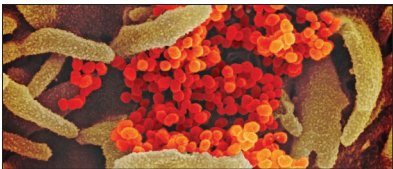


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# Financial Woes Force Chamber To Eliminate Director

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — Facing financial difficulties, the Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce eliminated its full-time executive director position on Friday.

Since 2018, the position had been filled by Nathan Karol, who issued a widely-distributed statement on Friday that said financial difficulties from the COVID-19 pandemic led to the elimination of the position.

Karol said he was informed by the board on July 6 that because of lack of available funds for the chamber, his job was cut.

"It is my hope that the members of the board in Littleton will be able to find a solution and a revised business model, including funding sources and direct aid, to help with collaborations and be a continued resource for businesses in the Littleton area," wrote Karol. "Additional information about services to members and value as a member moving forward will be released by the board in the coming days."

The chamber (which has about 275 members) was looking forward to a banner year, as many organizations were, before COVID-19 became the new normal, he said.

"The Chamber had financially struggled in the past for a number of reasons," wrote Karol. "Unfortunately, all of my efforts of the last two plus years to revise, reconnect and reinvigorate the Chamber were not a match for the economic effects of COVID-19."

On Thursday, The Caledonian-Record spoke with and sent an emailed list of questions to William Jolly, president of the LACC volunteer board of directors, about the future of the chamber.

Among the questions were the current status of the LACC; when could the director position be reinstated; is the chamber expected to continue to

operate out of the Thayer's Inn space, and if so, for how long; what are the near- and long-term plans for the chamber and will there be a restructuring of its mission and vision; and what could the program model to support that mission and vision look like.

More information on the future of the chamber could be available in August, Jolly said Thursday.

"We're looking at doing a lot of changes with the chamber and nothing is set in stone," he said. "It's an important institution and we have every intention of it remaining so."

In a statement issued Sunday morning, Jolly said the LACC is still serving the local business community.

"Like many organizations in this fluid, dynamic, and uncertain environment that we face, as we emerge from the covid-19 pandemic, the Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce has seen significant reductions in its revenues," he wrote. "Our board of directors has been working overtime to maintain the viability of our organization, and this necessitates very difficult decisions."

Regrettably, the LACC had to suspend its executive director position for the immediate future, and this has necessitated laying off Karol, he said.

"This was not an easy decision for the board," said Jolly. "By virtue of his position as Executive Director, Nathan was fully aware of the situation the Chamber faces, he agrees with the decision, and the parting is very amicable. Through its all-volunteer Board and our part time administrative-assistant, the Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce continues to operate and have a strong presence in the business community as we emerge from the covid-19 pandemic."

He said, "On behalf of The Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and our members, and personally, I would like to thank Nathan for his years of hard work, his professionalism, and his passionate devotion to the people and businesses of Littleton. We are sure of Nathan's continued success."

## Facing Unknowns, Staying Positive

Other area chambers of commerce are also facing challenges, such as fundraising, but, like Littleton, they are trying to stay positive as they look toward the future and work to promote and provide services and support for their member businesses.

"Short term over the last couple of months we have been reacting as quickly as we could to share information and communicate directly with our member businesses and also other businesses in the area," said Hannah Campbell, president of the board of the Colebrook-based North Country Chamber of Commerce.

"Our executive director, Jodi Gilbert, has done a phenomenal job keeping the flow of information going and maintaining a web page of business updates in real-time" said Campbell. "In addition, our members have shown truly amazing support by working with us to maintain membership despite the obvious financial challenges."

Like other chambers, the NCCC been forced to cancel events and fundraisers that directly support it ability to keep operating and providing services to the region, she said.

"As we transition to looking forward we are exploring creative ways to replace fund-raisers and events and have even given grants consideration to maintain our operating costs," said Campbell. "We're fortunate that our marketing committee has spent the last couple of years focusing on building a tourism-based, self-sustaining program so that is able to operate under this new normal still. We're having very similar conversations to other chambers right now, I imagine, although we are determined to adapt and only grow stronger."

The Franconia Notch Area Chamber of Commerce has an operating budget in place and has funding from towns, written into warrant articles, that support the information booth, said FNACC board member Kevin Johnson.

Its fiscal year runs from October to October and member dues are paid up to October 2020, he said.

"Financially, we are in pretty good shape," said Johnson.

The information booth that normally opens Memorial Day Weekend was this year opened July 1 and runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. seven days a week.

"Traffic at the information booth has been slow, but steady," said Johnson. "We are having people from all over the United States stopping in to inquire about hiking and dining and lodging."

That information, though, has changed significantly during the pandemic as some dining is take-out or limited seating, he said.

And some visitors have gotten a rude awakening when they learn that attractions like the Flume Gorge that had been general admission are now reservation only, said Johnson.

"That's a new word for people used to coming up here and used to paying admission and seeing sites," he said.

As far as individual businesses go, Johnson said he can only speak to the Gale River Motel, which he owns, and said it was a breath of fresh air when lodging establishments opened to guests on June 5.

That said, business is down for him by 50 to 60 percent.

"It's looking slow in the early stages," said Johnson. "I think there is a big question as to what the future will hold. We are settling into a new groove over the course of the summer."

Johnson said everyone is fortunate for the business they have now, but said the biggest fear for him is a resurgence of the coronavirus that could prompt restrictions again and throw a wrench into recreational pursuits.

If that happens, he said it could impact the fall foliage season business and possibly the ski season in the winter.

"We're fearful of what we might lose in the future and are taking it one day at a time," said Johnson. "It can turn on a dime."

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## Advocates Say Homelessness Could Surge During Pandemic

BY PAUL HAYES  
Staff Writer

Renters are at risk.

That was the message delivered by New Hampshire housing advocates during a conference call with Sen. Jeanne Shaheen on Wednesday.

Without a state moratorium on evictions (which expired July 1) or enhanced unemployment benefits (which end July 31) people could be forced from apartments and into homeless shelters.

"Housing is a huge issue in New Hampshire," Shaheen said. "It was an issue before this pandemic and sadly it's become even more critical as

a result. We have a lot of folks in rental housing who are in desperate straits. We have folks who still can't afford to buy homes in New Hampshire because of the cost."

Between 10 and 20 percent of New Hampshire renters have missed payments during the pandemic. Nearly half are "cost burdened," paying more than 30 percent of their income towards rent.

The problem runs deeper in the North Country where many lost jobs in the hard-hit hospitality, travel and tourism industries during the pandemic.

A surge in evictions would create a dilemma.

See **Homelessness**, Page 15

## North Country: School District To Advance School Reopening Plans

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

Summer is nearly halfway over, meaning the start of another school year isn't too far off.

But as the coronavirus pandemic remains a concern and is far from over, what exactly the fall semester will look like in the North Country is still being worked out.

To prepare, some local school districts are assembling teams to develop options and plans as they await guidance from the New Hampshire Department of Education and the recommendations from its School Transition Reopening and

Redesign Task Force, which is expected to issue guidelines next week.

"I have my reopening task force in place," Marion Anastasia, superintendent of White Mountains Regional School District SAU 36, said Thursday. "We have a team for each domain area. We have our kickoff meeting on July 20, then teams will work individually on their 'charge.' We are waiting for the NH DOE guidance."

SAU 36 includes the preschool-8 Lancaster Elementary School, preschool-8 Whitefield Elementary School, and 9-12 White Mountains Regional High School.

See **Reopening**, Page 14





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## News Briefs

## Selectmen Introduce Interim Fire Chief, Approve Apthorp Committee

In their first meeting open to the larger general public in nearly four months, the Littleton Board of Selectmen met Monday in the grand room of the Littleton Opera House, where everyone could be safely spaced.

