

# The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY SINCE 1932

Vol. 88, No. 49 December 3 — December 9, 2020 Prince George's County, Maryland Newspaper of Record Phone: 301-627-0900 25 cents



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY HALMAR INTERNATIONAL

Prince George's County—Halmar raced to stop hunger food donation and distribution on November 20, 2020.

## Halmar Raced to Prince George's and Montgomery Counties to Deliver a Ton of Holiday Meals for Families in Need

Food Delivered By Company's Nascar Team

By PRESS OFFICER  
Halmar International

LARGO, Md. (November 23, 2020)—Halmar Friesen Nascar Racing Team raced to Prince George's County and Montgomery County on Friday [November 20] to deliver a ton (2000 pounds) of holiday meals to needy families on behalf of Halmar International. Halmar partnered with Nourish Now, a food bank located in Rockville as well as with Prince George's County.

"Partnerships with local non-profits like Nourish Now and local governments such as Prince George's County are a part of who we are," stated Chris Larsen, CEO of Halmar International. "We take great pride in being a part of the community fabric where we work and what better time to demonstrate that than Thanksgiving."

Halmar International recently announced it will be moving its mid-Atlantic regional office to Maryland. Halmar is a leading highway and bridge contractor with an

earned reputation for delivering some of the most complex projects in the Northeast.

"We appreciate the generous donation by Halmar," stated Sonja Wilborne-Rice, Director of Stakeholder Engagement, Office of the County Executive, Prince George's County. "To see the faces of the Veterans and disabled members of our community who benefited from their donation is very rewarding. We look forward to continuing a long partnership with Halmar."

As a part of the distribution by

Prince George's County and Nourish Now, the donated food will provide a holiday meal to several hundred families. This is part of Halmar's ongoing effort to combat hunger. Earlier this year, Halmar provided a truck load of food to the Manna Food Bank as a part of its Race Against Hunger Campaign and more than \$70,000 donated to local non-profits to support at-risk families.

"Nourish Now is grateful to Halmar for including us in their charitable giving program," stated Brett Meyers, Founder and Executive Director of Nourish Now. "Their generous donation of Thanksgiving meals provides our organization with the opportunity to feed additional families struggling with food insecurity."

Halmar has won many coveted industry awards, including Top Contractor, Pride in Transportation Construction, and New York Construction's Top Project. National transportation agencies recognize Halmar's impressive legacy of successful projects whose cumulative miles would cover more than half the nation. Halmar is fully integrated with Itinera Infrastructure & Concessions (as both are a part of the ASTM Group—a global P3 developer of transportation infrastructure), which provides all aspects of design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance, and technological innovation for transportation P3 projects across North America. Globally, ASTM is currently the second largest tolling concessionaires by road miles, with over 100 years of related experience, and \$20 billion in assets under management. Halmar is positioning for the Maryland Capital Beltway P3 Program and a number of transportation mega projects in the region. [www.halmarinternational.com](http://www.halmarinternational.com).

## State's Attorney Releases November Update on Operation Safe Release

Report Shows 97 Percent of Detainees Held on Violent Offenses

By DENISE SMITH  
Office of the State's Attorney

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (November 25, 2020)—Prince George's County State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy announced today that as a result of Operation Safe Release, 97 percent of inmates at the county's detention center are currently held on violent or dangerous offenses. The remaining three percent consist of individuals held on detainers, fugitive warrants or who are awaiting disposition in mental health court.

"My Office initiated Operation Safe Release on March 1, 2020 to responsibly reduce the jail population during the pandemic. Through our release efforts and collaboration with the courts and Office of the Public Defender, we were able to significantly lower the number of pretrial detainees held," said Braveboy. "Unfortunately, because crimes of a violent nature have continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the population at the detention center has increased from the 40 percent reduction experienced during the early summer."

As of November 13, 2020, there were 745 in-

mates who remain in custody at the detention center, where the vast majority are charged with violent crimes, including over 200 charged with murder. Ongoing crime coupled with trial delays since the beginning of the pandemic has attributed to the rise in the number of inmates at the jail.

"We also continue to monitor the conditions of the jail. In September, there was a mass testing at the facility in which we have been advised by the Department of Corrections (DOC) that there were no individuals who tested positive for COVID-19. According to DOC as of today, there are no inmates housed at the jail confirmed positive for COVID-19," Braveboy said.

Under Operation Safe Release, each case is reviewed to determine the appropriate recommendation for release. The State's Attorney's Office will not recommend the release of defendants who pose a danger to any victims and/or the community at large. The goal is to ensure that we are protecting the residents of Prince George's County while advocating for the health and safety of detainees in a fair and just manner.

