City partners with organizations to test homeless for Covid-19

By Ken Smith

The city of Boston began widespread Covid-19 testing of homeless people and individuals living in shelters on March 12. As of May 3, 1,803 individuals had been tested, with 596 testing positive for the coronavirus, and two deaths. The number of positive tests comes out to approximately 33 percent, which is higher than the 22 percent average in the state, and many of the homeless people tested were asymptomatic.

After being tested, those with positive results receive medical care, and individuals who test negative are placed in designated shelters to allow for better social distancing in an effort to slow the spread of the virus.

The Boston Public Health Commission has been working to address the need for more beds for homeless people amid the Covid-19 outbreak. So far, over 900 new beds across the city have been added to reduce the density in the city’s shelters, and to treat homeless individuals who are impacted by the pandemic. “Boston Hope” a temporary shelter set up at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC) has 500 beds dedicated to the care of homeless individuals, and the city has built quarantine and treatment centers next to its largest shelters.

The city has also partnered with community organizations to create 172 beds at Suffolk University dorms to improve shelter spacing, and 70 beds at a former hospital on Commonwealth Avenue in Brighton. And the city added 250 beds at Newton Pavilion, in partnership with the Boston Medical Center. In addition, there are 50 beds for veterans at a facility in Brighton, and Boston University has provided 75 rooms for Pine Street Inn staff.

Martinez Martinez is the Chief of the City of Boston’s Health and Human Services (HHS), a position he has held since Nov. 9, 2017. Now he is over-

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Food distributors, grocery stores, and processors work to keep shelves stocked during coronavirus

By Shira Laucharoen

C-Mart Supermarket, an Asian grocery store carrying a selection of produce, seafood, and imported foods, sits on Herald Street in Boston’s Chinatown. The supermarket has survived the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and has had somewhat steady business, while seeing a reduced number of customers tending to buy groceries in bulk. Some employees are afraid to come to work, said manager Michael Fang, and many are trying to stay home. While many supermarkets have run out of dry goods, Fang said that C-Mart has luckily kept supplies in stock.

“Right now, we’re still doing all right. But in the near future, who knows,” said Fang. “Every day, I see the numbers of people with the coro-

The C-Mart grocery store on Herald Street in Boston is well stocked with a variety of seafood. The C-Mart on Lincoln Street outside of Chinatown, however, closed in March after its lease expired. (Photo by Ken Smith)

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seeing the city’s greatest health crisis and one that is affecting all sectors of the population, and some, like the homeless, are most vulnerable.

"An important part of this work around managing and trying to contain the spread of the coronavirus, or Covid-19, has really been to try to tackle the poor and really reach our most vulnerable Bostonians," Martinez said. "And the mayor has been very clear from the beginning that he didn’t want or not want to see any other Bostonians go under"

includes our homeless population, our homeless population living in dense shelters, getting refuge in these places. They are prone to not only get the coronavirus, but for there to be a spread of the coronavirus.

"We worked really hard at the very beginning with our community-based partners, with our own city-run shelters, to make sure that we could connect folks to testing and then up all these places across the city, where homeless folks could go get care if they’re Covid-positive, or get respite if they were not Covid-positive, so we could take them out of the shelter. So we’ve been doing that for the past several weeks, as we try to universally test everyone within the homeless community, so we can understand the spread and get them the support and care that they need. That’s been a really important part of our work around the coronavirus.

One of the city’s partners is with the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP), which has set up tents outside shelters like the St. Francis House and Pine Street Inn to conduct on-site Covid-19 tests. Vicki Ritterband is the media coordinator for BHCHP. She said that in addition to assisting with testing, they have been working closely with the city to provide medical care and housing for homeless people who have tested positive. She said they can take patients who have tested positive for the virus to several locations, and they also have a tent set up for people awaiting test results. The tent is located in the South End behind the Southampton Shelter. She said they are also utilizing the Convention Center for temporary housing.

"The city and state have set up a thousand-bed hospital there, and there are 500 beds for homeless people," she said. "So we’re responsible for the 500 beds, but they are not filled."

At the Convention Center, Ritterband said there are 74 homeless people who have tested positive. The Barbara McInnis House, located on Albany Street across the street from Boston Medical Center, is operated by BHCHP and has 104 beds as a medical respite for people too sick to be on the streets, but not sick enough to be in a hospital. "Since the pandemic began, we’ve dedicated one floor, or 52 beds to Covid-positive people, and the other 52 beds are for people with other kinds of illnesses," said Ritterband. "At the Barbara McInnis House, we have 44 Covid-positive patients there now."

With the coronavirus likely a long-term challenge that will have peaks and valleys that could extend for the next year or two, as some experts have speculated, so too must Boston make sure to prepare for long-term care, not only for the city’s homeless, but homeless people throughout the Commonwealth who come to the city for medical care and a place to sleep, which is estimated to be half of all the homeless currently occupying the city’s shelters.