They went through a busy agenda, introducing the interim fire chief and approving the creation of the Apthorp District and the formation of a committee to help revitalize the town's new designated district.

The interim fire chief of Littleton Fire Rescue, officially called a fire manager, is David Houghton, who has spent the last month coordinating with retiring LFR Chief Joe Mercieri.

The search for a permanent fire chief was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic and Houghton is expected to stay on toward the end of the year as the search continues for a permanent chief.

Because Houghton has to drive up from Moultonborough, the agreement with the town is he will depart before the snow flies so he doesn't have to go through the Notch when the weather turns treacherous, Littleton Town Manager Andrew Dorsett said Tuesday.

Houghton retired after 38 years in fire service and with experience as a fire instructor, fire inspector and as an EMT.

He was connected to the interim position in Littleton by Municipal Resources Inc. and will provide consulting services to LFR during his tenure.

Community members were interviewed to gather input on the permanent chief position and an advertisement has been issued.

Applications will be accepted until mid-August and candidates will be narrowed down to the finalists for further interviews and tests.

Dorsett said he is forming a Littleton fire chief citizen review panel for the purpose of providing the town with community-based input and feedback during the selection process.

"This is an important decision and I want to have the fairest process possible, resulting in the best possible person to drive the organization forward," he said.

### Possible Business Boost

Littleton businesses could get a boost after the town contacted the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and a DOT contractor to learn about a state initiative in which Interstate 93 and state routes could be used for tourist-oriented directional signs, called the "blue sign" program, for state highways.

"I-93 and state routes could increasingly be utilized by businesses to direct additional traffic into the Littleton market," said Dorsett. "The program for Littleton's four exits and major state intersections is severely under-utilized."

Additional outreach and program promotion should be undertaken for businesses, he said.

### Apthorp

Nominations are now being accepted from those wanting to serve on the new Apthorp District Committee that will look into ways to spruce up and revitalize the Union Street area to the east of downtown.

The vision includes new signage, a complete street-scape to entail new sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, trees, and traffic calming, as well as more access to the recreation trail and river and branding, marketing and promotion of Apthorp and its businesses.

### Parks And Rec, Schools Agreement

A revision has been made to the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Littleton Parks and Recreation Department and the Littleton School District.

The former agreement that involved an exchange of dollars is no more.

"This is a zero-cost one and I think it works out well," said Dorsett.

For several years, the school district and town had been meeting with the parks department to explore shared use of facilities between the town and the schools, he said.

Littleton Parks and Recreation lacks a facility to host its after-school and summer programs, and the schools as an organization lack the facilities of athletic fields and courts.

Costs and use for the separate entities had been an unresolved issue until Parks Director Chris Wilkins and School District Operations Director Dale Prior were able to establish operational expectations that resulted in a no-cost MOU, said Dorsett.

## Littleton: How Did Those Lines Get There?

LITTLETON — About every year, the town has been out there protecting its investment — the sidewalks from the multi-million dollar Main Street reconstruction project that were completed about a decade ago.

Since then, a chemical solvent sealer product has been applied to the sidewalks, from about the Littleton Diner to the Veterans Memorial Bridge on Cottage Street.

This year, to save taxpayers money and use an environmentally safer product, the town opted for water-based sealer with polymers from Unique Paving Materials Co., based in Cleveland, Ohio.

And that's when the town manager began hearing from members of the public with a question about sidewalks.

It turns out the new sealer applied by town crews left very visible lines.

Now, Littleton is working with the company to find a way to remove them.

"We evaluated it and saw it was a cost savings and a less caustic chemical," Littleton Department of Public Works Director Doug Damko said Thursday. "They're a company we use for some other products. We tried this and it backfired."

The company's representative from its Londonderry office, Brandon Holm, was in town to inspect the sidewalks and is collecting information and trying to help determine what happened and come up with solutions, said Damko.

The way Holm explained it, the former solvent sealer was absorbed into the concrete, whereas the water-based sealer, called Unique Concrete Sealer, stayed on the surface, said Damko.

"It basically created areas that have more product on it than others," he said. "It stayed on the surface and created thicker areas and created inconsistencies. You can literally see our spray pattern."

The product came in a 55-gallon drum at a cost of under \$800 versus the \$1,500 cost of the chemical sealer, said Littleton Town Manager Andrew Dorsett.

Representatives at Unique Paving Materials are not aware of other towns experiencing the same

problem with the product, said Damko.

"We want the protection that it offers, but also want it to look decent," he said. "We want to find out if there's anything that can be done to improve it and are waiting for recommendations from the company."

Salt breaks down concrete and the concrete sidewalks installed on Main Street were treated when put down, said Dorsett.

The town is now looking at and exploring funding sources for the Main Street Phase II reconstruction, an estimated \$4.7 million project from about the Littleton Diner to Meadow Street.

"We have to protect our assets," said Dorsett. "As we grow, there are growing needs in the community and we want to make sure we protect that for generations to come."

## Girl Dies In ATV Accident

A six-year-old girl died following an ATV incident in Stewartstown on July 4.

The incident occurred at around 9:45 a.m. when three young children were playing around an ATV that accidentally slipped into gear and rolled down a driveway, striking a tree and tipping onto its side, pinning the girl underneath, according to New Hampshire Fish and Game.

She was transported to Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital where she was pronounced dead.

"It was a freak accident," said Fish and Game Lt. Mark Ober.

The girl and her family were visiting from Vermont.

Members of 4th Parallel EMS, Colebrook Fire, New Hampshire Fish and Game, and State Police Troop F responded.

Two days later, a mental health debriefing was held for those who took part.

"It was a very traumatic experience for everybody," Ober said.

## Prosecutors Want Easton Fire Chief Held In Jail

Since December, the chief of the Easton Volunteer Fire Department has remained in county jail on charges of shooting 14 rounds from a 9-mm handgun into a Bethlehem home on Christmas Day.

Recently, his attorney filed a motion requesting he be released with pre-trial services.

Leonard Harden, defense counsel for Arthur Rainville, 60, who had been Easton fire chief for five years, argues the case appears headed to a jury trial, but no trials will be held in the foreseeable future because of the COVID-19 pandemic and Rainville could be held for an extended period of time without being brought to trial.

Grafton County prosecutors, however, object to a release, arguing Rainville, being held at the Grafton County House of Corrections, still represents a

See News Briefs, Page 9

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ON THE COVER: Murals popped up along the Riverwalk in Littleton last week as part of the North Country Mural Project. (Photo by Paul Hayes)





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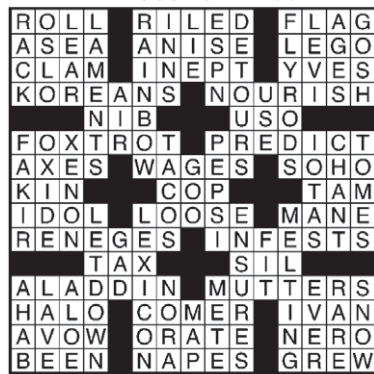
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- 52 Titled man
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- 37 Doctrine
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- 56 Drama award
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- 59 Blob
- 61 Frost
- 62 Responsibility
- 63 Into the sunset
- 66 Wood ash product

# Realtors: Pandemic Partly Responsible For Robust Real Estate Market

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

A robust real estate market.

That's what local realtors are calling the last few months when homes in the North Country and Northeast Kingdom have been selling like hotcakes.

Why did an already strong market become even stronger?

Chalk it up in part to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Certainly, for days on the market and activity and multiple offers on a single property, it's as busy as it's ever been," said Andy Smith, owner-broker of Peabody and Smith Realty, which serves a region that includes the towns in northern Grafton County.

