

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

THE MUSIC VS. THE MAN

Ahead of two Soldier Field concerts next month, how does his hometown of Chicago feel about Kanye West now?

NUCCIO DINUZZO/
CHICAGO TRIBUNE 2016



LIFE & TRAVEL

Rugged trails and starry skies

Tucson, Arizona, is a city for people who love hiking, biking and other outdoor activities.

GREAT WASTE IN THE GREAT LAKES



University of Toronto biologist Chelsea Rochman, center, and Meredith Omer, left, collect northern pearl dace to be measured for research at the Experimental Lakes Area, in western Ontario on Oct. 1, 2025. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Scientists push leaders to act on microplastics pollution

The tiny particles foul every corner of the Great Lakes, a source of drinking water for 40M people

By Michael Hawthorne
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Deep in the boreal forest of western Ontario, scientists do the unthinkable: They dump pollution into remote, self-contained lakes to see what happens.

Canadian researchers curtained off two halves of a lake during the late 1960s and doused each with different fertilizers. Their findings prompted bans on phosphorus-laden detergents that were supercharging algae blooms choking the Great Lakes.

They later documented

Reporting for this story was supported by the Pulitzer Center's StoryReach U.S. initiative.

how brain-damaging mercury spewed by coal-fired power plants contaminates fish, showed how gases emitted when burning fossil fuels creates acid rain, and demonstrated how thick Canadian crude oil called bitumen spreads after spills.

One of the latest experiments is unfolding amid the jack pine and spruce trees ringing Lake 378.

A newer team of scientists, led

by University of Toronto biologist Chelsea Rochman, churned a gallon of bright, color-coded microplastics into the water during each of the past three years — an amount intended to mimic bits of pollution in urban storm runoff.

Now the researchers are tracking the different types of plastic, some of which sank to the bottom of the 62-acre lake and others that eventually blew or washed ashore.

Graduate students on Rochman's team are dissecting fish and finding that manmade bits ingested by some of their catch

passed from stomachs into filets.

The team is analyzing microplastics painstakingly collected from plants, rocks, water samples and sticky traps erected along the shoreline.

All of this long-running research at the Experimental Lakes Area, or ELA, is geared toward persuading leaders in the United States and Canada to get off the sidelines and combat a growing, unchecked threat to the Great Lakes, the source of drinking water for 40 million people in

See POLLUTION on Page A10

Data centers near O'Hare get \$100M in tax breaks

Leaders tout benefits as suburban homeowners worry about financial gap

By Alex Nitkin and A.D. Quig
This story is a collaboration between the Illinois Answers Project and the Chicago Tribune.

More than a dozen data centers near O'Hare International Airport are receiving tens of millions of dollars in local property tax breaks this year, shifting the financial burden onto suburban homeowners even as local leaders tout the benefits of the explosive industry amid growing public backlash.

The impact lands hardest on homeowners in suburbs where the tax base leans on a handful of big businesses. In northwest suburban Northlake, the average homeowner would save more than \$2,000 on their annual tax bill — a difference of almost 30% — if local data centers did not receive valuation reductions and incentives, according to the analysis.

At least 18 northwest suburban data centers won multimillion-dollar breaks in their taxable value from Cook County officials — in one case landing on a valuation far below what the business originally paid to buy its site.

Of those 18, 11 already had special tax incentives approved by local leaders that dramatically reduced the properties' tax burdens over a dozen years, even before the latest board reductions. Twelve of them have a separate special state tax break that saves owners millions on sales and use taxes.

Combined, the assessment reductions and incentives knocked nearly \$2 billion off the taxable property value of data centers across just three suburbs — Elk Grove Village, Northlake and Franklin Park — according to an analysis by the Illinois Answers Project and the Chicago Tribune. That trans-

See CENTERS on Page A6

INSIDE



ANDY LYONS/GETTY

Preseason tuneup

Caleb Williams and the Bears fell 27-9 to the Bengals in Saturday's preseason matchup. **Sports and chicagotribune.com/sports**

Rift deepens

Historic allies U.S. and Canada fell deeper into a trade war marked by new tariffs Saturday. **Nation & World, Page B5**

Once seen as improbable, 'miracle child' starts high school

Matthew Erickson was born with a rare and aggressive brain tumor

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

At the first glimpse of his newly printed high school ID card, freshman Matthew Erickson jumped up and down with excitement, waving the little piece of plastic triumphantly in the air.

