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*Happy Holidays +
 Happy New Year
 From Local Talk*

Our Next Edition will be published
 on January 7, 2021.

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...and Good Riddance 2020!

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COVID-19 VACCINATION ROLLOUT CONTINUES

By Walter Elliott

NEWARK - The distribution of the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus vaccines, some eight days after the first inoculations here, is spreading out to other hospitals, nursing homes and designated sites while you tread this.

"Local Talk" received some evidence of the rollout's direction when a staff member got a message Dec. 21 from his mother's nursing home in East Orange.

The nursing home staff asked permission to inoculate "Mom" on or by the end of this year. The home's representative had set a Dec. 25 deadline to hear from the families or legal guardians of their residents so they could start detailed planning.

The state and federal governments' reaching out to the nursing homes with the first vaccine batches is in keeping with a strategy that is comparable to an army's invasion of an enemy stronghold in a World War Two

(Continued on page 11)

NEWARK BETH ISRAEL BEGINS VACCINATING FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES AGAINST COVID-19

Photo Courtesy
 Newark Beth Israel



Vatesse Pleasant, RN, becomes the first Newark Beth Israel employee to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine

NEWARK - December 21, 2020 - Following weeks of preparation, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and Children's Hospital of New Jersey, an RWJBarnabas Health facility, began administering the Pfizer- BioNTech vaccine to its high-risk, frontline employees. The hospital opened its employee vaccine clinic at 6:00 a.m. on Dec. 21 and employees were welcomed with cheers of support from the administrative and volunteer staff.

Vatesse Pleasant, RN, 40 years-old, was the first Newark Beth Israel employee to receive the vaccine. "I'm excited to be able to visit my granddaughter again," said Vatesse, who has been working with critically ill COVID-19 patients since July when she started working at Newark Beth Israel.

RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) has been working diligently with the state to support the New Jersey Department of *(Continued on page 14)*

FUNDING PACKAGE STILL UP IN THE AIR

President Calls Package "A Disgrace"



PAGE 11



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Turn to
PAGE 16



Editorial
Dhiren Shah
 Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

Wishing all of you Happy Holidays and a prosperous new year. Right now, the biggest threat amongst us is the coronavirus and its impact on our life. The biggest impact is on those who already are hospitalized and/or going through tough treatment including ventilators. The next impact is that we have to wear masks, keep social distancing and wash our hands regularly. The third impact is everything that has closed, including businesses, restaurants, amusement parks, etc. The fourth impact is that the majority of us have not seen our loved ones for the past 11 months and we don't know when we will see them. The fifth impact is that we cannot hug our family and

friends. The sixth impact is that we cannot live our lives like we used to, such as going to movie theaters, going to restaurants, traveling to many places in America and the world. And last but not the least, there is the fear of getting the virus at any given moment.

Finally, the second stimulus package of \$900 billion has been passed through Congress and the Senate. The nearly 5,600-page bill was sent to the President for his signature. However, the stimulus package awarded money to some countries. Right now, we should think about the USA, not other countries. President Trump rejected the package, stating that \$600 per person is not good enough. He said that it should be \$2,000 per person or \$4,000 per couple. Nancy Pelosi immediately said that she would work on an amendment to pass before the end of the year. President-elect Biden said that he would ask for a third stimulus package once he gets into office. That means he thinks that this round of stimulus

is not enough.

Small businesses are struggling right now. Due to large corporations getting most of the money in the first stimulus package of March 2020, this time lawmakers were a little more careful, but there is still a touch of politics in the latest bill. The new eligibility part of the PPP loan is the only thing that has been applauded by most of the media and critics. There are some changes in the eligibility. Instead of 500 employees max, they made it 300 employees at each location (that's problematic), for use of the full amount of PPP loans (that's good), companies must demonstrate at least a 25% reduction on gross receipts in the first 3 quarters of 2020 compared to 2019 (that's good), newspapers and public broadcasting with no more than 500 employees per location (why do they have advantages), the prohibition for publicly-traded news organizations was waived (large news media got the advantage... no good). So, as usual, the stim-

ulus package has been written and decided by both parties to help some larger entities.

I met with one of the bank managers. She said that her bank's administration is thinking about opting out of the PPP loan processing. She said that the work they are doing is too much to handle. Every other day, there is a rule change. These new PPP loans have more rules in giving out the loans and a lot of work in the forgiveness of the loan system. The way people are calling them, contacting them, and due to the fact that the SBA system is not up to par, the workload is so much more (triple) than they originally thought.

PPP loan and stimulus checks being digitally deposited in accounts is very good to uplift the economy. However, when a few people take advantage of it, it hurts all of us, especially small business owners. .

Have a wonderful week.

I'll talk to you next week.

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WEATHER FOR THE WEEK

<u>THURSDAY</u>	<u>FRIDAY</u>	<u>SATURDAY</u>	<u>SUNDAY</u>	<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>TUESDAY</u>	<u>WEDNESDAY</u>
Rain & Wind	Rain, Then Cold	Mostly Sunny	Sunny	Morning Rain	Precipitation Possible	Partly Cloudy
HI 59 LO 54	HI 58 LO 26	HI 36 LO 24	HI 41 LO 30	HI 46 LO 32	HI 39 LO 22	HI 37 LO 29

SPORTS WRAP



By William Hathaway

In the NFL, one local team lost, while the other won, but still lost. Regarding the second, the good news is that the New York Jets will not be the third team in league history to finish 0-16. They notched an upset win at the Los Angeles Rams 23-20. Now for the bad news. While the team avoided a huge embarrassment, they likely cost themselves huge prize, as the win now gives them the same record as the Jacksonville Jaguars, and thanks to strength of schedule, the Jags would get the 1st overall pick in the 2021 NFL Draft, likely to be Clemson star QB Trevor Lawrence. Ouch.

Meanwhile, the New York Giants just flat out lost in their primetime home game against the Cleveland Browns. The crew from Ohio beat Big Blue 20-6. While NY QB Colt McCoy was a respectable 19-31 for 223 yards, he was no match for Baker Mayfield, who went 27-32 for 297 yards and 2 touchdowns.

In college basketball, the surprise team in New Jersey is the Rutgers men's program who improved to 6-0 and earned the #13 ranking in the nation. They beat Illinois at home 91-88 in some Big Ten Conference action. On the other hand, the Seton Hall Pirates suffered a controversial overtime loss to Providence 80-77. The Friars got a game winning three-pointer off of an uncalled traveling violation. Speaking of Seton Hall, former SHU star Myles Powell will be heading to the Westchester Knicks after he was unable to make the NY squad.

Finally, the College Football Playoff is set. The rankings are as follows: #1 Alabama, #2 Clemson, #3 Ohio State, #4 Notre Dame. Just missing out was #5 Texas A&M. Also, in something that seems disrespectful to the tradition of the game, the Rose Bowl will not be played in Pasadena due to COVID-19 regulations in California. It will be played at AT&T Stadium in Dallas instead.

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NEW JERSEY JOINS ANTITRUST LAWSUIT CHALLENGING GOOGLE'S SEARCH ENGINE & SEARCH ADVERTISING MONOPOLIES

TRENTON - Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal joined a bipartisan coalition of 38 Attorneys General on Dec. 17 in suing Google for allegedly violating federal antitrust laws by using anticompetitive tactics to maintain its monopoly power in the markets for general search engines and related advertising.

Filed in federal court in the District of Columbia, the multi-state complaint alleges that Google illegally maintains monopoly power through a series of anticompetitive exclusionary contracts and conduct. As a result, Google has deprived consumers of competition that could lead to greater choice, more innovation, and better privacy protections, while exploiting its market position to accumulate and leverage data in ways that harm consumers.

"Big tech companies like Google have incredible power over our daily lives," said Attorney General Grewal. "We look to them for so much of the infor-

mation that we use to navigate the world, and they use our usage behavior to monetize their businesses. How they acquire and exert their power and influence over our behaviors must be scrutinized. The lawsuit we're filing today is the result of a broad, bipartisan effort to examine Google's market conduct and sends the message that no company is too powerful to avoid real accountability."

