

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SPEAKER:** (CHANTING) 1, 2, 3, 4.

**CHRIS** Good afternoon. This is *Minnesota Now*. I'm Chris Farrell. Cathy Mercer is off today, and I'm glad you're here.

**FARRELL:** Residents in Grand Marais are raising alarms that vacation rental homes are pricing them out of their hometown. We'll hear how and what Cook County officials are trying to do about it.

An organic farmer in Moorhead is trying to find ways to turn commercial food waste into fertilizer and energy. We'll find out why and how she's doing. You may have noticed a national spike in union organizing. Eight Minnesota Starbucks have voted to unionize this year. Why is unionizing gaining back its popularity?

And I'll talk with an Anishinaabe designer about her growing Minnesota-based fashion business. Stay tuned for all that, and of course, the Minnesota music minute and the song of the day. First, news.

**LAKSHMI** Live from *NPR News* in Washington, I'm Lakshmi Singh. The alleged shooter behind yesterday's mass shooting at  
**SINGH:** a holiday parade in Highland Park, Illinois preplanned the attack, in which he allegedly used a high-powered rifle, perched himself on top of a rooftop, and fired on spectators and parade participants below. That coming moments ago from Lake County Sheriff's Department Deputy chief Christopher Covelli in his update on the person in custody, Robert E. Crimo III.

**CHRISTOPHER** Crimo fired more than 70 rounds from this rifle into the crowd of innocent people.

**COVELLI:**

**LAKSHMI** And Covelli offered more details about how the alleged shooter or what the alleged shooter wore.

**SINGH:**

**CHRISTOPHER** During the attack, Crimo was dressed in woman's clothing. And investigators do believe he did this to conceal his  
**COVELLI:** facial tattoos and his identity and help him during the escape with the other people who were fleeing the chaos.

**LAKSHMI** At least six people were killed in the mass shooting. Many more were injured. In Florida, a judge temporarily  
**SINGH:** blocked a state law that would ban nearly all abortions after 15 weeks. NPR'S Greg Allen reports the ban was reinstated quickly following a state appeal.

**GREG ALLEN:** Judge John Cooper issued an injunction that was in effect for less than an hour. The state appealed his decision, which automatically puts it on hold. Florida's law, which went into effect July 1, would prevent any abortions after 15 weeks, except those where there is a fatal fetal abnormality or the health of the mother is at stake. In his order, Cooper cited the privacy clause of Florida's Constitution, which is broader than that in the US Constitution.

In previous cases, Florida's Supreme Court has said it preserves the right of women to decide whether to terminate their pregnancies. Since then, however, the state's highest court has become more conservative, following appointments by Republican governors. Greg Allen, *NPR News*, Miami.

**LAKSHMI** WNBA star Brittany Griner currently on trial in Russia for drug charges has written a letter to President Biden  
**SINGH:** asking for his help in gaining her release. NPR'S Charles Mains has the latest from Moscow.

**CHARLES MAYNES:** In a handwritten note passed to the White House through her representatives, Griner told Biden she was, quote, "terrified she might never return home" and asked the president not to forget about her and other American detainees. While much of the letter's contents remain private, released excerpts show Griner asking Biden to do all he can to gain her release.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist is in the midst of a trial on drug smuggling charges after she was detained at a Moscow airport in February for alleged possession of cannabis oil. The US has classified Griner as wrongfully detained and assigned her case to its envoy for Hostage Affairs. Her trial in Russia resumes Thursday. She's facing up to 10 years in prison. Charles Mains, *NPR News*, Moscow.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** At last check on Wall Street, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 561 points, 1.8% at 30,533. The S&P has fallen 1.4%. The NASDAQ is down slightly. It's NPR.

The United Nations Human Rights Office is preparing to ramp up monitoring of Russian military violations against civilians in Ukraine. That, today, from the UN Division's lead official, Michelle Bachelet, who told the Geneva-based Human Rights Council that her office has documented 270 cases of arbitrary detention and disappearances of civilians in areas held by Russian forces and their allies. She says eight of the victims were found dead. In response, Russia's delegate accused Bachelet of peddling disinformation to cover up crimes allegedly committed by the Ukrainian government.

A wealthy Chinese-Canadian financier is on trial in China, though it's not clear on what charges. NPR'S John Ruwitch reports the man was reportedly abducted by Chinese agents from a luxury hotel in Hong Kong five years ago.

**JOHN RUWITCH:** Billionaire Xiao Jinhua was reportedly living at the Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong and protected by bodyguards when he went missing in 2017. Hong Kong Police later confirmed that he'd crossed the border into China, and he hasn't been heard from since. Xiao was reported to have profited over the years from his connections with elite officials in China and even acted as a so-called white glove, helping them manage finances in hard-to-trace ways.

Xiao has denied that he's profited from his connections to the leadership. Since his arrest, authorities have seized companies connected to the huge conglomerate he owns, the Tomorrow Group. The Canadian embassy says all requests for Canadian officials to attend the trial have been denied. China has not made the charges public. John Ruwitch, *NPR News*, Shanghai.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** This, hour US stocks are trading lower with the Dow down 1.8%, or 565 points. This is NPR.

**ANNOUNCER:** Support for NPR comes from NPR stations. Other contributors include Subaru, with the 2023 Subaru Crosstrek, an SUV with standard, symmetrical all-wheel drive and an available 182-horsepower engine. Love-- it's what makes Subaru Subaru.

