

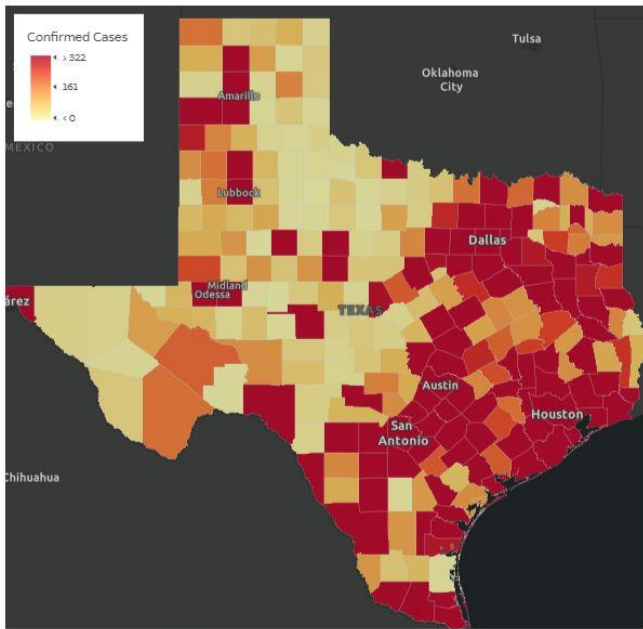
AUGUST 2020

HALIFAX NEWS

Contact Tracing during COVID-19

Before I moved to Vermont in 2016, I lived in Texas for 12 years, working for the Veterans Health Administration (VA), and for healthcare systems associated with medical schools. My work is in academic medicine, the teaching and research aspects of medicine. As part of my job I mentored many junior researchers, mostly students getting degrees and post-doctoral researchers and clinicians – that is, doctors who also want to do research. My youngest mentee, however, was a high school student who had become interested in learning more about statistics and the study of healthcare. Her name is Yashvi Reddy. Her mother, a doctor in the VA in Austin, Texas, contacted me at a colleague’s suggestion, and Yashvi and I enjoyed a pleasant adventure in online learning in the area of statistics.

Now let me take a small detour into public health, specifically into how the public and our public health officials are managing the coronavirus pandemic. One thing all states are doing is contact tracing. Contact tracing is important with infectious diseases such as COVID-19 because it lets us identify people who might get sick—before they get sick; and those who might infect other people—before any symptoms appear. The novel coronavirus is tricky in that you can carry it and give it to someone without being sick yourself. Contact tracing is part of the armamentarium we are using to slow down the spread of the coronavirus and protect people from getting COVID-19. (The other major parts are: **wear a mask – wash your hands – stay at least 6 feet apart**. Plus research into treatments and preventive vaccines.)



Hot spots with respect to number of COVID-19 cases – areas with fewer cases are yellow, intermediate -- orange, high -- red.

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/us/texas>

Back to the story. Since our foray into online statistics coursework, Yashvi and I have kept in touch, and Yashvi recently graduated from high school. She wrote to me describing some work she is doing in this summer between high school and college. For the summer, she took a job in her home state of Texas working in contact tracing for people with COVID-19. As you may know from the news, Texas has been experiencing a terrible spike in COVID-19 cases in June and July. The state has tested more than 3.3 million people out of a population of 29 million, and the tests have identified 390,000 people with COVID-19. Contact tracing for someone with COVID-19 involves calling up every person they were close to (within 6 feet) for 15 minutes or more from 2 days before they got sick to when they began self-isolation. This can add up to a lot of phone calls, but it is really important work to do. In Texas, the contact tracer can call on an interpreter if the contact tracer needs to talk with someone who does not speak English, and the interpreter then loops in an interpreter who knows the languages of both the tracer and the contact. I will let Yashvi tell you in her own words about doing contact tracing in central Texas.

“I have been working as a COVID-19 contact tracer for UT Health Austin [in Austin, Texas]. Contact tracing is going well, although it's been a rollercoaster of hard work and emotions, but I feel so grateful for the opportunity. One particular day last week, I had a 2-hour call with a patient and a Spanish interpreter, and I just connected with each of them in such a heartfelt way. The patient said, ‘You are so kind. God bless you, my child.’ That really struck me as we said goodbye because, even though I follow

a script, I like to add some of my own words to ask how they are doing and to express that I care about them in such a difficult time. And I'm glad that he and his family felt appreciated by me, a complete stranger.

“After we hung up, I spoke with the interpreter because at the beginning of the call, the person who transferred me to her translator line sounded very tired and I was worried they may not be okay, so I decided to ask how they were doing. He said he was fine and was really surprised and thankful that I asked. It was a very small thing for me but I'm glad it made a little positive impact on his day. Anyway, the interpreter heard this and said she was very proud that I am helping people out, to which I said, often I feel like I'm the one being helped more.

