

The HIGHLANDS Current

OCTOBER 30, 2020

Celebrating 10 Years!

Halloween
is Here
Page 14



Support us at highlandscurrent.org/join

Beacon School Board Fills Second Empty Seat

*Appoints John Galloway Jr.
to address vacancy*

By Jeff Simms

The Beacon school board on Monday (Oct. 26) appointed John Galloway Jr., a 2015 Beacon High School graduate who operates a youth development nonprofit called the Label Foundation, to

the nine-seat panel, filling a final vacancy and reversing course from a month ago.

Galloway's appointment caps off a process that began in July, when Michael Rutkoske resigned with 18 months left in his term. Before that opening had been filled, James Case-Leal resigned, indicating that he wanted Galloway and Jasmine Johnson, who are both African American,

(Continued on Page 25)



A PRINCESS AND HER SUBJECTS — The Tompkins Corners Cultural Center in Putnam Valley hosted a harvest festival on Saturday (Oct. 24) that included songs and music from Hans Christian Andersen stories and plenty of other all-natural entertainment for children. For more photos, see highlandscurrent.org.

Photo by Ross Corsair

Voters Face Long Lines

*Nearly 10,000 votes
already cast in the area*

By Chip Rowe

Voters in the Highlands braved long lines at early voting sites in Carmel and Fishkill this week, with many waiting as long as four hours to cast ballots ahead of the Nov. 3 general election.

More than 53,000 people had voted by Wednesday (Oct. 28) in Dutchess and Putnam counties, either in person or by returning an absentee ballot, according to election officials.

State law requires counties to have one early voting site for every segment of 50,000

voters, although election commissioners can choose to have more. Putnam is required to have one site, which is located at the Board of Elections office in Carmel. The Dutchess commissioners, who needed at least three, set up five, including one at Fishkill Town Hall on Route 52 near Beacon.

Early voting continues through Sunday (Nov. 1). The weather across the state was expected to improve for those waiting in line on Saturday and Sunday from the preceding cold and rainy days. The forecast for Election Day is partly cloudy with temperatures in the 40s, with no rain expected.

Catherine Croft, who is the Democratic election commissioner for Putnam, said on

(Continued on Page 3)

COVID2021 WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Home Alone

*As the pandemic moves into winter,
more seniors face isolation*

By Leonard Sparks

For Monica Perez and Mary Roth, life before COVID-19 was filled with connections.

Perez, 62, who is epileptic and lives in the Forrestal Heights Apartments for seniors in Beacon, shared Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas meals with family and discussed books with members of a monthly club that met at the Howland Public Library, where she also took classes.

Roth, 79, lives with her adult son in the Meadow Ridge development and twice a week attended a two-hour gathering at the Salvation Army, where she and other seniors would share lunch and participate in activities like crafts and movies. She and her son also, at least once a week, went to the Mid Hudson Animal Aid and Animal Rescue Foundation shelters on Simmons Lane in Beacon to socialize with the animals.

Now, Perez said she only leaves her apartment once a week — to buy groceries — and that, just like at Easter, she will not be spending Thanksgiving and Christmas with her family this year due to safety concerns. Roth, who drives, said she gets out for occasional errands, such as dropping off her ballot in Poughkeepsie last week, but otherwise remains at home.

"Practically nobody has been to our house," said Roth. "We've been pretty strict."

Even before the pandemic shutdown, seniors were at a higher risk of suffering from social isolation, which research has shown can be a detriment to mental and physical health, as well as cognition. With many older people having limited contact with family because of fears of infection, and with in-person activities and events significantly limited, the isolation has become much more pronounced.

(Continued on Page 7)

■ ABOUT THIS SERIES

COVID-19 has upended the world, the nation, our state and the Highlands. Nearly eight months after the pandemic shutdown began, New York residents have managed to bring the virus under control, with statewide infections on average at less than 2 percent — among the lowest in the nation — and no deaths in Putnam County since July or in Dutchess for more than eight weeks over the summer.

But the state also has new hot zones, including in the Hudson Valley, and the numbers have been creeping up. As we approach the cold winter months, we decided to take a closer look at the effects of the pandemic on three important aspects of daily life. This week we examine its effects on mental and physical health, specifically the psychological effects of isolation and damage to relationships and the prospects for a vaccine.

Next week we will look at the effects on education by checking in on local schools to see how their hybrid and virtual models are working six weeks into the year.

The following week we will explore the pandemic's effects on the local economy, including unemployment, how restaurants will fare once outdoor dining is no longer an option, how local gyms are doing and whether the commuting culture will ever be the same.



Monica Perez calls her doctor's office from her Beacon apartment on Wednesday (Oct. 28).

Photo by L. Sparks

COVID 2021

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

(Continued from Page 1)

The number of older adults who reported feeling lonely more than doubled during the first three months of the pandemic compared to the same period in 2018, according to a survey of 2,000 people between 50 and 80 conducted by the Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation at the University of Michigan.

Local and county agencies have responded by organizing drive-through, outdoor and virtual events for older residents, creating volunteer networks to deliver food and prescriptions and contacting seniors by video conference and phone. At the same time, many seniors are embracing the use of smartphones and social media to maintain contact with family and friends.

Putnam County's first outreach effort to seniors when the shutdown began in March was through phone "wellness checks," said Michael Cunningham, who directs the Office for Senior Resources. He said one woman who was not home at the time called back to say, "I've played your message seven times." He noted, "Some people really do not have people to talk to."

DOUBLE BLOW

The pandemic has threatened seniors on two fronts.

Of the nearly 26,000 people who have died in New York State of COVID-related complications — including 165 in Dutchess and 63 in Putnam — 85 percent have been 60 or older. As the state's death toll peaked in early April, many older victims died alone in hospitals and nursing homes, which for months, under state restrictions, were inaccessible to family members.

About 56 percent of the older adults surveyed by the University of Michigan reported feelings of isolation during the first few months of the pandemic, compared to 27 percent who reported those feelings in 2018. In addition, 46 percent reported "infrequent contact" with other people, compared to 28 percent two years earlier.

The pandemic also forced the closure of senior centers, churches, community organizations and libraries; led to the temporary cancellation of county-run services such as transportation to doctor's appointments; and spurred quarantines that prevented family members from physical visits.

Perez says she started feeling "a little bit lonely" as the shutdown began. "I'm very much a people person, and I'm very active, and I could not participate like I used to," she said.

Her family members — nieces and nephews and their children in Dutchess County — have been limiting their social contact. Concerned about getting infected, Perez and a friend decided to form a pandemic "bubble," a small social group in which members agreed not to have in-person contact with anyone else.

Once a week, the friend visits Perez in her apartment, where they eat and socialize with other women during a Zoom-based support group. The friend has, however, been having health problems recently, Perez said.

"If I lose her, I will lose my only face-to-

face contact until this is over," she said.

'THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS'

In March, when the shutdown began, Dara Silverman, a consultant living in Beacon, read Facebook posts from seniors worried about how they would get groceries. She also saw that a group called Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville had formed northeast of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to help local residents.

Silverman and others formed Mutual Aid Beacon and recruited a corps of volunteers to collect and distribute food to home-bound seniors and the newly unemployed. At one point, the organization was delivering food to 150 seniors each week, Silverman said. Volunteers also began making "emotional support" phone calls to seniors who lived alone.

"There was a need that existed before COVID, and it's gotten even more intense," said Silverman.

Roth said she heard Beacon Mayor Lee Kyriacou mention the group on television and called, along with telling others she knew about the organization. "We depended on the kindness of strangers," she said.

Both Dutchess and Putnam counties closed their senior centers at the beginning of the pandemic, including the Philipstown Friendship Center in the Butterfield complex on Route 9D in Cold Spring. Instead, the facility was transformed into a hub for meal delivery, said Cunningham. Both Putnam and Dutchess counties partnered with local nonprofits to distribute groceries and hot meals.

As the pandemic and its restrictions stretch on, the social needs of seniors have come to the forefront.

Dutchess County's Office for the Aging has organized events such as a drive-

Can Isolation Kill?

A 317-page study released this year by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine calls social isolation and loneliness among seniors a "serious yet underappreciated public health risk," noting that nationally about a quarter of people who are 65 or older are socially isolated despite living in communities. That isolation typically comes after the death of close family and friends and/or the development of a chronic illness or sensory impairments, such as a loss of hearing or eyesight, that limit communication and mobility.

Research shows that social isolation may be as much a risk factor for early death as high-blood pressure, smoking or obesity, the study said, and that it may accelerate dementia and heart failure. The report calls on health care professionals — who may be the only people that an isolated older person interacts with regularly — to be aware of the effects of social isolation, particularly among lower-income and other vulnerable populations, and offer remedies.