The complaint is consistent with a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) on October 20, which alleged that Google improperly maintains its monopoly power in the general search and search advertising markets through the use of exclusionary agreements.

However, this filing includes additional allegations and describes Google's monopoly maintenance scheme as a multi-part effort.

The lawsuit alleges that Google:

- Uses exclusionary agreements and other practices to limit the ability of rival general search engines and potential rivals to reach consumers. This conduct cements Google as the go-to search engine on computers and mobile devices. One example: Google pays Apple between \$8 and \$12 billion per year to ensure that Google is the default search engine on Apple devices, and limits general search competition on Android devices with a web of restrictive contracts
 - Disadvantages users of its search-advertising management tool, SA360, by promising that it will not favor Google search advertising over that of competing search engines such as Bing. Instead, Google continuously favors advertising on its own platform, inflating its profits to the detriment of advertisers and consumers
 - Discriminates against specialized search sites - such as those that provide travel, home repair, or entertainment services - by depriving them of access to prime positioning estate because these competing sites threaten Google's revenue and dominant position.
- The complaint further expands on DOJ's complaint by explaining how the company deploys the same exclusionary contracting tactics to monopolize the emerging ways consumers access general search engines, such as through their home smart speakers, televisions, or in their cars. In so doing, the Attorneys General allege that Google is depriving consumers of competitive choices and blocking innovation.
- The coalition also goes further than DOJ in explaining how Google's acquisition and com-

(Continued on page 12)

TOWN WATCH

DISCLAIMER: The following items are primarily drawn from first responders. Responders' accounts may not be their full activity range. Grand juries hand down indictments when evidence presented them warrant a trial. Named suspects/defendants are innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

NEWARK - The NJ MVC Regional Licensing Center was open and closed in an institutional eyeblink Dec. 16 - but not because of Winter Storm Gail.

228 Frelinghuysen Ave. was closed, long before all other state offices had closed in advance of Gail at 1 p.m. that Wednesday, because an employee here had tested positive for COVID-19.

The licensing center - but not the inspection station and road test site - will remain closed for contact tracing and disinfection until Dec. 31.

Prospective MVC customers are asked to check njmvc.gov to see which offices are closed, which ones are open for appointment visits - and whether one's business can be conducted online.

Walker Dead Near I-280

Newark Police and Essex County Prosecutor's Office detectives, as of press time, were still investigating the Dec. 23 early morning car crash off an Interstate 280 exit ramp that left an unidentified man dead.

Preliminary NPD/ECPO findings have the driver of a bronze four-door SUV losing control after leaving I-280 Exit 13 and crossing First Street onto the Sussex Avenue Connector at 3:20 a.m. Wednesday. It incurred front end damage after striking the walker.

The victim was rushed to Newark's University Hospital, where he had died at 4 a.m. The connector was closed into that morning's rush hour for the field investigation. The SUV driver had not been identified.

IRVINGTON - "Now just WHERE were you shot?" was the question asked by Irvington, Hillside and Newark police officers to a Newark hospital patient there Dec. 15.

IPD detectives were called to RWJBarnabas Health Beth Israel Hospital just after midnight Dec. 16 by their Newark colleagues. A man walked into Beth Israel's emergency ward with gunshot wounds 11:30 p.m. Dec. 15. He told hospital staff and NPD that he was shot in Irvington - but without further detail.

HPD detectives were called in by 4 a.m. Dec. 16 when the victim later said he had shot himself in that township. The now-tri-town investigation continues.

Man Sets Gas Station Fire

A township man, accused of setting an Elmwood Park gas station on fire Dec. 14, was to know if he would be home for the holidays after his Dec. 23 bail hearing at State Superior Court-Hackensack.

Glenn B. Wilson, 36, has been held in the Bergen County Jail since his Dec. 15 arrest. He has been charged with two counts each of aggravated arson and thereof with intent for bodily injury or death. The Dec. 23 hearing was to have determined if Wilson is facing either a first or second degree charge of theft by threatening.

The cashier and station attendant of Fuel 4 on Market Street said Wilson was arguing with them while they were pumping gasoline into his car at about 10 a.m. Dec. 14. They said Wilson removed the fuel pump nozzle, sprayed the ground with gas, used a lighter to set the fuel ablaze and sped away without paying. The fire was quickly put out.

EAST ORANGE - City police detectives are seeking the person who shot a man in one of his legs here in the Ashland section Dec. 15.

EOPD officers, responding to calls of gunfire around 234 North Arlington Ave., found the wounded man there at about 10 p.m. that Tuesday.

Local EMS medics took the victim to Newark's University

Hospital for overnight treatment.

Maskless Skateboarding Closes Park

Memorial Park's "Victory" statue will be lonelier over the holidays since Mayor Theodore "Ted" Green has closed its skate park.

Green, from his home Dec. 11, cited social media posts of skaters not wearing masks to close the East Orange Skate Park. The skate park had been seasonally open since its Aug. 14, 2019 ribbon-cutting.

Green, who had tested positive for the virus by Dec. 7, and city administrators have stressed that the rest of Memorial Park remains open for passive recreational use. Memorial Park, with its World War One "Victory" statue as its centerpiece, is bordered by Freeway Drive East, South, Arlington and Lenox avenues and South Walnut Street.

ORANGE - The City Council will be calling for public comment on establishing an Orange Municipal Court Director's post, and possibly casting a final vote, Jan. 5.

Resolution 62-2020, which was passed on Dec. 1 introduction by the council, would supervise court clerk performance, adjust workloads and set work priorities. The prospective director is to have a college or university bachelor's degree and at least three years' work experience in organizing, planning and/or directing "significant operating programs."

The reasoning, as per the ordinance's first of four pages, is that the OMC has an annual caseload upward of 30,000 cases, hold four or more court sessions a week and runs on an at least \$300,000 budget That budget passes annual adequacy muster by State Superior Court-Essex Vicinage Assignment Judge Sallyanne Floria.

Current Municipal Court Administrator James E. Moss currently oversees two deputy clerks, a temporary part-time ticket clerk and a high school intern clerk. The said p/t clerk partially fills the vacancy of a third deputy clerk, who had died in 2019.

Director-led municipal courts who have larger populations and/

or caseloads include Newark, Irvington, Jersey City, Paterson and Hamilton Township.

No salary has been proposed, nor does the ordinance state whether the director would replace the municipal court administrator. Also unstated is whether MCA Moss would be considered for the new post.

State websites have listed MCA annual salary ranges from \$49,000 to \$74,100 with a \$60,198 median income.

WEST ORANGE - The Township Council approved granting a 30-year Payment in Lieu of Taxes for the redevelopment of three Executive Suites office buildings by 1:05 a.m. Dec. 16.

City elders approved, on a 4-1 vote, a township administration agreement where Executive Suites owner Clarion will pay an average \$1.3 million a year after it has converted 100 and 200 Executive Drive into residential units.

The PILOT will also cover Clarion's payments for 10 Rooney Circle redevelopment, which would be converted to West Orange's new DPW & Engineering headquarters and West Orange Public Library.

What the council voted on can be considered "Executive Suites 2.0," where 300 Executive Dr. has been excluded. Clarion has also long spun off the neighboring Essex Green Shopping Center from its original redevelopment, PILOT and "An Area in Need of Redevelopment" request.

The township administration and its Heyer, Gruel and Associates consulting planners went back to the drawing board after A State Appellate Court panel overruled the first Executive Suites AINOR and PILOT Sept. 11.

