

EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

LOCAL

Historic Shin'enKan artifacts sold by Price Tower amid financial struggles



Andy Dossett

Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise

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The Price Tower owners confirmed Thursday that they sold the few remaining artifacts from Shin'enKan, Joe Price's Bartlesville home designed and built by architect Bruce Goff, which burned down on Dec. 26, 1996.

The centerpiece of the collection, the Shin'enKan gate that has stood outside the Price Tower for more than 20 years, was sold — cut from its pillars, dismantled and loaded on a truck Thursday morning.

The EE learned through an anonymous tip on Wednesday that two men were loading up a box truck with artifacts. Upon arriving Wednesday evening, the EE reporter was accosted by Price Tower owner Cynthia Blanchard.

"Andy, what the f*** are you doing here? What the f*** are you doing?" Blanchard yelled from across the parking lot. "Are you trying to kill the Tower?"

At the time, Blanchard initially reported that the gate was being sent off to be restored and wasn't being sold, but confirmed that other pieces from storage and the museum were sold to keep the Price Tower afloat.

The EE observed multiple items, such as furniture and pieces of art, loaded into the box truck on Wednesday. At the time, Blanchard didn't confirm which items were sold.

"These people offered to help, and they are restoring it for us," Blanchard said. "It's long overdue."

When pressed for further information Thursday, she confirmed that the gate had been sold to save it.

"In truth, the community should be thanking us for saving the gate," Blanchard replied in a text when asked if the gate had been sold. "Yes, someone has offered to help."

Mary Winn Dills, the former curator and caretaker of Shin'enKan, told the EE she was sick about what was happening.

"It's like we are reliving the loss all over again," Dills said. "The gate, phoenix and ashtray were all loaned to the tower by the Friends of Shin'enKan, and now they are gone."

Dills said the Price Tower told her they sold the artifacts and that they would have the first right of refusal once the gate was restored.

"I'm skeptical we will get it back; if it's gone, what difference does it make?" Dills said, "They don't have any money; how can they pay for the gate to be restored?"



Georgia shows Clemson’s plunge from national stage

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PRICE TOWER

Skyscraper struggles



The iconic Price Tower is Frank Lloyd Wright's realized sky scraper and is located in downtown Bartlesville. ANDY DOSSETT/EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

The turbulent history of the Frank Lloyd Wright building

Andy Dossett
Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise | USA TODAY NETWORK

From dropping a Ford F150 off the top to selling priceless artifacts, the past 24 years haven't been kind to Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic skyscraper.

Despite over \$30 million in donations since 2000, the Price Tower, located in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, never found its feet, and some argue that after being given away to a private company, it's worse off.

In May 2022, *Examiner-Enterprise* reporter Daisy Creager revealed the worst-kept secret in town: the tower was struggling. Price Tower employees reported bounced paychecks and operational challenges. Then Executive Director Tiffany Wade said that the Price Tower Art Center (PTAC), the nonprofit that owned and operated the building, was experiencing significant financial difficulties.

PTAC's public records revealed a consistent decline in donations and revenue dating back years, worsened by the deaths of major donors Peter and Theo Silas.

Operational struggles at that time included poor maintenance of the historic building, particularly heating and air issues, which affect visitors' comfort. Many of the staff reported disorganization, allegations of missing high-end alcohol from inventory, lax work culture, and low patronage, exacerbating the compounding issues.

"Our finances are absolutely dire," Wade told the *Examiner-Enterprise* in May 2022. "We're just drowning in all of these things we have to do."

While the tower dealt with financial issues, a local husband-and-wife team, Anthem and Cynthia Blanchard, owners of a now-defunct crypto-ransomware protection software company called HeraSoft, entered into negotiations to purchase the tower with the help of a local financial institution, Truity Credit Union.

Herasoft moved its operations to Bartlesville in 2021, with a reported \$5 million round of series-A funding and a growing client list. The Blanchards are

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Potential auction complicated by previous sale contract

Andy Dossett
Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise | USA TODAY NETWORK

A notice filed at the Washington County Court-house may complicate the upcoming auction of Bartlesville's iconic Price Tower, which is scheduled for October.

The notice filed on Aug. 23, 2024, reveals that McFarlin Building, LLC, an entity associated with Tulsa entrepreneurs John Snyder and his daughter, Macy Snyder-Amatucci, entered into a contract on May 23, 2024, to purchase the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building from Copper Tree, Inc. and Green Copper Holdings, LLC.

The notice claims Cynthia Blanchard, president of Copper Tree, signed the contract to sell the property on May 26, 2024. Neither Copper Tree nor McFarlin Building, LLC could not be reached for comment by the time of this article's publication. It is unclear why the alleged sale of the Price Tower wasn't completed and whether the contract had a sunset date.

The Price Tower is currently listed on tenx.com for an October sale date with a starting bid of \$600,000. The building's owner, Copper Tree Inc., has struggled financially since taking ownership 18 months ago, leading to worldwide attention and concerns about the Tower's future.

The notice filed by McFarlin Building, LLC claims a contract was signed by Blanchard on May 26, 2024, and confirmed that the buyers intended to proceed with the purchase. The notice warns that any third party attempting to purchase the property would do so with full knowledge of McFarlin Building, LLC's prior claim, potentially invalidating their status as a bona fide purchaser.

McFarlin Building, LLC's lawyer, Kenny Smith, said that the legal notice is meant to inform potential buyers of a prior claim to the property. If another party tries to purchase it, they're doing so with full awareness that this claim exists, Smith said.

Smith said the notice warns that any purchase of the Tower could lead to a legal dispute with his client, who asserts a right to the property. He said the notice is similar to a "notice of lis pendens," which signals pending litigation on a property.

The starting bid of \$600,000 is a fraction of the property's assessed value, which Washington County records indicate was \$6,214,060 in 2023.

Snyder and Snyder-Amatucci restored the Mayo Hotel in Tulsa. Snyder-Amatucci recently registered the Price Tower Hotel and Residence LLC with the Oklahoma Secretary of State, saying they were interested in purchasing the property. However, she has stated that a confidentiality agreement binds her and that she cannot provide additional information about her negotiations.

"The Price Tower is worth saving and should be saved," Snyder-Amatucci said when asked about the importance of the tower.

These cities most dangerous for drivers

Memphis, Tenn., tops list, according to data

Sara Chernikoff and N'dea Yancey-Bragg
USA TODAY

A trucker who was distracted by TikTok and speeding in the Phoenix area last year caused a crash that killed five people. He's now sentenced to spend the next 22 years of his life in prison.

The catastrophic crash is just one of millions of car crashes in the U.S. that kill many thousands of people. Last year, about 41,000 people died in traffic crashes, according to preliminary data from the National High-

way Traffic Safety Administration.

Some of the leading causes of the crashes include distracted driving, speeding, as well as drug and alcohol use. In 2022 alone, more than 3,300 people were killed on U.S. roadways because of distracted driving, according to the safety administration.