Resource Guide

Putnam County Office for Senior Resources

845-808-1700, x47110
putnamcountyny.com/osr

To volunteer for senior outreach,
call 845-808-1700, x47134.

Dutchess County Office for the Aging

845-486-2555
bit.ly/dutchess-aging

To volunteer for senior outreach, call
845-486-3555.

Mutual Aid Beacon

845-288-2559
beaconmutualaid.com

COVID-19 Emotional Support Hotline

844-863-9314
nyprojecthope.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline

800-950-6264

through picnic, an outdoor tai-chi class and a series of "drive-in" bingo gatherings. Putnam has set up outdoor events, as well, including a series of fall-prevention exercise classes in a county parking lot in Carmel. It is also offering more than 50 virtual classes and social gatherings, ranging from caregiver support groups to virtual bingo and book clubs, said Cunningham.

(Continued on Page 10)

COVID2021

Close Quarters

By Chip Rowe

Has the forced isolation of the shut-down led to more divorces? One national survey suggests that it has brought more couples closer together. It found that 58 percent of the married respondents between 18 to 55 said the pandemic had made them appreciate their spouses more, and 51 percent said their commitment had deepened.

Closer to home, since March, the number of divorces filed in Dutchess County has fallen 21 percent over the same period last year, and 34 percent in Putnam, although much of the drop can be attributed to courts being closed early in the shutdown.

To get an assessment of the situation on the ground, we asked Lisa Zeiderman, a Garrison resident who has been a divorce attorney for 15 years, for her impressions about what is happening now and what she expects over the winter months.



Zeiderman

Are you seeing more people seeking divorces?

Our firm has seen a huge increase in clients. It has been nonstop since April, and we've had to hire more attorneys. Many couples can't sustain living together, especially when there are no distractions or any ability to get relief. You can't go to work or work late or even continue your affair because you risk bringing COVID into the house because you don't know what that other person is doing.

Some clients say, "This was a long time coming," while others say, "We thought about it but weren't there yet." Or there now may be domestic violence or verbal abuse or domestic violence that has become more intense.* In the past, people often came for a consultation and when they left, they would say, "We're going to think about it." People are more certain now, quicker to pull the trigger.

At the same time, I do think other couples love it. They're seeing their spouse so much more. Their schedule has changed. They're not running all over. It's true for me. Usually I would be in Westchester and Manhattan all day. My husband and I might have dinner at 8:15 p.m. and then I'd leave in the morning at 7:30 a.m. Now we get to see each other much more. And for us, it's great.

When the pandemic began, you were probably handling clients who had already started the process.

That's correct. In March, after everything started to close, we were dealing with visitation issues. People would go to



Local Splits

	DUTCHESS		PUTNAM	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
MARCH	29	7	4	0
APRIL	82	0	15	1
MAY	76	15	20	10
JUNE	49	72	13	17
JULY	67	33	14	18
AUGUST	84	53	7	15
SEPT.	52	34	12	20
OCT.	57	54	12	19
TOTAL	496	391	151	100

Source: New York State Court System

Pennsylvania or Virginia or the Hamptons, and they wouldn't want to bring the child back because they felt it was unsafe, or so they said. So we had that for many weeks. Then, in April, we started to have consultations with people calling from their cars or hidden away in a spare bedroom because they had no privacy. From there we started to see an increase in divorces, for sure.

It was that quick — one month in?

Most people were thinking in April, May and June that if we had a second wave, their situation was going to become untenable.

I imagine this is unlike anything divorce attorneys have seen, not just the volume, but people being forced into a decision.

I wouldn't say *forced*. It's a choice. I think in many cases it would have happened at some point; it just happened sooner. It's a much easier process for clients who don't have children and, say, they live in a one-bedroom apartment. One person moves out and there are, what, 16,000 empty apartments in Manhattan right now? If you don't have children, it's only going to be a question of finances.

The state introduced electronic filing for divorces in New York City, Long Island and the Hudson Valley as of May 25. Has that helped, in that people don't have to go to court?

It makes it easier. We're also doing confer-

ences and trials now by Skype. I am involved with a few in-person trials, but for the most part we have moved to virtual. We are doing depositions via Skype so that people's cases and their lives can move along.

What will happen over the winter, when couples are truly stuck inside?

I think we're going to have another surge of divorces. Look, today was a great day. Everybody was able to take a walk and it was beautiful. But when the weather goes, one day will bleed into another. On top of that, you have the pressures of virtual learning for children. How does a judge decide when one parent wants remote learning and one wants in-person? I have that issue in so many cases.

Have you had couples who argue about masks?

Yes; they disagree about whether the children should be wearing masks or whether a parent who is coming to visit should wear a mask. Believe me, there are so many things to argue about in a day.

I suppose these arguments began long ago.

I think that's right. This is just new material. They probably were not on the same page about most things to begin with.

*If you are experiencing domestic violence or abuse, call the Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-942-6906 for help.

COVID2021

When Will This Be Over?

By Leonard Sparks

Michael Gusmano is a scholar with The Hastings Center, a bioethics research institute based in Garrison, and a professor of public health at Rutgers University. His responses have been condensed.

Has there ever been vaccine development that rivals the effort against COVID-19?

No, this is absolutely remarkable. We have multiple candidates entering Phase III human clinical trials, the last step to assess safety and effectiveness before regulatory agencies make a decision. Phase I trials can take one to two years, so the speed with which this is happening and the global scale is breathtaking, even if we don't have a vaccine until 2022.

What can we expect of a vaccine?

A minimum threshold that the Food and Drug Administration is likely to use is that it has to be 50 percent effective with nonexistent or mild side effects — soreness in the arm, perhaps a low-grade fever — but that doesn't tell you the duration of the effectiveness. We'll have to see once we get more evidence from the trials.

There will be the challenge of making sure that you can reach, or get close to, herd immunity, which is when you reach a point where enough people have immunity that it is difficult for the virus to spread. That's important with any vaccine, because there will be people who can't take it. The difficulty with the current conversations about herd immunity is that it's absolutely unethical to think about trying for it by allowing enough people to get sick. With COVID-19, that would mean millions of people dying.

Do we know enough about COVID-19 to make an effective vaccine?

It's important to recognize that while this is a *novel* coronavirus, there are many coronaviruses. The common cold is a coronavirus.

(Continued on Page 9)



Michael Gusmano

Gusmano *(from Page 8)*

navirus. There have been years of research on vaccines for coronaviruses, so we're not starting tabula rasa.

Three trials were recently paused due to adverse events. Were they similar?

The only thing they have in common is that one or two people got sick and the companies running the trial didn't know why. In many ways it's a positive thing. It reflects the fact that we are following the science, and they are following protocols to protect people. There's no guarantee that we will end up with a vaccine, frankly. But pausing a trial isn't necessarily devastating, and it's not even unusual.

The good news is because of the massive amount of money that has been put behind this effort, not only is the research moving forward quickly but drug companies are producing millions of doses even before the Phase III trials conclude. Typically, there is a major delay between the end of Phase III and manufacturing. The companies may end up dumping the vaccines, but they're willing to do that because the government is underwriting this process. That means if we do get a winner or more than one, they will be able to gear up quickly.

Still, it's going to be a massive industrial project. We don't yet know if it will require one dose or two. We don't know whether it will need to be frozen or just kept in a refrigerator. We don't know how big the vials will be. All that changes the calculus

in terms of how much you can ship, where you can ship, whether you have the infrastructure. And all of this is happening in the context of a global pandemic, which has caused disruptions in supply chains for materials like glass and rubber stoppers.

The U.S. will be in a much better position than many lower-income countries. I worry a great deal about Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Southeast Asia, where there are issues of electricity and refrigeration and distribution. Work can be done on defining priority populations, because it seems implausible that we'll be able to vaccinate several hundred million people in the first few months.

Have we learned anything useful about treating COVID-19?

Simple things like the standards for when you put somebody on a ventilator have changed. Some simple steroids can offer some benefit, as apparently they did for the president. We learned things that have helped reduce the death rate, although once you become severely ill, it's still an incredibly risky proposition. We're learning more about long-term health consequences. Whether we get a vaccine sooner or later, we have to get people to change their behavior to mask-wearing, social distancing, hand-washing. It sounds painfully simple. If we had a pill that would reduce your risk of death by the same percentage, we'd be willing to pay massive amounts for it.

