

Staying Healthy

FALL 2020

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Go To The doctor

Hospital officials warn against postponing regular exams, procedures over fear of virus

By RYAN J. DEGAN

With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic keeping many residents in their homes in an effort to avoid the potentially deadly contagion, some Tri-Valley hospitals have noted a decrease in the number of patients making medical visits out of fear of contracting the virus.

Some people have even gone so far as to postpone medical needs and non-essential surgeries out of concern over COVID-19 exposure; however, local hospital officials want residents to know that they are still open to safely fulfill all medical needs and that proper policies and procedures have been put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

“We currently have a backlog of patients who delayed their surgery. Some of these patients have unnecessarily made these already difficult months even more difficult for themselves by placing their health on the back-burner,” Dr. Saqib Hasan, a spinal surgeon

at San Ramon Regional Medical Center, told the Weekly.

While there are some cases in which it is safe and perhaps even advisable to postpone a surgery, Hasan said that every precaution has been taken to ensure that the hospital is sanitary and safe. He noted that certain complications can arise from postponing certain surgeries and patients need to consult with their physicians prior to making a decision.

“When it comes to surgery, there are some potential permanent problems from delaying care. For example, in spine surgery, muscular weakness from nerve compression can sometimes be irreversible if there is a prolonged delay,” he added.

Hasan did note that while there was a more noticeable dip in patients visiting the hospital at the beginning of the pandemic, recently there has been a steady increase in the volume of patients returning for various levels of care.

“In general, we want to make



MIKE SEDLAK

Tri-Valley hospitals like Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare in Pleasanton are urging residents not to postpone routine or recommended medical appointments and procedures during the pandemic, after noting a decrease in patient turnout since March.

sure our patients feel safe coming to the hospital and they aren't putting their health care needs on the back-burner, which can cause issues down the line. We are running a very safe, efficient hospital for patients to receive care,” Hasan said.

To keep patients safe from the virus when visiting, hospitals throughout the country have been practicing strict policies and procedures aimed at preventing the spread of the pandemic.

Pleasanton's Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare, for example, has implemented a number of policies geared toward combating the virus, policies primarily based off recommendations from county, state and local government health officials.

“We have an established interdisciplinary task force led by infection control practitioners, focused on developing response plans for infectious disease outbreaks (including COVID-19) in alignment with CDC recommendations,” Denise Bouillercce, ValleyCare's director of government and community relations, told the Weekly.

“(Stanford-ValleyCare) is continuously adapting procedures and policies based on new information and guidance from the county, state and local governments,” she added.

According to Bouillercce, at Stanford-ValleyCare policies enacted to protect hospital patients, visitors

and staff from the virus include:

- Visitor policy restrictions and expanded access to video visits limit the number of possible exposures.
- Universal masking and screening procedures for staff, patients and visitors
- Employees are tested for COVID-19 using methods developed by Stanford Medicine.
- Waiting rooms and clinics are arranged for physical distancing.

Stanford-ValleyCare and San Ramon Regional have also mandated that all patients are tested for the virus before their procedures, enhanced cleaning measures are in place and staff equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE), including gowns, gloves and masks.

“Every precaution is being taken, combining strong infection prevention processes, staff training, testing and ample supply of personal protective equipment. We are committed to universal protection and safety for every person who walks through our doors,” Hasan said about San Ramon Regional.

Hasan added that every patient and visitor who enters the hospital is screened for fever and other signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and hospital staff complete a coronavirus-related screening questionnaire every day as well as receiving temperature checks

when entering the building.

