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BREAKING FEATURED TOP STORY

'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown, area families remember loved ones, thank staff

Ruth Serve
Jun 21, 2020



Paul Nagy at Tip Top Restaurant in a submitted family photo.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

his story has been updated.

T Eric Nagy was expecting the call; when it came, he and his wife drove to the **'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown,** Lady of Peace retirement community, and staff helped them suit up in protective gear. They walked down the hall of the nursing center, where Eric's father, Paul Nagy, was isolated in his room.

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“He was really weak, but he was still there enough to get everyone on the phone,” Eric said. “I’m really grateful they let us in when they did.”

Paul Nagy died two days later on May 3 of the novel coronavirus. He was 83 years old, a former chemist who helped to develop the groundbreaking SX-70 instant camera for Polaroid and a lifelong musician. He didn’t enjoy performing for others, but loved laboring for hours over difficult pieces.

 Nagy, Paul James

“He would really work himself up into a sweat over hard music — that was his true love,” his oldest son said. Paul Nagy was the son of professional musicians who kept a half-dozen pianos in their Boston home. Everyone learned to play, and as an adult, he and his sister would often listen to performances over the phone together.

Later that month, on May 30, the Thomas Jefferson Health District marked more than 500 confirmed cases of COVID-19 **since the first local case was reported March 16.**

That same week, the district marked a total of 19 known fatalities from the disease — a number that has held steady even as case counts rise in June. Officials warn, though, that as the state reopens and medical examiners process death reports, the numbers of confirmed cases and deaths are likely to increase.

“I don’t think we’ll be out of the woods until there’s a vaccine,” said Ryan McKay, a senior policy analyst with the health district.

A majority of outbreaks in Virginia have happened in long-term care facilities, and on Friday, Gov. Ralph Northam **unveiled a plan to use federal funding to help nursing homes** and other facilities to safely reopen.

The Virginia Department of Health also on Friday released **a database of outbreaks at specific facilities**, something officials had long resisted doing. The data does not match **information** collected by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services, which the department attributed to differences in how and when data was collected.

The VDH database details five outbreaks at long-term care facilities in the Thomas Jefferson Health District. Case counts can include both residents and staff.

COVID-19 cases at long-term care facilities in TJHD, according to VDH

COVID-19 cases at long-term care facilities in the Thomas Jefferson District, according to recently-released data by the Virginia Department of Health.

Facility	Outbreak Status	Number of Cases	Number of Deaths
Westminster Canterbury of the Blue Ridge	In Progress	*	*
Our Lady of Peace	Pending Closure	56	5
Envoy at the Village	Pending Closure	53	6
Dogwood Village of Orange County	In Progress	*	0
The Village at Gordon House	Pending Closure	5	0

The database lists an outbreak in progress at Albemarle’s Westminster Canterbury of the Blue Ridge, with an unidentified number of cases, and an outbreak pending closure at Our Lady of Peace, with 56 total cases and five deaths.

On Saturday, Westminster Canterbury of the Blue Ridge released a statement to media disputing the state’s description of an outbreak at the facility. A spokeswoman said that all staff and residents tested through point prevalence and other testing have so far had negative results, though some results are still pending.

When asked how the pandemic has affected the facility and to confirm the number of cases at the facility, executive director Sara Warden said in a statement that Our Lady of Peace “enacted comprehensive infection control measures in accordance with the

“We express our sorrow for the passing of residents due to this global pandemic,” Warden wrote in the statement. “Fortunately, we have also seen more than 30 residents who have fully recovered and are doing well.”

Warden later confirmed that the facility has had 66 total cases among staff and residents. Only one case is active, she said.




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The Envoy at The Village, a skilled nursing facility in Fork Union, has seen 53 cases of the coronavirus and six deaths.

Fluvanna County’s Envoy at the Village, which also is listed as an outbreak pending closure, has had 53 cases and six deaths, according to the state. Two facilities in Orange County, Dogwood Village of Orange County and the Village at Gordon House, are listed as outbreaks in progress, with five identified cases associated and no deaths reported.

