

Striving for greatness

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Ford idling Region plant

Workers to be laid off for a week amid global parts shortage

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Ford plans to temporarily shut down the Chicago Assembly Plant and lay off workers next week as a result of the global semiconductor shortage that's greatly disrupted the automotive industry.

The automotive plant on the banks of the Calumet River on Chicago's far South Side, just across the state line, will be shut-

tered for the week along with Ford's Flat Rock Assembly Plant, Dearborn Truck Plant and Louisville Assembly Plant. Ford also plans to shut down the transit side of the Kansas City Assembly Plant and operate the Ohio Assembly Plant at a reduced level because of parts shortfalls.

The shutdown will affect thousands of automotive jobs at the Chicago Assembly Plant in Hegewisch, the Chicago Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights, and at suppliers throughout the Region such as Lear Corp. in Hammond, UGN in Valparaiso and Flex-N-Gate on the South Side.

Lear, for instance, makes seats for the Ford Explorer, Lincoln Aviator and Police Interceptor Utility that are manufactured at the Chicago Assembly Plant. They are delivered with no inventories built up so the supplier's operations are synced with Ford's.

"The global shortage is affecting all automotive manufacturers as well as other industries," Ford Vice President of Manufacturing and Labor Affairs John Savona wrote in a letter to workers. "Our MP&L, purchasing and manufacturing teams have been working tirelessly to find solutions to keep our plants running so you can

continue building high-quality vehicles that continue to be in high demand among our dealers and customers. One of those solutions is sequencing down weeks, allowing us to keep building our must-have vehicles for customers when we have adequate parts suppliers."

The global semiconductor shortage was caused by coronavirus pandemic-related disruptions and natural disasters. It's particularly dire for automakers because cars rely more on computers as they become more technologically advanced, such as with lane-assist and collision-avoidance sys-

tems.

Ford already had to reduce operations to one shift for a week at the Chicago Assembly Plant earlier this year. The Alliance for Automotive Innovation estimates the auto industry in America could end up producing 1 million fewer cars this year as a result of the parts shortages.

Dearborn-based Ford is canceling the traditional summer shutdowns when maintenance is done at the plants and workers go on vacation because of the production disruptions.

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MARY FREDA PHOTOS, THE TIMES

Lake Central High School seniors Graham Weber, left, Lilah Lopez, center, and Thao Nguyen discuss seroprevalence — the percentage of individuals in a population who have antibodies to a certain disease — in Kendal Smith's chemistry classroom on Wednesday. The students are conducting coronavirus antibody research.

Real-life STEM support

Local lab steps in to enable students to finish COVID study

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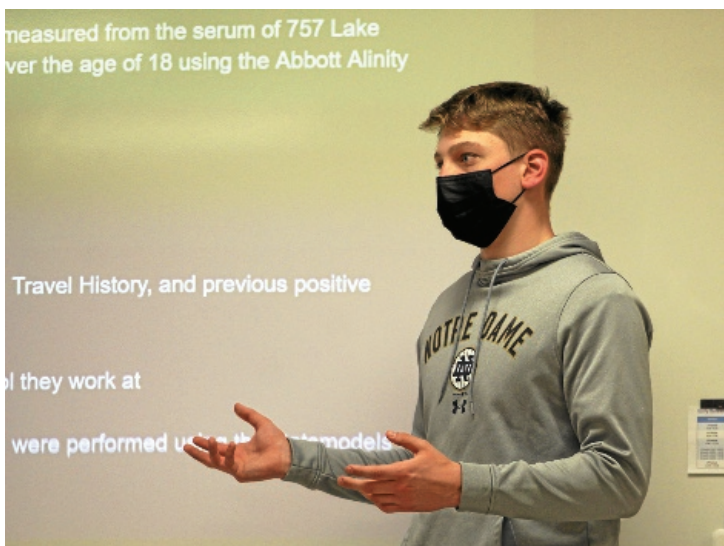
ST. JOHN — Nearly a year ago, three Lake Central seniors began research to measure the impact of COVID-19 in their community.

Now, Lilah Lopez, Thao Nguyen and Graham Weber are hoping to draw further conclusions about the presence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in teachers and staff within the Lake Central School Corp.