Will there be a time when, post-vaccine, we can go back to filling

COVID-19 by the Numbers

■ PUTNAM COUNTY

Number of confirmed cases:

1,825 (+57)

New Cases in Philipstown: **3**

Tests administered:

61,646 (+3,779)

Percent positive:

3.0 (-0.1)

Number of deaths:

63 (+0)

■ DUTCHESS COUNTY

Number of confirmed cases:

5,508 (+126)

Active Cases in Beacon: **18**

Tests administered:

219,039 (+12,148)

Percent positive:

2.5 (-0.1)

Number of deaths:

165 (+1)

Source: New York State Department of Health, with weekly changes in parentheses, as of Oct. 28. New cases in Philipstown for the week ending Oct. 22.

sports stadiums and dance floors and kids can play without masks?

I'm sure we are going to get past this, but whether things will ever be the same, I'm not so sure. It's good that people are more cautious about exposure because, before this, even in health care settings, people would show up for work even though they were sick. We need to get rid of that kind of macho attitude.

One of the dreadful things that acceler-

ated during the Trump administration was a decline in real-dollar funding for public health. If we ever get serious about public health measures, we can reduce the rate of community infection even without a vaccine. If that happens, we're going to be back in sports stadiums. We're likely to be living with this coronavirus for a very long time, but we have the capability to get the spread under control where it isn't shutting down the economy or dominating people's lives.

Gergely Pediatrics

Dedicated to keeping your child healthy & thriving

Dr. Peter Gergely, MD
Janet Eisig, CFNP
Danielle Chiaravallotti, CFNP

- Collaborative practice for children & adolescents
- Board Certified Pediatricians & Licensed Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
- Welcomes patients with developmental or behavior issues



Meet with us for a FREE first time consultation

34 Route 403, Garrison, N.Y. 10524
tel: (845) 424-4444 fax: (845) 424-4664
gergelypediatrics.com



Safely caring for you and your family's vision needs.

Our office is open for ALL services by appointment, including routine eye exams and optical service.



969 MAIN ST. FISHKILL (845) 896-6700 sdec2020.com
Optometrists Dr. Brian Peralta | Dr. Gary Weiner | Dr. Brian Powell | Dr. Weixun Wang

Help Us Help You!

Visit highlandscurrent.org/survey

We'd like to learn more about our readers and what you like to read.

TAKE OUR ONLINE SURVEY

and you'll have a chance to win free mail delivery for a year.

The HIGHLANDS
Current

Home Alone *(from Page 7)*

At local churches, a traditional social lifeline for seniors, the return of in-person worship has been followed by the return of live, socially distanced events. A few weeks ago, about 25 people, mostly seniors, attended an outdoor music performance at St. Philip's Church in Garrison, said the Rev. Amanda Eiman.

"It was great for folks to see each other and share in some fellowship and music in a safe way," Eiman said.

Roth and her son miss the cats at Beacon's shelter so much that they still go there, even though no one is allowed inside.

"We can look through the windows and there's a couple of cats we can always communicate with," she said.

TECH LIFELINES

Roth said she was "phobic" about computers, but the shutdown forced her to confront that fear. Her Chromebook is now a tool for ordering food and other items. Although the change has "been very frustrating sometimes," Roth said she has been "conquering it," and even taking foreign-language lessons.

Phone calls, video chats and social media messaging have replaced physical visits from family and friends, and with doctors. About 60 percent of older people in the University of Michigan survey said they used social media at least once a week



Mary Roth of Beacon has seen her activities curtailed because of the shutdown.

Photo by L. Sparks

to connect with family and nearly a third used some form of video chat.

In addition to her weekly Zoom meeting with friends, Perez checks in with doctors via video, receives photos from her family through Facebook Messenger, participates in a virtual book club organized by the Howland library and gets calls at least once a week from a volunteer with Mutual

Aid Beacon.

She is also joining an online women's support group hosted by Quarantine Buddy, a virtual platform created by Cornell University students to combat social isolation during the pandemic. The group "fills up very quickly," said Perez.

Others are not fortunate enough to have access to technology, however, noted Maeve

Eng-Wong, a therapist in Cold Spring.

"There are people out there who are truly isolated and who do not have these privileges," she said. "It is those people that I worry about."

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season, when seniors typically share meals with family and friends or with other older adults at county centers and churches, will be another of COVID-19's casualties.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that large indoor gatherings for Thanksgiving should be considered a "higher-risk" activity and has advised people to stay home.

The Office for Senior Resources in Putnam County usually holds Thanksgiving meals at its senior centers but this year is collecting donations to buy and distribute grocery gift cards, said Cunningham.

Roth said she normally shares Thanksgiving with a friend, but is staying home with her son. "We already have the dinnerware planned," she said.

Perez's nieces and nephews send photos via Facebook Messenger of her great-nieces and great-nephews. She responds with comments. But that will be the extent of the contact, an arrangement that Perez says was made "by mutual agreement" because she is as fearful as her family.

"If I gave it to them, I would never forgive myself," she said.

Hudson Beach Glass

Fine art gallery located on second floor

It's Pumpkin Time

Locally Blown Will Not Rot

162 Main St., Beacon, NY 12508 845 440-0068
Open daily 12AM - 6PM, Sunday 12AM - 5PM
www.hudsonbeachglass.com

Cold Spring Soundtrack
Marinella Senatore
September 9 - November 7, 2020
Organized by Magazzino Italian Art Foundation

Community members are invited to share an audio recording capturing any sound reflective of their current moment. Each and every contribution will be incorporated into a symphony.

Volunteers can participate by leaving their recordings by calling +1 (845) 476-8409 and leaving a voicemail, or sending an audio recording via text message or email to opencall@magazzino.art.

For more information visit www.magazzino.art

OPEN CALL!

MAGAZZINO ITALIAN ART

BOCHNER BOETTI FONTANA

Curated by Mel Bochner
In collaboration with
Magazzino Italian Art Foundation
October 3, 2020 - January 11, 2021
Magazzino Italian Art, Gallery 8

MAGAZZINO ITALIAN ART

The HIGHLANDS Current



Beacon Quarantine [PAGE 12](#)

NOVEMBER 6, 2020

Celebrating 10 Years!

Support us at highlandscurrent.org/join

Incumbents Hold Seats

Voter turnout about the same — just more voters

By Chip Rowe

Incumbents in the Highlands held onto their seats this week in the U.S. House, state Assembly and state Senate.

In the Assembly, Sandy Galef, whose district includes Philipstown, and Jonathan Jacobson, whose district includes Beacon, each easily won reelection. Both are Democrats.

In the Senate, Sue Serino, a Republican,

held off a second challenge from Democrat Karen Smythe, whom she defeated in 2018 by 688 votes of 118,000 cast. This time, Serino built a comfortable lead of about 19,500 votes that should hold up against any surge for her opponent in absentee ballots.

In the U.S. House, Sean Patrick Maloney, a Democrat and Philipstown resident, declared victory in his bid for a fifth term with 47 percent of the vote, saying the absentee vote would only widen his margin over Republican challenger Chele Farley.

(Continued on Page 9)



Voters waited in line on Election Day (Nov. 3) at the Methodist church on Main Street in Cold Spring.

Photo by Ross Corsair

No Layoffs or Tax Increase in Dutchess Budget Plan

County saves \$11 million from buyout program

By Leonard Sparks

For months, Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro and other county leaders warned of potential mass layoffs and cuts in services if President Donald Trump and Congress did not agree on a pandemic aid package for local governments.

With no aid in sight, the county instead will use nearly \$10 million from a reserve fund and savings from an employee buyout program to deliver a proposed \$502 million budget for 2021 that contains no layoffs

and no property tax increases, according to Molinaro.

Under the proposal, spending would fall by \$18 million and the county tax rate by 2.5 percent, from \$3.26 to \$3.18 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

To offset anticipated losses of \$6.1 million in sales tax revenue and \$4 million in state aid, the county will rely on about \$11 million saved when 152 employees accepted offers to retire or leave their jobs for payouts in 2021, said Molinaro.

The budget is before the county Legislature, which can amend the plan before a final vote.

(Continued on Page 8)

COVID2021 WHAT LIES AHEAD?

What Have We Learned About Schools?

Students and teachers adjust to pandemic education

By Jeff Simms

Matt Landahl, the superintendent of the Beacon City School District, may have had more of an idea than most that something was afoot before the COVID-19 pandemic hit U.S. soil early this year. But he said no warning could have prepared him for what has unfolded in the Highlands over the last eight months.

A college friend who works for the U.S. Department of State was stationed in Italy, one of Europe's most dangerous hot spots during the initial spread of the coronavirus. At the end of February, Landahl recalled last week, his friend sent a text message that read: "Get ready. This is really bad."

