

**Coverage of high school** softball, baseball, water polo, soccer and more **Sports, Section 2** 





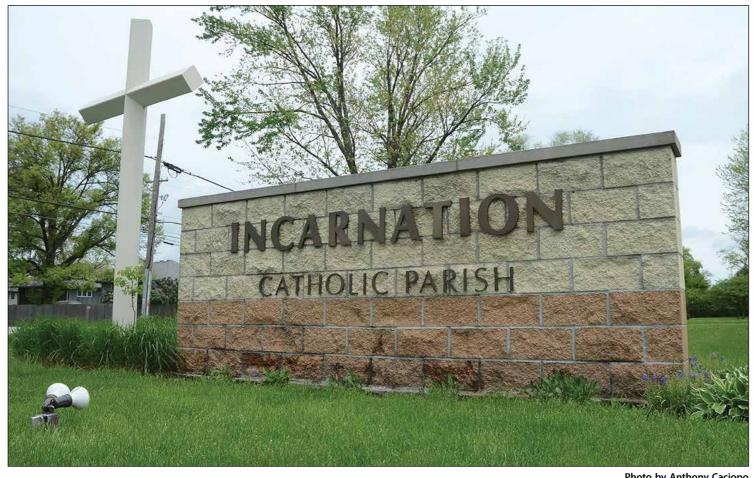
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## THE REGIONAL NEWS

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**Photo by Anthony Caciopo** 

Stone monument marking Incarnation Parish on West 127th Street in Palos Heights.

## Parents: Incarnation Monsignor berated kids, teachers at Mass

'Lousy Catholics' he reportedly said

**By Dermot Connolly** Staff Writer

Incarnation School in Palos Heights will be closing permanently in June, and parents of many of the students feel that hurtful remarks made by Monsignor R. George Sarauskas during his homily at a school Mass last Thursday effectively "kicked them when they were down."

"He told the students they were lousy Catholics," said Andrea Covert, who was at the Mass, as

was her son, a seventh-grader at the school at 5705 W. 127th St. in Palos Heights. "Students in fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade attend that Mass

Sarauskas every week, and I usually do too," she explained.

Covert said she never before had a problem with Sarauskas, who lives in the parish rectory, and regularly says Mass at the church. So, she was shocked when he began "calling out students and teachers" for not attending Mass

Monsignor

on Sunday regularly.

"He bullied the students and the teachers. He actually called people out from the pulpit, and had them stand up," said Covert. "He even said, 'It is a good thing this school is closing, because you are not learning how to be good Catholics here anyway.""

A call to Monsignor Sarauskas for comment was not returned in time for The Regional's deadline.

"We're not perfect Catholics, no one is. But that is why Jesus died for our sins. But we are loving Catholics," said Covert.

"This is happening after we've grieved and tried to move on. Everyone has picked new schools.

But now, because it is the last few weeks, it is getting sad again, and I feel like he beat us up while we were already down. You go to Mass to get strength and be renewed, not to be bullied," she added.

"This eighth-grade class will be our last, and they are just the most awesome group of young men and women. And he told them they weren't going to be successful,

"These children were being bullied. I am an adult and have had my ups and downs but they were just shell-shocked. It was like leaving a war zone to see

See INCARNATION, Page 2

## Palos Park mom with ALS 'lives in the moment'

By Anthony Caciopo Regional News Editor

Wisdom, it has been said, often comes

from the mouths of babes. Kristin Rankin, raising three young daughters with her husband, Kevin Kribs,

should know. Rankin, 40, has ALS, a disease of the central nervous system. It has affected her speech, her mobility and the dexterity in her hands, among other things.

There's no known cure. So what did her seven-year-old daughter, Paige, challenge her mother to do for fun

Why, an emoji-drawing contest! "They're all about emojis," Rankin said

with a smile about her daughters. Emojis are small, digital images or icons used to express emotions, an idea, etc.

Think of a happy face, a thumbs-up, or a heart, especially when sent in a text mes-

sage or an email, and you've got an emoji. Rankin took her best shot in the emoji-drawing contest with Paige despite the diminished dexterity in her hands and the results were judged by Paige's older sister,

Tess declared Paige the winner.

