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Mold in schools a growing problem

Climate change intensifying summer storms, causing damage, damp conditions in buildings

By Adriana Pérez
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Instead of returning to familiar hallways and classrooms, hundreds of students from John H. Kinzie Elementary School in Garfield Ridge began their first week of classes this year at the adjacent John F. Kennedy High School.

The students had been moved while the school underwent environmental testing and remediation after mold was discovered in several parts of the building at 5625 S. Mobile Ave. The Chicago Public Schools district began monitoring concerns at the South Side school in early August after receiving reports of musty odors, water damage, peeling paint and possible mold in some parts of the building, according to communications shared with families. On Aug. 31, one week after the first day of school, students safely returned to classes at Kinzie.

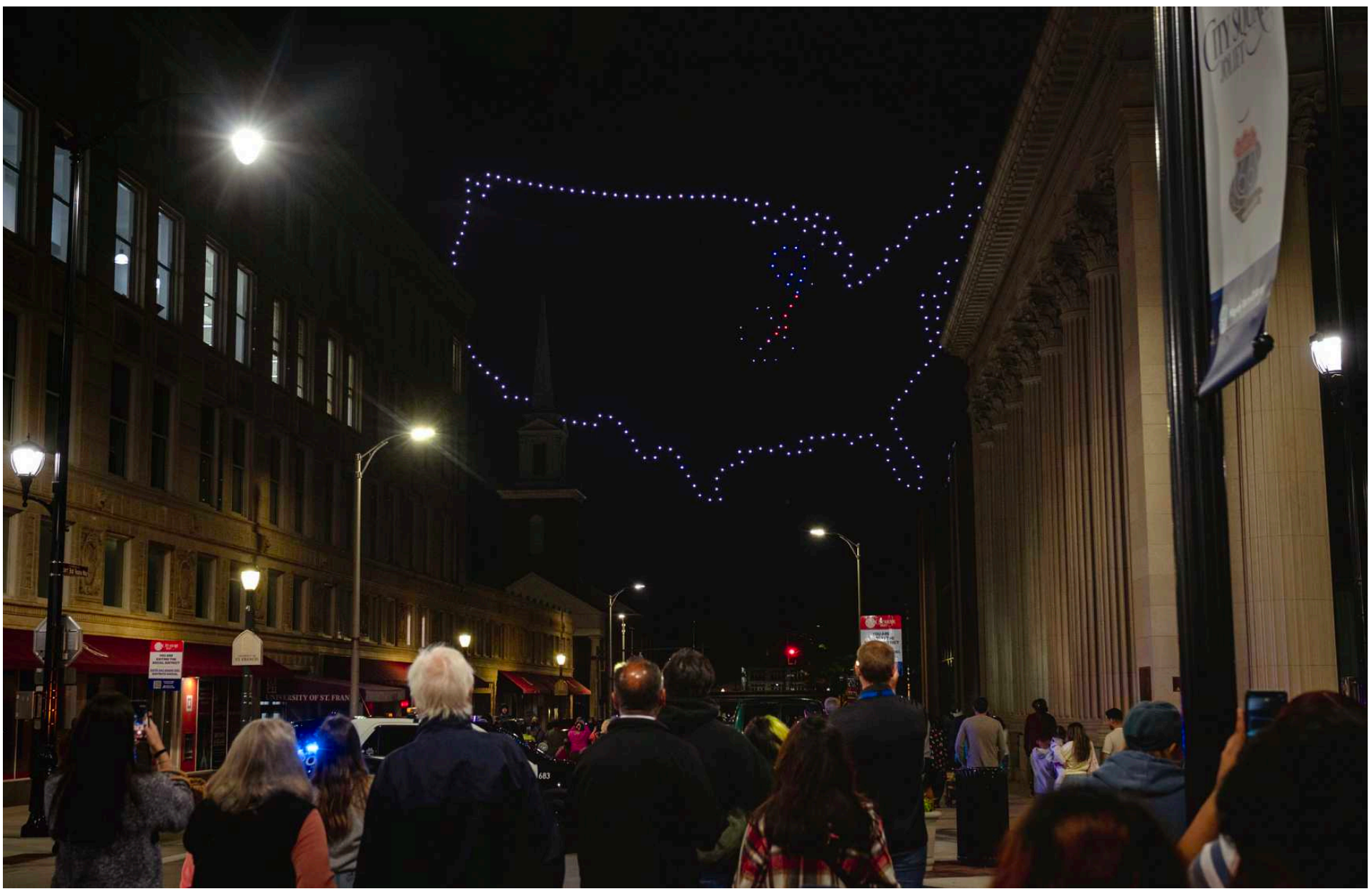
In recent weeks, mold has similarly derailed daily activities and operations across several public buildings in the area, including at least a handful of other schools in Chicago, multiple facilities in a southwest suburbs school district, two schools in Mount Prospect and a police station in Waukegan.

