

Staying Healthy

WINTER 2021

Inside:

- Robot kitties for comfort Page 13
- Food allergy solutions Page 14
- Cancer care collaborative Page 15

Feeling the burn (and cold)

Winter weather doesn't stop Tri-Valley residents staying fit amid pandemic

By JULIA BAUM

Getting in shape is a common New Year's resolution for many people, but doing so during inclement weather while also sheltering in place poses unique challenges in 2021.

Several Tri-Valley fitness centers and personal trainers shared their advice and tips with the Weekly, as well as what it's like taking — and teaching — an outdoor gym class during the wetter months.

After closing suddenly for in-person classes and training by public health order 11 months ago, along with other local gyms and fitness studios, Razi Hasni, founder and owner of Joya Yoga in Pleasanton, Livermore and Dublin, said his studio “did pretty well, we pivoted pretty quick into online fitness” because a full virtual lifestyle channel of theirs was already in the works.

The COVID-19 pandemic expedited development of Joya Soul TV, which now offers live streaming and on-demand classes, in addition to nutrition analysis and wellness workshops, by paying a monthly subscription. However, a number of Tri-Valley trainers are also holding open-air fitness classes in local parks, as well as specially assembled tents.

Outdoor classes for yoga and Pilates pose some challenges — “We’ve set the tent up with heating and lighting ... but it still has its drawbacks, it’s still not the same as an indoor class,” Hasni said — but offer a much-needed sense of community by providing “the human connection, that’s more important than anything else.”

“We’re seeing more meditation-minded individuals, focusing on the wellness aspect of their health,” Hasni said. “The people that are coming are more interested in building strong, resilient immune systems. That’s why they’re coming, and they’re vocal about it.”

“Even during the rain, we held outdoor fitness classes, you’d be surprised,” he added. “We had leaks in our tent but people came in. It helps them deal with the current situation.”

Alicia Ambrosini, manager of Brick Fitness Center in Pleasanton, said, “Transitioning to outdoor classes has been successful for us. People still need fitness, they need it physically, emotionally, mentally ... that’s been the glue that has held our membership together.”

Since moving to outdoor classes last June, Ambrosini said, “Having a tent has been critical, given the weather, both the hot summer days and the rain and cold as well.”

“I’ve been inspired by our membership;

weather is not slowing them down,” she added.

While Brick offers virtual courses and training that people can do in the comfort of their home, Ambrosini said in-person classes offer a chance to unplug.

“People are on their screens all day long and tired, they’re craving that normalcy,” Ambrosini said. “They’re also having more success coming in person versus having to show up on a computer screen.”

“We hear it countless times — it’s an outlet for them to get away from a screen, get away from another Zoom call,” she added.

Some people are reluctant to attend outdoor classes, but both Hasni and Ambrosini said it’s very possible to create a gym at home with smaller mobile pieces of equipment such as kettlebells, barbells, jump ropes and resistance bands.

Even food cans can be used to substitute for kettlebells, “or anything else that’s similar to the weights you’re using,” according to Hasni.

Hasni also suggested creating “a space dedicated to spending time with yourself inside your home that will be conducive with you following through with a workout.” If you don’t have an extra room, separating a workout space from your regular living space with a wall divider or curtain will also work.

“Enough space to put a yoga mat down without the hindrance of hitting a wall,” Hasni said.



RYAN J. DEGAN

Tri-Valley fitness centers and gyms have been flexing their creative muscles in order to adapt to social and business restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic, with some electing to host clients outdoors. Here, Natalie Kiff exercises outside at Pleasanton’s Brick Fitness.

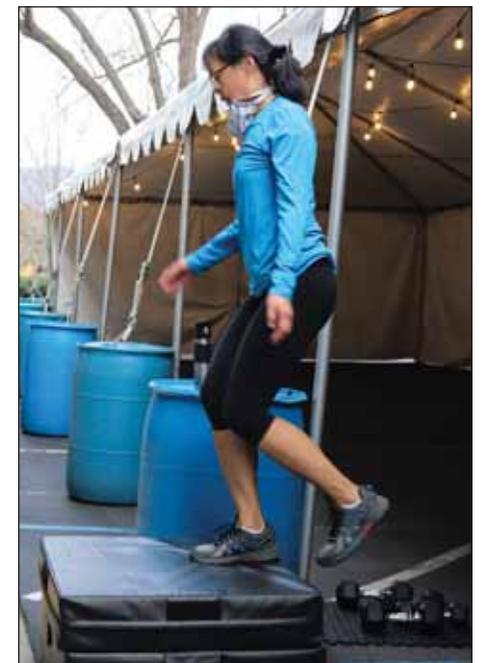
Ambrosini said her team is “encouraging everyone to be as healthy as they can in these trying times,” and reminded people to “hang in there and try and do the best you can. Get back to that routine.”