With graduation looming, the students are awaiting results from a second round of coronavirus antibody testing and looking to publish their initial findings.

Roughly 600 school staff were part of a second round of testing in February, which almost didn't happen, as the group fell short of raising funds.

Then came Hammond-based Alverno Laboratories, which stepped in and covered the cost of the tests.



Graham Weber, a Lake Central High School senior, presents initial findings from coronavirus antibody research conducted by himself and seniors Lilah Lopez and Thao Nguyen.

"Our hope is that kids will hear this story and focus on STEM studies and maybe a future in laboratory medicine," Sierra Breeden, director of marketing and customer experience at Alverno, said in a news release.

Lake Central chemistry teacher Kendal Smith, who previously had the students in his AP Chemistry class, said with-

out Alverno, the second round of tests would not have been possible.

"This is real valuable science, and it really gets valuable when you start looking at the change in seroprevalence that occurs because of working at school," Smith said, noting two data sets, one before teachers return, and one after, are needed to deter-

mine the change.

Seroprevalence is the percentage of individuals in a population who have antibodies to a certain disease.

The first round of antibody testing, conducted in July, revealed out of more than 750 staff, or 60% of Lake Central's eligible employee population, a majority of staff tested, had not yet been exposed to COVID-19.

Results have yet to come back from the group's second round of antibody testing, and the students hope to know more by mid-May.

"As time has increased, there's going to be more people who have COVID. That's just how the nature of it is," Weber said.

"We don't know by how much. We don't know the trends within that. It's hard for us to really give a rough estimate because there's a chance of someone testing positive, who may have not had it, or vice versa, someone who had may not test positive."

Nguyen added the results need to accurately represent the population, and it isn't as simple as dividing those who tested

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Cops: Man dies after shootout

Suspect shot during traffic stop by officer

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CALUMET CITY — A man has died after being shot by a police officer when he allegedly raised a handgun at the officer during a traffic stop in late March, authorities said.

Alvin A. Burrage, 26, of Calumet City, was pronounced dead about 7:19 a.m. Thursday at the University of Chicago Medical Center, Cook County medical examiner records show.

The manner and primary cause of Burrage's death was still pending Friday.

Burrage was shot March 25 after he was stopped by a Calumet City officer, then got a handgun from his car and began to point

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Plea offer for teen accused of murder, rape

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CROWN POINT — A man accused of killing a woman and raping two others in Hammond when he was 15 years old has been offered a plea agreement calling for a 65-year sentence, attorneys said Friday.

Omarion E. Wilbourn, 18, has been in custody since 2017 on charges alleging he raped a 14-year-old girl and 25-year-old woman July 16 and Aug. 8, 2017, respectively, and killed Lucia Gonzalez, a 25-year-old mother, Aug. 21, 2017, in her home in the 7500 block of Alexander Avenue.

Wilbourn's attorney, John Maksimovich, asked to continue



Wilbourn

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Family of boy killed by cop to view video

DON BABWIN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — The family of the 13-year-old boy who was fatally shot by a Chicago police officer last month will watch the video of the shooting next week, the family’s attorneys said Friday.

In a brief statement issued shortly after the funeral for Adam Toledo, attorneys Joel Hirschhorn and Adeena Weiss Ortiz did not say which day the family would watch the videos or detail what other materials might be made available to them in the March 29 police shooting.

It’s not clear what the video shows. The Chicago Police Department has said the boy had a handgun, and Mayor Lori Lightfoot — in demanding police find whoever supplied the weapon to the boy — has suggested that he was involved in street gangs. Among the questions that police have declined to answer is whether the boy fired the gun at the officer before he was shot or raised the weapon and pointed it at the officer.

The Civilian Office of Police Accountability, which investigates police shootings in Chicago, did not respond to calls for comment. The board has only said that the video would be made public after the family has had a chance to view it.

The video has been of intense interest in the city, particularly after the medical examiner’s office revealed the age of the person who was shot.

According to police, officers were dispatched to the Little Village neighborhood on the city’s West Side shortly before 3 a.m. after the department’s ShotSpotter technology detected the sound of gunshots. When police arrived, Toledo and a 21-year-old man ran away. While chasing the teen, there was an “armed confrontation” during which an officer shot the boy once in the chest, police said. A handgun was recovered and the 21-year-old man was arrested on a misdemeanor charge of resisting arrest, according to police.