After the first positive cases were reported in New York in March, a team of Dutchess County school administrators began discussing how to proceed.

Their first meeting, Landahl said, focused on handwashing.

By the second week of March, the county executive, Marc Molinaro, had joined the call, and the discussion progressed to preparing for school closures and the deployment of laptops and other materials to students.

Friday, March 13, was scheduled as an off-day for students in Beacon and a workday for teachers. But Molinaro had announced the first positive COVID case in Dutchess on March 12 — Putnam's would come three days later — and, by March 16, Gov. Andrew Cuomo had closed public schools statewide for two weeks.

"I felt a closure would be happening on some level," Landahl said. "I knew something big was happening," and during the meetings with other superintendents, "it started to crystallize what we needed to prepare for."

(Continued on Page 6)

■ ABOUT THIS SERIES

COVID-19 has upended the world, the nation, our state and the Highlands. In the nearly eight months since the pandemic began, New York residents have managed to bring the infection rate under control, with the statewide average at less than 2 percent, among the lowest in the nation.

As we approach the cold winter months, we decided to take a closer look at the effects of the pandemic on three important aspects of daily life. Last week we examined its impact on mental and physical health, specifically the psychological effects of isolation and damage to relationships and the prospects for a vaccine. (See highlandscurrent.org.)

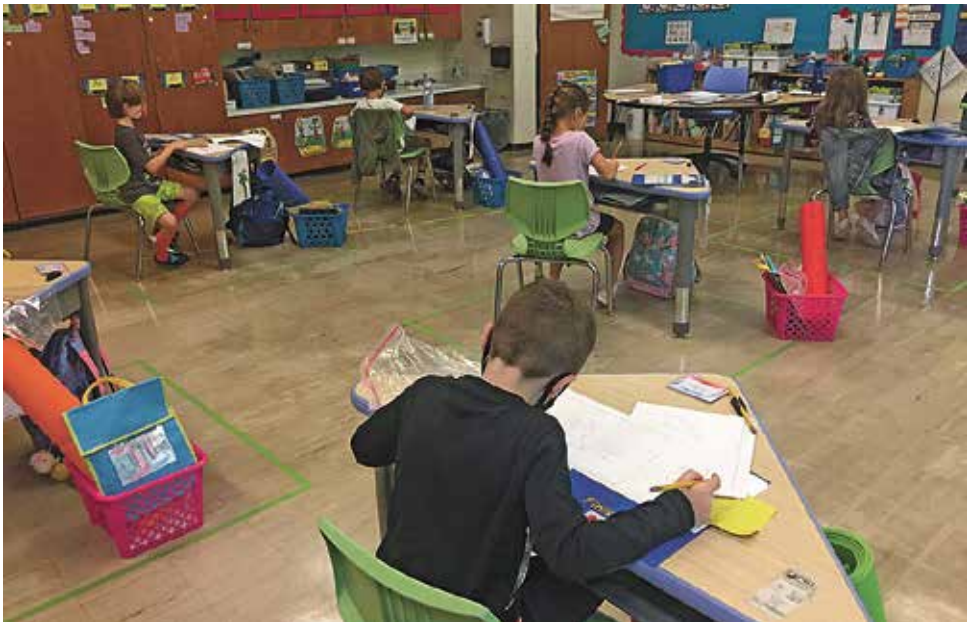
This week we study the effects on education by checking in with local schools to see how their hybrid and virtual models are working six weeks into the year.

Next week we will explore the pandemic's effects on the local economy, including unemployment, how restaurants will fare once outdoor dining is no longer an option, how local gyms are doing and whether the commuting culture will ever be the same.



Teachers at Rombout Middle School in Beacon prepared earlier this year for classes to begin.

Photo by Meredith Heuer



Inside a classroom at the Garrison School, where students attend daily unless their parents or guardians opted for all-virtual learning.

Photo by Maria Slippen

COVID 2021

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

(Continued from Page 1)

Cuomo made subsequent announcements of two-week closures until, on May 7, he said schools would not reopen until the fall.

Since that Friday the 13th, COVID-19 has been “on everybody’s mind every single day,” Landahl said, noting that he took an “alleged vacation” with his family in August and conducts text-message meetings with district staff frequently on Sundays.

While the Class of 2020 graduated in virtual ceremonies and other socially distanced events, administrators in the Highlands were already planning for reopening in the fall.

In July, Cuomo asked every district to submit detailed reopening plans for in-person, virtual and hybrid instruction.

The Garrison district, because of an abundance of space, was able to bring all students who chose the option back in person. Haldane also had enough space to bring elementary and middle school students back in person, while the high school is on a hybrid two- or three-day a week in-person schedule.

Beacon offered hybrid and virtual options, with about 65 percent choosing hybrid.

“The challenge over the summer was coming up with those three different schedules,” said Carl Albano, the Garrison superintendent. “Typically, we start scheduling in the spring and you refine it over the summer.”

But to meet Cuomo’s deadline, “all of them needed to be developed in a very short period of time,” Albano said, while, in the case of the all-virtual model, attempting to improve on what had been thrust upon the schools in the spring.

SCHOOL	STUDENTS POSITIVE	TEACHERS/STAFF POSITIVE
HALDANE MIDDLE SCHOOL	0	0
HALDANE HIGH SCHOOL	1	1
HALDANE ELEMENTARY	0	0
BEACON HIGH SCHOOL	2	1
ROMBOUT MIDDLE SCHOOL	0	1
GLENHAM ELEMENTARY	0	0
FORRESTAL ELEMENTARY	0	1
SARGENT ELEMENTARY	0	0
SOUTH AVENUE ELEMENTARY	0	0
GARRISON SCHOOL	0	0
HUDSON HILLS ACADEMY (BEACON)	0	0
MANITOU SCHOOL (PHILIPSTOWN)	0	0

Source: [Schoolcovidreportcard.health.ny.gov](https://www.schoolcovidreportcard.health.ny.gov), as of Nov. 4

SIX WEEKS IN

After reopening in September, the Garrison, Haldane and Beacon districts each had made it through the first six weeks of the year when Landahl announced a positive test at Beacon High School on Oct. 28. Later that afternoon, he announced a second case at the high school and an initial positive test at Rombout Middle School. On Oct. 31, a case was confirmed at J.V. Forrestal Elementary School, as well as on Nov. 5 at South Avenue Elementary.

With about 2,800 students, Beacon is the largest, by far, of the three Highlands school systems. In most school officials’ minds, it was a question of when, not if, a positive test would show up.

The individuals — the district cannot release identifying information due to federal privacy laws — are quarantining while officials conduct contact-tracing studies. The middle and high school

were closed until Thursday (Nov. 5), with students pivoting to an all-virtual schedule. Forrestal is scheduled to reopen on Nov. 12; South Avenue remains open because of limited exposure to the individual there.

The infections don’t indicate a failure in Beacon, Landahl said, but that the protocols set in place in the district are working. Clusters of cases that aren’t contained by quarantining, daily temperature checks, contact tracing and other measures would signal a breakdown in the system, he said.

“Our students and staff have done a great job adjusting to the health and safety protocols,” the superintendent said. “I never thought students would wear masks this well. We have a lot of people making a lot of sacrifices.”

Teachers and administrators this fall have sought to provide as near-normal an educational experience as possible, said Julia Sniffen, the Haldane High School princi-

pal. With Haldane elementary and middle school students in school five days a week, except for families who’ve chosen to go all-virtual for health concerns or other reasons, instruction has gone smoothly, she said.

But for high school students, “there is an added layer of pressure now at that level to get them the breadth” of the curriculum needed to prepare them for Regents exams, year-end standardized tests which were canceled last spring. (On Nov. 5, the state Education Department announced the cancellation of the January Regents. No decision has been made on the June and August tests.)

“The teachers are struggling to get through the content,” Sniffen said. “Their pacing is definitely slower than it has been in the past.”

Nonetheless, the principal said, after working all summer, the district has improved upon lessons learned in the spring.

“We were in full-on crisis mode,” after Cuomo shut the schools down in March, she said, which led Haldane officials to temporarily adopt a “do-no-harm” policy through the end of the academic year.

As in many other school districts, attendance requirements were relaxed and grading was not as strict during the shutdown. But since reopening, Haldane teachers have returned to traditional grading scales, while students must log in at the beginning of each class if they’re attending virtually.

“Whether you’re at home or you’re here, you’re at school,” Sniffen said.

In Beacon, teachers also began planning with Landahl and other administrators for reopening early in the summer.