As greenhouse gas emissions from human activities like fossil fuel burning increase average global temperatures, summers in the Midwest are becoming more humid. When the atmosphere warms, it can hold more moisture, leading to heavier downpours and local flooding. This causes storm damage and damp conditions in buildings, which can support mold growth and expose humans to bad air quality and health issues.

Because school buildings operate differently in the summer, their air conditioning, ventilation and dehumidification systems remain mostly unused, and water damage likely goes unnoticed without occupants. This puts them at particular risk of developing mold. But the people they serve are also especially vulnerable because of their immature immune systems: Children exposed to mold can develop short- and long-term health issues such as mild allergic reactions, worsening asthma, respiratory infections and severe illness.

"The safety and well-being of

See **MOLD** on Page A8



AMERICA 250 AN ESSAY

Requiem for the American Dream

Tribune photojournalist chronicles a nation in search of its past, with fragile hopes for its future

Photography by E. Jason Wambsgans and Words by Chris Borrelli
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

By some quirk of fate, the 250th anniversary of the country landed at exactly the same moment as a pivotal election that promises, regardless of who wins, to redirect the future of the country. That odd mix of unease, resilience, exhaustion and hope you're feeling right now, one week away from this nail-biting midterm election? That feeling's real. It's not just a bipartisan mood reflected in national polling. And that ambiguity has a face. It arrives having weathered centuries of history. But what does such a mood look like?

Tribune photojournalist E. Jason Wambsgans spent part of the year answering that question and considering the ways that our present is informed by our past. With an assist by features writer Christopher Borrelli, the result is a unique portrait of Illinois, and the nation itself, during a moment of truth. **Essay on Pages A14-A18**



Top: A drone show in celebration of America's 250th birthday in downtown Joliet on June 26. Above: Fireworks on 19th Street in Pilsen on July 4.

INSIDE



E. JASON WAMBSGANS/TRIBUNE

No paved paradise

Some call them Asphalt Hunger Games or the Thunderdome: Why Trader Joe's parking lots are the way they are. We ranked every one in Illinois. **Arts & Entertainment**

Bears stadium becomes political game as midterms near

For GOP, issue is a Hail Mary to find a subject that may garner votes

By Rick Pearson
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

When the topic of a new Chicago Bears stadium came up in their face-to-face forum on Oct. 13, Republican challenger Darren Bailey delivered a shot at Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker: "I'm just glad I'm not going to be known as the governor that lost the Bears."

Bailey later acknowledged the line was a "jab," a sound bite meant for newscasts and social media. But coming from a Republican making his second bid to unseat Pritzker, the phrasing also suggested Bailey wouldn't be the one in the governor's chair if the team left for Indiana.

In recent weeks, the saga over where the Bears will build a new stadium — Arlington Heights, Chicago or Hammond, Indiana — has become more than just a sports bar discussion. For Republicans, and Bailey in particular, it represents a political Hail Mary to find a subject that captivates voters and gets them to vote for GOP candidates.

Pritzker backs "policies that are forcing small businesses and the Chicago Bears to greener pastures," Illinois Republican Party Chair Bob Grogan said in a statement Tuesday. And Bailey told the Tribune Editorial Board earlier this month that his "critique of Pritzker is that he's done nothing" to keep the Bears in Illinois, while Bailey called Indiana, which has dangled a stadium entertainment district package largely subsidized by its local taxpayers, "a pretty amazing state."

As it stands now, separate proposals to keep the Bears in

See **BEARS** on Page A4

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179th year No. 298
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Cemeteries, crypts reveal stories of past



Rick Steves



At the Merry Cemetery in Maramures, Romania, graves include a poem and a painting of the departed doing something they loved. **CAMERON HEWITT**

Every time spooky season approaches, I think back on some of my favorite European cemeteries and crypts. Over the years, I've popped into a lot of burial grounds — some peaceful and scenic, some eerie and evocative — with all revealing compelling stories of the past.

While some high-profile places — such as the catacombs in Rome or Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris — get a lot of press, many lesser-known sights are worth visiting, too. These are some of my favorites.