But Paige didn't want to let her mom down.

"Pretty good for ALS!" she wrote on her mom's drawing, a comment that made Rankin smile.

"She was encouraging me, saying 'wow, I think you did great," said Rankin. ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis),

sometimes referred to as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a rapidly progressive, neurodegenerative terminal disease that causes muscle weakness, difficulty speaking and swallowing and, generally, complete paralysis, according to the Les Turner ALS Foundation, headquartered in north suburban

The foundation is named for a late Chicago-area businessman, father and husband, diagnosed with ALS in 1976, who was "frustrated by the lack of local resources available to manage the devastating effects of his diagnosis," as detailed on the foundation's website.

"His family and friends supported his desire to provide support to others affected by the disease with the resources and hope for a cure unavailable to him. In doing so, they inspired his legacy."

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Photo by Anthony Caciopo Kristin Rankin cuddles with her daughter, Laney, 4, at the family home in Palos Park. Rankin has ALS and is raising three girls with her husband, Kevin Kribs.

**PALOS TOWNSHIP** 

# Brannigan gets support at meeting

"They're the haters,' supporters say of protestors

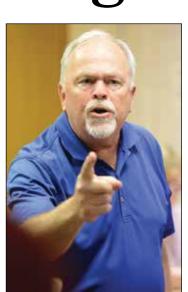
By Anthony Caciopo Regional News Editor

There was a new development at the Palos Township Board of Trustees meeting Monday—the presence of supporters of Trustee Sharon Brannigan.

The Township's monthly meetings since July 2017 have been noteworthy for the large number of people, frequently exceeding 100, who have protested Brannigan for remarks she posted on social media that many consider offensive to Muslims and Middle Eastern people in general.

Middle Easterners and non-Middle Easterners alike have been attending the meetings to express their rejection of her now-deleted remarks and to demand her res-

But Monday evening, a twist in the recent proceedings at the meetings took place when about a dozen people attended in support of the embattled trustee. And the differences of opinion were frequently heated.



**Photo by Anthony Caciopo** Turning to the crowd of protestors at Monday's Palos Township meeting following the Pledge of Allegiance, an unidentified man shouts, "You wonder why nobody wants to respect you." The crowd had taken part in the entire Pledge, raising their voices at the end "...with liberty and justice FOR ALL."

Even the Pledge of Allegiance was a cause for contention.

"You wonder why nobody wants to respect you," shouted a man who stood up from his seat

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## Son pays homage to Judy Baar Topinka in his new book

**By Steve Metsch** 

The son of the late Judy Baar Topinka is hoping a book he's written about his mother can teach valuable lessons

to our youths. Joseph Baar Topinka, who now lives in Texas and teaches employment law at Texas State Univer-



Topinka

"Just Judy," an entertaining and interesting 96page book about his mom, one of Illinois' most beloved politicians.

He presented a brief videotape about his mother's life, and then chatted with people at a book signing May 12 at the Riverside Public Library.

Judy Baar Topinka lived much of her life in Riverside and it was there that she began her career in politics. She certainly had a loyal following, losing only one election.

"Somebody had to tell the story. And what better person than her

son?" he said. "Her life has a lot of great lessons we can all learn from, especially young people."

The colorful book is designed to act as a study guide for middle-school students, he said, but at the book signing, all the people there were adults.

James Connelly, of Chicago, said Judy was popular because "she never forgot her roots and what people were about."

"Wouldn't you say we need a little bit more Judy? She was the most popular Republican in the state. Even Democrats liked her," Connelly said.

Judy Baar Topinka was all about four core issues, her son said: "Good government, civility, ethics and love of heritage, which is one reason I'm wearing this," he said.

He wore a bright red Czech Republic hockey jersey bearing the name of legendary NHL star Jaromir Jagr. His mother was proud of her Bohemian and Czech roots, he said.

"This book is about her life and really about how she loved

MASERATI

Levante

See BOOK, Page 3



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## Supreme Court opens door to sports betting

### Illinois is among the states considering the idea

**By Bob Bong** 

Legal betting on Bears games may become a reality in Illinois, thanks to Monday's Supreme Court ruling that struck down a federal law blocking most states from allowing wagers to be placed

The high court declared unconstitutional a 1992 federal law that prohibited states outside of Nevada, Oregon, Delaware and Montana from regulating and taxing sports betting.

