

Front Porch

Stapleton, Park Hill, Lowry, Montclair, Mayfair, NW Aurora, East Colfax

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MAY 2020



The New World We Live In

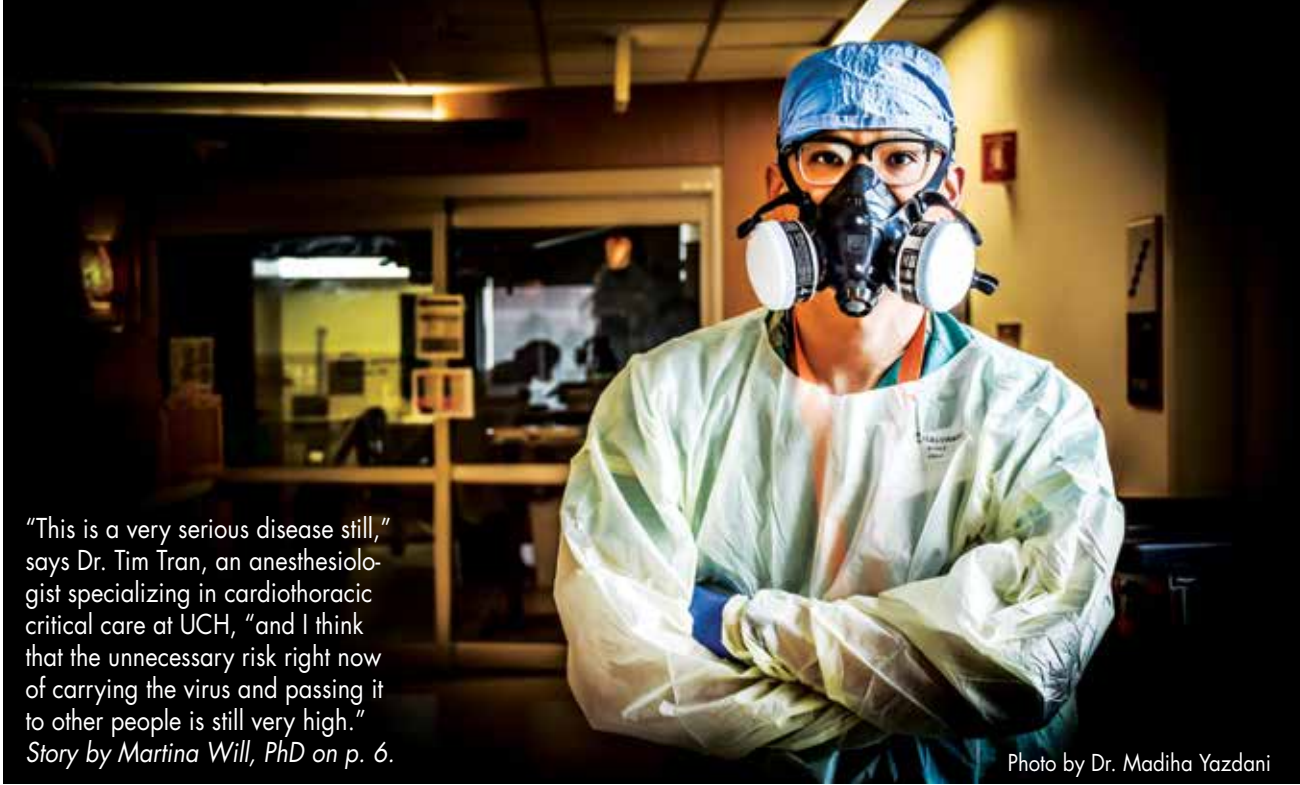
Within two days of Gov. Polis' April 3 recommendation that Coloradans wear masks in public, the Jacobson family donned homemade masks they had just been given by a neighbor. TJ (right), a first responder, pushes Liam, 4. Brooke (left), pulling Brittany, 7, and January, 1, works from home, so the stay-at-home restriction has impacted their lives less than for so many others. Brittany had no problem adapting. Her view: "I love being with my family all the time."

Pandemics and stay-at-home orders don't fit anywhere in the world we thought we knew. Suddenly words we've never used have become everyday language: COVID-19, flatten the curve, physical distancing, social

distancing, PPE, contact tracing, Zoom. Families and businesses are desperately cutting expenses and bracing for uncertainty. We worried that the newspaper might be a casualty—and we know we're lucky to be back this month. So,

it's with special thanks to our May advertisers that we share these local stories of the one subject that's on everyone's mind—COVID-19. And thanks to you, our loyal readers, because there could be no community paper without you.

"This Is A Very Serious Disease"



"This is a very serious disease still," says Dr. Tim Tran, an anesthesiologist specializing in cardiothoracic critical care at UCH, "and I think that the unnecessary risk right now of carrying the virus and passing it to other people is still very high." Story by Martina Will, PhD on p. 6.

Photo by Dr. Madiha Yazdani

Ode to Nurses

Artist Austin Zucchini - Fowler created a larger-than-life mural of a nurse wearing boxing gloves as a tribute to the frontline workers. It's visible driving west on E. Colfax in the alley at Williams.



A Coloradan's experience living in China through the quarantine —and now opening up. Page 15



Front Porch photo by Christie Gosch

This photo of the supermoon was taken on April 7 at 7:37pm in Greenway Park in Stapleton. On Tuesday and Wednesday, April 7 and 8, the moon's orbit brought it the closest to Earth it will be in 2020, making it the largest supermoon of the year. According to the *Denver Post*, the moon was "221,918 miles from Earth on Tuesday. The average lunar distance, according to NASA, is 238,855 miles. On March 24, the moon was 252,700 miles away, the farthest it will be in 2020."

Contents

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 6 | "It's not like the flu. It's far more deadly." | 12 | SUN Spot:
— Annual Community Forum:
Wednesday May 13, hosted
virtually at 6:30pm
— Follow up from SUN's April
21 Monthly Meeting
— Sand Creek Greenway Mural |
| 8 | <i>A View From Someone Who
Used to Clean Your Home:
"Being Undocumented,
You Don't Have a Voice"</i> | | |
| 9 | Restaurants:
Confronting the Pandemic | 12 | Op-Ed: An Ode to Businesses
and the Communities that
Support Them |
| 10 | March 2020: A Tough Time
to Open a New Business
— Healthy & Local Pet Food
and Dog Wash
— Pierogis Like Great
Grandma Made | 13 | Crow: Seeking a Science-Driven
Return to Normalcy |
| 11 | First Priority:
Keep the Employees | 14 | Pandemic Impact on Education |
| 11 | Indie Prof:
— <i>A Good Woman Is Hard to
Find</i>
— <i>Ozark</i> , Season 3 | 14 | Serving the Most Vulnerable |
| | | 15 | <i>A Coloradan's Life in China:
Living the "New Normal"</i> |



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Send Letters to the Editor to Carol@FrontPorchNE.com

Events & Announcements at Stapleton

MCA COVID-19 UPDATE

AQUATIC PROGRAMS & SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT:

We do not know how this virus will ultimately impact our seasonal operations over the coming months. Still, we do expect it to significantly influence our ability to operate our facilities at the scale we are accustomed to. **Following current protocols, all aquatic programming, including lessons, swim team registration, and seasonal employment opportunities, are on hold until further notice. Original enrollment deadlines have been retracted.** We will provide additional updates via our website, social media, and weekly eblast, regarding the proposed timeline for when activity registration and application acceptance may recommence. **All updates are dependent on current health and safety guidelines re COVID-19 provided by state and city government officials.**

RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP CARD RENEWALS:

The MCA understands that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduces the urgency for residents to renew their membership cards at this juncture, especially given the uncertainties surrounding the timeline for when the pools may be permitted to open this year.

Because of this underlying uncertainty, **we are temporarily amending our current policy, and allowing our residents to renew their membership cards by phone, once it is established that our facilities are safe to open. We ask residents to refrain from renewing their membership cards until we have additional information on how this virus will impact us moving forward.**

Membership card expiration exclusively removes the ability to renew passes online through the ActiveNet portal. Under normal circumstances, this would require residents to renew their cards in person. **However, once our facilities open, we strongly encourage residents to take advantage of this additional support and renew expired memberships over the phone by calling our front desk staff at 303.388.0724 (Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm). If your memberships are not expired come the time we are permitted to open, you will still be able to renew online through your ActiveNet account.** The annual renewal fee (\$20) will remain consistent across all methods of renewing Resident Membership Cards.

FACILITY RENTALS AND UPCOMING EVENTS:

The MCA has postponed/canceled all programs, activities, events, registrations, and facility rentals through May 31, 2020. This will include the following:

- All Cube & Community Room rentals are canceled through May 31, 2020

- All park rentals are canceled through May 31, 2020
- All Cube events are canceled through May 31, 2020
- All MCA Events are canceled through May 31, 2020 including:
 - Community Garage Sale
 - Sweet William Market
 - Denver Arts Festival
 - Pools Opening Memorial Weekend (Rescheduled date TBD)

Throughout May, the MCA will continue to spotlight local restaurants, residents, and the heroic healthcare workers within the community. If you would like to spotlight a local business or individual that is making a positive impact during these turbulent times, nominate them at www.stapletoncommunity.com

We will be sharing a variety of at-home activities and community-generated content via our social media accounts. Sign up for our weekly email newsletter, via our website, or follow us on social media to catch the latest updates and virtual events taking place throughout the community.

MCA & DENVER MANAGED PARKS:

Essential services and operations, including trash and park maintenance, will continue. MCA essential personnel, along with CTM maintenance staff, will maintain a presence in the community while upholding the guidelines presented by the CDC.

