

New arrivals in Bakersfield find housing bargains, kind neighbors

BY JOHN COX
jcox@bakersfield.com

Before moving to Bakersfield, Quincy Jones' only memorable experience speaking with neighbors was the time someone was shot and killed across the street from his home in a gang-infested part of South Los Angeles.

Imagine his surprise about a month ago when, having just moved with his wife and two children into a large house with a pool on a quiet cul-de-sac in

Rosedale, a knock came on his door. It was his new neighbors.

One after the other they showed up to introduce themselves and welcome the Joneses. One woman and her three sons brought over a batch of freshly baked chocolate-chip cookies.

He still sounds shocked. "Just the fact that people actually do that, like they do on TV," Jones said, trailing off.

Bakersfield's relatively low housing costs as compared with

other parts of California have attracted growing numbers of people who could scarcely afford to buy a nice home where they had been living. Or, they sell their old home and find they're able to get a lot more for their money in Bakersfield.

Of course, there's more to moving than simply switching living spaces. In some cases, relocating to Bakersfield brings a pleasant cultural shift.

New arrivals say they are struck

by the easy change of pace, and more than that, a feeling of personal warmth. They report running into less traffic, more patience and, for the most part, kinder people.

"It feels still kind of small and comfortable," said Matt Bateman, another new arrival who with his wife sold their house in the Bay Area in July and moved with their daughter into a \$540,000 home in Southern Oaks that he figures would have cost

more than \$1 million in their old neighborhood.

MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Intra-state migration is nothing new, even in California. But as local real estate people have observed, it's happening more and more often lately as longtime Bakersfield residents find willing buyers among people priced out of coastal markets.

Please see **ARRIVALS | A3**

'A little bit of art, love and sunshine' Via Arte brings Bakersfield parking lot to life

BY RON STAPP
rstapp@bakersfield.com

As the sun began to move across the sky, The Marketplace parking lot began to come to life Saturday morning.

By mid-afternoon, the outlines of a rendition of one of Mary Swanzy's cubist landscapes began to take shape. Two rows over, a husband-and-wife team worked with painstaking detail on fine-tuning a variation of one of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo's colorful paintings. Lakers' great Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gigi, who were killed in a helicopter crash in January, were immortalized in colored chalk in another 7 x 7 square.

It was all part of what has become an annual event in Bakersfield, the Via Arte Italian Street Painting Festival, which invites artists to showcase their talents through chalk drawings on the blacktop, and also serves as one of the biggest fundraisers for the Bakersfield Museum of Art. It continues Sunday.

Understandably, the 22nd version of the event had a different feel with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing participants to adhere to several safety precautions, including mandatory masks, extra spacing between artists' workspaces and one-way directional paths to funnel onlookers safely past from a separate entrance to the exit.

"Because of the pandemic world that we live



JENNIFER JOHNSON / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Artist Kathryn Ramos draws "Senecio" by Paul Klee. This is her 13th year taking part in the Via Arte Italian Street Painting Festival. See more photos at Bakersfield.com.

in right now, it's looking a little different," said Amy Smith, executive director of the Bakersfield Museum of Art. "We're just really grateful to this community and to the health department for allowing us to bring a little bit of art, love and sunshine back to our community this year."

In the interest of safety, event organizers also limited participation to adult artists only. That led to a decrease from more than



Amanda Gibbs and her husband, Brian, paid tribute to late actor Chadwick Boseman at the Via Arte event.

Please see **VIA ARTE | A3**

Nurses reflect on height of virus locally

BY STACEY SHEPARD
sshepard@bakersfield.com

When she thinks back on it now, it feels like a dream.

More like a nightmare, really. Anna Leviyeva, 34, was on the front lines of the local COVID-19 crisis this summer as an intensive care nurse at Bakersfield Memorial Hospital. When she first spoke to

COVID-19 PANDEMIC
The Californian in late July, the number of hospitalized patients had reached

its peak and the stress of the surge was mounting. Memorial Hospital had two intensive care units solely dedicated to COVID-19 patients.