New Jersey, which had looked into allowing sports betting to give a boost to its Atlantic City casinos

and racetracks, sued and the court ruled in its favor on Monday.

In a 6-3 decision, the court ruled that "Congress can regulate sports gambling directly, but if it elects not to do so, each state is free to act on its own."

Justice Samuel Alito gave the majority opinion, saying: "Our job is to interpret the law Congress has enacted and decide whether it is consistent with the Constitution. PASPA is not."

One research firm estimated before the ruling that if the Supreme Court were to strike down the law, 32 states would likely offer sports betting within five years.

New Jersey and Mississippi are

expected to be the first states to jump on the sports betting bandwagon the quickest. Both have sizable casino gambling operations already in place.

Illinois was one of many states that decided to be ready if the court ruled for New Jersey.

In January, the Sports Betting Consumer Protection Act was introduced in the Illinois Senate. The bill would "authorize sports betting or electronic sports betting by an electronic sports betting patron or sports betting facility patron."

Sports gambling consultants and representatives from the professional sports leagues, along with assorted opponents and sup-

porters, testified at a preliminary hearing on the issue last month before the Senate Gaming Com-

Also, in January, state Rep. Lou Lang offered a shell bill in the Illinois House that would be used to legalize sports betting if the court ruled in favor of legalized sports betting.

Among issues that would have to be addressed include tax rates, online wagering and potential venues such as casinos and horse racing tracks.

With the General Assembly session ending at the end of May, any action this session is unlikely.

"I'm excited about it," state Rep. Michael Zalewski (D-23rd), of Riverside, said Tuesday. "We should look into it immediately." Zalewski said sports betting would provide a needed tax boost for the state.

"Revenue is hard to calculate, but conservatively, I'd say sports betting would bring in from \$50 to \$75 million per year," he said.

Zalewski said if approved, sports betting would probably be offered first in sports books in the state's casinos, much like it is handled by casinos in Las Vegas.

"We also can't ignore the impact of the Internet," he said. Everyone today has some sort of electronic device."

What's at stake is a piece of a gambling pie worth an estimated \$150 billion per year in the United States. Experts say about 97 percent of that money is wagered illegally in the form of parlay cards or bets made with a bookie.

"That's the news every one of these states was waiting for," sports and gambling law attorney Daniel Wallach told USA TODAY Sports. "Every one of these states' legislative measures hinged on the finding of the Supreme Court that PASPA is unconstitutional. The ruling allows the states to legislate immediately and for all such laws to become effective immediately."

Many of the major pro sports leagues have indicated they will try to work with the states that allow betting to ensure themselves a piece of the action through socalled integrity fees.

## **Palos Heights City Council** approves road repair bid

**By Anthony Caciopo** Regional News Editor

Road repairs totaling at least \$480,630 are coming this season following unanimous approval Tuesday evening of a motion to award the 2018 Road Program to the low bidder, Lindahl Brothers, Inc., for the base bid amount.

That total might increase if more money becomes available.

"If we can get additional funding, we can go out to rebid later this season, and we can maybe do even more (work)," said Ald. Dolores Kramarski of Ward 3.

A contract with Lindahl has not yet been signed.

"We take the lowest qualified bidder," she explained. "We have a plan, we have the streets we want to have done and then there was an option. We took the option out and went with the lowest qualified bidder. Every bidder has a base and then the option.'

Kramarski said the Palos Heights Public Works Dept. typically handles drainage work on city streets, and the selected contractor works on the street

"They'll grind, do two inches of surface (base and topcoat), contract out to do gravel on the side of the road," she said. There's curbs and gutters in some of the areas; a street with curbs and gutters is always more money."

The Council voted unanimously to approve other motions, includ-

Requesting permission from IDOT to close a portion of Harlem Avenue on Wednesday, July 4 for the Annual 4th of July Parade between 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Authorizing the execution of an Intergovernmental Agreement between the City, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District for construction and perpetual maintenance of the flood control project at Arrowhead Lake.