**EMILY BRIGHT:** For *MPR News* in the Twin Cities, I'm Emily Bright. Minneapolis Park Police are investigating after shooting late last night at Boom Island Park in Minneapolis left eight people hospitalized. The Minneapolis Park Board said in a statement that several of the victims are in critical condition. A spokesperson said this was not a formal 4th of July event or fireworks at the park, but residents had gathered to celebrate the holiday. There have been no arrests in the shooting.

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation recently awarded more than \$3.4 million to 21 nonprofits in the state. 16 of the grants will go toward supporting efforts to improve early childhood care and education. Wildflower Foundation partner Daniela Vasan says her Minneapolis-based organization received \$200,000 over two years to provide training and fund new Montessori schools.

**DANIELA VASAN:** I'm extremely grateful for the foundation, in part, because they talk about being in partnership with their grantees. And I feel like it's one of the few foundations that really has lived up to that belief over the course of the last few years, and I'm looking forward to continuing this relationship.

**EMILY BRIGHT:** The Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation has awarded more than \$75 million to 600 nonprofits since being established in 1986. An upcoming webinar hosted by the North Dakota Department of Human Services will focus on helping chronically stressed farmers and ranchers. It is the first in a three-part series beginning Thursday. Professional counselor Monica McConkey says the webinar is free and open to anyone.

**MONICA MCCONKEY:** I hope they take away really practical strategies to either implement in helping others or to make even small adjustments in their own life or their own lifestyle to relieve stress, help them cope with difficult times, build resiliency.

**EMILY BRIGHT:** The webinar was set up after drought and other natural disasters hit agriculture hard over the last couple of years. This is *MPR News*.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**CHRIS FARRELL:** As more vacation homes and rentals pop up along Minnesota's North Shore, it's harder for locals to find a place to live. To try and solve some of the lack of housing residents are facing, a County committee has been formed to decide how vacation rentals fit into the future of Cook County.

So joining me to dive deeper into the issue is Joe Friedrichs. He is the News Director at WTIP in Grand Marais. He has been one of the main reporters following this story. So Joe, welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Thank you, Chris. Good to be here.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** All right, so give us a scope of the problem. Tell us, what is the problem here?

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Well, it's an interesting way to present it because some people would say that there isn't a problem here. So it depends who you're asking. Certainly, those in the vacation rental industry would say that there's actually a downward trend in the number of vacation rentals in Cook County.

And the County's own data supports that. For example, there were 266 illegally operating vacation rentals at the end of 2020. And now at the end of 2021, the County says there were 239. So people in the industry who are on this committee that you mentioned, Chris, are saying, well, wait a second, how could we, then, be taking away from the stock if it's actually a downward trend? So that's an interesting scenario.

They also point to the fact that a lot of these homes that are in the vacation rental industry or in the upper market, half million dollar homes or up that are typically a vacation rental-- so it's much more complex than, vacation rentals or the problem for our lack of housing in Cook County. Let's solve it through that. It's a lot of layers to it.

**CHRIS** So just following up on that, these vacation rentals, are they bringing income into Cook County?

**FARRELL:**

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Well, the Visit Cook County, our tourism agency, their data would certainly support that, as well. There's a lodging tax that the ordinance now has in place that was passed in 2019 in Cook County that you have to register a vacation rental the same way that a resort or hotel has to be registered through the County and pay a lodging tax.

They bring in revenue, now. And of course, then, the visitors that stay at these vacation rentals, they're spending money at the local restaurants, and buying things in shops, and so forth. So there's an economic connection to it, absolutely.

**CHRIS** So why is there so little housing? I mean, that seems to be the nub of the issue here, right?

**FARRELL:**

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Right. That's been a problem in Cook County for decades, certainly as long as I've lived here, which is now coming up on a decade, not quite. But I've talked with people who have been here since generations and that in the '80s, for example, this was research from Northspan Group in Duluth that said, this is an issue in Cook County. This is in the '80s that said, you've got a major housing problem in Cook County, and you better figure out something to do about it.

There's been some development in the housing industry. There's been about 50-plus units each year that are applied for-- building permits. A lot of those, 60% of those, are on a lake. So that's going to be an expensive project, not something that an average, medium income is going to be building a home on a lake or buying a home on a lake.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** And what about housing for workers, people who are working in the restaurant or at the resort? How concentrated-- and typically, they're going to be living on a-- earning a lower income.

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Well, some employers have taken that matter into their own hands. They've built workforce housing that's specifically-- even if it's for seasonal workers. Some of the vacation rental industries have done that.

I know Cascade Lodge on the North Shore on Highway 61 has done that, as well, have brought in specific housing just to say, hey, look, if you work here, we're going to have a place for you to live. Bluefin has done some of that in the past, as well. So there's some of that happens.

Otherwise, that's the issue. If people move here because they like Grand Marais and the job that they want to get, or Cook County is more a lower income, that's the issue is that if the employer doesn't offer housing it's very, very, very challenging to find any long-term rental. Even if you have connections in the community, there are almost zero, most of the time.

**CHRIS** So this committee in Cook County, I mean, what does it hope to achieve?

**FARRELL:**

**JOE** Well, I think a review of the ordinance that was passed in 2019 is its primary objective is to say, OK, we have this ordinance in place now. It'll be three years at the conclusion of it. What worked, and what didn't work?

