



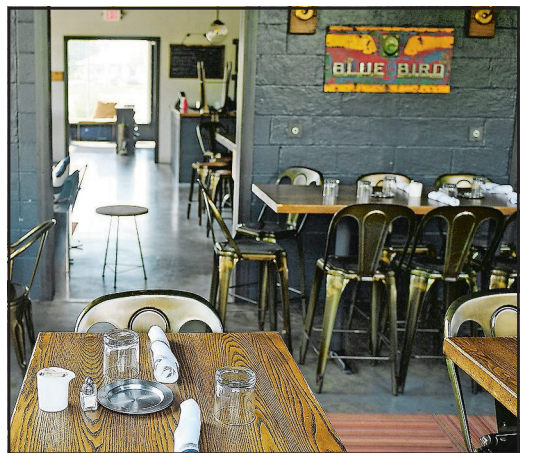
Life



in the time of



pandemic



How a coronavirus shook our world

Inside

Brian Hallenbeck looks at how the region faced a 'tidal wave that never came.' Page **I4**

Kimberly Drelich on how we are trying to adapt to a new way of learning. Page **I6**

Mike DiMauro considers high school athletes and the day the games stopped. Page **I9**

Erica Moser examines Connecticut's economy and asks: Will lost jobs come back? Page **J1**

Julia Bergman remembers some of the Connecticut lives lost to the deadly coronavirus. Page **J2**



Good for you, Connecticut.



We spread out. Stayed in. Masked up. And kept our COVID numbers down. **But now, we need to get our flu shots.** It's not just good for you — it's good for all of us, staying safe and healthy during this pandemic. Visit HartfordHealthCare.org/Flu.





DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Hair dressing and cosmetology graduate Olivia Lopez celebrates after crossing the stage to receive her diploma June 19 during the Norwich Technical High School drive-thru graduation.

Six feet apart and days spent alone

WHEN WE TELL THE STORY OF 2020, we do so in language rarely used previously: pandemic, distance learning, self-quarantine, WFH, social distancing, curbside pickup, Zoom.

We faced new rules: wait here, follow the arrows, wash your hands for 20 seconds (sing “Happy Birthday” if that helps).

And, of course, wear a mask, the unofficial symbol of 2020.

We have spent the year 6 feet apart and 14 days alone.

Businesses were order shuttered; some never to reopen. Thousands of people were laid off. The home became the schoolhouse and the workplace, all at the same time. From business meetings to happy hours to high school graduations,

we have lived remotely.

Most of those infected, including entire families, would recover. But COVID-19 is a killer: more than 200,000 people in the United States have died as of this writing. In Connecticut, there have been about 4,500 deaths, more than 100 of them in New London County. By summer, nearly seven of 10 victims were in nursing homes, the new ground zero.

We are under attack, not by a hurricane rushing up the coast or a foreign power, but by a deadly enemy that can be airborne or sitting on our kitchen counter. We have become afraid of even things we enjoy: going out to eat, travel, playing sports, attending concerts or the theater. We don’t shake hands or hug.

It hasn’t all been doom and gloom, though. In

the tough times, we come together. Neighbors made masks for neighbors. Drive-by birthday celebrations were held. Musicians took to online for virtual concerts.

We felt safer outdoors, so we hiked, biked and kayaked. We planted flowers and vegetables. We learned a new language, read that book we’ve been meaning to get to, finally gave yoga a try.

On March 13, like many of you, journalists at The Day headed home with their laptops and cameras. We have not returned to the newsroom in New London. We’ve spent countless hours chronicling this historic crisis. Many interviews were done over the phone. Photographs were taken mask to mask, 6 feet apart. Today, we publish this special section so we’ll never forget.

— Timothy J. Cotter, Managing Editor

On the cover

Left to right, top to bottom, staff from Hartford Health Care administer coronavirus tests in June from a mobile testing van in Norwich; basketball hoops, taken down amid the pandemic, are reinstalled in June in Norwich; the U.S. Coast Guard Academy’s football team takes to the practice field in August in New London; dancing in a June rain at Olde Mistick Village; coronavirus testing in May under a tent at Fitch High School in Groton; Swab Summer begins in July for prospective members of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy’s Class of 2024; apple picking in September in East Lyme; first day of school in September in Norwich; EMTs load a patient into their ambulance in April in Waterford; empty tables in June at MBar in Mystic.

COVER PHOTOS BY SEAN D. ELLIOT | THE DAY

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'Threat must be taken seriously'

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS when the seriousness of the crisis became clear, The Day in its editorials focused on the importance of leadership and shared community sacrifice in dealing with the pandemic. The newspaper's editorial positions backed aggressive steps to confront the economic damage. We marked the successes and shined a light on the failures.

The following are excerpts from some of those editorials as the pandemic played out across our region, our nation and the world.

March 11

COVID-19 threat must be taken seriously

Gov. Ned Lamont and other state and local officials deserve credit for the aggressive steps they are taking to slow the spread of coronavirus in Connecticut, protect the elderly who are particularly vulnerable, and keep our hospitals fully functioning.

Many will criticize some of the measures as an overreaction. But this is a situation where overreacting is preferable to failing to act or acting too slowly. Canceling events and imposing restrictions will cause disappointments, inconveniences and some short-term economic damage. But failing to act prudently can cost lives and lead to a deeper crisis with more profound economic damage that would not be easy to recover from.

As for this being a serious situation, consider that the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic, meaning a virus that can cause illness and death, is easily passed person to person and that has spread across the world. And among the stricken nations, the United States is one of the places it is spreading most rapidly.

March 28

Relief package incredibly costly and complex, but undeniably needed

The U.S. House of Representa-

OPINION

THE DAY EDITORIALS

No time to waste in ramping up testing

Without widespread testing, the assumption must continue that most everyone is a potential virus carrier and so general shutdowns are necessary.

Extensive testing is vital to permit a resumption of business activity. It would allow public health authorities to better identify who is infected and who has been exposed, quarantine them and allow others to safely resume work, shopping, schooling, and the like.

Without widespread testing, the assumption must continue that most everyone is a potential virus carrier and so general shutdowns are necessary. Without the perspective of broad testing, risks increase that states jump the gun in reopening and the virus spreads, causing lives and crippling the

The Trump administration's game plan for reopening recognizes the vital role of testing.

In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont on Tuesday announced an exciting partnership with Quest Diagnostics that could almost double COVID-19 testing in the state, from about 2,000 daily. Hartford

Healthcare, which has an extensive presence in southeastern Connecticut, including The William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich, is also a partner in the effort.

A mobile testing element will help get a better handle on infection levels in high-risk institutions, including nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, homeless shelters, and prisons.

The Trump administration has largely left it to the states to figure this out.

In Maryland, Gov. Larry Hogan this week announced his state had secured 500,000 test kits from South Korea, taking advantage of relationships formed

because Maryland's first lady, Yoon Ho-yeon, was born in South Korea. Maryland is paying \$9 million.

the nation is going to maintain the ability to test. As things stand, states are competing with each other, with other countries and even with the federal government for both testing kits and the various materials and chemicals needed to administer the tests and process the samples gathered.

President Trump has tasked the challenge the nation faces to a war footing, getting the economy open again, and

providing the Trump administration the greatest opportunity to implement the kind of bold and cooperative steps that helped this nation win past wars.

Fortunately for the president, he has a ready-made plan of action in a report recently published by the Rockefeller Foundation with the goal of reaching three million tests per week by June. The testing number is now about 150,000 per week.

The plan calls for construction of laboratory facilities to drastically boost the

number of tests available and to

regimen based on world domination. Federal authorities could also play an important role in assuring the needed chemicals and materials are effectively managed and provided where needed and when needed.

The Rockefeller Foundation plan, as has the Trump administration, concludes the states are in the best position to manage the testing deployment in their communities. However, it is the federal government that can provide the financial support and the muscle to mobilize a national effort and better enable the states to get the job accomplished.

Is the president and the administration up to the task? Or will the president continue to jump the hocky by leaving states on the hook and indulge in the fantasy that testing is already widespread?

This cannot wait. Further diluting will only retard the continued priority of vital and economic necessities. Pandemic that ravages nations.



containment strategy, knowing that it will not save us from a bad end, but cognizant that it can avoid a far more catastrophic outcome.

April 17

How to reopen may prove the bigger challenge

The broad outlines of Gov. Ned Lamont's plan to lead Connecticut into the post-pandemic stage appear sound. The Reopen Connecticut Advisory Group the governor formed to guide him is a strong one with a good cross-section of scientific, business and public policy experts. This gives the state a good chance of succeeding. It doesn't mean it will.

A full return to what once was normal must await the development of an effective vaccine to block COVID-19 infection. Even then, how people interact, and the disease risks they are willing to subject themselves to, may be forever altered.

Until there is a vaccine, the best the state can do is ease back toward normal. Widespread testing to assess the infection rates will be critical to getting people back to work and mitigating the economic damage. But officials cannot push too fast and risk the epidemic flaring up, requiring another shutdown.

April 25

COVID-19 death toll in nursing homes a scandal

The viral disease and death tearing through many of the nursing homes in Connecticut shows a major failure in the state's otherwise strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the administration of Gov. Ned Lamont has done a good job of promoting social distancing to protect the general public, it clearly did not do enough when it came to nursing homes.

As the week ended the number of confirmed COVID-19-related deaths in nursing homes pushed past 700 and accounted for nearly half of the virus-related deaths in the state.

SEE BE GLAD PAGE 17

The Day in its editorials focused on the importance of leadership and shared community sacrifice in dealing with the pandemic.

tives approved by a voice vote the \$2.2 trillion relief package engineered in the Senate.

It being Washington there had to be drama, as some procedural fireworks forced members to scramble back to Washington, including 2nd District Rep. Joe Courtney.

By any measure, it is the biggest emergency package ever approved in a single vote. How big? It equals 46% of the \$4.8 trillion budget approved in February to run the entire government. And that budget, by the way, was \$966 billion in deficit on the day President Donald Trump signed it because projected spending far outstripped projected revenues.

But the dire situation created by the COVID-19 crisis left Congress no choice. The decision to shut down much of American commerce to accommodate social separation and discourage the spread of the contagion is causing unprecedented damage to the nation's economy. Failing to pump these trillions into that economy would have assured a more severe economic collapse and that would have proved more costly than the bailout.

March 31

Making sense of mixed COVID-19 messages

The start of another COVID-19 week, and the end of what has been a very long and eventful month, brought mixed messages.

On the one hand, evidence is increasing that the strict containment strategies that are keeping us from interacting with one another are effective in limiting the spread of the highly contagious virus.

On the other hand, statistical modeling revealed during President Trump's daily briefing suggested that even using these extreme containment strategies, the battle to suppress the pandemic will be long, the cost in human suffering significant, and the economic damage unprecedented. If the nation uses aggressive social distancing practices, the projections revealed by the White House show 100,000 to 240,000 deaths.