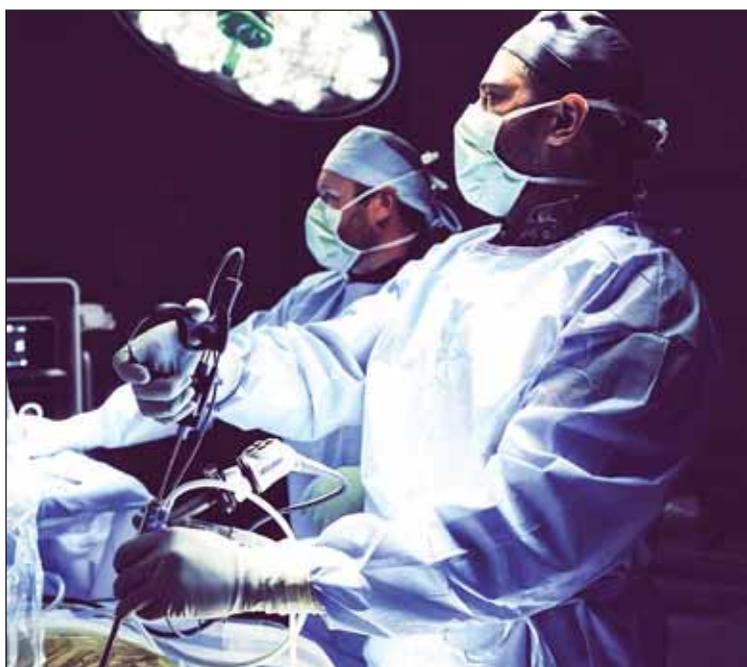
Diligent sanitation protocols are also followed at both hospitals, officials said.

“If you are in need of care or have questions about your health, please don't hesitate to reach out to us whether it's through the emergency room or through your physician. We have safe practices in place and your health is our No. 1 priority,” Bouillercce said.

Stanford-ValleyCare currently operates a public testing site at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, Gate 12 located off Valley Avenue, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon — or while supplies last. The testing site is open to residents of Pleasanton, Livermore and Dublin with no out-of-pocket expenses.

No appointment is needed to receive a test, which is available for residents who show symptoms or have been in close proximity with someone who has tested positive. Residents can learn more online at www.valleycare.com.

The San Ramon Valley's drive-thru testing site can be found at Bishop Ranch, 2600 Camino Ramon, in San Ramon. To make an appointment for a fast, no-cost test at any site in Contra Costa, residents can call 844-421-0804 or visit www.coronavirus.cchealth.org — online scheduling is available at most sites. ■



SRRMC

San Ramon Regional Medical Center spinal surgeon Dr. Saqib Hasan (front) says hospitals are doing everything they can to keep patients safe from COVID-19.

Anxiety is challenging many kids during pandemic

Mental health experts caution about too much screen time, loss of routine

By JULIA BAUM

Sheltering in place and remote learning are the new way of life for many Tri-Valley residents, and local mental health experts have recently stepped up to help parents and children better understand and recognize the potential risks and signs of anxiety related to long-term isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As residents pass the half-year mark since schools and many office buildings first closed to stop the spread of COVID-19, Dr. Jennifer Penney of Axis Community Health in Pleasanton told the Weekly that she has observed an increase in the need for mental health and counseling services.

“Usually depression and anxiety are the most common reason people come to counseling at Axis in particular, but we’ve seen such an uptick ... because of the pandemic taxing everybody’s resources and ability to cope,” Penney said. “We’re seeing that people who have never experienced depression before are now experiencing it, just due to the difficulty coping right now.”

According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.” The disorder affects an estimated one in three youths and can manifest itself in many ways.

Local family therapist Vanessa Varrelman, who works mostly with elementary-age students, also reported seeing more young clients with anxiety in recent months.

“I would definitely say anxiety has increased,” Varrelman said. “I definitely think that anxiety has increased around the pandemic but also just having their routine disrupted. It stands to reason that anxiety would be increased because routines are disrupted.”

Anxiety appears in both young and older people, as well as depression, but experts said the conditions can present differently in children.

“For kids, it’s sometimes hard for them to articulate what’s going on. They have difficulty putting words to their feelings and experiences,” Penney said.

It’s not uncommon for parents to notice changes in their child such as acting out, an increase in aggression or irritability, somatic complaints about headaches or stomach aches, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, bed-wetting or not paying attention in class.

With many potential distractions at home while trying to learn via virtual platform, though, Penney said it’s important for parents to remember “it’s more that (the child’s) maybe not comprehending the material, such as a kid that was learning normally and now they’re spacing out during class or not watching their video for school.”

Parents can and are encouraged to help their child avoid too much screen time outside of online schooling but have struggled with finding the right amount. Many want their child to still socialize with their friends over Zoom and feel connected but also interact with their real surroundings.

“There needs to be a limit on screen time, but right now families are in a space where they’re trying to balance the kids’ need to be on screens more,” Varrelman said. “We’re all in the same space together trying to navigate it, figure it out. We can only go on what best practices are, and trial and error.”