"We saw a little bit of that after 9/11, when you think about the population that was affected, New York City and maybe Boston," he said. "This COVID thing has created a much broader pool of potential buyers who are making a decision that now is the time to buy."

In the beginning, with the stay-at-home order, there were maybe five days realtors were a part of it and no one knew what was going on, said Cindy Sparks, real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Lifestyles, whose offices and locations include Littleton, Franconia, Lincoln, and Conway.

"Gov. Sununu then deemed us essential workers with some guidelines that we couldn't have open houses and had to wear face masks," said Sparks. "We started working right away. It's been a busy market, and a shortage of inventory and low interest rates made the fixings for a good market for sellers."

Primary homes are being bought by those moving up from metropolitan areas and some people owning or buying second homes in the area are making them into primary homes, she said.

Moving from metro to rural was the trend in the North Country a generation ago.

"This happened after 9/11 when people started moving to the country because they felt it was safer than the cities," said Sparks.

Fast forward to 2020 and home buyers feel more safe in sparsely populated areas like northern New England as opposed to heavily populated areas, like New York or Boston, which for a time were among the coronavirus hot spots.

"For the most part, the North Country

has been very active," said Smith. "We don't see that changing. We see a cultural shift."

Overall, as one goes farther north, homes below the \$450,000 to \$400,000 price range are selling vigorously as are condominiums in locations like Bretton Woods, he said.

"There is certainly a very strong desire and urgency for buyers that hasn't been there before," he said. "They've wanted to come up and thought about it for years and are saying, 'I need to do something now.'"

still have people who want to come up for ATVing and snowmobiling, but we have a different clientele right now, people who can work from home and a lot of retirees."

The last six weeks have seen a big increase, said Rancourt.

"It's brought buyers who are looking at a little higher price range," she said.

Low residential inventory in Coos has also led to an increase in land sales for those who want to have property for a future home, said Rancourt.

Across the river, Maurice Chaloux,

*"Certainly, for days on the market and activity and multiple offers on a single property, it's as busy as it's ever been."*

— Andy Smith, owner-broker of Peabody and Smith Realty

There's long been a push among some to move to the mountains and that has led to a greater push because of COVID-19, said Smith.

That's one of the reasons sales have been high and housing inventory low, he said.

## Numbers And Regions

"As soon as we were back to business, people wanted to look at houses," said Sparks, who added that condominium sales are likewise strong.

According to figures from Coldwell Banker Lifestyles, there were 165 listings in the North Country from April to June 2019 versus 99 listings for April to June 2020, equating to a 40-percent decrease.

Unit sales were 80 in April to June 2020 versus 72 for the same time period this year.

The average selling price April to June 2019 was \$242,000 versus \$310,000 for April to June 2020, a 28-percent increase.

Homes across Coos County, many valued lower than those in northern Grafton County, are also selling well.

"We have seen an increase, especially from people who want to move up to get away from the bigger areas, even if they are not right in the city," said Francine Rancourt, realtor with RE/MAX Northern Edge Realty in Colebrook. "You

realtor with the St. Johnsbury-based Parkway Realty, said the market is strong across the Northeast Kingdom, in part because realtors weren't able to show homes in April because of the pandemic and now they can.

"It's increased ever since we've been able to show properties again," he said.

Before it was more difficult, especially when those from out of the area, such as from Massachusetts, had to self-quarantine for 14 days before they could tour a house.

Like other realtors, Chaloux has also seen buyers pull the trigger on a property, sight unseen, such as a California couple who bought property in Landaff, in New Hampshire, where he is also licensed.

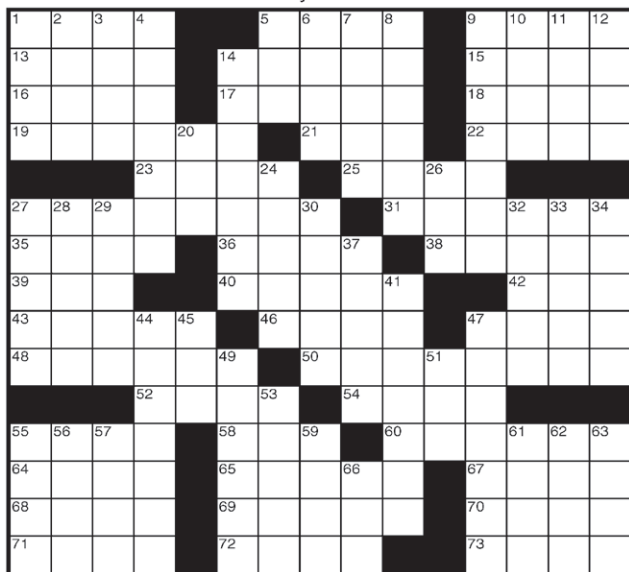
In addition to people now being able to move around and look at properties in the Kingdom, another reason for the strong market there is likely pandemic-related because of those wanting to live outside of more urban areas, said Chaloux.

"I don't dare say it's a seller's market yet, but it could soon be a seller's market," he said.

## Technology Boosts Market

During the last few months, the real estate industry was able to utilize what it had been implementing the last few

See **Real Estate**, Page 8



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COURTESY PHOTO

LEFT: Begin Realty is listing this country home in St. Johnsbury for under \$400,000. MIDDLE: You can have this home on Bickford Hill Road in Franconia for a little over \$1.1 million. North Country sales are brisk, realtors report. RIGHT: Mathew Ghafoori of William Raveis lists this property on Main Street in St. Johnsbury for \$359,950.

## Real Estate

Continued from Page 6

years - cloud computing, said Smith.

"As an industry, we are able to operate through the challenges and operate safely," he said. "All of that technology is really playing a big role."

People can now look at a 3-D tour of a home without physically visiting it, an op-

portunity that was nice a few years ago, but during a pandemic is critical now, he said.

Prospective buyers want to narrow down a purchase as much as they can investigating on the Web, said Smith.

"There were some sight unseen sale happening, more than the usual," said Sparks.

While such sales tallied about half a dozen in the last 10 years, Smith said he's seen half a dozen in the last four months.

"They are buying the house and closing

without stepping foot in it," he said.

But that doesn't mean they haven't vetted it, albeit virtually, with today's available technology.

Unlike in the years after 9/11, the technology available in 2020 has made buying remotely easier, with tours being done virtually on apps like FaceTime, said Sparks.

### Trends And Fast Internet

Sales are also strong because a good number of buyers can now work from home and because parents with children can utilize remote learning at home for schooling if such learning is to continue for some time, said Sparks.

Sales took a little while to take off after the shutdown that began in March, but by June, closings began to increase, she said.

In May, the price point from a year ago was 20 percent higher for homes with the average median sales price, and in part because the shortage of inventory has been driving up those prices, said Sparks.

The only thing holding sales back from closing in a timely manner are appraisers overwhelmed with the high number of refinances going on, she said.

As for appraisers, some have been cautious to enter homes because of the pandemic and have been allowed to make drive-by appraisals and then photograph similar homes as comparables, she said.

By and large, homes have also been selling above the town assessment before the pandemic and that has continued, said Sparks.

Statewide, year to date, houses are currently selling for an average of 106 percent of their list price, whereas the typical range of the year has been 94 to 96 percent of list price, said Smith.

Often, too, there are three to five offers in the first couple of days of a property going on

the market, said Sparks.

"The housing market is in really good shape," she said. "I've been doing this since 2012 and I've never seen anything like it ... It's definitely a good time to sell your home and to a buy a home, too, with the interest rates at 3 percent ... I feel if interest rates don't go up too much and we don't have a surge in the community leaving, I don't see this changing and I see this as a good market for a while. The more listings that come on the market, the more it will soften the price point for buyers."