"Put the phone away or pay," Sophie Shulman, deputy administrator for the administration, previously told USA TODAY. "Pay can mean a ticket or points on your license and it can also mean pay the ultimate price – a deadly crash that takes your life or the life of someone else on the road."

More than 3,300 people died and nearly 290,000

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In 2022 alone, more than 3,300 people were killed on U.S. roadways because of distracted driving, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. GREG LOVETT/PALM BEACH POST FILE



Lawyer calls on Congress to probe Boar’s Head plant

Mike Snider
USA TODAY

A prominent food safety lawyer said more illnesses can be expected and Congress should investigate Boar’s Head after deli meat produced in one of the company’s plants was linked to an ongoing multistate listeria outbreak.

The outbreak has led to at least 57 hospitalizations and nine deaths in 18 states since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initially reported it on July 19. The CDC on Aug. 28 reported six new deaths connected to the outbreak, including the first deaths in New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

There will likely be more illnesses – and possibly more deaths – because the incubation period for listeria may last more than two months, so people who consumed tainted deli meat in July could still develop illnesses, said Bill Marler, a Seattle attorney who specializes in food safety.

The CDC’s investigation found that meats sliced at deli counters, including

Boar’s Head brand liverwurst, were contaminated with listeria and made people sick. Subsequently, Boar’s Head expanded its recall to include every product made at the facility in Jarratt, Virginia.

Last week, inspection reports from the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service revealed that inspectors found insects, mold and mildew at the plant over the 12 months before it was voluntarily shut down because of the outbreak.

“This is the worst set of inspection reports I have ever seen,” Marler told USA TODAY.

Congress should investigate how the listeria outbreak arose and why inspectors allowed the plant conditions to exist for so long, said Marler, who is representing the family of one person who died and two others who had illnesses in the outbreak.

“It’s crazy. Not only was this plant better at producing listeria than it was at producing meat, but also, what were the inspectors doing?” he told USA TODAY.

After a link was confirmed between



After the CDC found that meats sliced at deli counters were contaminated with listeria, Boar’s Head expanded its recall to include every product made at the facility in Jarratt, Va.
JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

the liverwurst and the outbreak, Boar’s Head said on July 29 it “voluntarily decided to expand our recall to include every item produced at the same facility as our liverwurst. We enacted this broad and precautionary recall totaling 7 million pounds because we believed it was the right thing to do.”

Inspectors found insects – alive and

dead – black and green mold, and mildew within the plant in the weeks before Boar’s Head Provisions Co. Inc. issued a July 26 recall of more than 200,000 pounds of liverwurst due to potential listeria contamination.

In June, inspectors also saw “a steady line of ants” on a wall and in February found “Ample amounts of blood in puddles on the floor” in the plant’s Raw Receiving cooler. “There was also a rancid smell in the cooler.”

Overall, the Food Safety and Inspection Service filed 69 reports of “non-compliances” over the past year at the plant. The agency records were first obtained by CBS News through a Freedom of Information Act request; USA TODAY has also made a request for the inspection documents and independently confirmed the reports.

“It’s a layup, whether you are a Republican or Democrat, to have congressional hearings on why this happened and why FSIS inspectors let this thing drag on,” Marler said.

Contributing: Mary Walrath-Holridge, USA TODAY

Price

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linked to over 30 other companies, several of which are defunct crypto-blockchain companies. In a lawsuit filed in 2020 in the Travis County, Texas district court, Anthem Vault — a defunct crypto company owned by the Blanchards — was found liable for \$128,192.81 after credit card company American Express filed to recoup debt.

When asked if they were attempting to take ownership of the tower, the Blanchards told the *Examiner-Enterprise* that they were "just looking to help in any way we can." At the time, PTAC adamantly denied that negotiations were taking place to sell the tower.

A few months later, in the summer of 2022, Wade left her position, and Donna Keffer of Ambler Architects was named the new director of the PTAC. In November 2022, Keffer stated that after years of financial woes, the organization was turning a corner under her leadership.

Keffer's focus was on paying off debt and stabilizing the organization with the support of the PTAC board. To accomplish this, a board member personally guaranteed a loan of approximately \$600,000 for the PTAC to pay off and consolidate its debts.

To sustain the tower, Keffer acknowledged that small memberships alone would not suffice and advocated for broader community support. In that 2022 interview, Keffer said all options were on the table, including finding a benefactor to purchase the building while allowing the nonprofit to continue its mission.

Sold for the debt, \$10 and a promise

Within less than five months of Keffer's promising outlook on the tower's future, it moved from nonprofit to for-profit hands.

Keffer, who was staying on in a new role as general manager, explained in March 2023 that a "local group" called Copper Tree Inc. was taking ownership, and the deal had been in the works for over eight months. Additionally, Keffer said the PTAC used that time to do its due diligence. Most importantly, the new undisclosed owners would abide by the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy easement and keep the arts at the center of the tower, according to Keffer.

Keffer said that before the sale was finalized, the PTAC held a special all-members meeting and unanimously approved the proposal. Keffer described the sale as the best option for the tower "to be a place that our community and Oklahoma can be proud of and experience."

Eventually, the "local group" was revealed to be the owners of Herasoft, Anthem and Cynthia Blanchard, with Cythina Blanchard taking the leadership role and a group of former Herasoft employees based mainly in Florida. Those additional Price Tower stakeholders would later accuse the Blanchards of dodging debts.

The exact details of the transfer of ownership of the Price Tower were never shared publicly, but according to County property records Brad Doenges, chairman of the board of PTAC, signed a quitclaim deed March 7 for the sum of \$10 and other goods and valuables for the building which was valued at \$6,214,060 and carried a debt of approximately \$600,000.

The new owners brought a bold plan to transform the tower into a so-called



Donna Keffer was named executive director of the Price Tower Arts Center in 2022. ANDY DOSSETT/EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE



The Shin'enKan gate was put on display out side the Price Tower by the Friends of Shin'enKan in 2002. ANDY DOSSETT/EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

"Silicon Ranch," consisting of an injection of \$10 million in capital investment, NFTs, a crypto coin, modernization and licensing deals.

Additionally, Copper Tree Inc. released a promotional video titled "Safeguarding an Icon," which showed a seven-step plan to make the tower profitable, such as repairing the building and expanding the hotel. It also featured Mario Kart characters, connecting virtually with Japanese students and robot waitstaff. None of Copper Tree Inc.'s plans or promises have panned out.

One move to make the tower profitable under the new ownership, the Bartlesville Art Association, which freely used the annex building north of the tower for its classes, was notified rent would now be nearly \$70,000 a year and was forced to move out. Many in the public felt the move directly countered the new owner's commitment they made to the local arts community.

Public money, California flair and the new 'new direction'

Two months after taking ownership, the newly formed company Copper Tree, Inc., in partnership with Santa Monica restaurateur Anthony Fischler, announced the "reopening" of two restaurants at the tower within six weeks.