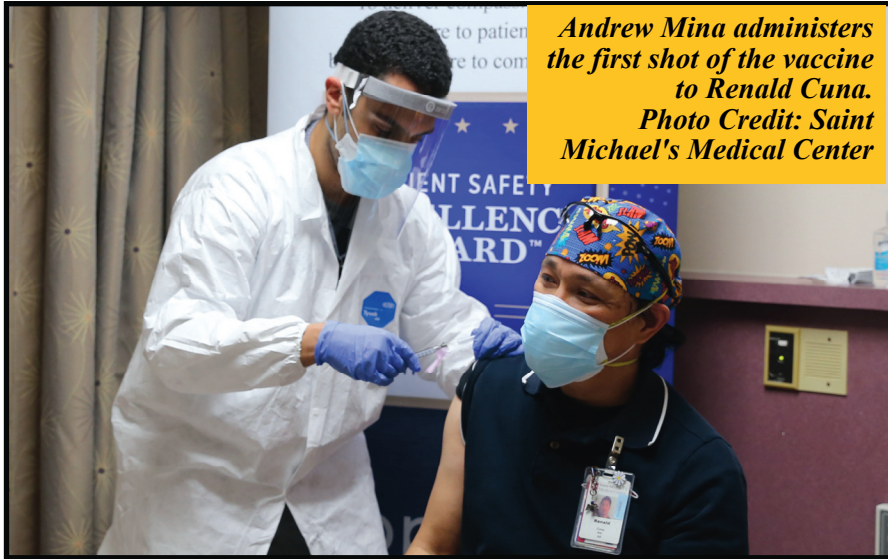
John Krakoviak, in his last major vote on the council, was the lone dissenter. Krakoviak's tenure, dating back to 2010, has declined re-election Nov. 3. Councilman Jerry Guarino, whose re-election bid failed Nov. 3, and newly re-elected Council President Michelle Casalino, voted for the PILOT.

Planning Board Chairman Ron Weston, according to council discussion, has either resigned or will not be returned to

(Continued on page 7)

MODERNA VACCINE COMES TO NEWARK HOSPITAL

Andrew Mina administers the first shot of the vaccine to Renald Cuna. Photo Credit: Saint Michael's Medical Center



NEWARK - Saint Michael's Medical Center in Newark began administering the newly approved Moderna vaccine on Tuesday.

Employees erupted in applause when Andrew Mina administered the first shot of the vaccine to Renald Cuna.

The hospital received a shipment of 300 doses only hours before and expects another 300 in the coming days.

More than 50 front-line hospital workers received the vaccine on Tuesday with more signed up in the days leading up to Christmas.

"I think there's nobody on our staff who hasn't been affected by COVID-19 personally," said Dr. Alan Sickles, the CEO of Saint Michael's Medical Center. "We've lost staff members and family members. Being able to offer the vaccine today is just an incredible advance for us. This is a Christmas gift a few days early, and we're all grateful for that."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an emergency use authorization for the Moderna vaccine on Friday, making it the second vaccine approved for emergency use.

The FDA approved a vaccine produced by Pfizer-BioNTech on Dec. 11.

Both vaccines work similarly to fight COVID-19 and both are considered safe and efficacious. Both also require a second shot a few weeks later.

Kathleen Ryan, a pharmacist at Saint Michael's, said the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine must be stored at extremely cold temperatures (-94 degrees Fahrenheit) to remain effective while the Moderna vaccine can be stored

at minus four degrees for long-term storage and around 40 degrees for up to 30 days.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that the first supplies of the vaccine be given to healthcare personnel and long-term care facility residents because the supply of both vaccines is limited.

Newark North Ward Councilman Anibal Ramos Jr., who attended the event on behalf of the city, noted that the pandemic has hit Newark harder than any other city in New Jersey.

"This is truly a historic day," said Ramos, whose father survived a COVID-19 infection in a nursing home this spring. "It's incredible that in such a short time we are in a position where we can safeguard our front line healthcare workers."

The following are quotes from Saint Michael's employees and medical staff: "This is a moment of celebration," said Matthew Morales, the director of Rehab Medicine. "Humanity should celebrate."

Dr. Richard Miller, a critical care physician, noted that Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, received the Moderna vaccine only hours before.

"If it's good enough for Dr. Fauci, it's good enough for me," Dr. Miller said.

Malori Clarke-Cameron said getting the vaccine was a first step on the road to normalcy.

"You forget what it's like to hug somebody or even just to shake a hand," Clarke-Cameron said. "This is the first step in being to do all the stuff again."

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DO YOU LOVE ANIMALS LIKE ME?



By Michele Lowe, East Orange, NJ

BLACK LIVES MATTER, ALL LIVES MATTER, ANIMALS LIVES MATTER

First, let me start off by saying Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year to all. I know many people who love animals just like me. It has always been my passion.

I would like to take just some spare time and hopefully, everyone can relate. These animals are hopeless; they are innocent. I need more people to love them; don't walk over them, and don't walk past them. All they need is love and affection, and a little attention. All the time when I'm out and about, I take time out to see animals. I may stop at the store, grab some pet food and feed them. It's the least that we

as people can do, if you can't provide a home.

They are our friends and family. They have hearts too; they bleed red too. People should stop overlooking at them, as they need help too. One of the best things in the world is a loyal true best friend. That of course is a pet. Animals understand us. They're very smart.

Let's slow down the speed limit, as a dozen a day animals get hit by car and left. Other people and myself love animals. I dislike seeing that kind of harshness in our cities and all over. People, we have to love better. There's an understanding in life, and a blessing in one. Don't overlook things because you don't care.

Growing up as a very young child, one of my favorite things was rescuing animals. My mom couldn't stand it. She would say, "Michele, what do you have now?" But she knew how much love and passion I had. She would say, "Just another Dr. Doolittle."

As always, she was right there to help me take care of them. My entire family understood. All I'm saying to the people out there is to stop the cruelty, stop the dog fights. If you have any problems and need to surrender a pet, please don't just throw them out in the street. How cold can we be? Just think, would you like to be treated like that?

So to all the listeners, please have patience and love, and be open for a change. P.S. Help is not hard.



UNITED STATES

Justice Department Sues Walmart

In a civil complaint filed Dec. 22, the Department of Justice has alleged that Walmart Inc. unlawfully dispensed controlled substances from pharmacies it operated across the country and unlawfully distributed controlled substances to those pharmacies throughout the height of the prescription opioid crisis.

The complaint alleges that this unlawful conduct resulted in hundreds of thousands of violations of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). The Justice Department seeks civil penalties, which could total in the billions of dollars, and injunctive relief.

“It has been a priority of this administration to hold accountable those responsible for the prescription opioid crisis. As one of the largest pharmacy chains and wholesale drug distributors in the country, Walmart had the responsibility and the means to help prevent the diversion of prescription opioids,” said Jeffrey Bossert Clark, Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Division. “Instead, for years, it did the opposite - filling thousands of invalid prescriptions at its pharmacies and failing to report suspicious orders of opioids and other drugs placed by those pharmacies. This unlawful conduct contributed to the epidemic of opioid abuse throughout the United States. Today’s filing represents an important step in the effort to hold Walmart accountable for such conduct.”

The result of a multi-year investigation by the department’s Prescription Interdiction

& Litigation (PIL) Task Force, the complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware alleges that Walmart violated the CSA in multiple ways as the operator of its pharmacies and wholesale drug distribution centers. The complaint alleges that, as the operator of its pharmacies, Walmart knowingly filled thousands of controlled substance prescriptions that were not issued for legitimate medical purposes or in the usual course of medical practice, and that it filled prescriptions outside the ordinary course of pharmacy practice.

The complaint also alleges that, as the operator of its distribution centers, which ceased distributing controlled substances in 2018, Walmart received hundreds of thousands of suspicious orders that it failed to report as required to by the DEA. Together, the complaint alleges, these actions helped to fuel the prescription opioid crisis.

If Walmart is found liable for violating the CSA, it could face civil penalties of up to \$67,627 for each unlawful prescription filled and \$15,691 for each suspicious order not reported. The court also may award injunctive relief to prevent Walmart from committing further CSA violations.

The claims made in the complaint are allegations that United States must prove if the case proceeds to trial.

The United States is represented in the filed action by attorneys from the Department of Justice Civil Division’s Consumer Protection Branch and from the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices for the District of Colorado, District of Delaware, Eastern District of North Carolina, Eastern District of New York, and Middle District of Florida. The DEA’s Dallas Field Division and Diversion Control Operations personnel investigated the case. The DEA’s Office of Chief Counsel and the Criminal Division’s Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Sec-

tion provided substantial support.

MEXICO

The Most Dangerous Place for Journalists

In a report released Dec. 22 by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the number of journalists singled out for murder in reprisal for their work more than doubled this year, leading to a rise in overall work-related killings.