In reconciling these messages of social distancing success, but still grim infection and death estimates, we reach the conclusion that America must strengthen the

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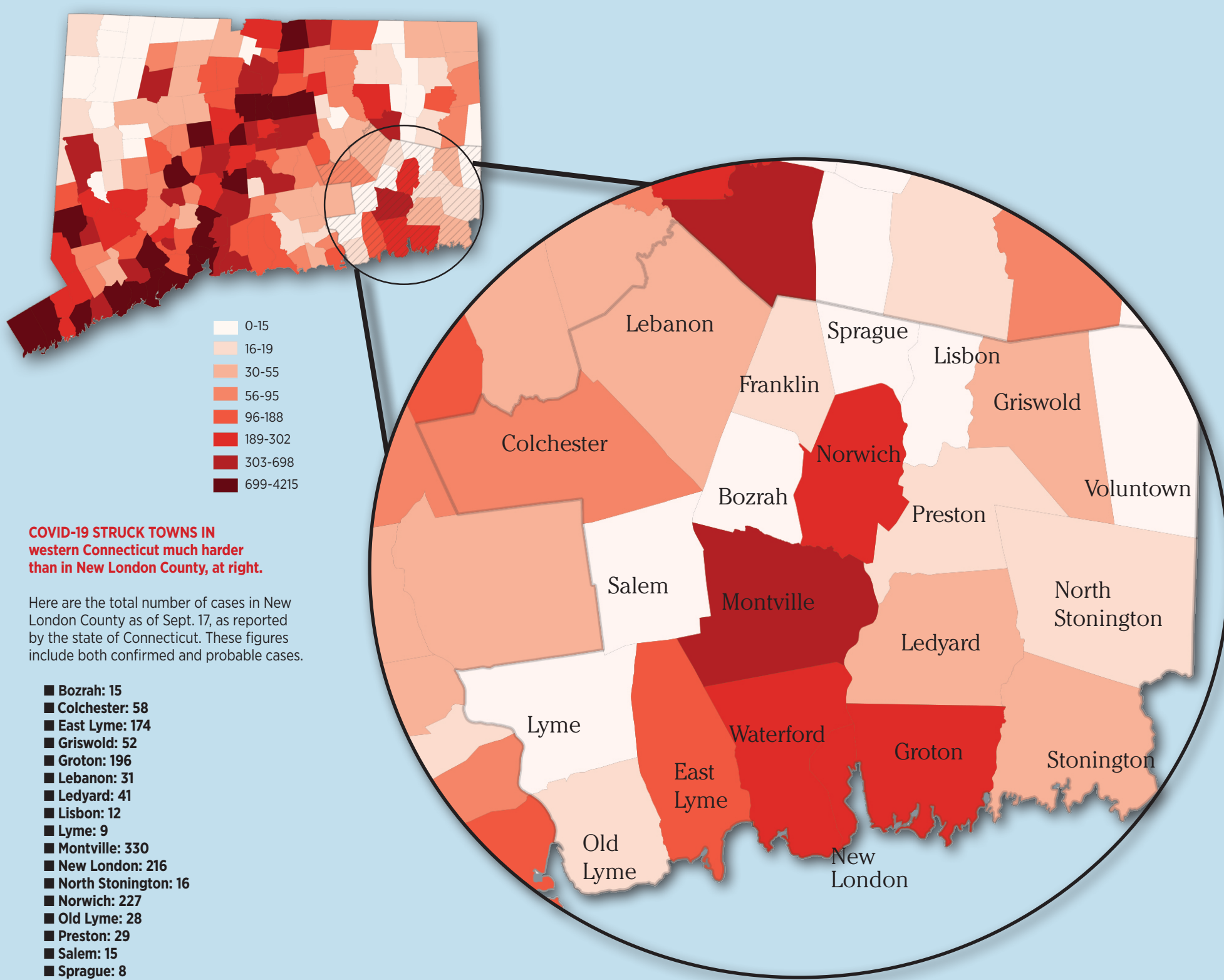


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COVID-19 STRUCK TOWNS IN western Connecticut much harder than in New London County, at right.

Here are the total number of cases in New London County as of Sept. 17, as reported by the state of Connecticut. These figures include both confirmed and probable cases.

- Bozrah: 15
- Colchester: 58
- East Lyme: 174
- Griswold: 52
- Groton: 196
- Lebanon: 31
- Ledyard: 41
- Lisbon: 12
- Lyme: 9
- Montville: 330
- New London: 216
- North Stonington: 16
- Norwich: 227
- Old Lyme: 28
- Preston: 29
- Salem: 15
- Sprague: 8
- Stonington: 40
- Voluntown: 14
- Waterford: 190

GRAPHICS: SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY | DATA: CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

‘A tidal wave that never came’

By **BRIAN HALLENBECK**
Day Staff Writer

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT has been spared the worst of COVID-19’s impact on the state, a circumstance it owes to its location, its relatively low population density and, perhaps, its citizens’ willingness to embrace safety protocols, public health officials have said.

The disease invaded from the west, first hitting Fairfield County and then spreading to Hartford and New Haven counties. As patients filled hospitals in Greenwich and Bridgeport, New London County officials took notes, met and planned.

“We were waiting for a tidal wave that never came,” said Dr. Kevin Torres, Lawrence + Memorial Hospital’s associate chief medical officer. “We have a decent amount of population here, but we’re able to spread out. People listened, people took it seriously. When we stopped elective surgeries until we could test safely, people accepted that.”

“Look where we are now,” he said. By mid-September, New London County’s rate of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was the lowest of Connecticut’s eight counties, according to the state Department of Public Health. At 630, it was substantially lower than Windham’s rate of 750, the next lowest. Fairfield County had the highest rate, 2,072.

New London County had 111 deaths linked to the disease, fewer than any county except Windham, which had 65. The statewide total was approaching 4,500.

What have we learned?
“Maintain your health,” Torres said. “Take your medications so you’re as healthy as you can be. Watch your weight. Don’t postpone your care. We’ve found that the healthy who get the disease can manage pretty well. ... Get your flu shot.”

A look back

COVID-19 showed up in Connecticut in March, the first laboratory-confirmed case involving a state resident turning up on the 8th in Fairfield County, a Wilton resident in his 40s who had sought medical care after returning from a trip to California.

Within a week, 20 cases had been

By mid-September, New London County’s rate of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was the lowest of Connecticut’s eight counties.

confirmed in the western half of the state.

On Monday, March 16, Gov. Ned Lamont joined Govs. Andrew Cuomo of New York and Phil Murphy of New Jersey in announcing that restaurants, bars, movie theaters and gyms in their states would be required to close at 8 p.m. until further notice. Going forward, restaurants and bars would be limited to takeout and delivery service. Hours later, Lamont delivered another blockbuster: the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribes had voluntarily fallen in line, agreeing to close their respective casinos, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun, at 8 p.m. the next day. Neither had closed since opening, Foxwoods in 1992 and Mohegan Sun four years later.

That same day, March 16, Electric Boat’s “essential” employees questioned whether their working conditions were safe, and L+M secured state approval for a drive-thru COVID-19 testing station in its parking lot. Days later, Backus Hospital in Norwich would do the same.

In southeastern Connecticut, COVID-19, or at least preparations for it, had begun. Cases were about to follow.

A mid-June surge?

While a report had surfaced March 13 that a Rhode Island child attending a Mystic child care facility had tested positive, another week passed before Ledge Light Health District confirmed that a resident of the nine-town area it serves, a 44-year-old East Lyme woman, had contracted the coronavirus disease. A Coast Guard Academy cadet and a Westerly Hospital physician also had tested positive.

The next day, March 21, the Uncas Health District, which covers a 10-town area around Norwich, reported its first case, a 43-year-old Norwich man being treated at Backus. He would die 10 days later, the first reported COVID-19 death in New London County.

In the days that ensued, a Corri-

gan-Radgowski inmate became the first prison inmate in the state to test positive, and Bayview Health Care Center in Waterford reported southeastern Connecticut’s first cases among residents of a nursing home. Both populations — prison inmates and nursing home residents — would become hot spots of the disease.

Connecticut’s COVID-19 cases and deaths steadily climbed during early April, but by the middle of the month Lamont was pointing to a statewide decline in the pace of new hospital admissions, what he called the “best leading indicator” of the disease’s trajectory.

On April 17, the day Connecticut recorded its 1,000th fatality, New London County had tallied a cumulative total of 292 cases and 10 deaths. But, despite the trend in more populous parts of the state, L+M’s COVID-19 hospitalizations had crept up, exceeding 30 for the first time on April 29. Backus was treating 10 patients with the disease and Westerly Hospital, five.

“Now, as we look at the models, we project we’re going to hit our peak at L+M around the second week of June,” said Patrick Green, the hospital’s president and chief executive officer.

Green predicted the hospital could have to deal with as many as 50 to 60 COVID-19 patients at one time, including as many as 25 to 30 in the intensive care unit.

The first phase of Lamont’s planned reopening of nonessential businesses, an event likely to lead to an increase in cases, was scheduled for May 20, still weeks away. Would southeastern Connecticut be ready?

Cases in region ‘plateau’

In mid-May, unionized nurses at L+M and Backus went public with concerns about what they said was a lack of personal protective equipment, or PPE. They petitioned corporate leadership at Yale New Haven Health, L+M’s owner, and Hartford HealthCare, which owns Backus, demanding “hazard pay”

and sick pay when exposure to COVID-19 forced them to quarantine. Hospital management insisted it was addressing the nurses’ concerns and that PPE supplies were sufficient.

Tragedy struck May 19 when Elva Graveline, a 52-year-old certified nurse’s assistant at L+M, died of heart complications associated with COVID-19. A grandmother of three, Graveline had tested positive in April after attending to as many as 10 COVID-19 patients per shift, a colleague said.

Pfizer, meanwhile, revealed it was working on a vaccine at its Groton labs.

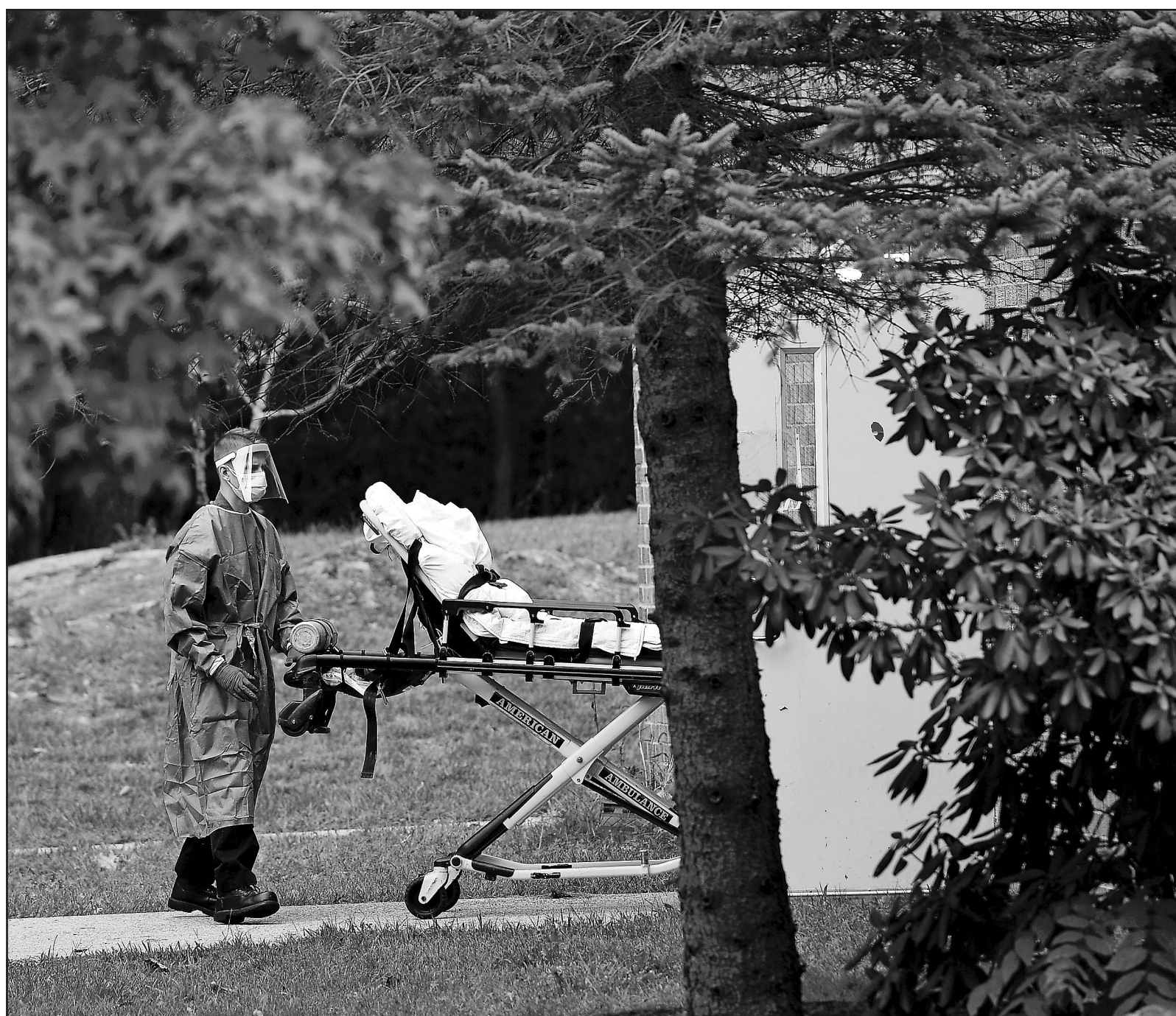
With the reopening looming and unemployment soaring in the region, southeastern Connecticut lawmakers urged the governor to let Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun reopen. In late May, it became clear the casinos were targeting June 1, a date Lamont believed was too soon, calling it “incredibly risky.” Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, an adviser to the governor’s reopening panel, lent him support, saying the risk in reopening the casinos outweighed the economic benefits.

