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VENEZUELA

THOUSANDS MISSING AFTER QUAKES

Two destructive, fatal shocks are worst nation has seen in decades

By Juan Pablo Arraez, Regina Garcia Cano and Megan Janetsky
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela — Venezuelans searched for survivors beneath collapsed buildings Thursday and rescue teams raced to northern areas rocked by a pair of powerful earthquakes that officials say killed at least 188 people and left more than 200 trapped.

More were feared dead from the 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes that struck Wednesday evening — among the strongest in Venezuela in more than a century and felt throughout the region. Some 1,500 people were injured, thousands were reported missing and buildings were evacuated as far away as Brazil's Amazon.

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A woman walks past a building damaged during an earthquake in La Guaira, Venezuela, on Thursday. **PEDRO MATTEY — ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Supreme Court makes spate of rulings

Asylum seekers can be turned away at U.S. borders, migrants' protected status ends, and decisions on guns and Roundup weed killer. **Page A4.**

ST. PAUL HIGHLAND BRIDGE

Tenant signs at Ford Parkway

Four more negotiate retail leases in one-story commercial buildings

By Tyler Quattrin
TQUATTRIN@PIONEERPRESS.COM

After years of debate over density and design at Highland Bridge, the first tenant has signed on to one of the new retail buildings rising along Ford Parkway.

Tierra Encantada, a Spanish-immersion child care provider, has signed a lease for a 13,000-square-foot building at the former Ford Motor Co. assembly plant site, according to an update presented this month to the St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

Ryan Cos., the master developer behind the 122-acre Highland Bridge project, said four additional prospective tenants have

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2026 Special Olympics

A PHOTO FINISH



Above, Minnesota's Andrew Iskierka celebrates his second-place finish in a Thursday heat race of the men's 100-meter dash competition during the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games at the University of Minnesota's Track & Field Stadium in Minneapolis. At right, Connecticut's Raishaun Holloway, left, gives Iskierka a hug after the race. Holloway won the race, with Iskierka second. Most sports were in their final rounds Thursday, with track events, basketball and bocce wrapping up Friday. The Olympics have drawn over 3,000 athletes from all 50 states to the Twin Cities this week.

PHOTOS BY JOHN AUTEY — PIONEER PRESS



ST. PAUL

Creating spaces for LGBTQ+ elders

Sold-out luncheon is one way local group combats isolation among seniors

By Mars King
MKING@PIONEERPRESS.COM

As some queer elders are feeling pressure to "go back in the closet," a St. Paul nonprofit is inviting them to be out — together.

On Friday, more than 100 LGBTQ+ adults ages 62 and older will converge in St. Paul for the annual Older and Bolder Pride Luncheon hosted by Friends & Co. The free event, which sold out just over a week after it was announced, will feature a performance from the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus.

Friends & Co., which was formerly known as Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly Twin Cities, is a St. Paul-based nonprofit that caters to older adults.

The Older and Bolder event was first launched in 2021 by Rainbow Health, a health care and social

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ST. PAUL CITY COUNCIL

Office of Arts and Culture proposed

Funding unclear; city faces \$26M budget gap

By Frederick Melo
FMELO@PIONEERPRESS.COM

A hallmark of St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman's administration was the addition of a cultural attaché of sorts, a director of arts and culture who answered directly to the mayor and served as a liaison, if not a project manager, for

the city's music venues, theaters, festivals and parks concerts. During Joe Spencer's time in the role, downtown gained the Palace Theatre, the Amsterdam Bar and Hall and a short-lived reinvention of the Bedlam Theatre.

The position did not carry over to Mayor Melvin Carter's administration, or to that of Mayor Kaohly

Her. During a policy committee meeting of the St. Paul City Council on Wednesday, Council Member Anika Bowie introduced a proposal to re-establish the role in an expanded capacity, with its own office and staff.

Robyne Robinson, a former Fox 9 news anchor and producer turned arts consultant, presented a general vision to the city council for an Office of Arts and Culture,

whose director would serve under a deputy mayor, much like other department heads.