Globally, at least 30 journalists were killed on duty in 2020, including 21 reprisal murders, up from 10 murders last year. The number of deaths in combat or crossfire fell to a 20-year low.

“It’s appalling that the murders of journalists have more than doubled in the last year, and this escalation represents a failure of the international community to confront the scourge of impunity,” said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon.

Countries with significant numbers of murders included Mexico and Afghanistan.

Mexico has long been the most dangerous country for journalists in the Western hemisphere. This year, at least five journalists were killed there, including four retaliatory murders. Journalists covering Mexico work in an environment of violent drug traffickers and entrenched corruption, and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has not shown the political will to combat impunity. Most recently, a murder and a series of threats to the media by a suspected criminal gang have decimated reporting in the city of Iguala, in Guerrero state.

Worldwide, criminal groups were the most frequently suspected killers of journalists. However, in one particularly appalling case, government officials in Iran executed journalist Roohollah Zam on Dec. 12 after he was sentenced to death for his reporting on 2017 anti-

government protests. Because he was jailed as of Dec. 1, Zam was also listed on CPJ’s annual census of imprisoned journalists, which is a global snapshot of those behind bars on that date (and which this year hit a record high).

“It is outrageous that Roohollah Zam appears in CPJ’s census of journalists imprisoned around the world and also the list of those killed in the same year,” Simon added. “His inclusion on both lists is testament to the abject cruelty of the Iranian regime, which cloaks itself in the veneer of legality. Zam’s killing is nothing but state-sponsored murder.”

“The fact that murder is on the rise and the number of journalists imprisoned around the world hit a record is a clear demonstration that press freedom is under unprecedented assault in the midst of a global pandemic, in which information is essential,” Simon concluded. “We must come together to reverse this terrible trend.”

MIDDLE EAST

Trump Pardons Draw Concern

The UN human rights office OHCHR, has voiced deep concern over the decision by United States President Donald Trump to grant pardons to four security guards who were tried and convicted for the killing of 14 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad, in 2007.

OHCHR spokesperson Marta Hurtado, said in a statement on Wednesday that pardoning the four employees of private military company Blackwater, for their part in the killings that took place when they and other guards opened fire in Nisoor Square, “contributes to impunity and has the effect of emboldening others to commit such crimes in the future.”

President Trump announced

(Continued on page 13)

REGISTRATION UNDERWAY FOR SPRING 2021 SEMESTER AT ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

December 22, 2020 - On-line registration for the Spring 2021 Semester at Essex County College is underway. The College's Spring I Semester starts Tuesday, January 19, 2021.

Please note that instructions will begin virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but some courses will be allowed to roll into face-to-face as the semester progresses. The College follows all CDC recommended safety guidelines including wearing a mask and social distancing while on campus.

"Essex County College offers more than 50 Associate degree programs and Academic Certificates in a wide range of disciplines. Essex graduates transfer as juniors to many New Jersey colleges and universities, as well as top schools around the country. Register early to get the classes you want," said Dr. Keith Kirkland, Dean of

Student Affairs.

For more information please click on this link: <https://www.essex.edu/registration/>. Students may qualify for free tuition through the state Community College Opportunity Grant program. Go to <https://www.essex.edu/tuitionfree/> to see how to qualify. Additional registration information is available through the College's Welcome Center at 973-877-4477/3389.

"Essex County College continues to provide high quality and affordable educational opportunities despite the pandemic. Our many support services help students stay on track to graduate and realize their dreams," said ECC Interim President Dr. Augustine A. Boakye.

The College is fully accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, with open access to everyone.

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 4)

the board Jan. 1.

SOUTH ORANGE - People with long memories are midway between saying, "Goodbye Gruning's and Blockbuster" and "Hello Vose + Taylor" here along 55-65b South Orange Ave.

Sanzari and other HUB Realty contractors had been demolishing the three South Orange Avenue storefront buildings plus 60-62 Taylor Place from Nov. 25 until only their basements were left by Dec. 18.

59 SOA and 60 Taylor Pl. may be best remembered as addresses for Gruning's Ice Cream. William Gruning, fresh from opening his first store on Orange Street in Newark's Roseville section, moved into the Freeman Building in 1925. He later bought 60 Taylor and rented it to his night manager.

"Gruning's at the Bottom" became the flagship store and ice cream factory of a chain that included Maplewood ("Gruning's

at the Top") and Montclair 1925-83, 84-91. 59 SOA became a pair of restaurants while the creamery became a Cuban restaurant and exercise gym. 60 Taylor became a daycare center.

When Village elders and planners began a "Vose and Taylor Redevelopment Zone" in 2017, reporters kept referring to the combined eight-property, 1.267-acre lot as "The Blockbuster Site." 55 SOA, which the video rental store existed since the 1990s, had been vacant since that chain's 2012 liquidation.

It their place will be a five-story 110-unit residential building with ground floor commercial/office/pop-up "maker" space. There will be 70 public parking spaces and 11 affordable housing units within the structure and plus another 11 affordable unit off-site nearby.

HUB, who bought the lots for \$1.3 million, will receive a 25-year Payment in Lieu of Taxes worth \$15 million. The village, in exchange for granting the PILOT, gets a \$700,000 public improvement contribution and a five-year first choice/right

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MAPLEWOOD - South Orange-Maplewood School District parents have until Jan. 4 to inform administrators here whether they want to opt into a proposed two-days-a-week in-person teaching model or stay on virtual/remote learning.

SOMSD Superintendent Dr. Ronald Taylor had opened the preference application pipeline at the end of a "Return to School Town Hall" webinar that was launched here Dec. 17. Taylor and his staff will also be feeding post-airing questions.

The two-town district administrators are aiming to have all students the opportunity for twice a week in-school learning by Jan. 25 in five phases. One phase has Pre-Kindergarten-Second Grade, Sixth Grade and Ninth Grade students plus special education and English language learners from all grades returning Jan. 19. Students will then be on an AA/BB twice weekly schedule.

Taylor did immediately re-

spond to why not go to a five-days-a-week in-person schedule "like a neighboring district is planning."

"Their five-day elementary design is based on a walking design," said the superintendent. "We're bound to offer transportation to families based on legal mandates, including the number of miles students live away from school buildings. This includes special education programs."

The "Return to School" webinar was launched five days after 65 parents and students marched to the SOMSD Administration Building, here at 525 Academy St. to urge reopening schools for full-time learning. The SOMA delegation were part of "Safe Return to School" rallies that were also held that Saturday in Montclair and Nutley.

SOMSD wants parental preferences on Jan.4 so they can plan on class sizes and staffing.

MONTCLAIR - Two men were injured, and a bagel shop's front windows were smashed, said township police, after a brawl

(Continued on page 15)

JUPITER & SATURN - A ONCE IN A LIFETIME COSMIC EVENT



Saturn, top, and Jupiter, below, are seen after sunset from Shenandoah National Park, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2020, in Luray, Virginia. The two planets are drawing closer to each other in the sky as they head towards a "great conjunction" on December 21, where the two giant planets will appear a tenth of a degree apart. Photo Credit: NASA/ Bill Ingalls

NASA - On the night of Dec. 21, avid sky viewers were treated to an extraordinary sight. What has become known popularly as the "Christmas Star" is an especially vibrant planetary conjunction easily visible in the evening sky, as the planets Jupiter and Saturn got really close.

In 1610, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei pointed his telescope to the night sky, discovering the four moons of Jupiter - Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto. In that same year, Galileo also discovered a strange oval surrounding Saturn, which later observations determined to be its rings. These discoveries changed how people understood the far reaches of our solar system.

Thirteen years later, in 1623, the solar system's two giant

planets, Jupiter and Saturn, traveled together across the sky. Jupiter caught up to and passed Saturn, in an astronomical event known as a "Great Conjunction."

"You can imagine the solar system to be a racetrack, with each of the planets as a runner in their own lane and the Earth toward the center of the stadium," said Henry Throop, astronomer in the Planetary Science Division at NASA Headquarters in Washington. "From our vantage point, we'll be able to see Jupiter on the inside lane, approaching Saturn all month and finally overtaking it on December 21."