Nevertheless, the casinos would partially reopen as they had planned, COVID-19 safety protocols in place.

As mid-June approached, the predicted surge in cases in the region was nowhere in sight. In the wake of the state’s reopening and local Black Lives Matter protests inspired by the May 25 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, L+M’s COVID-19 inpatient count had “plateaued” at about five. As of June 9, it had gone 14 consecutive days with fewer than 10 patients with the disease.

Westerly Hospital hadn’t admitted a COVID-19 patient in a week, and Backus had had no more than a few in recent days.

On Aug. 3, none other than Dr. Anthony Fauci, the infectious diseases expert named to President Donald Trump’s coronavirus task force, pronounced Connecticut in “a good place” as it faced the prospect of reopening schools. States like Connecticut, in which the COVID-19 infection rate is sufficiently low, should feel OK about bringing students back to school, Fauci said, adding that it’s ultimately up to parents to decide what’s best for



SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY

Nursing homes bear the brunt

The virus was so out of control in nursing homes that the state Department of Public Health enlisted the assistance of the National Guard to inspect facilities for infection prevention procedures.

By **KAREN FLORIN**
Day Staff Writer

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE equipment — face masks, shields, gowns and gloves — was in short supply when the COVID-19 virus blew its way into Connecticut nursing homes in March 2020.

The invisible virus was insidious in the congregate care settings, transmitted from person to person through airborne droplets emitted by coughing, sneezing or even talking, and believed to linger in the air for some time.

Coronavirus testing was limited, and adequate staffing was a problem even before the pandemic.

In southeastern Connecticut, frightened nursing home staff, residents and family members called lawmakers to ask for help and shared their stories with *The Day*.

Visitors were prohibited from entering nursing homes, and staff members were checked for fever and symptoms of the illness as they arrived for their shifts. But some people carry the virus without showing symptoms, and COVID-19 found its way to those who were most vulnerable.

By the end of July, more than 3,000 residents of the state's 216 licensed nursing homes and 83 assisted living facilities had died from illness related to COVID-19, representing 74% of the state's coronavirus deaths.

The devastating figures are contained in a preliminary report by Mathematica Policy Research, a Princeton, N.J.-based company Gov. Ned Lamont retained to conduct an independent review of the response to the coronavirus in Connecticut nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

The company was expected to issue a final report by the end of September containing recommendations to be implemented before a possible surge or second wave of the virus arrived this autumn.

The virus was so out of control in nursing homes that the state Department of Public Health enlisted the assistance of the National Guard to inspect facilities for infection prevention procedures. The state procured and distributed masks and other so-called PPE to augment what the nursing home



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Top, an American Ambulance crew arrives at Three Rivers Health Care in Norwich in September to transfer a resident to another facility. The state Department of Public Health ordered the closure of the facility the previous day. **Above**, Priscilla Johnson gets a visit from Twizzler, a pony, and Jerry, a llama, outside her window in May at the Groton Regency.

companies had.

By the end of July, with staff testing in place and “cohorting” practices instituted to separate residents who tested positive for the virus from others, COVID-19 was largely under control inside Connecticut nursing homes, with the exception of outbreaks in some facilities, including the Three Rivers nursing home in Norwich.

Since July 24, at least 21 residents and six staff at Three Rivers had become infected with COVID-19, and four of the infected residents have died.

The impacts of isolation

Mairead Painter, state ombudsman for those in long-term care, said residents of the facilities are struggling with mental and physical health issues due to the isolation they've endured over the past six months.

Some of the facilities have done an excellent job, but mostly she hears from the ones with dissatisfied customers. Family members and residents are telling her about weight loss and physical decline.

“That’s been very challenging,” Painter said. “We know that isolation impacts all people. It’s impacted all of us in our homes. Many of

us have gone back to a normal way of life, however our long-term care communities are still under strict restrictions.”

Because of the way the novel coronavirus spread, some of the residents’ visitation rights were waived due to the emergency nature of the pandemic.

Though restrictions have eased, many families have not been allowed inside nursing homes for months, and within the homes, many activities involving social interaction have been curtailed to prevent the spread of the virus. Painter said residents can spend time in small groups, if they maintain a 6-foot distance from one another, but normal activities haven’t resumed. She’s hoping that executive orders issued in late August will ease the isolation.

“The new orders that came out that expanded visitation and compassionate care visits really speak to the need of nursing homes to assess the psycho-social needs of each resident and in consultation with the resident come up with what types of visits they want and how the home will facilitate them,” she said.

She’s been conducting Facebook Live sessions with family members

who express a number of frustrations, from not being allowed to visit their relatives to having the relative refuse visits because they are frightened of introducing the virus into the facility.

“What I’ve been telling residents and family members is that as customers, they need to start making demands to some of the homes,” she said. “They can’t just be held there and given basic care. That’s not the expectation. As private citizens and customers I don’t know that people have done that. We look to the state to fix it, but I think people have more power in the fact of, where are they going to put their dollars?”

More inspections and testing

State Sen. Paul Formica, R-East Lyme, who had received calls from frantic family members earlier this year about shortages of masks and other protective equipment at nursing homes, said he’s now getting calls about the social and emotional impact of the virus. Some families have been able to hold outdoor visits, but others have been unable to see relatives who are confined to their beds.

“Some of the people have not seen their loved ones, except through a pane of glass or a telephone,” said Formica. “We’re trying to solve that problem and still be safe and not take any more risk.”

Painter said she hopes the facilities have taken the opportunity during the pause in virus cases to stockpile PPE and prepare for future waves of illness.

She said she was happy with the preliminary recommendations of the Mathematica report to the state, particularly because the company interviewed residents and family members as it conducted its evaluation.

Some recommendations in the consultant’s interim report include more frequent inspections of facilities by the state; increased testing of staff and residents; using two 12-hour shifts instead of three 8-hour shifts to limit entry and exit of staff into buildings; exploring strategies to limit the number of staff working in multiple facilities, and assigning staff to work on one unit with the same residents.



SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY



SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY

Top, Special education teacher Michelle Carmack helps students on the first day of in-person learning in September at C.B. Jennings International Elementary Magnet School in New London. **Above left**, family members of graduate Antonio Hellmers cheer as his name is called in June during Ledyard High School's drive-in graduation. **Above right**, director of guidance Tracy Lenz helps Jeremy Montazella with his tassel during drive-thru commencement exercises in June at Lyme-Old Lyme High School.

Adapting to a new way of learning

By **KIMBERLY DRELICH**
Day Staff Writer

BACK IN MARCH, SCHOOL districts across the region announced they would be closing temporarily to limit the spread of COVID-19.

"It would be our hope to have schools closed for a two-week period only," East Lyme Superintendent Jeffrey Newton wrote in his March 13 letter to families. "The reality is that we very well could be closed for a much longer duration."

Educators, parents and children quickly pivoted to distance learning, and districts found ways to get meals to students while schools were shut down during the pandemic. New London distributed meals to children via buses in a "meals-on-wheels" delivery.

School districts worked to get devices into the hands of students, with Groton, for example, distributing 1,400 Chromebooks over the course of several days.

But remote learning proved challenging to many students and families for a host of reasons, from a lack of internet access, to stress during the pandemic. Educators also were faced with a whole new way of teaching.

School districts worked to try to address some of the issues. In Norwich, for example, Human Services Director Lee-Ann Gomes helped connect families with Wi-Fi, and administrators said they spent time

"If we embrace this challenge of moving and adapting to this new world of advanced technology and instructional technology, I think we are going to be a lot better off."

GROTON SUPERINTENDENT MICHAEL GRANER

during April vacation reaching out to families to help boost attendees.

While many people hoped students would be able to return to school in person to finish the school year, Gov. Ned Lamont and State Department of Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona in early May announced that school was canceled for the rest of the academic year amid rising COVID-19 cases.

High school seniors lamented the cancellation of prom and traditional graduation ceremonies, and many high schools shifted to drive-thru graduations in which students and families kept the event celebratory by driving cars outfitted with balloons, streamers and congratulatory messages.

As school officials began planning for the next school year, the future looked uncertain. In late June, the state announced districts should plan to reopen schools in the fall, but also prepare for alternatives in the event COVID-19 cases spiked.

Lamont and Cardona told school officials in late July that they could return to school in a hybrid for-

mat, a mix of in-person and remote learning.

In late July, educators in East Lyme, Norwich, Ledyard and Stonington held rallies amid concerns about reopening schools. In August, labor unions for teaching staff, nurses, bus drivers and custodians outlined 13 principles to be in place before schools reopened, including mandatory mask-wearing for students, at least 6 feet of social distancing, and assurances that there would be no reprisals against anyone who raised a health or safety concern.

Most school districts in the area opted for the hybrid model, in which students would be separated into cohorts for two days of in-person learning and three days of remote learning. Some, including Lyme-Old Lyme Schools, opted for full in-person learning.

Colleges and universities also prepared to open their doors, most with a mix of in-person and distance learning. Connecticut College required twice-a-week COVID-19 testing and had students sign pledges

regarding the college's expectations for safety during the pandemic. In September, the college sent some students home who held dorm room gatherings that flouted the rules.

Students returning to local schools adjusted to a new reality of wearing masks in school, keeping 6 feet of distance and learning remotely for three days a week.

Many parents, staff and students said they felt a mix of emotions as they returned to school: nervousness to start the school year during a pandemic and also excitement to finally return after months of separation.

Educators and families had to quickly adapt to remote learning technologies thrust upon them. School officials say that in-person learning provides educational, social and emotional benefits, but some also said that retaining some of the technologies that worked during remote learning will benefit districts in the long term even after the pandemic. Groton Superintendent Michael Graner said the district shifted to a 1:1 technology initiative even for kindergarteners, who now have tablets where they can access literacy and math instruction and other programs.

"If we embrace this challenge of moving and adapting to this new world of advanced technology and instructional technology, I think we are going to be a lot better off," Graner said.

‘Stop complaining, start complying’

FROM 13

the virus-related deaths in the state. But nursing home workers are telling the Connecticut news media that they believe the actual fatalities are significantly higher and have not been fully calculated.

Nursing homes were sealed off from the general public early in the pandemic, but this was no guarantee of keeping the virus at bay. Workers come and go.

Two major issues have contributed to the failure to better protect these patients and the typically low-paid workers who care for them. Many of the workers said they have not been given the necessary protective gear to safely shield them and those in their care from the virus.

Nursing homes should have been better prepared.