“I think this experience will stick with me because helping people and making a positive impact on someone's life, however small the impact is, means so much to me. It makes my heart so happy! I told my Contact Tracing lead about it, and she said that it was really cool I got to connect with these people. Anyway, that's a little insight into a big part of my daily life right now.”

Yashvi, pictured at right on the occasion of her high school graduation, has been accepted at UCLA and will pursue a major in psychobiology.

- Laurel Copeland, Halifax VT with Yashvi C. Reddy, Austin TX



You know how you can see your breath when it's cold out? Yeah, that's why you should wear a mask. Those are respiratory droplets from your lungs.



Stay safe, stay at least 6 feet apart, wear a mask, and wash your hands.

TOWN NEWS

SORROW. We were saddened to learn that Doris “Dorie” Joan (Skidgell) Mirucki, 75, died peacefully at home on June 30, 2020 in West Halifax, VT. Dorie was born on August 26, 1944, in Hartford, CT, the daughter of Thornton M. Skidgell and Mildred G. (Fish) Palmieri and stepdaughter of Mario B. Palmieri. Our sympathies to Richard and the family and Dorie’s kitty, Molly.

ELECTIONS. The August 11 primary elections and the November election will be held in the HALIFAX COMMUNITY HALL, 20 Brook Road, in West Halifax from 10 AM to 7 PM.

Absentee ballots are strongly recommended and can be obtained by either calling our Town Clerk Patty Dow at 368-7390 or going to the Vermont Secretary of State website *my voter page*, <https://mvp.vermont.gov/>.

NEWSLETTER. Please remember that August is the month that MOST subscriptions to the newsletter are due. Please look at the name/address label on your newsletter for when your subscription is due. Some folks have already sent in their subscription money, and I am hoping that many will this month. Make checks out to NEWSLETTER; send to Joan Courser, PO Box 27, West Halifax VT 05358. The yearly fee is \$ 7.00. You will get a notice next month if your subscription is still due. After two months of non-payment, the newsletter will no longer be sent. I don't want that to happen to anyone.

CLAMBAKE Saturday, August 1, 2020 - The drive-thru clambake is on! The Fire Company looks forward to seeing you in West Halifax 1-3 pm. Info: Lewis Sumner 368-2824, Wayne Courser 368-7733.

COVID-19 – The Coronavirus Pandemic Continues. COVID-19 is named for its emergence in 2019, but it appears to be on track to continue in pandemic form for the entirety of 2020. We are lucky to live in a state with sparse population and good adherence to public health measures. Vermont has had 1400 cases so far as of today, July 26, 2020, and our cases-per-day rate is low, much lower now than at its peak in early April. Globally, there are more than 16 million cases confirmed. One of many sites that shows the numbers describing the pandemic is CoronaTracker, <https://www.coronatracker.com/>. In Vermont, the hardest hit communities are in the Burlington, Bennington, and Brattleboro areas. This reflects the higher risk that comes with living in a place that has more people and more travelers than quieter areas of the state.

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/images/2020/07/COVID19-CasesByTown-7-24-2020.png>

Thank you for **wearing a mask**, **washing your hands**, and **maintaining social distance** (6+ feet apart from everyone outside your household). We all help to keep each other safe.

FIRE DEPARTMENT NEWS

On June 20, four men responded to Gregory Lane for a medical call.

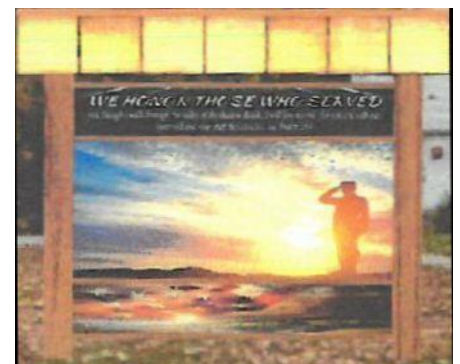
On June 30, five men responded to Old County Road for a medical call.

On July 5, ten men and one truck responded to a motor vehicle accident on Route 112. A vehicle hit an electric pole breaking the pole, there were wires down in the road, and the transformer that was on the pole was also down in the road. Route 112 was closed for quite some time; traffic was rerouted onto Stowe Mountain Road.

On July 5, two men responded to a residence on Stowe Mountain Road for a man not feeling well. He was transported to Brattleboro hospital.

On July 10, four men responded to a residence on Woodard Hill Road but were turned back en route.

HALIFAX HONOR ROLL. The Veterans Honor Roll relocated from the Church on Branch Road is being rebuilt at the Community Hall at a cost of \$3500. We need your help to complete this project. Please send donations to Town of Halifax, P O Box 127, West Halifax VT 05358. Make checks payable to Joan Courser. Thank you!



