



Beating No. 1

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Page 11

Thursday, Jan. 28, 2021

With the first phase underway, seniors receive COVID-19 vaccine

For many, it's been a time to celebrate

By **CAITLIN ANDERSON**
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Barb LaPolice, 75, said she didn't feel any pain when her arm was poked last week with the COVID-19 vaccine.

LaPolice, like many of her peers at her retirement community, received the first of two COVID-19 vaccine doses last week, part of an effort to vaccinate residents of senior living facilities across Edina.

Referencing the in-house vaccinations, "(It's) such a blessing," said LaPolice, who is a resident of Avidor Edina. Avidor had several stations set up in its lobby with healthcare professionals ready to provide vaccinations to many willing senior residents.

Residents at Avidor and many other long-term senior living facilities statewide are receiving the vaccine — on a voluntary basis — as part of the state's first



(SUN CURRENT STAFF PHOTO BY CAITLIN ANDERSON)

Barb LaPolice receives her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at her residence, Avidor Edina. LaPolice, 75, noted how convenient it was that the vaccines were administered in the lobby.



(SUN CURRENT STAFF PHOTO BY CAITLIN ANDERSON)

Health care workers set up at stations in the lobby of Avidor Edina in order to provide the COVID-19 vaccine to residents.

See **Vaccine**, Page 20

Edina resident Slavitt joins Biden COVID-19 response team

Group aims to contain the virus and garner public trust

By **CAITLIN ANDERSON**
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Andy Slavitt, an Edina resident who served in former President Barack Obama's administration, has joined the White House COVID-19 Response Team.

Slavitt, who served as the acting administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services under Obama, is now working with other Biden-appointed officials to plan and carry out a comprehensive COVID-19 response strategy aimed at better containing the virus, garnering public trust and improving vaccine distribution.

"It's an all-hands-on-deck moment," Slavitt

said in an interview with the Sun Current. "There is a tremendous amount to do."

Slavitt, who expects to work with the team for four months, serves as senior advisor to Jeff Zients, the coordinator of the COVID-19 Response Team.

As a member of the Obama administration, Slavitt oversaw Medicaid, Medicare, value-based payment model reforms and other related programs and initiatives. Before that, he helped fix problems with health-care.gov in 2013 during the rollout of the Affordable Care Act.

As the White House COVID-19 Response Team became official following President Joe Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration, the newly sworn-in president also addressed the pandemic by signing

See **Slavitt**, Page 2

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Volume 51, No. 6

Index

Education-Page 3
Opinion-Page 4
Business-Page 6
Public Safety-Page 8
Sports-Page 11
Classifieds-Pages 16-19

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PUBLIC NOTICES: See page 15

Vaccine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

phase of vaccinations. Given their age and their congregate settings, these residents are especially primed to appreciate a shot in the arm.

“I strongly think people should get vaccinated for whatever disease there is a vaccine for,” said 89-year-old Carolyn Schroeder, a resident at the Waters of Edina who nearly died from COVID-19 in March. “I think everyone should be getting vaccinated as fast as they can.”

Beth Kuhlmann, executive director for the Waters of Edina, said the beginning of vaccinations for residents has been a celebration – one that’s been a long time coming.

“There’s a light at the end of this tunnel,” she said. “We weren’t expecting what we experienced. ... But we made it through and we persevered. And it was challenging but it made us that much stronger.”

Seniors are one of the demographic groups most at risk of contracting and dying of COVID-19. On top of that, the close quarters of long-term living facilities for seniors has been of major concern throughout the pandemic.

After being rushed in March to St. Paul’s Bethesda Hospital, which was the designated COVID-19 facility, Schroeder’s medical emergency was still dire. She had already made a personal choice not go on a ventilator despite having pneumonia in both of her lungs and struggling to breathe.



(PHOTO COURTESY WATERS OF EDINA)

Rudy Ripple, 92, received the COVID-19 vaccine at the Waters of Edina senior living facility.

Schroeder was moved to hospice, expecting to die without family being able to be by her side. But soon, she started to improve.

“I did something that indicated that I wasn’t ready to give up the ship,” she said. “And here I am.”

“It’s certainly been a very difficult year for everyone in the world but it definitely hits a little harder for seniors and senior living communities not being able to see their loved ones on a regular basis,” said Castele Thauwald, executive director for Yorkshire of Edina Senior Living.

‘Hits a little harder’

The virus affected seniors more than just physically as the effects of isolation mounted. For many seniors in long-term living

facilities, they were unable to see loved ones due to restrictions on visitors.

“I haven’t seen anyone of my kids or grandkids for three months at least,” said Rudy Ripple, 92, a resident at the Waters of Edina. But he does talk to them over the phone often, he said.

But now, with the vaccine, returning to some semblance of normal life seems within reach, Thauwald said. Yorkshire began vaccinations earlier in January.

The Minnesota Department of Health’s COVID-10 Vaccine Allocation Advisory Group, which recommended the phases of vaccine rollout, formed in September to create the equitable and effective framework for vaccine allocation. It is made up of healthcare providers, public health representatives, bioethicists, healthcare associations and people of diverse community groups. Residents of long-term care facilities are part of phase 1a,

which includes healthcare professionals.

The two available vaccines currently are Pfizer and Moderna, which require two doses 21 or 28 days apart, depending on the type.

“It was really just super cool to see (the residents) come down and be excited for this new change and something that we’ve been waiting for a very, very long time,” Thauwald said. “It was a very exciting day. Lots of laughs, smiles through their eyes. And just a really, really neat day.”

For residents who have overcome struggles during the pandemic, like Schroeder and Ripple, Kuhl-



(PHOTO COURTESY YORKSHIRE OF EDINA)

Yorkshire of Edina staff member Stephanny Streeter writes why she decided to get the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition to residents of long-term senior living facilities, staff members were also given the opportunity to receive the vaccine.

mann said it’s important to point out the strength shown in the community.

“The overarching resilience of residents, staff and their families, the families and their willingness to sacrifice over this last year is really what has stood out to me, and now with the turning of the tides of getting these vaccines, we’re all looking forward to a happier and healthier 2021,” she said.

Schroeder, when asked her age, said it’s proudly no secret. “I’m happy to be 89,” she said. “That means I survived this year.”

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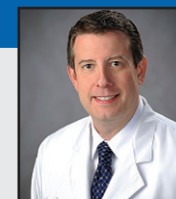
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