

Chicago Tribune



\$5.75 | SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2026 | CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

AMERICA 250

Reflections on citizenship

New US citizens in Chicagoland share the joys and struggles of their journeys as nation hits landmark anniversary

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

For much of his life, the pastor considered his immigration status akin to a legal purgatory.

At the age of 6, his undocumented mother and father brought him from his birthplace of Guadalajara to the Southeast Side of Chicago in search of a better life for their family in the United States.

The Rev. Edgar Torres has few memories of growing up in Mexico but vivid ones of singing “The

Star-Spangled Banner” alongside his classmates as a little boy.

“At a young age, you don’t know if you’re undocumented or documented. You’re just a child,” he recalled. “I thought I was a proud American because I didn’t even know I was a citizen of Mexico. Because I always found the U.S. to be my country.”

Despite this strong sense of belonging and patriotism, he was essentially living on the margins, first without legal authorization as a child and later as a Deferred Action

for Childhood Arrivals recipient for roughly a decade during adulthood.

Yet a quarter century after his immigration, Torres was finally able to become a citizen and formally take the oath of allegiance to the nation he had long known and loved during his naturalization ceremony in October at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in Chicago.

Surrounded by his wife, baby daughter, parents — who by then held green cards — and dozens of

See CITIZENS on Page A6



The Rev. Edgar Torres, who was born in Mexico and became a U.S. citizen, greets people after a service on June 14 at New Community Covenant Church in Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood. BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE



‘THEY DON’T WANT TO GIVE US CLEAN AIR’

Gary residents say US Steel is jeopardizing jobs, health. The company says modern furnaces are too costly

Above: Natalie Ammons holds a nebulizer device shaped like a fish that her great-grandchildren, including Alivia, 4, Adonis, 5, and Eli, 4, sometimes use to help their breathing, after they played on May 26 outside her home near the U.S. Steel Gary Works plant in Gary.

BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

By John Lippert and Maya Wilkins
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

To escape a surge in Chicago’s gang violence, Natalie Ammons and her family moved in 1979 to a home just a few hundred yards from one of the world’s biggest steel mills.

On some nights, when the Gary mill pounded its red-hot steel slabs into thin sheets, she’d see flames shoot up through the smokestacks. She’d go to bed to the sound of rumblings from the mill and the smell of rotten eggs. In the morning, she’d find greasy, black particles scattered on her lawn, sidewalk and car.

Ammons, 71, said she never thought much about air pollution, not even as her coughing and chest colds got worse and worse. She was too busy catching the train to Chicago to run document retrieval for a big law firm.

What really scared her — and transformed her into a clean-air activist — was the first time she saw the breathing machines that her three great-grandchildren, Adonis, Alivia and Eli, use to recover from asthma attacks that doctors say are more common among children in Gary than nearby towns.

See GARY on Page A14

Chicago’s 911 mental health team flounders

Group’s dispatch volume down despite Johnson’s campaign promises

By Alice Yin
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Throughout his 2023 mayoral campaign, Brandon Johnson championed a progressive vision of sending teams of mental health clinicians instead of police officers to help people suffering from psychiatric emergencies.

But since he took office and started phasing cops out of the city’s Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement program, those teams of mental health workers have struggled to respond to 911 calls. CARE’s dispatch volume plummeted almost 70% during his second year, according to data obtained via a public records request, and plunged again last year after the Chicago Police Department took back its devices that provide real-time updates on radio and dispatch communications.

Those in-vehicle machines, known as portable device terminals, were a critical tool for teams of mental health workers to learn about psychiatric emergencies they could help defuse. Proponents of CARE have long argued that police are not well-suited for managing those scenes, but without access to those live devices, scores of 911 calls involving Chicagoans who may need mental health assistance are once again only getting police and Fire Department responses.

The Johnson administration has still not managed to get those terminals back to the CARE teams, nor will it say whether it ever intends to. Instead, the mayor’s team touted a still-in-progress overhaul of the emergency dispatch system that would allow CARE to bypass police and fire channels.