May 6

Legislature should back Merrill’s approach to protect election

The COVID-19 pandemic could keep people from voting. That would be tragic. That is why the public should welcome Secretary of the State Denise Merrill’s steps to prepare and assure citizens do not have to choose between their health and voting. But to do it right, she needs the support of the state legislature and the governor.

The secretary wants wider use of absentee ballots, working around the restrictions. She has called for advanced planning so local voting officials are ready to handle a substantial increase in absentee ballots.

But who would be allowed to actually vote absentee? We think, if the viral threat remains, it should be everyone who chooses to do so. But the legislature must act to make that possible.

OPINION

THE DAY EDITORIALS

Be glad it’s working here

In truth, everything done to flatten the curve and mitigate the number of fatalities has been a large-scale science experiment. There was no choice but to try out strategies and discover in real time whether they worked.

Connecticut hit a small but heartening high point in the COVID-19 pandemic Tuesday when the state marked its first day since mid-March with no new coronavirus-related deaths.

New London County had its own good news: no new cases among residents in nursing homes in Groton, Waterford, New London, Stonington and East Lyme in the week ending June 30.

The numbers have been slowly but steadily improving, a trend that increasingly shows evidence that we have benefited from a series of good choices by the state, concerted efforts by health care workers, and a willingness by most residents to follow the rules of social distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks in public.

In truth, everything done to flatten the curve and mitigate the number of fatalities has been a large-scale science experiment. There was no choice but to try out strategies and discover in real time whether they worked.

lucky — or unwise — states that went with opening up completely. Unfortunately for them, those who have foregone masks and crowded into bars and otherwise tried to ignore the virus have found in huge numbers that COVID does not ignore them. In self-protection, Connecticut has now got quarantine orders for people coming from 19 other states.

This is not to boast. We have been humbled by this virus and we may well be again. A person who escapes a train wreck or a heart attack with his life knows intimately that it could have gone the other way. Connecticut is, for the moment at least, more like a cancer patient for whom the harsh and difficult treatment is working. Good news, great news — but not a long-term guarantee.

Like a cancer patient, we are glad to buy time. If and when there is a working vaccine that is effective for a majority of people, and if doctors can identify therapies that measurably lessen the effects

The Day An Independent Newspaper Since 1881

Timothy C. Dwyer, President and Publisher
Paul Chiosso, Editorial Page Editor
Timothy J. Cote, Managing Editor
Isabell E. Larameta, Deputy Managing Editor



“The newspaper should be more than a business enterprise. It should also be the champion and protector of the public interest and defender of the people’s rights.”
As written by Theodore Bodenwein in his will establishing The Day Trust.

around for long-term recovery. We can hope.

But we cannot let up. Among the many lessons learned about what works and what doesn’t is that there are whole categories of people at heightened risk. For them, new strategies are needed. These include the elderly, nursing home patients, and communities of color, particularly in urban — crowded — neighborhoods.

Very soon we will see another new experiment: if and when schools reopen as planned. Despite such strategies as not mingling in the cafeteria and the possibility of staggered attendance times, teachers, students and staff will be trying to accomplish learning with-

to have wider than usual spreads in skill levels. Some children had the internet, computer access and/or a parent who could teach. At the other end will be students who had none of those. Add to that the distraction that will come with new procedures and nervousness about being back in a group after months of isolation. Teaching will be the goal, but it won’t be the first task.

In the meanwhile, Connecticut residents can continue to model what has worked for this state. Wear masks, don’t politicize them. Wash hands. Wash them again. Give children the kind of summer for which summer vacation was invented: playing outside.

Not for nothing is Connecticut called the “land of steady habits.” Maybe there is something in our collective Yankee DNA that enables us to walk the line between extremes. We are no longer stuck inside but we are not kidding ourselves that things can go back to normal yet. Our science experiment has been working pretty well.

May 9

A tale of two leaders facing a crisis

Why the soaring approval numbers for Gov. Ned Lamont and the sinking numbers for President Donald Trump?

The public, confronted with uncertainty, wants a steady hand at the wheel, the confidence that there is a plan. People are willing to put up with a lot, to make necessary sacrifices, as long as leadership reassures them it has a destination and a strategy to get there.

Lamont has done this. Trump has not.

Essentially, the governor has met the test of leadership a crisis provides. The president has not.

June 25

More stimulus needed to prevent economic nosedive

As the expiration date for previous rounds of federal stimulus spending approaches, Senate Republicans are rudderless, with no consensus on what to do.

The pandemic remains deadly and gaining strength throughout large parts of the country. No swift economic recovery is emerging. The Federal Reserve Bank projects unemployment above 10% into 2021. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell says additional aggressive relief spending is imperative to avoid a prolonged economic calamity.

House Democrats in May passed the HEROES Act — Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions — another \$3 trillion bailout package.

Democrats are united in support. Republicans are divided and leaderless.

July 8

Be glad it’s working here

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July 20

To the inconsiderate few: stop complaining and start complying

There is really no way to say this tactfully: people have to stop being jerks.

They are a small group, but they cause outsized problems. They are the folks who don’t want to accept the relatively small inconveniences that come with trying to deal with a pandemic that has contributed to about 4,400 deaths in Connecticut and 144,000 nationally.

More troubling, they target for abuse the front-line

workers — the food servers, cashiers and clerks — who, in addition to their normal jobs, are given the task of enforcing rules: reminding patrons to wear their masks and maintain sufficient space to deter the spread of COVID-19.

Expose the unpatriotic behavior of those who would rather complain than comply, who are so quick to talk about their rights but in the process forget their responsibilities.

Aug. 16

American crisis deepens, Congress heads home

Congress has recessed. The senators and members of the House of Representatives have jetted home. They left without reaching any agreement to provide additional help to the 10% of Americans who are unemployed. There was no deal to help hospitals address the ongoing pandemic now responsible for more than 167,000 deaths. No lifeline to assist small businesses buffeted by the pandemic-caused recession and barely surviving. No plan to help states that have seen tax revenues plummet and which, unlike the federal government, cannot print money.

Nothing.

Rep. Max Rose, a freshman New York Democrat who won in a district President Donald Trump captured in 2016, had promised to go to Washington to get things done, not focus on partisan game playing. He has found out in recent weeks how hard that is.

“At this point, it’s a middle finger to the American people,” Rose told The Hill, crassly but not inaccurately assessing the congressional decision to take the end-of-summer break without a deal. They are not scheduled to be back until after Labor Day.



HERE’S TO OUR HEROES

We want to thank Connecticut’s first responders and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation police and fire departments for your hard work and service in the last few months. Your courage and commitment mean everything.

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Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation

Thanks for being a constant, reliable source of close-to-home news.

Professional excellence of The Day's reporters is greatly appreciated.

Local news outlets and locally produced media are vital components of our free press in America. I am happy and privileged to do my small part in helping keep The Day "pressing" on.

Thanks for providing an invaluable service. Where would we be without real news?

I have subscribed for decades and remember the advertising heydays of Thames East and West, when reporters were producing two to four or more local stories a day, plus writing Sunday features. It has saddened me to see the decrease in local coverage and I worry about the future of democracy if it disappears here and nationwide. Your reporters and photographers do an excellent job - keep up the good work, we depend on you!

Thanks to all reporters, editors, and staff members of the Day for keeping us informed about the daily, local news.

Yes to supporting the 50 years of steady journalism I've gotten from The Day! Currently, I'm especially appreciative of your efforts to keep us aware of the interesting and positive activities we can still pursue while abiding by the COVID-19 restrictions. Keep up your good work.

The Day is an excellent local newspaper that we read every day.

We need an independent free press at a time like this. The Day is true to that mission.

We moved here in 1989 and have always subscribed to The Day. We had a paperboy at that time and I still have memories of how angry our neighbor got when the paperboy was late! We have remained subscribers since that time and I don't regret it. Your professional journalism and willingness to publish different voices of view are timeless.

I am so grateful for your newsgathering. I am proud to be a part of your Day family.

Love The Day.

I find The Day reporting usually balanced and very readable. We really support the local columnists, especially Mike DiMauro, Dave Collins, and retired Steve Slosberg.

We appreciate where we live and need an independent local paper to be a part of this landscape.

The Day is an important part of every morning for the past 35 years. It is honest and a necessary resource for the local news. We are so much better for having it available.

We just wanted to let all The Day's photographers, reporters and editors how much we appreciate all that they do. You all are doing an awesome job covering this pandemic, and keeping all of Southeastern Connecticut well informed. Keep it up!

Thanks for all your hard work & great reporting. Local News is where it's at!

Thank you for always excellent reporting. Keep it up.

Thanks to The Day staff for keeping us informed.

THANK YOU

to everyone who made contributions to our COVID-19 Local News Fund campaign.

Your donations made it possible for us to upgrade essential technology which allows our news & local sports reporters a safe working environment and lets us expand our coverage during this time when local information is crucial for the region.

The support the community showed us through this campaign was humbling - the hundreds of comments left by donors was a reminder that the work we do each day is vital to the community.

We're in this together and will get through this together.



COVID-19 LOCAL NEWS FUND

We've been reading The Day for decades. A local, independent news source is vital, now more than ever. It keeps us connected and anchored. We would miss The Day tremendously, so hopefully this campaign will help the paper get through these challenging times and be better than ever on the other side.

We cannot do without The Day!

I've lived in a lot of different places, and read a lot of different newspapers, but The Day is one of the best. Thanks for all you do to keep us informed and entertained.

Thank you for your continued coverage and unique story ideas.

Now more than ever, we need reliable and accurate news that The Day has always provided.

The Fourth Estate is never more vital than at this time! Keep up the good work. The Day keeps us informed, provides a sense of community, and conveys the news in a clear and concise manner. They are a reliable source for local, state, national, and international news. And their opinion pages are balanced and reflect a broad spectrum of thoughtful ideas and commentaries.

Can't imagine starting our day without The Day. We appreciate all that you're doing to keep the paper coming during these difficult times.

Loyal subscriber and reader, thank you.

The Day is an invaluable resource. Keep up the good work!

Keep printing the facts!

Keep up the good work. We need local journalism now more than ever.

Gotta keep going -- need the morning paper to start my day!

We are ever grateful for The Day. Our donation is in honor of Sean Elliot and the team of photojournalists at The Day that bring stories to life.

I've subscribed to The Day starting when I moved here in 1974. I want to see the paper survive this challenging time.

This newspaper is important to us. Keep doing the good reporting that you've always done. Thank you.

Thank you to all of the members of The Day staff, including our excellent delivery person. You help to make this the wonderful community that we all love!

You give our community a voice and vital information. Thank you to everyone at The Day!

Can't be in touch without you. The Day is a necessity to our community.

We are grateful to have a local newspaper. Thank you The Day!

Thank you to all at The Day and to the delivery folks for all you do to keep us informed and entertained. We start every day with The Day.

Thanks for your coverage of local news during this pandemic.

I've been a subscriber for about 30 years and so appreciate The Day for its knowledge and understanding of our region. You must prevail.

Thank you for your dedication and determination during this extraordinary time. You are invaluable to our community.

To everyone at The Day. Your reporting and support of the SECT is explanatory. Please keep up your excellent reporting. Thank you.

I was just made aware this morning of your charitable work. Bless you! Here's a small donation from a big fan!

Thank you!

The Day is the little paper that could. Keep up the good work.

Since I moved to New London in 1998, reading The Day has been the first act of every day. Before I retired you kept me abreast of all the towns news I needed in my job. I have lived in big cities, small towns, and little burbs, and this is by far the best local newspaper I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Your reporters are stars; some have become friends. Rick Koster has introduced me to some of my favorite authors for which I am particularly grateful these days as I revisit them. My delivery person, John Satti, makes sure the paper is through the mail slot every day before 6am! Keep up the good work. Theodore Bodenwein would be proud of you all.

