

Six months into coronavirus crisis, change, uncertainty, fatigue are the norm for many

BY STACEY SHEPARD
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In June, Hortencia Cabral was in favor of her twins going back to school if proper precautions were taken. She and her husband both work and a classroom seemed a better fit than remote learning for the 10-year-old boys.

Today, she's not sure what to think.

In late June, Cabral lost a beloved uncle to COVID-19 and then her husband came down with the virus in July.

He recovered in isolation at home but the grief and stress was difficult for Cabral.

Yet she still heard talk locally and nationally about COVID-19

as a hoax, no big deal, or similar to flu, and some were pushing for schools to reopen in August.

"I would like to go back to normal as quickly as possible but with a plan I can trust. Don't tell me this is a hoax. If you start off with that then all your credibility is gone. I don't trust anything you have to say because you think this is a joke. The idea of playing

with people's lives is not one I'm willing to gamble with," she said.

As the medical community anticipates another surge in virus cases this winter, parents, business owners and the rest of us are stuck in limbo as life under COVID-19 drags on. Six months in, Kern County is at the tail end of a major outbreak that infected more than 30,000 people,

resulted in more than 350 deaths and pushed the local health care system to the brink. With school back in session, albeit remotely, the holidays looming and a change in season underway, the contrast between life as it used to be and how it is now — disrupted, difficult and different for

Please see **PANDEMIC | A4**

REVEALED

Anonymous good Samaritan who repaired restaurant's vandalized sign is made known



ROD THORNBERG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Jerad Webb, who runs California Neon Signs, is shown here at his shop in downtown Bakersfield. Nearly three months ago, Webb and his team created a perfect replica of a local restaurant's sign that had been damaged by a vandal and replaced it before dawn in early July. Now the good Samaritans have been unmasked.

BY STEVEN MAYER
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It was earlier this summer when Joe Munoz Jr. walked outside his family's Casa Munoz restaurant only to discover that someone had punched a gaping hole in the Mexican food eatery's outdoor sign.

Talk about putting a damper on your day.

Surviving the COVID-19 lockdown, and 2020 in general, has been stressful enough, Munoz said, without adding random and senseless vandalism to the list.

But then something happened that raised the spirits of the family — and brought smiles to many in the community as well.

"It blew me away," Munoz said at the time.

Please see **REVEALED | A3**



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN / FILE

Members of the Munoz family were shocked and grateful when they discovered an unknown individual repaired their sign, which had been broken this summer by a vandal. The man who replaced the sign has been revealed — Jerad Webb of California Neon.

BAKERSFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Four vie to succeed Sullivan in Ward 6 seat

BY SAM MORGEN
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The Ward 6 seat on the Bakersfield City Council will soon be filled by someone other than Jacquie Sullivan for the first time since 1995.

ELECTION 2020

The four candidates who have stepped up to try to succeed Sullivan, who is not running for reelection, come from varying backgrounds and have many differing ideas about how to take on the challenges facing the city. It will be up to the voters of Ward 6 to choose who they want to be their next representative.

PATTY GRAY

Endorsed by Sullivan herself, Patty Gray says she has the same value system as the woman she hopes to succeed, but she is her

Please see **WARD 6 | A4**



DINING OUT

Sancho's Tacos earns high marks

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SUPREME COURT

President Trump nominates conservative Amy Coney Barrett

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AJ CLEVELAND

Highland two-sport star hoping to attract offers from college coaches

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VIEWPOINT

A hundred traffic cones down, a thousand more to go



ROBERT PRICE
FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

If it seemed for an extended period of months one could not travel anywhere in metro Bakersfield without being abruptly shepherded to merge by a row of traffic cones — if not halted entirely — it's because that was in fact our reality. Still is, in places.

It has been, to borrow the word of the year, unprecedented. Never before has greater Bakersfield seen so much transportation funding — at least \$1.4 billion — dedicated to its streets and highways in one rela-

tively concentrated period of time.

We could, while at an idling standstill, always temper our annoyance by reminding ourselves how much better it will be when it's all finished.

One project at a time it's actually coming to pass, and where the earth movers continue to groan and lurch there is at least discernible progress.

One of the most visible of those projects is wrapping up: The 24th Street widening project, at least six years in the making, including three years of active construction, will es-

entially be complete on Oct. 2.