In the weeks that followed, Leviyeva recalled, so many of them died.

"Some of them had been there weeks and they were fine. And then all the sudden they're on a breathing machine and we're putting chest tubes in because their lungs were collapsing and then they just pass," she said. "I hope I never have to see anything like that again. It was tough."

Please see **NURSES | A2**

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

People looking for creative and safe ways to celebrate the holidays this year

NATION & WORLD | B1

KYRIE WILSON

Former Ridgeview football star speaks softly, but carries a big message

SPORTS | D1

VIEWPOINT

Two journeys through breast cancer, one shared conclusion: We can help



ROBERT PRICE
FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

For Diane Nelson, it was a lump that appeared almost overnight. No early indications, no prior tenderness.

For Stacey Shepard, it was a spot where her skin had indented and changed color, and she knew she had to get it checked.

Nelson and Shepard confronted their breast cancer on similar timelines and with similar outcomes —

thankfully, mostly good ones — but traveled paths that at times diverged.

Such is the nature of breast cancer: Some aspects are universal, some as personal as fingerprints.

They shared the same Bakersfield doctor — Dr. Ravi Patel of the Comprehensive Blood & Cancer Center — and similar places in life. Nelson was 41 when she was

diagnosed two years ago, Shepard 38: women in the approaching-middle-age phase of life where disease is supposed to be foreign and rare. Supposed to be.

Most breast cancers, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are diagnosed after age 50. Doctors most often

Please see **PRICE | A3**



Diane Nelson receives chemotherapy treatment for her breast cancer in 2018.



Stacey Shepard receives a chemotherapy treatment in 2019.



PRICE: \$2

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INSIDE YOUR CALIFORNIAN

Advice.....	E3	Nation & World.....	B1	Television.....	E4
Books.....	E5	Obituaries.....	B4	Today in History.....	A2
Classifieds.....	C1	Opinion.....	D5	Travel.....	E6
Eye Street.....	E1	Puzzles.....	C4, E3		
Horoscopes.....	E3	Sports.....	D1		
Lottery numbers.....	A2	Sunday Forum.....	D6		

NURSES

Continued from PAGE A1

She recently opted to drop her hours at Memorial and is now working as a travel nurse at a hospital in Los Angeles where there are no COVID-19 patients.

For the nurses, doctors and other health care workers in local hospitals, the summer of 2020 is likely one they will never forget.

On July 21, the number of people hospitalized in Kern County with a COVID-19 infection peaked at 280. Three weeks later, the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units hit a high of 87.

And during the seven-day period from July 31 to Aug. 6, 58 people died from the virus, more than at any other time since the outbreak began in March, according to available data from the Kern County Public Health Services Department.

Far fewer COVID-19 patients are in the hospital today. The total last week for Kern's 10 acute care hospitals was around 60 patients total. Bakersfield Memorial, which at its peak had 16 or more COVID-19 patients in intensive care units, has just one or two in the unit these days.

"When you think back, when this is over and we look back, I think we'll see how much this impacted our lives," said Terri Church, chief nursing officer at Bakersfield Memorial, who oversees about 800 nurses and 400 support staff.

Church expects that if there is another surge in COVID-19, it won't be quite like the crash course that hospitals and their staffs experienced this summer because a lot has been learned in the past few months. There are better protocols and treatments in place now than before, she said, and of course a vaccine in the works.

The Californian talked to several local nurses to get their reflections on this intense period in their careers.

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County health officials report 2 new deaths and 87 new cases

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

The Kern County Public Health Services Department reported two new coronavirus deaths and 87 new cases Saturday morning. There are now a total of 410 deaths and 33,373 confirmed cases since reporting on the virus began in mid-March.

The county reports 16,912 people have recovered from their illness.

This is the age breakdown of the positive cases: 3,813 people up to age 17; 20,707 people ages 18 to 49; 5,983 people ages 50 to 64; 2,863 ages 65 and older.

