

# Orland Park to use cruise lights during patrols

**By Olivia Stevens**  
Daily Southtown

The Orland Park Police Department is launching a program to boost squad vehicle visibility with hopes of deterring crime through use of nonflashing lights.

In contrast to flashing red and blue emergency strobes, cruise lights are steady and used without police sirens. Police Chief Eric Rossi told the Orland Park Village Board this month the department started using the lights in retail areas ahead of the holidays. The board unanimously approved the pilot program Dec. 15.

“They’re out there, they’re a little more visible with their lights on,” Rossi said of patrolling officers. “The object is to deter crime, in case we have criminals looking to prey on any victims coming out of the retail shops.”

Rossi said the pilot program will expand use of cruise lights, which unlike flashing lights do not signal an emergency, to residential areas.

“If somebody needs us, is lookin for us, they can see us,” Rossi said.

Trustee Cynthia Katsenes asked whether use of lights might be mistaken for flashing lights. Rossi said the department is working to communicate the differences to residents and will start out using the lights late at night to avoid traffic disruptions.

Police vehicles are already equipped with cruise lights, Rossi said, so the program will not incur additional expenses for the village.

“We want to see how it works,” Rossi said. “Again, this is a pilot program — if it’s successful, I believe we’ll move forward, we’d like to move forward.”

Mayor Jim Dodge said he supports the initiative but pushed

communications to residents, saying he’s witnessed another vehicle improperly stop in the middle lane of traffic after seeing a squad car’s flashing lights.

Drivers are only required to pull over when a police vehicle displays flashing red and blue lights, especially when sirens sound.

“I just think we need to be mindful of how this plays,” Dodge said. “If this works well for us, let’s not be afraid to share this with other towns that might ask our experience with it.”

The Police Department over the past year has looked to expand other programs, including plans to add another therapy dog for department use in 2026 and deploy more emergency response drones.

The six drones in the department’s arsenal are deployed to



Orland Park approved a pilot program for vehicles to use steady cruise lights during patrols on Dec. 15. **ORLAND PARK**

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# Starved Rock to get \$18M upgrades

**By Dan Petrella**  
Chicago Tribune

The new year will bring long-overdue upgrades at Illinois’ most popular state park and one of its top tourist destinations outside Chicago.

Preliminary work already is underway at Starved Rock State Park in LaSalle County for an \$18 million project that will include the first major improvements in three decades to a 13-mile trail system that winds through sandstone canyons and bluffs along the Illinois River.

Starved Rock, roughly a 100-mile drive southwest from the Loop, sees more than 2 million visitors per year, many of whom spend their time trekking along the park’s wooden boardwalks, bridges and stairways.

“As you might imagine, with that much foot traffic, a lot of deterioration can occur to the trails, to the paths, to the bridges, stairways, boardwalks, retaining walls, all those things that support the trail system,” Todd Strole, assistant director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, said at a news conference this fall announcing the work. “The last major trail system upgrade to this park was in the 1990s, and a lot of features have seen a lot of wear and tear since that time.”

That wear and tear has led to closures of portions of the trail system, which in turn leads some hikers to venture off designated paths, putting themselves at risk, Strole said.

Last year, a 38-year-old man from southwest suburban Oswego fell to his death at the park, and in April, a 37-year-old Tinley Park woman and her 7-year-old son had to be rescued after falling into one of the park’s 18 canyons.

Aside from reopening closed sections of the trails and making the system safer and more accessible, the project, much of which is slated for completion in 2026, will help preserve the natural habitat and prevent erosion, officials said.

The park, marking its 115th anniversary in 2026, can protect an ecosystem that supports diverse wildlife and accommodate its millions of annual visitors, “if they’re staying on trails,” Strole said.

DNR officials and locals who rely on tourism hope the ongoing upgrades don’t deter visitors, even if they may encounter dead ends or detours while hiking.

Abby Farrell, area operations manager for ExplorUS, which operates the Starved Rock Lodge in the heart of the park, said the company is “thrilled to see this investment in the park’s future, ensuring safer, more accessible trails and the continued preserva-

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Orland Park’s Adrius Stankus, left, and Nate Uldrych celebrate a catch in South Africa. **NATE ULDRYCH PHOTOS**

# Catching the big one

Graduates of Sandburg, Marist win gold at international fishing competition

**By Jeff Vorva**  
Chicago Tribune

Due to snowy and freezing weather, it took the USAngling Youth Bass team 53 hours to get home from South Africa.

It was supposed to be a mere 23-hour trip.

Once they made it home Dec. 14, they were treated to single-digit temperatures after spending a little over a week sweating in temps in the 90s.

“It was crazy,” said Orland Park’s Nate Uldrych, who is one of the 13 members of the team. “Coming back off that plane, a wave of ice came over our bodies.”

As for the rest of the trip?

“It was flawless,” he said. “Every single thing about the trip you could script out as being perfect.”

The United States won the gold medal at the Tri-Nations Cup at Loskop Dam in Mpumalanga, South Africa in early December.

This is the second year of the event. Last year, the team accepted a last-minute invitation, was not prepared and finished last.

This year was a different story as USAnglers pulled in 200-plus fish totaling more than 420 pounds, more than 100 pounds better than runner-up South Africa.

Area members of the national team were Uldrych, Adrius Stankus, Scotty Miklos and Caleb



The USAnglers won the Tri-Nations Cup in South Africa.

Moore.

Stankus and Uldrych and Miklos are Sandburg High School graduates from Orland Park who helped lead the Eagles to a third-place finish in the Illinois High School Association state meet at Lake Shelbyville in June.

Moore is a sophomore at Marist who is a rising star on the angling circuit.

Anglers on the team also came from Michigan, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana and Alabama.

Sandburg coach Jason Uldrych, Nate’s father, is also the USAnglers head coach. He said it was a world of difference in 2025 compared to 2024, when it was held in Zimba-

bwe in uncomfortable heat and humidity that reached triple digits.

“Last year we were not able to prepare,” he said. “There was nothing online about the lake, so our hands were tied as far as knowledge goes. And we never fished in weather conditions like that. We’ve never been that close to the equator.”

“But every day we got better in competition and won the last day.”

This year?

Those who think bass fishing is just dipping a line in the water don’t know these elite anglers. Technology and communication come to play big time and the USA

brought the goods, including a tech foot-long map to help with strategy.

That paid off.

“We didn’t know we would slap them by 100 pounds,” Jason said of the lopsided victory.

Nate said using LiveScope technology, which allows anglers on the boat to see what’s under water, was a boon to the team. But communication among the boats was even more essential to finding some of the hotspots.

“It was shocking how well our team worked together,” Nate said. “Having half or our team being complete strangers and being able to work together as well as we did — we went from strangers to family overnight.”

He said team members made a vow to try to get together once a year because they enjoyed fishing with each other so much.

The competition started out with one of the organizers warning the anglers this was going to be a tough event.

“December is their hardest time of year,” Nate said. “Going into the tournament, the South African director said the fishing would be the hardest it will ever be — ever.”

They were told the area hosted multiple tournaments that pressured the fish and with the sun beating down and no clouds, the fish would not react.

That didn’t stop the USA from dominating, although it took a little while to get going.

“The first day was a grind,” Nate said. “I went 10 hours without a single bite. But I wasn’t disap-

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