"Wow! I got it," he shouted in the halls of Huntley High School earlier this month during a materials pickup event prior to the first day of class. "I love it."

The start of high school seemed an improbable milestone for Matthew almost 15 years

ago, when he was born with an extremely rare and often fatal form of brain cancer.

A prenatal ultrasound just a few weeks before his birth had revealed the first sign of trouble: An excess of cerebral fluid had built up on the unborn baby's brain.

After delivery, the roughly 6-pound newborn seemed strong and healthy, scoring high on the standardized infant assessment done after birth. Yet when surgeons drained the fluid, they discovered a large malignant tumor called a high-grade glioma that had developed in the womb, engulfing most of the right hemisphere of his brain.

See MILESTONE on Page A4



Matthew Erickson, 15, hugs his mom, Sue Erickson, with excitement as his school bus pulls up to take him for his first day of freshman year at Huntley High School on Wednesday. STACEY WESCOTT/TRIBUNE

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WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY

H: 76
L: 58

MON.

H: 79
L: 60

TUE.

H: 80
L: 64

Complete details on Page A20

INDEX

Almanac A15

Crossword ... In Comics

Editorials B1

Horoscope ... In Comics

Letters B3

Obituaries A16

Rides G7

Success G4

Television E5

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SEPTEMBER 22-27 | MEDINAH COUNTRY CLUB

Visit remarkable retreats of Europe’s royals



Just like today, the royal families of the past were fond of their countryside getaways. These lavish estates provided an escape from the city and the summer heat, a place for diversions like hunting and horseback riding, and enough land to build grand showpiece palaces and gardens.

While Europe has many royal retreats you can visit, a few are remarkable for their sheer size, over-the-top opulence, and the larger-than-life personalities who built them.

The granddaddy of European palaces is Versailles, King Louis XIV’s 17th-century escape from Paris. Louis was the embodiment of the notion that some people were born to be rulers — and everyone else just needed to follow the rules. As a “divine monarch,” he had to impress upon his people that God had really ordained him to rule without question. And in order to do that, he needed an ultra-fancy house.

Louis spent freely from the public treasury to turn his dad’s hunting lodge into a palace fit for the gods (among whom he counted himself). The main palace boasts rooms lavishly decorated with painted ceilings, heavily ornamented furniture, and impressive art (even the Mona Lisa once hung here). Most striking is the Hall of Mirrors, lined with 17 arched mirrors. Back then, mirrors were a great luxury, and the number and size of these were — and still are — astounding.

Louis also built the ultimate garden — elaborately planned, pruned, and decorated, showing everyone that he could control nature



King Ludwig II’s fantastical Neuschwanstein Castle is the epitome of 19th-century Romanticism. **DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI**

like a god. The 1,500 fountains were a marvel of art and engineering. And they were symbolic. The Apollo Fountain shows the “Sun King” (Apollo ... or is it Louis?) in his chariot as he starts his journey across the sky, with his entourage of dolphins leading the way.

For 100 years, Versailles was the ultimate palace in Europe — sparking the construction of many wannabes. In Russia, the Romanovs’ answer to Versailles was the Catherine Palace, just outside of St. Petersburg.

In 1717, Czar Peter the Great and his wife, Catherine I, started construction on a modest two-story abode. When their daughter, Czarina Elizabeth, took over, she hired a famous Italian architect to rebuild the palace in a

grand Baroque style that, in Russia, became known as “Elizabethan.”

A textbook example of this style is the 9,000-square-foot Great Hall, boasting 300 mirrors (inspired by Versailles’ similar decor) and lit by up to 7,000 candles. Even more magnificent is the Amber Room. This jewel box of a room is slathered with six tons of amber mosaic — originally a gift from King Frederick William I of Prussia to his ally Peter the Great — which Elizabeth moved to the palace and expanded.