Eight weeks later, in July of 2023, the Bartlesville City Council, on the recommendation of the Bartlesville Development Authority (BDA), approved Copper Tree Inc. and Fischler's request for more than \$88,000 in public tax incentive monies to open the two restaurants.

Even though the deal stipulated that the money wouldn't be given until the restaurants were open to the public, the BDA confirmed it released the funds before the first restaurant opened. The other restaurant, Wright Steak, never opened. The BDA said they were under the impression the restaurants would open simultaneously within days after the funds were released.

Weeks after Love 66 Bistro opened to the public in August, Fischler said he was no longer involved with the project

and "couldn't stand by the product anymore." The restaurant closed in less than three months after opening.

After ten months of finances failing to materialize and debts piling up, Cythina Blanchard announced the "tower is going to tell us what its business plan is." That plan was pivoting from restaurants to a hub for community events, such as art galleries, a music listening room and more.

Under the previous ownership, the tower was primarily used for community events.

Additionally, Blanchard planned to re-open the never-reopened restaurant on the 15th and 16th floors into an exclusive members-only club and bar to fulfill the obligation for BDA incentives.

The Shin'enKan Gate-gate, claims of dodged debts, and the owners' exit plan

In April of 2024, an unmarked white box truck was loaded up with one-of-a-kind Price Tower furniture, Shin'enKan artifacts, items from Bruce Goff's estate and much more.

The centerpiece of the Goff artifact collection, the Shin'enKan gate that has stood outside the tower for more than 20 years, was cut from its pillars, dismantled and loaded onto the truck.

Shin'enKan, designed and built by architect Goff to be Joe Price's Bartlesville home, burned down on Dec. 26, 1996, due to arson. Joe Price was the son of Harold Price, who commissioned Wright to build the Price Tower in 1952. After the burning of Shin'enKan, many of the remaining artifacts were donated to the Price Tower's museum.

Blanchard initially told the *EE* that the gate was being sent off to be restored and wasn't being sold. She later confirmed she sold the gate and other items to keep the tower afloat during the ongoing financial struggles.

"These people offered to help, and they are restoring it for us," Blanchard told the *EE*. "In truth, the community should be thanking us for saving the gate."

Blanchard didn't offer an account for what museum pieces were sold, but a former tower employee told the *EE* that the art dealers were allowed to take anything they wanted, and no one was keeping track of what was taken.

Two months later, the *EE* discovered that many of the artifacts were for sale online, but a few items that the *EE* witnessed being loaded into the truck, like the Shin'enKan Gate, the Shin'enKan ashtray and the Goff bird sculpture, are still unaccounted for.

In response to community backlash over the sales, Blanchard told Tulsa news stations that the items were sold

to prevent her from laying off employees. She added that she is "as transparent as they come" and claimed no one from the community asked her why she had to sell the items.

During this time, tower stakeholders accused Anthem and Cythina Blanchard of dodging debts. The three partners, Mike Moran, Dale Takio and Craig Brand, claimed they traded the money owed to them by the Blanchards' company, Herasoft, for equity in the Price Tower.

"I was brought in by [Cynthia] and influenced by her that this was going to be a quick flip," Brand told the *EE*. "The assets were going to be added up, that the art was going to be added up, that the building was going to be appraised, and then it was going to be flipped, and everybody would get their money back and a whole lot more."

As more information emerged about the state of the tower under Cythina Blanchard's ownership, leaders of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy began expressing concerns about recent developments at the tower and its current ownership. The Conservancy advocated for a change in ownership.

In August 2024, the Conservancy sent legal letters to stop the sale of these items and hopes for their safe return. Blanchard argued that even though she initially agreed to abide by the easement, it no longer applied to her company, and she could, therefore, do what she wanted with the tower and its artifacts. She also claimed she never received any letters.

Blanchard didn't respond to repeated requests for comment about the *EE*'s reporting on the Conservancy's concerns, tower stakeholders' claims or the Bartlesville community's concerns over the recent sales. However, she spoke to multiple other news agencies about these issues.

Shutting down, claims of sabotage and online auction

After the news broke about the Conservancy's legal actions, Blanchard told Tulsa news agencies in a statement she was closing the tower because of "negative, unfounded, and untruthful series of articles that have come from the local press" and "It has tremendously hurt our business to the point that we could not support current staff, and decided to temporarily close the hotel because we could not have the staff to support our guests."

The Tower's commercial tenants were given 30 days to find new office space, and hotel reservations were canceled, leading to uncertainty about its future. The reported debt climbed from \$600,000 to approximately \$2M during Blanchard's 18 months of ownership.

Days after announcing that the tower was closing and then up for sale, Blanchard announced that it is now up for auction on the Ten-X Commercial Real Estate Auction Platform. The auction is scheduled for October 7-9, 2024, with a starting bid of \$600,000.

The auction includes the Price Tower property, but the accompanying art collection will be addressed separately in "Phase 2" of the ownership transition. No further details about Phase 2 have been provided.

The auction listing does not mention the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy's easement on the property, though more details are available after signing a confidentiality agreement. According to 2023 Washington County records, the assessed value of the property is \$6,214,060, but it is unclear if a reserve price has been set for the auction.



Advocates: Migrant children could suffer most under Trump’s plans

INSIDE, 8A

The BIG Thanksgiving Paper

Our biggest paper of the year! Filled with bountiful fun for the whole family

A special 12-page section inside, filled with a feast of entertainment.



The big crossword is here! Games and puzzles for kids of all ages.

Due to the holiday, Thursday’s publication will be available as an eNewspaper only. Head over to our website for puzzles, comics, national news and sports.

Turning the page



Kandelyne Wingate and Katie Taylor, the sisters behind Marigold’s Bookstore, turned their love for books into a welcoming community hub in Bartlesville. PHOTOS BY ANDY DOSSETT/BARTLESVILLE EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

Sisters bring bookstore magic to Bartlesville

Andy Dossett Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise | USA TODAY NETWORK

This holiday season, two sisters did what most don’t. Casting aside the fear of failure, outweighed by the fear of regret — they embarked on a journey. Guided only by the quiet call most learned to drown out, Kandelyne Wingate and Katie Taylor chose their dreams. They opened Marigold’s Bookstore one street north of downtown Bartlesville’s main thoroughfare. The store is named after the marigold, October’s birth flower, a nod to the sisters’ shared birthday month. And just like the flower, Marigold’s Bookstore blooms with warmth and color. From its whimsical children’s section — stocked with titles like *The Wild Robot* and *Knight Owl* — to the reading nook tucked under the stairs — an homage to Harry Potter’s cupboard — every detail invites patrons to linger longer, explore more and connect deeper.

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Two young readers enjoy the magical nook under the stairs at Marigold’s Bookstore which is perfect for discovering new adventures and worlds.

