed fish, petted horses and celebrated a liturgy for the program’s students, workers and their families.

The sprawling roughly 2,000-year-old property includes ancient Roman archaeological sites, farmlands, pontifical villas and lush papal gardens, with areas for organic farming and regenerative cultivation. More than 3,000 plants from 300 species thrive on the land, Dorantes said.

The site also houses the Laudato Si’

Turn to Dorantes, Page 9

By **Angie Leventis Lourgos**
Chicago Tribune

VATICAN CITY — Gazing at the lavish Italian-style gardens and intricate topiaries of the pope’s vast summer estate just outside of Rome, a local priest who immigrated to Waukegan from Mexico as a child marveled that he’s been entrusted with their care.

The grounds are home to the Vatican’s seminal ecological project, the Borgo Laudato Si’, a 135-acre experiment in sustainable farming and environmental education. It’s designed to serve as a model for intertwining the protection of both creation and often-vulnerable populations such as migrants, refugees and those in poverty, said the Rev. Manuel Dorantes, the initiative’s managing director and a longtime Archdiocese of Chicago priest with deep ties to several area parishes.

“We all need to come together to be able to promote environmental sustainability and uplift human dignity, especially of the most vulnerable,” Dorantes, 42, said.

Chicago native Pope Leo XIV formally inaugurated the Borgo Laudato Si’ on Friday, declaring that “care for creation is truly a vocation for every human being.”

INSIDE



A “No Guard” sign is held up at the Mexican Independence Day Parade. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/TRIBUNE**

Lower turnout at parade as Trump portends actions

President Donald Trump set the stage for a surge of immigration enforcement with a social media post depicting military helicopters flying over Chicago with the title “Chipocalypse Now.” In Pilsen, there were fewer people but the same pride at the Mexican Independence Day Parade.

Stories in Chicagoland, Page 3

Johnson’s new speed cameras see big early revenue

Aldermen tout safety impact, but resident reactions more mixed

By **William Tong** and **Jake Sheridan**
Chicago Tribune

The black box blinked once. Twice. Attached to a light pole on South Ashland Avenue, the newly-minted speed camera flashed a total of eight times in about 30 seconds one August afternoon, cars zooming by after cruising off I-55 a few blocks north.

Drivers ticketed for speeding there on June 1 — the first day the camera went online — have so far paid the city more than \$60,000, in increments of \$35 and \$100.

It’s a drop in the municipal bucket for Mayor Brandon Johnson’s citywide camera expansion

Turn to Cameras, Page 2



A speed camera fires its light as vehicles pass in the 7100 block of North Sheridan Road in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago on Aug. 26. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**



Visit Portugal's surprising 'second city'



Rick Steves

I'm really into "second cities" these days. For generations, Industrial Age powerhouses in Europe turned into what we would call "the rust belt," while their elegant "first city" counterparts enjoyed the luster of the Information Age.

But over the last decade or so, the rust has become a trendy accessory, and industrial ruins have turned bohemian chic.

A prime example is Porto — the hub of Portugal's north and the country's second city. Just three hours from Lisbon by train, it's fiercely proud of what distinguishes it from the Portuguese capital as it ages happily along the Douro River — alongside most of the world's port wine.

Spared by the 1755 earthquake that toppled Lisbon, Porto is charmingly well-preserved. Block for block, it may be even more full of gritty, Old World charm than Lisbon. Houses with red-tiled roofs tumble down the hills to the riverbank, prickly church towers break the skyline, mosaic-patterned stones line streets, and flat-bottomed boats called "rabelos" ply the lazy river.

The city comes with a steady sea breeze and a seagull soundtrack. Being on the ocean, Porto has weather that's always changing. You're likely to get sun and rain at the same time — causing the locals to exclaim, "A widow's going to remarry."

Porto offers two high-impact sightseeing thrills: the postcard-perfect ambience of the riverfront Ribeira district and the opportunity to learn more about — and taste — port wine that ages just across the river in Vila Nova de Gaia. (Afciona-



Flat-bottom boats called "rabelos" are a frequent sight along the Douro River in Porto, Portugal. **DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI**

dos of port — or of dramatic scenery — can use Porto as a springboard for visiting the nearby Douro Valley, where grapes grow on steep stone terraces.) Porto also features sumptuous Baroque churches and civic buildings, a bustling real-world market hall, atmospheric lanes of gloriously tiled houses, a variety of good restaurants, appealing boutiques, and quirky but worthwhile museums.