SENIOR MEAL (20 YEARS IN HALIFAX)

☞ There will be **NO** Senior Meal in Halifax in **August**. ☞

The **SEPTEMBER** meal will be *Sept. 18* at the Community Hall in West Halifax (20 Brook Road). This meal will probably still be TAKE-OUT ONLY. Pick up from 11 AM to 1 PM at the Community Hall. Menu: oven-roasted chicken drumsticks, potato, vegetable, rolls and dessert. I am hoping that the October meal will be back to normal and held in the Community Hall. Guess we'll just have to wait and see how things go. There is room for social distancing in the hall.
– Joan Courser

WILDLIFE CROSSINGS. Thanks for your calls and emails! If you see one of these 5 mammals **on or crossing a road**, or if you see tracks/scat that suggest one crossed the road, let me know (LaurelACopeland@gmail.com, 368-2439). I am interested in the date of the road crossing and the precise location. If you have a smart phone, take a pic of the location and email it (full size) to me; I will pull the geographic coordinates off the EXIF data embedded in the photo. The 5 animals are **Bobcat, Moose, River Otter, Black Bear, and Fisher.**

JOAN'S SIGHTINGS. Many turkeys and young are being seen so hopefully we will have lots of turkeys around. A few deer are being sighted. The bear is staying away from our place, perhaps because we put an electric fence around the chicken coop. The bear visited Monica Sumner a few nights ago. She heard him and got up from bed and scared him from the porch. Then she went out and got her feeders which had already been knocked down and carried off a short ways. She was brave to go out and rescue her feeders, but like she said to me, "they ruin them." She did say that he left her a pile of scat on the porch to let her know he was there and not happy she scared him away!!

I am sorry that the Baltimore Orioles have left, but they always leave mid-July. I sure enjoy them while they are here. I sure do miss the Chickadees. I only see one now and then; there used to be so many. Gretchen Becker called to inquire if I had a lot of them; I wish I could say yes. Actually, for summer there are not nearly as many birds as usual. Seldom do I see a Blue Jay, mostly I see Purple Finch, male and female, Cardinals now and then, a few Evening Grosbeaks but not often, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak nearly every evening at our supper time. Even the Sparrows are fewer this summer. I enjoy the Goldfinch but there are not a lot of them either. Still have the Hummers but just a few. I don't even see the Woodpeckers around much. I do have a couple of White Breasted Nuthatches every day. Now and then I see a Hawk flying over the village. Wayne said he found a Crow that someone had hit on Reed Hill road, not too often does that happen. Someone said they found a Yellow-Shafted Flicker hit on the side of a road and took it to someone who is trying to nurse it back to health but wonders if it will fly again. I briefly saw a Sparrow-size bird at my feeder with a pretty mellow yellow breast. I sure don't know what it was, but I hope to see it again for a longer time to try to identify it. I wonder where all the birds are???????? I hope there are lots this winter.

Send your animal sightings to Joan at jwcinvnt@gmail.com

- Joan Courser

Gretchen Becker did a quick poll on Front Porch Forum to find out where the chickadees went (photo from Indiana Audubon). She summarized the reports she got as follows: plentiful in West Guilford & Guilford, some in Jacksonville and on Collins Road in Halifax, few in other parts of Halifax and Wilmington, none in Halifax Center.





On Hanson Road, we've been seeing a lot of bluebirds and goldfinches. The bluebirds raised their babies after the tree swallows and have flown the nest. We see blue jays, crows, ravens, turkeys, a handsome hawk, doves, robins, sparrows. We hear the black-billed cuckoo (over and over!), and we heard the fledgling Barred Owls begging to be fed (sounds like an ascending raspy whistle). We had no idea what that sound was but sought advice from experts – Patti Smith and Bridget Butler. They knew instantly. We also seem to be on the new beat of a young bear. We've seen it 6 times this past month. He came right to



the house one time but found my basil and hot peppers and tomatoes boring. And chipmunks galore! It's like the squirrel incursion of 2018 but smaller, with less road death, and on horseback (see pic). There are a lot of toads and red efts and slugs and a few snails with shells, and many kinds of butterflies including a lovely Monarch. I had to look up how to distinguish Monarchs from Viceroy's, as it's been a while – the Viceroy adds a line cutting across the orange panes of each lower wing. Another butterfly needs identification – lovely sunny spots on dark wings may make it a common wood nymph (pictured under the hawk).



And most exciting of all to me was this wonderful sighting of moose with baby, captured by my neighbor Janis Bellow.



– Laurel Copeland, Halifax VT

Newsletter
P O Box 27
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Baby moose



Deer find me about as scary as a chipmunk

Editor LaurelACopeland@gmail.com. Email me for the color e-mail version.

Halifax News

AUGUST 2020

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Joan Courser, P O Box 27, West Halifax
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Thank you!!!

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