PRICE TOWER

Owner claims pressured to sale in new filings

Andy Dossett
Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise
USA TODAY NETWORK

Owners of Bartlesville’s iconic Price Tower, Copper Tree, Inc., and Green Copper Holdings, LLC (Copper Entities), responded to a lawsuit filed by McFarlin Building LLC with counter-claims of fraud, slander and interference. McFarlin, led by owner John Snyder, initially filed suit in Washington County District Court on Sept. 27, accusing the Copper Entities of breaching a contract to sell the historic Price Tower for \$1.4 million. McFarlin sought a court order to enforce the sale agreement, prevent the planned auction of

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Maria Tallchief Barbie Doll is out in time for the holidays

Robert Smith
Pawhuska Journal-Capital
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Osage Nation on Monday, Nov. 18 in Pawhuska announced yet another honor for Maria Tallchief, the celebrated ballet dancer who helped, along with choreographer George Balanchine, to revolutionize that art. Tallchief was the original dancer to play the “Sugar Plum Fairy” character in Balanchine’s version of “The Nutcracker.”

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YOURNEWS

Lawsuit

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the building scheduled for Nov. 20 and ensure its preservation through a planned \$10 million in upgrades.

In their latest court filings, dated Nov. 12, Copper Entities not only deny McFarlin’s allegations but have lodged their own claims against Snyder’s firm, arguing that McFarlin acted in bad faith during contract negotiations. The defendants asserted that McFarlin engaged in “fraudulent misrepresentation” and “tortious interference” by allegedly pressuring Copper Tree’s CEO, Cynthia Blanchard, into signing a contract under false pretenses.

According to the counterclaim, McFarlin allegedly sent an altered contract to Blanchard, bypassing the company’s legal counsel while its attorney was unavailable. The document was reportedly sent in PDF format, rather than in “redline” form, which the Copper Entities claims obscured changes that had not been agreed upon. The Copper Entities claim Blanchard “felt immense pressure” and signed the contract under the assumption that all agreed revisions were incorporated. When Copper Entities’ counsel later reviewed the document, they discovered multiple terms had been excluded, according to the lawsuit.

The Copper Entities also claimed McFarlin violated a confidentiality agreement by allegedly disseminating information to local media, specifically *Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise* reporter Andy Dossett. The counterclaim states articles published on Aug. 20 and Aug. 30 disclosed sensitive details about the sale discussions to portray the Copper Entities in a “bad light” and potentially deter other prospective buyers. The defendants argued that McFarlin’s alleged media leaks hindered future sales and damaged the Copper Entities’ reputation.

The Copper Entities’ response called for a declaratory judgment to nullify the sale contract and an injunction to prevent McFarlin from interfering with future sale efforts. The defendants claim McFarlin intentionally recorded a “Notice” in Washington County land records asserting a right to the Price Tower, which the defendants argued “clouds the property title” and interferes with their efforts to auction the building.

The Copper Entities sought damages exceeding \$225,000 plus punitive damages for their counterclaims of slander of title, fraud and tortious interference with prospective economic advantage.

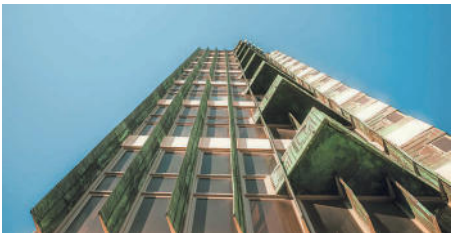
The Price Tower, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and completed in 1956, holds a unique place as Wright’s only fully realized skyscraper and remains a focal point of architectural interest. Financial troubles have plagued the Copper Entities since acquiring the property 20 months ago. The Tower is closed to the public and set for auction on Nov. 20, with a starting bid of \$600,000 on Ten-x.com.

Why the deal might have fallen apart

The breakdown of the \$1.4 million sale of Bartlesville’s Price Tower appeared to focus on new details about demands reportedly made by McFarlin Building LLC’s John Snyder less than 24 hours before the closing date.

In the email on June 9, attached to the Copper Entities’ court filing, Snyder reportedly requested a series of last-minute conditions aiming to resolve financial and liability issues surrounding the property prior to finalizing the sale.

According to Snyder’s reported email, the demands included adding proof of the release of the Copper Entities’ debts and partner equity releases to the closing statement. If the releases couldn’t be provided, then they asked for the pay-off amounts of a business loan made to the Copper Entities by former Price Tower Arts Center board member Mark Haskell and pay-off amounts to the Copper Entities equity partners.



The iconic Price Tower is Frank Lloyd Wrights realized sky scrapper and is located in downtown Bartlesville. ANDY DOSSETT/BARTLESVILLE EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

The reported email further specified that pro-rated property taxes and rental income for June, along with hotel pre-paid deposits totaling approximately \$10,000, be factored into the final calculations.

In addition to financial requests, Snyder reported raised concerns about a range of historic artifacts missing from the property, which he claims were previously sold by Copper Tree’s CEO, Cynthia Blanchard. These artifacts reportedly include six items listed under the Conservancy’s preservation easement as irreplaceable, as well as the Shin’enKan Gate — a structure sold by Blanchard for \$50,000 and sent off-site for refurbishment. Snyder’s reported email expressed intent to “calculate the risk cost of the missing artifacts,” proposing to hold funds in escrow until these items could be returned to the Price Tower.

This reportedly prompted further conflict between McFarlin and the Copper Entities, who argue that Snyder’s new demands added financial and logistical burdens beyond what was initially agreed. In response, according to court documents, the Copper Entities formally terminated the contract, arguing McFarlin’s last-minute demands and delays demonstrated a failure to uphold the closing terms, effectively nullifying the sale agreement.

The Copper Entities seek damages from Conservancy as well

The Copper Entities filed a lawsuit against the Frank Lloyd Wright Conservancy on Oct. 21 in Washington County Court, alleging that the organization interfered with its efforts to sell the Tower’s museum artifacts. The suit seeks over \$75,000 in damages and accuses the Conservancy of breach of contract and tortious interference.

The Copper Entities claims the Conservancy has obstructed its ability to sell what it describes as “personal property,” including museum artifacts, by filing Uniform Commercial Code statements that it argues “have no basis in law or fact.” According to the lawsuit, these actions have also blocked its plans to move forward with the sale of the Tower.

At the heart of the Copper Entities’ lawsuit against the Conservancy is a long-standing easement that protects the architectural integrity of the Price Tower. The Copper Entities asks the court to nullify the easement, claiming it no longer applies. After Blanchard took ownership of Price Tower in March 2023, Donna Keffer, director of the nonprofit Price Tower Arts Center, told the Examiner-Enterprise that the new owners promised to honor the Conservancy’s easement.

The Conservancy publicly responded to the lawsuit in a statement, rejecting the Copper Entities claims, defending its legal rights to the easement and asserting that its communications with the Copper Entities have consistently aimed to uphold the building’s preservation.

