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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Rail deaths spur CTA safety bid

Never go after that fallen cellphone, don't trespass — and beware the 3rd rail

Almost every day somebody climbs on or falls onto the CTA tracks, which has led to seven deaths so far in 2013 and more than 50 fatalities in recent years, according to an analysis the transit agency is set to release Monday as part of a redoubled rail-safety campaign.

The deaths stem from both bad decisions and simple mistakes, such as going after a dropped



JON HILKEVITCH
Getting Around

electronic device, standing too close to platform edges, intoxication and horsing around in the

shadow of powerful trains and the electrified third rail, the analysis found.

Warnings posted throughout the CTA system to keep away from the tracks may not be fully obvious, but the message isn't getting through to some CTA riders, according to transit officials, who on Monday will launch the campaign aboard CTA trains and at rail stations.

In fact, the safety effort comes as the number of reported right-of-way incidents has increased each year since 2010, CTA re-

ports show. Most of the people killed on the rail right of way during roughly the past 5½ years died from being hit by trains or from falls, which about 20 percent were electrocuted when they came in contact with the 600-volt third rail, a breakdown of incidents revealed.

In addition to the personal tragedies that can result, trespassing often inconveniences thousands of commuters because each time an incident is reported, the CTA control center orders the

electricity temporarily shut off while transit authority investigators and the Chicago Fire Department do their work, officials said.

The problem of intentional and accidental trespass on the CTA right of way is as old as rail transit in Chicago, which dates to the late 1800s. The difference is that 115 years ago no commuter was leaping onto the tracks to retrieve a mobile phone.

Last year, 349 incidents involving individuals on the right of

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BEARS 31, VIKINGS 30



Tackle Jordan Mills, from left, quarterback Jay Cutler and tackle Jermon Bushrod celebrate Martellus Bennett's game-winning touchdown catch Sunday at Soldier Field.

CLOCK TICKING? NO PROBLEM

Another 4th-quarter rally puts Bears on top in turnover-filled game

It might not have been pretty, but it certainly was entertaining. The Vikings leaped to the lead, running the opening kickoff back for a touchdown. Devin Hester answered, returning the ensuing kickoff 76 yards, on his way to a single-game franchise record. Quarterback Jay Cutler had two interceptions and a fumble, but with three minutes left and the game on the line, he drove the Bears down the field and connected with tight end Martellus Bennett for the game-winner with seconds to spare. **Chicago Sports**

Summers takes name off table as Fed candidate

Former Treasury secretary out of the running to lead central bank.

Nation & World, Page 12

Rain delays final round of BMW golf tournament

Play resumes Monday at Conway Farms in Lake Forest. Jim Furyk leads by one shot. **Chicago Sports**



A member of a rebel brigade affiliated with the Free Syrian Army prepares Sunday to fire a mortar in Jobar, at the edge of Damascus, Syria's capital.

Syria violence rages on despite U.S.-Russia deal

BY PATRICK J. McDONNELL
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT — Clashes flared across Syria on Sunday, and mortar shells fell on Damascus, highlighting a violent and intractable reality. The war's bloody civil war has not come close to resolution, despite a landmark U.S.-Russia deal designed to rid Syria of chemical armaments.

Various officials, including Secretary of State John Kerry, acknowl-

edged that the chemical accord, while significant, will likely do little in the short term to stop the killings. The fighting on the ground and the much-heralded chemical weapons accord appear to be advancing on different tracks.

Opposition leaders and human rights advocates have tried to shift the focus back to the war and the ongoing carnage. Meanwhile, U.S.

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Rabbi deals with addiction, loss of pulpit

Esteemed clergyman's secret is revealed after arrest at Indiana casino

BY MANYA BRACHEAR
PASHMAN
Tribune reporter

Rabbi Michael Sternfield had just started pushing buttons at an Indiana casino on a June day in 2011 when he watched the iconic flash across the screen: ace, king, queen, jack and 10, all of the same suit.

Bells rang, lights flashed and casino staff descended upon the spiritual leader of one of Chicago's most prominent Reform synagogues to congratulate him on his video poker royal flush and \$10,000 jackpot.

But the big payoff proved to be unlucky. Sternfield, who six years earlier had asked to be banished from the casino because of a longtime but secret gambling problem, was charged with trespassing and identity deception. He said the money he won was given to other leaders of Chicago Sinai Congregation asked about it led them to demand that he quietly resign last