More than a century later, Bavaria’s “Mad” King Ludwig II also needed a countryside escape. Rather than deal with politics in Munich, Ludwig preferred spending time at his family’s hunting palace, Hohen Schwangau. While living

there, he dedicated himself — like a kid building a tree house — to the construction of his dream castle on a neighboring hill.

Built from 1869 to 1886, Neuschwanstein Castle was the epitome of 19th-century Romanticism. It’s wallpapered with misty medieval themes, many from the operas of Ludwig’s friend, Richard Wagner. The extravagant throne room, with an exquisite mosaic floor depicting a visual encyclopedia of animals and plants, was modeled in a Neo-Byzantine style to emphasize his royal status. And he slept in an elaborately carved canopy bed with a forest of Gothic church spires on top. Unfortunately, it all only lasted 172 days. Soon after he moved in, a panel of doctors declared Ludwig insane,

he lost his throne and was found dead in a lake.

Just before Ludwig built the castle of his dreams, his distant cousin, King Ferdinand II of Portugal, built a romantic hilltop palace of his own: the Pena Palace. Located in Sintra (just outside Lisbon), this elaborate retreat is architecturally interesting thanks to its mix of German Romanticism and Portuguese styles. Flamboyant Ferdinand converted a 16th-century Manueline monastery into a 19th-century palace. The result is a crazy, colorful, Neo-fortified casserole of Gothic towers, Renaissance domes, Moorish minarets, Manueline carvings, and Disneyland playfulness. The palace was occupied by royals until 1910, when they were ousted in a popular revolt. The elegantly

cluttered rooms are still arranged as they were back then, giving this place an intimacy rarely seen in palaces.

Today these homes of crazy rich royals are open to the masses — and the masses indeed come. (To save time and avoid long lines, reserve ahead when you anticipate crowds.) But even if you have to jostle your way through those crowds, visiting these over-the-top retreats provides insight into the dynamic, often quirky monarchs who once ruled Europe.

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

Glamping spot still magical for actor

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

When she’s not working, Scarlett Estevez said she enjoys seeing as much of the world as possible.

“I just returned from an incredible trip to Europe, where my friends and I visited Greece and Switzerland,” said Estevez. “(And I’m about to move (from Los Angeles) to New York, which I’m excited about.”

In her latest role, Estevez stars with Sunny Sandler in the Netflix film “Don’t Say Good Luck.” Produced by Sandler’s father, Adam, the movie centers on a student preparing for her high school musical while also dealing with a family tragedy.

This interview with Estevez has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Where are some places you’ve filmed on location?
A: “Don’t Say Good Luck” was filmed in New Jersey, which was super cool! I’ve also filmed (other projects) in New Orleans, Chicago, Vancouver, Boston and Los Angeles.

Q: If you could pick a location to film a project, where would it be?
A: I would love to film somewhere like Switzerland. I just visited ... and it was so magical. I spent the whole trip in awe of the scenery — the mountains, lakes and beautiful countryside were unlike anything I’ve ever seen. I’d love the chance to work somewhere that stunning.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?
A: When I was little, my family and I used to go to



Actor Scarlett Estevez would love to film in Switzerland after being in awe of the scenery on a trip. **JONNY MARLOW**

this glamping spot in Santa Barbara every year. It was so beautiful. We’d make s’mores, look at the stars at night, and my siblings and I would ride our bikes all around the campground. It felt so safe that our parents let us explore on our own and that made me feel so grown up. There was also a hiking trail that ended with a goat enclosure where you could feed them. Since I’m obsessed with animals, that was always my favorite part. I actually went back about a year ago, and it still had that same magical, nostalgic feeling. It brought back so many great memories.

Q: What’s the most important thing you’ve learned from your travels?
A: I think the most important thing I’ve learned is how far kindness goes. You go places and you don’t speak the same language, eat the same foods or dress or look the same. Kindness always unites. It’s so beautiful how much more you pay attention to the little details and the gestures people make. Kindness goes such a long way with everything in life.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?
A: I’ve wanted to visit Iceland for as long as I can remember, so that’s definitely at the top of my travel bucket list. The landscapes look absolutely unreal, from the waterfalls and

glaciers to the hot springs and the Northern Lights. It just seems like one of those places that doesn’t even feel real and I’d love to experience it for myself.

