

New Variant Presents New Challenges

Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft

We learned a new Greek letter last month: Omicron, which is also the World Health Organization's designation for a new COVID-19 variant. Omicron was first detected in South Africa in late November, then spread rapidly to other countries, including the United States where cases have been confirmed in Alameda County and other parts of the Bay Area.

New scientific information emerges daily, but initial analyses suggest that Omicron is highly transmissible, but the symptoms it causes may not be as severe as those resulting from the Delta variant, especially for those who are vaccinated and boosted.

It's important to remember that the Delta variant is still the predominant cause of severe illness and death, primarily among the unvaccinated. Vaccines remain the best way to contain COVID-19 and are available for everyone five years and older. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also advises ALL adults to get booster shots to maximize their body's defense against COVID-19. Booster shots are available for everyone 18 years and older who had their second Moderna or Pfizer vaccination at least six months ago, or a Johnson & Johnson vaccination at least two months ago. To schedule your booster, or a vaccine for yourself or your children, call 833-422-4255 or visit www.alamedaca.gov/getvaccinated today! Don't delay: protect yourself and others!

To avoid a winter COVID surge, just continue the safety precautions we've all mastered: wear a mask over your nose and mouth in indoor public spaces or crowded outdoor spaces; maintain six feet of distance from others; and wash your hands frequently. Alameda County Health Care Services Agency Director Colleen Chawla also recommends getting tested

before and after travel, and family gatherings.

Students helping achieve vaccine equity: Despite Alameda's generally high COVID vaccination rate, County Public Health data shows that vaccination rates in several West End census tracts are lower than the city average. To address this imbalance, I enlisted the help of local students. Using materials developed for Alameda County Public Health's vaccine outreach program, D.O.O.R. (Direct Outreach to Our Residents), I recently trained 45 Encinal High School students from Kevin Gorham's Leadership class. (Alameda's D.O.O.R. program is being underwritten by the office of our revered late County Supervisor Wilma Chan.) These students are now canvassing identified neighborhoods, wearing bright orange "Alameda D.O.O.R." shirts, and equipped with literature to share the latest information about why and where to get vaccinations and boosters. I'm so proud of their commitment to protect all of our residents from COVID!

Neighbors helping neighbors: I want to highlight two impactful programs that have helped some of our most vulnerable residents during the pandemic: The Alameda Food Bank and Alameda Friendly Visitors.

At the height of the pandemic, Alameda Food Bank's clientele increased eighteen-fold, just as seniors, a majority of the Food Bank's volunteers, were advised to stay home to avoid exposure to the coronavirus. COVID protocols also required suspension of in-person shopping and implementation of drive-through grocery pick up. Fortunately, many residents who'd transitioned to working remotely from home stepped up to volunteer, as did members of the Coast Guard and Alameda CERT volunteers. Today, 200 Food Bank volunteers cheerfully maintain the Food Bank's Alameda Point location where clients can once again shop for their food in a



City of Alameda

City of Alameda Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft

pleasant setting that resembles a well-stocked grocery store. AC Transit Bus line 96 also stops near the Food Bank for easy access.

If you or someone you know lives, works or goes to school in the City of Alameda and has trouble feeding themselves or their family, please call 510-523-5850 or visit alamedafoodbank.org to arrange to receive food from the Alameda Food Bank. No one should go hungry.

During the pandemic loneliness impacted many who live alone, especially seniors who were unable to spend time with family and friends. For some, extended periods of isolation can lead to depression and cognitive decline. Fortunately, Alameda Friendly Visitors (AFV), which grew out of Alameda's Meals on Wheels program, provides screened and trained volunteers who make regular home visits to seniors, to provide companionship and offer assistance with light tasks. If you or someone you know would benefit from a regular visit from a caring volunteer, or would like to become a Friendly Visitor, please contact AFV Director Jane Neal at 510-748-0342.

We got this, Alameda. Keep doing what you're doing to stay safe from COVID. Help others. Be Alameda Strong!

Alameda CARE Team Launches Before the Winter Holidays

Sun Staff Reports

The City of Alameda announced it is launching a pilot program that intends to change procedures when responding to calls for service involving individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

Starting Dec. 16, the Alameda CARE Team (Community Assessment Response & Engagement), led by the Alameda Fire Department (AFD), will provide a 24/7 alternative response to nonviolent, noncriminal individuals facing a mental health crisis.

- If you are experiencing an emergency, always call 911.
- If you are in crisis or see someone who may be in crisis, call 911 or call 510-337-8340 and ask for the CARE Team to respond.

When the CARE Team is dispatched, first responders will arrive in a low-profile program-branded vehicle outfitted for this work. The CARE Team will triage and assess clients in order to assist them with navigating the best path forward in obtaining needed services.

Prior to launching, nine AFD staff members received program specific mental health responder training and crisis intervention behavioral health training. These initial nine AFD personnel have been assigned to this pilot program and will be serving in the role of CARE Team paramedic. They will be partnered with firefighter emergency medical technicians (EMTs) when serving the community.

Alameda Family Services has been contracted by the City to provide case consultation for the field units, clinical field response when needed, and case management/follow-up support for Care Team clients.

Developing options to shift certain responsibility for managing mental health crises from the Alameda Police Department (APD) to non-police agencies is a recommendation of the community-led committees on police reform and racial equity. At its March 16 meeting, the Alameda City Council unanimously approved moving for-

ward with this program and a series of recommendations ("Council Ponders Police Reform" March 10). The Alameda CARE Team is also supported by Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services and the Alameda County Emergency Medical Services Agency.

A celebration of the Alameda CARE Team will take place in early January. More information will be shared on the City's website at www.alamedaca.gov.