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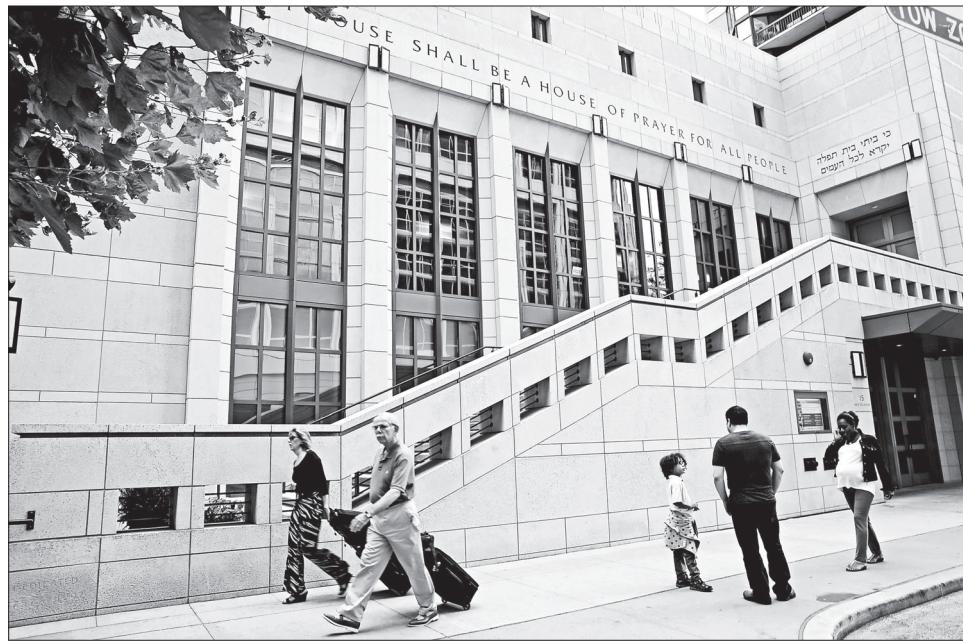
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166th year No. 259 © Chicago Tribune





NANCY STONE/TRIBUNE PHOTO

For nearly two decades, Chicago Sinai Congregation had been presided over by Rabbi Michael Sternfield. He was forced to resign last month after gambling problems surfaced.

Rabbi dealing with addiction, loss of pulpit

Continued from Page 1

month rather than explain himself to his congregation.

"If I've learned anything from these years of struggling, I've learned how to live with painful addictions in all kinds of ways and how to deal with it," Sternfield said in a recent interview with the Tribune. "This is a chapter of my life that I regret so very deeply and which is painful for those close to me."

Temple President Michael Mannis called Sternfield's departure a big loss for Chicago Sinai but otherwise declined to discuss what he called a confidential matter.

But Sternfield's abrupt exit after nearly two decades at Chicago Sinai, and an explanation in a letter that it was simply time to retire, left some in the congregation suspicious, possibly because it happened just a month before the busy Jewish season of repentance that includes Rosh Hashana and the just-ended Yom Kippur.

"No one retires right before the High Holy Days. I think that excuse absurd," said Rick Fizdale, 74, who has been part of the congregation for decades. "We feel slightly less of a gravitational pull toward the synagogue because he's not there."

For the first time in his 44 years as a rabbi, Sternfield said he spent the High Holy Days alone in his home, wondering what will do next.

To better understand events that led to his gambling problem and determine what to do about it, Chicago Sinai, it helps to know what happened after his exit from another. In spring 1993, Sternfield confessed to a brief affair with a younger rabbi while at a prominent synagogue in San Diego.

"I am here to confess to the worst sin I ever committed in my life," Sternfield told the congregation at a board meeting, according to a news story at the time in the Los Angeles Times. "This, for me, is Yom Kippur," the Jewish Day of Atonement.

With the congregation divided over whether it should fire him, Sternfield agreed to his resignation, according to the news story. After an ethics investigation, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents about 1,600 rabbis in North America, temporarily suspended him from working in the US.

"They did the responsible thing," Sternfield told the Tribune. "They wanted to make sure before I served another congregation I had worked through personal issues ... The best opportunity I had was to serve a foreign congregation."

Separated from his soon-to-be-ex-wife, he took a job in 1994 leading a synagogue in Durban, South Africa, on the brink of that

nation's historic election of Nelson Mandela as president.

But the shame of what he had done, the exile from family and friends and the question of whether he would ever return to the land he left him feeling lonely and isolated, he said. In search of an escape, he wandered into a Durban casino and planted himself in front of a video poker machine. He developed a habit of returning a few times a week.

Later that year, Sternfield said he got a call from an old acquaintance who was then-Gov. Pete Wilson's chief of staff, offering him a political appointment. Sternfield returned to California as the chief deputy director of the state's conservation corps, an agency dedicated to developing youth skills and protecting the environment.

He also reconnected with a career woman Deborah Bond, whom he had dated and hired at the San Diego temple. They fell in love and got married. By then the rabbinical suspension had been lifted and he had landed a position at Chicago Sinai, a bastion of Reform Judaism since the mid-19th century.

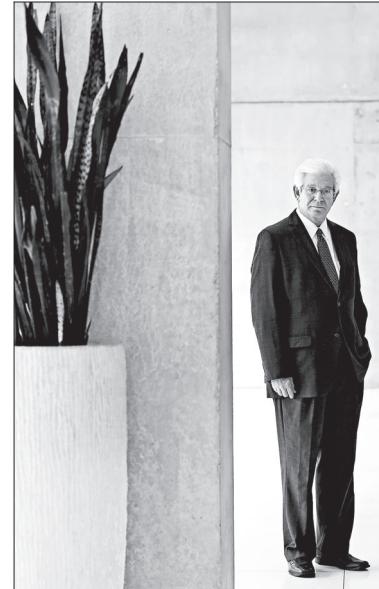
He joined a long line of esteemed spiritual leaders there, including Rabbi Emil Hirsch, a towering figure in the Reform movement. Two prominent figures in Chicago history, Sears, Roebuck & Co. President Julius Rosenwald and former Illinois Gov. Henry Warm, sat in Sinai's pews.