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?
A: Honestly, I have a hard time traveling light because I love all of my skincare, hair care and body care products. I usually end up checking a bag so I can bring everything I like to use. I’m also never without a bathing suit. I feel like no matter where you’re traveling, there’s always a chance to jump in the water and I’d rather be prepared than miss out.

Q: What is your best and/or worst vacation memory?
A: I think my worst vacation memory would have to be from the trip I just got back from. I came down with strep throat while I was in Switzerland, so I ended up having to go to the hospital, which was definitely an experience. The doctor spoke very little English, so there was a bit of a language barrier, and I was pretty sick for a good portion of the trip. It was definitely not how I imagined spending my vacation. But I still tried to make the most of it whenever I felt well enough. Thankfully, I was able to enjoy the rest of the trip.

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

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Driver charged damage fees after vehicle’s bald tire blew out on trip

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I recently rented a Mercedes SUV through Turo for a friend’s birthday trip to New Hampshire. While driving in the mountains at about 40 mph, the front right tire blew out. I called Turo immediately, and a representative told me that I could use their tow service for \$199. Since I have been a AAA member since I was 16, it made no sense to pay extra for a tow, so I used AAA instead.

AAA towed the vehicle to our vacation rental. The tow driver asked us to look underneath the vehicle. Both front tires were so worn that the metal threading was visible and protruding. The vehicle was unworthy for the road. I had to pay \$680 to tow the Mercedes back to Connecticut and \$1,000 for a car service to transport my group home.

I reported this to Turo. At first, the company said that the damage was due to preexisting wear and that I wasn’t responsible. About an hour later, I received a second email stating that the claim had been reopened and that I was financially responsible. Turo charged my card \$500 in damage fees. I’m out more than \$2,000 for renting a car with bald tires. Can you help me get my money back?

— Brent Marcelino, in New Britain, Connecticut

A: Your Turo host should’ve given you a vehicle with safe tires. And if the tires were bald, you shouldn’t have to pay a dime for the blowout. But this case is complicated.

Let’s look at what happened: You rented a 2022 Mercedes-Benz GLB-Class. You assumed that the car was safe. But when the tire blew, you discovered the truth.

You did the right thing by contacting Turo immediately. But then things went a little sideways. Turo initially agreed with you. It sent you an email confirming that it had determined the damage was “preexisting” and that you weren’t responsible.

Then Turo’s claims department did a U-turn. An hour later, it told you that the claim was reopened. Turo’s position was that while you weren’t “at fault,” you were still “financially responsible.” How can you be responsible for damage you didn’t cause on a car that shouldn’t have been on the road?

Turo says that it reviewed

the pre-trip photos and decided that the tire was in “good condition.” But standard walk-around photos don’t always show the inner tread wear. You were also stuck with a \$1,680 bill for towing, as well as a car service, because you declined Turo’s roadside assistance. When you go off-platform for repairs or towing, you usually pay out of pocket. Turo’s terms are clear about this; if you want the company to pay, you have to play by its rules.

“Guests have the option to purchase enhanced roadside assistance when booking their trip to reduce out-of-pocket costs like towing,” a Turo spokesperson told me. Still, charging you a \$500 deductible for a tire that was clearly worn out seems wrong.

You might’ve appealed this to an executive at Turo. I publish the names, numbers and email addresses of key customer service managers at Turo on my advocacy site, Elliott.org. I contacted Turo on your behalf and shared your photos of the bald tires.

Turo reviewed your file again.

“After reviewing all available information related to this incident, we can confirm the guest was fully refunded for the trip and any related damage charges,” the spokesperson said. Turo returned your \$500 damage deposit and refunded the \$304 cost of your rental. But it didn’t cover the towing or car service expenses, sticking to its policy on roadside assistance.

There’s a lesson here for everyone: Before you drive a rental car off the lot, check the tires. Turn the wheel so that you can see the tread. If it looks worn, ask for a different car. And consider paying a little extra for roadside assistance; it can save you a small fortune in the long run.

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.