**FRIEDRICHS:**

I don't think it's necessarily to try to solve the housing crunch. We've recently formed a Housing Redevelopment Authority, an HRA, in Cook County which has levee authority and so forth. And their primary objective is to get more homes and housing units available. But this vacation rental committee that you're talking about, Chris, is almost separate from that mission, so to speak, to solve the housing crunch.

It's, essentially, to review making sure that the compliance factor is working. They've contracted out with an organization called Host Compliance. They're a West Coast organization. The County's teaming with them to monitor and make sure people are registering and paying the fees, annual fees, to have a vacation rental in Cook County.

They may look at-- a consideration could be, do we want to follow Lake County's lead-- Two Harbors, Lake County, Silver Bay, and so forth-- and put a moratorium in place? Lake County did that in May of this year. So that's more what the Vacation Rental Committee is doing is, did this ordinance that we drafted work? What do we need to tweak about it? And should we consider some other aspects about vacation rentals? It's not about solving the housing crunch.

**CHRIS** Got it. And so what can you tell us about the-- I don't know. What's the right word? The demographics of the committee. Who's making up this committee?

**FARRELL:**

**JOE** I've heard from some local people that were disappointed in the fact that it's a lot of government-- local government officials-- the County commissioners have some representation, the county administrator, the assessor. People then who are involved in vacation rentals are on this committee, including the largest representation from Cascade Vacation Rentals. That's our largest company that does that.

**FRIEDRICHS:**

The citizen input side of it, from what I heard from some community members who reached out to me said, I think there's a couple, or three or four, maybe, at the most, who are citizen representation-- in other words, people who just consider this to be a community issue and want to say, hey, let's work around this. Maybe vacation rentals are a problem, and let's talk about it in that aspect.

So it's across the map, though. It's vacation rental organizations. It's government officials make up about half of it. And then there's also some hotel managers, small resort managers, and so forth, as well.

**CHRIS** And so-- and please correct me if I'm wrong on my details. But I understand that more than 500 people filled out a survey about vacation rentals. And so what were some of the results of that survey?

**FARRELL:**

**JOE** Well, we're waiting. They're coming. It just ended on the 27th, which was last Monday. So in all fairness to the County, they're going to compile that data. It just wasn't quite available.

**FRIEDRICHS:**

This committee was just officially formed on Tuesday, last Tuesday, a week ago on the 28th. So it's still-- a lot of that data needs to be processed because they just closed the survey on Monday. And some of that was written form or complete sentences, so they need to get that data put together. I'm sure that they will release that publicly, and we'll share that. And the Vacation Rental Committee will be reviewing that data, as well.

I just want to point out, Chris, it's very interesting that the narrative of our conversation is we opened today and as I heard in your host intro was, vacation rentals are a problem in Grand Marais. Residents are on high alert and trying to solve it or do something. And that isn't what this committee is necessarily about.

That may be, certainly, what community members are concerned about and just discussed on social media and so forth. But it's such a complex conversation that it warrants a little more depth than just that blanket summary.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yeah, and so that leads to my last question in the minute that we have here is, what do you think is missing from this conversation?

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Well, when it comes to-- they are almost two separate issues, when you look at them that way. Like, is this ordinance working? And the Vacation Rentals are going to figure that out. Is the housing stock an issue? Absolutely. The HRA, community members-- there's some other groups that have formed organically, locally that are also solving that.

Work's being done. It's just a process. And I think that people are coming to-- rallying around this, understanding the degree of how important, critical this is to figure this out, to get more homes in Cook County if we want to have places for workers to live and bring people to the County.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Well, Joe, I could keep asking you lots of questions. I'm really interested in this topic. But unfortunately, you understand the tyranny of the clock, which has just--

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** Indeed, indeed.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Indeed, you do. So that's just kicked in. So thank you very much for your time.

**JOE FRIEDRICHS:** My pleasure, Chris. Thanks a lot.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Joe Friedrichs is News Director at WTIP. And he's been following the future of vacation rental properties in Cook County. You can find more of his reporting at WTIP.org.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I always like that music, anyway, it is our *Minnesota Music Minute*. And this is Minnesota guitarist and bassist Cory Wong with "Power Station," off his new album with the same name. He's @coryjwong on Instagram. And Cory is spelled C-O-R-Y.

[MUSIC - CORY WONG, "POWER STATION"]

**CORY WONG:** (SINGING) Charge me up. Take me to the power station. Ch-ch-ch-ch charge me up. Charge me up, now.

The energy is vicious. The power's so delicious. I'm like a solar panel in the sun. Cryptomusicology is taking over all of me. Utopia is zeroes and ones.

Take me to the power station. Take me to the power station. Charge me up.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** All right, let's shift gears, now. And let's go to Noreen Thomas. Noreen and her husband Lee have been organic farmers in Moorhead since 1997. And organic farming-- that could be challenging work.