The planets regularly appear to pass each other in the solar system, with the positions of Ju-

piter and Saturn being aligned in the sky about once every 20 years.

What makes this year's spectacle so rare? It's been nearly 400 years since the planets passed this close to each other in the sky, and nearly 800 years since the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter occurred at night, as it will for 2020, allowing nearly everyone around the world to witness this "great conjunction."

The closest alignment will appear just a tenth of a degree apart and last for a few days. On the 21st, they will appear so close that a pinkie finger at arm's length will easily cover both planets in the sky. The planets will be easy to see with the unaided eye by looking toward the southwest just after

sunset.

From our vantage point on Earth the huge gas giants will appear very close together, but they will remain hundreds of millions of miles apart in space. And while the conjunction is happening on the same day as the winter solstice, the timing is merely a coincidence, based on the orbits of the planets and the tilt of the Earth.

"Conjunctions like this could happen on any day of the year, depending on where the planets are in their orbits," said Throop. "The date of the conjunction is determined by the positions of Jupiter, Saturn, and the Earth in their paths around the Sun, while the date of the solstice is determined by the tilt of Earth's axis."

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The Doctor Is In



Dr. Adil Manzoor OP/ED

Why Should You Choose Direct Primary Care?

Like many others, I entered one of the most challenging fields to date, so that one day I can learn to comprehend the human mind and body and provide care to the most innovative organism to set foot on this planet. Hence, I chose to study cell biology and neuroscience with psychology in my undergraduate years then went on to pursue my lifelong journey of learning medicine and completed my residency training in internal medicine and pediatrics. However, as my medical studies progressed, I became disillusioned, not only towards my ability to comprehend the vast amount of information required of me to care for the human body, and its intricacies along with the ever-evolving research, but also the business of health care.

It was during my second year of residency that the burnout caught up. I was ready to leave medicine and go into business school. I knew I wanted to go into primary care, but I could not fathom having to spend the rest of my life doing paperwork. It was while I was doing research on different practice styles for primary care medicine that I came across the concept of direct

primary care. After my experience, I knew that I would pursue direct primary care after I completed my training.

In order to set myself up for success, I needed to learn about the existing health care system and its flaws. Like everyone else, I knew it was broken, but not how. After reading "Catastrophic Care" by David Goldhill and "America's Bitter Pill" by Steven Brill, I had a better understanding of the existing health care system and its intricacies. I have since then concluded that the change required to fix the broken insurance-based primary care system and reverse primary care burnout isn't complex and there is ample evidence for me to make that claim.

I, however, will not discuss the possible policy changes that can potentially reverse the path we have chosen to pursue, as there are many more intelligent people pursuing such answers. Instead, my focus is to analyze health care spending, primary care segmentation, physician burnout and allow you to decide whether the solution I discuss is a potential one.

Problem #1: Cost

One big problem with the insurance-based system is cost. Health care costs in the United States have increased significantly over the last decade, dramatically outpacing inflation at nearly three times the rate of inflation.

Research suggests that primary care services account for between 5.8% and 7.7% of U.S. health care spending. Based on 2019 national health care spending forecasts, which is \$3.8 trillion, calculated by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, total primary care spending is estimated at \$256.5 billion.

Problem #2: Burnout

Physician burnout has become widespread in our profession, likely driven by frustrating electronic health records, and soaring burden of administrative tasks all the while undermining patient encounters. Perhaps the catalyst to burnout and this new era of measurement and accountability that targets quality, errors, inequities, and soaring costs may be possibly due to the 1999 publication of the Institute of Medicine's "To Err is Human" report or the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

Whatever the cause, the burnout is real, and patients do not like being cared for by physicians who are experiencing symptoms of burnout, which further translates to reduced patient satisfaction in primary care and increased medical errors.

Problem #3: Shortage

Since 2009, primary care visitation has been steadily dropping, according to data collected by the Health Care Cost Institute. The decrease has been especially sharp in recent years, as patients switch to lower-cost urgent care centers staffed with more nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

Some of the substitution away from primary care physicians (PCPs) may be due to a shortage of doctors in this practice area. United Health Group estimates that nearly 13% of U.S. residents live in a county with too few PCPs (defined as less than one PCP per 2,000 people). If the current physician retirement and medical student specialization rates continue, it is estimated that the PCP shortage could almost triple by 2030 or simply put, one PCP per 6,000 people. This physician-to-patient ratio will make it impossible for physicians to continue to practice primary care.

These problems, I believe, are the key to the continued destruction of primary care. The increasing cost of primary care

has potentiated increasing control by the government by enforcing measurement and accountability which has further translated into a system of rewards, punishments, and pay-for-performance. This tightening control has led to increased burdens and administrative tasks alienating physicians, not only from direct patient engagement, the core of their desire to pursue medicine, but also from their families which has further potentiated burnout.

Burnout overall contributes to a 1% reduction in physicians' professional work effort, which equates to losing the graduates of seven medical schools annually - before accounting for other outcomes of burnout such as early retirement, leaving the profession altogether, and even physician suicide. This snowball effect will continue to destroy our primary care system.

Even though many states have offered solutions such as providing nurse practitioners full practice rights so that they may serve the same role primary care physicians do, this solution will not fix the core of this problem, and the mounting stress among clinicians is likely to continue to increase burnout and cost. Replacing physicians will only shift the problem.

However, there is a solution, for cost control in primary care, to address physician burnout and to address the primary care shortage, and that solution, I believe, is direct primary care.

This article was written by Dr. Adil Manzoor DO, a Board Certified Internist & Board Eligible Pediatrician, who works as a Hospitalist, and Emergency Room Physician. He is also the current President of Garden State Street Medicine, a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide free preventive and acute urgent care services for the homeless. He is also the co-founder of his own unique medical practice Mobile Medicine NJ.

FUNDING PACKAGE STILL UP IN THE AIR

WASHINGTON - After months and months of bickering, whining, blaming and shaming, lawmakers in the nation's Capital decided to finally facilitate some help to the American public; but it still may not be coming.

On Dec. 21, Congress passed a funding package, featuring \$900 billion in stimulus funding and \$1.4 trillion in money for federal agencies - staving off a federal shutdown. Among the items in the bill are \$284.4 billion in Payment Protection Program loans, \$300 in weekly unemployment money for those without a job, and a \$600 check for most Americans, half of the \$1,200 that people got earlier in the year. As with the first checks, those making over \$75,000 and couples making over \$150,000 are excluded. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the bill 359-53, while the Senate voted in favor 92-6.

Not included in the bill is help for local and state governments, or liability protections for businesses, health care providers, and schools against COVID-19 claims. However, included in the bill is more money for COVID-19 testing and \$4 billion for the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).

And then, there was more

controversial elements of the bill. One, the length, as lawmakers had only hours to approve something that was nearly 5,600 pages. Another item was aid to foreign countries, which included such things as \$1.3 billion to Egypt, \$500 million for Israel, \$85.5 million to Cambodia and \$25 million for Pakistan, which has many Americans puzzled as to why other nations are getting critical money during this time.

The lack of money for everyday Americans and influx of money toward non-Americans drew the ire of President Trump. In a video posted to social media, he voiced his displeasure with what Congress offered.

"The bill they are now planning to send back to my desk is much different than anticipated. It really is a disgrace...I'm asking Congress to amend this bill and increase the ridiculously low \$600 to \$2,000, or \$4,000 for a couple. I'm also asking Congress to immediately get rid of the wasteful and unnecessary items from this legislation."

In a rare action, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi agreed with Trump on something, which was adding money to stimulus checks.

"Republicans repeatedly refused to say what amount the President wanted for direct checks," Pelosi posted on Twitter. "At last, the President has

COVID-19 VACCINATION

(Continued from page 1)

movie.

After establishing vaccination "beachheads" here at University Hospital and five other key regional medical centers across the state, the New Jersey Department of Health directed vaccines to another 47 hospitals on Dec. 19.

Two of Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health's hospitals - Newark Beth Israel and Belleville's Clara Maass - began inoculating their frontline workers Dec. 21.

Newark Beth Israel Medical Center opened its employee vaccination center 6 a.m. that Mon-

day - with RN Vatesse Pleasant first in line.