"We have space, we have space at the BCECC," said Martinez. "And because of other locations we have less space, but we definitely have space for people who have those needs.

"And again, we are just grateful that community came together under the mayor’s leadership, and that we were really able to make sure that people are getting the support they needed and that they have the space to get people the care that they need. So we will have it today, and hopefully we will be able to maintain it through the course of the epidemic."

ZONING HEARING
The Zoning Commission of the City of Boston hereby gives notice, in accordance with Chapter 665 of the Acts of 1956, as amended, that a virtual public hearing will be held on , May 13, 2020, at 9:30 A.M., in connection with Map Amendment Application No. 726, filed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority d/b/a the Boston Planning & Development Agency.

Said map amendment would amend Map 1G, Chinatown District, by adding the designation “U*”, indicating an Urban Renewal Area overlay district to the existing zoning of the parcels of land located at 21, 262, and 286 Harrison Avenue in the South Cove Urban Renewal Area.

This meeting will only be held virtually and not in person. You can participate in this meeting by going to bit.ly/2VMxXO or calling (631) 992-3221 and enter access code 110-901-982. A copy of the application may be obtained from the Zoning Commission electronically, and you can also submit written comments or questions to jeffrey.hampton@boston.gov.

For the Commission
Jeffrey M. Hampton
Executive Secretary

By Shinobu Ando

Next Steps Transitional English Program (Next STEP) at the Asian American Civic Association (AACA) has been noted as one of the leaders in remote learning. Next STEP is an intermediate English language program for adult immigrants that serves about 100 students daily. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have funded next STEP for over 25 years.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, DESE provided guidance for programs to suspend face-to-face instructions and move to remote instruction. Working together with students, AACA staff members put all the efforts and resources available at the community non-profit organization and made the transition to online learning swiftly. The program has transitioned to remote learning without missing a single class and continues to provide wrap-around services in collaboration with AACA’s Multi-Service Center and other departments. All AACA’s ESOL and vocational classes have successfully moved to remote learning.

The pandemic crisis has been very challenging. We are trying to balance family, home, and work responsibilities while problem solving and trying to stay safe. It can be very stressful and exhausting, but one of the silver linings is that the pandemic is pushing us to further incorporate technology in teaching. Adult learners and staff members are learning and teaching through technology every week.

Online learning is not the same as face to face instruction, yet when I visit classes online, it is incredible to see how teachers have been able to provide the same welcoming classroom atmosphere while teaching remotely from their own homes. Members are working together to bring in guest speakers online and plan virtual classroom field trips to continue providing the high quality content and simulated experience.

Shinobu Ando is the Director of Next STEP at the Asian American Civic Association.
Grocery Stores

Continued from page 1

products, meat, and dairy, although many grocery stores have since caught up to the need, he said. Some food distribution companies experienced shortages and were not always able to meet the demand for goods, leaving the supply chain vulnerable.

“There are still some shortages I’ve seen in certain areas,” said Houghton. “That’s probably due to the lack of production too, because a lot of those places that make these things closed down. The meat manufacturers out West, you get shutdowns like that, and that creates the little bumps in the whole pipeline.”

Smithfield Foods is one meat manufacturer, based in the Midwest, that had to close its processing plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, said Houghton, after many workers became sick with the coronavirus. While President Donald Trump signed a controversial executive order on April 28 to keep meatpacking plants open across the country, approximately 38 plants have shut down at some point since the start of the pandemic, due to cases of illness. In addition, farms are experiencing a large amount of food waste, as they typically have contracts with schools and restaurants, which are now closed or only serving takeout menu. Much of their product is not getting utilized, and, as a result, must be disposed of. Distribution may also be strained because of a shortage of labor out in the fields. As workers get sick with the coronavirus, they must be quarantined, and the industry is still adjusting to a demand in food that is “higher than normal,” said Houghton.

Nicastro said, the manager behind wholesaler Baldor Specialty Foods, said that the greatest challenge the company has faced during the pandemic has been the hit to its labor force, as many fear coming to work. Baldor also had an excess of product, as many of the restaurants that it distributes to stopped operat- ing. Messinger said that he predicts that meat may become scarce during this time and prices may go up, with the closure of processing plants. Another reason why farms have also had difficulties keeping workers, he said, is that it is hard to practice social distancing, when laborers typically gather crops side by side.

The meat industry has been experiencing difficulties during this time, particularly as grocery stores have been hit with shortages. Director of sales at Cambridge Pack- ing Company Cosmo Nicastro said that his company typically provides meat to restaurants, many of which have shuttered. As a result, the business has had to pivot towards supply- ing meat to grocery stores and has had to furlough some of its workers.