Mannie Nimmo — one of the co-founders of the Pleasanton-based Z-Cares Foundation, which specializes in mental health first aid training and public education about youth anxiety and depression — said parents ask her “a lot” now how much screen time during a pandemic is too much.

“They spend extra time in their room, but they have to because of schooling. So it’s, ‘where does that excess come into play and

what are the differences?’ That’s one of the questions that I get asked a lot,” Nimmo said.

Structuring screen time is important, so Penney said “it’s important to schedule in time for talks with friends since they can only do it virtually right now” and just try to find the right balance between virtual and real world activities instead.

“It’s a very individual issue for families, so the most important thing is for families to sit down and talk about it directly,” Penney said. “I see black-and-white extremes oftentimes. Some families have open ended and no structure, or the flipside is the parents are very stringent and have very limited hours, which

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Take a break from stress and anxiety

Library has books to educate, entertain and open new worlds

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

The Pleasanton Public Library has become a beacon of caring and sharing during the pandemic, as patrons old and new turn to it for information, education and pure escapism.

“We have all kinds of resources to help people find their next great read,” librarian Julie Eseltine said. “We are always happy to share our favorite books, and if we find out what they like and what their interests are, we can make recommendations.”

“If people are looking for ways to do self-care, if they need pointers on that topic, we have different things in the collection about taking care of themselves,” Eseltine added, citing books on healthy diet, meditation and trying yoga.

In normal times, the library had regular patrons as well as newcomers, and many would approach the desk to say they did not know what to read next, Eseltine said.

“We start with what you have read that you like, and can try and find books in a similar style or on the same theme,” she said. “Or we can expand on the topic from another perspective. There are all kinds of ways to get someone to their favorite book.”

When shelter-in-place began, the library expanded its online services, and now webpages offer suggestions, such as “Book Club Selections,” “Quirky Books” and “A Little Obsessed with Magical Realism” as well as recently reviewed books.

The library has kept its eight librarians full-time, as well as clerks and administrators, who alternate going into the facility and working from home to keep social distancing.

They staff the phone from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday each week to answer questions and recommend books the individual might enjoy. Inquiries can also be made via email. And librarians continue to advise patrons on how to set up their devices to download digital books as well as movies and documentaries.

The latest innovation, Eseltine said, is book bundles put together by staff.

“There is a menu of a dozen different selections, kids’ books in age ranges, adult materials, and Chinese materials and Spanish



NICK BINZONI

Librarian Susan Dickinson places books in the back of a vehicle for a patron who requested them on the website.

materials,” she said. “One group who really appreciates this is parents of kids who like picture books.”

The library normally circulates millions of items a year, Eseltine said, and curbside pickup, which began in June, has been a boon for readers.

“It is a system we’ve had to create, out of various parts of software, pivoting from our normal routines,” she said.

Patrons reserve books online, are notified when they are ready, and text when they leave for the library. Once there, the books are brought out and placed into the back of the vehicle. Returned books go through a four-day quarantine.

“The last number was 400 items per day newly placed on hold,” Eseltine said. “Our staff are embracing it enthusiastically. This is why we exist — to get resources for education and entertainment into the hands of people who want to use it.”

Anyone can log onto their website (via www.cityofpleasantonca.gov) and get a library card within minutes.

“The best advice I’ve seen is to find things that make you happy, that transport you and give you a break if you’ve been feeling stress or anxiety,” Eseltine said.

Those who cannot go online can telephone 931-3400 to request books for curbside pickup. ■

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Two healthy recipes to try

Cookbook author says family is thriving in the kitchen

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Christina Gray, Pleasanton photographer, author and real estate professional, also has made it her mission in life to develop healthy recipes and share them with others. And since the pandemic began, cooking has become a family affair with husband Lonnie and son Ethan, 16, and daughter Lauren, 14, both students at Amador Valley High School.

“The kids have had time to really dive into cooking and baking, and it was our most precious family time every day,” Christina Gray said.

For healthy meals, they came up with new recipes for chicken piccata and shrimp fettuccini, which are now in regular rotation.

“And if it can be skewered and put on a barbecue, we have done it,” Gray said. “That is an excellent way to keep things low in fat and calories but high in flavor.”