Clara Maass meanwhile greeted their first inoculant, ICU Nurse Tanya Howard, two hours later.

Glen Ridge-Montclair's Mountainside Hospital gave the first of its 975 doses to Respiratory Therapist Steven Sokolowski by 6 a.m. Dec. 17.

The state's remaining 18 hospitals are to get their first vaccines on or by Dec. 31. They may be vaccines from Pfizer and/or BioNTech, who received first FDA emergency authorizations Dec. 11, or ModernaTX, who received similar permission Dec. 17.

The foregoing are people

EAST ORANGE PLANNING BOARD MEETING

TAKE NOTICE that on the 6th Day of January, 2021 at 07:00 PM a hearing will be held before the East Orange Planning Board via Zoom Conference Meeting via the below link regarding the application No: PB740-20 for Preliminary and Final Site Plan Approval to construct a 3- family dwelling on the premises located at 116 Hollywood Avenue East Orange, NJ and designated as Block 21; Lot 26 on the East Orange Tax Map. Any maps and documents related to this application will be available for inspection in the Comprehensive Planning Division in Department of Policy, Planning and Development during normal business hours 8:30AM to 4:30PM.

Due to City Hall in East Orange being closed to the Public as a result of COVID-19, all documents and plans relating to this application may be inspected by the Public by appointment at 116 Hollywood Avenue, East Orange, NJ 07017. Please email thecollectivelc@outlook.com or call 732-688-2803 to schedule an appointment.

116 Hollywood, LLC

Publication Date: December 24, 2020

January 6, 2021 Public Attendee Zoom Link Credentials and Information:

<https://zoom.us/j/91535454769?pwd=TTAyL0ZXNnN4WjdCckxhOUl2MkFtZz09>
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Webinar ID: 915 3545 4769
Passcode: 506436

agreed to \$2,000 - Democrats are ready to bring this to the Floor this week by unanimous consent. Let's do it!"

Although the bill got through the House and Senate with a veto-proof majority, Trump could enact a "pocket veto" - in which he does not formally veto the bill. By law, the President can

refrain from acting on a bill for 10 days before Congress could then pass the law by themselves. However, because there is less time before a new Congress convenes, this could effectively kill the bill.

The bottom line: hopefully, something will get done by the time you read this.

who are in the state department's Category 1A, "paid or unpaid people serving in health care settings who have the direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials and long-term residents and staff."

Those who are considered 1B - essential workers - are getting scheduled for Essex County's five geocentric vaccination centers. State Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli announced on another six statewide vaccination "mega-sites" Jan. 18 with another 215 satellite sites being set up.

Those six mega-sites are:

- The Meadowlands Sports Complex, E. Rutherford.

- New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center, Edison.
- Moorestown Mall, Burlington County.
- Rowan College of South Jersey at Sewell, Gloucester County.
- The Atlantic City Convention Center.

"Local Talk" will pass along what satellite vaccination centers are established here when announced.

Pfizer, BioNTech and ModernaTX are to ship a second wave of their vaccines open on or by Dec. 28. They may be joined by AstraZeneca, Inovio, CanSino, Gamaleya Research
(Continued on page 15)



From The Pastor's Heart

OP-ED BY DR. ROBERT KENNEDY

A Blessing In Disguise

I had been trying to reflect on the subject of "a blessing in disguise" this week, and after reading several stories, I concluded that human beings are indeed imaginative. They will make sense out of nonsense, or find meaning out of tragedy, etc.

I too have had to learn, in my Christian journey, that many things that might seem to be a tragedy end up a comedy. At times, I do not understand what is happening around me, but in my journey of faith, I have to agree with the apostle Paul that, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Yes, I have been wrestling with what the COVID-19 might mean in terms of "a blessing in disguise." Other persons, I have noted, are struggling with sickness and death from other conditions. And many in the throes of financial distress have been asking how they can find the "blessing in disguise."

I cannot answer the question (s) for everyone, but I know this, that if God is on the eternal throne, in the most tragic of circumstances, he will find a way to bring triumph out of tragedy. And that is not imagination; it is inspiration and revelation. It is how the Bible interprets the coming of Jesus Christ into the world - A tragedy turned into a

blessing.

God found a way to reset the course of history when he sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world as our Savior. Jesus was right there with God the Father on the heavenly throne, but chose to come to earth as a blessing in disguise.

Here is how the apostle Paul frames it in his letter to the Philippians: Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (2:5-8, NKJV).

Just imagine what it must have looked like to the angels of God when Jesus Christ decided to come to earth to live among humanity. For the angels in heaven, that was nothing but a tragedy. The creator of the worlds, the head of the heavenly hosts, the Son of the Father, coming to earth "in disguise," to live among humanity? The angels imagined how challenging it would have been and were very conflicted by the decision. But Jesus left the splendor of heaven and came to earth as "a blessing in disguise."

We read the whole story in the biblical and some secular histories. Jesus came to earth as a babe in Bethlehem's manger. Because there was no room for him in the little hotel in the town, a lowly stable became his birthplace. His earthly parents did not look like royalty, and they were not popular in the town. They had come from Nazareth, where they lived, to their ancestral home in Bethlehem to

pay taxes, as commanded by Caesar Augustus.

No one in town knew Mary and Joseph. There was none to offer a good room, as the time for Mary to deliver her baby was near. The stable was the only option opened to this lowly couple.

When the baby was born, there was no layette set prepared for the child. They wrapped him in whatever pieces of rags they could find; that is what is called "swaddling clothes." And his bed was not a crib or bassinet, but a feeding trough padded with straws that the animals ate. The record also notes that a few shepherds went to find him there. They went because they heard the song of heavenly angels bearing the message that "a savior is born."

It is of interest that while the shepherds came to know who he was, the prominent teachers of Israel, the priests, the religious leader were looking for a messiah, but they did not recognize him in his lowly estate. Their minds were clouded by tradition. King Herod did not know of him and was jealous when he learned about a king who had come.

When his parents went to the temple on the day of his circumcision, the priest took him in his arms and treated him as one of the regular boys and had no knowledge that this was Jesus, the son of God, the savior of the world. He took him, prayed over him and handed him back to his parents. In contradiction, an old priest, Simeon, that was present, felt differently about him. He took him in his arms and lifted, saying:

*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your
servant in peace.*

*For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in
the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the
Gentiles,
and the glory of your people
Israel."*
(Luke 2:29-31 ESV).

The parents contemplated what the old priest had said, as he continued: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:34, 35 ESV)

Oh, we cannot forget the little old lady, Anna, who fasted all the time, and one who frequented the temple. She had the same impression as the old priest, Simeon. Just before the parents left with the child, "she went up to them, and she gave thanks to God for seeing the promised Messiah. She spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." (Luke 2:38)

What is the point that I wish to make? It is this, that Jesus came as a blessing in disguise. Only those who were open to spiritual insight recognized him. He came as the Savior of the world. He came to make us understand the love of God. He came as the bringer of peace. He came as the divine healer. He came as the bringer of grace and mercy. He came as the sinners' friend. But only a few recognized Him then, and only a few today appreciate Him.

Do you know who He is? Do you recognize "the Blessing in Disguise?"

GOOGLE (Continued from page 3)

mand of vast amounts of data has fortified Google's monopoly and created significant barriers to entry for potential competitors and innovators.

According to the Dec. 17 filing, close to 90 percent of all internet searches conducted in the U.S. are run through Google's search engine, and Google earned \$98 billion in revenue in 2019.

The coalition asks the court to halt Google's illegal conduct and restore a competitive marketplace. They also seek to undo any advantages that Google gained as a result of its anticompetitive conduct, including divestiture of assets as appropriate.

The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, in conjunction with a Motion to Consolidate seeking to combine the states' case with the pending

U.S. DOJ case.

The states' investigation was led by an executive committee made up of the attorneys general of Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah.

The other participating jurisdictions are: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota,

Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming, the District of Columbia, and the territories of Guam and Puerto Rico.

Deputy Attorney General Robert N. Holup of the Consumer Fraud Prosecution Section in the Division of Law's Affirmative Civil Enforcement Practice Group is handling the Google matter on behalf of the State.