Initially, the review board said it could not legally release the video because the person who was shot was a minor. But after calls for its release, including from Lightfoot and Police Superintendent David Brown, the board reversed course.

It has been several days since then. The family’s attorneys did not address the delay in the video’s release, but made a point of saying that, “The City of Chicago, the Chicago Police Department and the Civilian Office of Police Accountability have been very cooperative.

Wilbourn

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Wilbourn’s trial — which is currently set to begin May 3 — because he was still reviewing evidence in the case. A technical issue prevented him from viewing some of the material, he said.

Lake County Supervisory Deputy Prosecutor Michelle Jatkiewicz said a written plea offer was given to Maksimovich. She first heard he was having a technical issue Thursday, she said.

Maksimovich said the plea offer was delivered about a week ago, and the coronavirus pandemic has made it difficult for him to talk to Wilbourn and other incarcerated clients.

Inmates have periodically been in quarantine in the Lake County Jail, and the facility’s Telmate communication system has been down, he said.

Lake Criminal Court Judge Diane Boswell asked Jatkiewicz to lay out the terms of the plea offer for the record.

The agreement calls for Wilbourn to plead guilty to murder and two counts of rape, with a 45-year sentence on the murder charge and concurrent terms of 20 years on each rape charge. If Wilbourn accepts the offer, his total sentence would be 65 years, she said.

If Wilbourn were convicted at trial of murder, two counts of rape and several lesser charges, he could face up to 178 years in

prison, Jatkiewicz said.

Boswell told Wilbourn to discuss the plea offer with his attorney.

The judge declined to grant Maksimovich’s request to postpone Wilbourn’s trial, telling the attorney to talk with Wilbourn and return to court April 19.

Wilbourn’s name was not initially released Aug. 28, 2017, when Hammond police announced they had arrested a 15-year-old boy and that DNA evidence tied him to the two rapes and Gonzalez’s homicide.

Lake Criminal Court Judge Thomas Stefaniak granted a prosecutor’s request to waive Wilbourn to adult court in August 2018.

Stefaniak also granted part of Wilbourn’s request to suppress some of his statements to Hammond detectives during an interview Aug. 22, 2017.

The Court of Appeals on July 31, 2019, upheld Stefaniak’s decision, finding Wilbourn reasonably believed he was in custody at the time of the interview, and police failed to advise him of his rights under the U.S. Supreme Court’s Miranda ruling and Indiana’s juvenile waiver statute.

The Indiana Supreme Court declined to review the Appeals Court ruling in January 2020.

Maksimovich entered the case last year, after Wilbourn’s previous attorney, Jamise Perkins, temporarily served as judge pro tempore in Lake Criminal Court room 2.

at the officer before getting back into his vehicle and driving away while the officer took cover, police allege.

Police later learned Burrage was at St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago, where he was placed under arrest. He was later transferred to a trauma center in critical condition, police said.

Illinois State Police Crime Scene Investigators recovered a handgun that was in Burrage’s possession from the scene of the shooting.

Burrage was charged with attempted murder of a police officer, and additional charges were pending, a March 27 news release from the Police Department states.

conductor shortages. We will get through this, working together, and we appreciate all you do for Ford every day.”

The United Auto Workers union encouraged its members to file for unemployment insurance benefits while the plant was idled next week.

Ford employs 5,810 workers at the Chicago Assembly Plant and 1,290 at the Chicago Stamping Plant. Thousands more work at Tier 1 suppliers like the Lear factory in Hammond just south of the East Chicago South Shore Line train station.

Islamic leaders dispel myths about vaccines

DAVID SHARP AND MARIAM FAM
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Islamic leaders are using social media, virtual town halls and face-to-face discussions to spread the word that it’s acceptable to be vaccinated for the coronavirus during daily fasting that happens during Ramadan, the most sacred month of the year for Muslims.

During the holy month which begins next week, Muslims across the world abstain from all food and drink from sunrise to sunset before typically congregating for evening prayers and iftar meals. The vaccine discussion centers on whether an inoculation amounts to the prohibited act of ingesting something while fasting.