But Gray said the “meal winner” in her home during isolation has been a recipe she developed for the Sept. 11, 2014, “Chili

Cook-Off” in Dublin — which she won.

“This chili recipe is a great combination of both carbohydrates and proteins that come from vegetables, legumes and meat,” she added. “It freezes great, and if you’re a vegetarian you can easily omit the meat and substitute extra beans and vegetables.”

The list of ingredients is long, she admitted, but that is what makes it different from other chili recipes, which was important when entering the contest.

“It may look intimidating at first but it’s worth a family meal adventure to make it,” she said.

Gray published a cookbook in 2015, “Be Free Cooking — The Allergen Aware Cook,” which was named a bestseller for the year by Towne Center Books. She said the recipe from this book that gets the most compliments for being tasty is Tabbouleh Quinoa.

“This dish is a favorite of mine to make

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ANXIETY

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stresses out the parents and kids with trying to keep it at a minimum.”

By checking in with themselves about how they’re also feeling, parents can help their children better cope with remote learning and isolation, according to Varrelman.

“Kids’ success is a direct correlation with how the adults around them are handling it,” Varrelman said. “It’s equally as important for parents to be mindful and take care of themselves so that they can be a better support to the student. The thoughts and feelings (kids) have are directly related to the thoughts and feelings that parents are having about (COVID-19).”

Many of Samantha Nimmo’s peers in college are grappling with a daily case of déjà vu: “It’s good to have routine but at the same time, if you’re doing the exact same thing at the exact same time, every single day, that’s going to get really repetitive,” she said. “I’ve had a lot of people tell me they feel like they’re living the same day over and over and over again, and they’re bored.”

To stave off some of the monotony that can contribute to anxiety, Samantha Nimmo suggests “doing the same things you do every day but in different places” like a set amount of time for taking a walk or painting every day.

“Something different that you don’t usually do — it’s just a little change, but even that little change can really flip your whole day around,” Samantha Nimmo said.

Sometimes a specialist is needed, however, and whether for a child or grownup, finding professional help during a global health crisis is more difficult but not impossible. Steve Nimmo said Z-Cares recently revamped their mental health first aid training system to respond accordingly during the pandemic.

“The National Council of Behavioral Health, who certifies us, they came up with a Zoom solution to the training, so we were able to get that turned back on. We’re now again conducting mental health first aid trainings virtually on Zoom,” Steve Nimmo said.

“You miss a lot of nonverbal cues when you’re on virtual versus non-virtual,” Steve Nimmo said. “We can see from the shoulders up but we might not see the fidgeting hands

or feet wiggling around ... so I think you miss some of that.”

Virtual counseling doesn’t work for all patients, but Mannie Nimmo said it’s resonating with a lot of kids who have anxiety: “People with social anxiety, you’re not in a room with people, so you’re in your own home, your own space, you’re in a more comfortable environment, which can be helpful.”

“It’s been a mixed bag. On one hand, we have kids or adults who are either fearful to go out in public because of the pandemic or have agoraphobia and are just afraid of going out,” Penney said. “Some have chosen to put counseling on hold until they can be seen in person.”

Steve Nimmo recounted the recent successes of a Chicago therapist that he knows counseling patients over the internet.

“He did say a lot of the kids will like to go jump on Zoom and they do it from their own room, and they feel super comfortable about it,” Steve Nimmo said. “They might have a hard time even getting up and going into the office but it’s not so hard for them to open their computer in their room and have a conversation with them. That’s certainly the positive side of it, that they’re working in a comfortable space.”

Many experts agreed that they are likely to continue offering telehealth services after the pandemics, though Penney and Varrelman said some patients need or prefer in-person therapy, such as play therapy for small children.

Varrelman has offered some in-person treatment including play therapy for children during the pandemic, but under strict safety guidelines like wearing a face mask, practicing social distancing and disinfecting all toys as well as laminating or printing single-use worksheets.

Axis also switched to telehealth services within a week of sheltering starting; since spring, 17 licensed clinicians have conducted counseling sessions via video or phone. “That’s been the case since March and will continue until it’s determined to be safe to be indoors without masks,” Penney said.

For more information and resources about anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders, visit www.zcares.org or www.axishealth.org. ■



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Smoke gets in your eyes? Not good

Wildfires bring another health threat to town

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Recent wildfires have been a particular challenge this year. Just when everyone thought the healthiest place was outside, suddenly it wasn't.