WORLD NEWS FLASH

(Continued from page 6)

the decision to pardon the men on Dec. 22. A statement from the White House said that the four, all military veterans, had “a long history of service to the nation,” arguing the move reflected broad public sentiment in the US.

In 2014, a US federal court found the men guilty of murder in one case, while three were convicted of voluntary manslaughter, attempted manslaughter and other charges, according to news reports.

The men were part of a Blackwater team guarding a US diplomatic convoy, and according to the US Justice Department at around noon on Sept. 16, they opened fire at the busy roundabout, believing, they said, that they were coming under attack.

Of the 14 victims hit, ten were men, two were women, and two were boys aged nine and 11. At the time, the killings were condemned around the world.

One of the four now pardoned, one was sentenced to life in prison and the others received 30-year terms, but after appeals and two retrials for one of the men - sentenced to life in prison without parole in 2019 - three of them had their sentences reduced to between 12 and 15 years.

CANADA

Psychic Mail Scheme

A Canadian citizen accused of operating a decades-long psychic mail fraud scheme was extradited to the United States and made his initial appearance Dec. 22 in federal court in Central Islip, New York, the Department of Justice and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service announced.

On Oct. 25, 2018, a grand jury in the Eastern District of New York indicted Patrice Runner, 54, on charges of mail and wire fraud, conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, and conspiracy to commit money launder-

ing. Runner was arrested in Ibiza, Spain, by officers of the Spanish National Police in December 2018, based on the U.S. indictment. Following extradition proceedings, the Spanish government released Runner to the custody of U.S. Postal Inspectors on Dec. 21, 2020.

“The Department of Justice’s Consumer Protection Branch is committed to investigating and prosecuting transnational criminal schemes that target elderly and vulnerable Americans,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Bossert Clark of the Justice Department’s Civil Division. “As this case demonstrates, we will work with our law enforcement partners in the United States and around the world to bring to justice criminals who target Americans through mail fraud and other schemes. We thank the Spanish National Police for their efforts to apprehend Runner and ensure that he sees justice in U.S. courts.”

According to the charges, from 1994 through November 2014, Runner’s mail fraud scheme defrauded over one million victims in the United States of over \$180 million. The scheme allegedly involved sending millions of U.S. consumers, many elderly and vulnerable, letters purporting to be from two well-known French psychics, promising that the recipient had the opportunity to achieve great wealth and happiness with the psychic’s assistance in exchange for payment of a fee. The letters also frequently stated that a psychic had seen a personalized vision regarding the recipient of the letter, when in fact the scheme sent nearly identical letters to tens of thousands of victims each week.

Runner and his co-conspirators obtained the names of elderly and vulnerable victims by renting and trading mailing lists with other mail fraud schemes. When a victim responded to one letter, Runner and his co-conspirators sent doz-

ESSEX COUNTY COVID-19 CASE TALLY

Weekly Statistics from Dec. 16 - Dec. 23, 2020

Municipality	12-16-2020	Deaths	12-23-2020	Deaths
Belleville	2744	78	2939	81
Bloomfield	2612	87	2784	89
Caldwell	261	11	282	12
Cedar Grove	811	118	848	118
East Orange	3467	244	3620	246
Essex Fells	85	2	96	2
Fairfield	435	23	465	23
Glen Ridge	144	9	152	9
Irvington	2427	171	2516	173
Livingston	969	75	1005	76
Maplewood	606	29	640	29
Millburn	381	7	395	7
Montclair	1053	53	1105	56
Newark	19207	740	20223	751
North Caldwell	183	6	203	6
Nutley	1277	42	1389	43
Orange	1776	100	1860	103
Roseland	230	15	243	15
South Orange	323	6	355	7
Verona	398	15	434	15
West Caldwell	485	50	531	50
West Orange	2416	197	2547	201
Total	42296	2078	44632	2112

OTHER COVID-19 TALLIES (As of Dec. 23, 2020)

NJ: 445,138 cases / 16,521 deaths (Plus 1,945 probable)

United States (approx.): 18.32 Million / 324,500 deaths

Worldwide (approx.): 78.38 Million / 1.72 Million deaths

NJ Gov. Murphy has extended the Public Health Emergency that was declared on March 9, 2020 through Executive Order No. 103

ens of additional letters to the victim. Each of these additional letters also appeared to be a personalized letter from a psychic and requested additional money from the victim. In reality, the psychics had no role in sending the letters, did not receive responses from the victims, and did not send the additional letters after victims paid money.

Two of Runner’s co-conspirators, Canadian citizens Maria Thanos and Philip Lett, pleaded guilty in the Eastern District of New York in June 2018 to conspiracy to commit mail fraud. Runner used a series of shell companies to hide his involvement in the scheme while living in multiple foreign countries, including Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, and Spain.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant Director John W. Burke and Trial Attorney Ann Entwistle of the Department of Justice’s Consumer Protection Branch with assistance from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York. The Justice Department’s Office of International Affairs provided critical assistance in securing Runner’s extradition. The Spanish National Police also provided assistance in securing Runner’s arrest.

An indictment is a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of criminal law and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Legally Speaking



Cassandra Savoy, Esq.
OP/ED

More Good News & Bad News From The Courts And The Legislature

Good News...

If I had a nickel for everyone who comes to the municipal court for driving while suspended in violation of N.J.S.A. 39:3-40 or driving without insurance, I could go on vacation next week. These are probably two of the most serious offenses heard in the municipal court and the two with very strict penalties. For example, driving without insurance required a MANDATORY loss of license. Bravo!

The Legislature has amended the penalties:

For the first offense of driving without insurance in violation of 39:6B-2, the penalties are:

1. A fine of \$300 to \$1,000
2. Community service as determined by the court; and,
3. OPTIONAL suspension of driving privileges for one year
4. 9, (I repeat 9) insurance points; and,
5. \$750 MVC surcharge per offense
6. Court costs

By no means am I suggesting that these are not harsh penalties, but you know the old adage: "If money can fix it, it ain't broke!" What used to happen is that someone would be caught driving without insurance, lose his license, and lose his job because he could not drive to the job, and we all know that there is no bus service to all parts of New Jersey.

While the news should be categorized as "good," I will note that if you have nine insurance points, you will no longer be eligible to buy insurance on the open market. You will be placed in what we called the assigned risk group and will have to purchase insurance at a higher rate.

For the second and subsequent offenses, needless-to-say, the penalties are stricter:

1. 14 days imprisonment
2. Mandatory 30 days community service, AND,
3. License suspension up of two years
4. Fine up to \$5,000
5. 9 insurance points
6. \$750 MVC surcharge per offense

Remember that failure to produce at the time of trial an insurance identification card or an insurance policy which was in force for the time of operation for which the offense is charged creates a rebuttable presumption that the person was uninsured when charged with the violation. If you are cited by the police for being in violation of this statute, get insurance IMMEDIATELY! More than likely, if you have valid insurance at the time you get to court, the prosecutor will allow you to plead to failure to present a valid insurance credential which is a fine and no point violation.

Good News...

Everyone know that the law requires that if you are not free to leave, the police must advise you that you have the right to remain silent; anything you say

can be used against you at trial. You have the right to an attorney during questioning. If you can not afford an attorney, an attorney will be appointed by the court to represent you. These are called the "Miranda Warnings." The court this year reaffirmed the requirement that police apprise you of your rights, even if you have heard them said a thousand times on "Law and Order" or "Boston Legal" or "Blue Bloods."

In State v. Hager, the court considered whether the omission of one of the Miranda warnings during the custodial interrogation adequately conveys the substance of the warnings and concluded it did not, even if the defendant continuously interrupted their delivery. The court concluded that the suspect's interruption of the warnings does not discharge law enforcement of their duty to deliver them. The court found that it was not "harmless error" to give part of the warnings and not all of the warnings causing the court to reverse defendant's conviction.

All in all, the New Jersey courts and the state legislature has been a mixed bag, but mostly good to New Jersey citizens. Keep reading as I share with you some of the other news from the courts and the legislature in 2020.