It doesn’t, said Mohamud Mohamed, imam of the Maine Muslim Community Center, who is working to assure Muslims at his Portland mosque that getting the vaccine is perfectly fine but finds that some people are clinging to misperceptions.

“There is a lot of bad information going around,” said Mohamed, who devoted his address during recent Friday prayers to promoting the vaccine. A vaccine clinic is being held at the mosque on Saturday.

He and others seeking to reassure the faithful have the theological backing of top Islamic authorities. Saudi Arabia’s highest cleric, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al Sheikh, and Sunni Islam’s top religious leader in Lebanon, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Latif De-rian, have both said that getting the coronavirus vaccine does not constitute breaking one’s fast.

Still, Safiya Khalid, a city council member in Lewiston, about 30 miles north of Portland, sparked a lively conversation among fellow Muslims when she raised the issue on social media. Others questioned whether the vaccine violated fasting — until an imam weighed in.

“We need more communication,” said Khalid, who has already had her first vaccine dose and will get her second shot during Ramadan. “You can do this and protect your community and your family.”

On New York’s Staten Island, imam and NYPD chaplain Tahir Kukaj, whose mosque was administering 1,000 vaccines on Thursday and Friday, said he has heard all sorts of misconceptions about vaccines, and some “people tend to believe nonsense



MARY ALTAFFER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Patients wait Thursday in the observation area after being inoculated with the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at a pop-up vaccination site inside the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center in Staten Island, New York.

rather than facts.”

But protecting others is a core teaching of Islam, and Kukaj said Muslims are taught to do whatever they can to save lives. Getting vaccinated is a way to do that: “Of course, we have to save our own life first.”

Out west, the Utah Muslim Civic League has partnered with the Salt Lake County Health Department to put on two vaccination clinics including a drive-through one at a mosque that was held before Ramadan. The group also organized a virtual town hall Thursday night featuring imams and health professionals to discuss issues surrounding vaccination and fasting. The goal is raising awareness and “myth-busting,” said the league’s executive director, Luna Banuri, who found that many community members had wanted to avoid getting vaccinated during Ramadan.

“When you are starting the month of fasting, there’s a sense of resolve. ... So a lot of folks are trying to make sure that there are no disruptions during that period,” she said. “Even if they believe that they can take the vaccine and it doesn’t affect their fast ... (what) they’re not wanting to do is to get sick.”

Medicine and fasting is nothing new. Muslims may forgo fasting if they fall ill and make up for “missed” days at a later time, after Ramadan.

“If you miss a day because of the effects of the vaccine, then that is not a sinful act,” said Ahmed Abdirahman, a respiratory therapist at a Portland hospital and com-

munity service coordinator at the Maine Muslim Community Center. “Protecting lives is the ultimate goal in Islam.”

Dr. Hasan Shanawani, president of the American Muslim Health Association, said he’s encouraging everyone to be vaccinated even if that means getting the jab during Ramadan.

A lung specialist, he said he has treated dozens if not hundreds of people with COVID-19 and seen firsthand the horrific toll the disease can take.