The state reports that 59 people are hospitalized with COVID-19 in Kern, and 17 of those are in intensive care units. Those numbers were last updated Thursday.

The public can find more data on the county's COVID-19 dashboard at kernpublichealth.com/covid-19_dashboard/.

group was taught how to respond.

Six months later she found herself in the middle of the biggest medical crisis in her nearly two decades as a nurse, employing some of what she learned there.

Swanson said she worked through the H1N1 and swine flu epidemics and the Bakersfield hospital was busy but nothing like the number of critically ill COVID-19 patients she and her team cared for this time around.

It was stressful, she said, caring for patients who were so sick and the additional task of having to support the patients' families by phone. It was also hard to watch patients who entered the hospital alert and able to walk and breathe normally slowly decline to the point where they went on a ventilator and often stayed on it for weeks.

"COVID is such a slow recovery process. It's like watching a pot that never boils," Swanson said. "You go in every day and wonder if you're going to see any change."

Swanson also remembers how the disease affected entire families.

On the phone with a patient's loved ones, she would be told that another family member was being treated for COVID-19 on a separate floor or in a different hospital, or she would hear family members coughing on the phone.

Swanson said she had wanted to be a nurse since she was a young child and working through the COVID-19 crisis, as tough as it was, felt like an affirmation that she had chosen the right profession.

"Just to have all this come up after (the FEMA training), it was like this is what I am here for," she said. "This is what we're supposed to be doing."

'WE NEEDED EVERY OUNCE OF HELP'

Melissa Woods works as a charge nurse on the med-

ical surgical floor at Adventist Health Bakersfield. Her unit received the hospital's first COVID-19 patient.

She remembers the lead-up to COVID-19 reminded her of the preparations the hospital took for Ebola.

Unlike Ebola, however, Woods said she expected COVID-19 to happen in Bakersfield.

"We just never anticipated it would go on for so long," she said.

She, too, remarked on how different it was not to have patients' family members by their sides. But she also recalled the creative, nonmedical ways nurses found to help their patients, for example, by finding a window that would allow a family member to wave at their hospitalized loved one.

The teamwork and cohesion among the nursing staff and other hospital workers was strong and even people not working in her unit would stop to help out.

"Everyone pulled together because they knew we needed every ounce of help to take care of our patients," she said. "I don't think we'll ever see anything like this again. I hope not. It was certainly an experience I'll never forget."

She also said the support of the hospital administration and the community buoyed her and her co-workers through a hectic time.

"I think there was never a better time to be a nurse," she said. "We got so many donations and they would deliver food and cards and we felt really supported."

'RIGHT WHERE I'M SUPPOSED TO BE'

It was Kellianne O'Neill's birthday in March on the day the first COVID-19 patient came to the ICU.

"I remember how scared she was and we were trying to get the family on the phone and explain everything," said O'Neill, 34, a charge nurse at Mercy Downtown and Southwest

hospitals.

The doctors and nurses were trying to convince the woman to go on a ventilator, which she did. The patient eventually recovered and was discharged.

Going forward, O'Neill stopped wearing her typical business casual attire to work and has been in scrubs ever since.

"I wanted to make sure the staff felt supported, that I was there at the bedside," O'Neill said. "I would never ask my staff to do anything I wouldn't do."

With the county advancing through the state's reopening tiers, O'Neill said, "it's a little stressful worrying about if that's going to impact things."

"I just hope the community remains vigilant ... doing all the things we've been taught to do to keep the incidence of COVID down. Just remember that because we're opening back up, COVID hasn't gone away," she said.

Overall the experience, the former Army Reserve nurse said, has helped her to become a stronger leader.

"It's also helped to remind me why I became an ICU nurse in the first place," O'Neill said. "Which is always nice to know I'm right where I'm supposed to be."

'I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED'

As an ICU nurse for five years, Leviyeva has had difficult days. But one that stands out among them is when she laid a cellphone down next to a dying woman so her family could say their goodbyes.

