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## Rise of Delta variant, Covid cases impact policy

**Brian Woodham**  
Editor

The rise and spread of the Delta variant in the United States and Alabama and the increase in new cases of Covid-19 and hospitalizations in the Auburn community have spurred policy-makers to take up preventative measures again, including mask mandates.

The Delta variant, a highly contagious strain of SARS-CoV-2 that an internal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report said is as transmissible as chicken

pox, is now the dominant strain in Alabama. The variant is currently driving the surge in new cases and hospitalizations in the state.

The new data and guidance from local health care officials prompted Auburn City Schools to require face coverings/masks inside school buildings and school buses to start the school year. Face coverings will not be required for outside activities, like physical education, recess or athletics.

East Alabama Health released a statement Monday in support of wearing masks in school settings.

"We were all thrilled to go through a few months where masks were optional due to lower case counts. However, with the Covid positivity rate being extremely high in the vast majority of Alabama counties now due to the Delta variant being so contagious, it's definitely time to mask again," stated the unattributed quote in the news release. "So we encourage the wearing of masks by all individuals in situations where social distancing is not possible and certainly that would apply to schools. We

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## Suni shines at Olympics, takes home all-around gold medal

**Brian Woodham**  
Editor

With the eyes of the world trained on her, incoming Auburn freshman Sunisa Lee rose to the occasion and delivered in spectacular fashion, taking home a gold medal in the women's individual all-around competition last week to extend the U.S. run of golds into the event to five.

Lee, the first Hmong-American to win an Olympic medal, spoke to reporters in the mixed zone after capturing the gold.

"It feels super crazy," she said. "I definitely didn't think I'd be here in this moment with the gold medal. I definitely haven't let it sink in yet as I feel like it's just not real life."

Lee also stepped up her game when Simone Biles withdrew from the team competition due to the "twisties," a dangerous situation where gymnasts lose their sense of space and control of their bodies while in mid-air. Lee opted to perform a more difficult routine on the uneven bars to get a higher score



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Incoming Auburn freshman Suni Lee took home the bronze medal in uneven bars at the Olympics in Tokyo**

and also stepped into the rotation on the floor, putting together a solid routine and securing the U.S. a place on the podium with a silver medal.

"It was a lot to take in, just because I was coming in to take a silver spot, but I feel like I just kind of went out there and did it for myself," she said.

Lee has had to overcome several

challenges over the past few years, including injuries, losing family members to Covid-19 and dealing with an accident in 2019 that left her father, John, paralyzed from the waist down.

Shortly after her dad's accident, Lee shined at the U.S. Gymnastics Championships, winning gold on her signature event, the uneven bars, as well

as a bronze on floor and a silver in the all-around competition.

After Biles withdrew from the team and all-around competitions, Lee likely felt more pressure to deliver, said Jeff Graba, Auburn's gymnastics coach and twin brother of Lee's current coach, Jess

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## Company to build \$120M data center

**Brian Woodham**  
Editor

Founded by local businessmen, AUBix LLC plans to open a new \$120 million data center in Auburn that is expected to provide key infrastructure and a technological edge for its tenants while benefiting communities across Alabama, Gov. Kay Ivey announced on Monday.

The 40,000 square-foot facility, which is already under construction and will be located on Samford Avenue, is designed to bring technological parity

to underserved communities throughout the state, according to a news release from the governor's office.

"This investment is evidence that Alabama continues to grow its high-tech footprint and the innovation capacity of its economy," said Ivey.

AUBix LLC is building an edge data center, which brings the internet exchanges and fiber optics closer to the communities they serve instead of relying solely on data centers in urban areas, like Atlanta. Applications and entities, like hospitals, universities, and platforms like Amazon, would be brought closer to the end user, improving the speed because fiber optics have shorter routes to transmit the information.

In essence, the building of an edge data center would be akin to adding an exit on the digital interstate that would improve speed and efficiency for the surrounding areas.

"Our goal is to provide customers with secure and compliant infrastructure to host internet applications locally, as well as significantly higher



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**The planned 40,000 square-foot AUBix facility, which will be located on Samford Avenue, is currently under construction**

internet speeds and the choice of national/global carriers who compete for their business," said Andrew Albrecht, co-founder and CEO of AUBix. "In turn, that will attract new businesses to the state, support all levels of academic initiatives and research, and bring value to the communities we serve."

The AUBix data center will also have Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification, which will help the company draw in local healthcare entities, banks and other businesses that deal with sensitive information.

Bringing a data center to Auburn made sense to Albrecht, who graduated from Auburn University, played on the school's baseball team, met his wife on The Plains and recently moved back to Auburn in 2018 after working in Atlanta for more than 20 years.

"We have been underserved in this region of the I-85 corridor for too long in connectivity for simple broadband services, for wireless services, for advanced wireless services, and an asset like AUBix will begin to level that, create parity between

the rural markets and some of the larger markets and suburban markets around tier one markets," said Albrecht. "If you're an Auburn man or Auburn woman, there's a certain passion — to be in Auburn, to be contributing to the development of Auburn and bringing technology.

"It takes a village. It takes the cooperation of Mayor (Ron) Anders and Mayor (Gary) Fuller and even the state to bring assets like this to a rural area. You do

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