But now, Noreen is taking on another challenge, as if one isn't enough. She is trying to turn food waste into fertilizer. Now, that may sound like composting, but there's a twist. And Noreen is on the line now to talk about it. And welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Thank you, Chris. Good morning to you.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Good morning to you. So I have to ask you, you and your husband have been organic farmers since 1997. But as I understand it, your husband's family has an even much longer history when it comes to farming.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** They do. In fact, it's a six-generation farm right in Northwest Minnesota or just north of Moorhead.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So I have to ask you, what do you love about farming? Of course, I'm making the assumption in that question that you love farming.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** I think it's the land. I think it's taking care of the land and really providing nutrient-dense food is really where I land-- so when you have food that really tastes flavorful and tastes like it comes from the land that we farm on. And it's [INAUDIBLE] Chris.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yeah. Well, I was up on Lake Vermilion over the weekend, and we were picking strawberries. And boy, when you pick them right off the vine or whatever they're on, they really do taste good. So tell us about your new project. I mean, how did this come about?

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Well, it came about-- I applied to be a fellow through the Initiators Fellowship Foundation and got the fellowship to, actually, take a really deep dive into recycling different food wastes and different ways into two different projects, one to be a biodigester where you put food waste into it and it kind of gurgles and burps and provides fertilizer. And right now, the farmers are really experiencing high levels of anxiety, really, due to lack of fertilizer.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yeah.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** So it's one way-- I'm working with the company, actually, in the Valley. So we'll be at 40 tons of food waste a year here, shortly, which is just fabulous. It provides electricity for the office. It provides fertilizer for the farm. And I'm kind of figuring out a lot of the application, actually.

The other is to compost. We'll be at 140,000 tons by this time next year.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** That much?

**NOREEN** That much. I mean, that's just--

**THOMAS:**

**CHRIS** That sounds like a lot.

**FARRELL:**

**NOREEN** It is. It's a lot of work, actually, too. But keeping that out of the landfill and keeping all those nutrients back into the land is just fabulous. Because otherwise, we're just throwing it. For instance, pumpkins-- Clay County, we've been recycling pumpkins from the County for six years now.

**THOMAS:**

We're at 166 tons of pumpkins, just pumpkins, that the whole County works together on. And they come out to our farm. That's probably about 10 semi loads full of pumpkins alone that we've been able to keep them out of the landfill. So that whole project-- to see the community pride and to see how everyone would work together really sparked an interest in me.

**CHRIS** I mean, I can hear the pride in your voice, and not only your pride, but your interest. So why is sustainability so important to you?

**FARRELL:**

**NOREEN** I think it's for a couple of reasons. Back to that nutrient-dense foods is that when we deplete the land, we really have to look at what we're drawing from that land and putting it back into the land for the next generation to make sure that is there and available for good food.

**THOMAS:**

Because when you have good food, you have good health. You have good environment. And it really is-- we have to attribute ourselves to the first six inches of soil, actually, in the land. So it's a big interest of mine, always has been.

I think it got renewed when you started to see the cause and effect I mean, the first load of semis came out, and I thought, oh. Oh, my gosh. Or the first dump of the pumpkins, I thought, oh, my gosh. But they're mainly water.

But then when we did discovery into, what is in there? We found all sorts of things that helped with plant disease, helped with nutrients that we were actually importing into the land that is right there, that pumpkins draw up. So it really started this whole interest.

And there's a whole interest into, OK, what kind of microbes can we add to a compost pile to make it so it doesn't smell as much? Well, we're getting really close. And it's just, the more you learn, the more you know you don't know.

**CHRIS** So there's this term that's out there-- anyone who's involved in sustainability, cares about sustainability-- this term zero waste. So is your farm close to being a zero-waste place?

**FARRELL:**

**NOREEN** We are very close to being at that. And what's kind of fun is we're able to help other farms. For instance, when we're cleaning the grains, and maybe there are some that are cracked or it's not food-grade, we have a lot of people that are interested in homesteading right now, or they raise chickens, or they have pigs, or what have you.

**THOMAS:**

Then they come on farm and get that scratch grains. So we're able to help that farmer launch, the other farmers launch that maybe they have 10 acres or 5 acres. By working together, you can just see the results-- able to help them at affordable level.



**CHRIS FARRELL:** So you mentioned working together. What about the broader community and getting-- I don't know-- the broader community engaged understanding this?

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Oh, I think they're very interested. Because all of us-- know that landfill is on some of the richest land in the world here in the Red River Valley. So we all have to pay taxes if they have to expand that.

So if we can use that, it's an interest to persons, everyone. It's a connector because everyone loves good food. Plus, everyone is really worried about nutrient-dense food, as well. So even though we may not agree on other topics, people are very interested in this.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So you're in the early stages with the fellowship. So what are your next stages? Where are you-- where you are now-- so what's your next step?

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Next step is actually looking at the microbes. I really like what some of the European countries are doing with adding different microbes to make sure that you keep that nitrogen in place in that compost pile, making sure that you really don't have an odor problem. We're just on the cusp of that. And there's so much work to be done,

And it's very exciting because people-- for instance, I work with a brewery here locally. And they have some of the lactobacillus that they're making sour beers with, which, if you add to the pile, add a whole, new component that we don't even know yet.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Ah. And so I can look at beer with even greater appreciation than I do already.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Yes. And it's a close group, too, because one of the-- closed-loop, I should say. So one of the businesses we're working with will actually use it on some of our grains. And I think that there's some fungicide-- a natural fungicide, not a chemical-derived-- that is very good for the grains.

So we'll provide the grains back to that business to serve in their cafeteria. So it's kind of a-- they're helping us. We're helping them. And it's just a really great partnership and relationship.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Well, I just love this, the connections, the knowledge, the learning. I think this is absolutely wonderful. So thank you for taking your time to talk to us about it.