Across the country, many slaughter- houses have closed, forcing farmers to throw away meat. Nicastro said that the coronavirus has had a strong impact on the industry.

“In the greater Boston area, the fishing business has also felt the ef- fects of the coronavirus pandemic, said executive director of the Mas- sachusetts Fishing Partnership Angela Sanfilippo. Many seafood processors have shut down, and the closure of restaurants has led to a drop in the demand for fish and a lowering of prices. Thousands of fishermen have been laid off, due to the lack of demand, and workers have been hesitant to catch large amounts of fish, as they worry that they will not be able to sell them. Some grocery stores have even closed their seafood sections, said Sanfilippo. ‘I think as long as the restaurants are closed, the product is not going to move that fast,’ she said. ‘Fishermen will fish in a very cautious way. If it’s a long day, and you come home, and they tell you, ’Unload the fish, but we really can’t guarantee the prices. If we cannot sell it, we won’t pay you,’ that is a hard pill to swallow.”

By Anqi Zhang

Trump signed an executive order pausing family-based immigration for 60 days on April 22. The motivation behind the policy is to protect American em- ployees from foreign workers facing large-scale layoffs during the coronavirus pandemic, according to the white house statement.

“President Trump is suspending new immigrant visas to American communities and workers first as we move toward safely reopening the economy,” it was stated.

Those impacted by the new order are applicants for green cards through a family member of an American — a parent, an adult child or a sibling. Applicants who are seeking non- immigrant visas that are granted on a temporary basis are not affected by the order. It includes H-1B specialty workers, H-2A agriculture workers and international students applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Spouses and children under 21 of American citizens can still get green cards. The order also does not affect tourists.

The order took effect at 11:59 p.m. on April 23. By 50 days of its signing, the Secretary of Homeland Security will recommend to Trump whether he should terminate the order.

Under the current situation where immigration is already on hold, the proclamation has limited influence. Citizenship and Immigration Services functions to protect the state are closed, meaning appointments and naturaliza- tion ceremonies are not taking place.

“I would say that the short-term impact of the order is minimal, as it only applies to individuals who are outside of the U.S. and since consul- ers are currently not conducting routine visa appointments, few indi- viduals are coming in at this time,” wrote Jessica Chicco, staff attorney at Massachusetts Immigrant and Refu- gee Advocacy Coalition, in an email to Sampan.

However, if the order is extended beyond the 60-day period, family- based immigration could be signifi- cantly impacted, wrote Chicco.

“If it remains in place, the procla- mation could block roughly 26,000 immigrants each month, and would impact about four out of every five family-based immigrants,” wrote Chicco. “The fact that the procla- mation claims to protect jobs while clearly targeting family-based migra- tion is a clear indication that, the true goal is further to restrict legal immigration that have been part of the administration’s objectives from the start.”

As news continues to develop daily on the COVID-19 pandemic, South Shore Health is taking every precaution to help protect the safety of our patients, our staff, and our community.

Our Incident Command team is actively monitoring the situation, working around the clock on close collaboration with local, state, and federal officials to protect the safety of our patients and staff.

It’s very important that we work together, As One, to keep the people of our communities safe and to help further reduce the spread of the virus.

What You Can Do

• Stay in touch via social media and at SouthShoreHealth.org/ COVID-19 where we provide updated information and links to important sources.

• If you are experiencing symptoms, we are advising patients to call their primary care physician, or conduct a virtual doctor visit @ SouthShoreHealth.org/CareCall.

• Wash your hands frequently, for a minimum of 20 seconds at a time.

• Avoid unnecessary gatherings.

• Remain calm and be confident in the work that we are doing as a community to manage this crisis.

We continue in our steadfast commitment to the community.

You can learn more about the latest COVID-19 developments at CDC. gov and at SouthShoreHealth.org/ COVID-19.

WE’RE HERE FOR YOU
As children remain at home, abusive conditions may increase

Fewer reports being filed during coronavirus

By Yiming Zhao

Public schools across Massachusetts have been closed since the stay-at-home advisory took effect on March 15. Teachers, who often are the ones who spot and report abuse and neglect, now have limited visibility with children.

The number of reports of child abuse to the state has thus dropped by 60 percent across the country compared to the same time frame in 2019 according to the Massachusetts Office of the Child Advocate (MOCA).

Experts are worried about Massachusetts children as well, who are isolated at home with their parents at a time of extreme economic and health anxiety, with increasing pressure to balance childcare with other responsibilities.

“We know that families are under a tremendous amount of stress because of the pandemic,” said Child Advocate Maria Z. Mossaides. “People have lost their jobs. Children are now home seven days a week. If you’re in a small apartment, which many people are, and kids are not running around outside because we’re asking everyone to stay indoors. They don’t get to some of that. That is going to aggravate their parents.”