Whereas last spring was about deploying — laptops, wireless hot spots and even free groceries, along with volunteers from Mutual Aid Beacon — the fall has been about anticipating, Landahl said.

Enduring the spring shutdown led the district to buy 25,000 disposable masks and other personal protective equipment in June. Air-circulating ventilation systems were installed in district school buildings and additional hot spots for free distribution to students without reliable internet access at home were purchased.

“The thing we keep saying is we’re trying to seek out the next thing to prepare for, to stay one or two steps ahead,” Landahl said.

(Continued on Page 7)



Students at the Garrison School work on socially distanced art projects.

Photo by Maria Slippen

(Continued from Page 6)

“None of it’s a surprise anymore.”

The district’s 276 instructors have risen to the challenge as well, said John Burns, the president of the Beacon Teachers’ Association.

“I don’t know if I could do this,” said Burns, who retired from the classroom in 2016 but continues to lead the union. “They’re putting forth an amazing effort. Everybody’s in it and everybody’s positive but, at the same time, the demands on time and technology are overwhelming.”

Haldane parent Christine Johanson said this week that her daughter, a 10th grader, has responded well to the hybrid schedule.

“She loves it,” Johanson said. “I think back to when I was in high school — what would be better than two days on, two days off?”

The on-off schedule provides balance and a degree of normalcy, which Johanson called a best-case scenario considering the alternatives. With independent reading and research assignments, her daughter is “busy most of the day, if not a little bit more” on her virtual days, although Johanson also worries about students meeting all of the state’s curriculum goals.

“My daughter is a good student, so in that sense we’re lucky,” she said. “But I can only imagine the teachers are having a tougher time with some students. There is a huge risk of falling behind.”

ONLY A MATTER OF TIME?

The Mid-Hudson Region’s COVID-19 infection rate on Wednesday (Nov. 4) was at 2.4 percent, after hovering closer to 1 percent for much of the summer. In the past week, Dutchess and Putnam counties have both been under 2 percent.

Still, given the temporary closures in the last week in Beacon, and the tremendous spike in cases nationwide, it’s hard not to ask: Is it only a matter of time before the virus spreads further and Cuomo shuts schools down again?

“You see record-breaking positivity rates across the nation, and even though New York is still comparatively low with infections, experts are calling for exponential growth with the virus this winter,” Albano said. “You combine all these things and you do kind of feel that you’re on borrowed time.”

Before the announcements of confirmed

COVID-19 by the Numbers

■ PUTNAM COUNTY

Number of confirmed cases:

1,896 (+71)

New Cases in Philipstown: 4

Tests administered:

65,294 (+3,648)

Percent positive:

2.9 (-0.1)

Number of deaths:

64 (+1)

■ DUTCHESS COUNTY

Number of confirmed cases:

5,669 (+161)

Active Cases in Beacon: 17

Tests administered:

231,138 (+12,099)

Percent positive:

2.5 (0.0)

Number of deaths:

166 (+1)

Source: New York State Department of Health, with weekly changes in parentheses, as of Nov. 4. New cases in Philipstown for the week ending Oct. 29.

cases in Beacon, Landahl said he’d heard rumors that the district planned to shut down in January or February. No one’s planning that far ahead, he said.

“We’re taking this a day at a time,” he said. “We may have new information on any given day that changes our thinking.”

“There’s a majority of teachers who want to be at school,” added Burns. “Some have said that we’ll be gone by the end of the

State’s Financial Woes Trickle Down to Schools

Lack of aid could bust budgets for 2021-22

By Jeff Simms

The pandemic’s effect on education could be felt for years, as New York State struggles to balance its own budget while continuing to provide essential aid to public school districts.

Haldane and Garrison are far less dependent on state aid than Beacon because of their relative wealth and larger tax levies, but in Beacon, state funding made up 45 percent, or roughly \$30 million, of the district’s 2020-21 budget.

The state aid formula is based on districts’ ability to generate revenue through property taxes. Haldane’s 2020-21 budget relied on about \$3 million in state aid, or 12 percent of its budget, while Garrison’s was \$881,000, or 8 percent.

However, said Julia Sniffen, the principal of Haldane High School, any cuts in aid are going to be significant because of the costs incurred by schools to provide both virtual and in-person instruction, as well as COVID-related equipment.

At Garrison, where the parents of 48 of the district’s 215 students initially elected to go all-virtual, the school board voted this past summer to spend \$500,000 on an online tutoring system with state-certified teachers for 2020-21.

Garrison Superintendent Carl Albano said this week that he’s optimistic that a federal stimulus package will be passed to boost state coffers in New York and elsewhere. If not, “there would be an impact here, but for all schools, especially higher-need districts, I’m hopeful that the federal government will support education and the states.”

Beacon’s 2020-21 budget was based on the state’s forecasting in its own budget, which was adopted in March, just as the pandemic hit the U.S. But as a result of a \$14 billion revenue decline due to the spread of the virus,

New York State in August announced it would withhold 20 percent of its aid payments to school districts.

In Beacon, a freeze that significant could affect cash flow, said Ann Marie Quartironi, the district’s deputy superintendent. The district has not had to borrow to pay its bills since Quartironi has been there, but if it did, it would likely take out “revenue anticipation notes,” or short-term loans similar to the bonds school districts use to finance capital projects.

Quartironi said that the Beacon district had increased its fund balance by the end of the 2019-20 school year in anticipation of diminished aid in the current academic year and beyond.

“If we do get a federal stimulus and we don’t have to use fund balance, then we’ll have more for 2021-22,” she said.

If the financial situation gets really bad, the district would have to make cuts to its budget, with staffing the first area to reduce, although “it’s never something we want to do,” Quartironi said.

About five or six teachers are on schedule to retire next year, she said, and a handful of others could choose to retire. If cuts become necessary, the district will see if those positions can be left unfilled, Quartironi said, before considering layoffs and, in a worst-case scenario, programming cuts.

School districts in New York typically begin hearing whispers at the end of a calendar year about the amount of aid to expect in the upcoming state budget. Beacon has received increased funding in each of the last three years, and while even a flat aid package for 2021-22 would be satisfactory, “I have a feeling it’s going to be less,” Quartironi said.

A state budget representative would offer few details this week, saying only that New York’s 2022 fiscal budget “will include school aid funding for the 2021-22 school year and will be negotiated with the Legislature for an April 1 deadline, as is done every year.”

year, but most of us are trying to make this work. We’re not panicking.”

The day that schools close again may come, but Sniffen said she doesn’t regret the push last summer to reopen in person, even if it’s only temporary.

“You look at students and you recognize that school can be a constant for them,” she explained. “Seeing them and connecting with them helps you evaluate what they

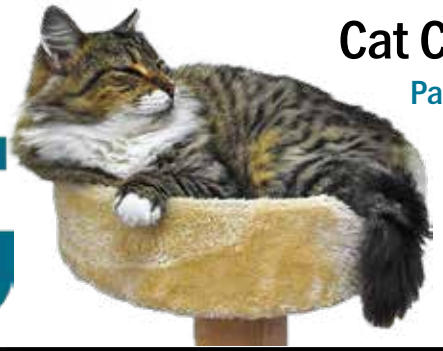
need. The academic piece is at the forefront of what we do, but their social and emotional needs are also at the forefront right now. Seeing them — it makes every sleepless night worth it. It makes every meeting worth it, to know you’re doing everything to support them the best you can.

“I don’t leave every day in a bad place,” Sniffen said. “I leave most days saying, ‘We made a difference.’”

The HIGHLANDS Current

Cat Cafe

Page 19



NOVEMBER 13, 2020

Celebrating 10 Years!

Support us at highlandscurrent.org/join

Virus Surges in Dutchess, Putnam

State orders business curfew, limit on gatherings

By Leonard Sparks

With COVID-19 cases surging statewide, including in Dutchess and Putnam counties, Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Wednesday (Nov. 11) ordered bars, restaurants and gyms to close between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. and restricted gatherings at private residences to 10 people as Thanksgiving approaches.

On Tuesday (Nov. 10), Dutchess recorded 65 cases, the county's highest daily total since May 18; it had 59 on Wednesday.

Putnam had 30 cases on Monday — the highest of any day since May 6, when Putnam was testing about twice as many people — 26 on Tuesday and 29 on Wednesday.

Dutchess and Putnam's positivity rates, or the number of cases divided by the number of tests, are also rising. Dutchess' daily rate has averaged 2.1 percent in November after averaging 0.8 percent in October.