Smith said, "Interest rates are the lowest they've ever been. A 30-year mortgage right now is 3 percent. That used to be the low point for a 15-year mortgage."

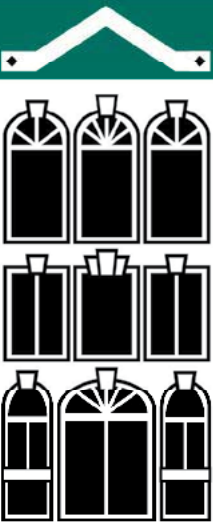
That adds to the motivation to buy a house, he said.

A good number of people pre-pandemic had been moving into the area, but that has accelerated and includes those from the millennial generation, who want to live within 10 or so minutes of shopping areas and want to live in a place like Littleton that is within walking distance of Main Street, she said.

In Littleton, and to an extent in nearby towns like Bethlehem and Franconia, millennials wanting convenience and the jobs that are available or that they can bring with them are driving that market, said Sparks.


"People also want high-speed Internet because more people are working from home," she said. "It wasn't as important before as it is now."

Smith said, "It's almost mandatory for homes to have high-speed Internet, and those that don't are at a disadvantage. A lot of employees have been working from home and some employers say, 'I don't want you back.' High-speed Internet is almost as important as electricity and water now."



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## News Briefs

Continued from Page 4

danger to the community and to himself, a determination they said has already been made by the judge during a bail hearing on Jan. 31.

A hearing for Rainville's requested release with pre-trial services is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. July 16.

In February, Rainville was indicted by a Grafton Superior Court grand jury on a Class B felony count of reckless conduct with a deadly weapon as well as two special class felony counts of criminal threatening with a firearm that carry extended terms of imprisonment.

He is accused of firing the shots into the home at 11 Cleos Way, where he had been invited by friends to dinner, and putting those inside - two men, two women, and several children - at risk of serious bodily injury.

Police said Rainville then fled in his pickup truck to Littleton, where he was arrested following a hit-and-run crash and charged with aggravated drunken driving and unlawful conduct after an accident.

His initial defense attorney at the time of his arrest, Charlie Buttrey, said Rainville had been going through a separation with his wife and was experiencing recent mental health issues as well as delusions just before the shooting incident (he was allegedly talking of aliens and being abducted by aliens) and his condition was exacerbated by alcohol in combination with anti-anxiety medication.

In a June 22 motion for release on pre-trial services, Harden, said Rainville has been held on preventative detention and has sought and completed programs available at the Grafton County House of Corrections, attended counseling since his incarceration, and has been a model inmate.

Rainville, who has no criminal record, suffers from medical conditions and would like to be treated by his primary care physician, wrote Harden.

His release would enable him to gather important documents to aid in his defense, argues Harden, who said Rainville was deemed eligible for pre-trial services on June 22 and is asserting his right to a speedy trial.

In a June 25 objection to release, Assistant Grafton County Attorney Amanda Jacobson argued prosecutors met their burden by "clear and convincing evidence that [Rainville] presents a credible threat to himself and the community at that juncture."

Police ultimately recovered 14 shell casings at the Bethlehem home, she said.

"Luckily, none of the four adults and several children inside the home were struck by a bullet," wrote Jacobson. "The defendant's firing of his weapon was preceded by a Christmas dinner with the occupants of the home in which the defendant consumed alcohol, ultimately leading to a blood alcohol content reading of .224 in combination with a positive result for benzodiazepines. The defendant was ultimately located ... by the Littleton Police Department after he struck a vehicle on Union Street and fled the scene."

She said, "The state maintains that [Rainville] presents a credible threat to himself and the community ... to include his threatening behavior and use of a firearm, alcohol and substance use, concerning statements as to his observations prior to committing the offenses, operation of a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol and a controlled substance, and access to firearms."

### Police: Woman Left Puppy Alone For Days With Adequate Food, Water

LITTLETON — A Littleton woman charged with animal cruelty is accused of leaving her 4-month-old puppy in a residence without adequate food and water for several days as she visited downstate, Littleton police officials said Monday.

Crystal Corriveau, 29, of Littleton, was arrested on a warrant for the incident that allegedly occurred in December at a Sampson Road residence.

She is being charged with a Class A misdemeanor count of animal cruelty negligence.

"She took off for an extended period of time and left the animal in

### N.H. Won't Require Schools To Reopen

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — New Hampshire will not require any schools to reopen this fall, but is offering guidance on how districts can do so safely.

Gov. Chris Sununu on Tuesday outlined recommendations for screening, social distancing, hygiene and other safety measures aimed at preventing further spread of the coronavirus. While President Donald Trump is demanding that schools resume in-person instruction, New Hampshire is leaving it to each school district to decide whether to fully return to the classroom, continue with remote instruction or combine those two options.

"We feel very confident that all students can come back to the classroom in a safe, health and productive manner, in a practical way," he said. "We also appreciate that in some districts, it could be because of staffing, it could be because of public health anxiety — maybe the rate of COVID starts to skyrocket in one town versus another — we want them to have that flexibility."

The 54-page roadmap released Tuesday includes information about rearranging classrooms to maximize social distancing, screening of staff and visitors and other precautions. Schools that do reopen must provide accommodations for students and educators who are not able to return due to underlying health concerns. Masks will be required for all outside visitors, including parents, and strongly encouraged for staff and students under certain circumstances, for example, when within 3 feet (1 meter) of each other during group activities.

Dr. Ben Chan, the state epidemiologist, acknowledged that some of the recommendations are inconsistent with

previous advice to wear face coverings when within 6 feet (2 meters) of others. But he said, taken as a whole, the guidance is built upon layers of protection.

"I almost think about this as a Swiss cheese model. Each layer has holes. No layer is going to be 100% effective at preventing transmission, but when you put the layers together, the goal is to minimize the risk to staff, to children in the classroom, while trying to maximize the educational benefit of bringing students back to class," Chan said.

The Republican governor initially ordered all schools to close for three weeks, starting March 16, and later extended that for the remainder of the academic year. The new guidance emphasizes that the pandemic "has created a traumatic event in the lives of students and educators" and urges school staff to support their social and emotional needs.

"Schools will need to model a sense of calmness and self-assurance to their students as they enter the school year," the guidance states.

Other coronavirus-related developments in New Hampshire:

#### REQUIRED FACE COVERINGS

The city of Portsmouth is moving toward requiring the use of face coverings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The Portsmouth Herald reports that the City Council voted 9-0 in favor of a mask mandate resolution Monday night and will meet with the city attorney later this week to write a formal ordinance.

Momentum for such a mandate grew after Trump announced plans to hold a campaign rally at the Portsmouth International Airport at Pease on July 11. The president later postponed the rally, citing the threat of bad weather, and Gov. Chris Sununu said Tuesday he has not heard from the president about rescheduling.

The resolution calls for the wearing of

face coverings when people are within 6 feet (2 meters) of each other. It wouldn't apply to children ages 6 or younger, people with a medical condition where wearing a mask may pose a risk, or individuals walking, biking or exercising as long as social distancing is maintained.

A judge this week refused to strike down Nashua's mask ordinance while it's being challenged in court.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

New Hampshire's 11.8% unemployment rate for June reflects the impact of the pandemic, officials say.

The rate was a decrease of 3.6% from May, which increased to 15.4% after revision. The June 2019 seasonally adjusted rate was 2.5%.

The number of employed residents for June was 656,580, an increase of 35,460 from the previous month and a decrease of 97,190 from June 2019.