NAPLES, ITALY

The quirky caves known as the Cemetery of the Fountains are stacked with human bones and dotted with chapels. A thousand years ago, this was just a quarry cut into the hills north of Naples. But in the 16th century, churches with crowded burial grounds began moving the bones of their long dead here to make room for the newly dead. Later, these caves housed the bones of plague victims and paupers. In the 19th century, many churches again emptied their cemeteries and added even more skulls to this vast ossuary. Then a cult of devout locals started to "adopt" the remains. They named the skulls, put them in little houses, brought them flowers, and asked them to intervene with God for favors. If you visit this sight in Naples' gritty Sanità District, consider bringing some flowers. (And let your hotel know where you're going ... in case you never return.)

MARAMURES, ROMANIA

In 1935, a local woodcarver in northern Romania — inspired by a long-forgotten tradition — began filling a local cemetery with a forest of vivid memorials. Now known as the Merry Cemetery, each grave comes with a whimsical poem and a painting of the departed doing something they loved. Although the cemetery is dubbed "merry," many of the poems are downright morose. Tales of young lives cut short by tragic accidents, warriors mowed down in their prime, or people who simply never found happiness are a reminder that life can be anything but cheerful. Even if you can't read the poems, the images speak volumes: weaver ... loved bikes ... television repairman ... soldier ... hit by a car ... struck by lightning ... nagging mother-in-law. Everything is painted a cheery blue to match the heavens where the souls are headed. It's a poignant celebration of each individual's life, a chronicle of village history, and an irreverent raspberry in the face of death.

BOYNE VALLEY, IRELAND

Just 30 miles north of Dublin are two enigmatic burial mounds at Brú na Bóinne. These 5,000-year-old passage tombs — Newgrange and Knowth — are massive grass-covered burial mounds built atop separate hills, each with a chamber inside that's reached by a narrow stone passage. Both are aligned to the sun's movements so that a beam of light creeps down the passageway and lights up the chambers — Newgrange at the winter solstice and Knowth at the equinox. Perhaps the ancients believed this was when the souls of the dead were transported to the afterlife, via that ray of light. At both sites, huge curbstones — carved with spirals, crosshatches, bull's-eyes and chevrons — add to the mystery. Thought-provoking and mind-bogglingly old, these tombs can give you chills.

ROUEN, FRANCE

When the Black Death swept through northern France in 1348, it took the lives of two-thirds of this community. Dealing with the corpses was overwhelming. The half-timbered courtyard of Aître Saint-Maclou was an ossuary where the bodies were "processed" — dumped into the grave and drenched in liquid lime to help speed decomposition. Later, the bones were stacked in alcoves above the arcades that line this courtyard. The exposed wood timbers were later carved with ghoulish images of gravediggers' tools, skulls, crossbones, and characters doing the "dance of death." In this danse macabre, Death, the great equalizer, grabs people of all social classes. A cat skeleton displayed here in a glass case was found in the wall; local historians believe it was a black cat buried alive to ward off evil.

PALERMO, SICILY

Recently I found myself surrounded by thousands of mummified bodies at Palermo's Capuchin Crypt. Generally, when their brothers died, the Capuchin monks put the bones on show to remind people about their mortality. But the monks of Palermo didn't just display bones, they preserved entire bodies. Later, they realized they could charge wealthy parishioners for the privilege of being mummified, which became a fashionable way to be memorialized. By the 1880s, the practice had become forbidden except in special cases, and about 4,000 bodies had been collected in their crypt. Today, the public is welcome to wander this collection of fully clothed and remarkably preserved bodies.

All over Europe, you'll find fascinating cemeteries and crypts to visit. When you do, you'll see that, even long after death, these bones and memorials still have something to say.

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

Fong feels renewed by shrines in Japan

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY



Singer Paula Fong says she is looking forward to exploring more of Canada. **ARTURO GARCIA-AYALA**

Musician Paula Fong said her multiracial background has always influenced who she is and the music she creates.

"My father is a Chinese immigrant who grew up in Taiwan and Hong Kong," Fong said. "(He) came to the United States for college where he met and married my mother, a Midwestern Hoosier with family roots in Kentucky. I asked my grandmother to teach me traditional Chinese folk songs and lullabies, and eventually would end up taking classes in Chinese opera and playing the dizi — wooden flute — in the Chinese orchestra during my time in undergrad at UCLA."

Fong is on tour behind her new album, "A Bird on the Wing."