(Continued on Page 20)



VICTORY LAP — Supporters of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, including these noisemakers on Main Street in Beacon, took to the streets on Saturday (Nov. 7), when unofficial results showed Biden, the Democratic presidential candidate, securing enough electoral votes to defeat the Republican incumbent, Donald Trump.

Photo by Alejandro Lopez

Upgrade for Renegades

Team will join Yankees system and play full season

By Chip Rowe

The Hudson Valley Renegades will change their affiliation starting in 2021 from the Tampa Bay Rays to the New York Yankees. The Renegades also will move up a level in professional baseball's minor leagues, from short-season to Single A, and begin their season in April instead of June.

The Yankees made the announcement on Saturday (Nov. 7). The team signed player-

development deals with the Renegades and the Somerset Patriots, a team in central New Jersey, while ending their affiliations with minor-league teams in Trenton and Staten Island.

The Renegades, who have played at Dutchess Stadium on Route 9D just outside of Beacon for 26 seasons, had been part of the Class A, short-season league, the fifth of six levels in the minors. They had partnered with the Rays since 1996, but their most recent contract expired this year. There were no games played in 2020 in the minor leagues because of the pandemic shutdown.

The Renegades will now play in April and May for the first time in their history, jumping from about 75 games beginning in mid-June to something closer to 140. The season will still end in early September.

The changes are part of an agreement

(Continued on Page 21)

COVID2021 WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Business as Unusual

Local merchants hunker down for winter

By Jeff Simms

A year ago tomorrow (Nov. 14), Joe Robitaille finalized his purchase of Homespun Foods in Beacon after its longtime owner, Jessica Reisman, retired to Seattle.

By taking over the restaurant in the fall, Robitaille, who had worked for nearly a decade at high-end Manhattan restaurants, knew he had several slow winter months ahead. His approach was to take things one day at a time, he said this week, noting that he set no goals other than to make it to the first anniversary.

The first four months went well, he recalled. The staff of seven full-time and three part-time employees — many of whom had stayed after the sale — knew the business.

"The team was in a great place," Robitaille said. "I was excited for the busy part of the year."

Then came the shutdown because of COVID-19. On March 16, the same day schools shuttered statewide, Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered restaurants

and bars to close to diners, permitting only takeout and delivery.

Unsure that he could keep his employees or customers safe, Robitaille opted to close entirely. He recalled "sleepwalking" out of the bakery Homespun rented across the street from the restaurant and pretending to take a phone call so he could walk outside in silence.

"It was absolutely terrifying," he said. "One of the things that scared me was knowing that all the businesses in Beacon were at the lowest point of our cash flow for the year because we'd just used our resources to get through the wintertime. I had no idea what to do."

The timing wasn't good for anyone.

"April is the first month that things start turning up for businesses," said Eliza Starbuck, the president of the Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce and co-owner of Flowercup Wine in Cold Spring. "People couldn't even respond. If your business isn't online, you can't just throw a website up and start selling in a week."

(Continued on Page 6)

■ ABOUT THIS SERIES

COVID-19 has upended the world, the nation, our state and the Highlands. In the nearly eight months since the pandemic began, New York residents managed to bring the infection rate under control, with statewide infections on average at less than 2 percent, among the lowest in the nation.

As we approach the cold winter months, we decided to take a closer look at the effects of the pandemic on three important aspects of daily life.

On Nov. 6 we examined its impact on mental and physical health, specifically the psychological effects of isolation, damage to relationships and the prospects for a vaccine. Last week we looked at the effects on education by checking in with local schools to see how their hybrid and virtual models were working six weeks into the year. (See highlandscurrent.org for both.)

This week we explore how the pandemic is affecting the local economy, including employment rates, how businesses such as restaurants and gyms will fare and whether the commuting culture will ever be the same.



Fabiola Diego Herrera and Hannah Ashburn fill empanadas at Homespun made from Fabiola's recipe.

COVID 2021

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

(Continued from Page 1)

Scott Tillitt, the founder of the Beahive coworking space in Beacon, said that rentals for meetings and events “went to zero overnight,” dropping monthly revenue by 10 percent to 15 percent. “Flex” desk rentals to freelancers and remote workers decreased, as well.

Beahive attempted virtual member lunches, coffee breaks and other gatherings, he said, but Zoom fatigue quickly set in.

“We’re so physical space-based,” he said. “I don’t know any other way to pivot. We’re biding our time until people feel comfortable coming back.”

Robitaille reopened Homespun for four days per week on June 19. By then, Beacon officials were allowing Main Street restaurants to place tables in curbside parking spots to create “parklets” for outdoor dining.

Homespun put three tables on the sidewalk, each 8 feet apart, and kept eight tables in an enclosed backyard.

But reopening wasn’t as simple as dragging a few tables out front, Robitaille said. Every aspect of the business — from food prep to delivery to customers and cleanup at the end of the night — had to be revised to meet state health protocols aimed at slowing the spread of the virus.

“I was completely exhausted from



Joe Robitaille

Photos by Meredith Heuer

getting us reopened,” he said. “And it just wasn’t busy. We were nowhere near breakeven numbers.”

As the Mid-Hudson Region neared Phase 3 of its reopening, which would allow indoor dining at 50 percent capacity, business suddenly turned around for Homespun. Robitaille decided to stay cautious and stick with outdoor dining, while permitting no more than seven people inside for pickups.

That was at the end of June. But with cold weather on the way, restaurants and their employees and customers must now grapple with how to navigate winter during a pandemic.

“Restaurants, which require a full staff to operate, have struggled to find employees brave enough to take on the kinds of safety demands basically taken by essential workers,” Starbuck explained. “Their incomes are partially made up of tips. What happens when the tables are reduced?”

Starbuck said she thinks some restau-

rants will utilize outdoor heaters to keep patio dining spaces open as long as possible.

Robitaille isn’t sure that would work at Homespun, so he’s planning to revamp his takeout menu while looking into delivery, as well, although that would add insurance costs. Selling frozen prepared foods could be another option.

He plans later this month to reopen on Mondays (Homespun was open seven days a week, pre-pandemic) to allow employees to pick up extra shifts.

At Beahive, the state’s phased reopening was challenging this summer “because none of the guidelines apply” to coworking spaces, Tillitt said. Fortunately, some long-time members have continued to pay rent even while they haven’t been in the building.

With that level of commitment, Tillitt said, “I’m confident that we’ll rebound strongly, it’s just a matter of when.”

Starbuck hopes Beacon and Cold Spring’s Main Streets can make it to Christmas without another shutdown.

“Holiday gift sales are the bread-and-butter that get independent retail businesses through the winter,” she said. “The best thing people can do to support small retailers is start their holiday gift shopping now, under the assumption that another shutdown could happen in December.”

Even though Robitaille knows business will slow once he cuts outdoor dining, he insists he’s not dreading the winter.

“I came into this expecting a struggle,” he said. “If anything, it’s pretty amazing to be here still and to be in the position we’re in now. Any feelings that I’m feeling are cautious — that you don’t know what to expect; to check yourself when you think you know what’s coming.

“It’s sincerely how I feel,” he added. “In the summertime, it wasn’t the same, though. I thought we were going down.”

COVID2021

Closer to the Edge

For many, shutdown has made bad situation worse

By Victoria Shannon

With unemployment in the Hudson Valley much higher than it was a year ago because of the ongoing shutdown, state and federal bans on evictions imposed earlier this year have allowed many tenants to stay in their homes even if they can no longer afford the rent.

But that won’t last. Housing advocates fear a flood of evictions after state and federal moratoriums expire next month, possibly causing a large spike in homelessness in early 2021 while the pandemic still rages.

It’s another consequence of the high cost of living in Putnam and Dutchess counties, where more than 33 percent of residents were one emergency away from financial ruin even before COVID-19, according to research by the United Way.

In a series called *Living on the Edge* published last year, *The Current* reported on Highlands residents who were living on “survival budgets” despite being employed. Two in five residents of Beacon and Cold Spring, according to the data, did not have more than \$400 in savings.

According to the most recent United Way report on “asset-limited, income-restrained, employed” residents, which relies on data from 2018, a family with two adults and two children in the Hudson Valley needs to earn at least \$99,242 annually to get by, while a single adult must earn \$35,510.

To support those budgets, a single person would have to earn at least \$17.55 an hour, far more than the \$11.80 minimum wage in this part of New York state.

Beyond the ban on evictions, another buffer could disappear at the end of the year when two federal pandemic unemployment programs are scheduled to expire unless Congress acts. More than 1.9 million New York residents receive payments from the two programs, which were designed to extend benefits offered by the state.