We so appreciate all you are doing!

We have subscribed to the Day since moving to Niantic in 1998 making it a part of each morning. Whether we breeze through it quickly or spend more time with it the paper covers the world we live in. We get national news from all manner of sources but news about our local communities comes from only one place. You guys cover the stories each day, ask the questions of local officials, tell us about our local sports and cultural events, and more. It all matters to our communities. I don't always agree with the columnists or the letter writers but I do typically read what they have to say. The fact that The Day is an independent newspaper matters. I have often thought that should The Day fall victim to the changing times of print journalism we would lose a very important voice and a source of public accountability. Thanks to all your staff for the work you do.

Thank you for your excellent local coverage! I look forward to continuing to read The Day on the other side of the curve.

We really appreciate having an independent, trusted local news source. Thank you!

We're happy to do our part to keep local news available. Thank you all.

As a longtime subscriber and supporter, thank you again for your continuing excellent and essential work!

Thank you to The Day for keeping us informed! Stay strong & independent!

I was a paper carrier for The Day over 50 years ago. While I do not always agree with the stories that are reported, The Day is the only newspaper my wife and I read on a daily basis. We will continue to do so for decades to come. Hopefully our donation will help to continue the publication. Stay safe and good luck!

Our small support reflects our overwhelming gratitude for your tireless, balanced and thoughtful efforts during this time of crisis. Here's to the continued strength and viability of The Day, which is essential to our community.

Thank you for working tirelessly to bring us the news each and every day! Stay safe and stay healthy!

I have subscribed to The Day for over 40 years and reading it each day has always been an important part of my day.

My father read The Day every day of his life would be happy that you all are working so hard to keep the paper going.

Our thanks to everyone at The Day for your dedicated service to our community. Your balanced coverage keeps us informed and connected, and helps us through these difficult days. Keep up the great work!!

Grateful to live in a community where The Day is our news source. A healthy democracy requires active, thorough, humane, smart, robust journalism and that's exactly what The Day provides. Here's to a robust future.

I applaud The Day's professionalism and commitment to keeping us informed. The Day staff continues to do their jobs while navigating their personal challenges during this pandemic. Thanks to the entire staff for their flexibility and dedication in getting us the local, national, and world news.

We don't know what we would do without our morning New London Day newspaper. Stay well, stay steady, keep 'em coming.

We look forward to reading The Day each morning. Thank you for being consistently available in these trying times, for providing the local angle and local news with respect to national and state news, for risking your own health and well-being to seek out the news on a daily basis. And this was even before the coronavirus crisis! Please keep up the good work!

I start my day with The Day every day! Wonderful community partner.

Thank you for your excellent coverage during these challenging times. We need you all.

The Day is as much a part of the fabric of SE CT as the Thames River. You're part of our family and like all family members, we don't have to agree all the time to love you and want you to survive this terrible time.

I am a subscriber and I rely on the Day for local news coverage. Since I just received my stimulus check in my account I want to share some where it makes a difference locally.

Thank you for your commitment and service.

Here's to your awesome creativity, quality journalism, and local coverage. With appreciation for all of you and your contributions to our community.

We rely on The Day for its excellent local news coverage, and don't know what we would do without you!! Thank you for all your work, especially in these difficult times.

Keep up the good work. Local media is crucial.

The Day is needed to keep the region alive and thriving.

Keep The Day paper tradition alive. Top-quality, independent, local journalism.

A viable free press is our best hope to maintaining democracy.

Supporting our local news and the communities that it reports on!

Thank you for providing the honest, hard-hitting truths we need during these uncertain times. Keep on keepin' on!

I can't think of a better way to spend my coronavirus stimulus check than to support the newspaper that has given me a voice, and a vocation, all these years. Let's not forget helping local charities and businesses, too.

How many of you had a paper route or watched the success of your kids school teams reading The Day. The Day is an essential part of our community.

I encourage the community to support our local paper. Here is to the strength & success of The Day

We value all that you do for the region.

Thank you for hanging in there. The Day provides world news but more importantly news about our local communities. In this era of dwindling local independent papers, The Day is important and relevant to New London County.

Local news and in-depth independent journalism are critical to our survival! We support The Day and especially the work of our niece, Julia Bergman! We are proud of her contribution as a staff reporter to this vital Public Good.

The Day always provides exemplary journalism, and we need you guys now more than ever! THANKS for keeping us informed!



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Old Lyme's Aedan Using (33) goes up to dunk the ball against Morgan's Jason Cohen (3) and Cam Carlson (24) during the Shoreline Conference basketball championship game in March at Polson Middle School in Madison. Five days later, the state basketball championship tournament would be canceled because of the pandemic.

DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

The day the games stopped

By MIKE DIMAURO
Day Assistant Sports Editor

IT WAS AN OTHERWISE unremarkable winter day, a Tuesday morning, the 10th of March. Kids in school. Chilly weather. Rather innocuous, except for a curious meeting of Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference officials to discuss the future of the state high school basketball tournament, amid this burgeoning, bewildering thing called the coronavirus.

'The saddest I've ever been'

A little before lunchtime, the news hit social media with the thud of a bowling ball dropping off the kitchen table. Tournament suddenly canceled. Season over. Some careers over.

"It just feels kind of surreal," Old Lyme senior Aedan Using, later named The Day's Player of the Year, said, after receiving an alert about the cancellation. "In most cases your season is ended by loss or by winning a championship, something tangible. All I have to prove that I'm never going to play basketball again in high school is a tweet on my phone."

Norwich Free Academy was about to enter the state boys' basketball tournament undefeated. The Wildcats cut a swath through the Eastern Connecticut Conference and had visions of a prestigious Division I state title.

"Probably the saddest I've ever been in my life," NFA senior Nolan Molkenthin said. "Just devastated."

"In most cases your season is ended by loss or by winning a championship, something tangible. All I have to prove that I'm never going to play basketball again in high school is a tweet on my phone."

OLD LYME SENIOR AEDAN USING

One day later, Rudy Gobert, a center for the Utah Jazz, became the first prominent athlete to test positive for the virus, prompting the NBA to suspend all activity. The dominoes began tumbling, eventually leaving sports — a societal constant — as a stunning victim of the virus. Worse: Their return was unclear, causing parents, coaches and student-athletes to wonder if the spring season would be imperiled, too.

They got their answer soon enough. Most hope for spring sports dissipated when the Ivy League and New England Small College Athletic Conferences — home of some of the country's most prestigious universities — canceled their seasons in April. The CIAC, criticized for abruptly ending the winter season, extended hope into late April, until canceling spring state tournaments April 23.

It left high school seniors without athletic closure for perhaps the first time in their lives.

Waterford High School senior Jared Burrows, named the Gatorade Player of the Year, would have

returned to a defending state championship baseball team with three future Division I pitchers: Burrows (University of Hartford), Ryan O'Connell (Central Connecticut) and Payton Sutman (Holy Cross). The Lancers would have bid for their third state championship in four years.

"We all wish we could have seen how good our team could have been this year," Burrows said.

Hopes turn sour

The summer, which provided a glimmer of hope with some outdoor basketball leagues, Amateur Athletic Union events and some baseball and softball, turned sour when the Ivy League and NESCAC canceled fall sports.

Professional sports resumed in late July and early August under unique circumstances. Major League Baseball played to empty stadiums. The NBA, WNBA and NHL played in "bubbles," or areas where all participants were confined to the same arena and living spaces. The NFL and college football returned in some cities and conferences, some in empty

stadiums and others filled to about 20%-25% capacity.

School officials in states across the country, meanwhile, wrestled with fall sports models. Some moved on as planned, others discussed moving certain sports to the spring. In Connecticut, CIAC officials haggled with the state Department of Public Health over the status of what DPH called "high-risk sports," such as football and volleyball.

Volleyball gets go-ahead

Other fall sports were to go forward as planned with reduced, regionalized schedules provided COVID-19 numbers in schools remained manageable.

CIAC, state and health officials gave volleyball the go-ahead — determining the sport was safe provided players and coaches wore masks — but had a harder time agreeing on the future of football. The CIAC's football committee recommended moving the sport to the spring until the Board of Control ruled against it. DPH officials wouldn't allow anything beyond 7 on 7, as opposed to the regular 11 on 11. It prompted more than 1,000 players from 40 different schools to rally for a protest at the state Capitol.

"We are very thankful we will continue with our fall sports offerings at this time," Ledyard Assistant Principal and Athletic Director Jim Buonocore said at the time, "but my heart breaks for our football players."



Thank You, ShopRite Heroes



Join us in thanking all essential heroes on the front lines at [EssentialThanks.com](https://www.essentialthanks.com).

For every "Thank You" note posted between April 20 and June 30, ShopRite donated \$1 to help fight hunger in our communities.

We continue to thank our ShopRite employees and customers, as well as all police, first responders and medical providers for their great service to our community.

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Life in the time of pandemic



SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY



Will lost jobs return?

Nonfarm employment figures (in thousands) for the Norwich-New London-Westerly labor market from 1990 to August. The numbers are seasonally adjusted.

By ERICA MOSER
Day Staff Writer

ECONOMIST DON Klepper-Smith planned to retire in December, but he felt he just couldn't leave when people are seeking perspective on an economic situation that he has described using words and phrases like "unprecedented" and "uncharted waters."

With businesses impacted by the pandemic, Connecticut lost 269,000 jobs in April, more than twice the number of jobs created over the past 10 years, and regained more than half of them since.

Complicating matters is the fact that, unlike most states, Connecticut never regained 100% of the jobs it lost in the Great Recession. Klepper-Smith, who works for DataCore Partners, said that in February, the state was 17,000 jobs away from a full recovery, and now is about 155,600 jobs away.

For August, the federal government pegged Connecticut's unemployment rate at 8.1%, but the state Department of Labor and Klepper-Smith say the actual rate is much higher.

Klepper-Smith noted that nationwide as of August 2020, for every 10 workers who are officially unemployed, there are another six "discouraged workers" who gave up looking for work or part-time workers seeking full-time jobs.

"It's a dizzying exercise trying to predict exactly where this economy is going. It's like trying to predict a hurricane," Klepper-Smith said.

But he's certain that Connecticut will continue to face outmigration, though now tempered by people leaving New York for Connecticut, and that "we can't tax our way into economic prosperity." His sense is that the future will involve some good months punctuated with some bad months.

The sector that lost the most jobs in Connecticut from August 2019 to August 2020 was leisure and hospitality, followed by trade, transportation and utilities, which includes retail.

Compared to a 7% drop in nonfarm employment statewide from last August to this August, the Norwich-New London-Westerly area saw



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Top, NoRA Cupcakes on Bank Street in New London in June. It's among a number of businesses that have closed for good during the coronavirus pandemic shutdown. Above, Tiffany Shultz talks in July about her new vegan dessert shop, Dutch's, in Pawcatuck.

an 11.7% drop — the largest of any region in Connecticut.

But both Klepper-Smith and Mark Hill, president and CEO of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, see hope in the manufacturing sector.

"I think one thing that is a silver lining for our region, maybe relative to other parts of the state and country, is that Electric Boat has a really robust outlook in terms of the second half of this decade," Hill said. EWIB is still operating its free Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative training program.

Hill said the big question is whether certain jobs are coming back, but he thinks it's too early to make predictions about particular industries. Through workshops and case managers, EWIB is trying to upskill people who are unemployed and position them for jobs they know will still be here in two to three years.

Working from home

Among the unprecedented economic impacts of the pandemic, Klepper-Smith points to the uncoupling of the growth in business productivity with growth in gross domestic product.

Typically, he explained, growth in GDP is highly correlated with growth in productivity, measured as output per man hour. But GDP fell at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 31.7% in the second quarter of 2020, the largest drop since the Great Depression, while business

productivity increased 10.1%.

