

Staying Healthy

SUMMER 2020

Inside:

Love and protect your skin	Page 12
Food assistance in Tri-Valley	Page 13
Reducing plastic pollution	Page 14

Mental health care during lockdown

Local therapists find new ways to treat patients as reports of anxiety, depression increase amid pandemic

By RYAN J. DEGAN

Much like the practice of wearing masks when venturing out in the world, feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression have become commonplace due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and local mental health professionals want residents who are experiencing these issues to know that they are not alone and help is available.

As the Bay Area's shelter-in-place order stretches on into its fourth month, health care professionals in the Tri-Valley continue to document increases of certain mental health issues and have expressed a desire for local leaders to not neglect the negative mental health effects brought on by the pandemic.

"While I think it's important and critical to have infection control during times of global pandemic, we need to maintain a wide-angle view of what is going on for the overall health of the individual and our community. The inclusion of mental health in that view is essential," said Dr. Daniel Jon Kostalnick, MD, FAPA, who operates an independent psychiatric medical practice in Pleasanton.

According to Kostalnick, as a result of the pandemic and subsequent isolating shelter-in-place order, many patients have had recurring feelings of depression and anxiety — among both children and adults. These issues are compounded by other safety concerns such as an increasing number of patients who are having thoughts of suicide and increasing occurrences of domestic violence in homes.

In some cases certain patients have been required to shelter-in-place with their abuser.

"A concern that is a very clear interest to me is the person's mental health," he added. "One of the things that I am very concerned about at this time is the suicidal patient, the patient that is isolated and alone, the patient who is not

available and able to access community resources, perhaps because they are older and shut in and they don't know how to access care."

Kostalnick encouraged county health officials to take these issues into account when crafting policies related to the shelter-in-place order and to consider the full health of a resident, both physical and mental.

"In my view, (for coronavirus coverage) there's been very rare occasions that I've seen any reference to mental health, especially in the news and media," he said.

When it comes to the practicality of meeting with patients, while he does provide telehealth services for patients who are comfortable with meeting online, Kostalnick is still able to meet with patients in-person as an essential business but he did implement certain safety precautions outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

'Recognizing how you're feeling can help you care for yourself, manage your stress and cope with difficult situations.'

NAMI

The precautions include the extensive use of bleach on all contact surfaces and using social distancing practices when meeting with patients. He also has open windows to the outdoors with fresh air that enabled him to decrease the potential for infection.

The National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) — which has a Tri-Valley affiliation located in Pleasanton — has recommended that



RYAN J. DEGAN

Brent Robery, clinical director at the Community Presbyterian Counseling Center, now utilizes video conferencing for therapy sessions, a move many mental health professionals have taken due to the coronavirus pandemic.

individuals who are concerned with the spread of the coronavirus contact their health care provider about teletherapy or mental health services online, a practice that has been adopted by many mental healthcare providers throughout the Tri-Valley.

Any patients worried about access to prescribed medications are also encouraged to ask their health care providers about getting 90-day supplies as opposed to a 60- or 30-day supply.

"It's common to feel stressed or anxious during this time. It may be especially hard for people who already manage feelings of anxiety or emotional distress. For example, for those of us with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), public health recommendations about contamination and hand washing may make it more difficult to manage our symptoms," NAMI officials said.

"Recognizing how you're feeling can help you care for yourself, manage your stress and cope with difficult situations. Even when you don't have full control of a situation, there are things you can do," NAMI added.

Local groups such as the Community Presbyterian Counseling Center (CPCC) and Discovery Counseling Center of the San Ramon Valley, for example, provide extensive teletherapy services for patients.

"There have been studies done

(on therapy sessions) that telehealth therapy is just as effective as in-person therapy," Brent Robery, director of the CPCC, told the Weekly. "Some therapists since the shelter in place have gone exclusively to (teletherapy)."

Depending on the mental health situation a patient is dealing with, teleconferencing is not necessarily right for everyone; however, Robery explained that teletherapy still offers patients a beneficial, and socially-distancing conscious, experience.

"It is different. For example, you're not in the same room with each other so you might not be able to see some physical responses. However, there is also the opportunity that if you are not in the same room as each other; people have the ability to feel more open because they are not feeling judged," he said.

Robery explained that while at first patients and even many therapists were hesitant to try telehealth, recently individuals have become more receptive to the idea. In fact, after first seeing a drastic drop in referrals, over the past couple of weeks more and more patients have begun seeking out therapy and counseling, he said.

Adding that as the shelter-in-place order continues to stretch on, he has also documented increased feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety, as well as abuse among individuals.

"When this first came out, I think

people kind of pulled back from therapy because they didn't know exactly how long this was going to be and so they thought that this will just be a couple weeks and we'll be back at it. But what we're finding now is just that people are getting a little stir crazy and they're willing to come back and some of the people that have not been willing to do the telehealth are willing to jump into it," Robery said.