The Conservancy claimed it had previously warned the Copper Entities of potential legal action in August to prevent the sale of easement-protected items. The Conservancy says the Copper Entities responded by agreeing to halt future sales. The Conservancy claims the Copper Entities’ recent lawsuit indicates it is prepared to take legal action while in settlement discussions with the Conservancy. The Conservancy states it will seek to enforce the easement, preserve the building and protected artifacts and ensure that Wright’s architectural legacy remains intact.



Mattel doll designer Carlyle Nuer is shown in a video projected on a screen in the Constantine Theater, demonstrating characteristics of the Maria Tallchief Barbie Doll. ROBERT SMITH/PAWHUSKA JOURNAL-CAPITAL

Doll

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Maria and her younger sister, Marjorie Tallchief, were both world-class dancers who spread interest in ballet. They co-founded the Chicago City Ballet.

Mattel, Inc., which is an international toy and game company, designed and manufactured a Barbie Doll in recognition of Maria Tallchief’s place among high-achieving women. Tallchief, who died in 2013, was the first major American prima ballerina and the first Native American to achieve that rank. She was born in Fairfax, Oklahoma and was a member of the Osage Nation.

The Maria Tallchief doll, which Mattel lists at \$35, is part of the company’s Inspiring Women Collection. Tallchief’s daughter, Dr. Elise Paschen, said during the announcement event at the Constantine Theater that she worked closely with Mattel staff members on the doll and found them very helpful and professional.

“I would just like to express huge gratitude to Mattel,” Paschen said. “Their expertise shone brightly.”

Paschen also said the experience of collaborating on the creation of a doll was unusual.

“When all those different heads arrived, I was sort of unnerved by it,” she said. Paschen credited her mother with encouraging her own career choice. She studied at Harvard and Oxford universities and became a poet, editor and

teacher.

Just over a year ago, in Tulsa, Treasurer of the United States Marilyn “Lynn” Malerba was on-hand for the announcement of the Maria Tallchief Quarter as an element of the American Women Quarters Program. That event was held outdoors under a tent on the grounds of the Tulsa Historical Society & Museum on a very rainy Sunday in late October of 2023. It was pouring rain again on Nov. 18, a similarity that Russ Tallchief, the ballerina’s grand-nephew and the master of ceremonies on both occasions, acknowledged with amusement.

Russ Tallchief also commented on the doll’s significance in regard to the personal discipline and dedication of Maria Tallchief.

“This is not just a doll,” he said. “This is a symbol of perseverance against great odds.”

The crowd at the Nov. 18 announcement event viewed a video recording of remarks by Mattel doll designer Carlyle Nuera, and learned of a congratulatory message from Misty Copeland, who has been a principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre, in New York City. Copeland is the first African-American woman to become one of the principal dancers of the ABT. She has also been the subject for a Barbie Doll.

Geoffrey Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation, offered brief remarks, and identified himself as someone who has been familiar with Barbie Dolls as a giver of gifts.

“I’ve purchased a lot of Barbies in my time,” he said.



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Bills, Ravens asserting themselves in AFC

SPORTS, 1B

Historic Price Tower in Bartlesville struggles



The unmistakable Price Tower adds Frank Lloyd Wright’s iconic touch to Bartlesville’s skyline.

ANDY DOSSETT/EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

Andy Dossett

Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Price Tower, an Oklahoma architectural landmark designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, is sinking under an ever-growing mountain of debt.

While future ownership of the Tower is embroiled in a legal battle, an *Examiner-Enterprise* review of lien filings, unpaid bills and statements from local officials paints a picture of the Tower’s financial health under Copper Tree, Inc.

After less than a year, Tower debt grows to \$2M

In April and May, the *Examiner-En-*

terprise discovered, based on numerous reports from former employees, potential investors, court documents and shareholders, that since taking ownership in the spring of 2023, Copper Tree, Inc.’s debt and liabilities went from \$500,000 to approximately \$2 million as of January 2024.

Key debts and liabilities at the time include:

- A \$600,000 loan from local businessman Mark Haskell and former Price Tower Arts Center board member.
- \$170,000 in deferred salary for Cynthia Blanchard, CEO of Copper Tree.
- A \$10,000 loan from Hans Schmolt, who holds one of the Tower’s copper relief panels as collateral.
- A \$180,000 personal loan from Cynthia Blanchard

● \$250,000 to \$500,000 is owed to principal shareholders

● Over \$200,000 in personal loans from Blanchard’s friends, family and other Bartlesville community members

● Over \$200,000 in deferred salaries to other employees

● Thousands in unpaid taxes, vendor bills and utilities

Cynthia Blanchard, CEO of Copper Tree Inc., sold Price Tower artifacts in April, a deal estimated to be worth over \$125,000. In response to community backlash over the sale, Blanchard told Tulsa news stations that she sold the items to prevent employee layoffs. She said she is “as transparent as they

See **STRUGGLES**, Page 2A

Ukraine assassinates Russian commander

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov was chemical weapons chief

REUTERS

MOSCOW – A top Russian general accused by Ukraine of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops was assassinated in Moscow by Ukraine’s SBU intelligence service on Tuesday morning in the most high-profile killing of its kind.



Kirillov

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, who was chief of Russia’s nuclear, biological and chemical protection troops, was killed outside an apartment building along with his assistant when a bomb hidden in an electric scooter went off, Russia’s Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said.

An SBU source confirmed to Reuters that the Ukrainian intelligence agency had been behind the hit. “The liquidation of the chief of the radiation and chemical protection troops of the Russian Federation is the work of the SBU,” the source said.

The source said that a scooter containing explosives was detonated, killing both Kirillov and his aide, as they stepped out of a building on Ryazansky Prospekt in Moscow.

Unverified video footage of the attack circulating on social media showed two men exiting the building to get into a car followed by a large explosion as the two men remained on the pavement. Reuters could not independently verify the footage.

Kirillov, 54, is the most senior Russian military officer to be assassinated inside Russia by Ukraine, and his murder is likely to prompt the Russian authorities to review security protocols for the army’s top brass and to find a way to avenge his killing.

Former President Dmitry Medvedev, now a senior Russian security official, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that Ukraine’s military and political leadership now faced imminent revenge for Kirillov’s murder.

Moscow holds Ukraine responsible for a string of high-profile assassinations on its soil designed to weaken morale and punish those Kyiv regards as guilty of war crimes. Ukraine, which says Russia’s war against it poses an existential threat to the Ukrainian

See **COMMANDER**, Page 4A



A view of the blast scene outside a residential building in Moscow where Igor Kirillov, commander of Russia’s nuclear, biological and chemical protection troops, and his assistant were killed, according to the Russian Investigative Committee on Tuesday.

ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Motive sought in Wisconsin school shooting

Sophie Carson, Christopher Cann and Claire Reed

USA TODAY NETWORK

A day after a 15-year-old student opened fire at a Christian private school in Madison, Wisconsin, investigators worked to identify a motive in the shooting that killed a student and a teacher and left two others in critical condition.

The shooting occurred Monday morning in a classroom at Abundant Life Christian School during study hall. A second-grade student called 911 to report an active shooter at 10:57 a.m. local time, said Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes.

The suspect, identified Monday night as Natalie “Samantha” Rupnow, died on the way to a local hospital of what police believe to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound, Barnes said.

Two students were in critical condition as of Monday night, authorities said. Three other students and one

See **SHOOTING**, Page 2A



Law enforcement officers are shown at the scene of a shooting Monday at the Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin.

MARK HOFFMAN/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

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YOURNEWS

Struggles

Continued from Page 1A

come” and claimed no one from the community asked her why she had to sell the items.

It’s unclear if the Tower used the funds to pay down the debt and liabilities, and Blanchard hasn’t responded to multiple requests from the EE to comment. Public records indicate the debt has only grown since May.

Liens filed for unpaid taxes levied on Price Tower

In October, the Oklahoma Tax Commission filed liens with the Washington County Clerk’s office, revealing that Price Tower owed over \$9,000 in unpaid hotel, lodging, sales, and alcohol taxes since June 2024.

The Tax Commission lien records indicate that payment on certain taxes

ceased in June, a period during which Blanchard publicly commented on the company’s economic hardship.

Key tax debts include:

- \$5,411.47 with penalties and fees for June hotel taxes.
- \$3,844.42 with penalties and fees for July and August hotel taxes.
- \$942.74 with penalties and fees for unpaid alcohol taxes in July.

Based on the taxes owed, the Price Tower reported approximately \$26,000 in revenue in June and \$19,000 for July and August. While the Oklahoma Tax Commission filed liens against the Inn at Price Tower, Inc., the EE has been unable to determine whether its parent companies, Copper Tree, Inc. and Green Copper Holdings, LLC, Delaware and New Mexico companies, respectively, owe additional taxes to the state.

In October, Blanchard closed the Tower and removed its commercial tenants.

Thousands in unpaid utilities,

taxes owed to Bartlesville and Washington County

The City of Bartlesville confirmed Price Tower owes \$5,156.36 in unpaid utility bills. After missing payments in August, City Manager Mike Bailey approved a Sept. 17 plan to delay payment until the Tower’s auction. When the auction failed to take place, the city shut off water to the building on Nov. 25 due to the unpaid debt.

“The Price Tower is a one-of-a-kind historical artifact that is important to our community,” read a statement from the City of Bartlesville. “There is infrastructure in the Price Tower that cannot operate without water, including fire suppression and HVAC equipment. Once the sale failed to occur, the City coordinated a shut-down of the facility with the manager to try and prevent any damage to the facility.”

A city payment agreement policy dated 2003 and amended in 2012 allows the City to negotiate payment arrange-

ments in specific circumstances to benefit both the City and its customers. While not required by ordinance, these arrangements aim to assist individuals when feasible, safeguard city assets and promote timely payments for greater efficiency, according to the policy.

As of Dec. 11, power to the Price Tower has been shut off. It remains unclear whether this was due to a request or nonpayment to the Public Service Company of Oklahoma.

Washington County records show Copper Tree, Inc. owes over \$70,000 in property taxes, which are due Dec. 31. Washington County treasurer’s office records indicate that additional business taxes for the Tower’s hotel and restaurant, totaling \$1,000, will also be due.

County records indicate that the Price Tower paid its 2023 business taxes four months late but didn’t pay any property taxes. A nonprofit owned the Price Tower for a few months in 2023, exempting it from property taxes that year.

Shooting

Continued from Page 1A

teacher suffered non-life-threatening injuries; two of the victims were released from nearby hospitals. Officials did not release the names of the victims.

Monday “is a day that I believe will live in our collective minds for a very, very long time,” Barnes said.

Abundant Life Christian School, founded in 1978, serves about 400 students in grades K-12, according to its website. Barnes did not immediately know what grade the shooter was in. Police believed she had been at school earlier in the day; investigators had no evidence of a breach to the school building, Barnes said.

Barbara Wiers, the school’s director of elementary and school relations, described the school’s security protocols at a news conference Monday. Security cameras in the building are monitored, doors remain locked and every student is “visually scanned” by staff as they enter the building, she said. The school does not have a school resource officer or metal detectors.

At the school, investigators discovered the firearm they believe was used in the attack, Barnes said. He said authorities are looking into how the suspect got a handgun and how much her parents knew ahead of the deadly shooting. He said her family was cooperating with authorities.

“We also want to look at if the parents may have been negligent. And that’s a question that we’ll have to answer with our district attorney’s office,” Barnes told CNN on Tuesday. “But at this time, that



People attend a prayer service to mourn the victims of the shooting at Abundant Life Christian School, Monday in Middleton, Wis. SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

does not appear to be the case.”

Investigators searched the teen’s house and have spoken with her family, but have not identified a motive for the attack. Barnes said at a news conference Rupnow had no criminal history and no previous run-ins with police.

Police are also investigating social media posts and other writings allegedly written by the suspect, Barnes told CNN Tuesday morning.

“We have been made aware of a manifesto, if you want to call it that, or some type of letter that’s been posted by someone who alleged to be her friend,” the chief told the outlet. “We haven’t been able to locate that person yet, but that’s something we’re going to work on today.”

He went on to say investigators were looking into whether Rupnow had contact with anyone else about the shooting.

“We’ll also be looking through her effects, if she had a computer or cell phone, to see if there are any transmissions between her and someone else,” Barnes told CNN.

Female mass and school shooters are exceptionally rare, according to the data and experts who study such incidents. In fact, the percentage of people who have perpetrated mass shootings who are female is in the low single digits.

Of 544 school shootings over an 11-year period, less than 5% of the perpetrators were female, according to Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonprofit group

that advocates for stronger gun laws. The group noted that the gender of the shooter is not always available, so the data is incomplete.

Justin Heinze, an associate professor of health behavior and health equity at the University of Michigan, said while school shootings are extremely distressing, they are comparatively rare compared to other firearms deaths and that therefore drawing data from such incidents warrants caution.

“We’re talking about an outlier of an outlier,” he said, referring to female school shooters. “But I’ll tell anybody who asks me that there is not necessarily a profile. I cannot give you individual characteristics, or some patterns of behavior, or some life experiences that produce, with any real accuracy, who might end up perpetrating an event like this.”

President Joe Biden said in a statement Monday the shooting was “shocking and unconscionable” and called on lawmakers to take legislative action to prevent future shootings.

“From Newtown to Uvalde, Parkland to Madison, to so many other shootings that don’t receive attention – it is unacceptable that we are unable to protect our children from this scourge of gun violence,” Biden said. “We cannot continue to accept it as normal.”