Nationally, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for June was 11.1%, a decrease of 2.2% from the May rate, and an increase of 7.4% from the June 2019 rate.

#### THE NUMBERS

As of Tuesday, nearly 6,100 people had tested positive for the virus in New Hampshire, and 392 had died. The number of infections is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected with the virus without feeling sick.

For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms. For some, especially older adults and the infirm, it can cause more severe illness and can lead to death.

*Associated Press writer Kathy McCormack contributed to this report.*

the house," said Deputy Littleton Police Chief Chris Tyler.

It was a neighbor who contacted police on Dec. 31 about a welfare check on the dog, a chocolate lab, and was concerned because no one was inside the house, he said.

"They believed the dog was left in the residence and the owner had not been home for three days," said Tyler.

The investigating officer, Littleton Police Det. Jillian Myers, tried to reach Corriveau with telephone numbers she obtained, but none of the numbers were in service, he said.

When Myers arrived at the residence on Dec. 31, it had already snowed on Dec. 29 and 30 and no footprints or tracks were seen going into or out of the residence, said Tyler.

"She knocked on the door and heard a dog barking inside and moving around," he said. "The residence was secured, but she could look into the window and saw trash and other items littering the floor. She couldn't see the dog from the windows, but could see dog feces and urine scattered throughout the residence."

Another neighbor told police Corriveau hadn't been seen at the home since Dec. 24, said Tyler.

"Based on that information and not being able to make contact with the owner, we contacted the Littleton Fire Department and they assist-

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## News Briefs

Continued from Page 9

ed us with making entry into the residence so we could locate the dog for safety reasons," he said.

The dog was located in a bathroom and transported to the Littleton Pet Center, he said.

"We were notified on Jan. 5 that the owner of the dog had returned back to the area and we tried to locate her at her place of work," said Tyler. "We spoke to her about the condition of the dog and asked her if she knew we had taken it, and she said she did."

Corriveau was last home on Dec. 29 and said she had to travel to the southern part of the state unexpectedly and was trying to make arrangements for someone to check on the dog, but was unable to do that, said Tyler.

Corriveau told police she came back to the area on Jan. 5, which would have made the dog six days uncared for had the animal not been rescued, he said.

At the time fire crews rescued the dog on Dec. 31, two days after it was allegedly left alone, there was already inadequate food and water, said Tyler.

"Following this situation, Ms. Corriveau decided to surrender the rights of the dog," he said.

The puppy has since been relocated to a new home.

It took a lot of back and forth between police and Corriveau before Corriveau turned herself in, said Tyler.

"I do know that Detective Myers made several attempts after obtaining the warrant to meet with Ms. Corriveau, but had difficulty doing so," he said.

That's why it took some time between the warrant and arrest and it was not for lack of trying on the part of police, said Tyler.

Corriveau was released on summons and is scheduled to appear in Littleton District Court on Aug. 11.

In any given year, animal cruelty cases in Littleton are not common, said Tyler.

"People are really passionate about animals and for the most part take care of them like they're supposed to," he said. "When we do get a complaint, it is usually something serious."

Although it's been a hot summer and Littleton police every summer receive complaints from people calling about dogs seen left in hot cars, Tyler said few calls have come in this year, and that could be because of fewer people shopping and visiting town because of the pandemic.

"Overall, dogs in hot cars are down this year, which we're very happy about," he said.

### Name Of Fatal Accident Victim Released

Littleton Police have released the name of the New York man who died in a motor vehicle accident over the weekend.

Christopher McLoughlin 24, of East Meadow, N.Y., died after being struck by a vehicle on Hilltop Road at approximately 4 p.m. Sunday, July 5.

According to Littleton Police, CPR efforts were underway when they arrived on scene. McLoughlin was transported by Littleton Ambulance and declared dead at Littleton Regional Hospital.

Additional details were not disclosed. The incident remains under investigation.

### Businesses Receiving COVID-19 Main Street Relief Money

As they struggle to stay afloat, retain employees and help keep the local economy going, some businesses and organizations in the North Country are receiving Main Street relief money under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

For transparency, there is a link on the Governor's Office for

### Blind Voters Sue Over N.H. Absentee Ballot System

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — New Hampshire's absentee ballot system will force blind voters and those with other disabilities to sacrifice their privacy, safety or potentially both during the coronavirus pandemic, according to a lawsuit filed against the state.

Disabilities Rights Center-New Hampshire sued Secretary of State William Gardner on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind and its New Hampshire chapter, Granite State Independent Living, and three voters with disabilities. The lawsuit, filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court, seeks to force the state to implement an accessible, electronic absentee voting system.

Every step of New Hampshire's absentee voting program is inaccessible," the lawsuit states. "Plaintiffs are entitled to equal access to New Hampshire's absentee voting program to vote privately, secretly, independently, and safely, as individuals without disabilities can."

Absentee ballots typically are only available in limited circumstances, but the state is allowing anyone to use them for the Sept. 8 state primary and Nov. 3 general election if they have concerns about the virus. Special voting machines for people with disabilities will be available for those who vote in person, but both scenarios are problematic, according to the lawsuit.

For example, plaintiff Daniel Frye, who is blind, often asks his personal care attendants to fill out and sign forms for him. But he does not want to disclose his voting choices to them because it could affect their relationship if they disagree. But he's also concerned about the safety of voting in person, because he can't confirm whether others are wearing masks or gloves, or are maintaining adequate distance. In addition, "he has often been grabbed by strangers who assume he needs help when he does not," the lawsuit states.

According to the lawsuit, technology is in use across the country that allows voters with disabilities to register to vote and request, receive and return absentee ballots electronically, and nearly half the states allowed such returns as of Sep-

tember. More recently, New York was court-ordered to allow voters to request absentee ballots for its June 23 primary by email, receive the ballots and an envelope template over email, mark the ballots on their computers and print and return them by mail.

But Gardner, the secretary of state, said Wednesday that many computer scientists warn against using the Internet for any part of voting, and said many states that rushed to embrace technology have now gone back to paper-and-pencil voting. He said he shares the concerns of the plaintiffs about voting in person, however, and has been working with experts to explore possible solutions.

"We're looking at this process that they believe is best," he said. "We have been working to see what could be done that could be secret and secure."

Mark Riccobono, president of the National Federation of the Blind, said the organization has offered assistance to no avail.

"We therefore bring this litigation to prevent the continued treatment of New Hampshire's blind voters as second-class citizens."

Emergency Relief and Recovery (GOFERR) web page showing how much each received and it be accessed by plugging in the name of the town.

"Everything is out in the open and very clear," said state Rep. Erin Hennessey, R-Littleton.

In April, Hennessey was appointed to the GOFERR advisory board, which has been meeting every two weeks to gather stakeholder input and develop recommendations on how to spend the \$1.25 billion in federal COVID-19 relief money set aside for New Hampshire.

On Monday, the applications for self-employment opened up, she said.

Funding opportunities for others are also being looked at.

"Our next meeting is at the end of the month, and at that point what I'm hoping to do is propose additional funds for any group or type of business or someone who thought they didn't need funding, but now realize they do," said Hennessey.

One group now coming to the advisory board now summer camps that are organized in different ways, with some for-profit and others nonprofit, she said.

"There's been several groups that have been missed," said Hennessey. "Hopefully, we can do a roundup of those who didn't qualify previously or who thought they didn't need money, but need it now."

Also being proposed are more funds for community colleges and for housing groups, she said.

So far, dozens of businesses across the North Country have received funding, with average disbursement per business in the low to high five-figure range, and a few disbursements in the six figures for some of the larger businesses.

