

Local:
St. Paul Winter Carnival unveils four new buttons to celebrate the festival's 140th year. **A5**



Thrifting St. Paul:
Creative, inexpensive crafts to give this holiday season. **A9**

NCAA volleyball: Gophers beat Iowa State in straight sets, move to Sweet 16. **C1**

Keep up with all the latest food and news in the Twin Cities.

Sign up at:



twincities.com/newsletters

SUNDAY PIONEER PRESS

Serving our community for 176 years

| SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025 | TWINCITIES.COM |

★
ST. PAUL

Where should Her focus in '26?

After she chooses dept. leaders and staff, voters have issues in mind for new mayor

By **Frederick Melo**
FMELO@PIONEERPRESS.COM

When former state representative Kaohly Her moves into the St. Paul mayor's office next month, she'll have an especially short amount of time to get comfortable in the corner office and pursue her own agenda. The newly elected mayor will serve three years,

instead of four, as a result of the city's switch to even-year elections in 2028.

Her, who worked for St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter as a policy director eight years ago, unseated Carter in the November election on the promise of returning more phone calls, forging better relationships with the county and other city partners, re-evaluating



Her

major projects like the Summit Avenue bikeway, and putting a greater focus on the nuts and bolts of city services, from state lobbying to business

permitting.

In addition to the many challenges surrounding downtown St. Paul, the backdrop of rising property taxes did the outgoing mayor no favors, especially when coupled

with the diminishing appeal of neighborhood business corridors like Snelling and University avenues, which lost a 24-hour Cub Foods grocery and a CVS store.

During the campaign, the St. Paul Area Chamber's political action committee declined to endorse any candidate, calling out a "sense of stagnation" around key questions, including tax issues and declining commercial property values.

See **HER** on Page A14

IMMIGRATION ANALYSIS

Biden ignored policy warnings

Anger over illegal migration aided Trump's reelection

By **Christopher Flavelle**
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — In the weeks after Joe Biden was elected president, advisers delivered a warning: His approach to immigration could prove disastrous.

Biden had pledged to treat immigrants lacking legal status more humanely than President Donald Trump, who generated widespread backlash by separating migrant children from their parents.

But Biden was now president-elect, and his positions threatened to drastically increase border crossings, experts advising his transition team warned in a video call briefing in the final weeks of 2020, according to people with direct knowledge of that briefing. That jump, they said, could provoke a political crisis.

"Chaos" was the word the advisers had used in a memo during the campaign.

They offered a range of options to avert that crisis, by better deterring migrants. Biden seemed to grasp the risk. But he and his top aides failed to act on those recommendations.

The warnings came true, and then some. After Biden became president, migrant encounters at the southern border quickly doubled, then kept rising. New arrivals overwhelmed border stations, then border towns, and eventually major cities like New York and Denver.

See **BIDEN** on Page A15

EAST METRO

'A MIRACLE TO BE ALIVE'



Isabelle Richard and Zach Zarembinski talk about their love of Jesus and dining out while at his Apple Valley apartment on Wednesday. The newly engaged couple first met in 2019 at Regions Hospital in St. Paul after each had woken up from a coma. After meeting again five years later, they started dating, and soon came the engagement and a hoped-for September 2026 wedding.

PHOTOS BY JOHN AUTHEY — PIONEER PRESS

Couple who met at hospital after emerging from comas are now celebrating their engagement

By **Mary Divine**
MDIVINE
@PIONEERPRESS.COM

Zach Zarembinski fell in love with Isabelle Richard over a head of lettuce.

It happened in October 2024 at a restaurant in Lakeville. Richard ordered a salad that "came out looking like a head of iceberg lettuce, and she didn't complain,"

he said.

"She just started eating," he said. "She's so authentic. She doesn't have a closed face that has to be revealed over time. She's just herself. That's rare."

Even rarer are the circumstances surrounding how Zarembinski, 25, of Apple Valley, met Richard, 23, of Lakeville.



See **COUPLE** on Page A10

Richard shows off her new engagement ring from Zarembinski.

Hegseth defends strikes on 'drug boats'

Trump can order use of force 'as he sees fit,' defense secretary says

By **David Klepper**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth defended strikes on alleged drug cartel boats during remarks Saturday at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, saying President Donald Trump has the power to take military action "as he sees fit" to defend the nation.

Hegseth dismissed criticism of the strikes, which have killed more than 80 people and now face intense scrutiny over concerns that they violated international law. Saying the strikes are justified to protect Americans, Hegseth likened the fight to the war on terror following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"If you're working for a designated terrorist organization and you bring drugs to this country in a boat, we will find you and we will sink you. Let there be no doubt

See **STRIKES** on Page A12



Toni Pierce-Sands, co-founder and artistic director of TU Dance, is pictured at the St. Paul studio in February. **JOHN AUTHEY — PIONEER PRESS**

OBITUARY TONI PIERCE-SANDS, 63

Renowned TU Dance studio founder created community

By **Jared Kaufman**
JKAUFMAN@PIONEERPRESS.COM

The dancer's reputation preceded her. While a dance student at the Ailey School in New York, Arcell Cabuag was flipping through a book of Jack Mitchell photos of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performances. In one image, from

1992's "Shelter," a female dancer stares intensely at the camera, at the height of a split jump — powerful legs extended, hands in fists, wavy black hair defying gravity.

"I'd known about her, like, 'Who is this dancer?'" he said. "My roommates and I talked about her all the time. We were huge

See **PIERCE-SANDS** on Page A14

SECTION A News, Opinion, Local, Business, Obits
SECTION C Sports
SECTION E Sunday Life

WEATHER FORECAST
SUN. H: 10 4 L: 22
MON. H: 20 L: 35
TUE. H: 21 L: 31
Full weather report C8

CONTACT US

Newsroom 651-228-5490
Subscriber services 651-717-7377

Ads & other info 651-222-1111
Reader advocate 651-228-5446

©2025 St. Paul Pioneer Press (Northwest Publications)

Volume 177, issue 224