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families has lost its 24-hour emergency line is still operating as usual. Complaints are still being screened. Social workers, equipped with PPE, are still responding to emergencies. At the moment, visits for on-going cases are conducted virtually.

Mossaides, the daughter of immigrant parents, is an extremely difficult time for many families. Communities are afraid to say “we’re having a hard time with our children” have this fear that somehow the state is going to come and take their children away.”

The MOCA recognizes that this is an extremely difficult time for families and encourages all of them in need, especially communities of color and immigrant communities to reach out and utilize state resources.

“The message we want to send is it’s okay to ask for help,” said Mossaides. “We want you to ask for help. State agencies are really here trying to provide support. There’s no reason for people to suffer.”

The MOCA advises all parents need to help call the state’s hotline 211 so they can be connected to the right resources. The state has added more staff to operate the hotline and provides translators for multiple languages.

The 211 system has also enabled the state to track the requests for help coming in from all over the state so they can better respond to the increased needs like food, housing and connecting families with the school system.

Many teachers are also keeping in touch with students and alleviating some pressure from parents through virtual schooling.

Buds & Blossoms, the childcare and early education center created by the Asian American Civic Association are now hosting virtual classes every day. Jeanne McKenna, director of the center said they have also introduced childcare techniques to parents to better care for their children at home.

“Keeping a consistent schedule is very useful,” said McKenna. “What’s happening now is that some children are on the computer a lot more. I’d rather have them just be on the virtual meeting in the morning and no more technology later on so they can be creative in their house.”

Teachers from B&B are now introducing activities that children can do with their parents at home. McKenna has no idea when the kids can return to school, but the center will implement social distancing when the school reopen. Everyone is now in uncharted territories, McKenna said.

“We haven’t been in this situation,” Mossaides said. “Not when we have winter storms, not after 911 where we don’t know when this is going to end. None of the specialists can tell us what the path of this disease is going to be. That is anxiety producing. I think even people who never sought help from the state may need help now.”

Empty Nest

By Venerable Master Hsin Yun, Founder of Fo Guan Shan Temple

In agricultural society, it was not unusual to have a large and close-knit family. Children usually stayed home to help their parents with fieldwork. Even when they grew up and got married, to maintain a strong network of support, they would move to the city and keep their children close.

The parents were never alone, even in old age, for there were numerous grandchildren as their companions. There was no such thing as the “empty nest syndrome.”

However, with the passing of time and the arrival of the Industrial Age, our society has undergone a tremendous transformation. More and more people have moved into the city, making it more and more crowded. With limited living space available, parents have chosen to have fewer and fewer children.

Today, a typical nuclear family consists of a mother, father, two children and maybe a dog.

As children grow older and move away from home, parents are left with an empty house and sometimes a feeling of emptiness, their life is suddenly rendered meaningless and without a center. The empty nest syndrome is not unique in any way and is often a problem for today’s parents. Children leave home like birds leaving the nest, in search of their own future.

Feeling sad and perhaps abandoned, parents are now faced with the problem of starting their life anew. They must make a series of adjustments in order to avoid the bottomless pit of despair.

It is natural for parents to miss their children, but in reality, nothing in this world stays together forever. Life is full of comings and goings. There is no such thing as “we will be together forever.” There will always be departures. Therefore, parents must remain calm and composed when their young children are ready to fly the coop. They must not be overly anxious when their children are ready to say goodbye.

What should parents do to avoid overreacting? What steps should they take to minimize the devastating effects of the empty nest syndrome? Parents should first harvest broad affinity as much as possible. They should be virtuous and broadminded, for in this world, they will be partners to the entire world. Parents who are without virtue or who are unwilling to establish proper parent-child relationships will not be parents to their own offspring. They will be like strangers even to their own children.

As long as one understands the impermanent nature of the world and takes everything in stride, one will not suffer the negative effects of empty nest syndrome. Instead, one can use this opportunity to enrich one’s own life and to devote oneself to charity work and public service. One can take time out to enjoy life as it is and to broaden one’s horizons. Therefore, having an empty nest can be a blessing in disguise.

As for today’s young parents, they should develop some kind of hobby, so they will not be miserable when their children are ready to live their own lives.

Affordable Housing Lottery

Modera Framingham

266 Waverley Street, Framingham MA

Studies show 1.40% (188) of the population are at or below the poverty level. 217,716 ($4,198), 299,726 ($5,594), 389,736 ($7,994)

The Lottery for eligible households will be held on July 6th, 2020, at 6:00pm via:

YouTube Live Stream https://youtu.be/0122CqdBPJU or just search “SEB Housing”

To apply, complete an application online at www.sebhousing.com, call or mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494.  For TTY Services dial 711.  Free translation available.