He further added the financial strains are another source of anxiety for many, and while his counseling center will aim to assist patients in whatever way they can, therapists also need to be compensated in order continue their work.

Residents interested in learning more about how to receive care or being put into contact with a mental health professional can reach out to Crisis Support Services of Alameda County's 24-hour confidential crisis line at 800-309-2131 or CrisisSupport.org, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, via text at 800-799-4889, chat or at SuicidePreventionLifeline.org.

"Some people feel that crisis lines are only to be used in a crisis. The accessible and free mental health crisis services that these centers offer are especially vital during these times of social-distancing and are a vital service," Dr. Kostalnick added. "They can help overcome the barriers of access to service." ■

'Love the skin you're in' — and protect it

Entrepreneur from Danville on mission to prevent skin cancer

BY DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

When she was at San Ramon Valley High School in the 1980s, Christie Covarrubias worshipped the sun as much as any California teen. But as an adult, when her cousin Renee died at age 32 of melanoma, the dangers of sun exposure hit home.

"She was six months younger than I was, and we grew up at Lake Tahoe. I remember us getting sun-burned together," said Covarrubias, co-founder of Sun50, a company that sells protective clothing.

"I could not understand how this could happen to someone so young and healthy. It could have been me," she added. "Her passing definitely had an immediate impact on the way I raised my three daughters — who were raised on the Santa Monica beaches — wearing hats, swim shirts and sunscreen always."

Covarrubias graduated from UC Santa Barbara in 1991, then worked for Southern California companies in business development or marketing roles. In 2010, the family moved to Minnesota, and Covarrubias was surprised to

'I could not understand how this could happen to someone so young and healthy. It could have been me.'

Christie Covarrubias
Co-founder Sun50

learn it has the country's third highest incidence of skin cancer.

"The statistics prove no one is exempt from the perils of skin cancer," Covarrubias said. "The good news is we can minimize our UV exposure by adhering to sun-safe practices, even on cloudy days. Skin cancer is 90% preventable if we look after ourselves diligently."

Covarrubias saw a need for sun protective clothing that is trendy, fits well, and is soft to the touch,

but she said no one was providing it. She and husband Jim Lockhart decided to fill the void and founded Sun50, getting a loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Their mission includes being socially and environmentally aware.

"We take a slow-fashion approach to the sourcing, manufacturing and sustainability," Covarrubias said. "The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world."

A search for a manufacturer brought them to Los Angeles.

"My husband and I went to the site where the clothes are made and met with the owner and the lead supervisor, and took a tour," she recalled.

The clothes are not inexpensive, but the workers are paid well and work in a healthy environment, she noted. Everything is hand-cut and sewn, plus there is minimum waste.

"When it is done overseas, over 80% goes into landfills," she said.

Sun50 uses eco-friendly fabrics like Tencel and organic cotton to



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Christie Covarrubias co-founded Sun50 to provide sun-protective clothing that is trendy, fits well, and is soft to the touch. Her dog Myrtle is the company's top dog and mascot.

reduce its carbon footprint and they are at least UPF 50, meaning only 2% of ultraviolet radiation can penetrate.

The first line came out in January, and Covarrubias was making presentations at 10 to 15 events a month. She was also working with 5-star hotels about selling her clothing. Then COVID-19 struck.

"When the pandemic came around, our production was halted," Covarrubias said. "They started making masks and hospital gowns. We were in full support of that."

Online sales at Sun50.co also slumped, but now business is returning.

"Our sales are up again — people are starting to think about going on vacation or being outside on their boats and going for hikes," Covarrubias said. "Our best-selling item is the white beach shirt."

She said their bandanas are also popular.

"I have heard from customers they keep it in their purse and have an instant sun shield and face covering," she said. "They are pretty and washable and feel like silk."

And Sun50 has added masks to its offerings.

"We have done really well with the masks," Covarrubias commented. "I think they are here to stay."

Sun50 already had a partnership with Feeding America, but recent events spurred management to take more action.

During June, a portion of Sun50 sales are going to We Love Lake Street in Minneapolis to help rebuild businesses, many owned by immigrants; and to Eyekonz Field Hockey and Lacrosse, which uses these sports to teach life lessons to inner city girls and boys in Philadelphia.

"We can't ignore what happened," Covarrubias said. "There is an issue here. And it's our mantra: 'Love the skin you're in.'"

"We have always been about love your neighbor, but now it is more than ever so important," she added. ■

We've Missed You!!

We Are Open!

Thank you to everyone for your patience during the last few months!