"Because St. Paul does have some economic challenges, as well as challenges with downtown, (this could be) a great way to embed artists with municipal agencies so you can create solutions that involve arts ... whether

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS

A daughter, a guitar and a reminder of what becomes possible

By Tim Loesch

This week, Minnesota is celebrating some of the most inspiring examples of human achievement you'll find anywhere. Athletes, families, coaches and volunteers have gathered for the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games — a celebration of perseverance, determination and possibility.

For me, the Games are also deeply personal.

I am the father of a beautiful daughter with Down syndrome.

This week, my daughter Olivia had the opportunity to participate in the USA Games in her own way — not on the playing field, but on the stage. She performed as part of Emergence, an adaptive music ensemble created through 3 Strings, a nonprofit that uses adaptive music instruction to help people of all abilities learn, perform and experience the joy of music. The group performed at several events connected to the Games, including a featured

appearance on the FanFest main stage. Watching Olivia walk onto that stage with a guitar in her hands was one of those moments parents never forget.

A few decades ago, I never would have imagined it.

In fact, my first exposure to the Special Olympics came when the Twin Cities hosted the World Games in 1991. Not long out of college, I was part of a public relations team supporting the event. I remember being moved by the athletes and their stories, but I could not have imagined how personally meaningful that experience would become decades later. At the time, I had no idea that one day I would become the father of a daughter with Down syndrome, or that my life would be enriched beyond measure because of her.

I see the possible.

I see athletes, musicians, families and communities demonstrating what can happen when people are given the opportunity to

succeed.

At a time when support for disability services, special education and inclusion is being questioned in some circles, the Special Olympics offers a powerful reminder of what becomes possible when barriers are removed and opportunities are created.

The irony is not lost on me. At the very moment we are celebrating these athletes and performers, some of the systems and supports that help make their success possible are being questioned. Yet the evidence of what is possible is all around us.

The Special Olympics asks us to see the possible. Not someday. Not in theory. Right now, in front of us.

When Olivia and her fellow musicians took the stage, they opened with the song "It's My Life."

It felt like a declaration: This is my life. This is who I am. This is what I can do.

That message lies at the heart of the Special Olympics movement. For too

long, society viewed people with disabilities through the lens of what they could not do. The Special Olympics invites us to look through a different lens. It asks us to see what they can do, to see their gifts, to see their contributions and to see the possible.

After one of the performances, Olivia met Tim Shriver, son of Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver — a reminder that a movement launched more than 50 years ago continues to open doors and expand opportunities today.

And when we see the possible, something remarkable happens.

One of the great truths about inclusion is that the benefits rarely flow in only one direction. Those who teach, coach, volunteer or befriend people with disabilities often receive just as much in return — perspective, joy and a deeper appreciation for what matters most.

That has certainly been

true for me.

Olivia has brought immeasurable joy, purpose and perspective to our family. She has helped us slow down, celebrate progress, appreciate small victories and see the world through a different lens. We are among the lucky ones whose lives have been enriched by someone the world too often underestimates.

The musicians closed their performance with Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It."

It was an unexpectedly fitting ending.

Not because it was angry, but because it reflected the determination of a community that has spent generations overcoming barriers, challenging assumptions and insisting on the opportunity to participate fully in society. It felt less like a rock anthem and more like a hopeful declaration to keep moving forward, keep opening doors and keep believing in what people can achieve.

In other words, keep seeing the possible.

As Minnesota celebrates the Special Olympics this week, let us celebrate more than medals, scores and performances. Let us celebrate the progress that comes when people are given the chance to learn, contribute and belong. Let us celebrate the families, educators, volunteers and advocates who help make that progress possible.

Most of all, let us celebrate the athletes and performers themselves.

They remind us that human achievement comes in many forms, that every person has gifts worth sharing and that progress is worth protecting. Most of all, they remind us to keep seeing the possible.

Tim Loesch is director of communications and marketing, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, University of Minnesota. He lives in Rosemount.

HIGHLAND

From Page 1

signed letters of intent and are negotiating leases, though the company has not publicly identified those businesses.

About 118,000 square feet of commercial space has been completed across the development since 2022, including a Lunds & Byerlys grocery store, a medical office building and retail space within the Marvella senior housing project.

Another 35,000 square feet of commercial space is under construction, according to a statement from Sean Ryan, director of real estate development for Ryan Cos.