"The air quality impacts of these wildfires burning throughout Northern California are a testimony to the ongoing harmful impacts of climate change," said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, as wildfires caused elevated levels of smoke pollution in late August. "It's important for us all to continue to be vigilant and stay indoors as smoke continues to impact the region."

Wildfire smoke contains fine particles that are respiratory irritants which, when inhaled deeply, can affect the lungs and the heart, according to the Alameda County Public Health Department. Exposure to high concentrations of these fine particles can cause a persistent cough, a runny nose, phlegm, wheezing and difficulty breathing.

ACPHD officials cautioned those with respiratory conditions, compromised immune systems or other significant health issues, but noted that exposure to wildfire smoke can affect healthy people, too. It can cause respiratory symptoms as well as reductions in lung function, including the ability to remove foreign materials from the lungs, such as pollen and bacteria.

When wildfire smoke is in evidence,

residents are advised to do following:

- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed.
- Keep indoor air cool or visit an air-cooling center.
- Set home and car ventilation systems on recirculate to prevent drawing in outside air.
- Stay hydrated by drinking water.
- Limit or avoid outdoor activities.
- Use an air filter, especially for household members with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory conditions, or elderly persons and children.
- Avoid using wood-burning stoves or fireplaces, lawn mowing, leaf blowing, burning candles and incense, barbecuing, smoking.
- If possible, leave the affected area for the duration of a heavy smoke event.

The air district also advises residents to keep polluted air out of their homes by caulking windows and using weather-stripping under doors. Windows and doors can be sealed with paper towels held in place with painter's tape.

If adults must go outdoors, they may benefit from wearing an N95 mask, according to Kaiser Permanente, which can block the fine particulate matter in smoke.

Kaiser also noted that irritation or swelling in the air passages may not be noticed until several hours after exposure to smoke. If impacted, it advises the following:

- Get plenty of rest and sleep; your energy

level will improve with time. Prop up your head on pillows to help you breathe and ease a cough.

- Suck on cough drops or hard candy to soothe a dry or sore throat.
- Take cough medicine if your doctor tells you to.
- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you.
- Avoid things that may irritate your lungs, which include cold, dry air or hot, humid air.

Call your doctor if you cough up yellow, dark brown or bloody mucus; if your coughing or wheezing gets worse; or if you do not start to feel better.

The air district continually monitors the air and posts Spare the Air alerts. Sign up for text alerts by texting the word "START" to 817-57; register for email AirAlerts at www.sparetheair.org; call 1-800-HELP-AIR; download the Spare the Air App; or connect with Spare the Air on Facebook or Twitter. ■

RECIPES

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during the summer because the lemon and mint make it so light and refreshing," she said.

She also noted, "Not all lemons are the same: Some lemons are very sweet while others are tart. If you find your dressing is too tart, just add a pinch of sugar."

Gray said her cooking changed at first when sheltering in place began.

"The pandemic encouraged us to eat things mostly from the pantry or freezer," she said. "We tried to leave the house as little as possible so we even froze many of our vegetables so we would have them on hand."

They also baked "countless cookies and cakes."

"It was a bright spot in an otherwise scary situation of COVID-19, death, isolation and virtual schooling," Gray said. ■



CHRISTINA GRAY/BELLA LUNA STUDIOS

Tabbouleh quinoa

Ingredients:

- 2 cups water
- 1 cup quinoa
- 2 green onions, chopped

- 1/4 cup mint, chopped
- 1/2 cup parsley, chopped
- 1/2 cup cucumber, peeled and diced
- 1/2 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

Dressing:

- 1/4 cup olive oil
 - 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
 - 1/4 tsp salt
 - 1/4 tsp black pepper
- In a medium pot, bring water to a boil. Add quinoa, stir well, cover and turn heat to low. Cook for 20 minutes or until liquid has been

absorbed. When quinoa has cooled, add the green onions, mint, parsley, cucumber and cherry tomatoes. Mix well.

In a small sealable container, add the dressing ingredients and shake well. Drizzle the dressing over the quinoa and mix. Serve warm or cold for a delicious meal.

(For added flavor, include cubed avocado or a sprinkle of cayenne pepper.)