MAXIMUM Household Income Limits:

- $67,400 (1 person), $77,000 (2 people), $86,650 (3 people)

- MAXIMUM Household Income Limits:

A Public Info Session will be held on May 20th, 2020, at 6:00pm via

- YouTube Live Stream https://youtube.com/tQoG9dF1pFJ or just search “SEB Housing” in the YouTube and click for thumbnail for Modera Framingham Info Session, AND

- Conference call (425) 436-6200, Access Code: 86267

Completed Applications and Required Income Documentation must be delivered, or postmarked, by 2 pm on June 23rd, 2020. Applications postmarked by the deadline must be received no later than 5 business days from the deadline.

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For Lottery Information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, go to www.sebhousing.com or call (617) 782-6903 and leave a message or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. For TTY Services dial 711. Free translation available. Traduzione gratuita disponibile. Tradução livre disponível.
Despite Covid-19, Greenway Conservancy continues its work in parks

By Ken Smith

The Greenway Conservancy, a non-profit that manages The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, a 1.5-mile, 17-acre linear public park through downtown Boston, announced that a number of its horticulture and maintenance staff continue to work in the park on staggered schedules, and that much of the office staff are working remotely.

The Conservancy also announced a number of 2020 budget cuts due to projected loss in revenue. “Unfortunately, one of these is some new planned improvements for the Mary Soo Hoo Park granite hill area that we were planning to announce this spring,” stated Rachel Lake, the Marketing and Community Affairs Manager of the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy. “For those of you who helped us consider these possibilities, thank you for the thoughtful and deliberate discussions that we had and we look forward to continuing work with our Community Board Members and the Soo Hoo Family on this project in the future.”

She told Sampan that 80 percent of the budget is generated from programs they run to raise money such as food trucks, and beer and wine vendors that they have throughout the parks, as well from donations.

Because of the coronavirus, the closures of many of these programs and drop in philanthropy has impacted the revenue streams, leaving a shortfall in the budget.

But work will continue on Greenway projects despite the virus. “Spring doesn’t stop because of a national pandemic,” Lake said, “and we’re still working, and underway with maintenance of the Greenway.”

Still ongoing are a number of projects in the Mary Soo Hoo Park, and the Auntie Kay & Uncle Frank Chin Park on the Greenway, including the next phase of the bamboo renovation project, the transplanting and new plantings in the Serpentine Park area to improve the sightlines for safety, and the continuation of the Chinatown lighting study that explores new lighting options in both spaces.

Lake said that they are still in planning stages of bigger events as well, but they will only take place if they can do so in a safe way.

“As things are really changing daily on this, we are really working just to stay up to do date with what we’re hearing from the city and the state in regard to when we can gather as a group again,” she said. “When you think about some of the programs, especially in Chinatown, those are very large group events, like the August Moon Festival and the Lantern Festival, those are really large gatherings.

In regard to the bamboo restoration project for the Auntie Kay & Uncle Frank Chin Park, the original bamboo trees were not flourishing as anticipated, Lake said, so the conservancy has introduced a new kind of bamboo that should grow better. The bamboo was part of the original design of the park in 2009 before the conservancy had been established.

“The conservancy over the past two years has worked with a bamboo specialist to think about what type of bamboo would work well and be successful in that space,” Lake said. “Thinking about soil, and the wind conditions. We have actually renovated that entire bamboo structure and replaced it with a different type of bamboo.”

She said the new bamboo planted last spring is growing as it was originally designed for the space, and it is now growing upward rather than growing wide and extending outside the metal frames as the former bamboo was doing. Not only is it important aesthetically, she said, but from a safety viewpoint for site lines to be clear on the pathway.

“The Greenway Conservancy is replenishing the bamboo in this area,” she said, “which has struggled to grow in our urban conditions. We love the experience of gentle waving branches of bamboo, the play of light through the leaves, and the elegant look of the tall stems.”

She said the work would be ongoing at the park this spring and summer, and more bamboo trees will be planted. She added that they are still moving forward with a public art installation in Chinatown, which includes a light works project that would accompany the Lantern Festival, which is in February. “That artwork is definitely still moving, and we hope to unveil it this fall.”

Lake said that they are also continuing to move forward with the Chinatown lighting project for increased lighting in the community park areas, and currently working on the design study.
Lexington resident Shiei Kuida makes more than 150 masks for front-line caregivers through her Peppermint Girls Project. (Photo courtesy of Shiei Kuida)

Lexington resident Shiei Kuida loves crafts. When she started sewing masks, she had no idea she’d go on to make more than 150 to donate.