Klepper-Smith said this defies the common logic that the average worker is more productive in a workforce setting than working from home.

Vivek Banerjee, senior business analyst for the consulting company Accenture, has been working from home in Groton rather than from the site of his client, Pfizer.

"I am more productive working from home, because in the morning you don't lose hours getting ready, preparing lunch and then starting," he said.

Banerjee has seen a greater emphasis on employee health and more frequent connections with people in leadership positions, but he said one downside of the flexible working hours is a greater expectation to overlap with the international teams in Europe and Asia.

Mark Russell, video technology specialist with Groton Public Schools, started working from home in March and then gradually returned to the office. An introvert who was used to having headphones on all day while editing, he didn't face the dramatic decrease in social interaction that some did.

But he did find himself a lot busier, between doing everything on a laptop rather than six computers and hosting Board of Education meetings on Zoom.

Some businesses shutter; others see opportunity

In Connecticut's small

business climate, May 20 was a momentous day, as phase one of reopening meant the return of Mystic Aquarium, Olde Mistick Village shops, Crystal Mall and numerous restaurants providing outdoor dining.

Gov. Ned Lamont made the controversial decision to push the opening of hair salons and barbershops to June 1, an edict one Pawcatuck barber opted to disobey. Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun also reopened June 1.

Phase two on June 17 brought the reopening of gyms, indoor dining at restaurants, museums, libraries, theaters, hotels and amusement parks.

Lamont confirmed July 6 he was indefinitely postponing the start of phase three, originally scheduled for July 20. He announced on Sept. 24 that Connecticut would move into phase three on Oct. 8; this includes increased capacity for restaurants, wedding venues and hair salons, but bars and nightclubs will remain closed.

By the end of June, multiple businesses had decided to close, such as MBAR, Bartleby's Café, Avanti's, Café Otis, O'Neill's Brass Rail and the NoRA Cupcake Company location in New London.

But businesses continued to open. Adam Young brought doughnuts to Mystic and Tiffany Shultz brought vegan cupcakes to Pawcatuck. A high-end New York chef moved to Mystic to open The Shipwright's Daughter at The Whaler's Inn. David Roden brought clients into The Exercise Coach in Groton at the end of July, and Patty Serrano opened Baptiste Power Yoga Groton for in-person classes in early September.

Surprisingly, more businesses started up and far fewer stopped operation this July than in July 2019, according to data from the Secretary of the State's office.

Now, many restaurants are looking ahead to cold weather, unsure how they will survive the winter months without outdoor dining. Dan Meiser, who owns Oyster Club, Engine Room and Grass & Bone in Mystic, said he would like to be able to put up tents with heaters in spaces traditionally used for outdoor dining.

GRAPHIC: SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY
DATA: CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, OFFICE OF RESEARCH

Those we lost



Anthony C. Bailey at the De Young Museum in San Francisco.

JESSICA 'BIBBY' GIESEN

“He was the best sustained writer of prose work in southeastern Connecticut in the last half of the 20th century,”

TONY BAILEY’S LONGTIME FRIEND AND NOANK RESIDENT STEPHEN JONES

By JULIA BERGMAN
Day Staff Writer

THE CORONAVIRUS HAS claimed the lives of more than 100 people in southeastern Connecticut.

Numbers from the state in mid-September showed 83 confirmed and 28 probable deaths in New London County. Many of the deaths were nursing home residents, which make up about 70% of coronavirus fatalities across the state.

The Day has written about some of those lost, putting faces to the numbers. Here are some of their stories.



Paul Brockett Sr. of East Lyme got the news that he tested positive for COVID-19 shortly after he had finished rebuilding one of the diesel engines on the Mijoy 747, the last task to ready the charter boat for the 2020 fishing season.

Three weeks later, on April 29, he died. He was 79.

Brockett was an avid fisherman for much of his life. He loved to talk about the times he was out tile fishing and swordfishing in the middle of the ocean, in the midst of a storm, stories that were “full of rich detail and always ended with wonder and gratefulness that they had survived,” his obituary said.

Brockett was also a skilled machinist and a woodworker, crafting nearly all the fishing weights and jigs for his boat. He loved spending time with his dog, a Bichon named Little Cesar.



Warren B. Rogers Sr. of Uncasville celebrated Christmas morning 2019 the way he always did: videotaping his family members as they opened each package, then carefully staging the gifts on the living room couch for more recording.

On April 30, Rogers died of COVID-19 after being hospitalized and then sent to a nursing home to recover after contracting the disease. His family, due to coronavirus precautions, had to say goodbye to him via Zoom. He was 88.

Rogers was a United States Air Force veteran and retiree of Electric Boat, where he’d been a purchasing processor at the end of his 40-year career. He enjoyed a range of hobbies including history, astronomy, collecting coins and stamps and every play made by the UConn women’s basketball team.



Thomas “Tommy” Bly of Quaker Hill died of COVID-19 on May 5, the day before his 88th birthday.

One of Bly’s notable projects during his career as a wallpaper installer and painter was a map of the Whaling City that took up an entire wall at the New England Savings Bank in New London. He loved to paint pictures and give them to his family members and friends.

A veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, he had married his late wife, Gladys, at age 50. They enjoyed traveling together, and he took care of her after she developed Alzheimer’s disease.

“One time I went over there, and he was cleaning her up, and I said, ‘Man, they don’t make men like this anymore,’” his niece, Millie Simon said during an interview.

Anthony C. Bailey, the writer whose 1971 book “In the Village” detailed life in Stonington Borough, where he and his wife lived in the 1960s, died May 13 of COVID-19 in Harwich, Essex, England. He was 87.

Prior to Bailey’s death, plans had been underway in Stonington for a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of “In the Village,” which will now be both a celebration of Bailey’s literary legacy and an occasion to look back on a half-century of life in the borough. “Unlike other big time writers who spent some time here, Tony was part of the community,” said Stephen Jones, Bailey’s longtime friend and Noank resident. “He was the best sustained writer of prose work in southeastern Connecticut in the last half of the 20th century.”



Bettye Beard of Mystic initially went to the hospital with chest pains and later found out she had COVID-19. She and her husband both contracted the disease and were asymptomatic.

She died May 17 at the age of 81. Beard always talked about how she had a good life and “whatever happens, happens,” and that was

true in her final days, her daughter Marie Sebastian said in an interview.

“There was nothing left unsaid. Nothing left undone. She was very happy with her life,” Sebastian said.

Beard, whose father was a pastor, was a longtime member of Shiloh Baptist Church in New London. She loved spending time with her family, who said she was a woman of her word and taught her kids to be the same way. She played games with her friends — “the ladies” — as her children called them, who would come over three times a week for game night.



Helen Hine of East Lyme was living at Bride Brook Health and Rehabilitation Center when she died May 21 about a month after contracting COVID-19. She was 99.

Her obituary described her as having “an irrepressible sense of humor,” and her daughter Pamela Hine described how she was always putting things on her head — hats, bows at Christmastime. Oftentimes, she would pair them with an accent or a silly voice.

Hine, who worked as a nurse for many years, including 10 years at Connecticut Hospice when it was a new program, loved to travel and took trips with her children across the country and the world.

She climbed Mount Washington four times — at age 20, 40, 60 and 80 — traversing to the top by foot each time except the last, when she took The Mount Washington Cog Railway, her daughter Nancy Hine said.



Above, colleagues Briana Hansen, left, and Isabella Nematalla “work from home” in September at McCook Beach in Niantic. “This is how we’re being creative but still being a team,” Hansen said.



Left, Army National Guard candidates take notes during a classroom session on preventive medicine countermeasures in July at the Connecticut National Guard’s Stones Ranch Military Reservation in East Lyme. “The military has to keep training, soldiers are always on the front line,” said Maj. Steven Roy with the New Jersey Army National Guard. “The enemy doesn’t stop because of (COVID-19) so neither can our training.”

PHOTOS BY SARAH GORDON | THE DAY



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SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY
Junior quarterback Ryan Barlow, right, hands off to Jay Griffin as the football team at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy takes to the field for practice Aug. 31 in New London.

Game over

By **GAVIN KEEFE**
Day Sports Writer

MENACING STORM CLOUDS settled over the sports world in mid-March and still haven't left.

The forecast remains tricky in college athletics due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact hit home in New London at the Coast Guard Academy, Connecticut College and Mitchell College.

First, the winter championship season was cut short, and the spring season abruptly ended after only a handful of games.

Then hope for a fall season gradually disappeared, the cancellation adding to the heartbreak and disappointment felt by athletic directors, student-athletes and coaches.

"It's a year like no other," Coast Guard athletic director Dan Rose said.

And it's a year that's been especially challenging for senior athletes, many that never got a chance to play their final season or celebrate their careers on Senior Day.

Take Conn College track and field standout Koko Mensah.

Mensah, a senior, was preparing to compete in the NCAA Division III Indoor Track and Field Championships in Winston-Salem, N.C., in mid-March when the NCAA canceled the competition due to the pandemic. As the third seed, she had a great opportunity to challenge for a national title in the

shot put and earn All-American honors.

On top of that devastating news, the New England Small College Athletic Conference had already called off its spring season.

Just like that, Mensah's career was over.

"It was very overwhelming at first, really upsetting," women's track coach Ned Bishop said in March. "Then realizing that none of this was directed at anybody in particular and it's a much bigger issue that everybody was having to deal with."

Throughout the spring, coaches stayed connected with their teams, running Zoom meetings and holding virtual workouts while student-athletes attended school remotely.

But they all badly missed the regular interaction and daily grind.

"As a coach, you don't realize how much you enjoy the struggle — win or lose — and the ramp-up, the planning, the emotion and the passion that you're going to pour into that struggle," CGA men's lacrosse coach Ray LaForte said at the time. "And now there's no struggle."

"As a coach, you don't realize how much you enjoy the struggle — win or lose — and the ramp-up, the planning, the emotion and the passion that you're going to pour into that struggle. And now there's no struggle."

COAST GUARD ACADEMY MEN'S LACROSSE COACH RAY LAFORTE

Summer brought optimism that the fall season could be salvaged.

Athletic directors put together game plans for a variety of scenarios with safety guidelines and protocols in mind. They remained hopeful but also realistic.

The news, however, continued to be bleak and the fall competitive season was lost as well.

Mitchell, Conn and Coast Guard quickly shifted focus to finding a way to give athletes a positive experience despite the circumstances.

Teams are practicing this fall, working out in small groups and with players wearing masks.

"Obviously, it's different from what it normally would be but we're embracing it," Mitchell women's soccer coach Marc Davis said. "The girls are pretty happy. We're getting creative with the sessions and they're working hard. So far, so good."

Coast Guard also is taking a creative approach, designating two hours six days a week as an athletic period. Fall teams work out about three days a week while two days — Wednesdays and Saturdays — are reserved for fun competition in

nine different sports for the entire corps.

"An athletic team, as you would imagine, that's one of the biggest mental health breaks you can have at a military academy," Rose said. "Being with your teammates, being with those people you're so close with, those are some of the tightest bonds. But we also don't want to take a step back to our peers at other schools. I talked to my (New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference) colleagues, they're doing the same thing on average three days a week."

"So we felt that we didn't lose anything there but we added this competitive element by putting in this competition."

What the future holds is as difficult to predict as the New England weather. The winter season is next in the crosshairs. The forecast is optimistic, though, with odds favoring a later start, most likely before the second semester begins in January.

There's a chance that fall sports teams could play games in the spring. The NCAA already has determined that there won't be any fall championships.

"For most colleges in America, they just want to provide something for their student-athletes," Rose said. "This year, it's probably not about the national championships the way things are going. To be able to roll out your seniors and acknowledge them on some type of a senior day, that would be a big deal."