**NOREEN THOMAS:** Well, thank you. You have to come out to the farm sometime and see us.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** I would love to. Absolutely. Noreen Thomas is a Moorhead area farmer and a fellow with the Initiative Foundation, which is based in Little Falls.

**ANNOUNCER:** Programming is supported by Carlson Capital Management, an integrated wealth management firm offering clients a disciplined investment approach and financial planning to help weather market volatility. Connect with the fiduciary advisor at CarlsonCap.com.

**ANNOUNCER:** The *Minnesota Today* podcast from *MPR News* brings you the most important local stories on your busy schedule. In about 5 minutes every weekday, get the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Minnesota, plus a forecast and the day's top headlines from around the state. Listen anytime from anywhere. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So let's get to weather right now. It's a little cloudy in the Twin Cities. And oh, I'm reading the copy here, and it says it's a steamy 82 degrees. When I took that walk yesterday afternoon, steamy is the right word.

We're going to get to a high of 88, even warmer in the southern part of the state. There's a heat advisory that includes Mankato and Albert Lee until 8:00 PM. Is going to be a lot more comfortable in Duluth, right now. It's 68.

And then let's just see-- and then tonight, we should get some severe storms are possible in southwestern Minnesota. But now, let's-- yeah. Now's a good time to turn to Emily Bright and get the latest news. Emily.

**EMILY BRIGHT:** Well, hi, Chris. Thank you. Details continue to emerge as FBI agents investigate a shooting at an Independence Day parade in Highland Park in suburban Chicago. Police say the gunman fired more than 70 rounds with an AR-15-style gun killing at least six people.

He then evaded initial capture by dressing as a woman and blending into the fleeing crowd. The assailant's shots were initially mistaken for fireworks before hundreds of panicked revelers fled in terror.

The 30 NATO allies today have signed off on the protocols needed for Sweden and Finland to become members. The move means the question of admitting the two nations now goes to the capitals of existing members for legislative approval. Turkey's President has said his parliament might block the process, even though Sweden, and Finland, and Turkey reached a memorandum of understanding at the Madrid Summit.

The Russian war in Ukraine has abruptly drawn millions of dollars away from longer-running humanitarian crises. Somalia is, perhaps, the most vulnerable, as thousands die of hunger amid the driest drought in decades. Aid funding for Somalia is less than half of that year's level, as donors, overwhelmingly from the West, have sent more than \$1.7 billion in response to the war in Europe.

And in Sydney, Australia, emergency response teams made 100 rescues overnight to people trapped in cars, and on flooded roads, or inundated in homes. 50,000 people in and around Sydney were given evacuation orders and warnings to prepare to abandon homes. Days of torrential rain have caused dams to overflow and waterways to break their banks bringing a fourth flood emergency in 16 months to parts of the city of 5 million people.

In Minnesota news, former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin will be sentenced in federal court this Thursday. Chauvin had pleaded guilty to charges he violated George Floyd's civil rights when he knelt on Floyd's neck and killed him in 2020. Prosecutors have asked the court to sentence Chauvin to 25 years in prison. That is longer than the state sentence Chauvin is currently serving for Floyd's murder. We'll have more news at 1:00 here on *MPR News*.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Last week, employees at an Eden Prairie Starbucks store announced that they're pursuing unionization. And the week before, the Mall of America Starbucks workers voted to unionize. In all, eight Minnesota Starbucks stores have pursued unionization this year.

And you may have noticed nationally, 2022 saw a spike in workers organizing for more benefits, pay, and for a say at work. Gracie Nira works at a Starbucks in St. Paul that recently unionized. They started working at Starbucks as an undergrad at Macalester College.

They're now a shift leader and union organizer at their Starbucks store. So they join me now to talk about the next generation of union organizers. Gracie, welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

**GRACIE NIRA:** Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

**CHRIS** So to start off, just tell us, how did you get involved in unionizing?

**FARRELL:**

**GRACIE NIRA:** So in back in 2020, 2021, I actually worked at a different Starbucks on Snelling and Marshall. And we did a number of issue-based, safety, COVID organizing informally. And when I transferred to the 300 Snelling location back in July of last year, that culture really moved with those of us that went to the store.

And we began talking about unionizing informally right at the outset. And it wasn't until seven employees were fired in Memphis that we actually started to have the conversation of what it would mean to show solidarity and organize our own union to stand with the movement.

**CHRIS** And so as this conversation has grown, how have you reinforced each other, how have you supported each other  
**FARRELL:** as union members during this whole-- thinking about this process?

**GRACIE NIRA:** I think a lot of that comes back to the importance of grassroots relations. Something that was true during COVID-- they closed down a lot of stores temporarily and then moved all of us into drive-through locations, those of us that were willing to work. And I think having that limited-- I mean, that was the only place that we were going right during the lockdown.

It really reinforced this sense of team camaraderie and something that felt more deep, personal, and urgent, I think, for those still at work. And that's translated to now. I think all of us following the news, the local climate-- there's a different aspect of ourselves that we bring to the work that we do and that really strengthens our personal relationships.

**CHRIS** You used the word camaraderie a couple of times. And I mean, you've kind of answered-- I can hear it in your  
**FARRELL:** voice. But what's the difference being a worker without a union and being a worker with a union?