In compliance with the City and County of Denver's current directive, **the MCA has closed all their playgrounds, basketball courts, volleyball courts, picnic areas, and other similar spaces conducive to public gatherings.**

Of course, we understand it is physically and mentally healthy to be outdoors. Within MCA managed pocket parks, we are enforcing the state and city provision that residents only be outdoors at times and in places where they can maintain six feet of physical distance between themselves and others.

It is best to socialize only with your household members, limit group size, and **make sure there is at least six feet of physical distance between all people at all times.** The MCA also urges residents to wear a mask or cloth that will cover their mouth and nose and use it whenever they are outside their own house or yard. Colorado officials are asking everyone to wear a non-medical cloth face covering while out in public.

*** The Stapleton MCA has special plans in development to commemorate neighborhood seniors of the 2020 graduating class. Keep an eye on our website and social media platforms for details coming soon! ***

Be well and stay safe, **Lawrence Uhling**
Administrative Assistant
www.stapletoncommunity.com
303.388.0724

Master Community Association **STAPLETON**

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The Front Porch – NE Denver distributes more than 25,000 free papers during the first week of each month. Papers are delivered by mail and/or racks in Stapleton, Park Hill, Lowry, Montclair, Mayfair and NW Aurora.

The Front Porch is printed with soy-based ink and the paper contains 30% post-consumer waste. We contribute monthly to replant trees equivalent to the amount of paper used in each issue.

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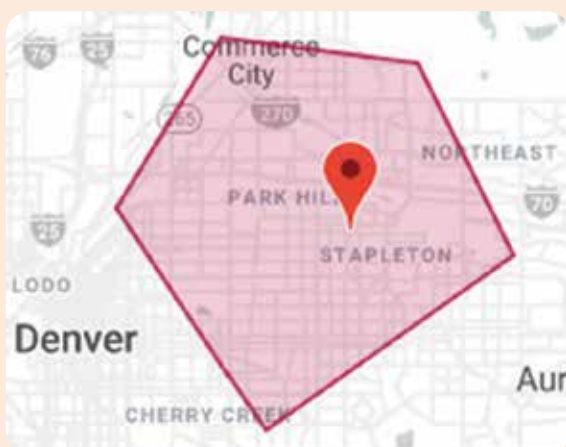
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	Stapleton Orthodontics	7
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Dispensary	Starbuds	5
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	League of Women Voters Denver	13
Health and Wellness	Insight Behavioral Health	9
Home Services	Reflection Windows & Doors LLC	10
Housecleaning	Number 1 House Cleaning	8
	White Magic Cleaning Services	13
Insurance	Allstate - The Mathes Agency	12

Liquor Stores	Vic's Liquors	3
Pre-Schools/Childcare	Creative Learning Preschool	6
Public Notice	Rocky Mtn. Arsenal Nat'l Wildlife Refuge	6
Real Estate	Neir Team-Kentwood City Properties	8
	New Perspective Real Estate, LLC	16
	Wolfe & Epperson Real Estate	7
Retail	Stanley Marketplace	4
Schools	Monarch Montessori	11
Travel	Suzanne Beverly Dayton	12

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To advertise, contact Karissa McGlynn at 303-993-9963 or KarissaMcGlynn@gmail.com. Submit ads for the upcoming issue by the 15th of the month. Or visit us at FrontPorchNE.com.





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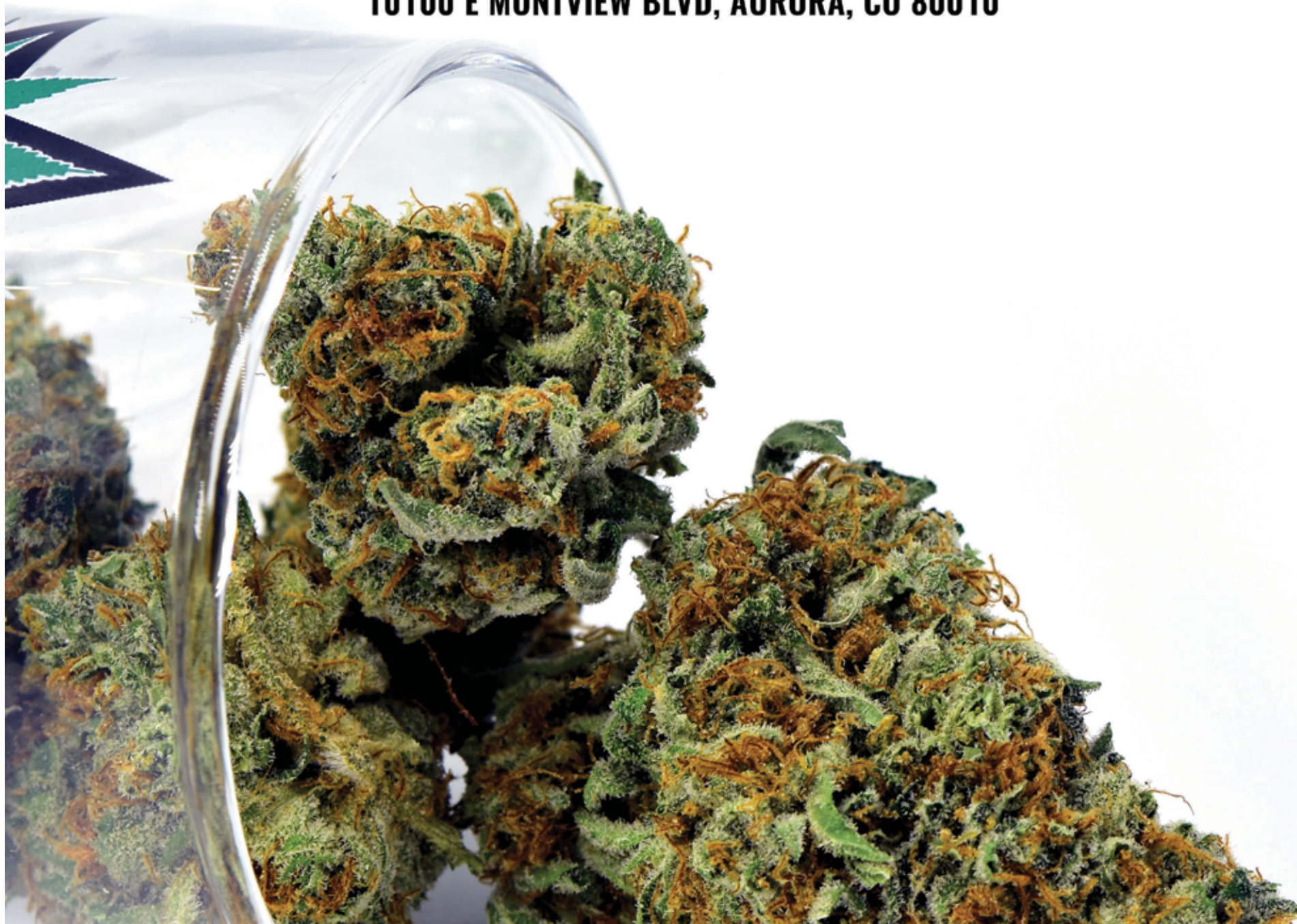
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“It’s not like the flu. It’s

By Martina Will, PhD

The 1980s anthem “Don’t Stop Believin’” has taken on new meaning for Kimberly Schmitt, an RN at St. Joseph Hospital in Denver. “It is the greatest feeling,” she says, when she hears Journey’s familiar tune over the hospital intercom at the end of a day. The song signals that there’s been a success in the hospital’s efforts to help a patient overcome COVID-19. “Success” may mean that a patient has been extubated and can leave the ICU to step-down care.

“People hear that it’s a virus and think that we’re being overly cautious, but it’s not like the flu...It really goes for your lungs... and it’s way more deadly,” says Schmitt, a Stapleton resident who has been working in the ICU as needed since the pandemic began. She volunteered to care for COVID-19 patients as an ICU Extender, a support position for ICU nurses.

She had misgivings and fears before taking on this new role, but her calling as a nurse ultimately took precedence. “It’s like, if

you have a lifeboat and everybody is drowning...why would you not help. I am able to help people when they really need me now.” Though she feared getting the virus herself or possibly passing it on to her family, “Once I got over that initial fear, my drive to help this community kind of took over.”

She loves the new mural of a nurse in boxing gloves on E. Colfax, and says nurses think the image is “awesome” and “motivating.” One co-worker, however, says she “doesn’t want to be hero-worshipped, and wishes people would focus their energy on fixing the problems that the government had in response to the virus.”

Schmitt follows a thorough decontamination routine after work, leaving her scrubs at the hospital, wiping down her car, and showering “before I even breathe in the general direction of my husband and my kids.” Schmitt says the speed with which the disease progresses is frightening. People may walk into the Emergency Department short of breath and need to be intubated a few hours later. Intubation in turn requires

Rocky Mountain Arsenal Five-Year Review

The U.S. Army is starting its Five-Year Review (FYR) process for the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RMA) environmental cleanup. This process includes a statutory, policy, and technical review of RMA’s 1995 Off-Post and 1996 On-Post Records of Decision (ROD). The RODs provide detailed descriptions of the cleanup approach implemented for the site.

The purpose of the FYR is to determine whether RMA’s cleanup approach continues to be protective of public health and the environment. A critical part of the FYR is to update any changes to standards and determine if the remedy outlined in the RODs and subsequent ROD change documents remains protective in light of these new standards.

This is the fifth FYR document to be prepared for RMA. FYRs at RMA will be required for the foreseeable future, since the cleanup approach included on-site landfills and consolidation areas that hold contaminated waste from RMA’s cleanup. The Army manages and monitors these areas, which total approximately 1,000 acres.

In keeping with its commitment to public involvement, the Army is seeking public input during this process. Community members are encouraged to submit, in writing, any concerns or issues they would like to see addressed during the FYR. Once the FYR is complete, a draft document summarizing the findings will be made available for public review.