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY
Eunice Sutphen, director of outreach for Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association, bags produce she and volunteers harvested in August at Groton Family Farm for the Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens program.

Neighbors helping neighbors

By STEN SPINELLA
Day Staff Writer

WHETHER IT WAS distributing food or personal protective equipment to those in need, helping people financially, supporting local businesses or simply bringing people joy and lightness during a dark period, the region showed a charitable and hopeful spirit during a rather uncharitable and sometimes hopeless time.

Combating hunger

Local nonprofit organizations as well as municipal departments hosted food giveaways throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of households were served in August by a Connecticut Food Bank mobile distribution event in New London. As was the case throughout the pandemic, all types of people volunteered their time: Ledge Light Health District representatives, city employees, college students, political leaders, residents and local business owners.

Area farms also found ways to get food to those who needed it. Groton Family Farms helped provide a bag of produce each week to Groton Housing Authority residents.

Some residents took it upon themselves to collect food for families in need. Area pastors and local leaders offered to pick up and deliver groceries, prescriptions and other essential items to residents at risk back in March.

The Groton Senior Center and others began an effort to provide dinners twice a week to those struggling during the pandemic in June.

Waterford's Youth and Family Services held regular food drives. Montville Senior and Social Services met the increased need for food during the pandemic, delivering between 250 and 300 meals a week to homebound seniors.

Department Director Kathleen Doherty-Peck recalled people calling the department after receiving their federal stimulus checks saying they wanted to donate the money.

"We saw a huge spike in the amount of people in need of food, with people getting laid off, and, as I have found in the past, the community's help always parallels its need," Doherty-Peck said.

Essential workers

The region found different ways to thank essential workers. New London restaurants often brought



SARAH GORDON / THE DAY



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Top, Kim Roche carries a tray of food to a car as a passenger gives a thumbs up to volunteers distributing ham dinners to local hospital employees in April at Filomena's in Waterford. **Above,** volunteer Betsy Higgins of Redding helps distribute food in August in the Fort Trumbull area of New London.

meals to Lawrence + Memorial Hospital. L+M received numerous donations of money, supplies and grants, including one for \$200,000 from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

In April, about 250 people employed at L+M, Backus Hospital and the Pequot Health Center received

ham dinners in the parking lot of Filomena's restaurant. Filomena's owner, Mike Buscetto, engineered the Easter meal with a number of partners, including the Waterford-based Cactus Jack Foundation.

"I would say people are even more generous during this time,"

Buscetto said.

"I feel good knowing that thousands of people are better fed, better clothed, and more importantly, their morale lifted, knowing they have a support system in their community," he added. "That's what makes eastern Connecticut a great place to live."

Essential workers were appreciative of the community's recognition. When group One Ledyard brought food to the Ledyard Regional Visiting Nurses Association in May, Karen Goetchius, administrator supervisor, said she and her staff, who care for sick residents throughout town, were honored by the delivery.

Random acts of goodwill

Some of the region's good deeds were meant to provide normalcy or comfort to people during the pandemic. Waterford tried to take care of its high school seniors, who had to miss the end of their final year in high school, by sending them little gifts of encouragement.

People got creative while battling the boredom of quarantine: The "A Life in One Line" project encouraged participants to write a single line encapsulating their lives to that point to be compiled into a book and serve as a time capsule of lives in the New London County area. Trivia nights held outdoors got families out of their homes in a safe manner.

In Mystic, resident Bill Furgueson sought to bring humor and human connection to his neighborhood by installing a board on his lawn and writing a new joke each day. One of Norwich's smallest congregations, the Unitarian Universalist Church, gave \$15,000 to Norwich Human Services to help residents facing hardships because of the pandemic. Religious and nonprofit organizations hosted events to help people and promote unity in the area.

And then there were the parades. Emergency responders supported the community by showing up to children's birthday parties and other special occasions.

A Facebook group, Make Some Noise :: New London Folks, encouraged friends and neighbors in New London to go outside every night at 7:30 and create a burst of sounds from pots and pans and instruments. It was meant to make people smile for a moment.



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

Dorothy Moreau laughs as she talks with social worker Jordyn Perlin on her 102nd birthday Aug. 10 at Bride Brook Health and Rehabilitation Center in Niantic. Moreau tested positive for COVID-19 in April and recovered.

‘Still keeping our guard up’

By TAYLOR HARTZ
Day Staff Writer

AS THE COVID-19 coronavirus spread throughout the world, then the country, then our very own towns and cities, it crept into unsuspecting homes and businesses, upending — and sometimes ending — lives.

The virus found its way into a nursing home in Niantic, infecting a 102-year-old. Into a mall, infecting a lawyer who brought it home to his Waterford family. It snuck into a New London home, infecting a 13-year-old boy and his mother. And it found its way into a home tucked away in the woods in Colchester, infecting The Day’s deputy managing editor, her husband and their children.

The virus was relentless and merciless, but many of its victims were strong and resilient. In total, an estimated 55,031 people contracted the virus in Connecticut and 50,546 are survivors.

In the southeastern region, New London, Groton, Waterford, East Lyme, Old Lyme, Lyme, Montville, Ledyard, Stonington, North Stonington and Colchester saw 1,279 confirmed and suspected cases, according to state data. There were 855 survivors.

In early March, Connecticut residents watched as COVID-19 case numbers soared in neighboring New York, encroaching on Fairfield County. They held their breath, waiting for the virus to arrive. And arrive it did.

A “1” popped up on a map of Waterford on the nightly news. It represented the home of Greg Massad, a lawyer, husband and father of five. He had begun to feel feverish while picking up a coffee in New London on March 18. He felt hotter and hotter throughout the day, with his temperature spiking to over 100 degrees. It would be nearly two weeks before that fever broke.

As soon as he recognized he was sick, Greg was sectioned off from his family. His three adult children — Alexa, 23, Erica, 23, and Matt, 20 — were home from their respective cities and schools to ride out the pandemic with their parents, not knowing they were walking right into its grip.

The virus made its way through his family members one by one. His wife, Kristin, was the next to get sick after caring for her ailing husband.

Alexa and Erica soon lost their senses of taste and smell, a common symptom of the virus.

Greg was the only one to actually be tested for the virus but, in the weeks after their illness, Kristin, and three of the Massad daughters



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Greg Massad, left, and his daughter, Alexa, of Waterford, sit outside in May at Muddy Waters in New London. The father and daughter both recovered from COVID-19.

tested positive for antibodies to the virus.

After a terrifying night during which Massad feared for his life, his fever broke. He had beaten the virus. They all would.

On May 20, the first day of the first phase of Connecticut’s reopening, Greg and Alexa were eager to get out of the house. The pair had lunch at Muddy Waters on Bank Street in New London — the coffee shop Greg was leaving when he first felt sick back in March. They sat at a table on the sidewalk, eating and drinking coffee, and later went out to dinner. Since they’d already survived the virus, they said they felt “a little bit of immunity.”

“I think we’re still being pretty cautious because even if we’re hopefully better off than people who haven’t had it, we’re still keeping our guard up,” said Alexa.

Though the family spent five long weeks inside, only venturing out to their driveway to pick up deliveries, they’ve been able to see the silver lining. Without anywhere to go, the family spent weeks of quality time together, binging television shows and playing games.

“I hate to say that it was pleasant, but it really was pleasant,” Kristin said. “I enjoyed the time with the kids.”

As life slowly returned to normal, they continued nightly family dinners and made an effort to support local businesses trying to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic.

Surviving two pandemics

In Niantic, Dorothy Moreau celebrated her 102nd birthday at Bride Brook nursing home, just a

few months after testing positive for COVID-19. The disease ripped through the nursing home, infecting 100 residents and killing 14.

But Dorothy, a survivor of the 1918 flu pandemic, survived once again.

Her advice on living a good life and surviving two pandemics? “Keep yourself, and be happy.”

The milestone birthday was a welcome celebration for the nursing home after an otherwise somber spring and summer.

Though people in Moreau’s age range are much more susceptible to the coronavirus, the young aren’t immune. In New London, 13-year-old Jeriel Suriel battled the virus in March. His mother, Angelly Suriel, was working as a patient care assistant at L+M when she got a call from her son, who said he was feeling sick.

For the next few days he had a myriad of symptoms, ranging from headache and fatigue to diarrhea and vomiting. His fever reached 104.9 degrees.

Angelly took her son for a COVID-19 test, but before she could get the results, he started having trouble breathing.

“He wasn’t getting any better yet. He was breathing hard. He wasn’t eating. He looked pale. It was awful looking at my child like that in that bed,” Suriel said, her voice breaking. “It was crazy. I broke into tears.”

On March 31, she took him to L+M twice. On the second visit, a doctor ordered a chest X-ray, which showed bad inflammation in Jeriel’s lungs. He was taken in an ambulance to Yale New Haven Hospital, since L+M was not admitting

children. He spent five days in the hospital, some of that time in the intensive care unit. On April 3, he went home to continue his recovery. Twelve days later, Angelly tested positive for the virus.

Neither Angelly’s boyfriend nor her three other children contracted the virus, and she and Jeriel have fully recovered, with no lingering symptoms.

Jeriel started high school in September and has visited with some of his friends and cousins, but is still wary of activities like sports, his mother said.

Though her son is quiet, she said she knows he was nervous to go back to school, but they’re trying to give it a chance while remaining vigilant.

“This time my back-to-school shopping cart was Lysol wipes, hand sanitizer, masks (and) travel size bottles for hand sanitizer,” she said.

Though they’re slowly returning to normal, COVID-19 is still on their minds every day. At her job at L+M, Angelly said she is constantly reminded of what they went through.

“I take care of (COVID-19) patients on a daily basis,” she said. “I look at the families of these patients and always get a flashback of what happened to me and my son, it was a nightmare that we would never forget.”

Ongoing headaches

In Colchester, 8-year-old Nora Gudelski and 13-year-old Xavier Gudelski navigated their way first through a harrowing month. First, their father, Brian Gudelski, who works at a nursing home, fell ill and was quarantined in the family’s basement. Then, their mother, The Day’s Deputy Managing Editor Iza-skun Larraneta, spiked a fever. She, too, tested positive.

Nora cried as she spent days separated from her parents, all confined to different parts of their home. But then, she and her older brother Xavier started to feel sick. Tests confirmed that they, too, had COVID-19. The family spent nearly a month fully quarantined in their home, hoping they’d survive.

The family recovered, sparing Larraneta’s mother from the virus by isolating her in a nearby hotel. Larraneta, who never suffered migraines before, is still plagued by headaches she thinks are related to COVID-19. Health experts are still figuring out the long-term effects of the disease.

Even though they’ve survived COVID-19, the family is just as pre-cautious as they were in March — if not more. They don’t know if they can get it again, but they know they don’t want to.

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Your efforts and dedication to our mission and community through the COVID-19 pandemic is obvious and deeply appreciated.

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Top, Garde Arts Center marquee in New London in March. **Above left,** friends Jacob Wirch, left, and Colin Miley of Avon use paddleboards rented from Black Hall Outfitters as they move along the water in August in Old Lyme. **Above right,** people listen to the Playbillies perform in August on the lawn of the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam. The outdoor concert was presented by Goodspeed Musicals, which had to cancel its 2020 musical season due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Theaters and arenas went dark

By KRISTINA DORSEY and RICK KOSTER
Day Arts Writers

SO MUCH FREE TIME, SO little to do: such was the case during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Entertainment venues shut down in mid-March, as so many other businesses did. Sites such as the Garde Arts Center, the Mohegan Sun Arena and Foxwoods' two theaters haven't been able to bring in audiences since.

So people couldn't cram into arenas to hear rock concerts or watch sports events. They couldn't file into theaters to see plays or musicals. They couldn't pop into a cinema to catch a flick.