Even if it’s just 15 or 20 minutes a day, Hasni said “just dedicate the time. Don’t take your fitness for granted, this is the time to spend focusing on your wellness. Take your health by the bullhorns and take charge of it.” ■



RYAN J. DEGAN

Above: Dayna Aguirre and Sandeep Birla break a sweat in a tent set up in a parking lot area outside Brick. Right: Kim Marcelis partakes in an outdoor fitness class at Brick.



RYAN J. DEGAN



HOPE HOSPICE

Patients living with dementia respond positively to animatronic pets, especially as they go without the benefit of face-to-face companionship as the pandemic drags on.

Robot kitties comfort patients with dementia

Pets lessen impact of pandemic-related isolation, loneliness

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

The elderly man, a Hope Hospice patient with dementia, sat with his new furry cat on his lap, stroking its fur and bonding, his daughter by his side. The feline was a robot pet, which Hope Hospice began giving to patients in December.

Then the man tilted his head toward his daughter and whispered, "You know this cat isn't real."

The daughter was taken aback. The animatronic cat was designed to comfort older adults in need of companionship and, given her father's cognitive decline, she wasn't sure if he would notice. After all, it did move and meow.

"Yes," the daughter responded. "It's just here if you feel like petting it."

"It's great," the dad told her. "I just wanted to make sure you knew it's not real."

This anecdote is a favorite of Gia Barsell, manager of dementia services at Hope Hospice, who is overseeing the distribution of the Joy for All Companion Pets. They are battery powered, and when stroked, they become alert and make realistic noises and small movements.

Made by Ageless Innovation, the pets are designed specifically for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of cognitive decline. A donation from NorCal Minis car club enabled Hope Hospice to purchase 20



HOPE HOSPICE

A donation has provided Hope Hospice with 20 animatronic cats that become alert when stroked and make realistic noises and small movements.

cats, and Barsell has given out five so far.

"I like to think that some of them maybe do think they are real," Barsell said. "Some have tried to feed them or put the cat's mouth in a water bowl."

But she said the pets do more than provide a furry companion.

"What these cats are doing is maybe bringing someone back to a pet they had when they were growing up or they had when they were in their own home, enjoying family life," Barsell explained. "It is not about the pet; it's about the memories."

"It may or may not be about the pet specifically but it is more about the emotions associated with the pet," she continued. "It reminds them of simpler times when they could sit and tactilely stroke their pet. They elicit positive emotions."

The cats have helped lessen the impact of pandemic-related isolation on patients with dementia, Barsell noted, who are prone to side effects from long-term social isolation and loneliness.

