

LAKE COUNTY
NEWS-SUN

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2026 | CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM/SUBURBS | \$2.00

State's drivers long for gas-tax holiday



Charles Selle

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker blames the administration of President Donald Trump for the high gasoline prices we find as we fill up. He's not wrong.

But the governor can take some of the sting from Illinoisans by declaring a gas-tax holiday until fuel costs return to at least last year's pump prices. Fellow governors in Indiana and Kentucky

have already done so as the cost of gasoline and diesel has nearly doubled in price since the Iran air war began in late February.

Even Pritzker's nemesis, Trump, has hinted at a drop in the federal gas tax.

We're now at a four-year high at the national level for fuel. March gas prices rose about 25%, according to government consumer price data, and have been climbing ever since.

Gasoline costs have inched upward in Illinois and in Lake County to just below \$5 a gallon. At least one county location last week had the pump price listed at over \$5 a gallon, including state and federal motor fuel taxes, for

those who pay with credit cards. Premium gas is about \$1 more, as is diesel.

One of the reasons for prices higher than neighboring states is the Illinois practice of applying sales taxes to the cost of gasoline after the motor fuel tax is charged to motorists. Sounds like regressive double taxation, right?

The average price in Illinois for regular gasoline on Monday was \$4.97 a gallon, according to AAA; the national average was \$4.52. Remember that much of what's raised with Illinois gas-tax money is going to bail out our regional mass transit agencies.



A Shell gas station advertises \$5.599 a gallon for 87-octane gas in the 1700 block of West Armitage Avenue on April 9 in Chicago. JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

See SELLE on Page A2



A crowd of 125 people gathered for a group picture with Xonita, the world's largest teddy bear, on Sunday during the second day of its visit to Waukegan Municipal Beach. CITY OF WAUKEGAN

Giant teddy bear draws thousands to Waukegan

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

Children from Waukegan, and as far away as Chicago, used words like "cool," "love," "huge," "pretty," and "amazing" to describe Xonita, the world's largest teddy bear, measuring 63 feet from head to paw and weighing four tons.

Parents matched their offspring's enthusiasm.

"I love it," third-grader Sophia Blaszczyk of Chicago said. "I have my own," she added, hugging a children's version of Xonita. It is 17 inches long and weighs less than a pound.

"It's huge," said Sophia's mother Agatha. "It's in the Guinness Book of World Records. We had to see it."

"It's cool," said Silas Cornelius, a fourth grader at Andrew Cooke Magnet Elementary School in Waukegan. "It's so big."

"It's simply magnificent," added Silas' mother, Crystal. "We had to come here and see it."

"I've never seen such a big teddy bear," Sophia Salinas, a fifth grader from Waukegan, said.

"I've never seen anything like it," added Sophia's mother, Yasmina. "This is the world's biggest bear, and it comes from

Mexico," she added, referring to the country of her parents' birth.

The Blaszczyk, Cornelius and Salinas families were among approximately 10,000 people who saw Xonita Saturday and Sunday at the Waukegan Municipal Beach, excited to get a look, take pictures, and, in some cases, buy their own smaller versions of the bear.

Older children in the Salinas family were no less enthusiastic about Xonita.

Natalie, a Waukegan High School junior, was both proud that the bear came from Mexico and taken aback by its size. Her

middle-school sister Nicole also liked the family outing.

"It's fantastic," she said. "It's amazing to see."

Waukegan Mayor Sam Cunningham let his imagination take control as he wondered what a bear like Xonita could do for the Chicago Bears. He said in an email Monday that he may not move fast, but the opposition might have a hard time getting past her.

"If Xonita were to suit up for the offensive line, the quarterback would easily be the safest person in the league, and her presence

See BEARS on Page A3

WAUKEGAN

Public works portal launched

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

Getting a pothole repaired, a fallen tree removed, graffiti scrubbed from a building or a number of tasks falling within the purview of the Waukegan Public Works Department recently became easier for city residents.

With the launch of a new public works online portal, Alonzo Jenkins, the supervisor of public works, said residents — or anyone else — can provide the department with quick, precise information around the clock.

"We have made the process very easy with this new digital system," Jenkins said Friday. "It lets residents report repairs and concerns they may have. It's available 24/7 by email. It's directed to the right department."

The new portal for the Waukegan Public Works Department went live online on April 27, giving people the ability to report problems or concerns at any time, with a quick response guaranteed.

Jenkins said when someone has a need or concern, they access the portal on the city's website, find the specific subject, give the details of the situation, provide the location and upload a picture if possible. Updates will be generated at each stage of the process through completion.

Mayor Sam Cunningham said in an email Friday that it is important to make connections with the city as easy as possible. The portal is one way of easing the connection. It is one of the ways he hopes to make government work better for city residents.

"This tool puts accessibility front

See WORKS on Page A3

Detention basin to mitigate flooding in area of North Chicago



Local officials break ground on the Lewis Avenue detention basin in North Chicago, which will be a passive park most of the time. CITY OF NORTH CHICAGO

Rainfall levels should be mitigated

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

By early November, hundreds of homes and other buildings in North Chicago will no longer be in danger of flooding every time it rains, and Neal Math & Science Academy middle school will have an outdoor classroom when a nearby detention basin is completed.

For decades, homes and other buildings near the intersection of 20th Street and Lewis Avenue have flooded when it rains because all rainwater east of Green Bay Road moves downhill into Lake Michigan.

When the work is completed this

fall, heavy rains will flow into the basin and then slowly drain within a day into the lake. North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham Jr. said Friday it will improve the lives of a lot of people.

"They will no longer have to go into the basement and lift furniture off the ground to protect their possessions," he said. "The children will have a place to learn about the vegetation."

Rockingham, elected officials and others involved with the project broke ground to start the creation of a detention basin and passive park on May 1 near the intersection of Lewis Avenue and 20th Street to prevent flooding in the area.

Greg Jackson, the city's chief of staff, said the detention basin is the start of a series of \$55.7 million of infrastructure projects over the

next few years. The city will pay \$9.7 million while state or federal funding finances the rest.

Though the major purpose of the basin is to eliminate flooding in hundreds of homes, Jackson said most of the time the area will serve as a passive park where people can sit or explore.

Steve Cieslica, an engineer with Trotter & Associates Inc., which handles engineering for the city, said the area around Lewis Avenue has long had flooding issues. After a rain, water east of Green Bay Road drains into Lake Michigan, while on the west it goes into the Mississippi River.

As homes were built in the area in the 1930s, 1940s and into the 1950s, Cieslica said little attention

See DETENTION on Page A2