All public comments received during this process will be reviewed and considered in the final report.

Please submit comments and questions to: **Patty Lee**
Rocky Mountain Arsenal
6550 Gateway Road, Commerce City, CO 80022
Phone: 303-289-0300 E-mail: Patty.Lee6.civ@mail.mil
For more information about the Five-Year Review, visit online at www.rma.army.mil



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far more deadly.”

sedation to synchronize respiration with the ventilator, and patients are kept in isolation.

Both Schmitten and Dr. Tim Tran, who is an anesthesiologist specializing in cardiothoracic critical care at UCHHealth University of Colorado Hospital (UCH), say that it takes several nurses as well as a respiratory specialist to turn a patient, which has to be done every two hours. To minimize exposure, the medical team must be extremely efficient in all of its interactions. For the 2-3 weeks someone is on a ventilator, contact is minimal, a reality that is exceptionally hard on family waiting at home for news, as well as for healthcare workers.

Schmitten reflects on one of her patients, whose wife called her frequently for updates on his condition. She learned about his life and family through their conversations, and when she went into his room, “even though he was intubated and sedated, I would talk to him about his wife and kids,” she says.



Photo by Michael Anderson

When she’s not caring for COVID-19 patients, Kimberly Schmitten cares for her 7-month old twins with her husband, Chris. He is active military but now provides “daddy daycare” so she can serve on the frontlines.

She hoped that hearing his name and a kind voice talking to him about his wife and children would somehow reach the sedated man. He has since been extubated and Schmitten hopes he gets to return home soon.

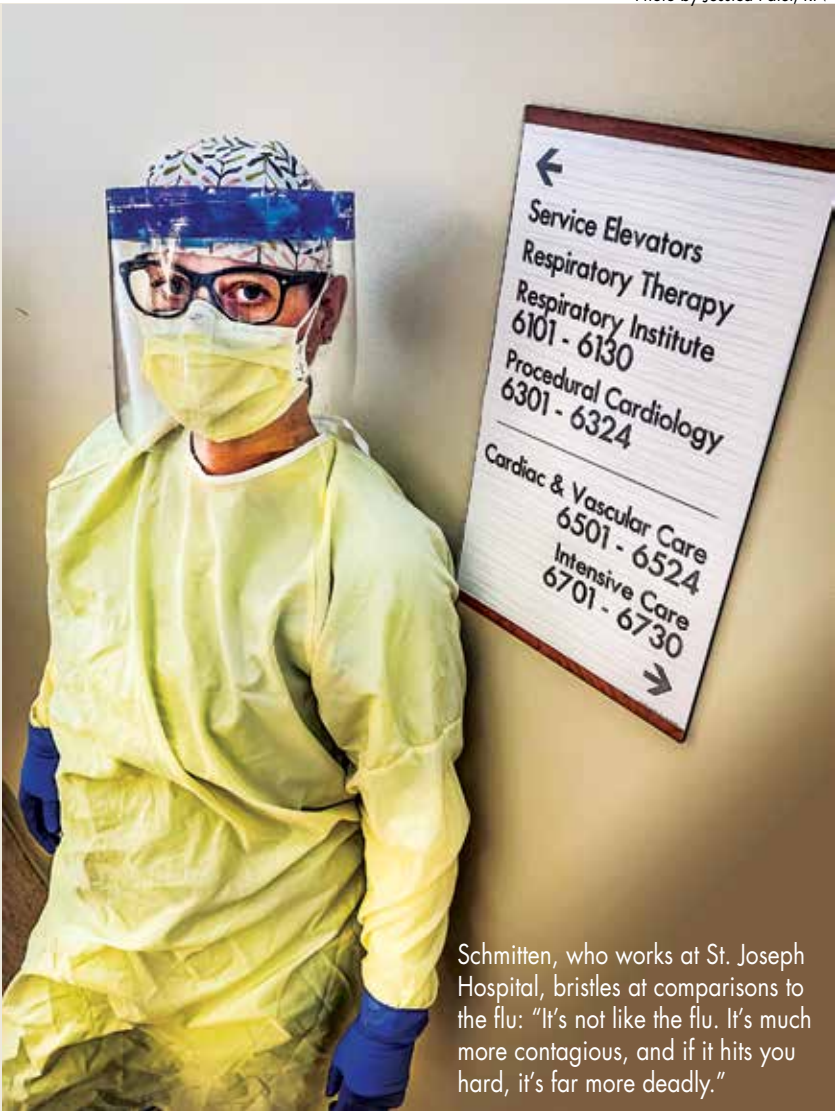
While patients and their families long for a return

home, a small vocal minority is getting impatient staying at home. April’s protests over the stay-at-home orders in Denver and elsewhere disturb and sadden these healthcare professionals. “It’s personal. I am putting my life and my family on the line to protect the community, and for them to completely disregard it, gathering in large groups, not wearing masks, it’s a slap in the face,” says Schmitten.

“I am empathetic to people who want to be independent and return to ‘normal,’ says Tran, who lives in Stapleton. He cautions, though, that “this is a very serious disease still, and I think that the unnecessary risk right now of carrying the virus and passing it to other people is still very high. We don’t have great labs yet to consistently test fast and test everybody so I’m kind of saddened by that [the protests].”

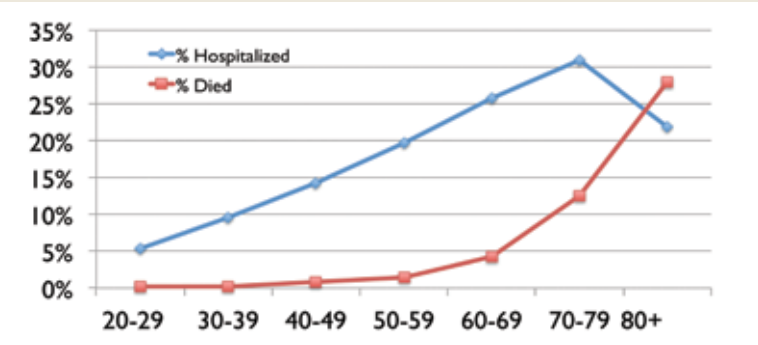
Intermittent news stories about different medications and treatments offer flashes of hope, but Tran says at this point “There’s no silver bullet. As of now there’s nothing that’s a guaranteed cure or treatment for any of this.” In early April, UCH became the first Colorado hospital to treat a COVID-19 patient with convalescent plasma. To date, 17 patients at UCH have received transfusions of convalescent plasma, but data on outcomes is insufficient at this point and more plasma donors are needed, according to Jessica Berry, Senior Media Relations Specialist with UCH.

Tran sees room for optimism as the curves in New York and Washington states slowly flatten. “We can overcome the pandemic with appropriate measures,” he says. Unlike the Journey song, however, beating this disease is not merely a matter of “believin’.” Re-opening businesses and beginning a return to “normal” will require more testing capability than currently available in Colorado. “You would need 1) the ability to test for the virus itself rapidly and widely and 2) the ability to test for the antibody levels as well, to see if you actually developed some kind of immunity,” says Tran.



Schmitten, who works at St. Joseph Hospital, bristles at comparisons to the flu: “It’s not like the flu. It’s much more contagious, and if it hits you hard, it’s far more deadly.”

Colorado Hospitalizations and Deaths Due to COVID-19



These statistics as of April 23 show the percent of Colorado COVID-19 patients who were hospitalized or died in each age range. While the risk of death remained relatively low before age 50, then jumped dramatically, the rate of hospitalization increased steadily from the 20s to age 70.

Statistics from Colo. Dept. of Public Health and Environment

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A View From Someone Who Used to Clean Your Home: "Being Undocumented, You Don't Have a Voice"

By Martina Will, PhD

"I felt a little outraged," says "Linda" when describing how clients began canceling her housecleaning services, before either the local or state stay-at-home orders were announced.* In her five years cleaning homes for families in Stapleton and beyond, Linda had built up a strong client list of ten households. Though she was healthy and prepared to continue cleaning and disinfecting kitchens and homes as part of her regular workday, at a time when many people were still socializing in parks, about half of Linda's clients had canceled.

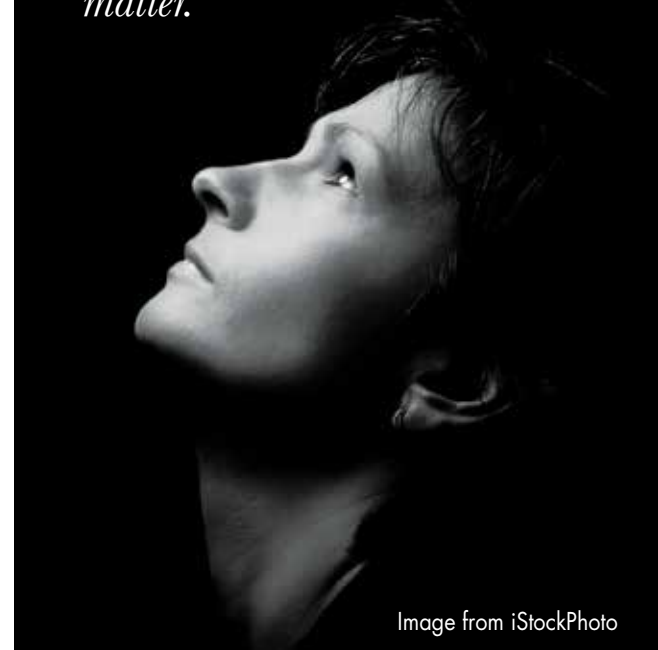
Linda appreciates people's concerns and precaution, but says that in many cases all she received was a text saying "you can't come until further notice." No phone call. No "thank you for your service." No reassurance that they would return to her client list at a future date. Given her longstanding relationship with many of the families, she felt disappointed.

