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Sunday, November 16, 2025

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COMMUNITY | FOOD AVAILABILITY

‘GETTING OUT OF THE DESERT’



CLAY JACKSON, THE PANTAGRAPH

Nidal Alzebdieh stocks new items Thursday, Nov. 13, 2025, at South of Chicago Groceries in Bloomington. The store offers a range of essential kitchen items including eggs, flour, milk, fruits, vegetables, canned goods and cleaning supplies.

South of Chicago Groceries seeks to help neighbors, but needs SNAP

D. JACK ALKIRE
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BLOOMINGTON — Less than two months after opening South of Chicago Groceries in August, Dabrona Alzebdiah was working on getting approvals to start accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payments from customers on Bloomington’s west side. That was in late September. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers SNAP and EBT, which is short for electronic benefits transfers, but on Oct. 1, the federal government shut down. “There’s not a day that doesn’t go by (when) we have someone walk in and say,

‘You take EBT?’” she said Thursday, Nov. 13 inside the store at 903 W. Wood St. in Bloomington. “Not a day that doesn’t go by. ... It would help tremendously, because those the same people that I turn away and say, ‘I’m sorry, we don’t accept it,’ have to find a way to eat.”

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MORE ONLINE: To watch a video interview with Dabrona Alzebdiah of South of Chicago Groceries, point your smartphone camera at the QR code and tap the link. [NEWSVU](#)

Longtime assistant anchors Pritzker

Chief of staff shapes governor’s path

BRENDEN MOORE
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SPRINGFIELD — As President Donald Trump pondered deploying federal troops to Chicago in late August, Anne Caprara posted a 34-second video to her sizable social media following. Caprara, the veteran Democratic political operative who managed Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker’s 2018 campaign and has served as his chief of staff ever since, filmed a bustling block on a sunny Sunday morning in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood. Her voiceover deadpanned, “We’re really in an emergency situation here in Chicago.” “Things are so really, really bad,” said Caprara, 46. “I mean, I think there might be a line at my Starbucks — not sure how I’m going to deal with that.” Less than a day later, Pritzker took out his own cellphone as he walked the city’s lakefront trail in the early morning, recording the glistening water of Lake Michigan to his right, the towering skyscrapers in the background and a steady stream of joggers and walkers. “Doesn’t feel like a hellhole here,” Pritzker said, in a similar deadpan tone. “In fact, everyone’s having a great time and enjoying themselves. So I don’t know who in Washington thinks that Chicago is some sort of hellhole, but you may need to look inward.” The back-to-back posts represented more than a clapback at Trump’s rhetoric. They showed how much his chief of staff and closest strategist shapes messaging for Pritzker, who has emerged as one of Trump’s most pugnacious critics and is widely viewed as a contender for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination. They occupy different roles — she the staffer, he the principal — and they have different bully pulpits, but their message is aligned. When it comes to dealing with Trump, they are on “Team Fight.” Trump is largely the reason for their close partnership and friendship. Without the 45th and 47th president, Caprara might never have interacted with Pritzker beyond a chance encounter at Hillary Clinton’s election night watch party in November 2016.

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When the stories get even better

Another week, another twist. Just when you think you’ve heard the end of a good story, life adds yet another new chapter. In today’s case, three times, in fact ...

A wonderful, miraculous new daughter

Remember Kellie Kinsella Du-bravec, featured in this space a couple months ago? She’s the homeschooling mom of six, originally from Merna — daughter of Cooksville farmers



BILL FLICK

Patty and Kevin Kinsella — a former Normal U High softball standout who, amid her seventh pregnancy, learned something distressing: She also had stage-4 metastatic breast cancer. Her chemotherapy was stopped, to help her gain strength for the pregnancy and also try to save the baby. The family girded for the better

... or the worst. In one of those small-town moments that prove goodness still lives in a ZIP code, what began during summer as a simple chat and voice of concern among patrons at Merna Tap blossomed into a highly organized, community-wide fundraiser in late September for Kellie and her family. Hundreds came. Thousands of dollars were raised. Here now is even better news: Kellie has — successfully and,



PROVIDED PHOTO

Four of Kellie Du-bravec’s family, enjoying their newest family member, Gianna.

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