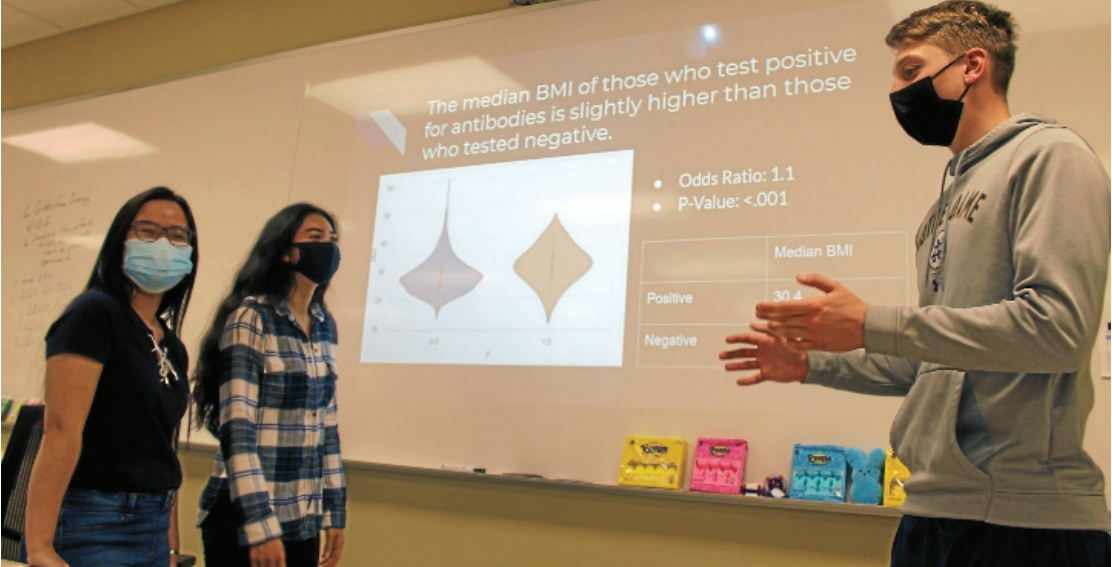
“This is not just a decision that weighs on you,” Shanawani said from his office in Michigan. “It weighs on everybody.”

Similar conversations have played out in other countries.

The British Islamic Medical Association circulated a WhatsApp message reassuring people that “taking the Covid-19 vaccines currently licensed in UK does not invalidate the fast during Ramadan as per the opinion of the majority of Islamic scholars.”

Association vice president Dr. Wajid Akhter said there is a growing understanding among Muslims in his community of the importance of not delaying vaccinations due to Ramadan. But for any who may be wavering, he emphasized that COVID-19 represents a threat that cannot be ignored.

“How many fasts are you going to miss if you catch COVID? How many fasts are you going to lose if you get long COVID? ... And how many fasts will you lose if you die from COVID?” Akhter said. “You’re never going to fast again.”



MARY FREDA PHOTOS, THE TIMES

Lake Central High School seniors Thao Nguyen, left, Lilah Lopez, center, and Graham Weber explain findings Wednesday from their initial study about the presence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in teachers and staff within the Lake Central School Corp.

Study

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positive by the total population.

“Even though we know that numerically more people tested positive, we don’t know whether or not the actual seroprevalence of the population increased because we don’t know whether or not it’s statistically significant,” Lopez chimed in.

Weber added the group is looking forward to seeing trends within the data, including if certain staff members across the district, or those who live in a specific ZIP code, have a higher chance of contracting COVID-19.

Lopez, Nguyen and Weber agreed they didn’t expect the project to go this far when they began the research last summer. Chemistry teacher Smith first approached Lopez with the opportunity, who later brought in Nguyen and Weber to work on the project.

“We weren’t originally plan-



Thao Nguyen, left, and Lilah Lopez, right, both seniors at Lake Central High School, listen to chemistry teacher Kendal Smith during a Wednesday presentation of their initial coronavirus antibody research, conducted with senior Graham Weber.

ning on having multiple trials for this. This was just going to be one study figuring out the baseline seroprevalence of our staff,” Lopez said.

“As we went along, we decided to collect more data on it; try and figure out if there were any connections in there. A lot

later on, we decided to do a second trial.”

Smith told The Times recently it has been remarkable to see the students conduct the research during a pandemic.

“They’ve accomplished more than any student I’ve ever had,” Smith said of the trio.

Burrage

From A1

it at the officer, police have said.

The officer stopped Burrage about 4:53 p.m. that day in the 500 block of Jeffrey Avenue on suspicion of a traffic violation. Police did not specify the nature of the traffic violation.

Immediately after he was stopped, Burrage stepped out of car, reached into the back to retrieve a handgun, and began to raise it at the officer, police allege.

As he began to point the gun, the officer fired one shot, striking Burrage. Burrage then led the officer on a foot chase and continued to fire several rounds

Ford

From A1

“We understand these schedule disruptions are inconvenient,” Savona wrote in the letter to workers. “We also appreciate that this year’s summer schedule may be disappointing to those who look forward to time away during the traditional shutdown weeks. We thank you for your flexibility, understanding and your dedication — as we’ve seen throughout COVID-19 challenges and this year’s semi-