Paul Nagy moved into Our Lady of Peace in 2016, after coming to Charlottesville to be near family. He suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and in the past six months, that and other conditions had worsened, until he was moved into Our Lady of Peace's nursing unit, which offers more intensive care, in April.

By that time, the nursing home was on lockdown, and Eric struggled to stay in touch with his father, who had a hard time calling frequently or navigating video calls. Even toward the end, though, Nagy remained a scientist, curious about the medicines he was being prescribed; Eric said his father would have liked knowing that among many other treatments being tested nationally for the coronavirus, doctors tried an anti-parasitic drug, ivermectin.

Staff went to “heroic efforts” to set up a video call when Nagy entered hospice. **‘Heroic efforts’: Three months into lockdown,**  **0** comments
said. They also made sure to coordinate a priest to give last rites; Nagy’s Catholic faith was important to him.

Melanie Mason, a social worker with Hospice of the Piedmont, remembers that effort clearly. Nagy was the first COVID-19 positive case she handled.

The facility had largely restricted hospice staff from entering, and so in order to get a spare iPhone into the building for the Nagys to FaceTime to their dad, hospice staff hatched a handoff. An employee left the phone on a bench outside of the building and waited for a nursing home staff member to take it inside to Nagy’s room.

“We were trying to relieve some of the pressure on staff inside, give peace of mind to the family and help the patient, all while in the midst of a global pandemic,” Mason said. “The whole way we do hospice has changed.”

Nagy’s case, in the chaotic early days as local health care workers tried to devise playbooks for various scenarios, helped hospice staff to make a game plan for future cases, Mason said. A week later, she was fit-tested for an N95 mask, trained on how to don PPE and began taking an iPad into the facility regularly to check on other hospice patients and connect them to their families. She had to carefully plan visits to avoid cross-contaminating positive and negative residents.

Mason said not going to work wasn't an option.

“We’re all going to die; this is just one more cause of death,” she said. “Everyone deserves to die with dignity, and I wouldn’t be doing my job if I picked and choose who to help based on how they’re dying.”

Mason also has worked to counsel families through uniquely challenging aspects of grief and help them to find closure.

She doesn’t normally help with death certificates, but Eric Nagy wanted to make sure that COVID-19 was listed as his father’s cause of death and stated in his obituary; though he had other chronic conditions, doctors and family members were sure coronavirus killed Paul Nagy.

“He said, ‘It gives legitimacy to the chaos of his death,’” Mason recalled. **“Heroic efforts”: Three months into lockdown,** personal, social, political level, being able to see that confirmation gave him some closure. That’s a statement I keep going back to every day — how to help families find closure right now.” 0 comments



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Our Lady of Peace Retirement Community in Charlottesville, VA.

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Another area COVID-19 casualty was Betty Bradshaw, a former Charlottesville City Schools employee who had lived in the area her whole life.

“I’m still riddled with guilt,” said one of her sons, Keith Bradshaw.

Betty Bradshaw was an antique car collector who was active with the Piedmont Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America. She went back to work when Keith was in middle school, and was always a steadying presence, he said.



'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown,

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Bradshaw

“It was always wonderful to have her there because she got me out of trouble,” he said.

She loved knickknacks of all kinds; one of her favorite possessions was a bowl her grandmother had used.

'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown,

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 Bradshaw, Betty

When she moved to Our Lady of Peace after the death of her husband, the bowl had a place on her nightstand. Keith and other family members visited her regularly, working to get used to changes in her routine and mood as dementia set in.

Since September, Bradshaw had lived in the facility's memory care ward, and Keith said nurses were alert to her decline in April and early May.

She entered hospice May 7. Bradshaw had tested negative once for COVID-19, but on May 9 she tested positive, and on May 11 she died. COVID-19 was listed as her cause of death.

Keith, who has asthma, said he decided not to go see her during those final days.