We have resumed scheduling appointments for eye exams and other visits Monday – Saturday, with late evening appointments on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

To help limit the number of patients in the office and practice social distancing, **ALL VISITS** to the office will **REQUIRE AN APPOINTMENT!**

We have enhanced our safety and sanitation protocols and everyone entering the office must wear a mask or face covering and will have their temperature taken at check-in.

For added convenience, you can now schedule your appointment, order contacts and pay your balance online at www.fogeyes.net

We welcome you back and are here to serve your vision care needs!

463-2150
6155 Stoneridge Drive, Suite 100, Pleasanton
(at the corner of Stoneridge & Franklin, between Hopyard & I-680)
www.fogeyes.net

2017 & 2018

HIRED HANDS INC.
Homecare
Family owned and operated since 1994

Where the Client-Caregiver Relationship is Everything.

925-621-7650
HIREDHANDSHOMECARE.COM

CA License# 214700014

Tri-Valley ramps up food assistance efforts

Emergency food distribution site open at fairgrounds Tuesdays, Thursdays

By JULIA BAUM

A new drive-thru food pantry at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton is giving Tri-Valley residents facing hunger an easy and convenient way to access healthy food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The emergency food distribution site opened its operations earlier this month as part of a collaboration among partner agencies including the Alameda County Social Services Agency (ACSSA) and Alameda County Community Food Bank.

Nearly every aspect of daily life has been disrupted for most people since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, including being able to afford basic food items.

The number of Americans facing food insecurity is projected to jump from 37 million to 54 million this year due to COVID-19, according to Feeding America. The national organization recently declared that “demand for charitable food assistance has increased and is expected to continue to increase for the foreseeable future.”

The twice weekly drive-thru food distribution at the fairgrounds — also known as a community point of distribution, or C-POD — is a local response to the rapidly growing problem of food insecurity.

Replicating the same process as the Zhong Way Emergency Food Distribution site that’s been operating in Oakland since the end of March, Alameda County representatives said the fairgrounds C-POD “provides relief to area residents who have been hard hit by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“Making sure that every person in Alameda County has access to food during this difficult time is a priority,” said Supervisor Scott Haggerty, who represents District 1, including Livermore and Dublin. “I’m pleased that we are providing drive-thru emergency food distribution at the Alameda Fairgrounds.”

Close to 300 cars (or a total of 330 households) lined up for the first day of operation on June 2. Boxes filled with produce, meat and cheese provided from the California Association of Food Banks were loaded inside vehicles, following social distancing protocols.

“With the addition of a second food distribution site, we are able to expand our efforts to ensure that residents throughout the county have convenient access to the food resources needed to sustain them through this pandemic,” said Lori Cox, ACSSA director. “The county and partner agencies understand the importance of building and sustaining effective partnerships that are able to rapidly respond to the emerging needs of our community

during critical times like these.”

Last month, the county also launched an “all-out effort to raise public awareness” about CalFresh, the state’s food assistance program (known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), which currently serves about 131,000 county residents.

Public events have traditionally commemorated the month of May as CalFresh Awareness Month in Alameda County but the pandemic forced both organizations to regroup.

The digital outreach campaign, “Healthy Food When You Need It Most,” is an effort between Cox’s department and the food bank to educate the public on how to apply for CalFresh through social media, websites and email, and help connect residents to food distribution sites near them. With thousands of recent job cuts in Alameda County, new applications for CalFresh to ACSSA are up 120% from this time last year, and many more families and individuals in the area may be eligible.

Recent CalFresh policy changes triggered by COVID-19 include temporarily suspending the “Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents” (ABAWD) work requirement and interview requirement in some cases for CalFresh benefits, and providing emergency allotments to increase benefits to the maximum based on household size.

Due to school closures, children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals will also receive additional benefits to buy food called Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT. Families with children receiving CalFresh, Medi-Cal or foster care benefits do not need to apply.

“The need to increase awareness, outreach, and enrollment in CalFresh has never been greater, while reaching the public has never been more challenging,” Cox said.

As part of the campaign, more than 115,000 emails containing a link to apply online for CalFresh will be sent to those on the food bank mailing list. An online informational session for community-based organizations covering options to connect people with food benefits will also be organized by the food bank and ACSSA.

Pleasanton city officials have also given their support to local organizations that are providing food service to needy residents. Last month, the Pleasanton City Council agreed to fully fund the city’s annual human services grant requests this year, which include local nonprofits like Open Heart Kitchen, Axis Community Health, Sunflower Hill and Spectrum Community Services.

‘The need to increase awareness, outreach ... has never been greater, while reaching the public has never been more challenging.’

Lori Cox,
Social services director

See **FOOD ASSISTANCE** on Page 14




THE PARKVIEW
ASSISTED LIVING & MEMORY CARE IN PLEASANTON

Managed by **ESKATON**

Your Story, Our Inspiration.