Amending the City's personnel policy to allow non-contractual employees the option to use sick days in the form of paid leave of absence immediately preceding his/her retirement date.

Approving the proposal from Tyco Security to provide and install an outdoor security system at the Recreation Center in the amount of \$13,810.

Approving the proposal from the Sound of Music to provide and install an audio-visual system in the Orchard Room at the Recreation Center for \$7,846. This improvement will aid in the marketing and promotion of the Orchard Room for business meetings, presentations and trainings," the meeting agenda noted.

Approving a request from Palos Baseball Organization to allow the lights on the Pony Field and the North Field to stay on until 11 p.m. June 9 for a homerun derby being held as a fundraiser for 12U Cooperstown training camp.

Approving a final payout to D-Construction for work completed on the 2017 Road Program in the amount of \$34,683. Retainage in the amount of \$5,000 is still being held.

#### **Incarnation**

**Continued from Page 1** 

them leaving the Mass, crying and holding on to each other. I have a hard time getting that image out of my mind.'

She said Sarauskas didn't stop when he left the altar, either.

"He bullied them from the front of the church to the narthex in the back. Because they were crying, he pretended to play a little violin as they filed past him in the narthex.'

Covert said she was pleased that the pastor, Rev. Arek Falana, acted quickly after he found out what

The pastor did do a good job and was on top of it. He held an intervention where the students

talked about their feelings about what happened." Falana also informed parents about the incident via a robocall. In it, he said Sarauskas "addressed some issues in an inappropriate way that hurt many of the children. I want you to know that my staff and I took this incident very seriously, and addressed it with the students and teachers." He urged parents to discuss it with their children as well, to ensure that they are "processing it properly."

The Archdiocese of Chicago also issued a statement on the matter, saying, "We are aware of the complaints regarding the May 10, 8:30 a.m. Mass at Incarnation Parish. The Archdiocese is looking into the matter further in coordination with Incarnation School and Parish. The Archdiocese of Chicago and Incarnation School and Parish are committed to treating all students, parishioners, teachers and staff in a manner consistent with our Catholic values."



**Photo by Anthony Caciopo** 

A figure of the Virgin Mary kneels at the base of the bell tower at Incarnation Catholic Church in Palos Heights, where Monsignor R. George Sarauskas allegedly called out students at Mass for being "lousy Catholics."

#### Meeting Continued from Page 1

near the front of the crowded meeting room just as the Pledge concluded.

Most, if not all the crowd had seemingly taken part in the entire Pledge, raising their voices at the end "...with liberty and justice

We're not asking for anyone's respect," Basem Kawar told the man. "We demand respect!"

Kawar is the national coordinator of the National Network of Arab American Communities.

Shortly before the meeting began, a Brannigan supporter said "She shouldn't resign. She's got her right, too."

"When it impacts people's rights," a protester said to her about Brannigan's remarks, "then she has no rights."

"If she stays, we stay," said another protestor, referring to Brannigan's refusal to resign. "This is our township. She doesn't represent all the people, then people don't want her.'

"Then vote her out!" came a response from another supporter.

The voting process, not repeated protests, has been cited by township officials as the only method by which Brannigan can be removed from the board. Because she is an elected official, the board has no power to remove her or to even pressure her to resign, the trustees have said.

But the board was again called upon Monday to speak out against Brannigan, and township officials were grilled about why there has been no statement from the board about the matter.

"We've been coming here for 10 months," said Kawar. He was one of a handful of people who took the opportunity to formally address the board before the meeting was abruptly adjourned.

"Not once have we gotten our questions answered. Can you explain why? You claim that you'd issue a statement to address the concerns of everyone in this room," he said. "Where is that statement?'

"The only statement the board will make, for anyone that was not at that first meeting (in July), when we went around the table and each board member gave their opinion and thoughts of what was going on," said Township Supervisor Colleen Schumann.

"We stated, myself and the other board members, that we did not agree with what Trustee Brannigan said. But she's an elected official

and we have no authority to remove her from the board. That statement stands.'

A mock game of Jeopardy was started by Bill Beaulieu in an effort, he said, to get answers from the board, but it was met with little patience by Supervisor Schumann.