“That’s what mom would have wanted, too — she wouldn’t have wanted it that way,” he said.

Keith has talked with family members of other Our Lady of Peace residents who have had to make tough choices about whether to pull their loved ones out of nursing homes.

Bradshaw's older sister, Martha Shepherd, died at a local assisted living March — she didn't have the coronavirus, but the family has been unable to gather in person to mark her passing. They hope to have a joint service for the two sisters in the future.

'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown,

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“It’s so bizarre, who survives and who doesn’t,” he said.

He said it’s hard, after his family’s loss, to see people out and about in town without masks. And it’s been hard to grieve, too, not only because of the limited funeral options, but because the pandemic has complicated other aspects of his life, from his work to his daughter’s senior year of high school.

Hospice workers have pushed to find ways for people to grieve with others, even though many of the things they typically counsel people to do — go to church, spend time with friends — aren’t possible right now.

“Grieving already tends to be an isolating experience, and this environment tends to make that even more isolating,” said Teresa Haase, director of bereavement and supportive care services with Hospice of the Piedmont.

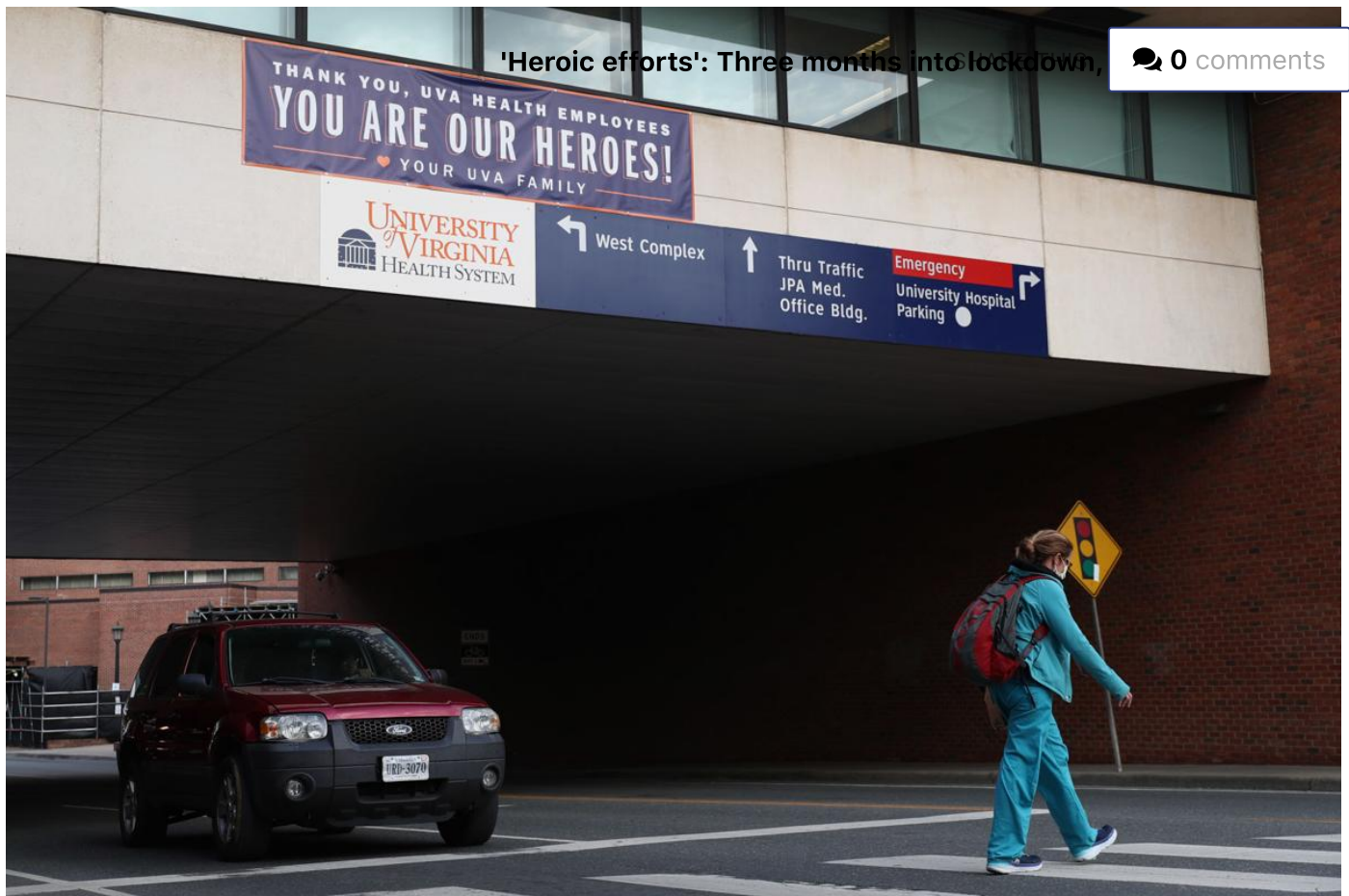
Hospice workers are using technology to counsel family members and set them up with support groups, she said; the hospice now has private Zoom calls for spouses, children and parents to talk together.

Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 can feel a different level of heartache, Haase said, because of doubts about whether care was handled appropriately or guilt about not seeing them often enough before death. People aren't sure how long the pandemic will force them to grieve this way, or where to find hope, she said.

"I really believe in resilience, and we're really relying on it right now in lots of ways," she said.

Mason said that in recent weeks, as the local situation has leveled out, staff and residents in nursing homes seem more cheerful and hopeful.

"Now that we've been through this initial jolt, we can take a step back and assess," she said.



'Heroic efforts': Three months into lockdown,

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DAILY PROGRESS FILE

A woman walks under a sign thanking University of Virginia Health System employees outside the UVa Medical Center in April.

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“With the caveat that deaths can be a lagging indicator, my understanding is that we’re pretty low in fatalities compared to other parts of the state and country,” said McKay, with the Thomas Jefferson Health Department.

He said that after an initial wave of deaths from very sick and high-risk patients, he believed the health care system caught up to treat the virus much earlier; local cases now appear to be less serious.

Data from the University of Virginia Medical Center appears to bear that out, according to spokesman Eric Swensen.

Case mix index, which refers to how sick a specific group of patients is, has been declining for COVID-19 patients, Swensen said. COVID-19 patients appeared to be at the sickest levels the week of May 4, after a high number of patients from hospitals with maxed-out ICUs were transferred to UVa.

Still, the statewide picture remains grim compared with a typical summer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since April, Virginia has seen death rates from all causes exceeding normal levels; the excess rate of 13% to 25% in recent weeks can be attributed to the pandemic, according to officials.

Locally, one point of disparity remains the racial makeup of cases, hospitalizations and deaths. Black residents make up 18% of confirmed cases, but 48% of hospitalizations and 22% of local deaths, **according to the district**. Officials have **pointed to disparities in access to medical care** as likely causes and, as part of a broader effort to enact racial equity in public health and address those disparities, Director Dr. Denise Bonds said **in a statement Thursday** that the district plans to hire a consultant to review internal policies.

Increased testing has made it easier to spot emerging incidents at long-term care facilities and other communal settings, officials say, and the health district has worked to educate health care workers about precautions and equipment. A big effort by the Albemarle County Fire Rescue Squad also helped fit-test area workers for N95 masks, McKay said, which increased staff confidence about working.

But all of that work is now in the past: Health care professionals are acutely aware that the situation could shift at any point, especially as Virginia reopens. Fall school schedules and university classes likely also will present new populations and vectors for infection, experts say — making it more important than ever to maintain social distancing guidelines until an effective vaccine is created.

“If individuals and the community stop adhering to mitigation efforts, things that each individual person can do on their own, that would put us at risk of increasing local cases,” McKay said.

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