In Littleton, which to date has received a total of \$2.743 million in funds disbursed to 55 businesses, the largest disbursements have gone Brau Inc., doing business as Schilling Beer Co., which received \$264,642; Secured Network Services at \$238,135; Timberwolf Logging at \$235,836; Littleton Freehouse at \$193,808; Littleton Millwork at \$170,641; and Chutters candy store at \$102,673.

In Bethlehem, which to date has received a total of \$330,725 funds disbursed to 10 businesses, The Floorworks received the

largest of the funds disbursed, at \$125,703. Rosa Flamingo's received \$50,095.

### Faculty Votes To Remove Franklin Pierce Name From Law School

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — The faculty at a New Hampshire law school bearing the name of the state's only president, Franklin Pierce, have voted to support removing him from its title, weeks after students raised concerns about Pierce's ties to slavery.

Pierce, the country's 14th president, served from 1853 to 1857. He never owned slaves and expressed moral opposition to slavery, but he was concerned with keeping the nation unified and opposed steps to stop slavery.

Faculty members at the University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law released a statement Monday saying Pierce's reputation as a pro-slavery Northerner was counter to the school's commitment to racial justice, New Hampshire Public Radio reported.

"While he may have been a product of his time, he is not a historical figure worthy of the honor of having New Hampshire's only law school, part of the state's flagship public university, named after him," the statement read.

Of the 25 full-time faculty, 12 supported the resolution, six voted against it, one abstained, and six didn't vote.

"This is a great example where we see reasonable, well-intentioned reasonable people with very different opinions on the matter," Dean Megan Carpenter said.

The final decision for changing the law school's name rests with the university system's board of trustees. The school had targeted Aug. 1. The name change is just one of many issues being considered by a task force that is expected to make recommendations on addressing racism, diversity and inclusion at the law school.

The move came as protesters nationwide have are calling for a reckoning with racism and police brutality in the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of police in Minneapolis.



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(1992), Cast: Winona Ryder, Gena Rowlands, Isaach De Bankolé, Roberto Benigni. Music by: Tom Waits (R)

**Saturday, July 18, at 7:30 • Dead Man**

(1996), Cast: Johnny Depp, Gary Farmer, Billy Bob Thornton, Iggy Pop, Crispin Glover, John Hurt, Michael Wincott, Lance Henriksen, Gabriel Byrne, Mili Avital and Robert Mitchum. Music by: Neil Young (R)

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# Youth Board Member Pleased Age Of Foster Care Is Raised

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

A North Country member of New Hampshire's youth advisory board is applauding the state's decision to raise the age limit for foster care in New Hampshire from 18 to 21, a decision she said could especially benefit those in foster care in northern New Hampshire.

"It should have been done a long time ago," Dolly McPhaul, of Sugar Hill, who has served several terms on the New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth And Families Advisory Board, said Friday.

"It's compounded by the drug problem and compounded by the mental health issues that people are becoming more aware of," she said. "An 18-year-old is not capable of all of a sudden facing the world on their own. Those three years will help them get a grounded start on life."

Unlike more populated areas of the state, the North Country has fewer services, and raising the age limit can ensure services are available for those still in need instead of throwing them on the street as soon as they hit their 18th birthday, said McPhaul.

In June, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced the decision, which follows the approval of DCYF's Title IV-E state plan amendment by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.

DCYF now has additional federal money to launch the voluntary Hope Program, which will allow youth to stay with their foster families until age 21 and continue to be eligible for DCYF services and crucial support as they transition to adulthood.

The Hope Program is voluntary for young adults ages 18 to 21 who are enrolled in high school or a high school equivalency program, enrolled in college, or enrolled in a vocational program six or more hours per semester; employed 80 hours per month; or participating in a program designed to promote employment, said DCYF representatives.

Program participants will continue to receive case management and other supportive services through DCYF, they said.

In a statement, DCYF Director Joseph Ribsam, said, "We are excited about this opportunity for youth in foster care, who will continue to benefit from the support of a loving family as they make decisions that will shape their futures. As these youth start to think about college, employment, and housing options, they still need the safety net that a family provides. We are grateful for the funding that will allow our foster youth to remain with the caring adults in their lives as they begin new chapters."

On Friday, DHHS spokesperson Kathy Remillard said, "As of June 30, there were approximately 1,200 children in out-of-home care in New Hampshire. We anticipate that the HOPE program will serve an additional 30 to 45 youth per year."

Even though age 18 is officially an adult, many 18-year-old who've had challenges in their young lives aren't prepared to go out on their own if they have no contacts, no job, or no money,

said McPhaul.

"That would be extremely hard," she said. "We just feel it's important for them to get that footing. If they come out of a foster situation with a good job and contacts they've made, those extra three years will make a huge difference and make a difference for society overall. We just thought it was worth it ... All of the support systems will be in place, which I think makes total sense."

As the drug problem persists in the North Country and the state, extending the age can help foster families stabilize that and can allow those youth with mental health issues to be served longer, said McPhaul.

"If you throw someone out on the street, that's just asking for trouble," she said.

In the North Country, services are in place, but unlike other areas, they are not as concentrated and might be in other towns, said McPhaul.

"There are services up here, but an 18-year-old is not going to know how to access them whereas in a place like Manchester services are more accessible, there are more of them, and chances are they could find a service a lot easier than up there," she said. "The detriment to being up here is access to ancillary services they could get in a more populated area."

But with an extension of the foster age, there is the opportunity to help youth build strong futures for themselves, said McPhaul.

"It's an important thing," she said.

## News Briefs

Continued from Page 10

### Sununu Signs One Coronavirus-Related Bill, Vetoes Another

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Republican Gov. Chris Sununu vetoed two bills for a second time Friday, along with a third aimed at protecting renters during the coronavirus pandemic.

Sununu also signed a pandemic-related bill into law — a measure that helps town and school districts whose usual process of adopting annual budgets via Town Meeting in March was disrupted. The new law allows communities to hold virtual meetings this year, and to spend money at last year's rate in the meantime. It also requires the state to publicly list on its website details of how federal coronavirus relief is being spent, including the names of each person or entity receiving payments.

The vetoed bill would have required landlords considering eviction to first offer tenants a six-month repayment plan for rent missed during the coronavirus emergency. Sununu issued a moratorium on evictions on March 13, but it expired July 1. To ease the transition, the state has allocated \$35 million of its federal funding to help people avoid losing their housing, including assistance for past due rent and utilities and help securing more permanent housing.

"We must remember that property owners have also struggled throughout the COVID-19 pandemic," Sununu said in his veto message. Landlords with 10 or fewer units account for 90 percent of the state's rental market, and if they can't pay their bills, they could end up selling their property, he said. That would drive up the cost of rent statewide, he said, hurting "the very same group that proponents of this legislation suggest they are trying to help."

The bill also would have created protections for homeowners who fell behind on their mortgage payments. Senate Majority Leader Dan Feltes, D-Concord, called the veto a "slap in the face"

to hardworking families.

"Creating a housing fund is fine, but a housing fund is not housing protection. Rather than allowing baseline housing protections to move forward, Governor Sununu once again sided with lobbyists and big banks over families trying to stay in their homes," said Feltes, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for governor.

Sununu also vetoed a paid family leave and medical bill for a second time, repeating his characterization of it as an income tax. He also again rejected so-called "no-excuse" absentee voting. While the state will temporarily allow anyone to vote by absentee ballot this fall because of the pandemic, state law limits the use of absentee ballots to only a few circumstances. Supporters of the bill argued that permanently expanding absentee balloting would ensure equal access to elections, but Sununu called it a "radical, partisan piece of legislation."

"New Hampshire's voting system works very well and we consistently have some of the highest voter participation in the country," Sununu wrote in his veto message. "The proponents of House Bill 1672 seek to take advantage of a global pandemic to fundamentally and permanently weaken New Hampshire's electoral system."