CHRISTINA GRAY/BELLA LUNA STUDIOS

Cook-off chili

Servings: 8

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Cook time: 60 minutes (simmer up to 2 hours)

Ingredients:

- 1 roasted and seeded pasilla pepper
- 1 lb ground beef (85% lean)
- 1 lb ground pork
- 1 tsp Most Powerful Stuff (brand of salt blend) or seasoned salt
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3 tbsp chipotle peppers in adobo: 2 tbsp of the liquid and 1 tbsp chipotle pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 15 oz kidney beans, drained
- 15 oz pinto beans, drained
- 28 oz crushed tomato
- 1/2 cup water

- 1 tbsp white sugar
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp cacao, unsweetened
- 2 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Roast the pasilla pepper over an open flame, either on your BBQ or gas range. Blacken the skin on all sides. Once black, remove from heat and place in a paper bag or covered container (to help the blackened outer layer pull away from the flesh of the pepper). Once cool, carefully scrape away the black outer layer. Cut the pepper lengthwise and scrape the seeds away. Chop the seeded roasted pepper and set aside. (Roasting step can be skipped if necessary.)

2. Cook the ground beef and pork in a large pot over medium heat.

3. Add 1 tbsp Most Powerful Stuff or seasoned salt and mix well. Once cooked, drain the meat and set aside.

4. In the same pot, heat the oil over medium heat.

5. Add finely chopped bell peppers, onion, garlic and roasted pasilla

pepper and saute for about 10 minutes.

6. Add chipotle peppers, kidney beans, pinto beans, tomatoes and water. Stir well. The chipotle peppers in adobo are very spicy, so if you prefer less heat consider reducing or omitting this ingredient. Be mindful of the seeds, which are the spiciest part of all.

7. Add white and brown sugars, cacao, chili powder, cumin, salt and pepper. Add more or less to taste.

8. Add the cooked meat back into the pot and mix well.

9. Simmer on low for 60 minutes with the lid on. Stir frequently so the bottom doesn't burn.

The longer it simmers, the more the flavors develop.

10. For those who prefer meatless, this recipe is easy to modify so have fun with it. Add in your favorites — extra beans, bell peppers, fresh tomatoes, whatever your taste buds desire. You will have a hearty and delicious meal in any direction you take this.

11. Enjoy!

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Sunflower Hill releases face mask awareness video

Aimed at helping adults with developmental disabilities navigate pandemic

By EMMA HALL

Sunflower Hill released an educational video last month expressing the importance of wearing a mask for adults with developmental disabilities.

The video was created alongside Sunflower Hill's online activities program. In response to COVID-19, Tri-Valley nonprofit has adapted to online-based education.

"It's important for us to know that we are not alone when learning a new skill," said Emily Corerria, the director of Enjoy Life More, an adult day program in Livermore. "This video is a useful tool to remind us that we can work through problems with a little help from our friends."

Sunflower Hill partnered with Robert Half, a global staffing firm with locations in the Tri-Valley and a longtime supporter of the nonprofit, for the recent video.

"When this year's program went virtual due to the pandemic, it was only natural to continue supporting the organization — but in a different format," Roy Cook, senior program manager at Robert Half, said in a statement. "By producing a video on the importance

of wearing masks, and presenting it in an educational and approachable manner, we hope to help Sunflower Hill's program participants and the community at large."

The video discusses the importance of wearing a mask and following health guidelines in public places, particularly in stores.

Rachel Clark, communications and administration manager at Sunflower Hill, hosted in the video with tips on how to social distance.

For example, she stated to imagine holding a pool noodle with your arms out, a strategy she said should help maintain a six-foot distance between people. She also talked about when shopping at a store to limit the things you touch and follow the signs of the store.

Overall, she emphasized that wearing a mask is a part of a team effort to protect one's self and others around them.

"It was important for us to create a face mask video resource for both our program participants and our new residents at Sunflower Hill at Irby Ranch," Sunflower



Rachel Clark (left), communications and administration manager at Sunflower Hill, shares a peek behind the scenes on the set of the nonprofit's face mask video.

Hill Executive Director Edie Nehls said in a statement. "(We need) a platform for discussion about

masking wearing and how that impacts social interactions. We created the video to ensure our

program participants continue to feel supported and confident both when going out in public." ■



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