“I was making some masks for my friends first. Every time I called them, they wanted more,” Kuida said. As Kuida texted her friends in their “Peppermint Patties” group chat, she dedicated her homemade masks to them as the Peppermint Girls Project. Her husband bought her a sewing machine to make more masks when she gets off work at the Lexington Children’s Place. Kuida’s masks also helped protect her son, who has autism and lives in a group home.

“I asked if they needed masks and they said yes,” Kuida said, who made 46 masks for her son and his caretakers. “Most of the masks go to the group home’s front-line workers. Because my son is in the group home, he’s another reason for doing it as well.”

One of the Kuida’s mask recipients is Melhui Li, a therapist providing in-home care for children. Li was thankful for her contribution and uplifting spirit.

“She has a generous heart and crafty hands,” Li said. “As a therapist providing in-home care, masks are important to our health. My clients and myself benefit greatly from her handmade masks.”

A Peppermint Patties member gave two masks to her aunt, who sent Kuida a thank you card with $10 inside.

“She said in the card, ‘Please make more.’ So I made origami crafts for her, then I kept making masks,” Kuida said. Kuida also includes origami with her homemade masks.

Kuida suffers from seasonal allergies, so wearing a mask is a habit for her. She was glad to not have experienced discrimination for mask-wearing in her community.

“In Japan, it is not a big deal,” Kuida said, who moved to America with her husband in 1993. “Here, it is funny; in March or April, I didn’t see many other people wearing masks, but they didn’t say anything to me. But now at the store, I see more people wearing masks.”

Kuida has been unable to visit her son’s group home since March 19, so she waves to him when she drops food off. She has an older son living in New York, who will be unable to celebrate Mother’s Day with her due to Covid-19 travel quarantine restrictions.

“This Mother’s Day is so different,” Kuida said. “I hope [families] have a way to communicate. My mom lives in Japan, we still have Skype to talk. I hope they find a cure.”

Kuida is in good company among Asian Americans fighting the coronavirus. Local efforts include Lin Champion donating more than 2,000 cloth masks, with Dorchester’s Christine Ho and Quincy’s Sammy Lau and Barbara Nguyen sewing hundreds of masks. Boston Taiwanese fighting Covid-19 made homemade masks and surgical caps, along with importing personal protective equipment (PPE) from Taiwan. Other groups have worked to ship PPE to local hospitals, with WeStar Alliance of Weston collecting 35,000 KN95 masks, 148,000 surgical masks, 1,260 coveralls and 1,000 protective goggles from China. Sifu Mai Du of Wuh Lum Kung Fu and Tai Chi Academy raised more than $15,000 to ship 30,000 surgical masks from China; community members may request masks for personal use.

Faith-based groups have been active, with and Boston Chinese Evangelical Church asking members to sew masks for Tufts Medical Center and to donate PPE. Buddhist organization American Wisdom Association is giving away PPE in Greater Boston, through an online form. Tzu Chi Foundation has donated more than a million masks and 100,000 other PPE items to northeastern America from Taiwan.

By Ling-Mei Wong

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“This Mother’s Day is so different,” Kuida said. “I hope [families] have a way to communicate. My mom lives in Japan, we still have Skype to talk. I hope they find a cure.”

Kuida is in good company among Asian Americans fighting the coronavirus. Local efforts include Lin Champion donating more than 2,000 cloth masks, with Dorchester’s Christine Ho and Quincy’s Sammy Lau and Barbara Nguyen sewing hundreds of masks. Boston Taiwanese fighting Covid-19 made homemade masks and surgical caps, along with importing personal protective equipment (PPE) from Taiwan. Other groups have worked to ship PPE to local hospitals, with WeStar Alliance of Weston collecting 35,000 KN95 masks, 148,000 surgical masks, 1,260 coveralls and 1,000 protective goggles from China. Sifu Mai Du of Wuh Lum Kung Fu and Tai Chi Academy raised more than $15,000 to ship 30,000 surgical masks from China; community members may request masks for personal use.

Faith-based groups have been active, with and Boston Chinese Evangelical Church asking members to sew masks for Tufts Medical Center and to donate PPE. Buddhist organization American Wisdom Association is giving away PPE in Greater Boston, through an online form. Tzu Chi Foundation has donated more than a million masks and 100,000 other PPE items to northeastern America from Taiwan.

By Ling-Mei Wong

Lexington resident Shiei Kuida loves crafts. When she started sewing masks, she had no idea she’d go on to make more than 150 to donate.

“I was making some masks for my friends first. Every time I called them, they wanted more,” Kuida said. As Kuida texted her friends in their “Peppermint Patties” group chat, she dedicated her homemade masks to them as the Peppermint Girls Project. Her husband bought her a sewing machine to make more masks when she gets off work at the Lexington Children’s Place. Kuida’s masks also helped protect her son, who has autism and lives in a group home.