## COVID App May Help Contact-Tracing Challenges This Holiday

By PHILIP VAN SLOOTEN  
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (November 24, 2020)—"Answer the call" and download the COVID Alert app have joined the growing list of pandemic precautions, such as wearing a mask and social distancing, as the Maryland Health Department battles a pandemic surge during this holiday season.

"Of course everyone wants to be with family and loved ones, but we are in the midst of a pandemic and cases are skyrocketing," Dr. Katherine Feldman, director of the Maryland Department of Health's contact tracing unit, told Capital News Service on Thursday.

The health department on Tuesday reported over 1,600 more confirmed cases and 32 deaths added to state totals in the past 24 hours. The counties with the highest number of cases continue to be Prince George's, Montgomery and Baltimore while the spike in Allegany challenges hospital capacity.

Feldman said it was important for Marylanders to enable the MD COVID Alert exposure notification app, answer a contact tracers' call, wear a mask, socially distance and continue to take other pandemic protective measures to "reduce transmission and have all of us stay safe and healthy."

MD COVID Alert is a passive system that users enable on their iPhone or download to their Android phone in order to receive notifications when they have come in close proximity to another user who may have tested positive for the virus.

Feldman describes "close proximity" as within the 6-foot social distance threshold for at least

one minute of exposure to a potentially infected person.

The app then makes the user "aware they were exposed, so they can take preventative action," which includes getting tested and self-quarantining to stop the spread of the disease, Feldman said.

The Maryland Department of Health launched the system Nov. 10 and reported over one million Marylanders, around 17% of the state's population, downloaded the exposure notification app within the first week.

Research results released in September of Washington state's exposure notification system found COVID-19 infection rates could be reduced by 8% and deaths by 6% when at least 15% of the population enables the app and the system is complemented by traditional contact tracing methods.

Traditional contact tracing involves an investigation process where health department officials question individuals infected during a disease outbreak in order to find out whom they may have come in contact with and "break the chain" of infection, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This process is also used during outbreaks of food-borne illnesses in order to locate the source.

Gov. Larry Hogan, R, stated in a Nov. 17 press conference that while the number of state contact tracers have been "ramped up" to around 1,400 in order to reach as many people as possible who may have been exposed to the disease, there are other challenges to address.

"Our problem is that so many people refuse to give the information. A little more than half, if we

contact them, don't want to participate," he said. "We have to get the word out for people to participate."

Hogan said the state was administering around 30,000 tests a day, and many people had downloaded the alert app, but it was still important for infected Marylanders to answer tracers' calls.

This is for tracers to determine who else may be infected, so they can be notified and encouraged to get tested and to quarantine as well.

"Contact tracing is critical for local public health officials to be able to understand how an epidemic is moving through a community," said Dr. Wilbur Chen, an infectious disease specialist with the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health in the University of Maryland's School of Medicine and an adviser to Hogan's COVID-19 task force. "We have to have the same approach for finding out who has symptoms and who has been in contact with them, in order to determine the source."

According to Feldman, local health departments began investigating the first COVID cases in March and April but were quickly overwhelmed. A statewide effort began in June.



PHILIP VAN SLOOTEN / CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Maryland businesses prepare for the holiday season in the midst of a pandemic surge in November 2020.

Chen explained one of the first hurdles the state program had to overcome in the early days of the pandemic was to hire more tracers, because of how easily COVID-19 can spread through a community.

"COVID is a fast-moving target," Chen said. "But we need to get those who are infected or exposed quarantined in case they are not symptomatic. All of this has to be done as quickly as possible."

But an ongoing concern is for Marylanders to answer the phone when called.

"In order for us to stem the spread of the disease,

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**ChildWatch: A Litany of Thanksgiving**

As this prayer reminds us, it can still be a time to be thankful for all that has sustained us in the past and brought us this far and for the hope and promise of tomorrow.

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# HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## Social Security Matters

### Ask Rusty:

## No Simple Answer to Question On When to Claim Benefits

By RUSSELL GLOOR,  
AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor  
Association of Mature American Citizens

**Dear Rusty:** I'm almost 59 and hope to retire from working soon. Should I take Social Security as soon as possible, or wait for the maximum amount? **Signed: Planning Ahead**

**Dear Planning Ahead:** I'm afraid there's no simple answer to your question, except "it depends." It depends on your health; it depends on your need for the money when you retire; and it depends on your life expectancy. Plus, your marital status may also influence your decision on when to claim.

First of all, you cannot claim your Social Security retirement benefit until you are at least 62 years old. But if you claim at 62 your benefit will be cut by 30% from what it would be if you waited until your full retirement age (67). You actually have an 8-year window starting at age 62 and lasting until age 70 to claim your Social Security benefit. The earlier in that window you claim, the smaller your benefit will be. And the longer you wait to claim (up to age 70), the higher your benefit will be.