"If we come and clean your house, we're part of your household, because it's something very private; you're opening the doors to your house and inviting us in, and you can't just set us aside as though we don't matter," she says. "We make your bed, pick up your clothes off the floor, clean your bathrooms....we know your pets," she says, emotion in her voice.

Linda enjoys her work, and takes pride in it. Each month, she sends money back to family members in Chihuahua, Mexico, who rely on these remittances. "As a Latino, the tradition is to help one's parents; I grew up with this mentality," she says. Chihuahua, a northern border state famous for Pancho Villa, the Copper Canyon, cattle ranching, and cowboy boots, is also one of the epicenters of cartel activity. Linda left to escape the violence and "to fight for a better future" for herself and her family. Already on tenuous footing as someone working without work authorization in the US, losing her clients has left her unable to support herself or send money to her sister.

Like the families that employed Linda, many industries in Colorado and across the nation rely on undocumented workers in construction, accommodation and food services, childcare, and manufacturing. The Pew Research Center estimates about 130,000 undocumented immigrants call the Denver metro area home. One local business owner, who requested anonymity, estimates that about 60% of the workers in their industry are undocumented, observing: "They truly are the hardest workers." Most file taxes using an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number). "I often

"We're part of your household; because it's something very private...you can't just set us aside as though we don't matter."



wonder where all this money goes," says the business owner.

Despite paying into the system and despite businesses' widespread reliance on this labor pool, which includes millions nationwide, these individuals cannot access government benefits or many services. "They'll lose their chance of ever becoming legal, and that's the dream," says the business owner. The CARES Act does not extend to these approximately 4.3 mill. taxpayers, even though many of their estimated 3.5 million children are US citizens.

Linda accepts this reality. "Being undocumented, you don't have a voice," she says, acknowledging the challenge of negotiating deferred or lowered rent with her landlord, who knows she has no legal recourse. "You have the stress of the virus, the bad economy, and the racism," she says, enumerating the challenges before her now.

"We as Latinos are honorable, respectful, and punctual and we came here to work and find an opportunity." Two families gave her a parting tip to help mitigate the lost wages. "I am not alone," Linda says. Her friends who work cleaning houses had similar experiences, receiving some payment from 3 or 4 of the 15-20 homes they clean. "I feel that the value of the person is missing...it's not that you need to pay every week, but in this time, \$10 or \$20 makes a difference, so you feel that someone values you, values your work," says Linda. When asked if she thinks her clients will call her after the pandemic, she says "I don't know. I wouldn't have thought they would have treated me this way....nothing is certain."

**To protect her identity, we are using the pseudonym "Linda"; the interview was conducted in Spanish and translated by the author.*

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Cattivella's Elise Wiggins (left) and Intersections' Rick Humbert (right) share a love for food's ability to unite people and nurture community. Both are thinking creatively about how to maintain both their staff and their customers during the pandemic.

RESTAURANTS

These especially hard-hit businesses are fighting to survive and to save their staff.

Confronting the Pandemic

By Martina Will, PhD

At first glance, Intersections, Northfield's cozy breakfast spot, and Cattivella, Eastbridge's sophisticated Italian dinner locale, seem to have little in common. Their menus are at very different price points. One specializes in breakfast and the other in dinner. A month into the stay-at-home orders, however, as both owners speak to how they are adapting, some common themes emerge: gratitude for their customers and concern for their valued employees.

"People like the atmosphere, and they come to meet other people and have a conversation," says Rick Humbert, who owns Intersections. The stay-at-home orders make that impossible, so he has had to shift to takeout orders. Delivery did not prove to be a great option: "Trying to deliver eggs is not a good idea.... They're great hot, but they're not good cold."

Intersections now relies on carryout to sustain the business, offering a free kid's breakfast with every adult breakfast to entice people. Humbert or his remaining staff member meets people at the door with their orders, disinfecting the keypad after each

customer. "The good news is... [people] like what they like and that's what they come here for—items on our menu like chicken and waffles or shrimp and grits with the red sauce," draw regulars in from as far away as Evergreen. "Even though we don't get a lot of volume," he says, "the community is very, very generous." He is already thinking how he can expand the menu and include more lunch options post-pandemic.

For the present, Humbert is partnering with several nonprofits, both to help feed the homebound and to keep his doors open. Intersections recently gave away 100 Easter "basket" meals with support from the Epworth Foundation. He continues to explore creative ways to provide meals to hospital workers and low-income folks. Still, Humbert has had to let go of all but one of his staff as he reduced days and hours of operation; he says many are eligible for unemployment, and he is optimistic that the very special team he has put together over the years will return to work when things return to normal. "We've been blessed," he says, talking about his staff, sharing the story of one "kid" who had come up through a really challenging

home situation: "He wanted a break and he's been with me for two and a half years now, and he's never missed a shift....no one would give him a shot, and I gave him a shot...he's like an official part of the family."

Cattivella's owner and Executive Chef Elise Wiggins speaks of her staff in a similar way, as family. Like Humbert, she's cut her hours of operation and her payroll to keep her doors open. "I'll rotate a cook or a prep cook or dishwasher to come in, one maybe two days a week... they're not getting their five days, their 40 hours like they normally do," she says, but it's part of her effort to retain the team she had so carefully assembled. She is grateful for the outpouring of community support the restaurant has received, both in the form of a GoFundMe page that raised thousands to support laid-off staff, and the takeout orders that continue to help her pay workers.

Part of the joy of Cattivella is the experience: dining amid the bustle, being waited on, and watching the chefs work their magic in the open kitchen before the wood-fired oven. Its takeout business boomed the first week of the stay-at-home order, and began to taper after the first week: "I knew that was going to happen because everybody's trying to support so many restaurants, and they want everybody to survive, but that can only go so far because eating out is expensive and there's just so much people can do." She knows some of her customers are likely working fewer hours or have lost their jobs, too.

Wiggins began offering delivery, surprising customers as the local celebrity chef making housecalls. Cattivella has also innovated by offering a discounted family meal deal. She says those promotions are going



Photo courtesy of Intersections

well, but admits that it's very challenging: "I'm not making any money. I am in the hole." Wiggins had completed a big build-out of her space in 2019 to add more seating and is 3 years into a 10-year lease that has been deferred but that will still need to be paid. She takes no salary. "The money that I'm making goes to... the food that we order, the electric bill, and my employees."

Intersections (<http://intersectionsof.com/>), at the Northfield Shops in Conservatory Green, is now open Fri.-Sun. from 8am-1pm, at 8241 E. Northfield Blvd. Call 303-963-5909 to place an order for pickup and they will meet you at the door; you can also order using the Heartland app. Cattivella (www.cattivelladenver.com), in the Eastbridge Town Center at 10195 E. 29th Dr., is open Tue.-Sat. from 3-8pm for pick up or delivery: call 303-645-3779. For both establishments, hours and days will likely change as local and state government guidelines shift.

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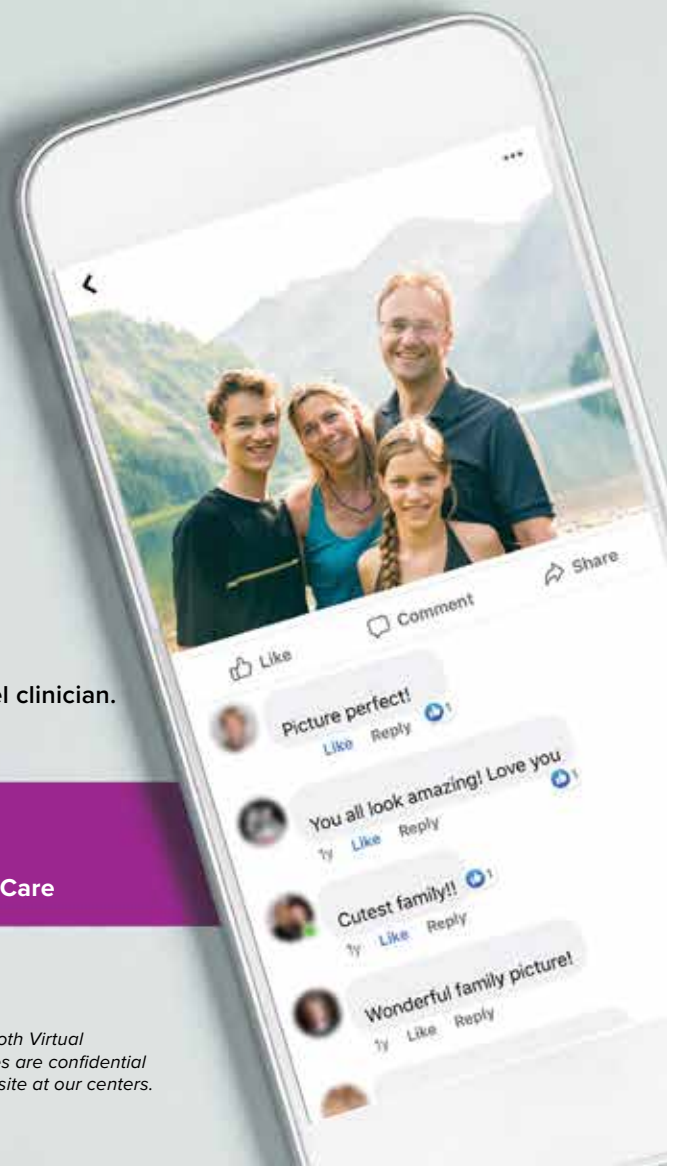
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March 2020: A Tough Time to Open a New Business



Bob Corman, owner of Paws'n'Play pet store in the Shops at Beeler Park, shows his affection for his rescue golden retriever Cierra. Due to construction delays, instead of opening in October, his new store ended up opening the day stay-at-home restrictions were announced.