The program’s struggles since

See PROGRAM on Page A16

NATION & WORLD

US says it hit targets in Iran

The U.S. military said it struck multiple targets in Iran on President Donald Trump’s direction, continuing attacks that have shaken an uneasy ceasefire. **Page B5**

SPORTS

Summer of love ... and soccer

Paul Sullivan’s 12 takeaways from the summer, from a Cubs history lesson to the World Cup tourists’ love for U.S. hospitality to a gift for the pope and more.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Chiseling out ‘Iceboy!’

The Goodman Theatre’s big summer musical, the finale to its centennial season, is being put together bit by bit, piece by piece, using trial and error.

SUBSCRIPTION

Visit myaccount.chicagotribune.com or call 312-546-7900 to sign up for a subscription. To place an ad, visit placeanad.chicagotribune.com.

WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY H: 85 L: 75
MON. H: 94 L: 79
TUE. H: 96 L: 78
Complete details on Page A22

INDEX

Almanac A17
Crossword ... In Comics
Editorials B1

Horoscope ... In Comics
Letters B3
Obituaries A18

Rides G7
Success G4
Television E5

179th year No. 179
© Chicago Tribune



PRESIDENTS CUP™

INT vs USA

SEPTEMBER 22-27 | MEDINAH COUNTRY CLUB

TICKETS ON SALE NOW AT PRESIDENTSCUP.COM

Old-school joys await in beachy Nazaré



Tucked into a far corner of Europe, just two hours north of Lisbon, is one of my favorite beach towns: Nazaré, a Portuguese fishing town turned tourist retreat. Visitors are greeted by the energetic applause of the surf, widows with rooms to rent, and fishermen mending nets. This is a place to relax in the sun among cork groves, eucalyptus trees, ladies in petticoats, and men who stow cigarettes and fishhooks in their stocking caps. Nazaré strikes the ideal balance between romantic old-world Portugal and bustling seaside resort. Though most locals seem older than many buildings here, the town feels like a Portuguese Coney Island — humming with young people who flock here for beach fun. Off-season, it’s almost tourist-free — the perfect time to take in the wild surf and get a feel for the local way of life. The town’s layout is simple: Super-skinny streets with sun-bleached apartment blocks stretch away from an expansive beach. The beach sweeps between the new harbor in the south and the cliffs to the north, capped by the old-town neighborhood of Sítio. It seems that most of Nazaré’s 15,000 inhabitants are in the tourist trade, but it’s not hard to find pockets of vivid and authentic culture. Somehow traditions survive, and locals go about their old-school ways. I like to stroll through the market and wander the back streets for a fine look at Portuguese family life. Laundry flaps in the wind, kids play soccer, and fish sizzle over tiny curbside hibachis. Nazaré is famous for its traditionally clad women



On the Nazaré boardwalk, locals and tourists alike are enticed by vendors offering all sorts of sun-dried and salted fish. **RICK STEVES**

who — at least according to local lore — wear skirts with seven petticoats (one for each day, or for the seven colors of the rainbow, or ... make up your own legend). While the story is somewhat of an invention for the sake of tourism, there is an element of truth to it. In the old days, women would wait on the beach for fishermen to sail home. To keep warm in the face of a cold sea wind, they would wear several petticoats so they could fold layers over their heads, backs and legs. Even today, older and more traditional women wear skirts made bulky by several — but not seven — petticoats. The ensemble is completed with house slippers, an apron (hand-embroidered by the wearer), a woolen cape,

head scarf and flamboyant jewelry, including chunky gold earrings (often passed down from generation to generation). Nazaré doesn’t have any blockbuster sights, but its people-watching could keep you busy for days. The beach, tasty seafood and a funicular ride are the bright lights of my lazy Nazaré memories. The funicular — which leads from the beach up to the Sítio neighborhood — was built in 1889, the same year as the Eiffel Tower, and was designed by a disciple of Gustave Eiffel. With its own church, museum and main square, Sítio feels like a separate village on a scenic bluff. Up here, a stone memorial honors the nobleman and explorer Vasco da Gama,