**GRACIE NIRA:** Legal protections. I think that some of that issue-based organizing we did back in 2021, Starbucks would have captive audience meetings and intimidation tactics that, at the time, I and fellow coworkers didn't really have a good framework for understanding. And in many ways, that drove us to support each other as workers more and to actually seek out the protections that a union could give. And so I think there's a strong sense of collective strength that comes with knowing that we can organize ourselves to win a union through a vote and a lot of momentum that is gained through that, as well.

**CHRIS** So I'm curious what you think. Because it seems that a lot of people who are involved in the union organizing  
**FARRELL:** efforts these days, they're younger. They're better educated than, say, their union counterparts in the past, like in the 1950s and 1960s.

And I read in, think it was a *New York Times* story, a lead organizer in the Starbucks Union campaign is a Rhodes Scholar. So maybe an unfair question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Why do you think a younger, educated group of people seem to be fired up about unionizing?

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yeah, I've been thinking a lot about this question, too. I was reading some research through the Pew Research Center that was talking about how millennials and Gen Z-- I consider myself a millennial. I'm one of the oldest people in my store. I just turned 26. I work with a lot of people who are still in college.

And there's a lot of natural, generational agreement on social issues. A lot of nonwhite workers, a lot of queer workers. And I think we're living in a moment where we can see our rights and the past wins that past generations have made eroding in real time. *Roe v. Wade* is one. I know there was a ruling in Alabama that allowed for the separation of blocks that disenfranchised Black voters.

We're really seeing what can happen if we don't stick our necks out and bargain for our rights. And I think there's a very urgent and existential need to bargain with our employers for protections that we might not have legally otherwise anymore.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So are you getting information calls from Starbucks workers maybe elsewhere in the country saying, how did you do this? How does this work? Tell us what's going on here?

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yeah, we have a pretty good network between the Minnesota region. So people can get in contact with any of the organizers, myself. But there's also the parent union we have, Workers United.

We have their information, and they have really helped us formalize the process, doing our intake, getting organizing committee set up. And so partners can reach out to us, reach out to them, and start their own unions that way.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So tell us about this event, I gather, that you're organizing with the Eastside Freedom Library. There's other union activists are going to be involved. And it's later this month, right?

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yes, it is. So on July 30, in collaboration with the Eastside Freedom Library at 1:00 PM, there's going to be a number of us workers from different stores across the state either on the organizing committee, just rank and file workers having a public conversation around what the background of organizing at Starbucks in Minnesota has looked like and how we're imagining its future, as well.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** And what do you hope to get out of this-- out of this particular event?

**GRACIE NIRA:** I would really like to see-- I really want to get on the same page, I think, as other stores and assess how we want to creatively approach bargaining. So for those of us that have won our union elections, we can enter the bargaining phase with Starbucks. And Starbucks has been pretty slow on the uptake.

But I think there's a lot of power that comes with the rights to bargain. And I want to see just kind of how we're approaching some innovative negotiations and what our baseline is.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** And I'd asked you, and you answered in terms of other Starbucks employees and [INAUDIBLE] Starbucks. Do you think that there are opportunities in different industries, different businesses than some of the ones that we've heard about, such as Starbucks and one of the Apple stores, for example?

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yeah. To unionize, you mean?

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yes.

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yeah, I definitely think so. I know that across industries, things comes with their own challenge. An Amazon warehouse looks really different than a Starbucks cafe.

But I think there is a lot of momentum and a lot of creativity and energy that makes-- I know Chipotle just won their first union. Half Price Books actually started their unions. Minnesota's were the first to take off. So I could definitely see that transferring across industries.

**CHRIS** Well, thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

**FARRELL:**

**GRACIE NIRA:** Yes, thank you so much for having me.

**CHRIS** That was Gracie Nira, a union organizer and shift supervisor at Starbucks in Saint Paul. You can learn more about  
**FARRELL:** the July 31 panel discussion she mentioned on Starbucks workers unionizing. It's going to be at the Eastside Freedom Library. And you go online, it's [EastsideFreedomLibrary.org](http://EastsideFreedomLibrary.org).

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ANNOUNCER:** Support comes from SDN Communications. Your company can't provide security for customers if your business network is vulnerable. SDN's secure, broadband network can help protect your institution's data. [SDNCommunications.com](http://SDNCommunications.com).

**ANNOUNCER:** *MPR News* is wherever you are-- on the radio, on your smart speaker, and on Instagram. Every day, we have new Instagram stories that will delight, entertain, and inform you. Follow @MPRNews on Instagram.

**CHRIS** Minnesota has hundreds of dams that hold back water in rivers and streams. Many aging dams are deteriorating  
**FARRELL:** and costly to maintain, and they can also damage the river's ecology and habitat. Reporter Kirsty Marohn went to Pine River to learn about that city's projects to remove its dam, a fixture since 1910.

**KIRSTI** The first thing you notice about the new rock arch rapids in Pine River is the sound. That's the noise of water  
**MAROHN:** rushing over rock, boulders, actually-- almost 700 of them.

**TERRI DABILL:** I love coming down here and just watching what's going on. And just the sound of it is very peaceful to me.

**KIRSTI** Terri Dabill, the City Clerk Treasurer, often spends her lunch break here at the water's edge.

**MAROHN:**

**TERRI DABILL:** There's a lot of birds, sometimes. And it seems like the fish are-- they're having a lot better luck catching the fish.