Healthy & Local Pet Food and Dog Wash

By Carol Roberts

For an experienced businessman like Bob Corman, the Shops at Beeler Park looked like the perfect place for his third Paws'n'Play pet store. It's location at E. 56th Ave and Central Park Blvd. has lots of cars going by each day, and it's surrounded by newly developed Stapleton neighborhoods with lots of dog owners. In addition, new construction offered him the chance to design the store with a self-service dog wash, a feature he'd long wanted. He liked the plans showing a new neighborhood retail center where he and other small businesses would all open about the same time.

With his experience running two other Paws'n'Play stores, he knew exactly what pet food products to carry. "We're very particular about our ingredients; we don't carry any that have a byproduct of corn, soy or wheat. We try to carry limited-ingredient natural products, and we really stress buying from as many local companies as we can."

Corman also sells CBD products for dogs that have arthritis, dysplasia, or cancer. "We probably have 60 to 70 cats, dogs, rabbits that use it daily for anxiety or pain management—especially for dogs like my rescue golden who is scared to death of fireworks. It really helps keep her calm."

Years of retail experience at Albertson's and as Purchasing Director for the State of Colorado Department of Transportation gave Corman all the skills he needs for running his businesses. But he acknowledges that trying to open a business in Denver is difficult. His work in the government, however, gave him an understanding of "government-speak," which helped him through the required paperwork. But his experience

couldn't mitigate the other hurdles.

The shopping center plans originally had opening day scheduled in October. That got pushed to January. By February, Corman thought he could start stocking his shelves—but had to stop. Finally, on March 23 he officially opened. Yes, March 23. The day the mayor announced the stay-at-home order and that non-essential businesses would close.

Selling pet food is considered an essential business, so he could stay open. Initially there was a rush of business, says Corman, but it "kind of fell off a cliff." His dog wash is self-service and in its own separate space, so happy customers patronized it initially, but the City determined a dog wash is non-essential, so it's closed now.

COVID-19 restrictions turned out to be only one part of Corman's frustrations. He has been waiting three months and still doesn't have approval from the City of Denver for his sign. And instead of being surrounded by other

new businesses, he's alone—and the parking lot is full of equipment due to the gas station being under construction. Developer Tyler Carlson explains that some of the lots were sold, so his company no longer has any control over their plans. He says the Taco Bell is expected to open May 8, and the car wash and gas station should open in June. Panda Express is expected to start construction in the next two weeks and open in late September or October. Future plans for the barber shop, the restaurant and the nail salon are unclear at this time. "We feel terrible," says Carlson. "We're working with him [Corman] on rent so he can survive til the other tenants open."

Paws'n'Play is located at 5665 N. Beeler St., www.pawsnplay.com, 720-502-6960.



The Paws'n'Play dog wash was a big hit when the store opened, but was then closed as a non-essential business, though the main store is open.

Jeremy and Katherine Yurek's pierogi shop, Baba and Pop's, offers hot pierogis with all the toppings as well as frozen. They make pierogis from scratch, as shown here.

Below: The original "Baba" and "Pop," Jeremy's Polish immigrant great-grandparents, Josephine and Charles. Photos courtesy of Baba and Pop's



Pierogis Like Great-Grandma Made

By Martina Will, PhD

Katherine Yurek and her husband Jeremy decided to open their new business, Baba and Pop's Pierogi Kitchen & Bar on Friday, the 13th of March. "Friday the 13th has always been a lucky day for me," she says with a laugh. This was no ordinary Friday the 13th given the pandemic, but Yurek sounds upbeat. After running a food truck for several years, she says, the couple realized a lot of their customers wanted to take pierogis home. In 2016, they began shifting their sales to farmers' markets to meet this demand.

And what a demand there is for this Polish-inspired dumpling filled with potatoes, cheese, sauerkraut, pulled pork and other savory ingredients.

The Yureks estimate that they sell over 15,000 pierogis each week. "We make every single one of our pierogis by hand and from scratch; it's very labor-intensive and then we boil them and then we package them. The whole process takes a very long time," says Yurek. "We don't skimp on any ingredients whatsoever."

Though the original pierogi recipe came from Jeremy's great-grandmother (Baba), who emigrated from Poland, ingredients like green chile are clearly the couple's inspired addition to the original. Other menu items include cabbage rolls, soups, salads, and sandwiches.

Although they live in Denver, Yurek



Baba and Pop's is across the street from the Aurora Fox Theater at 9945 E. Colfax Ave.

says they selected Aurora as the site of their new business not only because they found a great space and a great landlord, but also because of the City of Aurora's Restaurant Incentive Program, which supports restaurant projects in "blighted properties" in northwest Aurora. "They actually built out our kitchen space for



us; they put over \$300,000 into the space and it's absolutely gorgeous. It's the greatest program ever. Without them, we literally would not have had this opportunity."

Located next to Third Culture Bakery—another

Restaurant Incentive Program business—Baba and Pop's offers cocktails, beer and wine, seated dining, a grab 'n go section, a freezer for pierogis to cook at home, and a complete take-out menu.

Baba and Pop's is located at 9945 E. Colfax Ave. in Aurora, across from the Fox Theater. To order online, call 303-919-3584 or visit babaandpops.com. Curbside carryout is available during Covid-19 restrictions. Hours are Monday - Saturday 11am-5pm.

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First Priority: Keep the Employees



Photo courtesy of Amina Auto

"We don't want [employees] to struggle in the time they need us the most," says Mohamed Mouaddine (right), pictured with Mohamed Tazi.

By Martina Will, PhD

"Are you really worried about getting an oil change in a time of pandemic?" asks Mohamed Mouaddine when queried about his April workflow at Amina Auto Repair. Though his business was deemed "essential," Mouaddine, who established Amina in 2004, says April was "dead" with the exception of some collision work and big projects. He appreciates that automotive services are not a priority for people with all the uncertainties of COVID-19. "People are really refraining from allowing any stranger to get into their cars."

Amina closed its lobby, instituted touchless dropoff/pickup, and disinfects all vehicles before and after service to minimize risks to employees and customers. Still, by the last week in April, Mouaddine expected his lot to be empty for the first time in years as all the long-term projects he and his staff were working on get finished.

Though he always runs a lean business model, Mouaddine is drawing on his reserves to keep staff on the payroll for as long as possible. "They're getting paid, even if we don't have the volume to justify the costI can't in good conscience send someone home at this time." As a small business owner, he also knows how hard it is to assemble just the right mix of skills and personalities to run his own shop, and he doesn't want to risk losing anyone.

Despite the challenges, Mouaddine has faith that his business and others will rebound in time. "I know that people are terrified and I know people are in a limbo right now...but this was a good wakeup call so we can shift our attention to what matters the most," he says. "We are going to get through this, and life will return to something like normal. People who don't have any safety nets are going to suffer, but I believe as a community, we can offer some help to other people until life gets back to normal."

A Moroccan émigré, Mouaddine especially understands the struggles of neighbors in the immigrant and refugee communities, and serves on the board of the nonprofit Village Exchange Center (VEC, see story on p. 14). Mouaddine buys and repairs vehicles that VEC lends to families in need for six months, until they are able to buy a vehicle.

Amina Auto Repair is located at 9650 E. 25th Ave. in Aurora, near the Stanley Marketplace. Call 303-321-8880 or visit aminaautorepair.com.



center; and Capital in the 21st Century (2019), a documentary adapted from the bestselling book examining wealth, power, and inequality. Try "Dinner With a Movie" this weekend!

Ozark (Season 3—Netflix)

If you liked seasons one (reviewed 9/17) and two, you will love season three. In that review of season one, I stated that the series is "a wild, unpredictable, interesting, lively, and unlikely new show that continually surprises and delights" while praising Jason Bateman who produces, stars, and directs several episodes. Season two followed that same line and season three amps up the crazy tenfold. The story of the suburban Chicago family (father, mother, daughter, son) who moved to the Ozarks and

launder money (yes, the entire family is in on it) for a Mexican drug lord now focuses on the family's casino business and their money-laundering scheme therein. We are barely scratching the surface.

The family is hounded by the FBI, is watched over by the drug lord's lawyer

(Janet Mc Teer), is fighting with the Kansas City mob, and is struggling to stay together as a family. Bateman and wife, played by a wildly unpredictable and fantastic Laura Linney, rule the most unlikely of crime families and then sit down to a nice dinner at the end of the day. The cast is littered with fantastic performances starting with Bateman, Linney, and Mc Teer, but also from the fiery Julia Garner as the trailer-park girl who runs the casino, to the hillbilly-heroin-magnate played by Lisa Emery, to

the enigmatic turns of Felix Solis as the Mexican drug lord. While the writing and performances have always been standout, the cinematography, editing, and music now lift the show's production values to a higher level. Still crazy, but then

again, what isn't crazy these days?

You will like this if you enjoyed Breaking Bad, Better Call Saul, and/or Weeds.

Vincent Piturro, PhD, is a Professor of Film and Media Studies at Metropolitan State University of Denver. He can be reached at vpiturro@msudenver.edu. And you can follow "Indie Prof" on Facebook and @VincentPiturro on Twitter.

A Good Woman Is Hard to Find (2019)

This very Hitchcockian thriller follows a recently widowed young mother (Sarah Bolger) of two as she struggles to get by after her husband was murdered. One day a local drug dealer, who has stolen from bigger dealers, forces his way into her apartment, threatens her at gunpoint, and makes her keep his stash hidden there while he deals the drugs and is simultaneously hunted by the local kingpin (Edward Hogg). Things go downhill from there, and not necessarily in a simple, formulaic manner. It gets downright ugly.