A warm, welcoming and compassionate community awaits you.

Visit us today.

The Parkview
Assisted Living - Memory Care

925-401-7414 | eskaton.org/parkview

License #015601283



San Ramon high-schoolers target plastic pollution

Reusii sells reusable silicone bags to replace single-use plastics

By RIVA CHOPRA

In the midst of worrying about the personal health of ourselves and loved ones, issues like environmental health can often fall by the wayside. One group of local high-schoolers, however, recognized the influence that environmental health issues like plastic pollution can have on human communities.

Their solution? An online business, Reusii, which sells reusable silicone storage bags in an effort to lessen the use of plastics and prevent plastic pollution.

Led by six students from California and Dougherty Valley high schools, the group of 24 students who launched Reusii hail from seven different Bay Area

high schools. They originally met through an entrepreneurship program hosted by Junior Achievement of Northern California, which provided them with mentors who guided them through the process of building a company from the ground up.

“As a team we realized just how much plastic we use in our lives,” said Anish Lathker, one of Reusii’s heads of marketing, on what inspired them to tackle this environmental issue. “Coral reefs and other natural habitats are being destroyed due to plastic pollution. It’s a trickle-down effect in the sense that when these habitats are harmed; it starts a chain that affects everything else, including us.”

In addition, Lathker described

how constantly being surrounded by plastic products can increase the inhalation of microplastics that can be detrimental to human health.

Explaining how their product came to be, Lathker said, “When we began researching, we found there weren’t any proper alternatives to plastic that were easy, affordable, and useful. Our CEO, Rishika Vinnakota, had the amazing idea of creating a reusable silicone food storing bag.”

Now, the company sells the bags online at reusii.com in three different varieties: snack-, stash- and super-sized.

Lathker emphasized the ways in which they sought to improve on pre-existing reusable storage options.



REUSII

The Tri-Valley students who created Reusii aim for their food-safe silicone bags to be highly durable.

“We compared all of our competitors’ products to find any weaknesses or flaws to improve upon. Theirs may be reusable and dishwasher safe, but our products are also 25% cheaper on average, temperature safe and highly durable,” he said, citing that Reusii’s bags can be both frozen and microwaved safely.

Reusii also distinguishes itself from competitors by donating 10% of its profits to Project Aware and the World Wildlife Fund, both of which “work on reducing human impact on the environment and preserving wildlife,” according to Lathker. So Reusii customers can help the environment not only by purchasing eco-friendly products, but by directly contributing to prominent nonprofits dedicated to the cause.

Reusii was formed last fall, and its team has recently been looking to expand its scope. Earlier this year, they pitched their product to representatives of Clorox and Workday.

While the COVID-19 pandemic

stalled these endeavors, “an executive from Clorox who listened to their pitch remarked that their entrepreneurial acumen was MBA level extraordinary,” said Cristene Burr, CEO of Junior Achievement of Northern California and one of Reusii’s mentors.

Burr also noted that the students’ “commitment to reducing plastic waste through innovation and perseverance earned them a coveted spot in the National Student Leadership Summit,” highlighting the success of Reusii thus far and its potential going forward.

Junior Achievement of Northern California board member Mark Linsky expressed similar optimism for the future, saying that “the Reusii team has demonstrated incredible leadership, business acumen, teamwork and other 21st century skills” which leave them “well-positioned to be successful in careers where they can have an even greater impact with their passion for improving the environment.” ■



Works of Hope

Hope Hospice invites individuals to create and/or donate existing artwork that will be distributed to hospice patients in homes and nursing facilities in the Tri-Valley area.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE



- ◆ Make a piece of art in a medium of your choosing that can be displayed on a wall or tabletop.
- ◆ Donate a piece of existing art.
- ◆ Recruit friends or family to participate.
- ◆ Collect and deliver artwork contributions to the Hope Hospice office in Dublin.

(925) 829-8770; HopeHospice.com/art

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Continued from Page 13

City staff have also been helping Tri-Valley Haven pack and deliver groceries to seniors during the pandemics and doing meal preparation alongside Open Heart Kitchen at Ridgeview Commons Kitchen on a daily basis.

“The city historically has partnered and supports many local organizations and nonprofits to serve our residents in most need pre-pandemic. During the pandemic, the city continues to work with local nonprofits,” city

spokesperson Cindy Chin told the Weekly, including assisting Open Heart Kitchen with meal distribution at the Pleasanton Senior Center.

CalFresh recipients can now also use their benefits online to purchase groceries at retailers such as Amazon and Walmart.

The emergency food distribution site at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, located at 4501 Pleasanton Ave., is open Tuesdays and Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The schedule may change according to demand. Food is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. ■



Fresh news delivered daily

Sign up today at PleasantonWeekly.com/express