**KIRSTI** For more than a century, a gated dam held back the water that flowed out of Norway Lake into the Pine River  
**MAROHN:** and eventually to the Whitefish chain of lakes.

**BRYAN** And it was listed as a high-hazard dam.

**DROWN:**

**KIRSTI** Brian Drown is the city's engineer who helped the city decide what to do with the aging structure.

**MAROHN:**

**BRYAN** Not necessarily like it was going to fail tomorrow, but they knew something had to be done in the relative near  
**DROWN:** future.

**KIRSTI** When the State Transportation Department decided to replace the highway that ran along the top of the dam

**MAROHN:** with a separate bridge, city leaders considered several options-- rebuild the dam or do something different to reconnect the lake and the river. Drown says what they settled on was a rock riffle, a series of boulders that stretch across the water in descending rows for several hundred feet.

**BRYAN** Then in between those are about a foot and a half deep pools with the idea that a fish has a place to rest and

**DROWN:** then can come up through.

**KIRSTI** It's like a giant staircase for fish. Owen Baird is a Fisheries Management Specialist with the Minnesota

**MAROHN:** Department of Natural Resources who helped with the project's design. He says dams prevent fish, from walleye to suckers, from swimming upstream to spawn or find new habitat.

**OWEN BAIRD:** They get to the dam, and they hit that and stop and like, well, that's as far as we're getting.

**KIRSTI** Baird says dams also pose a barrier to native mussels whose life cycle depends on their larva hitching a ride on

**MAROHN:** fish. And dams have other drawbacks. They hold back sediment that builds up in lakes and reservoirs. And Baird says they also pose a risk to the public.

**OWEN BAIRD:** When you hold back a lot of water, there's that safety issue of, if the dam were to break, what happens, and who gets flooded, and that kind of stuff.

**KIRSTI** Many of Minnesota's dams were built a century ago to control lake levels or generate electricity for flour and

**MAROHN:** paper mills. But a dam's lifespan is about 50 years. Many have outlived their usefulness and are now a liability for local governments. Amy Childers is the DNR's Outreach Specialist for River Ecology.

**AMY CHILDERS:** It comes down to trying to decide if it's worth rebuilding these structures. It's very costly. And I think people are starting to realize the impacts they're having on the river network.

**KIRSTI** Ideally, the best option for a river's health is to completely remove a dam and let the water flow naturally. But

**MAROHN:** Childers says that's not always feasible when there are property owners who'd be affected by a sudden change in water levels. She says a rock riffle or rapids allows the river to flow while still maintaining some control. Childers says it's a solution that's being replicated on Minnesota rivers, including the Red, the Willow, and the Mississippi.

**AMY CHILDERS:** And I just think as more and more people see them and see all the benefits, I think they're going to be more and more common.

**KIRSTI** In Pine River, residents seem to be adapting to the changes which were completed this spring. The old swimming

**MAROHN:** hole near the dam was replaced with a safer, sandy beach farther upstream. And kayakers and canoeists can now shoot the rapids.

**TIM MAHONEY:** I think for recreational, it's just absolutely perfect.

**KIRSTI** Tim Mahoney, a retired medical technician, spent summers on his property near Pine River and comes here

**MAROHN:** often.

**TIM MAHONEY:** Fishing has been pretty good here on this river. So I'm not sure if it improved the fishery, but it certainly, I think, makes it less stagnant and gets the flow going. Terri Dabill says the community's reaction has been mostly positive.

**TERRI DABILL:** There have been different comments. It's too loud. But sometimes change is hard, so you just smile.

**KIRSTI MAROHN:** That sound of moving water is likely to become more common as Minnesota's aging dams give way to more free-flowing solutions. Kirsti Marohn, *NPR News*, Pine River.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**CHRIS FARRELL:** For many BIPOC people, wearing their traditional cultural clothing in their everyday lives can be a way to express their cultural heritage, honor the legacy of their families, and send a powerful message about creating more representation in traditionally white spaces. Today on *Minnesota Now*, we're featuring one Native designer who draws inspiration from her Ojibwe heritage in the knitwear she creates.

Maggie Thompson is a textile artist and owner of Makwa Studio. She joins me now to talk more about her work and her thoughts on the growing movement. Maggie, thank you for joining us.

**MAGGIE THOMPSON:** Hey. Thanks so much for having me.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So tell us a little bit about the pieces you design.

**MAGGIE THOMPSON:** Yeah, so I knit my items. I'm using a hand flat knitting machine, so everything's hand-driven. I create work influenced by a lot of different beadwork and quilt work patterns and structures. And then we live in a place where it gets cold and dreary in the winter, so having that pop of color or brightness in my work to help cheer people up. Yeah.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yeah, so I'm just curious, what's your creative process as an artist?

**MAGGIE THOMPSON:** Yeah, so I do a lot of research. I'm always collecting images. Usually I'll sketch up different patterns or designs and do a series of knit samples exploring different color work and structure until I find something that I like.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** And is there a medium that you particularly like to work in?

**MAGGIE THOMPSON:** Yeah. So my studio-- I have a knitwear side and then a fine arts side. So the majority of all my knit items are made out of wool. Just for winter season, wool is biodegradable. It's natural material. And then for fine art, I do a lot of more exploratory ways of connecting different materials or fastening different pieces together.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So are there people that have inspired you in your art that you draw on? I don't know-- their inspiration or what they did.