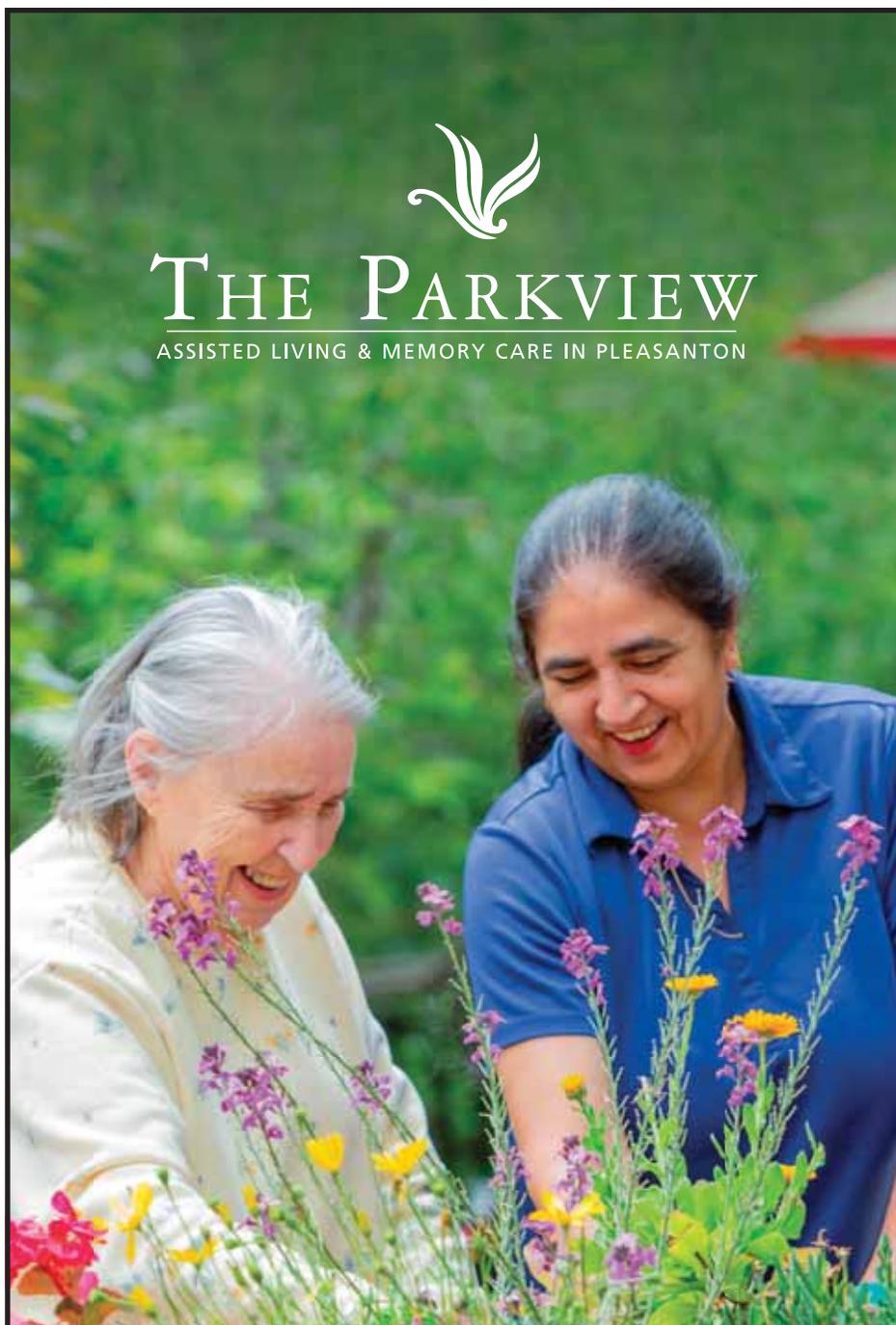
"Here we are, nearly a year into this pandemic, and our patients continue to go without the benefit of face-to-face companionship visits from our volunteers, and in many cases, even the patient's own family," Nikki Tildesley, manager of volunteer services at Hope Hospice, said. "They are truly suffering."

Plus, Barsell added, the pandemic has caused a change in routine, which causes these patients to struggle. Although pharmacological interventions may make an agitated patient easier to care for, Barsell questions whether that is best for the patient.

Clinical studies conducted with Joy for All Companion Pets have shown positive results in reducing anxiety and agitation. This resulted in more socialization with others, decreased episodes of delirium, and less need for medications.

One caregiver in a study reported on a patient who had been withdrawn, rarely interactive and frequently mumbled incoherently.

See **ROBOTIC PETS** on Page 14



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Tri-Valley clinic battles food allergy crisis

Latitude Food Allergy Care opens new facility in San Ramon

By RYAN J. DEGAN

While the spread of the coronavirus has captured health headlines throughout the world, a more silent crisis of food allergies has also been on the rise in the U.S., and Bay Area-based Latitude Food Allergy Care has dedicated itself to caring for patients dealing with food hypersensitivity.

To help fight food allergies and serve patients in the Tri-Valley and greater East Bay, Latitude recently opened a new care clinic in San Ramon, offering patients the opportunity to assess, treat and even possibly prevent food allergies and the often dangerous reactions to them.

"Millions of people are desperate for answers to their food allergy questions," said Kimberley Yates Grosso, founder and CEO of Latitude. "Our team set out to transform food allergy care by providing a place where patients and their families could finally make sense of their food allergies and find solutions with full support from food allergy experts and clinicians."