He called on Congress to pass universal background checks, a national red-flag law and a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Sophie Carson reports for Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Christopher Cann reports for USA TODAY. Contributing: Jonathan Limehouse, Claire Thornton, John Bacon and Minnah Arshad, USA TODAY; Alison Dirr and John Diedrich, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel



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Bell: Rookie QB had perfect setup in sudden rise to starter

SPORTS, 1B

Au pair program draws scrutiny



The au pair program was designed as a cultural exchange program where young foreigners between the ages of 18 and 26 – usually female – live with a host family for a year, with the opportunity to extend their stay up to a maximum of two years. GETTY IMAGES

Low wages, potential for abuse draw calls for reform

Bailey Schulz USA TODAY

Maria Jose Vence said she looks back fondly on her experience as an au pair, when she worked 40 hours a week as child care provider for a chance to experience life in the U.S.

The 25-year-old from Colombia described her Massachusetts-based host family as “wonderful people” and remains in touch since the March end of her two-year stint. She said the program gave her the opportunity to explore a new culture, and her \$15-per-hour earnings allowed her to travel and save up for tuition at Lasell University, located in the same state as her host family, where she’s working toward a master’s degree in marketing.

“Fortunately, I had a wonderful family that gave me an excellent experience. They allowed me to live the experience as a cultural exchange,” she said. “But we know that some families and some girls don’t have the same experience.”

Run by the State Department, the au pair program was designed as a cultural exchange program where young foreigners between the ages of 18 and 26 – usually female – live with a host family for a year, with the opportunity to extend their stay up to a maximum of two years. The host family provides a place to stay, food and – in all states besides Massachusetts – a minimum stipend of just under \$200

per week, while the au pair provides up to 45 hours per week of child care.

The program is viewed by some as a cheaper alternative to day care, which has seen costs rise at almost double the pace of overall inflation in recent years. Court cases have accused some host families of overworking and underpaying au pairs, and while many agree the program needs updating, there’s not a consensus on how.

“It’s a good program,” Vence said. But “it’s not for everybody.”

See AU PAIRS, Page 4A

BARTLESVILLE’S PRICE TOWER

AG Office warned about the owners

Tulsa attorney writes letter about misconduct

Andy Dossett
Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise
USA TODAY NETWORK

More than a year after Oklahoma’s Attorney General was warned about alleged financial misconduct involving the owners of Bartlesville’s iconic Price Tower, it remains unclear if any action was taken to address the accusations.

Tulsa attorney Kevin Adams filed a complaint with Attorney General Gentner Drummond on March 27, 2023, detailing allegations of criminal activity by Anthem and Cynthia Blanchard and their companies, including claims of cryptocurrency fraud and dubious financial dealings.

See PRICE TOWER, Page 2A



The iconic Price Tower is Frank Lloyd Wrights realized sky scraper and is located in downtown Bartlesville. ANDY DOSSETT / EXAMINER-ENTERPRISE

Iconic tower legal dispute may resolve in January

Andy Dossett
Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise
USA TODAY NETWORK

The legal dispute over ownership of Bartlesville’s historic Price Tower appears to be nearing its end, with settlement talks between McFarlin Building LLC and the Copper Entities making progress, according to McFarlin’s lawyers.

The dispute centers on McFarlin’s claims that Copper Entities breached a \$1.4 million contract to sell the Price Tower. The Copper Entities countered with allegations of fraud, slander and interference.

Copper Tree, Inc. and Green Copper Holdings, LLC, collectively known as the Copper Entities, have owned the Price Tower since March 2023, when they acquired it via a quitclaim deed.

See LEGAL DISPUTE, Page 2A

Feds to probe derailment of scenic train

Craig Webb
Akron Beacon Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The investigation has started into what caused Saturday night’s derailment of a scenic Christmas train that left hundreds of passengers stranded in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad’s final run of its North Pole Adventure excursion on Saturday night was cut short after the train derailed in northern Summit County.

CVSR spokesperson Lynee Bixler said the train derailed around 8:53 p.m. just north of Peninsula, Ohio, as it was about to embark on its return trip.

There were no reports of injuries among the hundreds of passengers on board or among the crew members.

Peninsula police officers along with

park rangers assisted at the scene.

Four of the train’s cars came off the track, and there were 588 passengers and crew members onboard.

One of the derailed passenger cars – a historic silver California Zephyr Silver Solarium – had an obvious tilt after the mishap. Buses were dispatched to pick up the stranded passengers and

See DERAILMENT, Page 2A

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Price Tower

Continued from Page 1A

“I’ve sent this letter and complaint to you directly because I could not locate the appropriate place to send the complaint on the attorney general website, and did not want the complaint to get lost by sending it to the wrong department,” Adams begins in his letter. “The attached complaint gives an overview of the situation and proof of past criminal activity.”

The complaint came shortly after Cynthia Blanchard’s companies, Copper Tree, Inc. and Green Copper Holdings, acquired Price Tower, the only fully realized skyscraper designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, for \$10 the debt and a promise to develop the property.

The Blanchards’ ownership has been marred by legal and financial controversies. Among them, Anthem Blanchard’s crypto company, which the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filed charges against in September for allegedly defrauding investors of over \$5 million.

It is unclear what, if anything, the AG’s office did in response to the complaint. Under Oklahoma state law, the Attorney General is “authorized and directed” to investigate complaints that involve violations of state laws or issues of substantial public interest. While the AG has the power to investigate and pursue charges if warranted, the law does not require the AG to act on every complaint of criminal activity submitted by a citizen but only “when-ever he deems necessary...”

Complaint surfaces after open records battle

Adams provided the EE with a copy of his original complaint and the letter sent to him by the AG’s office acknowledging it had received complaint.

The Examiner-Enterprise contacted the AG’s office in August and requested public documents pertaining to Adam’s complaint and access to other complaints which may have been filed. In response to the record’s request, the AG’s office, in a letter, said a search revealed no complaints were received.

The EE submitted a narrowed records request, after which the AG’s office confirmed it had received Adam’s complaint.

The AG’s office has not disclosed whether it has opened an investigation, taken further action regarding the Blanchards or Price Tower or if any other complaints were made against the Blanchards.

The Oklahoma Attorney General’s office has not responded to requests for further comment on the matter.

Fraud linked to cryptocurrency business

According to the 17-page complaint submitted by Adams, Anthem Blanchard and his wife, Cynthia Blanchard,

were key figures of the company Hercules SEZC, which owned the now-failed HERC cryptocurrency.

In the letter, Adams alleged one of Blanchard’s former employees accused the company of using a “classic pump-and-dump scam.” The complaint, referencing emails from the former employee, alleged that Anthem Blanchard directed staff to manipulate the token’s market price.

