

School mask mandates ease

Positivity rates dwindle to below 1%

By Peter Yankowski

As Connecticut's one-day positivity rate dropped below 1 percent for the first time in months, the state Department of Education announced Thursday that

students and staff can take off their masks outside. The news comes a day after the state dropped almost all of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions, including the requirement that fully-vaccinated people wear a

mask indoors. "Everything is open in total except for if you haven't been vaccinated, you still have to wear the mask indoors. Otherwise, we're open." Gov. Ned Lamont said Thursday during his CO-

VID-19 briefing. He noted that when the state's reopening began a year ago, the positivity rate was about 9 percent, though at the time, the state was only testing those who showed symptoms. As of Thursday, the positivity rate stood at just over 0.9 percent — the lowest since October — with 206 new cases found out of

22,265 new tests. Hospitalizations for the virus declined by a net four patients, bringing the statewide census to 141. Four more deaths were reported, increasing the state's official death toll to 8,208. Josh Geballe, Lamont's chief operating officer, said the deaths are a lagging metric and may

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Colleen Kennedy, a kennel hand, works on the dog kennel side of DAWS. The Danbury Animal Welfare Society is looking to renovate its facility in Bethel.

DANBURY City seeking developer for key downtown property

By Julia Perkins

DANBURY — A city-owned parking lot could be prime for commercial development. The city wants to sell the property to the developer that has the best plan for a just under half-acre site at the corner of Liberty and Delay streets. "It's an exciting piece of property, centrally located downtown," Mayor Joe Cavo said. "We're really hoping we're going to get some unique, interesting and firm plans and designs from people that are interested in developing it." The sidewalks adjacent to the 9 to 11 Liberty St. property are being up-

graded through the streetscape project the city has launched. That project is meant to liven the downtown by attracting businesses and developers. "Downtown is changing for the positive," Cavo said. "It's been years and years of work to get it to this point, and we'd like to keep that momentum going, which would be really beneficial for the whole plan for downtown." The sidewalk on Delay Street will be improved during the ongoing first phase of that project, while Liberty Street's sidewalks will get its face lift in the second phase, which could start in 2022.

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City property at 9-11 Liberty St. at the intersection with Delay Street on Monday.

'We will never be unneeded'



A rendering for renovation at the Danbury Animal Welfare Society, Grassy Plain Street in Bethel.

Animal shelter in Bethel seeks \$2 million for renovation

By Kendra Baker

BETHEL — The Danbury Animal Welfare Society is on a mission to raise around \$2 million to renovate its shelter on Route 53. The nonprofit organization, which originated in Danbury, has been providing shelter and care to dogs and cats for more than 40 years. For the past 28 years, the organization known as DAWS has been headquartered at 147 Grassy Plain St. in Bethel,

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'Underground Railroad' star emerges from Conn.



Chase W. Dillon, 11, is one of the stars of the new Amazon limited series "The Underground Railroad."



age, or anyone at any age, it might all seem overwhelming. He's not only one of the top-billed actors in a 10-part epic by the hottest director in the business; he's a young Black youth coming of age in the George Floyd, Black Lives Matter era, with his own personal experience of racism, playing one of the more complex roles in a production that lays bare the most brutal chapter in American racial history. But meeting Chase Dillon and his family in a busy playground on a May

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'Love for India' compels CT doctor, N.Y. woman to help

By Currie Engel

DANBURY — It was 4 a.m. several weeks ago, and Dr. Sakshi Sethi and Nidhi Garg Allen couldn't sleep. They were mourning the COVID-19-related deaths of two people close to them back home in India. They

were concerned by the fact that so many young people were dying of the virus. They were worried about the small children, orphans, left behind, and anxious about relatives who were unable to find a bed in the crowded hospital. See Help on A7