The request for a non-APD response team for mental health calls began after police bodycam footage of the detainment of Mali Watkins outside his residence was released on June 5, while nationwide protests to the George Floyd killing by Minneapolis police officers were ongoing.

City Council responded by forming a community-led committee to review and offer recommendations on police reform and racial equity in Alameda on June 29, 2020. One of their recommendations was to unbundle APD services.

Calls for an APD alternative were heightened after the death of Mario Gonzales on April 19, while in police custody ("Suspect Dies in Police Custody" April 20). APD responded to reports that Mario Arenales Gonzalez, 26, was suspected of theft and under the influence of a controlled substance. Three responding APD officers got into an altercation with Gonzalez, who was unarmed, and he died later that day.

At a town hall meeting on April 30, City Manager Eric Levitt said the city was exploring alternatives to police response as recommended by the committee ("Townhall Discuss Gonzalez's Death" May 4).

"The council is talking about an alternative mental health approach and we are actively working on it as a staff, not only as a long-term plan, but an interim plan," said Levitt.

Similar programs have been implemented in Eugene, Ore. and discussed throughout the Bay Area.

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Alameda Sun is a publication of Stellar Media Group, Inc. 3215J Encinal Ave. Alameda, CA 94501
Locally Owned, Community Oriented
News: (510) 263-1470
Ads: (510) 263-1471
Fax: (510) 263-1473

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Date	Rise	Set
Today	6:07	20:05
Month 00	6:06	20:05
Month 00	6:05	20:06
Month 00	6:04	20:07
Month 00	6:03	20:08
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Tampered ATM Machine Discovered

Sun Staff Reports

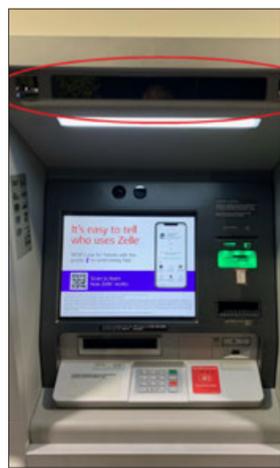
The Alameda Police Department (APD) is warning residents to be vigilant when using automated teller machines (ATM) after an ATM service technician located a "skimmer device" at the South Shore Center Bank of America.

The service technician located the device on Monday, Nov. 29.

It appears people have been targeting Bank of America ATMs and customers using California Employment Development Department (EDD) debit cards. EDD cards typically do not have an EMV security chip, making it easier for the skimming devices to obtain account information embedded on the magnetic strip.

APD said in a Facebook post that the technician located a replica of the machine's mirror and camera bar attached to the ATM that contained a pinhole camera. It is possible the device was installed up to four weeks ago. Alameda police officers are working with Bank of America to review security footage to identify the involved parties.

APD said if you used the machine recently they recommend changing your Pin number or continuing to monitor your statements and immediately report any fraudulent activity to



Alameda Police Department

Thieves attached a skimmer device on top of the ATM machine at Bank of America to steal patrons card information.

the bank to reverse any inaccurate charges.

Sophisticated skimmer devices can be hard to detect. The safest alternative is to arrange for transactions to be made in person. Consider transferring EDD funds into an account protected with an EMV-chipped card. Never use an ATM that appears damaged or altered. Always cover the

PIN pad with your hand when you enter your PIN. APD is encouraging the community to review their banking statements. If you or someone you know believe you may have been impacted, please contact your banking institution and file a report online at <https://www.alamedaca.gov/Departments/Police-Department/File-an-Online-Report>.

Get Well Soon, Dennis

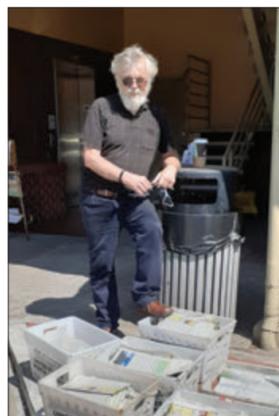
Sun Staff Reports

As many of our dear readers may have heard through one grapevine or another, our esteemed publisher, mentor and friend, Dennis "The Menace" Evanosky has been forced to take an extended leave of absence due to an ongoing health situation, effective as of last week. This will be the first edition without his wisdom, vision, and guidance — or his iconic historical articles.

Our tiny office here on Encinal suddenly seems absolutely cavernous without him around.

Dennis suffers from mild seizures which have made the herculean task of running the paper increasingly difficult these last few months. But fear not, fellow islanders, Dennis is alive (and as well as can be) and in good spirits.

The inexhaustible Evanosky is never finished. Hopefully, he'll use the time off to finally finish his novel, which is what he's usually pounding away at in front of his computer when not cranking out hundreds of pages of news and history a year. Let's just consider this a truly well-deserved vacation



File photo

Dennis will be taking an extended leave after more than 15 years with the Sun. After his many years of dedicated service informing and educating the communities of Alameda, Oakland, and wherever the Sun shines.

We wish Dennis, his wonderful and supportive wife Pauline, and their extended family of cats, birds, and other creatures a safe and peaceful holiday and a healthy

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Local Business Gives Back For the Holidays

Embarc Alameda used the 1% of its sales proceeds this quarter from its cannabis storefront to donate turkeys to Alameda Food Bank's Turkey Drive. Embarc's Community Advisory Board voted to spend its sales proceeds to buy turkeys from a local Grocery Outlet. Embarc donates 1% of all sales in perpetuity to their local

fund. Embarc Alameda opened its doors to the community in 2019 in conjunction with its local Community Advisory Board, a voluntary group of residents and community leaders that directs the Community Investment Fund. Embarc Alameda is located at 1616 Webster St.



Embarc Alameda

Embarc donated several turkeys to Alameda Food Bank.

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Alameda, CA 94501