Bolger is both believable and forceful in the main role as she uses her newfound "superpowers" to make her way through the morass of her immediate world. Hogg steals his scenes as the linguistic sadist who rules the local drug scene. In true Hitchcock fashion, he is a worthy antagonist with a penchant for giving English lessons (some of which, this Professor notes, are not correct). The whole production becomes overly hyperbolic at times, but the tension, thrills, and blood make this wacky film a satisfying view.

You will like this if you enjoyed Psycho, Les Diaboliques, and/or Hard Candy

Starts May 8 at the Sie Film Center, online at denvefilm.org

Also recommended at the Film Center: The Infiltrators (2019), a lively story about a group of undocumented youth who infiltrate a for-profit detention



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SUN Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month from 6:30-8:30pm; a break at 7:30pm allows attendees to depart after an hour, though all are welcome to stay until the end. Meetings are held at Central Park Recreation Center, 9651 MLK Jr. Blvd. For information about SUN, visit www.stapletonunitedneighbors.com. To contact SUN, email stapletonunitedneighbors@gmail.com

May SUN News

By Amanda Allshouse
SUN Board President

Annual Community Forum: Wednesday May 13, hosted virtually at 6:30pm

A link will be posted on SUN's website (link below) and at <https://www.facebook.com/StapletonUnitedNeighbors>

SUN has determined that a virtual meeting is not only in agreement with public health, but also allowable under our governing documents. SUN's Annual Community Forum will begin with opening comments and business from SUN. Remarks will include updates on work in the previous year, goals for the upcoming year, and annual elections. The community will be asked to vote on a slate of 7 candidates to begin 2-year terms on the SUN board. Names and biographies for each candidate are available on SUN's web site.

After SUN business, Denver police and the Stapleton MCA will provide community updates. In the next 30-minutes, city-level topics will be covered with Councilman Christopher Herndon and other representatives from the City of Denver. The latter portion of the evening will include updates from area developers. Brookfield (the company that acquired Forest City), and Evergreen (the developer responsible for several retail projects within the community), and updates on the transit oriented development projects at the Central Park train station.

The evening will conclude with closing remarks from SUN. For details on the slate of SUN board candidates and a final agenda, visit www.StapletonUnitedNeighbors.org.

Follow up from SUN's April 21 Monthly Meeting

Denver Parks and Rec (DPR) has asked that cyclists avoid "social trails" along the south bank of Sand Creek between Westerly Creek Greenway and Havana Street. Also, off-trail cycling use near Florence Way and Fulton Street however has been disruptive to the ecosystem and should cease.

Representatives from DPR addressed a memo issued by a park ranger that contained statements about exposures to toxins in our environment that the department says are false. The memo's statement of environmental risk did not reflect testing and remediation that occurred on the Stapleton land after it was decommissioned as an airport. Based on remediation and results from testing, regulatory agencies have deemed land safe for residential use, including the land near Sand Creek.

After the meeting, DPR followed up with responses to questions raised at the meeting: 1) The timeline for playground renovations for the Central Park Playground Renovation project—This project is under design; construction is scheduled to be complete in early 2021. 2) The sports complex planned for the undeveloped green space surrounding the Wicker Park neighborhood (east of Central Park Blvd between 53rd Ave. and Northfield High School, to Dallas St). This sports complex is currently not prioritized for funding and could cost up to \$20M.

Sand Creek Greenway Mural

SUN has partnered with the Sand Creek Greenway to identify funding sources for a large mural project depicting native wildlife on cement retaining walls beside the trail. The proposed location is adjacent to the Central Park North neighborhood between the Smith road trail head and the Central Park Blvd overpass. The amount needed for the project is \$20,000.

Op-Ed

An Ode to Businesses and the Communities that Support Them

By Mark Shaker

For those not familiar with our story, Stanley Marketplace started as a quest of three neighbors to open a beer garden. We wanted an independent place where friends and families could comfortably hang out. We knew nothing about running a restaurant, and even less about developing a marketplace, but we knew that something was missing in our community: a gathering place.

From our vantage point, Stapleton and the surrounding neighborhoods were great places to live. The schools and parks were top-notch, everyone knew their neighbors, but there were too few independent, local, and compelling businesses to support.

We shared our beer garden concept with Stapleton United Neighbors (SUN) in the summer of 2013, and in October of that year we presented at a SUN meeting to an enthusiastic audience. Fortunately for us, the *Front Porch* was in attendance. Carol and Steve shared our concept with their readers, one of whom worked in the development office at the City of Aurora. The next day she went to her coworkers saying: "Let's go get this project." That is how our community marketplace was born.

Now, just seven years later, Stanley feels like it's been here for ages, and in Stapleton, Park Hill, Lowry, East Colfax and NW Aurora we're surrounded by great local businesses. We've got top-notch dining options including ones from renowned chefs Troy Guard and Elise Wiggins in Eastbridge. We've got locally-owned fitness establishments, bakeries and boutiques, including new businesses that have opened just this year. Many of us who've lived here for a decade or more used to dream of what NE Denver and NW Aurora have now become.

If we want our neighborhoods to



Mark Shaker shares his proposal for a beer garden at a SUN meeting in October 2013.

remain places where locally-owned businesses exist and thrive, then it is absolutely vital that our residents wrap their arms around our independent business community and support them in the weeks and months ahead. Our small businesses are facing an existential threat. The challenges before us cannot be understated: months of lost revenue, constant uncertainty and stress, and few models for a successful path forward. Restaurants are essentially starting over; retailers are sitting on inventory that can't be sold; and service providers have to figure out how to continue businesses that rely on close contact. With so many local small businesses in jeopardy, the very fabric of our community is at risk of going away.

We can't let that happen. NE Denver and NW Aurora made Stanley and so many other local small businesses possible; now we need to make sure they remain. Please make a conscientious decision to shop, dine, work, and work out at locally- and independently-owned places in our neighborhood every time you can. We need our restaurants, our retailers, our gyms and our other services. We need our community paper. But none of them can survive without your consistent support.

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Rep. Crow: Seeking a Science-Driven Return to Normalcy

By Martina Will, PhD

How might we slowly and safely get to our new normal as a nation? *Front Porch* asked this question of Rep. Jason Crow, who lives in the Aurora neighborhood of Stapleton and is a prominent freshman voice in the US House of Representatives, representing District 6. We'll follow up on this question a month from now with Rep. Diana DeGette, who represents District 1.

What are your thoughts on the different proposals for reopening the country and how we might return to normal?

Testing is the key to returning to normalcy, to have a surveillance system that gives us an ability to know where the virus is, where the hot spots are, and who has it—and necessary to that is contact tracing. We need to drastically ramp up our testing capacity...that's the near-term.

The mid-term is the need for antibody testing to find out who has had it already and who can return to work. Then the longer-term is continued expediting of a vaccine. That's probably a year or more out, to have broad vaccinations across the country.

Through the use of the Defense Production Act, we need to drastically expand the industrial base for PPE [Personal Protective Equipment], and then restock not only the national stockpile, which was woefully insufficient from day one, but also restock the stockpiles at our hospitals and healthcare systems, schools, and places of work as well.

What are the gaps between the Democrats' and Republicans' approaches?

There are some gaps as to how quickly we can lift some of these stay-at-home orders. I think that needs to be data-driven and science-driven and medically-driven. There are people who are pushing to do it faster, and I think that would be a big mistake. The data shows us that we have been

able to flatten the curve very successfully. We are on a trajectory to avoid some of the more extreme fatality levels because people are following the recommendations of public health officials. So it

would be a mistake to think that we're out of the woods and lift that early. That could reverse that trajectory and get back on a very extreme collision course. This could be much, much worse than it is even now,

and it's pretty bad right now.

The bigger area of disagreement right now is on the economic side. The Paycheck Protection Program, which is really the preeminent program to help support small businesses and to prevent layoffs right now through the CARES Act, ran out of money April 15. That was very quick, which means that the economic need is much deeper and broader than we expected.

We need to provide more money quickly into that program, but we also need to provide more money to SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] for food security, and for our hospitals and for our cities. Right now the Senate and most Republicans are only willing to do the business side of this, and they don't want to do the public health and municipal support side of it. And that's where the disagreement is right now.

The pandemic has raised awareness about our nation's profound economic and racial inequities. What would you like to see the federal government do to ameliorate some of these systemic inequities?

You're absolutely right that this crisis—not only the health component, but also the economic component—really has highlighted these inequalities; the African American and Latino communities are much more impacted.

It also shows that the fundamentals of our economy were not as strong as some people were saying. What I've known for a long time and what others have known for a long time is that homeownership is dropping, consumer debt is increasing, and, yes, people are working jobs, but they're working two or three jobs without benefits. All of those things mean that the resiliency was very low—and that's why, within a matter of a month, we've gone from a very low unemployment rate to one of the highest unemployment rates we've seen since the Great Depression. People who are living paycheck to paycheck can't pay their rent, their mortgages, and buy food. We need to have a larger discussion about what needs to happen to make sure we're actually supporting middle-class lifestyles and jobs.

One of the many things going on to address both the short-term crisis as well as the long-term structural challenges is broadband. We have seen there's a wealth gap in broadband, but there's also an urban-rural gap. You can't have access to tele-health and tele-learning and remote working unless you have broadband, so

broadband is an essential part of the public conversation. We're working on getting that into a CARES 2.0 package.

Part of the issue of getting more money to schools in both an interim supplemental package and in a long-term package is that these schools have to buy iPads and Chromebooks for students. IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] funding—funding for our disabled students that need personalized learning programs—has been chronically underfunded for many, many years. There are numerous areas that have to be addressed in the short-term because people need the help now, but addressing these issues also will provide some long-term benefit if we do it in the right way.