"We are pleased with the strong commercial momentum at Highland Bridge," Ryan said in the statement. "We are actively delivering on our vision of a vibrant, walkable district by building in phases that respond directly to the neighborhood's needs."

The "Albert" section of the development, formerly known as "The Gateway," is also expected to be completed this summer, with the first residents expected to move in during August. The mixed-use project includes 97 apartments and about 23,500 square feet of retail space, according to the June presentation.

ONE-STORY RETAIL BLOCKS INSTEAD OF HIGH-DENSITY

The leasing activity comes as construction nears completion on a group of one-story commercial buildings that became the subject of a lengthy zoning dispute earlier this year.

Plans for the Ford Parkway frontage initially called for larger commercial or mixed-use buildings of at least four stories, which likely would have situated housing above ground-level retail in a style similar to The Albert.

The Ryan Cos. later sought



The "Albert" section of the Highland Bridge development in St. Paul, shown Monday at center left, is under construction and expected to be completed this summer. **FREDERICK MELO — PIONEER PRESS**

city approval to construct a series of one-story commercial buildings, arguing that challenging site conditions and financing realities made the original concept difficult to build.

The city's Board of Zoning Appeals denied Ryan's variance requests, but the dispute ultimately reached the city

strip-mall-esque than what we would have liked," said Jacob Hooper, director of operations and advocacy for Sustain St. Paul, a nonprofit that advocates for housing density.

Reducing the density originally planned for that section of the development will result in fewer benefits for the city, Hooper said.

Hooper said it is a missed opportunity to boost ridership along the Metro Transit A Line, and to increase property tax revenue at a time when the city faces a \$26 million budget gap.

The new businesses also would have more customers if housing were built above them, he said, and increasing the housing supply overall improves affordability through supply and demand.

"When you create a density of residences, especially along transit lines, that's how you create thriving, vibrant neighborhoods," Hooper said.

critics say the outcome is disappointing. "It is a lot more suburban-oriented than we would have liked to have seen here. It is a lot more

council, where the company's appeal was effectively approved by default in the face of procedural complications following a tie vote.

critics say the outcome is disappointing. "It is a lot more suburban-oriented than we would have liked to have seen here. It is a lot more

PROGRESS AFTER DORMANT PERIOD

Ward 3 Council Member Saura Jost's office said it is encouraged to see construction resume after a prolonged slowdown.

"The Ward 3 office is really thrilled to see progress on Highland Bridge after a long dormant period," legislative aide Tom Basgen said in a statement. "I also think we wanted to see a bit more building on the site, but a combination of uncooperative soil conditions and a challenging financing environment put that out of reach."

As for other Highland Bridge updates, construction on Civic Square, a publicly accessible gathering space that will feature historic Ford plant frieze panels, landscaping and outdoor dining opportunities, began this month. It is expected to be completed by September.

LUNCH

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service provider for the Twin Cities LGBTQ+ community for more than 40 years. After Rainbow Health announced its sudden closure in 2024 due to funding issues, Friends & Co. stepped in to carry on the luncheon tradition.

"A bigger-arching issue that we here at Friends & Co. are helping to address is that many older adults that have lived through ... decades of social and cultural changes ... are feeling the need to go back in the closet," said Paul Cram, marketing and communications manager for the nonprofit.

There are often stories shared of teenagers who are turned away from their homes after coming out, but Cram said it's happening to older generations too.

Cram shared a recent story of an older gentleman who was living with his children when he decided to come out.

"He was living with his family at the time and they

kicked him out," Cram said. "It breaks my heart. It's one of those stories that, unfortunately, is very common."

Jeff Mihelich, who plans to attend Friday's pride celebration, said, "Doing these types of events is important because as older persons, we tend to be a little more isolated."

Mihelich said in his opinion, older LGBTQ+ adults are more isolated than their straight counterparts, "just because the (gay and lesbian) world is small to begin with and then the older segment is even smaller."

While she hasn't considered going back into the closet herself, Valerie Hauch said she can understand why some feel pressured to.

"I think that really can happen, especially when people leave the homes they've had and they need to move into long-term care facilities or assisted living. ... There can be a fear of being out and people can feel like they need to go back in the closet," she said.

Hauch, 77, said she is

"very out" as a lesbian, but like many in the LGBTQ+ community, she uses discretion.