"We're not playing a game up here at the township board," she said. "This is not how township meetings are run."

"I thought this (meeting) was to talk about township business,' said the final person to formally comment. "I think it is a political rally, so to speak. And if it is, I'd like to know how many people

are registered to vote?" Multiple people quickly responded and the meeting was adjourned, followed by boos and chants of "Racist!" as Trustee Brannigan exited the

"We'll be back, we'll be back" was shouted dozens of times in the immediate aftermath of the adjournment.

The appearance by multiple Brannigan supporters at Monday's meeting, when almost no supporters have been heard from in all previous meetings, may have been prompted by an email. A copy was given to The Regional News in the parking lot of Township headquarters, 10802 S. Roberts Rd. in Palos Hills.

"I fully anticipate the protestors will be at this meeting again trying to obstruct a government meeting," it read. "The protestors continue to refuse to meet to start a conversation and, as expected, no further contact with the Department of Justice has been had by the township.

"I am encouraging everyone to come out to the Township Meeting if only to see fascism in action. This is the new face of the democrat party: Scream and throw a fit until you get your way."

The copy of the email included notification of a Citizens Utility Board meeting the township will be hosting May 30 at 10 a.m. and concluded "Please contact me at if you have any questions or would like to donate or volunteer for my campaign for re-election."

At last month's meeting, in an unexpected interview with The Regional, Trustee Brannigan said she chooses not to encourage her supporters to attend the meetings due to her concerns about security.

Palos Township government provides a variety of services to all or parts of Bridgeview, Hickory Hills, Orland Park, Palos Heights, Palos Hills, Palos Park, Willow Springs and Worth.

Outside, Brannigan supporter Greg Lombardi, who said he lives in the township, expressed his opinion.

"The problem I find with most of these people is that they can't agree to disagree," he said. "Just because you don't have the same political views they do, immediately they start the name calling.

You're a racist, you're a bigot, you're a homophobe, you're this, you're that," Lombardi said. "Then they shout you down."

"I have neighbors who are Palestinian and Muslim," said a woman standing nearby. "They've been here for 30 years. They've been nice to us, we've been nice to them. So how dare they (the protestors) tell us that we're racist."

Tom Monahan, who also said he lives in Palos Township, said "I think what she (Brannigan) said back then was nothing mean-spirited or derogatory. It was something that most Americans outside the Arab community think.

"They don't talk to you, they're not friendly, they're secretive," he said, referring to Middle Eastern people. "I was in a park once, and here comes about 20 of them. They take it over. I was being polite and I thought 'I'll move over and let them know I'm being nice.'

"But usually the ones that always say 'racist', they're the racists, they're the haters. They're wasting time and they're not making any progress," Monahan said.

"She offered an apology. Why don't they sit down with Ms. Brannigan and talk to her, like she said?"

Coalition members withdrew recently from a proposed meeting with selected members of the township board and a representative from the Department of Justice, citing bad faith from the board because the potential meeting was mentioned by a township official to the media.

Ala'a Mbayed, who was attending her first Palos Township board meeting with her friend, Flavio Aguirre, said "I feel uncomfortable and upset that we could allow someone like this to be part of

Mbayed said she lives in Bridgeview and is a first-generation Syrian American.

"We have a huge population of Arabs in the community, to be disregarded that way in that way, and for (Brannigan) to take that position and think no one is going to care and no one is going to do anything...people are upset," she said.

#### Mom

Continued from Page 1

Countless people helped raise awareness and money for ALS research by participating in the Ice Bucket Challenge a few summers ago. The IBC was not a function of the Les Turner Foundation. The Turner Foundation sponsors four major fundraising events per year,

including the ALS Walk For Life. The first symptoms of the disease struck Rankin barely more than two years ago, in the spring of 2016.

"I started tripping and falling on my way to the train station, and then I had some issues with my hands in cold weather," she said.

"I went to see a neurologist. It's kind of a rule-out process of other conditions. Around the end of June, I was told I probably have ALS." Rankin had a glimmer of hope, however, because as part of the

process it was discovered she also

had Celiac Disease. "There were a couple of other patients who were written about in the scientific literature whose undiagnosed Celiac Disease mim-

icked ALS symptoms," she said. With that hope, Rankin went on a strict gluten-free diet but after about a year the medical professionals determined that Celiac Disease wasn't what was going on.