who stopped here before leaving Europe for India. A tiny adjacent chapel sits on the spot where a statue of the Black Madonna hid in the rocks throughout the 400 years of this region’s Muslim Moorish rule, before it was rediscovered during the 12th-century Christian Reconquista. Down along the beach, local folk music groups play and dance for visitors. On my latest trip, I was treated to a show by the town’s oldest group, which has been kicking up Nazaré’s sand since 1934. If they’re not on the beach, you’ll probably find them dancing on a sidewalk inlaid with fine Portuguese stonework. When these dancers were younger, the vast beach at Nazaré was littered with

colorful fishing boats that were hauled in by oxen or teams of fishermen. But ever since a new harbor was built south of town, the working boats have been kept out of sight — only a few historic examples still ornament the sand. On the boardwalk, squadrons of sun-dried and salted fish are crucified on nets left under the midday sun. Locals claim they’re delicious ... but I’d rather eat barnacles. Barnacles (percebes) are sold on the street here like munchies. Merchants are happy to demonstrate how to eat them — like boiled clams, washed down with local beer. Fresh barnacles are expensive, as they are difficult and dangerous to harvest from the rocks they cling to in turbulent waves

along the coast. But when you rip off the tough outer skin of one of these guys and pop it in your mouth, knowing it was harvested just hours ago ... it’s worth the expense. With its black-shawl tradition and beachy hospitality, Nazaré is a great spot for a vacation from your vacation. Kick back and share a bottle of chilled vinho verde on the beach at sundown, and enjoy the endearing charms of tranquil Portugal. *Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.*

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Traveling helps fuel author’s creativity

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

For “Dreamt I Found You” novelist Jimin Han, putting herself in different environments is a great way to channel her creativity. “Traveling creates an energy that spurs me on to write,” said Han, who also teaches at the Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College. “I notice more things than I do when I’m home. Right now, I’m sitting on a terrace in a hotel in Myeongdong in Seoul. Already, I’ve written on the flight and earlier this morning working on the new book. Fingers crossed I have another novel soon.” This interview with Han has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What are you doing in South Korea?
A: I’m getting ready to take a bus to see a family member who is ill. Two years ago, I was here getting ready to travel to Namwon with my cousin to do research for “Dreamt I Found You.” We had one night in Seoul before jumping on a train early the next morning. I never imagined I’d be back so soon.

Q: Do you think any of your characters would make good travel partners?
A: Dahee from “Dreamt I Found You,” because she notices what you need without you saying it aloud and looks out for you. Chohui from “The Apology,” because she, too, can adapt to situations and make the best of them. Readers keep asking me to write a sequel centered on Chohui, who loves to travel. Maybe someday she’ll get



For novelist Jimin Han, her travels are an integral part of her writing process. **CHRISTINE PETRELLA**

her own story.

Q: What trips do you have planned so far?
A: I’ll be in Cape Cod with my writers group. We’ve been going every summer for over a decade and it’s so fun and inspiring. Two of us have a reading event at Harwich Port Library this time around with Below the Brine Bookshop selling copies. It’s such a great week, because we each go off to write during the day and then take turns cooking dinner at night. There are 12 or more of us so there’s always someone to walk into town with if you want company. Or if you want to be alone, there are so many places in the house or in town to work without interruption. You don’t have to take care of anyone and no one has to take care of you.

Q: Have you been to a place that felt like a storybook setting?
A: Scarborough Beach in Narragansett is summer for me. Every summer until I was in high school, we’d drive to visit my aunt and uncle in Rhode Island. We’d spend the whole day there with giant coolers of food. There was no end time other than the sun setting and we could do whatever we wanted. I was never bored. It didn’t feel like we were visiting the beach. It felt like it belonged to us, like we belonged there.