"Older LGBTQ+ people often become more isolated as we age and it's so important to have events that specifically celebrate and extend community to the elders in our LGBTQ+ community," said Hauch, who is looking forward to Friday's event. "We need to be part of the larger LGBTQ+ community, but also have a real focus on our needs and our history."

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

If you missed out on reserving a spot for Older and Bolder, Cram invites older adults to attend Let's Do Lunch Cafe, a free weekly drop-in program for older LGBTQ+ adults.

Hauch, who is a regular attendee of the program, said, "It really helped me put my life back together after my partner passed away."

Hauch and her partner, Jackie Farrow, were together for more than 37 years, she said. When Farrow



Jeff Mihelich, left, and Jethra Kapp, director of community engagement at Friends & Co., at Friends & Co.'s annual fundraiser at Dual Citizen Brewing Company in St. Paul on April 30. **COURTESY OF PAUL CRAM**

got early-onset Alzheimer's, Hauch was her primary caregiver for six years.

"I'm not alone in losing a longtime life partner ... and how isolating that can be," Hauch said, emphasizing the

importance of community.

"I think it's important for LGBTQ+ elders to know they are very welcome," Hauch said. "We want to keep growing and we want everyone to feel safe and accepted."

The program, which started in 2013, meets at various locations across the Twin Cities for coffee, lunch and community. Find a calendar of events at friendsco.org/events/.

COUNCIL

From Page 1

its planning and zoning, or working with Parks and Rec," Robinson told the council.

"Artists, they work with communities that are diverse," she added. "They think outside the box ... and give an artistic bend that gives identity to communities."

ARTS AND CULTURE

The director would serve as the chief arts representative for the city and research and develop a comprehensive arts plan. Director duties, according to Robinson's presentation, would include administering public art, technical assistance

programs and community service grants for the city, as well as coordinating Arts and Culture meetings and committee work.

Robinson, a former board chair with the Minnesota Museum of American Art, said the office could focus in part on "space redemption," or filling underused places with cultural uses, and "creative allyship," such as partnering arts organizations with businesses who have excess resources to share.

The museum, for instance, was able to connect visiting artists with free stays at the homes of snowbirds who left Minnesota for the winter, and cover the cost of pricey art transport by finding businesses that could donate

truck hauls in exchange for tax write-offs.

The position could also strengthen relations with arts-related organizations, from tourism bureaus to the Upper Midwest Film Office and Explore Minnesota Film. The city council is in the midst of evaluating how best to support eight or more "Cultural Corridors," such as the District del Sol on the West Side and Little Africa and the Creative Enterprise Zone in the Midway, and a director could play a role in those partnerships.

FUNDING

Robinson did not provide a specific budget for the office, but she encouraged the city council to think about creating dedicated

funding for the office and its initiatives. A likely avenue would be the city's existing half-cent municipal sales tax, which already funds the city's Cultural STAR grant program.

Additional dollars for public infrastructure related to the arts could come from a dedicated allotment of the city's Capital Improvement Budget, she said.

The proposal lands on the doorstep of the city council even as the mayor works to explain a \$26 million financial gulf between expenses and revenues in budget outreach events across the city. The gap will have to be closed in her 2027 city budget proposal, which is expected in August.

Even accounting for infla-

tion, the gulf is thought to be the largest in recent history, with one possible exception. The 2018 property tax levy rose 23.9% over the previous year when, under legal pressure, the city scrapped the majority of its right-of-way street assessment system and shifted charges from individual fees to the general fund, which is largely supported by property taxes.

Robinson, who spent much of her allotted time on Wednesday explaining how her own credentials and previous projects aligned with her vision for the office, is the principal of fiveXfive Public Art Consultants. She won multiple regional Emmys for her arts coverage with Fox 9, previously served as art direc-

tor for the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and spent seven months as the art director for the city of Carlsbad, Calif.

In 2010, when then-House Speaker Matt Entenza, a DFLer, ran for governor, Robinson joined the ticket as candidate for lieutenant governor.

Robinson's presentation was one of three policy proposals delivered to the city council's policy committee on Wednesday morning. The presentations did not allow time for public discussion, but Council President Rebecca Noecker said later that council members likely would vet them with their council peers individually before returning to the full council for further review.