Can you offer some ideas on how we might prevent the next pandemic?

We don't have the institutions in place... to deal with a crisis on the nationwide level. We do not have the structure or the scale to deal with a crisis that sweeps the entire nation. So we really have to look at what type of restructuring of the government agencies, our communication systems, and our funding systems are necessary to be able to do this. This is not going to be the last pandemic we're going to see, particularly with climate change, because it's very well-known that one of the impacts of climate change will be increased pandemics. We have to have the larger conversation on what restructuring is necessary to better respond to this. It is abundantly clear that we were not ready.

Rep. Crow's comments were lightly edited for length and clarity.



Rep. Jason Crow

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Pandemic Impact on Education

By Martina Will, PhD

For many Denver parents and their children, it was undoubtedly the March 12 announcement from Denver Public Schools that signaled life as we knew it was about to change radically. DPS' declaration of an "extended spring break" was followed with a shift to remote learning, signaling tremendous challenges for teachers, administrators, students, and families. The complex web of relationships and interdependencies that center in our schools quickly became apparent, making pre-COVID transportation challenges like juggling carpool and bus schedules seem small by comparison.

Educators and administrators revamped curricula, distributed Chromebooks and other resources, selected distance learning platforms, and communicated information about internet service providers. For the approximately 65% of DPS children and their families who rely on Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), food security represented a major concern. Essential workers confronted childcare hurdles, and seniors' hopes for spring prom and graduation dissolved.

Kurt Dennis, Principal of McAuliffe International School, estimates that 98% of students either had internet service or were able to sign up using one of the providers who stepped up to make service more affordable during the pandemic. Others are relying on district-provided hotspots. The bigger issue at McAuliffe was getting devices to students whose families did not have enough technology at home to ensure everyone could be online at the same time; McAuliffe distributed almost 1,000 Chromebooks to its 1,600 students. A few weeks into remote learning, technological hiccups have passed and classes are meeting in Google classrooms and other settings.

Dennis doesn't anticipate online learning being able to replace the classroom experience post-pandemic, though he does observe that his math team in particular appreciates the interactive program (Desmos) they are using, which allows real-time feedback to students. In terms of timing, the school closures were less inconvenient than they could have been. "We were heading right into the start of state testing," he says. Since teachers front-load the curriculum, they had already covered the year's academic standards. Most of the remote learning content is therefore "reinforcing what they've already learned this school year with the hopes that when they start in August we're not seeing any gaps or deficits."

Ayla Perez, a junior at Northfield High School (NHS), is not enamored of remote learning. Much of her spring class schedule consists of theater classes, which

are hard to reproduce in an online format. She will miss the spring musical that is usually a highlight of the school year, though some new experiences are also ahead. Her acting teacher

has assigned students to perform a radio drama, an entirely new experience. In terms of college, however, everything is on hold, from campus visits to SATs and other rites of junior year. "I hope they get rid of SATs altogether," says Perez, echoing the feelings of everyone who ever applied for college.

NHS junior Brianna Johnson, also relieved that she doesn't have to take the SAT anytime soon, is less concerned about the pandemic's academic implications than she is about its mental health impact. She speaks from experience, having suffered from depression and anxiety since a very young age: "My social anxiety, it's a lot better because I don't have to see people, but my depression has taken a little bit of a toll on me, because I can't go anywhere to

distract myself." Johnson misses her usual outlets, including her friends and playing softball for NHS. She is finding joy these days in painting, practicing her batting, doing weight training, and listening to her grandparents' old vinyl and cassettes.

NHS Principal Amy Bringedahl notes that some of her students are facing additional stressors due to the economic dislocation so many families are experiencing; some are working full-time to help support their families even as they navigate multiple remote learning platforms. Though online learning may help reduce the social isolation, it cannot replace the daily connections in-person learning provides, says Bringedahl. Like senior classes everywhere, NHS seniors will also miss out on cherished traditions like senior skip day, senior prank, senior BBQ, and prom. A virtual graduation is planned for May, and DPS is finalizing plans for in-person commencement ceremonies across the district in August.

In the meantime, the once-noisy halls at NHS, McAuliffe and across the district are empty. "It's like the building was evacuated on a moment's notice—teachers' lessons are still on the boards, posters for events that were to have happened this spring are still on the wall, kids' personal items are lying around," says Dennis. Educators are already thinking about how to best transition students from the very long "break" into classrooms when face-to-face learning resumes. That transition is sure to bring a whole new meaning and joy to back-to-school for everyone.

For information about meals and supplemental food offered by DPS, go to: <https://www.dpsk12.org/coronavirus/food-distribution/> for pick-up locations and hours.



NHS junior Ayla Perez (above) finds remote learning is not a great replacement for in-person theater classes. Brianna Johnson, also an NHS junior, misses playing softball with her team. Photos courtesy of Ayla Perez and Brianna Johnson.



Serving the Most Vulnerable

How Nonprofits are Adapting

By Martina Will, PhD

Typically run on tight budgets with minimal staff, local nonprofits can often be more nimble than other entities, refining or pivoting programming to quickly adapt to changes. To understand how the pandemic and the stay-at-home orders are impacting those serving some of our most vulnerable neighbors, Front Porch spoke with representatives from SafeHouse Denver, which serves survivors of domestic violence, and Village Exchange Center, which serves immigrants and refugees in the Aurora neighborhood adjacent to Stapleton.

SafeHouse Denver

Abby Hansen, Director of Counseling and Advocacy Services at SafeHouse Denver says her team "is seeing a significant dip in our calls to the crisis line." For a second, this feels like something to celebrate. But the second passes and Hansen shares a chilling insight from her 15 years in the field: "It makes me think that those survivors that are in immediate crisis can't access our services because the abusers are home, their kids are home."

Hansen anticipates "a dramatic spike in our crisis line calls" and referrals once the stay-at-home orders end. For now, she says: "Survivors do what they always do. They survive. Women especially are very savvy about reading their perpetrator and about finding extremely creative ways to change their environment to appease perpetrators and keep the peace while they need to."

Founded in 1977, SafeHouse Denver operates three facilities to serve those fleeing intimate partner violence. DPD data matches Hansen's anecdotal information, with District 5 reporting an 8.3% drop in domestic violence incidents, part of an overall decline in crime, which is down 21.5% over the previous 28-day period.

SafeHouse continues to staff its hotline and residential facilities, though it is presently unable to accept new residents because it has to ensure adequate space should any current residents need to be isolated. Advocates have increased reliance on phone counseling to serve clients, and they continue to accept referrals.

Hansen says the cases they are seeing now, however, tend to be more complex, with multiple challenges facing survivors. The shortage of housing options remains one of the biggest obstacles for survivors in Denver. Once someone decides to leave a violent partner, they cannot wait months or years to move to safety.

Hansen, a licensed clinical social worker who resides in Park Hill, appreciates the community's expressions of support for healthcare workers. She asks that people remember that "Domestic violence advocates are also first responders," and worries about her staff, who now work in isolation while also absorbing a lot of trauma.

Village Exchange Center (VEC)

"We were always serving the homeless, near-homeless, refugees, immigrants," says Stapleton resident Amanda Blaurock, co-founder and Executive Director of Village Exchange Center. VEC opened its doors on Havana St. in 2017, in a building it shares with like-minded partner organizations. VEC serves a predominantly immigrant and refugee population and celebrates diversity while building bridges across ethnic and faith communities.

Though it offers a host of programs, it is the food pantry that has grown exponentially in the past month. Whereas they used to serve 225 individuals twice a week, VEC now provides food, diapers, and toilet paper to 1,400 individuals weekly. To scale operations to meet this need, VEC added food delivery and volunteers. Faith leaders and others from more than 10 organizations

are also picking up and distributing food bags directly to their communities.

VEC further innovated by employing the Routific app to coordinate logistics and communications across staff, volunteers, and clients. Soon VEC will be able to help with some healthcare needs for the uninsured: "We are partnered with the Dawn Clinic... to get prescriptions, Tylenol, and oxygen concentrators to people who are COVID-19 positive," says Blaurock. VEC is also partnering with organizations to support the Undocumented Workers Fund, which is providing assistance to undocumented hospitality workers.

Through a gift from Stanley Marketplace, VEC is launching a new program, The Village Farms, to further its commitment to self-sufficiency, job security, and food security. Stanley partner Jonathan Alpert confirmed that Stanley is giving VEC a 20-year lease to grow produce and have a commercial space that will one day include a tea house, in partnership with Denver Botanical Gardens. "Imagine a beautiful indoor and outdoor tea house that's also an apothecary, where our community members make different teas and herbal remedies from their countries," says Blaurock.

"We want to plant culturally appropriate food and distribute food to our community either free or at a reduced price... additionally we have restaurants at Stanley Marketplace that would purchase our food as farm to table," says Blaurock. Though vertical gardens and hydroponic farming are part of the plan for The Village Farms at Stanley, the pandemic has shifted the immediate focus to building sixteen 50-foot farm boxes this spring. VEC offers naming rights for individual garden boxes to recognize donors who contribute \$7,000 toward one box's construction.

SafeHouse Denver and Village Exchange Center welcome donations to support their efforts. To learn more: SafeHouse: <https://safehouse-denver.org> or call 303-318-9989 for the 24-hour crisis line. VEC: <https://villageexchangecenter.org> or call 720-668-9968.



VEC is starting construction of its Village Farms at Stanley. Pedro Romero, age 1 1/2, stands before stakes marking where VEC is building garden boxes to promote community as well as food and job security. Photo courtesy of VEC

Editor’s note: Our lead story in April explored how our political system and culture could shape this country’s response to COVID-19 in ways that differ from the approaches we saw in Asia. Now, as the conversation has turned to next steps, we share a first-person account by a Coloradan, our son, who lived through the quarantine and now is seeing the “new normal” in China. He grew up in Colorado and moved to Shanghai, China in 2009 after graduating from college with a degree in Mandarin. After years of working in the sports and healthcare fields, he started a business there in 2016.