Q: Where have you eaten a

meal so delicious that you still think about it?
A: Perfect follow-up question! In Seoul near Namdaemun, I had the best jjajangmyeon (noodles with black bean sauce). I don’t know if it’s still there.

Q: What is your best or worst vacation memory?
A: Our close family friends arranged a trip to Italy one summer. They’re the best planners and have been to so many places around the world. Our kids were around the same age, middle school at the time, which is a great age to take on vacation. They’re old enough to be independent and young enough to want to be with their parents. ... So we started in Rome and then went to Umbria. We went on amazing day trips to small towns, beautiful markets, incredible food everywhere. We were about to travel on to Florence when we got word that our friends’ very close extended family member was gravely ill, so our friends had to return to the U.S. ... They insisted we continue the trip, (saying) they’d feel terrible if we left early too. So we reluctantly went on to Florence and then Milan before flying home. Best and worst, that was the trip. I feel so lucky to have friends like them. Traveling together as families like that is really a rare gift.

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

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

United changes flight, leaving passengers stuck in Australia

By **Christopher Elliott** | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I booked flights from San Francisco to Auckland, New Zealand, going back through Cairns, Australia, for my family of four. We purchased business class upgrades using 30,000 miles and a \$600 copay per passenger. Our return became a disaster. At 1 a.m. in Cairns, I checked the United app and discovered that my mother’s status on the flight had changed to “waitlisted.” I called United’s customer service. A representative told me that the flight was “not operating” and rerouted all of us through Sydney. When we arrived at Cairns Airport, Virgin Australia, which operated the first leg of our return flight, told us that only my mother had a confirmed ticket; the rest of us had nothing. I called United again. An agent said that Qantas had my ticket but couldn’t explain what this meant. Qantas couldn’t find any reservation without a confirmation number, which I didn’t have. United then offered a three-way call with Qantas but disconnected. While I was on the phone trying to sort this out, the flight departed without us. The next United agent claimed that we had seats on a flight from Sydney but couldn’t explain how we were supposed to get there from Cairns. Qantas staff at the airport refused to help. I purchased four one-way tickets on Virgin Australia from Cairns to Sydney for nearly \$890, plus \$60 in baggage fees. When we reached Sydney, I learned that United had canceled our tickets because we didn’t board the assigned Qantas flight, which never appeared in my app, email or texts. The Sydney United staff rebooked us, but our business class upgrades were gone. United claims that they sent a schedule change notification weeks before, but I never received it. When I contacted United’s customer service, a representative offered \$100 travel certificates and said that the matter was closed. United refuses to refund the \$1,800 in upgrade fees or reimburse the tickets that I had to buy. — *Krupa Singampalli, Union City, California*

A: When an airline makes a schedule change, it has a legal obligation to notify its passengers. United claims that it sent you an email, but a single email sent six weeks before departure isn’t enough. Airlines should send multiple notifications as the departure date approaches, and they should require you to acknowledge them. According to the Department of Transportation, when a flight is significantly changed, and a passenger doesn’t accept the new itinerary, the airline must provide a refund. United rerouted you through Sydney on partner airlines without ensuring that you actually had confirmed seats. This is a massive

breakdown in coordination between United and its partners. The situation at Cairns Airport was absurd. You bought a United ticket, so United should have been responsible for getting you home. Instead, you got caught in a blame game between three airlines. You could have escalated this to a United supervisor when the first agent couldn’t help. I publish the executive contact information for United on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org. But you did an excellent job of documenting your case with confirmation numbers, time stamps, and the names of agents you spoke with. After my team got

involved, United refunded the \$600 copays. The airline refuses to reimburse your Virgin Australia tickets. United maintains that because it had rebooked you on a Qantas flight (that you knew nothing about), the case is closed. This is the kind of runaround that drives travelers crazy. I recommend that you contact your credit card company to see if you can recover the rest of your expenses. *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.*