Nidhi Garg Allen, left, and Dr. Sakshi Sethi

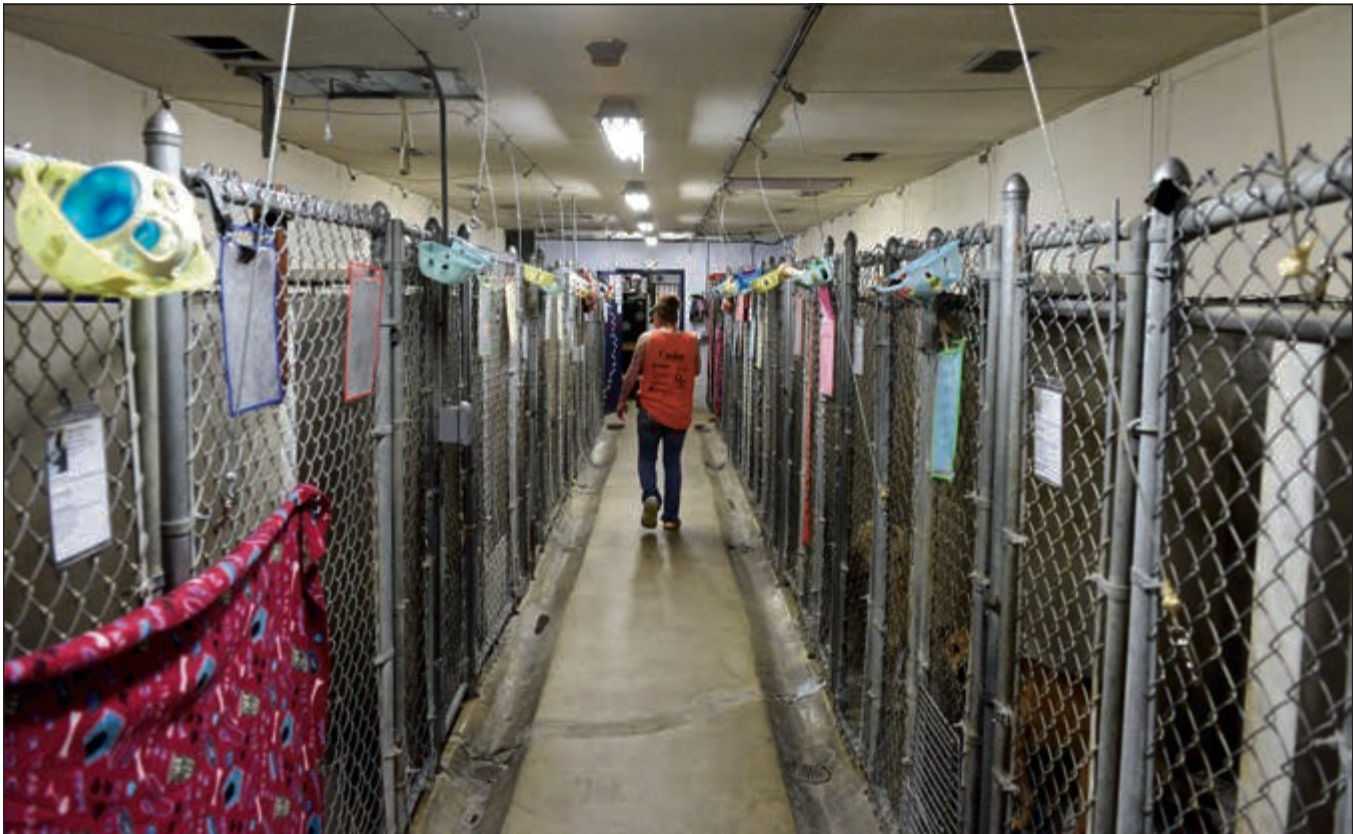
Advertisement for NEJAME & SONS, featuring a woman and child, and text about pool installation and equipment.

Barcode and business information.

Weather forecast: Sunshine and patchy clouds. High: 83, Low: 58. Page A14.



# FROM THE FRONT PAGE



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**Amy Mazza, a kennel hand and Vet tech assistant, walks through the dog kennel in DAWS, Danbury Animal Welfare Society, on Tuesday which is looking to renovate its facility located in Bethel.**

## SHELTER

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where it also offers spay and neutering services, adoption counseling and education programs.

DAWS renovation chairperson Cheryl Rykowski said repairs have been made over the years to keep the building operational — but that just won't cut it any longer.

"We've done everything to keep the lights on, keep it heated and cooled, and keep animals happy and healthy — but we've gotten to the point where we just know that we can't do that anymore and maintain the kind of quality care that we'd like to," Rykowski said.