Rep. David Cote, chair of the House Election Law Committee, said the pandemic has shown how urgent and necessary it is to give voters a choice in how they vote.

"Voters have become very concerned about the health risks they may face by voting in-person. Requiring a narrowly defined excuse for voting absentee is archaic, unfair, and should be changed immediately," Cote, D-Nashua, said in a statement.

Sununu vetoed just seven bills in his first term when his party controlled both the House and Senate. But after Democrats took control of both chambers, he vetoed more than 50 bills. Democrats were unable to reach the two-thirds majority required to override the vetoes in all but a few instances. None of three bills Sununu rejected Friday had passed with veto-proof margins.

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# Epidemic In A Pandemic: Opioid Crisis Exacerbated By Virus Response

BY PAUL HAYES  
Staff Writer

New Hampshire appeared to be making headway on opioid abuse.

Then COVID-19 struck.

Those enrolled in drug and mental health treatment programs were cut off from services when the pandemic hit. They could not meet with counselors or groups because of orders to stay home, maintain social distance, and avoid large gatherings.

They have struggled without in-person services, and drug deaths in the state are up.

"The face-to-face, the connection, that is what is so important in recovery," said DJ Johnson of The Family Resource Center in Gorham, who believes a client's recent suicide was linked to pandemic-related loneliness. "He was really, really isolated. Since then I do as much as I can with trying to get out there and at least talking to and seeing people. As someone in recovery myself, I'd probably be lost if I didn't have people, I really would."

Johnson joined a half-dozen mental health and substance abuse professionals from across the state Tuesday for a roundtable discussion on Tuesday with Sen. Maggie Hassan, who called the opioid crisis "an epidemic in a pandemic."

New Hampshire overdose deaths increased 300 percent over a five-year period and peaked at 490 in 2017. After two years of decline, they are poised to rise again due to pandemic-fueled drug use.

"I appreciate that right now, in the midst of a pandemic, a challenge that was already a really significant and difficult one has been made that much harder," Hassan said.

Those in the industry described a growing statewide problem.

Nina DeMarco of Amoskeag Health in Manchester reported that "our patients' overall health is declining — mental health, substance use, physical health, all of that — since the pandemic started."

According to DeMarco, social distance makes it tough to properly treat clients. Telemedicine cannot replicate her organization's integrated, team approach.

"We're used to sitting in a room together — providers, clinicians, [certified recovery support workers], nurses — being able to communicate, being able to work on a patient's treatment plan right then and there," said DeMarco. "Since we've had to social distance and whatnot, we haven't been able to do that, and it's made it more difficult."

"We have seen it impact our patients for sure," she said.

## PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

The pandemic has strained the substance use and mental health treatment industry.

In a survey conducted by non-profit New Futures of Concord, 83 percent of substance abuse recovery programs had experienced a significant financial hardship, averaging \$23,000 in billing losses from March through May.

"Twenty-three thousand dollars may not sound like a lot but it does represent a significant loss for

a very fragile provider system," said Michelle Merritt, President and CEO of New Futures, "These drops may have hindered their ability to sustain their operations and has resulted in temporary layoffs, closures, hiring freezes and in some cases permanent layoffs."

Merritt added that 45 percent haven't received federal aid to offset losses.

"Some of these hits to New Hampshire's substance use disorder system are going to take, frankly, years to rebuild and it's going to treatment capacity," Merritt said.

That means New Hampshire's recovery system has less capacity — while need continues to grow because of the pandemic.

Since March, overdose deaths have increased 30 percent from last year. Meanwhile liquor sales are up 15 percent.

"We already know that there are unique stressors to COVID-19: Fear, anxiety, loss of a loved one, grief, job loss, social isolation, the list goes on. And that often contributes to heightened rates of substance use disorder and mental illness in the general population. And we are already seeing this play out in New Hampshire," Merritt said. "So there are people across the state who are still suffering, who are going to continue to suffer."

## RISK FOR MOTHERS

Mothers coping with addiction face unique challenges during the pandemic.

"The impact of COVID-19 is particularly hard for pregnant and parenting women with substance use disorders. This is a highly vulnerable population both economically and socially," said Daisy Goodman of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Moms in Recovery Program, Lebanon.

Goodman said close to 90 percent of those enrolled in Moms In Recovery are unemployed (up from 50 percent before the pandemic) and they face higher risks for eviction, homelessness and food insecurity.

Those stresses — and others — place women at greater risk for relapse and family violence.

"The stay at home orders have not been positive for women. Family stress due to isolation, untreated mental health needs, and other stressors have increased the already high rates of family violence, both intimate partner violence and child abuse. And isolation also increases the risk of escalation and the inability to get away," Goodman said.

Even before the pandemic, overdoses were already a leading cause of maternal death in New Hampshire.

Now there's concern the problem could worsen.

"Frankly we're terrified what this is going to look like moving forward," she said.

## TECHNOLOGY LIMITS

Recovery centers have attempted to maintain contact through telemedicine solutions, using video conference software like Zoom.

Those solutions have limits. Some clients lack the technology to access video calls and register for social services. Others lack the privacy to discuss

## COMMUNITY VOICES

# The Chickens

We got six baby chickens at the beginning of the summer. They have now grown into much-less-cute teenage chickens, who poop a lot, squawk a lot, and manage to get their food and water dirty every single day. This morning, I grabbed the handles of our wheelbarrow and, yup, put my hand right on a big pile of wet, sloppy chicken poop. Thanks, ladies. And, it turns out one of them is a rooster. Still, I'm thankful for these silly chickens.



BY AMY LAWTON  
MCKEEVER

In a crazy summer, they've provided a large measure of joy for my family and me.

We never intended to get chickens. A friend ended up with some extras, though, and my daughter was in need of a little cuteness as she slogged her way through the end of remote learning, and we figured we weren't doing much else this summer, so we went for it. In that way, they were definitely a "pandemic purchase." Some people bought pools or RVs, everybody bought yeast, and we bought chickens.

We've spent a lot of time with the chickens this summer. When they were little, we would sit together in the grass and let them wander between our outstretched legs. While we watched them, we would chat about whatever, and laugh, and just enjoy being together and not really doing much. We built them a coop, and the kids helped with every step, doing much of the work themselves — digging holes for the footings, measuring the space, making the cuts, painting the siding, nailing everything together. My husband was kind of the construction supervisor; he gave us each a pair of safety glasses, specific jobs, and then told us our first job was to stop laughing at him because he had drawn detailed coop blueprints in his CAD program. With the kids helping, building the coop took twice as long as it would have taken just the two of us, but it became our family project. That was pretty much what we did for the month of June, other than some hiking and lots of swimming at the river. Perfect for a pandemic summer.

There's a fair amount of stressful unknowns floating around this summer, es-

pecially the last two weeks or so, with many states (not to mention other places around the globe) seeing huge spikes in COVID cases. I'm thankful that in New Hampshire numbers are moving in a better direction. But how long will that last? We aren't an island. What's going to happen with schools in the fall? Will there be soccer? Can we go on the backpacking trip we had planned out in the Tetons in mid-August? When can I have

a friend sleep over? Is it safe to hug my mom? All of us here at my house have different questions, and they reflect the uncertain nature of our current times.

I see this stress manifest itself in my daughter, who has trouble sleeping sometimes and occasionally wants me to sit in the bathroom with her while she showers because she is "lonely." I see it in myself, as I struggle to focus on any book that isn't in the Young Adult category. And I see it in my friends and neighbors, as we all try to figure out what is safe for ourselves and our families.