"As members of the food allergy community ourselves, we know that specialized care is not only necessary but life-changing, and we are committed to making it accessible to all those who need it," she added.

Founded in 2018 by Bay Area parents of children with food allergies, Latitude is unique in that, while most general allergists

can provide care to patients suffering from food allergies, their clinical team is led by board-certified allergists who have specified expertise focusing in on the treatment of food hypersensitivity.

"Patients come to Latitude searching for answers to their food allergies, with many having had no choice but to avoid foods their entire lives," said Tessa Grosso, a community adviser at Latitude and a patient advocate for food allergy treatment. "As a food allergic patient myself, it is truly exciting to live the rest of my life with the ability to eat freely, and to create the same possibilities for other children, teenagers and adults in the food allergy community."

Latitude has four clinics throughout the Bay Area located in San Francisco, Los Gatos/San Jose, Redwood City and now San Ramon, which have remained open for virtual and in-person visits.

One of the top ways Latitude provides care, according to co-founder Debbie Taback, is first and foremost ensuring that patients have an accurate diagnosis of what their allergies actually are.

Through a combination of skin and blood tests, clinicians can get an accurate diagnosis of the allergens that affect a patient. Then once an accurate diagnosis is reached, patients can sit down with allergists to create a treatment plan that best suits them.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tina Dominguez (PA-C, MMS), the East Bay clinical director at Latitude's clinic in San Ramon, attends to a young client. Latitude offers a practice called oral immunotherapy, where clients are slowly desensitized to their food allergies.

"A lot of the time people come in and they say 'I'm allergic to this list of 20 foods' and we do the hard work with them to really determine what people are allergic to. Because oftentimes, and especially for young adults who may have been told something as a child, maybe these things that they have been avoiding for years and years may be fine," Taback told the Weekly.

In some cases, Latitude can help even desensitize patients to their allergies to severely minimize or even remove symptoms that can result from exposure to allergens.

Herself a mother of three children who have suffered from various types of food allergies, Taback said her eldest daughter was diagnosed with an allergy to sesame that she was desensitized to through a practice called oral immunotherapy.

Oral immunotherapy is an innovative process based on evidence-based protocols from Stanford University, the University of California San Francisco, Baylor University and other leading research institutions that includes exposing patients to small doses of their allergies, helping patients build a tolerance and reducing the symptoms of accidental exposure to their allergies.

"(My daughter is) kind of an anomaly because at the 5-1/2-year mark after her treatment, she's now completely tested out of her

allergy. She's no longer allergic to sesame," Taback said.

"With the desensitization process, the goal is to retrain the immune system to recognize the food as something safe. You do this in a very slow, monitored way and you progress from very very small amounts up to maybe a whole nut or several whole nuts (for patients with nut allergies)," Taback added.

The new San Ramon clinic is led by East Bay clinical director Tina L.R. Dominguez (PA-C, MMS).

The demand for organizations dedicated to treatment of food allergies has only grown, according to Taback, who said that the rates of food allergies reported among people has grown to epidemic proportions over the past decade.

"Allergies rates have absolutely increased over the past decade and are on a trajectory to continue to increase unless changes are made," Taback said.

"There are some new guidelines that make sure babies are exposed to potentially allergenic foods at a very young age, whereas 10 years ago the advice was don't give babies these allergenic foods until they are 3. Well those guidelines have turned upside down because we are trying to stem that tide of this epidemic of food allergies," she added. ■

ROBOTIC PETS

Continued from Page 13

"With the introduction of the pup, the patient would smile, laugh, talk to and pick up the pet," the care provider said. "Her son observed that, as a result, she was more responsive to him."

"It's taken off like wildfire — we've had so much success," Barsell said. "We have not had one unsuccessful match yet."

The robotic pets are preferable to live animals for this population not only due to their lack of maintenance but also because a patient may pet it too hard, resulting in a cat or dog defending itself and hurting the patient, she also pointed out.

The cats cost about \$110 each and, pleased by their success, Barsell is looking at puppies, for \$50 each. Hope Hospice

is seeking grant funding and donations to get the lap-dog models and continue the program.

One of the cats was placed in the common room of a facility, where it began to meow, Barsell said.