City transportation engineers expect the \$43 million, six-lane arterial to be ready for prime time in two weeks, the last bit of roadside landscaping notwithstanding.

After Oct. 2, the arterial linking Highway 58 and the city's Rosedale district to Highway 178 and east Bakersfield by way of downtown will basically need just three things, and shovels, brooms and a laptop will suffice to accomplish them. Workers will need only to plant a few remain-

ing shrubs, sweep up their trash and program the technology-assisted crosswalk.

HAWK — that's the nickname of the High Intensity Activated Crosswalk — is a unique and some might say intimidating two-phase, signal-regulated crossing area at Pine Street that requires pedestrians to take temporary refuge in a bollard-protected median, literally called a refuge zone. Cross the first

Please see **PRICE | A3**



PRICE: \$2

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Everything you need to know about voting in Kern

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Ready or not, Election Day is right around the corner. Coming during the coronavirus pandemic and a heightened period of civil unrest, Nov. 3 could prove to be a unique day in which the American people choose their next round of leaders.

The biggest difference Kern County residents will see is that every registered

voter will be sent a mail-in ballot. The state is encouraging Californians to vote by mail this year in order to avoid crowding at polling stations, which could help spread COVID-19.

The change won't be that much of a difference from previous elections as 72 percent of ballots cast in March's primary in Kern County were sent in by mail. Counties throughout the state will

begin mailing ballots to voters by Oct. 5.

Ballots can be mailed in up to Election Day. They will be counted as long as they are postmarked on or before Nov. 3. A secure drop box will be placed outside the County Administrative Center, 1115 Truxtun Ave., 29 days before the election.

Other drop-off points are expected to be announced soon.

A ballot will be counted

as long as it is received before Nov. 20 and the voter's signature matches the signature on file at the election office. If the signatures do not match, the voter will be notified and given an opportunity to correct the deficiency.

Ballots can be tracked at california.ballottrax.net.

For those who want to vote in person, don't worry. Kern County Elections Division has issued assurances that the number

of polling sites will be the same in November as it was in March.

The Elections Division strongly encourages voters to bring their mail-in ballots with them to their polling stations prior to voting. Those who do not will need to vote provisionally, which requires the elections office to certify that a mail-in ballot has not already been counted.

Masks are strongly encouraged, but not required.

Those who do not bring a mask to a polling site may need to follow alternate protocols to protect the health of poll workers and other voters, which may take longer.

Polling sites will follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines regarding social distancing and sanitizing of surfaces. Voters may need to wait in line outside a polling site if the location becomes too crowded.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL PANDEMIC

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so many — is stark.

Today, Cabral works from home in the morning to help her sons with any technical problems — or to break up a fight, as happened last week — then goes into the office for the afternoon when her husband comes home from his job.

Cabral feels lucky that her employer lets her work from home because so many other parents don't have that option. But she worries about being able to do it all.

"I still feel like I'm being pulled in all different directions," she said. "That's hard because you do worry about your career and you want to make sure you're not dropping the ball."

"That's the reality of what's going on in our community," she said.

While a vaccine is on the horizon, local health experts predict a second surge in cases locally this winter, meaning the next six months will likely feel much like the last six months.

"Throughout Dignity Health, there's a lot of discussion about 'the resurgence,'" said Ken Keller, CEO of Bakersfield Memorial Hospital, which along with Mercy and Mercy Southwest hospitals in Bakersfield, is part of the Dignity Health system.

Keller said the winter months from December through February are typically the hospital's busiest time of the year due to flu, pneumonia and flare-ups in chronic pulmonary and heart conditions. When you add additional hospitalizations on top of that from COVID-19, Keller expects local hospitals will reach capacity again in the coming months as they did in late July.

Clinics and doctor's offices will also likely be slammed with people who have respiratory symptoms wanting to get tested to find out if they have COVID-19, the flu or just a cold.

"Now with COVID, your workplace is not going to let you come if you have any kind of symptom. Your day care is going to send your kid home with any symptoms," said Dr. Olga Meave, the chief medical officer for Clinica Sierra Vista, who predicted "a chaotic" winter ahead for health care providers.

"I think this season everyone is going to be so vigilant about everyone's symptoms, it's going to increase the people wanting testing," Meave said.