According to court documents that are now sealed by the court at the defendant’s request, the Blanchards accused that employee of stalking. After a warrant was issued for his arrest in 2021, the former employee was extradited to stand trial in Bartlesville. The month before the Blanchards acquired the Price Tower, the former employee was tried in Washington County for stalking and computer fraud and found not guilty on all charges. Adams is listed as one of the former employee’s attorneys.

“I have learned about the ongoing criminal activity through conversations with others after the trial and from articles in the [Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise] newspaper,” Adams wrote.

The complaint also contained concerns about Cynthia Blanchard’s leadership at Copper Tree, stating that the Price Tower acquisition occurred without paying fair market value. Adams referred to Internal Revenue Code and IRS rules that requires transactions between a non-profit and a for-profit entity must occur at fair market value.

At the time of acquisition, the Washington County records assessed the value of the Tower and surrounding property at \$6,214,060; this value doesn’t consider the tower’s contents. The Copper Tree, Inc. acquired the property by assuming the \$500,000 debt and a promised \$10 million investment. This investment has yet to happen, and Cythina Blanchard told Tulsa news agencies in July it was a “wish list” instead of a promise.

Oklahoma law requires certain charitable organizations to notify the Attorney General at least 45 days before disposing of all or substantially all of their assets. This law went into effect on Nov 23, 2023 — nine months after the sale.

The complaint further alleges that people in authority are protecting the Blanchards.

“I’m sending the attached complaint to the Attorney General’s office because I believe that personal and financial relationships in Washington County are preventing local law enforcement from investigating past and ongoing criminal activity,” Adams wrote.

An acknowledgement letter from the Attorney General’s Office to Adams dated shortly after the complaint was submitted, advised Adams to file complaints with additional agencies, including the Oklahoma Securities Commission.

Vaclaw, emphasizing the importance of resolving the matter quickly, stated that the case primarily revolves around enforcing a signed contract. He allowed a one-week extension for Copper Entities’ lead attorney, John Farley, to return and scheduled the next hearing for Dec. 17, where he would set trial dates.

That hearing was brief. Only McFarlin’s attorneys were present, and Kane announced that settlement negotiations were underway and nearing finalization. He requested two weeks to finalize the agreement, with the next court date scheduled for the beginning of the year.

Depending on the progress of negotiations, the Jan. 9 hearing could mark the end of the Price Tower saga. Neither lawyer responded to the request for comment on the ongoing talks.

Attorney Marty Meason explained that in civil cases like this, potential outcomes include a formal settlement approved by the judge, an out-of-court resolution with case dismissal, a request for more negotiation time or the resumption of litigation. He said depending on the settlement terms, the details might never be made public.

Wisconsin eyes efficiency panel inspired by DOGE

Laura Schulte and Hope Karnopp

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

MADISON, Wis. – A new Assembly committee will focus in the next session on government efficiency, inspired by a similar federal department to be run in part by Elon Musk.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said the new committee will be known as the GOAT – short for Governmental Oversight, Accountability and Transparency – Committee.

“That’s going to focus on kind of returning to our roots. Republicans have always been reformers. We are the ones who invented worker’s compensation all the way up until school choice,” he said last week. “But we have more work to do.”

State Rep. Amanda Nedweski, a Republican, will chair the new committee. Vos said using technology such as artificial intelligence, the committee will explore options to improve services for Wisconsinites in more cost-effective ways.

“I think that we can look at a lot of ideas and try to find ways to make government do a better job than we currently are,” he said. “I’m super excited that we’re going to now kind of focus on, not just how do we layer more things on, but how do we make the things that we already have work better.”

The incoming Trump administration’s Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, is to be led by Musk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy.

Vos said finding ways to return the \$4 billion surplus to taxpayers is the No. 1 priority for the Assembly in the upcoming year. Vos said Republicans would focus on passing tax cuts into law at the beginning of the session, before budget work begins. Vos indicated his party would again propose exempting up to \$75,000 of retirees’ income, a measure Democratic Gov. Tony Evers vetoed last year.

“We’re not going to begin spending money until we know how much is in



Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos said the panel will be known as the GOAT – short for Governmental Oversight, Accountability and Transparency – Committee. RICK WOOD/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

the till,” Vos said. “In my mind, all tax cuts are good.”

A few Democrats voted for the portion that would have exempted up to \$75,000 in retirement income. Evers said the tax cut package would have likely forced the state to partially or fully drain its rainy day fund.

Asked on WISN-TV’s “Upfront” earlier this month if he’d consider signing a Republican tax cut plan, Evers said he’s focused on crafting his state budget proposal. He said it’s “hard to say” if he’d sign something similar to Republicans’ tax cut bill that he vetoed last year.

“If (Republicans’) idea is that we’re going to send every dollar back and run a deficit, that’s obviously stupid,” Evers said when asked if the state’s surplus should be returned to taxpayers.

Assembly Minority Leader Greta Neubauer, a Democrat, expressed a similar stance, referencing a recent nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum report that found the state is in strong financial shape. She cautioned lawmakers against big moves, especially large tax cuts or spending increases.

“(We) need to be thinking about the long term and making sure that any decisions we make – for example, a tax cut – do not undermine our long-term ability as a state to fund essential services,” Neubauer said.



Toni Stutler takes a picture of the derailed California Zephyr Silver Solarium car in Peninsula, Ohio, on Sunday. Four cars on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad North Pole Adventure derailed Saturday night. MIKE CARDEW/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Derailment

Continued from Page 1A

volunteers. The final passengers were evacuated and brought back to their cars by 1 a.m. This was the last sold-out run of the season for the scenic railroad before its scheduled winter break.

The North Pole Adventure is a family-friendly excursion that departed from the scenic railroad’s Independence Station earlier in the evening for a trek through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park to the North Pole in Peninsula, where costumed characters and Santa Claus would greet the passen-

gers before heading back to Cuyahoga County.

The excursion was just making its way back from its brief stop in Peninsula when the derailment happened.

Bixler said special equipment was being brought in Sunday to put the derailed cars back on the track so they can be brought back to the railroad’s Fitzwater Maintenance Yard for inspection.

Park Service spokesperson Pamela Barnes said the Federal Railroad Administration will investigate the mishap. The scenic railroad operates on tracks owned and maintained by the National Park Service within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Bixler said all affected passengers will receive full refunds.

Legal dispute

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Lawyers say settlement near in Court

Both parties appeared before Judge Russell Vaclaw on Dec. 10 for a scheduling hearing to determine next steps. McFarlin’s attorney, Jess Kane, pushed for an expedited trial schedule, arguing that the case is straightforward.

“We are ready to try this next week,” Kane said.

The Copper Entities, represented by Attorney James Asbill, requested additional time, citing the unavailability of their lead counsel. Asbill argued for extended preparation time, noting plans for up to 12 depositions and the need for expert testimony. Asbill’s timeline sought a trial date in the fall of 2025, while Kane sought a trial in the following months.

Kane further argued that the defense claimed the lawsuit was financially hurting the Copper Entities business and that there was a duty to mitigate the damages.

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