"We let the patient process it, and told her she could stroke it. As I put it in her lap, she leaned in it and snuggled it and said, 'It's purring.' Sure enough, it had started vibrating," Barsell said, a happy coincidence.

"They also bring their paw up to their mouth like they are licking it, and they show you their belly to get you to rub it. They are darling," she added.

Some patients keep them at the foot of their beds.

"They pick them up when they want," Barsell said. "It is an amazing gift, especially at this time of so much social isolation." ■

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Stanford Medicine enters collaborative with Sutter Health for cancer care program

Joint venture includes creation of East Bay Cancer Center in Oakland

By RYAN J. DEGAN

Sutter Health and Stanford Medicine have launched a joint cancer care program that officials say will strive to expand access and state-of-the-art cancer services for patients and families in the East Bay.

The collaborative cancer program will pair Stanford Medicine's cancer programming with Sutter's integrated network of care, offering patients a comprehensive number of cancer-related services such as early detection methods, cancer care and support programs, as well as further enabling the groups to create a new outpatient East Bay Cancer Center, according to officials.

"We are thrilled to formalize our collaboration with Sutter Health and together bring the highest level

of cancer care to patients in the East Bay," David Entwistle, president and CEO of Stanford Health Care, said in a statement. "We believe the best possible care for patients involves an environment where patients and their families can have access to the full spectrum of early detection, cancer care and survivorship services close to their homes."

"Through an integrated approach and partnership, Sutter Health and Stanford Medicine will provide enhanced cancer care services in the East Bay," added Sarah Krevans, president and CEO of Sutter Health. "By working together, we can make an even greater positive impact on the communities we serve, including vulnerable populations, so that patients and their families can focus

on treatment and recovery."

In an effort to further improve upon cancer care for East Bay patients, the collaborative includes plans to develop an integrated, multidisciplinary outpatient cancer center in the region -- which Stanford staff say will be modeled on the Stanford Cancer Center South Bay in San Jose.

Proposed to be located on Sutter-owned land at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center campus in Oakland, the new cancer center would serve as a central hub for East Bay patients, providing complete cancer care that will carry patients from early screening through treatment and survival.

With an estimated completion date of 2024, the center would

include imaging, lab, infusion and radiation therapy services, and would also house physician offices and an ambulatory surgery center.

"The treatment of cancer is a rapidly evolving field," said Dr. Lloyd Minor, dean of the Stanford University School of Medicine. "The collaboration between Stanford Medicine and Sutter Health will provide a continuum of care for our patients, starting at the beginning with cancer prevention and screening as well as opportunities to participate in some of the world's most innovative cancer treatment trials."

"Stanford Medicine's physician-scientists are actively investigating new therapies and working to make sure that they are accessible to all patients in our community. This

collaboration presents a tremendous opportunity to expand patient access to cutting-edge cancer care, informed by the latest biomedical research," Minor added.

Stanford staff say the cancer center will offer a central hub for cancer patients in the East Bay, including for Tri-Valley patients beyond what is or will be available at Pleasanton's Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare.

"Stanford Medicine has a large presence in the Tri-Valley, including for cancer care, at Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare. Caring for patients close to home is fundamental to our approach, and we will be developing patient-centric cancer services in the Tri-Valley area, in coordination with all of our centers of excellence and our entire network," Stanford Health spokesperson Courtney Lodato told the Weekly.

According to Lodato, Stanford-ValleyCare does offer patients cancer care services; however, Stanford's current cancer center hub is located in San Jose. ■

Pleasanton Rides vans hit the streets

City paratransit via Black Tie underway

By JEREMY WALSH

The city's paratransit service has a new look — and a new operator.

Pleasanton Rides, the rebranded name for city service now provided by Pleasanton-based Black Tie Transportation by contract, launched operations earlier this month with the revamped vans starting to pick up local seniors to help fulfill their short-distance transportation needs.

"We are honored to have the opportunity to serve the Seniors of Pleasanton," Black Tie owner Bill Wheeler said in a statement this week. "The city of Pleasanton takes pride in the senior community, and Black Tie is proud to be the trusted transportation resource behind Pleasanton Rides. Partnering with Trakk for the mobility management technology has provided us a

best-in-class contactless reservation and fare-payment experience for our riders and their caregivers."