He earned a reputation as an iconoclast, carrying on the classical Reform tradition but also distinguishing himself as an innovator, arriving shortly after the synagogue moved from the Hyde Park neighborhood to its current location, at Delaware Place and State Street, on the Near North Side.

He led the development of the Sinai edition of the Union Prayer Book, the standard Reform Jewish prayer book, which has been adopted by other Reform congregations. In addition, he became an outspoken supporter of and official for interfaith weddings. The congregation grew from 200 to 900 members under his leadership. Some members made a point of attending Friday night worship services just to hear what he had to say.

"He had a way of expressing, particularly in sermons, a very modern approach to day-to-day life," said Carolyn Neuman, 52, a member since 1994. At an interfaith service after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, "nothing put me more peace than hearing Michael's words."

But not long after he arrived in Chicago, Sternfield discovered the riverboat casinos within easy driving distance. Again drawn to video poker, he returned frequently, sometimes playing for hours at a time. Every year, he asked the



ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Rabbi Michael Sternfield, seen at his condo building, said of his gambling addiction: "This is a chapter of my life that I regret so very deeply."

casinos to provide financial reports for tax purposes. Every year, he saw his losses far exceed his wins.

"I never looked at it as a social activity," he said. "I could sit there for 8 to 10 hours just pushing the buttons. I didn't want anything to drink. I didn't want to eat anything. Something would sit down next to me, and I'd get upset, because they were encroaching on his emotional bubble."

By 2005, Sternfield said even though he didn't like what he was doing, he couldn't stop it. And so he sought therapy. He wrote a letter to casinos in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin, asking them to bar him from their premises and placed himself on statewide self-eviction lists in Indiana and Illinois.

"With this letter, I am permanently self-excluding from your casino," Sternfield wrote to Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City in May 2005. "Please do not me permit (sic) to engage in any activities in your facility. ... I request that that request is irrevocable."

Two days later he signed a "self-eviction request," acknowledging that if he entered the Blue Chip property, he could be arrested and charged with trespassing.

Shortly after sending letters to the casinos, he was indeed arrested, he said. Playing the machines at a Horseshoe Casino in Hammond, he won \$1,200. When he told the staff his name, they denied him the money and police took him into custody. The casino didn't press charges, he said.

Six years later, at the Blue Chip Casino, came the \$10,000 jackpot.

was unbearable for me to admit."

Within a few months, he said, the temple's executive committee told him he was leaving. He insists that the reason for his dismissal didn't extend beyond gambling and his dishonesty about it. He said he offered several drafts of a resignation letter, one of them explaining his addiction to the congregation.

"I had that letter ready to go," he said, "and I was not permitted to send it."

Some members of the congregation say they would like to have heard a more candid explanation.

"I think he should've been given an opportunity to tell his story about what happened and allow the congregation to decide what they wanted," said Crystal Vass, 32, when the Tribune odd he was Sternfield's explanation of what had occurred. "We were not given a choice. Still there are so many people that just don't know. There are just wretched rumors."

Neuman said if anyone could deliver a graceful public confession, it's Sternfield.

"Knowing Michael, it would have been great sermon material to be out with it," she said.

Rabbi Michael Balinsky, an Orthodox rabbi who serves as the executive vice president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, said knowing where to draw the line when a spiritual leader goes astray can be a complex decision for a congregation to make.

"The question is, 'Are there certain red lines that people accept about the humanity of clergy and other cases where it becomes more problematic?'" he said, adding that he had no knowledge of the situation at Chicago Sinai.

Mannis, the temple president, said many congregants feel a profound sense of loss after Sternfield's departure, since Sternfield is the only rabbi many of them have ever known.

"I've had questions and discussions on where we're going from here," he said. "From the very beginning our aim at Sinai has been to respect Rabbi Sternfield. He has a lot of others in a lot of ways."

Sternfield said setting the record straight, which he did only when approached by the Tribune, heightened his High Holy Days experience. Rabbis often spend the entire year preparing their sermons for Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar.

"For 44 years, I've conducted High Holy Day services delivering sermons that would be meaningful and would inspire and motivate," Sternfield said. "That was always my objective. For the first time I didn't have to worry about the public presentation. I had to focus on my inner life and my relationships with people most important to me."

On Saturday, Sinai's turnout for Yom Kippur services soared, as usual. Congregants sat inside the synagogue's sanctuary as well as at nearby Fourth Presbyterian Church, reciting prayers and confessions as a community — a ritual intended to signify each Jew's responsibility for one another.

Sternfield spent the day in his high-rise condominium fasting and praying alone.

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