At age 70, your benefit will reach maximum at 24% more than it would be at age 67, and 76% more than it will be at age 62. Essentially, if you are in good health, don't urgently need the money earlier, and expect to enjoy at least "average" longevity (about 85 for a man your age today), you will not only get a much higher monthly benefit, but also collect much more in cumulative lifetime benefits by waiting until age 70 (or as long as you can) to claim. Of course, no one knows how long they will live, but there are online tools which can assist you with estimating your life expectancy. One relatively simple and user friendly tool is available from Social Security at this link: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/population/longevity.html>.

Conversely, if you are not in good health and don't expect at least average longevity, or if you urgently need the money when you retire from working, claiming earlier may also be a prudent choice. If you are married and you predecease your wife, her survivor benefit will be based upon the benefit amount you are actually receiving, so by waiting to get a higher benefit for yourself you are also enhancing your wife's eventual benefit as your widow, should you pass before her.

Be aware too that, should you decide to go back to work, until you reach age 67 you'll be subject to Social Security's "earnings test" which limits how much you can earn before Social Security takes back some of your benefits (the 2021 limit is \$18,960 and if that were exceeded, they'd take back benefits equal to half of the amount it was exceeded by). The earnings limit changes annually but goes away at your full retirement age.

So, these are the things you should consider in deciding when in that 8-year window to claim your benefits. I cannot directly answer your question for you, but I hope the above gives you what's needed to make an informed decision on when to claim your Social Security benefits.

The 2.3 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] [www.amac.us](http://www.amac.us) is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation ([www.AmacFoundation.org](http://www.AmacFoundation.org)) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at [www.amac.us/join-amac](http://www.amac.us/join-amac).

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## Maryland Oversight Committee on the Quality of Care In Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities Makes COVID-19 Recommendations to State Leaders

Governor Hogan, Senate President Ferguson and House Speaker Jones among recipients of annual report

By CINDY SCHELHORN  
Alzheimer's Association

MCLEAN, Va. (November 23, 2020)—Assisted living facilities and nursing homes are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis. With almost half of residents living with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia, these communal settings with an elderly demographic susceptible to underlying chronic conditions make this population exponentially vulnerable to the virus.

On Nov. 12, the Maryland State Oversight Committee on the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities, chaired by Maryland State Secretary of Aging Rona Kramer, published its annual report assessing the quality of care in nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Maryland.

"This report reflects a multi-stakeholder consensus about the quality of care in nursing homes and assisted living facilities," said Eric Colchamiro, Maryland Director of Government Affairs with the Alzheimer's Association. "We must all do better to invest in consistent rapid testing, and the support for staff and residents to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The committee identified three core areas of concern, with findings in each area:

- **Long-Term Care Workforce—recruitment, retention, and development:** Encourage staff development through initiatives such as use of voluntary CNA/GNA

training programs offered at local community colleges, and the use of the personal information forms about residents, which can ease transitions between care settings and enable more person-centered care.

- **COVID-19: Testing and Personal Protective Equipment:** The State of Maryland can further subsidize testing and personal protective equipment (PPE) for nursing homes and assisted living facilities including increasing access to and training for rapid, point of care testing, along with existing mandated polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing.

- **Industry Stabilization: Consistent Guidelines, Prioritization of Funding:** Industry operations have been taxed by frequently shifting guidelines during the pandemic, which require significant ongoing resources and staff education. As clinical guidance and best practices continue to evolve, continued support is needed to navigate changes and implement policies that protect residents, patients, staff, and visitors.

The Oversight Committee is a multi stakeholder group composed of aging and long-term care facilities professionals, associated non-profit organizations, Maryland state government agencies and loved ones of those living in such facilities.

"AARP Maryland, a member of the Oversight Committee, applauds the significant measures highlighted in this report to

improve quality in the long-term care industry with state oversight and support," said Tammy Bresnahan, AARP Maryland's Associate Director for State Affairs. "There is much to be done to protect our most vulnerable, especially in Long Term Care, and during the COVID-19 pandemic; this report and its recommendations are a good first step."

"These recommendations reflect significant discussions among many who are concerned about the needs of Marylanders who reside in long term care facilities," said Virginia Crespo, who represents United Seniors of Maryland on the committee. "The current pandemic has revealed how much is necessary to protect our vulnerable citizens. This report provides a solid path for the Governor and the General Assembly to follow."

A list of all committee members is available on the Committee's website.

For tips on caring for a loved one with dementia during COVID-19, visit [alz.org/covid19](http://alz.org/covid19) or call the Alzheimer's Association free 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

The Alzheimer's Association leads the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia®. Visit [alz.org](http://alz.org) or call the 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900.