For the past few years, Rykowski said DAWS has been on a quest to raise money for a renovation.

DAWS development and marketing director Alice Meenan said architect Lynne Persan has come up with an architectural design for the shelter that's not only beautiful, but would "be efficient and healthy and allow us to achieve everything that we want to for all of our animals."

The renovation project would involve a tear-down and rebuild of kennels, as well as a transformation and repurposing of the rest of the DAWS building space — which includes its clinic, cattery, office and greeting spaces, and community and education rooms.

Rykowski said renovating the shelter would mean "everything" — not only to DAWS, but the animals, people and communities it serves.

"We will never be unneeded — there will always be animals to adopt out — and we cannot do our mission of saving or rehoming animals without a space that can physically accommodate them, the volunteers and the staff," she said. "It is the tool by which we do our lifesaving work, so it is everything."

Rykowski said the entire DAWS kennel needs to be torn down because of "severe drainage issues" that have made keeping them dry extremely difficult.

"It's in very rough shape and it's getting harder and harder to keep the animals in the kind of care that they need to be kept in," she said.

Meenan noted that the renovation would fix temperature control issues at the shelter, where propane heaters and blankets are used to keep the animals warm in the winter and fans are brought in to create air movement during the summer months.

A renovation would also allow more dogs to be housed there.

The current shelter can hold up to 45 cats, but only 25 dogs at a time due to some inoperable kennels.

"Because some of the kennels are inoperable, we can't take in as many dogs," Meenan said, noting that with the renovation, the shelter would be

able to hold roughly 25 percent more animals at a time.

Meenan said the renovation project would also include the creation of a "healthy hold" area where incoming dogs can be observed and evaluated before they're placed amongst others at the shelter.

"We work with what we have, but we just don't have the flexibility right now (to create) an area where we can protect some of the current dogs before we bring in new ones," she said.

The renovation would not only allow DAWS to take in more dogs and provide a better space for the animals at its shelter, Meenan said — it would also benefit the services provided by the organization, such as low-cost spay and neuter services and community education.

"The funds we raise will go to supporting our mission, which is to support the community and pet owners in the greater Danbury area," she said.

DAWS has raised about a quarter of the \$2 million sought for the renovation project.

"I know that doesn't sound like a lot, but due to COVID we had to halt on some of the major fundraising efforts," Meenan said, noting that DAWS recently relaunched its fundraising efforts.

Information on the project and how to donate can be found at [renovation.daws.org](http://renovation.daws.org).

## HELP

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tals.

Sethi had recently lost her brother-in-law to COVID, and has been avoiding Facebook because almost every day for the past two weeks she has seen the announcement of another young person's death.

Sethi and Garg Allen felt helpless.

The women, friends for eight years, wanted to do something to help their families, friends and loved ones in smaller, rural areas throughout India. Both had been donating to large non-profits and other organizations, but felt there had to be another way to help.

"We thought, you know, we can form a good team, why don't we both step up and instead of relying on big NGOs (non-governmental organizations), why don't we directly provide help to these communities," Garg Allen said.

Their main goal: get medical equipment and proper personal protective equipment to smaller hospitals and communities. So, a few weeks ago, they started a fundraiser which they're calling "Love for India," and now, are about to send their first shipment out.

Since February, India has been hit hard by the virus, in part because of highly contagious variants as well as increased holiday gatherings. May has seen tripling case counts and deaths that have increased by more than six times the amount a month prior, according to reports from the Associated Press.

On Wednesday, the country hit the highest COVID death toll seen by any country in a single day. Crematoriums are full to overflowing and hospital beds are very hard to find.

If there was any time to send aid back home, it was now.

### Collecting materials

The two women, both originally from small towns in India, met in New York City while Sethi was training at Memorial Sloan Kettering.

"It just clicked," Sethi said. "We've been like family since then."

As a pulmonary and critical care physician at Danbury Hospital, Sethi knew what would be needed at hospitals to properly handle severe COVID-19 cases. She said she can't imagine having to care for someone with COVID without oxygen machines. Yet, with more than a dozen family members working as doctors in India, Sethi has heard what they are having to work with — and more importantly, what they're working without.