"One grandchild told her,

"I'll always treat women well because you taught me that," she said. "Her husband called and he was begging her to come home ... he was saying 'please, please, you're fine, just come home.'"

When she arrived home from work, her fiancé asked about her day and the floodgates opened.

"I couldn't even talk I just started crying," she said. "I'm pretty sure a lot of people experienced the same thing."

During another shift, two patients coded and another went into respiratory arrest back to back. She

described it as "mayhem."

A native of New York City, Leviyeva recently decided to make a

change and became a travel nurse. She now works at the University of Southern California's Keck Medical Center in Los Angeles but still works an occasional shift at Memorial Hospital.

"I don't think (COVID-19) was really the main reason" for the change, she said. "I just wanted to experience other things."

But she said she suspects that those in her position who experienced the COVID-19 surge likely thought of leaving their jobs at some point.

"At the height of it, when everybody was passing away, I'm sure everyone had thoughts about it," she said. "There's nothing you can do. You put all your effort into it for 12 hours and they're passing away."



Leviyeva



Church

The Bakersfield Californian

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Saturday's SuperLotto

7 19 25 29 42 1
 Next jackpot: \$19 million MEGA

Daily 3

MIDDAY: 4 4 3 EVENING: 9 5 1

Daily 4: 5 7 6 2

Fantasy 5: 1 3 12 18 26

Daily Derby

HORSES: 5 9 10 RACE TIME: 1:46.25

Lane closure scheduled on Hwy. 99 beginning today

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Lane closures are scheduled for southbound Highway 99 at the Ming Avenue offramp from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. today through Thursday, according to the Thomas Roads Improvement Program.

The inside lane will remain open while work is underway and no impacts are anticipated for northbound traffic.

Motorists wishing to use the Ming Avenue offramp will be detoured to California Avenue, according to the news release.

TODAY IN HISTORY

1867: The United States took formal possession of Alaska from Russia.

1892: The first long-distance telephone line between New York and Chicago was officially opened (it could only handle one call at a time).

1898: The American flag was raised in Puerto Rico

shortly before Spain formally relinquished control of the island to the U.S.

1944: Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia during World War II.

1954: Texas Instruments unveiled the Regency TR-1, the first commercially produced transistor radio.

1962: James D. Watson and Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins were honored with the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology for determining the double-helix molecular structure of DNA.

1968: The U.S. Olympic Committee suspended Tommie Smith and John Carlos for giving a "Black power" salute as a protest during a victory ceremony in Mexico City.

1969: The federal government banned artificial sweeteners known as

cyclamates because of evidence they caused cancer in laboratory rats.

1972: Congress passed the Clean Water Act, overriding President Richard Nixon's veto.

1977: West German commandos stormed a hijacked Lufthansa jetliner on the ground in Mogadishu, Somalia, freeing all 86 hostages and killing three of the four hijackers.

2001: CBS News announced that an employee in anchorman Dan Rather's office had tested positive for skin anthrax. Four disciples of Osama bin Laden were sentenced in New York to life without parole for their roles in the deadly 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa.

2009: Jessica Watson, a

16-year-old Australian, steered her bright pink yacht out of Sydney Harbor to start her bid to become the youngest person to sail solo and unassisted around the world. (She succeeded, returning to Sydney Harbor in May 2010.)

2010: Four men snared in an FBI sting were convicted of plotting to blow up New York City synagogues and shoot down military planes with the help of a paid informant who'd convinced them he was a terror operative. (Defendants James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams and Laguerre Payen were each sentenced to 25 years in prison.)

2014: The Supreme Court said Texas could use voter identification law for the November election, rejecting an emergency request from the Justice Department and civil rights groups to prohibit the state from requiring voters to produce certain forms of photo ID. (Three justices dissented.)

2019: The world's first all-female spacewalking team, NASA astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir, replaced a broken part of the International Space Station's power grid. A bomb killed more than 60 people during prayers at a mosque in the Afghan village of Jodari.

— The Associated Press

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