“I asked if they needed masks and they said yes,” Kuida said, who made 46 masks for her son and his caretakers. “Most of the masks go to the group home’s front-line workers. Because my son is in the group home, he’s another reason for doing it as well.”

One of the Kuida’s mask recipients is Melhui Li, a therapist providing in-home care for children. Li was thankful for her contribution and uplifting spirit.

“She has a generous heart and crafty hands,” Li said. “As a therapist providing in-home care, masks are important to our health. My clients and myself benefit greatly from her handmade masks.”

A Peppermint Patties member gave two masks to her aunt, who sent Kuida a thank you card with $10 inside.

“She said in the card, ‘Please make more.’ So I made origami crafts for her, then I kept making masks,” Kuida said. Kuida also includes origami with her homemade masks.

Kuida suffers from seasonal allergies, so wearing a mask is a habit for her. She was glad to not have experienced discrimination for mask-wearing in her community.

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Graduating in a pandemic, international students in U.S. face travel restrictions, visa issues, and job uncertainty

By Carey Lin

While the government continuously postpones the end of the city’s lockdown, confidence in official reports and statements are on the decline. Government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic has brought upon pressing concerns and uncertainties that directly impact international students who have come to the United States for school or work. As graduation day approaches, the impact of Covid-19 on college graduates transitioning into the next phase of their lives has made things especially difficult. Instead of beginning a new journey of post-graduate work, many are seeking refuge at home. While this is a logical response for most, it is a far more complex dilemma for international students.

Jack Fan, a 21-year-old student from China, just completed his undergraduate Computer Science degree from Northeastern University. He had planned to attend graduate school in the fall, but due to the pandemic, he may not be able to.

“The University of Virginia actually told me that I can defer if I can’t get my visa,” Fan said. “Or I will want to defer to start in the spring. They didn’t say the specifics. They said I could and said to also wait for further instructions if I don’t get my visa.”

Currently, there is a suspension on visa processing, and Jack’s original plan to attend graduate school has been delayed. “My original plan was to go home after graduating in May and applying for the visa in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing,” Fan said. However, he is still in the U.S., and Fan said that he expects to return to China. “Maybe I can go back home after applying for the visa,” he said. “I’m optimistic that the embassy will open after June.”

For international students who intend to find a job in the United States, they must file for an “Optional Practical Training” (OPT) as an extension to their F-1 visa status, and receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) before they can begin to work in the U.S. They have 90 days to look for work, or will otherwise have to leave the country. Those who applied for OPT in February usually receive their card around this time of the year.

Marilyn Cheng, 22, from China, graduates from Boston University this month with a degree in Advertising. As a second semester senior, she had been applying for jobs long before the pandemic began. “It was a struggle to find a job before the pandemic [as an international], but I was still hopeful,” she said. “And then everything changed.”

She had successfully landed some interviews, but in the end, the recruiters would prefer to hire someone they do not have to sponsor. “It was super annoying that I get on the second or third round interview and then after the mention of OPT they would just ghost me,” Cheng said.

Since the pandemic began in the U.S., Cheng has slowed down her job hunt. Her OPT application has been approved, however she has yet to receive her EAD card. Without it, she may not be able to re-enter the U.S. within the card’s valid date. As the pandemic worsens in the U.S., she fears the pandemic will not end in time for her to find a job in time before the 90-day period ends. For this reason, Cheng will be flying back to Hong Kong once her final exams are over. “I’m just trying to think that I am already luckier than most,” she said. “On the bright side, everything could be way worse. The fact that I have the resources to go home is already privileged enough.”

Another recent graduate from Boston University, Claire Yu, 22, from China, also faces the dilemma of returning home. Yu already received her EAD card and has a job lined up in August. Since the pandemic began, Yu had planned to return to Taiwan late May to visit. “So I was initially thinking [to leave] late May, because I feel like COVID might have gone down by then a little from its peak, and quarantine might have let up a little,” she said. “But now, because of my grandmother, I’m planning to leave right after finals end for me on the seventh, so I might leave on May 9.”

However, as a result of Covid-19, international flight restrictions pose many difficulties logistically and financially. “When you fly back to Asia, it’s usually about 20 hours,” Yu said. “But now only a couple of airlines fly, and it will take 45-plus hours to get home and transfer from Boston to Dallas, Dallas to Tokyo, and Tokyo to Taipei. I feel like this will expose me to a lot more risk of infection.” And it is not only a dangerous health risk flying now, but expensive too. “The cheapest ticket I can find is $1,200 two-way but the outbound flight will be 45-plus hours,” she said.

Yu’s friend, Roxanne Chang, has also been trying to go back to Taiwan. Despite being an American citizen, she grew up and lives in Taiwan. Deciding to go home was not a difficult choice, but doing so has been a challenge.