"It provided a sense of normalcy for me, that year when I could hold onto hope, but by last summer I got the formal diagnosis," she said. Certain circumstances have changed quickly for her, even

since then. "I started having the speech issues, probably starting in December or January, progressively getting worse in terms of pronunciation and clarity," she said.

"My hands don't work very well right now. I've fallen due to balance issues. I still have strength in my legs, but I started to use a walker last fall.' Rankin, a Ph.D., is an assistant

professor at the University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health. Before her diagnosis, she says, "I was on a tenure track, about halfway through, working crazy hours. Last summer I decided

I couldn't be working full-time

any more. My priorities changed.

I transitioned all my research proj-

ects to other faculty." Rankin's work includes maternal and child health research.

"We support the Illinois Dept. of Public Health to help mothers and children," she said. "We do women's health, especially in the post-partum period, health-services research about women getting or not getting a post-partum



Photo by Anthony Caciopo

The Rankin-Kribs family enjoys a game at the dining room table. From left are Kevin Kribs; Paige, 7; Kristin Rankin; Laney, 4 and Tess, 9.

visit, variances in that and how we can help them. That's a major focus of my research.'

Rankin currently works at UIC one day per week and one day at home. Earlier this week, The Regional News caught up with her as she was headed home on I-55 where she, like countless other drivers, expressed frustration with

rush-hour traffic. But she was happy to talk about her Mother's Day surprise of a couple days prior that Tess, 9, Paige,

7 and Laney, 4 arranged for her. "First thing in the morning, they brought me to the kitchen and had a lot of presents for me," she said.

The presents included "cute, laminated bookmarks with fulllength pictures of them, and then they drew pictures of pairs of animals—moms and babies—with the words 'I love you, mom,' Rankin said.

The girls also made cards for their mother, painted in watercolors, and Laney created a potpourri heart. In addition, Paige made scrambled eggs for breakfast.

Rankin grew up in Alsip and her husband, Kevin, grew up in Oak Lawn. They could've been high school sweethearts, but the timing wasn't quite right.

"We were in band together," she

said of their years at Queen of

Peace High School and St. Laurence High School. "We were only friends. We reconnected after college.' Kristin played the alto sax in the marching band and the bassoon in the concert band. Kevin played

the trombone. Kristen also loved

to play softball, even beyond her high school and college years. The couple and their daughters moved to Palos Park last summer, leaving their home in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood for a house with a primarily ground-level

floorplan. "Honestly, it was an agonizing move for us, because in Beverly we had such great neighbors,' said Kevin. "But (now) we've got lots of natural light and a view

of nature."

Kevin said when his wife got the diagnosis, "it was devastating, there's no way around that. You go through a lot of different emotions and a lot of the stages of grief.

"It's taken time to process, but I think for the most part I'm kind of accepting of it," he said. "Day to day, it's difficult and hard to watch her go through this. No one wants to lose their independence. We've got a lot of family and friends to support us."

"A lot has fallen on him," Kristin said of her husband. "He's more grounded, on top of everythinginsurance, equipment, making sure I have what I need, to be as independent as possible."

Kevin, a former portfolio manager in the investment industry, now describes himself as a stayat-home dad. He also manages an investment apartment building.

Especially when you have three little ones, you've got to keep plugging," he said. "We've got to do the best we can. I'm grateful for what we have, you've got to look

at it that way." Kristin credits the Les Turner Foundation for the walkers and wheelchair she uses for her mobility, and for access to a social worker.

"The social worker really helped me, how to talk to my kids about it. Be frank about it, because they

can see what's going on," she said. Kristin is currently involved in clinical trials with stem-cell therapy out of the University of Massachusetts.

"Let's make the best of every day and be positive, make the most of every moment, live in the moment, instead of dwelling," she said.

ment, her daughters asked their mom if they could have popsicles. For more information about ALS, visit the Les Turner Foundation's website at www.lesturn-

And, as if to punctuate that state-