The Ribeira (literally "riverbank") district is the most colorful and touristy quarter. Strolling the Ribeira Embankment, while popping in and out of shops that line the way, is Porto's best lazy-afternoon activity. Be sure to duck into the back streets, where time-worn faces and once-dazzling facades age together gracefully as if inspired by all that Port wine.

Downtown Porto is compact but steep, making distances seem longer. Foot-weary travelers take the well-promoted "Six Bridges" cruises that float up and down the Douro River, offering a fine orientation and glimpses of all of Porto's bridges, including the majestic steel Ponte Dona Maria Pia, designed by Gustav Eiffel — architect of Paris' famous landmark.

For wine connoisseurs, touring a port-wine "lodge" — where the wine ages for years — and sampling the product is an experience not to be missed. Port is a medium-sweet wine, usually taken as a digestif after dinner. For some, port is an acquired taste — but it's one worth cultivating. As I always say, "Any port in a storm..."

In the district of Vila Nova de Gaia there are 18 lodges open for touring

and tasting. At any lodge, the procedure is about the same; travelers simply show up and ask for a tour. Sandeman, the most high-profile company, is sort of the Budweiser of port — a good first stop for novices. While the wine-cellar experience can be unforgettable, consider splurging for a convivial, romantic, and port-centric gourmet dinner at one of several fine port tasting rooms in downtown Porto. I've long liked Prova, a lounge-y little wine bar where sommelier Diego lavishes guests with nicely paired plates to go along with his fine wines and port.

In addition to tasting wine, consider taking a food tour in Porto. They're timed for an early lunch or dinner, last three or four hours, come with a mile of walking, and include four

to eight stops. The tours are pricey, but if you think of them as a meal as well as a tour, they make the splurge easier to swallow.

Porto natives are known as "tripeiros" (tripe-eaters), compared to Lisbonans who've been dubbed "cabbage-eaters," and you may encounter tripe stew on your food tour. Along with this local specialty, a favorite sandwich is the "francesinha," which is like a Portuguese French dip with a tomato-based sauce. Picnic sandwiches and scenic perches — for people-watching, views, or both — are easy to come by in lively Porto.

The town's two most famous foods — tripe stew and a quadruple-decker, sauce-drenched, gut-bomb of a sandwich — say it all: This place is unpretentious. Locals claim they're working too hard to worry

about being pretty. As an oft-repeated saying about Portuguese cities goes, "Coimbra studies, Braga prays, Lisbon parties...and Porto works."

Portugal's second city is ever-changing, often chaotic, and worth a visit now more than ever. Whether you're enjoying Ribeira's riverfront promenade, cruising the Douro, or sampling port in this port town, Porto gives you a delightful taste of authentic Portuguese culture.

Rick Steves 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. Visit his website at ricksteves.com, email him at rick@ricksteves.com or follow his blog on Facebook.



Ampers&One members said that traveling in the U.S. was inspirational. **FNC ENTERTAINMENT**

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

NYC vibe special for Ampers&One

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
Tribune Content Agency

The seven-person band Ampers&One boasts quite the international lineup. Group leader Kamden and Kyrell are from the United States. Brian hails from Canada. Mackiah is from Australia, and Jiho, Siyun and Seungmo are from South Korea, where the group is based.

Formed in 2023, the septet recently released their latest mini album, "Loud & Proud." Of the title, Kamden said, "We all decided to be loud and proud of ourselves in whatever we do in life. That mindset also carries into how we perform the songs on this album." Jiho added, "The overall vibe is powerful, with melodies and beats that really stick in your head. I think fans will especially enjoy focusing on those points."

This interview with the members has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Everyone says that touring can be difficult. What did you do to maintain your health?

Jiho: During the early part of our first North American tour, there was one show where I wasn't in the best condition and couldn't perform one of the songs. Since then, I've made sure not to eat too much right before going on stage. Normally in Korea, I don't really eat breakfast, but on

tour I realized I needed energy to perform, so I made a habit of waking up and having breakfast every day.

Q: Did you work on any of the songs while you were traveling around the U.S.?