Even if a vaccine is developed soon, Meave hears every day from patients who are skeptical about taking it. She thinks it will take some time for the vaccine to



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN / FILE

In March, Heather Laganelli, owner of Locale restaurant, began to offer trays of lasagna for sale for pickup or delivery as a way to keep business going during the coronavirus pandemic. This was even before health officials were recommending the use of face masks. Six months later she is still having to find new ways to draw in customers and keep the restaurant open.

In the wider community, there is concern that pandemic fatigue is setting in. After a long summer of restrictions, and with cooler weather and the holidays approaching, the temptation to throw caution to the wind will be strong. But public health officials say the only hope of containing the virus requires continued vigilance: avoiding gatherings, socially distancing, wearing a mask, washing hands.

have an impact.

"A lot of my patients say, 'I'm not going to get it right away, I'm going to wait and see if it works,'" Meave said. "There's fear."

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cially distancing, wearing a mask, washing hands.

"I think just the amount of change we're all having to deal with — initially, all at once and now over time — has been incredibly stressful for people," said Michelyn Devine, a licensed clinical psychologist with Kaiser Permanente in Bakersfield.

People have grown tired of the demands brought on by the pandemic, whether it's avoiding the virus or juggling kids and working from home, not going out or partaking of regular activities.

County officials report 2 deaths, 82 new cases of virus on Saturday

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Kern County Public Health Services reported two new coronavirus deaths and 82 new cases Saturday morning.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

That brings Kern's totals to 369 deaths and 31,957 cases since reporting began in mid-March.

The county says 15,964 people have recovered from the illness.

This is the age breakdown of

the positive cases: 3,641 people up to age 17; 19,864 people ages 18 to 49; 5,709 people ages 50-64; 2,727 ages 65 and older.

The state reports that 72 people are hospitalized with COVID-19 in Kern, and 21 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 https://kernpublichealth.com/covid-19_dashboard/.

Devine worries that simply cautioning people not to gather for Halloween or other upcoming holidays won't be enough.

"The need to celebrate and connect with people is still there and people do far better if there's an alternative than if you're just taking it away all together," she said.

She is paying attention to ideas for how families with kids can celebrate Halloween in a safe way so she can encourage her patients to still enjoy the day. She also encourages many of the people she works with to avoid information overload by limiting social media and news consumption and reminds them that everyone is going through this even though it feels like a lonely time.

"I try to normalize that we are all in this together and no one is an expert in this. The anxiety, while uncomfortable, is pretty normal and what we would expect. We just need to help figure out ways to manage it," Devine said.

For Heather Laganelli, owner of the popular downtown lunch spot Locale, managing uncertainty and the unknown has come in the form of innovating and finding creative ways to keep her restaurant going the past six months.

"We're still in the whole grind of trying to figure out how to stay relevant and in business and keep the doors open. Every day, it's a numbers game figuring out labor costs and figuring out how to get people to come in. We're just doing our best," she said.

In an effort to adapt, Laganelli has opened a pickup window, expanded the restaurant's hours, purchased an awning to create more outdoor seating

and recently invested in a new computer system, including an upcoming mobile app to make it easier to handle takeout orders.

But she's had to reduce staff from 12 to six, seating capacity has gone from more than 100 to about 30, and with no events happening, her catering orders have completely dried up. All the new requirements for sanitizing and preventing the spread of infection are more labor-intensive and costly, she said. People tell her the restaurant seems to be doing well but business remains way below normal and she's gone into debt trying to adapt and adjust to new restrictions.

Despite the hardships, the move to outdoor dining has come with a sort of silver lining, she said. On a recent day, she took in the scene at her restaurant: she had hired a musician to play music on the restaurant's patio and the outdoor tables were full of diners eating and listening to music, even in 100-degree heat.

"When you see people eating outside it creates this feeling of something happening, this old-school vibe of community and connection and people and humanity," she said.

"There's a lot of normalcy in a restaurant for people," she said. "Sitting out on a patio listening to live music, even though it's 100 degrees, it just makes you feel kind of normal, you know."

When the winter months roll around, she hopes people will be equally tolerant of the cool weather and continue to dine outdoors.

"Worst-case scenario, we will offer blankets," she said. "For one-time use and then we'll wash them."

WARD 6

Continued from PAGE A1

own person.