“Even going home has been so hard,” Chang said. “My flight got cancelled three times. I was supposed to fly out tomorrow, and then it got can-celled two days ago. So I have to fly out next week. It’s been awful, but I’m like super blessed because I have friends in Boston that I can stay with.”
Sampan Interview: City Councilor Ed Flynn

By Ken Smith

Boston City Councilor Ed Flynn represents District 2, which includes Chinatown. (Photo courtesy of Sin Yau Lo)

Boston City Councilor Ed Flynn represents District 2, which includes Chinatown. “I’ve noticed anti-Asian sentiment long before this pandemic in our country, and I am proud to represent the largest Asian community in Boston,” Flynn told Sampan in a phone interview. “I’m fortunate to have three women on my staff that are from China and speak Cantonese and Mandarin fluently, so language access is a critical part of our outreach to our constituents.”

Flynn said the Chinese staff is important in assisting him to understand the culture and language, and to understand the issues of the Chinese community he serves. “Many of the people in Chinatown speak Cantonese,” Flynn said. “So without the translator, I would not be able to communicate effectively with them. My staff are on the phone everyday talking to residents, but also we communicate everyday through social media in Chinese as well.”

As for the anti-Asian problem, Flynn said that it is still prevalent across the state and the country and has impacted Chinese businesses. “Certainly this pandemic impacted Chinatown greatly, especially at the very beginning,” he said. “Restaurants were closed and business was down. That was before the widespread shutdown of the city. So, I’ve heard reports of Asian Americans experiencing discrimination, and the type of language that we heard on social media against the Asian community only makes matters worse, and it makes our Asian communities scapegoats. It’s unfortunate that this discrimination and racism still takes place today.”

The businesses of Chinatown are also foremost on Flynn’s mind during this pandemic. He said that the pressure to reopen business in Chinatown to protect them from closing permanently is of great concern, as is the housing situation in the community. “I’m always concerned about businesses or development projects that displace residences or small businesses,” he said. “So, I’m very aware of the displacement that has been taking place in Chinatown. We’re working to build more affordable housing and to help small businesses. So any threat to displacing residences or small businesses is something we take very seriously.”

The coronavirus outbreak has only made things more severe in Chinatown and other communities in Boston that are heavily reliant on the restaurant industry, and obtaining funding for small businesses is necessary, he said. State grants, government loans, and other assistance programs must be introduced. Or perhaps taking a look at tax relief or a tax forgiveness plan for small business who are falling behind on their loans. But no matter the financial assistance provided, the economic recovery will not be swift, Flynn said.

“It’s going to take a while for this city to come back,” he said. “I think it’s going to take much longer than people anticipate. But I am confident that we are going to come back, and we are going to come back strong. But it’s going to take everybody working hard and working together to accomplish that. I don’t want provide false hope, but we have a long road ahead of us, but we’re determined to help get Boston back on its feet.”

As for public health and medical issues during the pandemic at the local level in Boston, Flynn addressed the most important role government plays. “Making sure the voices of residents are heard and that we’re able to effectively work with residents so that they can get the services and help that they need,” he said. “That’s my role as a district city councilor, providing that type of close leadership, working closely with city government, city agencies, and with the residents to get things accomplished.”

“I think that it’s important to get our economy moving forward, but also addressing the public health of residents especially the residents of communities of color, working together with our colleges and hospitals, and addressing the major challenges that we have across our city.”

Job Posting

Brookline Housing Authority is seeking a highly qualified entrepreneurial Executive Director. Over the next five-plus years, the BHA will be engaged in approximately a $300 million redevelopment effort to revitalize its federal public housing using the HUD RAD program, converting half of its public housing to project-based Section 8 utilizing Low Income Housing Tax Credits and tax-exempt bond financing.

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- Eight years’ experience in housing management, community development, public administration, or a closely related field. Bachelor’s degree may substitute for up to two years of experience.
- Working knowledge of fiscal management, maintenance systems, personnel and administrative management systems in public or private housing.
- One year’s supervisory experience of a staff of ten or more.
- Written and verbal skills.
- Substantial background in the implementation of management controls and systems.
- Considerable knowledge of local, state, and federal governmental procedures and regulations as they relate to housing development, construction, and the management of local housing authority operations.
- Experience working with people of various socio-economic backgrounds.
- Bondable.
- Certification as a Public Housing Manager from a HUD approved certification agency or similar classification by a nationally recognized housing or real estate organization or by certification as a PHA of a DHCD-approved Massachusetts Public Housing Administrator Certification Program.

How to Apply

To apply in confidence, please submit cover letter and resume to Susan Barry, Egmont Associates, sbarry@egmontassociates.com.

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