Kamden: Yes, I wrote lyrics for a few songs. On long travel days, I played the songs on repeat and thought a lot about what kind of message I wanted to convey. I usually prefer writing lyrics in my own practice room, where I can block out any distracting noise. But for the first time, I wrote (part of) "I'm Down" on the airplane. And surprisingly, it turned out pretty well!

Mackiah: While we were touring in America, we ... started working on our raps whenever we had free time. Personally, I focused on what I wanted to express and jotted down keywords for each track.

Q: Does the music you hear in a particular city or country inspire your own work?

Kamden: Definitely. Actually, not just the music, but I think each country has its own vibe. During our U.S. tour, I came up with some melodies just while walking down random streets. **Siyun:** I also get inspiration from the scenery, the artwork and the people we see along the way when we're driving or walking through a city.

Q: What do you recall about some of the cities where you played?

Kyrell: I had already been to New York City before, but exploring it with all the members was special. We loved Joe's Pizza! We also had a blast at the Mall of America in (Minnesota). I do wish we could have explored more of the cities we visited. I remember Nashville had a really great vibe, even just driving through.

Brian: I had only been to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, San Francisco and Seattle before in the U.S., so everywhere else was new to me. **Seungmo:** LA left the biggest impression on me. We stayed there the longest and so many fans came to see us. I especially remember how beautiful the sky was.

Q: What is a bucket-list venue that you want to perform in one day?

Kyrell: I would love to perform all over the world, but one of the top venues on my bucket list is the Tacoma Dome, since it's close to my hometown! **Seungmo:** I've always wanted to perform at Wembley Stadium in the United Kingdom. I love soccer, so I know the stadium well, and seeing the artists who've performed there makes me really want to do it, too.

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

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Hertz wants \$842 more after insurance settles original bill

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

I rented a van from Hertz, and while I was driving it, I hit a deer. I immediately reported the accident to Hertz, filed a police report, and submitted a claim through my Chase credit card, which offers primary collision coverage.

Despite my efforts, Hertz failed to provide the necessary documentation for months, causing my claim with Chase to close due to nonresponse. Ten months later, Hertz suddenly sent me a bill for \$5,873, threatening to send me to collections.

After Chase settled the claim, Hertz demanded an additional \$842 for "diminished value," but it couldn't provide any documentation or explanation for this fee.

I've spent over a year trying to resolve this, and I'm exhausted. Do I have to pay this fee or can Hertz be held accountable for their lack of communication and transparency?

— *Victoria Muenchow, Anchor Point, Alaska*

A: Hertz should have sent you the necessary documentation, including the accident report, demand letter and itemized repair bill, promptly after the incident. Under most rental agreements, companies are required to act in good faith and provide timely communication, especially when insurance claims are involved. Hertz's 10-month delay in contacting you is unacceptable and likely violates their own policies for handling claims efficiently.

You did everything right by reporting the accident immediately, filing a police report and submitting a claim through Chase. You also kept meticulous records of the incident and claim.

In hindsight, you could have escalated the issue sooner by reaching out to Hertz's executive team or filing a formal complaint with your state's attorney general. (I publish the names and numbers of the Hertz customer service executives on my

consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.)

What is "diminished value"? Hertz claims the accident reduced the vehicle's market value after you hit the deer. According to Hertz, even though the repairs may have been flawless, the van was worth \$842 less. But there's just one problem — Hertz didn't bother to provide any documentation that proved the diminished value. The car rental company's inability to furnish documentation or a clear explanation for how it calculated this fee raises questions about its legitimacy.

Diminished value and its cousin, "loss of use," are the two most controversial car rental fees. Loss of use is the theoretical amount of money the car would have earned if it hadn't been in the repair shop. Some states have banned loss-of-use fees. While some rental agreements may include clauses that allow for diminished value claims, it's under-

stood that companies must substantiate such fees with evidence, like appraisals or a market analysis. Hertz didn't do this.

I contacted Hertz on your behalf. "Hertz sent me an email apologizing that everything had taken so long and said they would waive the diminished value fee as a gesture of goodwill," you reported. "Thank you so much for your help!"

This case is a reminder of the importance of paperwork — not just theirs but yours. Thank goodness you kept excellent records of your interactions with the car rental company and the credit card company. If you hadn't done so, you might not have had much of a case.

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.