The chickens? Well, they are about as simple and tangible as it gets, not bothered at all by the uncertainty around them. They need food and water every day. They want to be let out of their coop as soon as the sun comes up. They like to hide underneath the hosta leaves. They have soft feathers and tolerate being held and they are fun to watch as they roam around the yard and the woods. Taking care of them has helped us stay focused on the things we can control, added some positive routines to our days, and brought lots of smiles to our faces.

I'll enjoy the eggs when they eventually start laying, for sure. But the chickens have anchored us a bit this uncertain summer, and I'm thankful for them, eggs or no eggs.

*Amy Lawton McKeever is a teacher/librarian over at the Monroe Consolidated School. More of her writing can be found in the New York Times Motherlode blog and on her home computer under "future book." She lives in Easton with her family.*





# Reopening

Continued from Page 2

One June 22, Anastasia issued an update to school district staff and families, saying that the reopening team — composed of a variety of stakeholders and a broad representation of administrators, school staff members, community leaders, medical representatives, emergency management personnel and parents — will use the state guidance as a framework to build a local plan.

The work at SAU 36 will be done in collaboration with other North Country school districts to ensure there are similar protocols region-wide, she said.

At White Mountains School District SAU 35, which includes the K-6 Bethlehem Elementary School, K-6 Lafayette Regional School in Franconia, K-3 Blue School in Landaff, K-12 Lisbon Regional School, and 7-12 Profile School, interim superintendent Tari Thomas said one model there could involve a group of students spending a few days a week in school and the other days at home for remote

learning, and another group in school when the first group is at home.

Thomas is finishing her first full week on the job at interim superintendent at SAU 35 and said she came out of retirement (she was formerly a superintendent in Massachusetts) when the pandemic struck, to help a school district in need and to help SAU 35 transition to its next permanent superintendent in 2021.

At SAU 35, the school principals are the ones who are forming and consulting with their reopening committees and Thomas said her job will be supporting the principals, whom she is beginning to meet.

"I feel like everyone is eager for us to be back in school for a lot of different reasons and we're working through the intricacies of keeping our kids and staff safe," said Thomas.

The plan at SAU 35 will also ensure there are good matches for students, staff members and families with medical situations and with extended family situations, she said.

Individual needs to be taken into account and that's not an easy task, said Thomas.

"I commend those principals for jumping on board and trying to work out solutions that make sense for individual schools," she said.

COVID-19 also comes with a cost, such as for personal protective equipment, or PPE, and other things that need to be in place, and while money from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act will fund some of what's needed, it's not yet clear if it will cover all costs or how much of the expenditures, she said.

"I think the biggest challenge for our schools is needing to be nimble," said Thomas. "If there's a spike or rise in cases we need to shift gears."

The coming school year could be that hybrid model, where some kids are in school and others are at home learning remotely and the groups switching back and forth between classrooms and their home to keep with social distancing guidelines in schools and classrooms, she said.

The reopening plan for each school will be slightly different and will depend on the size of the classrooms and the needs of students and staff, she said.

"This is a Herculean task to think about how to roll this out," said Thomas. "The principals call it the 'what ifs.' Having to think about all the what ifs and how to reopen is a daunting task. I see my role as interim superintendent to take care of them as they do this demanding work."

## BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS & SERVICES GUIDE



## Opioid

Continued from Page 13

their situation openly with counselors.

"The decrease in in-person visits has decreased our ability to screen and intervene for relapse and for family violence," said Goodman.

Goodman suggested various steps to improving access to tele-health.

"We must address the issues of equity in tele-health by continuing reimbursement for audio only tele-health, to avoid worsening disparities when women can't participate in video tele-health," Goodman said. "And then subsidizing cell phones and data for low income women. We have a pilot [program] at Dartmouth-Hitchcock where we're doing this right now with a small internal brand and it's already making a difference."

"Long term I would hope the federal government will rapidly and meaningfully support expansion of low-cost broadband to remote rural areas."

Hassan said she is pushing for expanded broadband access in a new COVID-19 relief package.

### SIMPLE THINGS

Looking at patients at Amoskeag Health, DeMarco said the state needed to focus on basic needs first and foremost.

"When it comes to substance use and mental health, the foundation starts at food, shelter, phone service, those types of things," she said. "If we're seeing patients losing their housing or not having enough food, they're not going to be able to treat their mental health or substance abuse."

She also pointed to a need for additional staffing, in order to alleviate the burden on staff during the pandemic.

"Provider burnout has been extremely high since the pandemic has started," DeMarco said. "I can speak on behalf of myself and some of the clinicians that I work with, it's been tough for us as clinicians. We don't always practice what we preach, we try and educate our patients to take care of themselves and do something for their self care every single day, but as clinicians a lot of our time and priority is spent trying to care for our patients, and sometimes we forget to do it for ourselves."

Meanwhile at The Family Resource Center, Johnson and others are making efforts to re-establish face-to-face contact with clients, with the appropriate social distance and public health precautions in place.

"In the North Country we're spread out as everybody knows, so it's nice we can finally get out there, because for a while there we couldn't even get out to see them," Johnson said. "Now we at least can travel to see a lot of them. They are struggling with substance use. But it's starting to get a lot better."

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Continued from Page 2

Homeless beds and new housing are both hard to find in New Hampshire. Shelter demand remains high and the rental vacancy rate is one percent, well below the national average of 6.6 percent.

"Vacancy rates are so low, and once people become homeless due to eviction it is extremely difficult to re-house them," said Dean Christon of the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority. "The homeless service sector is already under enormous stress, and adding more people to that would not be in anybody's interest going forward."

The problem has been felt locally.

Carolyn Towne, of Tri-County CAP in Littleton, said the number of homeless individuals and families has increased over pre-COVID levels.

"This we have anecdotally attributed to the challenges likely faced when trying to quarantine or successfully stay at home when doubled up with another family," she said.

The 13-bed Tyler Blaine House in Lancaster and a 15-bed domestic violence shelter are both at half capacity due to social distance requirements. Before staying at the facilities, people must complete quarantines.

"We have utilized hotel stays as temporary shelter with the goal of supporting individuals and families with a 14-day quarantine prior to entering a shelter," Towne said. "This reduces the risk of exposure to those already in the homeless shelter."

Cathy Kuhn, of Families In Transition-New Horizons, said her organization's shelter space in the southern part of the state has been cut from 138 to 64 due to pandemic safety measures.

A temporary 40-bed shelter was created to maintain overall capacity, but it was paid for with temporary funds that will run out at the end of July.

"We're trying to be as creative as we can in finding a solution, especially as we head into winter, but in a lot of ways we're feeling like we don't have a ... long-term answer," she said.

Shaheen expressed frustration that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development continues to withhold Emergency Solutions Grants to aid homeless Americans and those at risk of becoming homeless.

She has continued to work on a follow-up federal relief package that would include additional homeless and housing assistance, she said.

## News Briefs

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### Police Commission Feels Crunch, May Ask For Extension

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A commission examining police accountability in New Hampshire is feeling the time crunch to get its recommendations in to the governor.

The Commission on Law Enforcement, Accountability, Community and Transparency formed by Gov. Chris Sununu in the wake of the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis began meeting last month. It was given 45 days to submit its recommendations to Sununu, but members on Tuesday discussed that they have a lot more work to do in that time frame. Many people have testified, more are scheduled, and more topics need to be addressed.

The commission is considering asking Sununu for more time to prepare its report. In the meantime, members approved encouraging written testimony and putting time limits on speakers and commissioners' questioning.

It would be up to Attorney General Gordon MacDonald, chairperson, to allow more time per speaker as needed.

The commission is reviewing police training and policies, procedures related to the reporting, investigation and punishment of police misconduct, and the state of relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

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