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

Q: Were there any elements of "A Bird on the Wing" that were created while you were on the road?
A: I actually wrote the majority of this album while I was touring with Abby Posner. I forced myself to find the time and inspiration to do it while we were traveling. "River Run" is a song that I wrote while sitting on the banks of the McKenzie River while traveling through Oregon, and it speaks to how the peace and calm we find in nature can help recenter us and ease the heaviness weighing on our minds. "What Are We Running From" is perhaps most directly about being on the road. I wrote it while on tour in Georgia, and it deals with how sometimes we use travel or just a good drive to escape from the overwhelm of life, and how comforting it can be when you're going through it with someone who is present for you through it.

Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?
A: I would love to perform at the Freight in Northern California. I performed there as a young musician as a backup vocalist in a band that was opening for Jack Tempchin. The theater felt like just the right amount of intimate and grand, with a great deal of history. It left a lasting impression on me.

Q: Does the music you hear in a particular city or country inspire your own work?
A: I draw inspiration from old-time Americana music as well as Celtic music of all kinds. I've also felt inspired by Japanese pop and folk music from China and various European countries. Really, if it has soul, I think it has the potential to inspire anyone who's listening with open ears.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?
A: I have such a strong affinity for Japan. I lived and worked there one summer while I was in college and the family I stayed with gave me a very broad traveling experience, but my absolute favorite places were the shrines and temples. I love old buildings and traditions, anything that has what feels like real weight and history paired with peaceful beauty moves and revitalizes my heart. Other than that, I'd have to say the Sierras. I'm always up for a beautiful mountain camping trip.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?
A: Perhaps the most significant trip I took as a child was the first time I flew to France alone at 12 years old. It was difficult at first being in a country where I didn't speak the language well. I didn't know anyone but my aunt and uncle.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?
A: Short answer, to see how wide and varied we are as a human race and to value beauty in the many ways people walk through life. And from a practical standpoint, I learned how to be a quick and efficient minimalist traveler! My bandmates always laugh at how light I pack, but I'm always thinking about efficiency, how to get smoothly through airport security and how I want to be able to travel around the towns we're in. If I can get away with just a guitar case and a backpack, I'm happy as a clam.

Q: What are your five favorite cities?
A: London, Tokyo, Asheville, Montreal, New Orleans.

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

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Guest pays additional $360 after Priceline cancels hotel booking

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I booked two rooms at the Hampton Inn in Islandia, New York, through Priceline.com for a stay over the holidays. The total cost was $502.

A few days later, Priceline canceled the rooms without my knowledge or consent and issued a refund.

I immediately called Priceline to ask for a rebooking at my original rate. An agent told me "no" and said that Priceline wouldn't offer anything.

I then rebooked the same rooms on the same website for the same dates, but this time, I was charged $862.

I've spent weeks calling and emailing Priceline. During these conversations, a Priceline agent actually confirmed that my original reservation was canceled by an agent without my consent.

Despite admitting to the error, the company refused to refund the $360 price difference.

I've been very diligent and honest. I provided a full log of my calls and the original receipts.

I filed complaints with the California and New York attorneys general to try to get some movement.

I even had an attorney send a demand letter for the refund.

Priceline kept telling me that the matter had been escalated to a management team and asked for my patience, but nothing has happened for months.

I didn't cancel this trip, and I shouldn't have to pay for a mistake that the company admitted it made.

Can you help me get my money back?

— *Charles Marcus, in San Francisco*

A: Priceline should've honored your original rate. If its own agent canceled your reservation by mistake, the company is responsible for making it right — either by restoring the original booking or covering the cost of the new one.

You did the right thing by trying to resolve this through the official channels, but when a company admits that it made an error and still holds on to your cash, it's time to escalate.

You can avoid a lot of this frustration by keeping a meticulous paper trail, which you did. If the front-line agents are stuck in a loop of "we're looking into it," you should send a brief, polite email to an executive. I publish the names and email addresses of the Priceline executives on my advocacy site, Elliott.org.

In hindsight, though, I think it might've been better to wait for a resolution instead of booking a replacement room.

Generally speaking, online agencies are reluctant to refund customers who book on their own and then bill the company. But getting something in writing (not a confession by phone) that promises to fix the problem is usually a sure thing.

I contacted Priceline on your behalf. Priceline asked you for more evidence, including phone logs and previous emails where Priceline admitted its error. Priceline finally did the right thing. You received an email authorizing a full refund of the $360 difference.

It's a reminder that persistence pays off, especially when you have the receipts to prove that the company is wrong.

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.