"If you don't have oxygen, no matter how qualified you are, you can't treat anybody," Sethi said.

Garg Allen, founder and CEO of Marasim and an adjunct professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, has many ties to grassroots organizations in India and had also been getting information from her friends on the ground about the dire need for relief materials.

With Garg Allen's connections to local organizations and Sethi's vast medical knowledge, the two thought they'd make a good team.

Garg Allen would connect with those on the

ground to organize deliveries, Sethi would ensure the proper equipment was purchased, and Garg Allen's husband, Abhishek Allen, would help manage the finances and tech aspects of the campaign.

Originally, they started by asking for donations from family and friends. Now, the team has set up a GoFundMe page called "Help Us Save Lives Together Covid crisis in India," to gain more traction and fund more donations for "Love for India."

As India hit another record COVID daily death count of 4,329 fatalities Tuesday, which would surpassed the next day, the first shipment of aid materials was headed out.

So far, the page has raised just over \$7,700, much of which is being spent on the cost and shipping of four BiPAP machines, which provide a non-invasive oxygen treatment, according to Sethi. The BiPAP machines are also important because they can keep patients from having to be intubated and put on a ventilator, which leads to a higher likelihood of death.

Currently, 80 percent of the beds at the smaller hospitals where the women are sending the medical equipment have been converted to COVID-only beds, Sethi said.

"But these hospitals were not really equipped for managing COVID patients," Sethi added. "They don't have these BiPAPs and stuff because they were smaller hospitals."

With more machines, these smaller hospitals won't have to transfer patients to the larger, overwhelmed hospitals where the ratio of patients to nurses and doctors can sometimes be 50 intensive care patients to four nurses and one attending physician. Sethi said she's not even sure if the doctors are able to know the names of all their patients in that situation.

"Hopefully, each machine can save many, many lives," Garg Allen said.

Each BiPAP machine — its initial price and shipping — is costing around \$1,200.

Other monetary donations will be used to cover food and medical expenses for families in need and other essential hospital staff.

The Danbury Hospital nurses union has also donated 8,000 surgical masks, 800 N95 masks, along with face shields, to include in the Tuesday shipment, the women said.

In addition to friends, family, and social media, Garg Allen has been reaching out to local yoga studios to see if they're willing to do some classes to raise funds.

Both are eager and anxious to get back to their families in India as soon as travel is allowed again. But there are still no flights running between the US and India. Sethi had taken two weeks off from her job at Danbury Hospital and was supposed to be there now.

"We all want to be home, and you know, be with our families," Garg Allen said.

As they keep collecting funds, the women hope to keep sending more machines and relief materials.

"It is a nightmare that we dreaded from the beginning of the pandemic," wrote Garg Allen on the GoFundMe page. "Please help us help save lives in India."



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**One of the dogs available for adoption at DAWS, Danbury Animal Welfare Society, which is looking to renovate its facility.**

## PROPERTY

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Danbury targeted this property for development in its 1990 plan for the downtown, according to the request for proposals the city issued on Monday morning. It was again noted in a 2019 study of downtown.

"The most recent study identified the parcel as suitable for a multi-story building containing a mix of uses with ground floor commercial use that would help activate the public right-of-way," the city wrote in the bid document.

The 2019 study noted developing sites like this parking lot would fill "critical

gaps on downtown corridors." There's more parking north of West and Liberty streets than to the south, where there's more demand for parking, according to that study.

The city wrote in the bid document that it's looking for purchasers who can "execute a high-quality, financially-feasible project

that advances the city's vision" for the site and downtown.

Danbury said it would not sell the property for use as a parking lot or garage for private land owners. Instead, the city is encouraging ground floor retail and restaurants, upper story residential units, and below grade parking that includes

public spaces.

The property is in the Downtown Revitalization Overlay Zone, which means development incentives, such as an expedited permit process, reduced permit fees and decreased utility connection costs, are available, according to the city.

Developers must submit proposals by 2 p.m. July 14.

A committee with various city officials, including the planning director and someone from the mayor's office, will be formed to review the proposals. The committee may create a short list of developers to interview. Developers may be asked to present their plan publicly to City Council or a subcommittee.