Folks searching for diversions during the pandemic had to find new ways to amuse themselves.

During the first months of the lockdown in Connecticut, TV watching was, naturally, a popular pursuit, as was reading. Families went old-school, too, by joining together to play spirited rounds of Uno and Bananagrams and by figuring out jigsaw puzzles. The Bowerbird in Old Lyme was selling about 10 times as many puzzles as usual, owner Chris Kitchings said in April.

And many people turned to the great outdoors because it was available, but also because virus particles were known to disperse more easily outside and because nature provides an emotional boost. Hiking trails became a huge draw, so much so that the state had to close down some parks when the turnout became too great.

As the weather warmed up, getting out on the water became the thing to do. Businesses that rent kayaks and stand-up paddleboards noticed a major uptick in interest. Stonington Marina had seen a drop in kayak rentals over the past few years, but general manager Paul Kirrane said in August, "We've

"There is so much to reflect on, and how can I write without letting it in? I can't and I shouldn't. I feel such a bottomless sorrow for the world — for the illness, the loss of life, and the fear that is affecting us all."

OLD LYME BESTSELLING NOVELIST LUANNE RICE

seen about a 100% increase over last year. So the steady decline has completely reversed itself."

Getting creative

While multiplexes were shuttered, a throwback moviegoing experience returned to the fore: drive-ins. Misquamicut Drive-In Theater in Westerly drew film fans to see classic flicks like "Jaws" and eventually featured concerts, too.

As the restrictions eased up, a few more out-of-the-house options became available. People could eat outdoors at restaurants and eventually indoors — socially distanced, of course, with all the COVID-19 precautions in place.

Two local museums reopened during the summer. The Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme invited the public back on July 7 and the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London threw open its doors on June 30. The Lyman Allyn offered free admission through the end of September.

Samuel Quigley, director of the Lyman Allyn, said in September that the museum has seen "an incredible uptick (in attendance) — huge. Almost unprecedented since we opened on June 30, especially after the Peter Anton show opened on July 18. We started experiencing what we would normally expect for weekend days on the weekdays." It might have, for instance, 120 people on a Tuesday and then 115 on Thursday.

Why the increase? "Well, cer-

tainly people are looking for things to do. I think the free admission policy we put into place was a big part of that," Quigley said.

And, as they have had to do in so many ways since March, organizations got creative. Goodspeed Musicals couldn't stage musicals inside its intimate theaters, but it did present concerts on the lawn outside its iconic Opera House in East Haddam. The Norwich free summer concert series that was Rock the Docks at Norwich Harbor became Rockin' the Dodd, moving to Dodd Stadium, where socially distanced shows could happen. Those were organized by the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce. The Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra offered small ensemble performances in the fall at locales like Hygienic Art Park and Olde Mistick Village.

'Trauma we'll never recover from'

Writers and musicians, too, found ways to express themselves and communicate. Members of area bands learned to record virtually with one another, sharing files and compiling tracks and working on albums separately. Performing shows via YouTube and other social media became not sources of fan entertainment but a way of keeping the musicians creative and occupied.

Eric Stevenson, pianist, vocalist and songwriter of the art/pop duo Pocket Vinyl, said they had just started a national tour when the virus hit and they had to return home.

Relying on music as their sole means of support, Stevenson said they began to perform online concerts every Monday night, with merch sales and donations helping out.

"We were able to buy groceries, which has been a blessing," Stevenson said in May. As for getting used to the experience of performing for a virtual audience, he added, "It's definitely different playing to an inanimate object, but it helps a little to know there's an audience behind it. There's a different energy when you're in a room with people and they can call out requests or laugh or clap or sing along. That interaction is what makes a performance stronger. But streaming, you can at least see comments pop up and how many people are watching you."

Area authors, who are used to working in solitude, probably reported the least variance in routine. But each of several who spoke with The Day said as June rolled around that there were certainly differences, if only through the awareness of what was happening in the world.

Old Lyme bestselling novelist Luanne Rice said that, at a certain point, a sense of social suffocation and the cause of it began to creep into her work. "Concentrating on my revisions during the early awareness of the pandemic was nearly impossible, and I came close to missing my deadline," she said.

"There is so much to reflect on, and how can I write without letting it in? I can't and I shouldn't. I feel such a bottomless sorrow for the world — for the illness, the loss of life, and the fear that is affecting us all. Coupled with life in America under the Donald Trump presidency — he is so callous, so without compassion in the way he deals with the pandemic and everything else — I think we're experiencing a trauma we'll never recover from."



PHOTOS BY BETSY GRAHAM/SPECIAL TO THE DAY

Above, hikers maintain social distancing on the trail at Hartman Park in Lyme in March. **Below**, hikers pass beneath a forest canopy at Lyme's Pleasant Valley Preserve in July.

Beckoned by the call of the wild

Determined to continue exploring the outdoors but mindful of new social distancing restrictions, we avoided beaches and state parks that tended to attract hordes of visitors.

By **STEVE FAGIN**
Special to The Day

LAST MARCH, WHEN coronavirus shut down schools, offices, bars, restaurants, movie theaters, concert halls, sporting events, festivals and virtually every other place where people gather, our small band of hikers headed for the hills — literally.

Determined to continue exploring the outdoors but mindful of new social distancing restrictions, we avoided beaches and state parks that tended to attract hordes of visitors.

Instead, we tramped up and down trails in lesser-known but equally worthy nature preserves and wildlife sanctuaries, suffused with wildflower meadows, fern-be-decked fields, evergreen forests, moss-covered ledges, secluded ponds and tumbling streams.

Under the guidance of Maggie Jones, director emeritus of the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center in Mystic, our crew took in the sights and sounds while snacking on wild mushrooms, roots and berries.

We meandered past pools created by beaver dams, where spotted turtles basked on partially submerged logs, bullfrogs, as still as statues, crouched in the mud, and garter snakes slithered through the reeds.

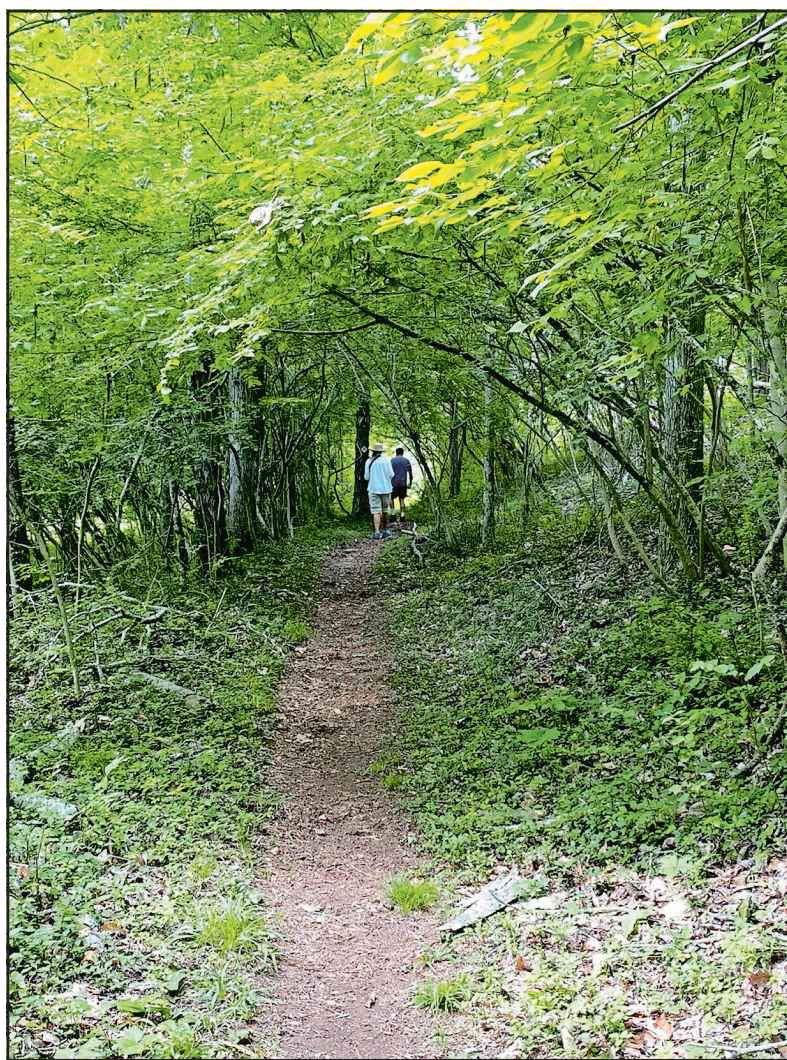
Off the beaten path

Maggie also identified countless butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies and moths that flitted by, along with scores of birds: barred owls, pileated woodpeckers, gnatcatchers, towhees, veeries, red-shouldered hawks, scarlet tanagers, hairy woodpeckers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, great blue herons, yellow-bellied sapsuckers.

During miles and miles of hiking on off-the-beaten paths, though, we rarely encountered other two-legged creatures.

We repeatedly asked ourselves, "Where is everybody?"

The answer: At Bluff Point in Groton, Harkness in Waterford, Rocky Neck in East Lyme and other popular state parks. In fact, so many people jammed these well-at-



tended places that authorities often had to lock the gates.

We had no such difficulty visiting such scenic sanctuaries as The Grills Preserve in Westerly, Pleasant Valley Preserve in Lyme, Ledyard Glacial Park, McCulloch Family Open Space in Old Lyme, Rock Spring Preserve in Scotland, Ayers Gap in Franklin, The Preserve in Old Saybrook/Westbrook and Walden Preserve in Salem.

We also had the Pawcatuck River mostly to ourselves during a 38-mile, multiday paddle from its source at Worden Pond in South Kingstown, R.I., to its mouth in Little Narragansett Bay between Westerly and Stonington.

Not long after completing that voyage, friends and I paddled on the Mystic River and were stunned

to see huge flotillas of kayaks plying from Old Mystic to Noank, past Mystic Seaport Museum and through downtown.

In addition, the pandemic has inspired a bicycling boom — not just here in southeastern Connecticut but around the globe, with a surge in sales not seen since the oil crisis in the 1970s encouraged so many people to cut down on driving.

The growing popularity of biking underscores the worthiness of such institutions as Bike New London, a nonprofit organization whose volunteers restore old bikes and offer them for resale. Their mechanics also offer repair services. More information about the group's Community Bike Shop is available at bikenewlondon.org. Whether hiking or biking, all

of us who enjoy the outdoors appreciate the value of preserving open space, either through land acquisition using public funds or from private donations.

Preserving open space

State parks are public-supported resources, while land preserves and wildlife sanctuaries have been established by local conservation organizations that rely on a combination of public and private contributions. These volunteer groups also devote countless hours clearing and maintaining trails; everyone who hikes on their properties owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Organizations that have preserved thousands of acres in our area include the Avalonia Land Conservancy, Connecticut Forest and Park Association, East Lyme & Niantic Land Conservation Trust, Friends of Oswegatchie Nature Preserve in East Lyme, Groton Open Space Association, Lyme Land Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Old Lyme Land Trust, Old Lyme Open Space Committee, North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance, Salem Land Trust, Stonington Land Trust, and Waterford Land Trust (originally West Farms Land Trust). The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association also has worked to preserve and provide access to the Pawcatuck River.

Check their websites or Facebook pages, as our group of hikers has, for directions to dozens of preserves open to the public. We've also relied on suggestions from readers eager to share their favorite hiking destinations.

Of course, you don't have to visit a state park or local land preserve to enjoy one of life's simplest yet most rewarding pleasures: walking.

It has been heartening to see so many families strolling around neighborhoods — a trend that expanded at the beginning of the pandemic and, one hopes, will continue when the COVID-19 dust eventually settles.

Steve Fagin writes a weekly column, *The Great Outdoors*, for The Day.



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