

Mayor weighs in on hospital change

Waukegan's Vista has change at top

By Steve Sadin
FOR LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

With outgoing Vista Medical Center CEO Kim Needham moving into a consulting role and the background of new CEO Daily Rodriguez, who has worked with hospitals in working-class areas, Waukegan Mayor Sam Cunningham said he is cautiously optimistic about the future of the financially troubled hospital.

Needham, a 27-year employee of the hospital and longtime Wauke-

gan resident, began her career at what was then Victory Memorial Hospital in 1999 as the director of respiratory care. Needham became the chief operating officer in 2009, and CEO nearly 16 months ago.

Rodriguez was hired as the CEO and chief nursing officer of Vista Medical Center East this week, according to a news release from Vista Health System issued Wednesday.

Since Los Angeles-area-based American Healthcare Systems (AHS) purchased Vista three years ago, Rodriguez has become the hospital's fifth CEO. Needham was the fourth, taking the reins in April of last year. AHS bought Vista with

the debt of its predecessor, Qorum Health Corp.

Kevin Spiegel, Vista's second CEO during AHS's tenure in Waukegan and now the senior vice president of AHS, said in the release that Rodriguez has vast experience in healthcare organizations in diverse communities.

"Rodriguez is an accomplished healthcare executive whose leadership has guided hospitals through change while strengthening clinical operations, supporting care teams and expanding access to care," he said.

Since the acquisition, red ink has

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Former Vista Medical Center East CEO Kim Needham, center, talks with colleagues at the time of her appointment as the head of the hospital last year. **VISTA MEDICAL CENTER EAST**



An aerial rendering of Camp Timber Trail, which will be transforming Six Flags Great America's Yukon Territory into a wilderness camp-themed family adventure, including a brand new roller coaster. Camp Timber Trail is planned to open in 2027. **SIX FLAGS**

Six Flags announces largest investment in decades

New attractions to add to theme park

By Joseph States
PIONEER PRESS

Six Flags Great America announced its largest park investment in decades on Thursday morning, promising a brand new roller coaster and themed area — Camp Timber Trail, scheduled to open in 2027 — along with a broader renovation of the park.

Park President John Krajnak called it one of the most significant investments in the park since

the 1996 opening of the Southwest Territory. As the park celebrates its 50th anniversary, Thursday's announcement was a way of "looking forward," he said.

"It's really special," Krajnak said. "I'm impressed with the investment we're making. It's substantial. It's on a larger scope than we've done in some time."

Camp Timber Trail will be a family-oriented, woodland camp-themed immersive "adventure destination," and include interactive play and outdoor discovery experiences, a park news release said.

The most notable addition will be the Sky Hawk, a brand new

suspended family coaster that will be the Midwest's "longest tallest and fastest" of its kind according to the release, and offer "stunning views" of the woodland landscape below.

Other new attractions include Trail Trotters, an animal trek taking guests on a wilderness journey "filled with exploration and discovery," and Forest Grove Play Park, an outdoor play destination with nature-inspired elements.

Four classic Yukon Territory rides will be "reimagined" — Sprocket Rockets will become the bird-themed Chirp Chaser, Crazy Bus will become the rustic Wilderness Wagon, Yahoo River will be

the Creek Cruiser, and Buzzy Beez will return with new theming as Bee Boppin'.

Camp Timber Trail will also be the home of Little Dipper and Logger's Run, both classic rides of the park that largely meld with the area's theming, the release said.

Krajnak said there's additional theming reworks planned for other aspects of Camp Timber Trail. According to the release, the area will offer themed dining, specialty treats, shopping — including exclusive merchandise and souvenirs — and "immersive environmental storytelling

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OUTDOORS

Northern cardinal presence lifts spirits



Sheryl DeVore

Even on a steamy August day, my spirit animal sings.

Richee-ear. Richee-ear. Rit. Rit. Rit. Rit. Birdy. Birdy. Birdy. Cheer. Cheer. Cheer.

The northern cardinal's varied melodic notes shine like a beacon through the humidity as well as difficult days. These notes remind me of the power of resiliency and that there's always something to sing about.

Some hardcore birders likely don't take the time to look at the male cardinal's bright red plumage and fancy crest, or pause to hear its music.

They've seen and heard it so many times before. They are on a quest for rarer avian species.

I, too, love seeing and hearing rare bird species. But when it comes

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A male northern cardinal. **STEVEN D. BAILEY/FOR THE LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN**

Teen's death highlights danger of electronic scooters



Alex Blacio's mother, Maria Mizhquiri, and father, Herman Blacio, gather on North Western Avenue in Chicago on Wednesday to mourn the death of their son. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

16-year-old killed in crash in Chicago

By Lila Hempel-Edgers
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Alex Blacio wasn't scheduled to work Monday afternoon, but when a shift opened up at the indoor trampoline park where he'd recently been hired, he grabbed it. The 16-year-old was saving every paycheck to buy his mom a new house someday.

But the rising senior at Lake View High School never made it back to Albany Park that evening.

"He was hit by a moving truck," his sister, Andrea Blacio, said Wednesday through tears. "He was nearly home."

The teenager was riding a Lime

scooter northbound on the 4100 block of North Western Avenue when he collided with a semi truck around 3:30 p.m., Chicago police said. Alex Blacio was taken to Advocate Illinois Masonic Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

He's at least the third teenager to die this year in a crash while riding an electric scooter in Chicago, after 17-year-old Astrid Alexandra Carrillo Noguera and 15-year-old Violet Harris were killed in separate South Side accidents this spring. Blacio's death comes as Chicago reports record-breaking use of its shared electric scooters, a surge that's left health officials increasingly concerned about the injuries and deaths following close behind.

"We've seen a huge rise in serious injuries from these vehicles," said Dr. Marion Henry, a pedi-

atric surgeon at UChicago Medicine Comer Children's Hospital. "It's just as common, if not more common, than regular motor vehicle crashes in the emergency room this summer."

Nationwide, emergency department visits and severe injuries from electric scooter crashes are climbing, with children accounting for roughly half of all incidents, according to multiple studies. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Children's Center found earlier this year that boys younger than 18 accounted for about 70% of pediatric e-scooter injuries recorded between 2020 and 2024.

That's consistent with what Henry has seen in Chicago, a city where riders logged a record 13

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