Pleasanton City Manager Nelson Fialho added, "The city of Pleasanton is excited to continue serving our seniors through our senior transportation program now called Pleasanton Rides. We are pleased to partner with Black Tie, a homegrown Pleasanton business, to provide the best quality of service to our residents."

City officials decided last year to outsource its decades-old Pleasanton Paratransit Service for cost and operational reasons.

The City Council on Dec. 1 awarded Black Tie a three-year contract worth a total of \$896,400 to take over the management and day-to-day operations of the city's paratransit service. The program is funded via

the city's general fund, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Transportation Development Act 4.5 funds, and Alameda County Measure B and BB funds, according to city officials.

The newly rebranded Pleasanton Rides van fleet, which hit the streets on Feb. 1, were upgraded with a new vinyl brand wrap of the Pleasanton ridgeline, in addition to detailing and maintenance work, according to city officials.

Wheeler said last week's launch was "highly successful."

"The frequent riders were very pleased and excited with the new look and feel of the equipment and the care, concern and service provided by Black Tie's seasoned professional drivers," he added.

The program primarily serves



CITY OF PLEASANTON

A look at the revamped paratransit vans now operated by Black Tie under the program name, Pleasanton Rides.

Pleasanton seniors who are 70 years old or older. Adults who qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act are also eligible for the paratransit details, but details for riders with more complex wheelchair or scooter transports are pending an agreement with the Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority, according to the Pleasanton Rides website.

Pleasanton Rides service during COVID-19 social restrictions will be available on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The fares remain the same as when under city operation; one way within Pleasanton is \$3.50 while travel to select destinations in Dublin, Livermore or San Ramon is \$4 per one-way ride.

New and existing riders can contact Pleasanton Rides at the new phone number, 925-398-1045. Customers can request rides, access the rider application or find other information via the new website, www.blacktietrans.com/pleasanton-rides. ■

Oakland Coliseum to open as COVID-19 vaccination site

Partnership between state, federal agencies

The state of California plans to launch a pilot partnership with federal officials to establish a community COVID-19 vaccination site at the Oakland Coliseum next week.

The state will collaborate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to operate the Coliseum vaccination site, part of a goal of President Joe Biden's administration to establish 100 large-scale vaccination sites nationwide in his first 100 days in office.

"The reason this site was chosen was the framework of making sure that communities that are often left behind are not left behind, they're prioritized in terms of the administration of these vaccines," Gov. Gavin

Newsom said at a briefing at the Coliseum on Feb. 3.

The state has already helped establish similar large-scale vaccination sites at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles and Petco Park in San Diego.

The Coliseum will have the capacity to administer some 6,000 doses per day once it opens on Tuesday (Feb. 16).

The Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Authority's Board of Commissioners, which oversees the property, and Oakland Athletics president Dave Kaval expressed interest last month in converting the Coliseum into a mass vaccination site, with Kaval targeting it to

open as soon as February.

"We've obviously been hosting people here for generations to come to baseball games and football games and basketball games," Kaval said. "Now folks can come out, actually get their shot and get vaccinated."

The Coliseum's use as a vaccination site comes as California's number of vaccine doses administered has surged in recent days, with nearly 3.8 million shots to date.

That has allowed the state to vault much closer to the national average of how much of its vaccine supply has been administered. Previously, California had been one of the slowest states in the country to distribute and administer its doses allocated

from the federal government.

The state also recently contracted with Blue Shield of California and Kaiser Permanente as third-party administrators of the vaccination effort and switched to an age-based prioritization for who gets vaccinated, targeting the state's oldest residents first.

"There's never been a time where partnership has been more needed than now," Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf said. "And this partnership between the federal government, our great governor ... and local communities like Oakland and Alameda County is going to accelerate the delivery of vaccines and get us back to normal as quickly and as safely as possible."

Newsom said the state was

expected to receive 1,060,000 doses last week, but the federal stockpile of doses is still not equipped to adequately supply a state of California's size.

"No one is satisfied with the pace of distribution of these vaccines," Newsom said, noting that some parts of the state have had to cancel vaccination appointments due to a dearth of doses.

"Of course we have more work to do, but we have made demonstrable progress," he said, "and we will continue to build on that over the course of the next days, weeks and months until we eradicate and eliminate this disease." ■

—Eli Walsh, BCN Foundation