"I'm a decision-maker. It's not hard for me to make decisions," she said. "I'm not here to follow in her footsteps and become (Sullivan's) clone."

The co-owner of Dream-Maker Bath and Kitchen, Gray, 63, describes herself as a wife, a mother and a businesswoman. She says she never planned on being a politician, but as she nears the end of her professional career she wants to give back to the community that has allowed her to thrive.

"I've always wanted to live my life with purpose," she said. "I'm close to retirement age now and that will be coming and I don't want to just live my life frivolously where I'm not making a difference."

Gray said she is a woman of faith, and pointed to her experience as a businesswoman who survived the recession of 2009 as valuable to running a city. Public safety is a chief concern. She said she hopes to have happened in cities across the country from occurring



Gray



Tatum



Quijada



Stevens

in Bakersfield.

"I want to see the average citizen be able to thrive in our city and not just survive," she said. "It's very important that their families are living in a place where they feel safe and secure."

GREGORY TATUM

A U.S. Army veteran who was in Germany when the Berlin Wall fell, Gregory Tatum hopes to use his position on the City Council if he is elected to benefit veterans.

"I'm interested in veterans and also the homeless," Tatum said. "Many times our veterans have a hard time finding employment because of certain injuries they suffered. Because of the pandemic, a lot of veterans have lost their jobs."

Tatum, 61, is the pastor at Change Community Church. He has been working as a community activist for the last 12 years, focusing on gang and drug violence.

"I can see things that the other candidates can't see," he said, "having been out there in the streets, and communicating with some people that have been involved in terrible acts of violence and crime."

He said he would focus on revitalizing Ward 6 if elected, as having depreciated during Sullivan's political career. He previously ran for mayor, but says winning a seat as the Ward 6 representative would allow him to focus on his constituents.

"I can have better hands-on in District 6," he said. "I can have a more strategic plan, a better one-on-one with some of the constituents, versus trying to reach the whole city. This will be a perfect opportunity for my ward to benefit."

JESSE QUIJADA

The youngest candidate on the list, Jesse Quijada

nevertheless has some big ideas about how best to help the ward's residents.

A 22-year-old medical assistant at two local urgent care centers, Quijada says he hopes to bring back integrity and transparency to the City Council.

He has helped lead the COVID-19 response at Universal Urgent Care and StatMD Urgent Care, where he works, and he has experience working in government as well.

At 15, he said, he worked for San Jose City Councilwoman Magdalena Carrasco before starting state Sen. Jim Beall.

"Basically, I'm a young guy who has moved to Bakersfield within the last five years or so, and I had just seen so many things here that I knew could be changed," he said. "I decided it was best to have someone with a background in politics, and a background in getting the job done being the representative for this community."

Seemingly drawn to public service for most of his life, Quijada served in AmeriCorps in 2017 during a destructive hurricane season in which he helped

people in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico.

After AmeriCorps, he said, he was offered a job with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which he eventually resigned from after saying he witnessed politicized decisions from the agency's leaders that went against the department's mission.

"I did have a promising future at FEMA, but ultimately I felt the atmosphere of it was you had to play their games to continue to move up," he said, "and unfortunately I wasn't willing to do that."

TITUS STEVENS

Titus Stevens, 41, uses his upbringing in Compton as a foundation for his campaign for the Ward 6 seat. He says he witnessed the effects of the city disbanding its police department in 2000, and hopes to protect the Bakersfield Police Department from the same fate.

The recent protests that erupted across the country as a result of the death of Black residents at the hands of law enforcement prompted Stevens to run for office. He says he sees parallels between the 2020

protests and the Rodney King riots, which he also witnessed.

"None of those businesses ever came back," he said of his neighborhood following the Rodney King riots. "The dairy that was around the corner from my house never was rebuilt. We had to start driving out further and further."

He hopes to launch more programs for the BPD to interact with local youths, and said working with people of all political persuasions is a priority.

"We don't have politicians in office anymore. We have activists," he said. "Once you start getting together, you're not working together, you don't want a solution. We need people that are actually willing to work, that want a solution."

Aside from his opposition to defunding the police, he mentioned his desire to bring more job opportunities to the people of Bakersfield as a prime issue.

"My slogan is, 'Together we can keep Bakersfield a great place to live,'" he said. "Because there are great ideas on both sides ... If we work together, we can keep this city running smoothly."