As of September, about 11,600 people in Dutchess County and 3,800 people in Putnam were receiving state jobless benefits — far fewer than in April at the height of the shutdown but far more than in September 2019, when only 1,100 people were receiving benefits in Dutchess and 500 in Putnam.

HOUSING

Paying for a roof over your head, of course, is usually a large expense, eating up nearly half of the income of a single person on a survival budget in Dutchess, according to the United Way study.

That has people like Maureen Fox, chief development officer of Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, concerned about bills that will come due in January.

(Continued on Page 7)

Unemployment in the Highlands

	SEPTEMBER 2019			APRIL 2020			SEPTEMBER 2020		
	RATE	RECIPIENTS	BENEFITS PAID	RATE	RECIPIENTS	BENEFITS PAID	RATE	RECIPIENTS	BENEFITS PAID
DUTCHESS	3.5	1,100	\$1,410,000	14.2	15,700	\$20,250,000	6	11,600	\$12,770,000
PUTNAM	3.6	500	\$580,000	14.4	5,300	\$7,400,000	5.6	3,800	\$4,450,000
HUDSON VALLEY	3.6	19,000	\$13,210,000	14.4	117,600	\$154,600,000	6.5	103,200	\$118,400,000

Source: Department of Labor

The Edge (from Page 6)

“Although the rental moratorium is in place, it doesn’t mean you don’t *ever* have to pay your rent,” Fox said, noting that the moratorium on evictions is not the same as forgiveness of overdue rent. “That’s our fear — that there will be this tsunami of people who get eviction notices all at one time because they haven’t been able to pay the backlog.”

Christa Hines, executive director of Hudson River Housing, which manages affordable housing and homeless shelters in Dutchess County, said her group estimates that at least 36 percent of renters across the state are at risk of eviction.

“It’s given people false hope,” she said of the moratoriums. “They’re using that [unpaid rent] money to pay for other things, and they’re getting deeper and deeper in the hole. That’s the case even if their income hasn’t changed because of COVID.”

Homelessness in the area is already on the rise, Hines said. The Dutchess County shelter in Poughkeepsie has been averaging about 100 people a night, up about 20 percent from a year ago, and she estimates that around 20 percent come from the Beacon and Wappingers Falls area.

“Anecdotally, we’ve always known that some people live precariously, with family or friends or couch-surfing,” Hines said. “The pandemic presented a lot of challenges with that. People were scared to

open up their homes as much as they might have in the past.”

The groups suspect the Dutchess facility is serving clients from Putnam County, as well, which doesn’t have any shelters. “Because our shelter provides good services and we don’t turn anyone away, we wonder if folks come up here from other counties,” Hines said. “It’s something that we’re looking at.”

At the start of the shutdown in March, Hudson River Housing began dispensing \$90,000 it had received from a federal grant to help people with their rent, Hines said. Unfortunately, they had \$350,000 worth of requests.

Based on data collected by the organization, most renters in Dutchess are “severely cost-burdened,” which means they spend more than half of their income on housing. Renters would need to earn an average wage of \$26.87 per hour, or work 2.3 minimum-wage jobs, to afford the average two-bedroom apartment.

At the same time, the vacancy rate in Dutchess apartment complexes was 1.5 percent last year, the lowest it’s been since 2000. (In Beacon, the rate was zero percent.) In addition, the median home price in the county jumped by more than 20 percent between 2015 and 2019.

FOOD

After the shutdown began, food pantries in the Highlands began to serve a growing



Where is
‘The Edge’?
\$35,100

This is what a single person in Dutchess or Putnam needs to earn annually to survive, according to the United Way. It equates to \$17.55 per hour.

\$101,724

This is what a family with two adults and two young children in Dutchess or Putnam needs to earn annually to survive. It equates to \$50.86 per hour.

Source: ALICE in New York:
A Financial Hardship Study, 2020

number of people.

Amy Richter, an assistant at the Philipstown Food Pantry in Cold Spring, which is

open Saturday mornings, said it has seen up to a 150 percent increase in demand some weeks. Lines have formed hours before the 9 a.m. opening as people try to get the first crack at limited supplies of fruits and vegetables, although pantry organizers say they have discouraged that.

“What is striking to me are the people who come who I always thought were in my peer group,” Richter said, referring to middle- and higher-income levels. “It’s scary. Many, many are those who lost jobs. What we hadn’t seen before was a lot of single men. People in the arts have lost jobs, and we’ve seen them here.”

“People are doubling up,” she said. “There are extended families living together who weren’t before.”

She said the donations to the pantry so far have kept up with the demand.

“We’ve had a huge influx of money and food items from the community,” Richter said. “We are able to serve everyone who comes, and then some. But about 70 percent of our clients are Latino, and we’re constantly running out of things like white rice.”

Because of financial donations and the work of the Philipstown Town Board, the pantry was able to distribute gift cards from Foodtown in Cold Spring, as well as fresh and packaged foods.

“People were hurting so much that they began to cry when I handed them the gift cards,” she said.

COVID2021

Will It Work Out?

Gyms struggle as clients exercise on their own

By Leonard Sparks

Gym owners around the state launched a vigorous lobbying campaign — as well as a class-action lawsuit — before Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s administration allowed them to reopen as of Aug. 24, five months after the shutdown began.

But three months later, local gyms are struggling to get clients to return and facing a winter when the virus is expected to surge as people are forced indoors by the weather. During the shutdown many of their clients purchased their own fitness equipment and

have continued working out at home.

Zoned Fitness in Beacon and Cold Spring Fitness in Philipstown dropped group classes to focus on private training. Keith Laug, the owner of Zoned Fitness, located on Main Street, said this week that his schedule was about 70 percent full, enough to pay the bills.

Business at Cold Spring Fitness is down 90 percent from a year ago, said owner Dawn Scanga. She reopened on Oct. 1 but said many of her clients are older and hesitant to work out indoors.

“It’s been a struggle to just pay my rent,” said Scanga, who has sublet half of her space to Flex Physical Therapy. “People aren’t as eager as I thought they would be to come to the gym. If it doesn’t start opening up, it’s not going to be sustainable.”

Preparing to reopen involved “redesigning our entire business model,” she said. “We had to figure out 33 percent capacity for physical distancing and we had to close the shower. All our trainers and instructors are wearing face coverings and maintain 6 feet distance.

(Continued on Page 8)



Dawn Scanga, the owner of Cold Spring Fitness on Route 9, reopened on Oct. 1 but is struggling to keep her business going. Photo by L. Sparks

COVID2021

From Chords to Discord

Musicians, venues squeezed as pandemic marches on

By Leonard Sparks

Sara Milonovich, a Beacon resident who is a professional fiddler and violinist, has survived the shutdown with the help of a part-time job at a wine store, while singer and songwriter Dar Williams, who lives in Cold Spring, has delayed for at least a year the release of a new album because she cannot tour to support it.

Phil Ciganer has reopened his Towne Crier Cafe in Beacon, but under state guidelines cannot advertise the performances or sell tickets and the music must be “incidental” to dinner service. The Howland Cultural Center in Beacon has shifted to livestreaming performances that must take place without an audience other than the performers and technicians.

Musicians have recorded performances at home that they post online, but it’s a far cry from the atmosphere of a live show, said Williams, who believes the music industry is facing an “existential threat” as the pandemic continues.

When performing live, “you feel the energy of the audience, you feel their mood, you feel the material more, you feel the message of it more,” she said.

Williams was finishing a tour when the shutdown began in mid-March, and considers herself lucky because only the last two shows were canceled. Income from that tour, plus an advance for a book she is writing, cushioned her from the immediate financial toll the pandemic inflicted on other musicians.

Milonovich, by contrast, immediately felt the pain. On the eve of the shutdown she was substituting as a violinist for the Broadway show *Come From Away* and looking forward to a year of gigs both as a freelancer and a member of the band Daisy Cutter, which had finished a tour in November 2019.


She last played on Broadway on March 10, two days before theaters announced their closing for what initially was to be month. Musicians then watched as gigs at venues and festivals were scuttled, as well as summer music camps where they had planned to teach.

“It was immediate and catastrophic,” said Milonovich. “Financially, it’s been nothing short of devastating.”

Ciganer, with the Towne Crier’s restaurant and two performance stages closed, in June launched an online fundraising campaign that has brought in about \$31,000.

The restaurant has reopened for indoor and outdoor dining, with musicians playing several nights a week on a small stage located just inside the entrance. Ciganer noted that pandemic restrictions are hurting not just venues and musicians but sound and lighting technicians, agents and managers. “It’s a devastating blow to the industry,” he said.