NEWARK BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL CENTER BEGINS VACCINATING FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES AGAINST COVID-19

(Continued from page 1)

Health's ambitious vaccination plan to get 70 percent of the state's adult population vaccinated in six months. As the largest, most comprehensive academic health care system in New Jersey, RWJBarnabas Health is committed to treating and saving the lives of patients with COVID-19, and to fighting the spread of the disease, protecting its team members and ending the pandemic.

With the opening of its employee vaccine clinic, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and

Children's Hospital of New Jersey is proud to be an integral part of the national and New Jersey COVID-19 vaccination effort. Public health officials and medical experts believe vaccination is an important step in helping to prevent or lessen the effect of COVID-19 and its potentially devastating consequences.

"By offering this vaccine to our staff, we are providing them with additional piece of mind. Our clinical teams can provide critical care at the bedside without the fear of contracting COVID-19 and bringing it back to their families," said Amy Doran, RN, MSN, APN-c, Chief Nursing Officer, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and Children's Hospital of New Jersey.

"Our employees are overjoyed to have access to this vaccine. It is a proven and effective deterrent to this infection and we can all rest easy knowing that we now have a vaccine that can adequately protect us against this virus," said Matthew Schreiber, MD, Chief Operating Officer, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and Children's Hospital of New Jersey.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine received emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on December 11, 2020. Vaccine safety and efficacy for Pfizer's vaccine has been issued Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the FDA. FDA authorization of a vaccine means the agency has determined, based on sub-

stantial evidence and a stringent review process, that the vaccine is safe and effective for its intended use. The vaccine has been shown to be 95 percent effective and requires two doses received 21 days apart. The vaccine is voluntary for employees and medical staff and is being offered free of charge.

Due to limited supply, the vaccine is being given in phases based on prioritization order. The prioritization order for RWJBarnabas Health staff is determined by the risk of contracting COVID-19 from exposures while at work, primarily by job setting. RWJBarnabas Health facilities expect to vaccinate staff over a 6-week period (weeks 1-3 first dose; weeks 4-6 second dose).

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 7)

here Dec. 12.

MPD officers on patrol said they noticed "upwards of 25 people" who were fighting each other in front of 560 Bloomfield Ave. that Sunday. Many of those combatants scattered when the first cruiser and other units arrived.

The two men who were left behind had cuts on their hands and arms, prompting a call for local EMS. The men said that the altercation began three doors west at the Antika Grill, 578 Bloomfield Ave. - and refused medical attention.

Two storefront windows and the glass front door to Royal Bagel & Deli, which was closed at the time, were shattered. The incident remains under investigation.

BLOOMFIELD - The closest a township man will be coming home from Atlanta for Christmas, according to U.S. Department of Justice-New Jersey District Attorney Craig Carpenito, will be a Newark federal courtroom for an arraignment hearing.

Attorneys for USDOJ-Northern Georgia District informed Carpenito's office that Cedric Lewis, 30, is available for extradition. Lewis, they said, had been arrested in Atlanta Dec. 4.

Lewis had been wanted for narcotics and weapons possession since an incident in Elizabeth Sept 20. He had been accused of possessing "an AM-15 rifle with a high capacity magazine containing 30 rounds of .300 caliber ammunition" plus "188 jugs of suspected crack cocaine" in a car there.

That car, a 2012 Jeep Cherokee, was found abandoned with the said rifle and suspected narcotics on Newark's Van Vechten Street. Elizabeth police said they began pursuing the Jeep in their city "chasing another vehicle" until they lost sight of it on Frelinghuysen Avenue. Lewis was the Jeep's passenger.

An authorities' search warrant served on Lewis' home here at 21 Lackawanna Plaza Sept. 25 yielded a 9-mm. Glock pistol with an extended magazine reported as stolen from North Carolina. They also found a .40 caliber Glock pistol with an extended magazine, nine suspected Xanax pills, several distribution quantity bundles of suspected heroin, a clear plastic bag of distribution quantity suspected crack cocaine, \$800 in U.S. currency, drug paraphernalia and a scale.

Federal attorneys here charged Lewis in absentia on two counts of possessing controlled dangerous substances with an intent to distribute, two counts of firearms possession while a convicted felon and a firearms possession count in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. He was also charged with cds possession with the in-

tent to distribute within 500 feet of Watsessing Park.

Carpenito thanked the Bloomfield Police Department, the Essex County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Marshalls in Newark and Atlanta for their investigation and arrest.

BELLEVILLE - The volume of properties the township has put up for delinquent taxes and liens Dec. 17 may dwindle to where the actual 9 a.m. Dec. 28 sales session here at the Belleville High School Auditorium may be a short one.

The 191 residential and commercial properties Tax Collector Mary Cabanillas and listed on a Dec. 17 legal notice was down to 141 by Noon Dec. 22. That 26 percent decline is due to property owners who removed themselves off the list by paying their taxes and charges in full.

Those who do not make good in full on the current year's back taxes and liens may lose their tax certificate to a third party bidder Dec. 28. The property owner and tax lien certificate holder have two years to come to a payment plan - or the former may lose the property to the latter through eviction or foreclosure.

Belleville Township administrators have called for the \$17,005.37 accelerated tax sale to help recoup revenue that went to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. That sale, as posted, individually ranged from \$27,425.82 to \$16.23.

Cabanillas told "Local Talk News" that "Conrail-Greenwood Lake Branch" had paid off \$659.22 for a billboard charge on Block 702, Lot 2. That property was the Conrail Shared Assets-Norfolk Southern right of way linking the "Lower Boonton Line" to the former Jergens/Roche Diagnostics site over Mill Street 1938-2016.

That billboard has been Conrail Shared Assets' only income generator there since the Mill Street bridge was demolished in 2016. There are no known plans to include that spur with Norfolk Southern's June 16 \$65 million sale of the Montclair-Jersey City LBL to the Open Space Institute for a proposed rail trail.

NUTLEY - An elderly resident is back home after being reported as missing and found in a Miami airport within a 24 hour period.

The man's relatives first called Nutley police to file an "endangered missing person" report, due to his health condition, Dec. 5. They said the man's luggage had arrived at Newark Liberty International Airport earlier that day - but not himself.

Miami International Airport Police called NPD and the family that they found their man on premises Dec. 6. They said he had traveled with his passport but without his wallet and cell phone.

The man was in MIAP custody until a relative arrived to escort him back home.

COVID-19 VACCINATION

(Continued from page 11)

Institute and/or Novax pending FDA approval.

The more pharmaceutical companies' vaccines which join the vaccination pipeline means that there will be a more consistent supply chain to the pandemic's front lines.

"We expect vaccine demand will outpace supply," said Persichilli during her part of Gov. Phil Murphy's Friday Coronavirus Briefing. "So we'll need to initiate vaccine sites in phases to assure equitable distribution."


What the "Local Talk" staffer received is the state expanding vaccinations to Category 1C - adults 65 and older and/or adults with "underlying medical conditions." Those who fall in 1C include patients and residents among the state's 600 long-term health care facilities - including 33 in "Local Talk Land."

Long term care facilities' residents and staff are to receive their shots delivered by UPS, Federal Express and other private parcel carriers That delivery is part of the U.S. "Operation Warp Speed" partnership that also includes CVS and Walgreens pharmacies.

Those who do not fall into the state's three categories - "The rest of us" - will be receiving inoculations in April or May.

The NJDOH's objective is to have 70 percent of Garden Staters - 4.7 million people - vaccinated by or into May.

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"As our Community is impacted by another wave of COVID-19, the Heart Center of the Oranges is here to safely assist our patients. We encourage patients to take advantage of our Telemedicine visits to prevent the spread of the virus. We encourage everyone to come in for the flu shot as soon as possible – *Dr. Rajiyah*



Contact us: **973-395-1550**
Orangeheartcenter.net

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Bloomfield: 135 Bloomfield Avenue, Suite B	Tel. 973-743-2248
Newark: 202 Stuyvesant Ave.	Tel. 973-374-8807
West Orange: 77 Main Street	Tel. 973-324-2090
West Orange: 95 Main Street	Tel. 973-736-5552
West Orange: 92 Old Northfield Road <small>(currently closed for renovations)</small>	Tel. 973-736-5552