## Black Women's Health Imperative ANNOUNCES The Rare Disease Diversity Coalition's "RISE for RARE" Campaign

The RISE for Rare Multi-Channel Campaign Will Build Awareness Around Rare Disease and Its Impact on Communities of Color

By PRESS OFFICER

### Black Women's Health Imperative

WASHINGTON (November 18, 2020)—Today, the Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) announced the launch of a comprehensive multi-channel campaign entitled RISE for Rare. This campaign is the first large scale activation of BWHI's Rare Disease Diversity Coalition that was formed in May 2020. The purpose of the RISE for Rare campaign is to build awareness around the health disparities, specifically with respect to rare disease, that many communities of color face. BWHI, through RISE for Rare, aims to ultimately reduce the time from symptoms to diagnosis, enhance the quality of care and improve health outcomes for patients of color.

The Rare Disease Diversity Coalition is led by BWHI and a steering committee, comprised of industry, advocacy and community leaders with the support of the founding sponsor Trave Therapeutics, Inc., a biopharmaceutical company dedicated to identifying, developing, and delivering life-changing therapies to people living with rare disease. The Coalition was established at a pivotal time, as the country continues to grapple with the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the painfully evident disparities that exist among communities of color regarding infection rates, treatment and access to care.

"This campaign and the work of the Coalition is critical in order to raise awareness around the health disparities communities of color face with respect to rare disease and bring attention to the misunderstood symptoms that often delay diagnosis," said Dr. Garfield Clunie, National Medical Association (NMA) National Treasurer and Board Member.

"In order to address these inequities, we must fully understand the impact on diverse populations by committing more support, funding and resources to research while we simultaneously strive to dismantle other systemic structures that support inequity and injustice," said Dr. Elena Rios, President & CEO of the National Hispanic Medical Association.

"There are significant barriers to the development of effective therapeutics for patients of color. Lack of researchers of color and lack of participants of color in clinical trials mean evidence-based medicine is applied to people who had nothing to do with the creation of the evidence. However, the number one reason patients of color are not included in clinical trials is because they are not asked by their physicians. RISE for Rare is a powerful first step to ensuring patients of color are included in research and that physicians and researchers understand the importance of that inclusion," said Linda Goler Blount, BWHI President and CEO.

The RISE for Rare campaign will utilize an interactive program to focus on raising awareness on health inequalities in communities of color, reducing racial disparities and advocating for evidence-based solutions, with the goal of eradicating systemic inequities.

The Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to advancing health equity and social justice for Black women, across the lifespan, through policy, advocacy, education, research, and leadership development. The organization identifies the most pressing health issues that affect the nation's 22 million Black women and girls and invests in the best of the best strategies and organizations that accomplish its goals. Visit [www.bwhi.org](http://www.bwhi.org)

## Maryland Small Business Development Center Upcoming Events

**Holiday eCommerce for Small Retailers: From Brick and Mortar to Click and Mortar**  
December 9, 2020 • Register: <https://mdsbdc.eccenterdirect.com/events/16407>

How can small retailers transform their brick and mortar holiday customer experience into an equally compelling and seamless online experience for individuals who may not be comfortable enough to shop in public? Join retail expert Marc Willson as he introduces "next level" eCommerce strategies for creating a robust digital shopping experience that works!

**Holiday eCommerce for Small Retailers: Fulfillment**  
December 16, 2020 • Register: <https://mdsbdc.eccenterdirect.com/events/16409>

On top of being busy in store, small retailers have become fulfillment centers for rapidly increasing online sales that are anticipated to grow exponentially during the holidays. Retail expert Marc Willson will provide practical tips on setting up or expanding your store's packing and shipping capabilities—from pricing, to packing, to getting items out the door—and even marketing your brand as you ship to attract customers even as the holiday season ends.

**Love – Grow – And Sustain Your Business** *This is a bilingual event*  
February 11, 2021 • <https://mdsbdc.eccenterdirect.com/events/16392>

The coronavirus pandemic has placed tremendous stress on the American economy. More than 55 million Americans are unemployed, as the Maryland SBDC tirelessly assist Maryland Businesses to remain sustainable. This FREE workshop is in English and Spanish for those who are interested in starting a business as well as those who have established businesses. Many constituents are using this time to start a business they have thought of for years, now laid off looking for new opportunities they now have the time to figure out how to make this happen. In this course we will cover:

How to Start a Business in Maryland Lab time offered to assist participants in registering their business online Marketing Your Business Access to Capital Participants will receive a "Congratulations for Starting your Business" certificate via email upon SBA guidelines.

**COVID-19 RESTAURANT RESILIENCY FUND**

Brick & Mortar | Food Trucks | Catering | Farm Stands

Grants up to \$25,000  
Applications Accepted November 13th – December 18th

Apply Today  
[PGCEDC.com/RestaurantFund](http://PGCEDC.com/RestaurantFund)

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