The Howland Cultural Center has turned

 You feel the energy of the audience, you feel their mood, you feel the material more, you feel the message of it more.

~ Sara Milonovich



The Judith Tulloch Band performs on the small stage at the Towne Crier on Nov. 6.

Photo by L. Sparks

to livestreaming performances with a production outfit handling audio and video. The Beacon duo Annalyse McCoy and Ryan Dunn are hosting *The Valley Hour*, a monthly music series, and the center on Saturday (Nov. 14) will stream a performance of *The Artichoke*, a storytelling series. Craig Wolf, who is president of the nonprofit’s board, said in some cases the venue has been able to sell more tickets to online viewers than it would have with a live audience.

That demand demonstrates that livestreaming has legs, he said, and that the technology will be part of Howland’s future. “We’ve always known that there are people who couldn’t come to a live concert

— they couldn’t come because the time was not right for them or they don’t drive at night or they can’t get a babysitter,” he said.

While Williams had been able to survive through 2020, “next year, if it continues, that’s going to be a different conversation and if this goes through 2022, that’s also a different conversation,” she said.

Milonovich has played a few livestreamed shows and has another scheduled for Nov. 22 from Cafe Lena in Saratoga Springs. She is also a member of the Wynotte Sisters, who finished recording an album of “obscure holiday music” that will be released through the streaming site Bandcamp. “These revenue streams are important now that we’re not able to tour,” she said.

Gyms (from Page 7)

“We needed to install a new air-handling system to meet [state] standards; disinfect every surface while documenting the time and scope of cleaning products; post signage and complete the safety plan, including daily screening conducted for employees plus members, with a log of everyone who enters, including a designated site safety monitor to ensure compliance.

“We were pushed so far and expected to comply with so much,” she said.

Scanga said she surveyed her members and found they had two concerns: working out while wearing a mask and exercising indoors.

Laug said he has gained a few clients who belonged to larger gyms but felt more comfortable exercising in a private space. Both he and Scanga hope the winter months will bring more people indoors when outdoor classes end.

“I do see a lot of people, though, sticking with what they did when we shut down — doing a lot of home training,” said Laug.



Weekday ridership on Metro-North is down about 80 percent from before the shutdown.

File photo by M. Turton

COVID2021

What Happens to the Commute?

Workers grow accustomed to being home

By Michael Turton

Since March, there have been plenty of seats on the rush-hour trains to and from Grand Central and Beacon, Cold

Spring and Garrison.

Last year, Metro-North recorded 1.84 million round trips from Beacon, 382,220 from Cold Spring and 220,722 from Garrison. A month into the COVID-19 shutdown in April, those numbers had fallen by 98 percent.

Ridership has bounced back some-

what in recent months, but the number of passengers across the system is still down nearly 80 percent on weekdays and about 57 percent on weekends from a year ago, according to the railroad.

Metro-North has instituted 24-hour off-peak fares to lure commuters back, but a representative for the railroad said the impact on ridership is not yet clear.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which operates Metro-North, the Long Island Railroad and the New York

(Continued on Page 9)

Commute *(from Page 8)*

City subway and bus systems, has asked the federal government for \$12 billion in aid to offset what the state comptroller has called the worst financial crisis in the agency's history.

Last month, Patrick Foye, the chief executive officer of the MTA, said that, without federal funds, the agency may have to eliminate more than 7,000 jobs and cut service on Metro-North in half.

For people who bought homes in the Highlands just before the shutdown, "it never occurred to them they were buying a house that would become a remote workplace," said Bill Hussung, the owner of McCaffrey Real Estate in Cold Spring. "They had assumed they'd commute — and now they just don't."

Travis Fyfe and his wife, Molly Admana-Fyfe, who moved to Cold Spring 13 years ago, both commuted before the shutdown. Travis took Metro-North daily to Manhattan for his job as a construction project manager. Molly, an apparel designer, drove to Secaucus, New Jersey.

When the shutdown began in March, Molly began working from home, while Travis changed his commute to driving into the city once a week. By July, Molly had returned to work in New Jersey twice a week and Travis began driving to his work-site on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Working remotely has affected them differently.

Travis said he works more hours but is more available to his family. "I can take my daughter to school, pick her up and stay connected to work by phone," he said. "It's a small amount of time with her but a huge plus for me."

Being in the village more has also enabled him to join the Cold Spring Fire Co. "Working at home means I can respond to calls," Travis said. "If work gets interrupted, I get it done later."

By contrast, Molly said working remotely has not translated into more family time, noting she now works 12- to 16-hour days.

Both believe that once COVID-19 is conquered, they will resume working full time at their jobs.

But Neal Zuckerman, a Garrison resident who is Putnam County's representative on the MTA board, wonders if commuting patterns will ever be the same.

"We may not work in New York City five days a week the way we used to," he said. He wondered if Putnam County offers enough office space, coworking opportunities, digital access and ways to gather and socialize "that can make up what was the commuter's work life."

Putnam, he said, has "a great opportunity to reinvent and blur that line between 'work' and 'home' for the betterment of our community."

Through the Roof

When the shutdown began, many New York City residents fled to second homes in the Highlands or began looking to buy. That pace has slowed, but the market "continues to outperform anything we could have expected," said Bill Hussung, the owner of McCaffrey Real Estate in Cold Spring.

The initial alarm has given way to careful thought. "People are no longer in a rush," he said. "There's no panic to purchase a house before the next wave. It's now a well-thought-out lifestyle change; buyers see this area as having a better quality of life."

Demand for houses in Philipstown and a limited supply have pushed prices up. Properties that sold for \$400,000 last year now go for \$500,000, Hussung said, adding that sales volume in dollars has increased by 40 percent over last year while the number of sales has remained about the same.

"Sellers are happy but inventory is down," Hussung said.

Agents who usually only dealt with properties in the Highlands are now

looking farther afield. "We used to be a very narrow, Philipstown brokerage; we're not anymore," he said.

Now, if a suitable house isn't available in Philipstown, Hussung said, buyers are increasingly willing to relocate anywhere within the Hudson Valley.

In Beacon, broker Daniel Aubry said things have quieted slightly after "the craziest summer I've ever experienced," and, like Philipstown, inventory there is limited.

While a number of houses are "for sale by owner," Aubry said they are often overpriced, causing buyers to shy away. "When properly priced, properties here go in one weekend," he said, pointing out that standard ranch-style homes can receive multiple offers.

Beacon has a considerable supply of new condominiums, ranging in price from \$350,000 to more than \$1 million, although Aubry said until 51 percent of a building's units are sold, lenders require a down payment of 25 percent to 30 percent, which slows sales.

Holiday Pottery Show & Sale 2020

November 20–29

Open daily 10–5pm
Closed Thanksgiving

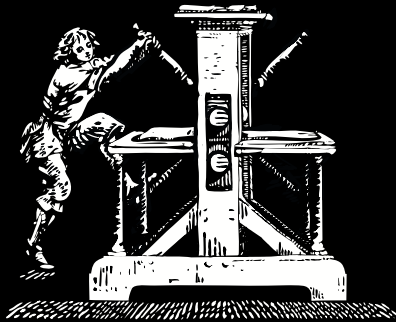
Member Discount Day
and Opening Reception
Friday, November 20, 1–7pm

See website for COVID precautions and procedures
garrisonartcenter.org



Garrison Art Center

HIGHLAND STUDIO



PRINTMAKERS

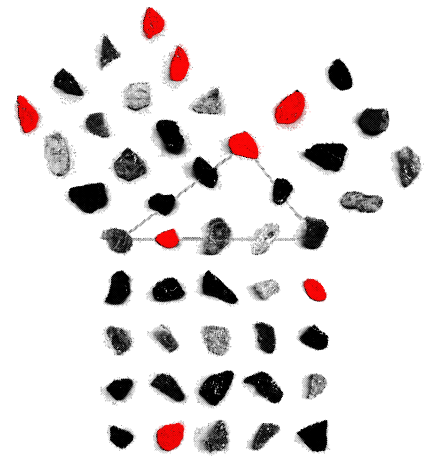
FINE ART
PRINTING
SCANNING
LARGE FORMAT

HUDSON VALLEY'S
ARCHIVAL PRINTING
SINCE 1997

PICTURE FRAMING
print & map gallery

845-809-5174

31 STEPHANIE LANE
COLD SPRING, NY
www.thehighlandstudio.com



BOCHNER BOETTI FONTANA

Curated by Mel Bochner
In collaboration with
Magazzino Italian Art Foundation
October 3, 2020 - January 11, 2021
Magazzino Italian Art, Gallery 8

MAGAZZINO
ITALIAN ART