My fiancé and I came home to Denver for the holidays, then attended CES, a retail conference in Las Vegas for our business. We hadn’t heard about the new coronavirus in Wuhan until we got back to China on Jan. 16—and by then the blogosphere was buzzing about it. That first week back, we could feel the gravity of the situation start to sink in. But we proceeded with our planned business trip to the Philippines on Jan. 21—and that flight seemed normal (albeit with more masks than usual, though they are common in China and typically worn anytime someone feels unwell).

By the time we returned to Shanghai on the 28th, everything had escalated a hundredfold. Airports at both ends had undergone serious transformations. People in hazmat suits took our temperatures several times, and we had to make signed declarations about our health and travel history and everyone—100%—wore masks.

China’s New Year and the Lockdown

On Jan. 23, two days before Chinese New Year, Wuhan had been locked down. Millions of people had already begun traveling for the holiday, which is taken very seriously in China. The majority of our friends had already left town by the time Wuhan was locked down. Officially the Chinese New Year lasts for seven days (though many factories close for 3-4 weeks), but because of the outbreak, all citizens were asked to halt travel and the holiday was indefinitely extended—everything just stayed shuttered.

Shanghai, with about 25 million people, is located 500 miles due east from the epicenter of the outbreak, Wuhan, Hubei. We were

A Coloradan’s Life in China
Living the “New Normal”

shocked to hear what was happening in Wuhan—and immediately, repercussions spread across China. Shanghai was eerily quiet—I could walk down the most heavily trafficked streets in one of the biggest cities in the world and not see another soul. Citizens were clearly alarmed about the virus and everyone stayed indoors—though in Shanghai there was no official mandate that we couldn’t leave our home as there was in Wuhan.

Big changes to our daily lives happened instantly. Wearing masks outside was mandatory; gatherings of any kind were banned; temperature checks and a declaration of your travel history were required to enter any building—including our own apartment. A temperature above 37.5 C (99.5 F) would be reported to local health authorities and would require going to one of the dedicated COVID-19 hospitals to be tested. Each housing complex was assigned a volunteer to guard the entrance and record our travel history, take our temperatures, and make sure that no guests entered our building.

Businesses were quite literally sealed off—large stickers were placed across the front doors—and if the door was opened and the sticker was torn, the venue would be fined. Only essential stores, including supermarkets and pharmacies, remained open.

Tracing and the Power of Apps

China was quick to utilize technology to help trace the virus and its spread. It’s a reality, when living in China, that your personal information is...well not exactly “personal.” So, when the outbreak happened, cell phone data became available for contact tracing.

Using WeChat and Alipay—the two biggest apps in China—a set of tools was created to track cases in real time and trace anyone who had been in a high-risk area or interacted with anyone from a high-risk area. We’ve had several friends who had a knock

on their front door and were brought to quarantine after being exposed to someone who tested positive (usually on a flight).

These apps use QR codes for making and accepting payments and adding friends, so the use of QR codes is second nature (I’ve even seen people begging via QR codes because nobody carries cash anymore).

As users of the apps, we can check our local area to help us understand our virus threat level. We can see the location of every person who tested positive for COVID-19. For us, the closest confirmed case was about five blocks away. If we had taken a train or flight, we could have looked up whether anyone on the same train/flight had tested positive.

The app also shows how each person contracted the virus: 1.) Visited Hubei 2.) Visited other “hotspot” in China 3.) Close contact with confirmed case 4.) Under investigation. (Contact tracing was so successful, I never saw more than 5 cases here.)

Everyone is assigned a color code in the app to show their health status—green (has no virus and is low risk), yellow (at-risk of contracting the virus) and red (has the virus). At first, receiving your QR code color was opt-in—but soon it became mandatory to show this color code to enter supermarkets, take taxis, and enter other public areas.

Then a new threat emerged—cases arriving from international virus hotspots. Upon landing, international visitors are required to take a COVID-19 test. Based on the result, their mandatory 14-day quarantine is either at home or at a designated hotel. Home quarantines are taken very seriously; magnetic sensors are put on the doors to ensure no one enters or leaves the apartment. Two volunteer nurses in hazmat suits come twice a day to take your temperature, assist in food deliveries and remove your garbage. Those who test positive go straight to the hospital.

Slowly Opening Up to a New Normal

With all these measures in place and the spread of the virus slowing, “non-essential” businesses began to open in Shanghai around mid-March. We started to see life on the streets again, but a new set of requirements were being implemented to prevent potential spread.

Venues were given a strict maximum number of people who could enter per square meter (e.g. 10sqm/person for gyms and 5sqm/person for restaurants) and it was still mandatory for us to wear masks, have our temperature checked, and show our green health code before entering.

Offices gradually brought back their staff—some divided their work force into two groups so only half would be in the office on alternating weeks. For restaurants, all employees’ health codes were publicly shared, and it wasn’t uncommon to receive a slip of paper with the names and temperatures of every person who had any contact with our food.

Even though businesses started to open up in mid-March, it still felt like the majority of people stayed inside. It wasn’t until the second week of April things really felt like they were getting back to normal—a new normal.

In April, some big milestones have happened that have made life seem more normal. We no longer get our temperature checked when entering supermarkets, we can have guests in our home again, and we are no longer required to wear masks outside (although they are still worn by 90% of people). Most offices are now fully operational and schools are scheduled to open on April 27.

While life now seems more normal, the threat of a second outbreak still lingers in the back of our minds. We live cautiously—and watch with interest as the US follows two months after China.



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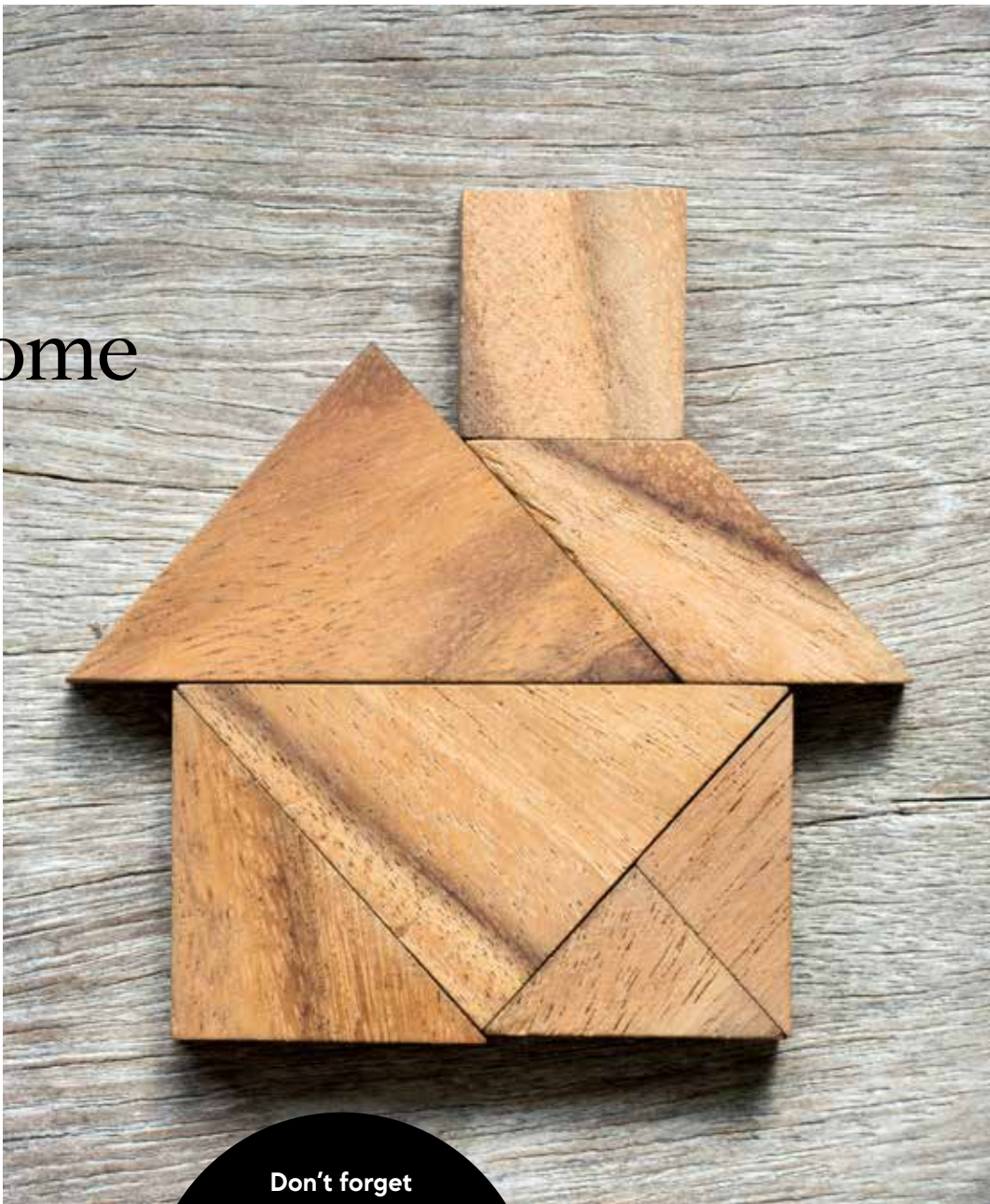
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Don’t forget to keep an eye out for a new date for our Recycling Paint Event. Our team looks forward to celebrating Earth Day with our neighbors later this year.

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