**MAGGIE THOMPSON:** You mean specific people?

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yeah.

**MAGGIE** I mean, I feel like I'm influenced by other artists, designers. I was an intern at the Minnesota Historical Society, so  
**THOMPSON:** just being able to walk through collections and just, honestly, anything and everything that I see and am surrounded by.

**CHRIS** And is there a period where you started to incorporate your own cultural traditions into your work, or is that what  
**FARRELL:** you wanted to do from the beginning?

**MAGGIE** I think-- so my background is mostly in fine art. But I wanted to come up with a way to make the work more  
**THOMPSON:** accessible and also use it as a tool for education, so whether that's specific patterns, as I learn about my cultural heritage.

I did a project with Askov Finlayson for the iconic North hats. And instead of saying North, we used Giiwedini, which is North in Ojibwe. So that's something that's kind of developed more as I've grown my business and art practice.

**CHRIS** Yeah. And so there does seem to be growing movement of Native people in Minnesota who are wearing  
**FARRELL:** traditional cultural clothing. Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan is one of them, of course. And so how do you look at this growing movement? How does it affect you?

**MAGGIE** Yeah. I mean, growing up, I feel like there wasn't a lot of representation. Or what was available was more  
**THOMPSON:** kitschy. I've talked with friends about this.

And I think we are we're coming after a generation of folks who didn't necessarily feel comfortable or safe expressing themselves as being Native. And now that's overturning. And now it's so important to see work in a contemporary context and people showing up in spaces.

So I feel like when some-- like Peggy, when she supports Native artists and designers, she's always making a statement about where she comes from and uplifting others as she pursues her passions in life. And it's just-- it gives people inspiration. There's solidarity. People feel a sense of pride and strength. And yeah, I mean, it's really great to see that the culture is still alive and thriving in our communities.

**CHRIS** It has to be cool to have the Lieutenant Governor Flanagan wearing your designs.  
**FARRELL:**

**MAGGIE** Yeah. It's amazing. Yeah. It's really cool. Yeah, I mean, I was shocked the first time I saw her name pop up in my  
**THOMPSON:** order list. I was like, what? No way. It's so cool.

**CHRIS** And so I hear, I have a note here, that you just got a new knitting machine.  
**FARRELL:**

**MAGGIE** So I did a fundraiser for a STOLL industrial knitting machine. So it's actually supposed to arrive in the cities today,  
**THOMPSON:** fingers crossed.

**CHRIS** Fingers crossed. Well, we'll have our fingers crossed for you. So what are your-- is part of plans to be expanding  
**FARRELL:** your business, develop your business?



**MAGGIE** Yes. Yep, so it'll allow-- since everything is hand done, now, it allow us to scale up. And then I also want to start  
**THOMPSON:** working with other Native artists and producing small batches of whatever they want, whether it's knitwear products or fine artwork. And then also developing my own art practice in knit items, as well. So there will be a Makwa portion and then a artist support collaborative section of it, too.

**CHRIS** So is there a collaborative, Native artists supporting each other, or is this more of a lonely endeavor?  
**FARRELL:**

**MAGGIE** This, getting the machine?

**THOMPSON:**

**CHRIS** No, working with other artists. Do you support each other? Do you work together much?

**FARRELL:**

**MAGGIE** I mean, I have affiliations with a bunch of artists, especially in the Twin Cities. But Makwa is just me at the  
**THOMPSON:** moment.

**CHRIS** At the moment, yeah. So what are your hopes for the future?

**FARRELL:**

**MAGGIE** I would love to see just more representation, more Native entrepreneurs and businesses, people supporting the  
**THOMPSON:** community, more educational opportunities. I am really interested in wealth distribution. And that's in terms of working with artists, and how can a business support an artist, in that sense?

And then I am also interested in how Native art and fashion will develop with technology. And that's another drive behind the reason for getting a STOLL machine and seeing that shift and change happen, whether it's knitting or a different art form.

**CHRIS** And how hard was it to start your business? I mean, it's hard enough for any artist to start a business, and I can  
**FARRELL:** only imagine that it must be even harder for a Native artist.

**MAGGIE** Yeah. I feel like I have a really good support system here. And I think the Native community is really strong. And  
**THOMPSON:** then I also have built up a circle of mentors of small business owners that I look up to, as well.

And then I started really small, so I literally started with buying like two balls of yarn and knitting one hat and selling that hat, which then turned into a couple more hats. So my background is not from business. So it started pretty organically and small.

**CHRIS** Well, thank you very much for taking your time. And I look forward to seeing what you're able to do with the new  
**FARRELL:** equipment, the new knitting machine.

**MAGGIE** Thank you. Yeah, thanks for having me.

**THOMPSON:**

**CHRIS** Maggie Thompson is a designer in St. Paul and owner of Makwa studio. You can see her work at  
**FARRELL:** MakwaStudio.com.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

OK, let's hit the weather. It's 83 degrees. We could get to a high of 88, and it's even warmer in the south part of the state. There's a heat advisory that includes Mankato and Albert Lee until 8:00 PM, so be careful. Much more comfortable up north. Duluth, right now, it's 70 degrees.

Later this afternoon on *All Things Considered* on *MPR News*, reporter Vicki Adame has a story on how being Latino often means having more than one identity. One of those identities, Afro-Latinidad, is invisible to many people.