

# Northeast

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## Eldercare is coping with COVID-19

by Cynthia Sowden

Since February, residents at Catholic Eldercare's senior living facility at 817 Main Street NE have gotten used to eating meals in their rooms and seeing staff dressed head-to-toe in protective garments, including face shields. Staff have become accustomed to speaking through a mask. It's a situation no one likes, but it's necessary.

On April 22, Catholic Eldercare sent out a media advisory from Greg Baumberger, president and CEO. "As of today, we have eight lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our Care Center. There are no active cases in our assisted living or independent living communities. However, it is with great sadness that we announced we have experienced 12 deaths since the virus was first detected. We grieve with the loved ones of those who have succumbed to this deadly virus and extend our prayers to them during this difficult time."

In an April 23 phone interview with the Northeast, Baumberger said, "In the state of Minnesota, there were 221 new cases since yesterday. We're moving up on the curve. For Catholic Eldercare, the curve arrived sooner."

As at other Minnesota nursing homes, Catholic Eldercare leaders saw the virus race through senior care facilities on the West Coast and began preparing for the worst. They monitored communications from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Minnesota Department

of Health (MDH). As members of LeadingAge, a trade association of non-profit caregivers that deals with seniors, they took note of best practices and began implementing them as the situation evolved.

"Early on, we stopped visitors from coming onto the premises," said Diane Lucas, Eldercare's director of marketing communications. "The only people coming through our entrances are employees and our vendors." She said the staff is in daily contact with MDH.

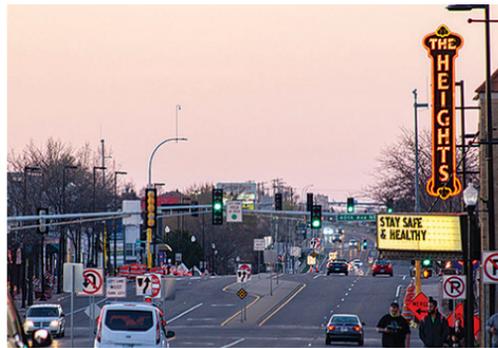
Baumberger added, "All deliveries go to the loading dock. They're held there to minimize the spread of COVID."

He said Eldercare has two nurses on staff who are specialists in infection control. Those two have trained other staff on how to prevent the disease from entering the building.

Lucas said one floor of the 174-bed building has become an "isolation unit" where residents with lab-positive COVID-19 tests are sequestered. "That's the most recent thing we have done to help mitigate the spread," she said.

Baumberger talked about the "complexity" of the coronavirus. "We've tested people who have been negative twice," he said. "Then, on the third test, they're positive." He's encouraged by the efforts of the University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic to develop antibody testing.

But it's not all gloom and frustration, ELDERCARE ▶ 11



## Spring scenes amid new stay-home extension

Joel Bartlett and Kevin Bumgardner of Columbia Heights walked with their dogs Carrol and Gustav at Kordiak Park (Photo by Karen Kraco). Heights Theater remains closed under the governor's orders about gathering (Photo by Nik Linde). Fishing off the dock on Silver Lake (Photo by Carol Jensen).

## Philip Harder debuts feature film "Tuscaloosa"

by Liz Jensen

It's August in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1972. Billy, a recent college graduate, works on the grounds of an old world mental institution run by his psychiatrist father. At the end of summer he falls in love with Virginia, one of his father's patients. Meanwhile, Billy's childhood friend Nigel joins fellow activists in the fight against Tuscaloosa's white power elite, which includes Billy's father. Billy finds himself torn between Nigel, his father, and Virginia as tensions rise and mysteries unfold.

"Tuscaloosa," is the first feature-length narrative film from Minneapolis writer and director Philip Harder. Harder has been a longtime creative force behind music videos for artists including Prince, Foo Fighters, and Hilary Duff, as well as commercial clients including Apple, Disney, and Target.

Harder, who lives on the Missis-



Virginia (Natalia Dyer) and Billy (Devon Bostick) meet near the railroad bridge over Tuscaloosa's Black Warrior River, played by the BNSF bridge over the Mississippi on Marshall Street. (Provided photo)

sippi River in Northeast near The Sample Room, filmed the entire movie in Minnesota, including locations around Northeast Minneapolis, Anoka, Northfield, and on the Carleton College campus.

Harder and his film crew shot in many familiar Northeast locations such as the Northrup King

Building, the Mississippi River north of the Broadway bridge, the Frost Building near Broadway and Central, the PNA hall at 13th Avenue and Fourth Street NE, Studio 6, the River Liquor sign (now torn down), and Harder's own house on Marshall Street.

The film "Tuscaloosa" was

adapted by Harder from the novel of the same name by Glasgow Phillips, published in 1994. "I met Glasgow Phillips in Los Angeles 20 years ago after I read his first novel, 'Tuscaloosa,'" said Harder. "I was impressed by Glasgow's natural talent to weave humor and romance with complicated social issues."

Harder and Phillips became friends and talked about the possibility of bringing "Tuscaloosa" to the screen someday. But it wasn't until 2016 that the idea became reality. After Phillips hinted that his novel was available for a screen adaptation, Harder made his move. "I took the leap and we finally shot the movie a couple years later," said Harder. "While shooting, I always relied on my memory of my first read because I couldn't predict what would happen in the story," he said. "That's what I hoped to capture for the audience."

Natalia Dyer (Stranger Things) plays Virginia, a patient at a mental institution. Tate Donovan (Argo), plays the lead character's psychiatrist father. Devon Bostick (The 100), plays Billy, the lead. Rapper YG (Def Jam recording artist), plays a civil rights activist. And Marchánt Davis (The Day Shall Come), plays Nigel, Billy's childhood friend.

"Our casting agent Bess Fifer from New York cast the kids in 'Stranger Things,' so she had a connection to Natalia Dyer, who plays Virginia, a complicated character thrown into a mental institution against her will," said Harder. Harder said Virginia is an unpredictable character who is challenging to play, "She blurs the line between sanity and youthful wild living."

Harder said the character of Virginia reminded him of the character McMurphy, played by Jack

TUSCALOOSA ▶ 5

Hopeful signs...3, 7  
Abuse victims still access services... 4  
Arts Insights:  
Home, senior and trail collections ... 6



Farmer's market will open soon with modifications .....7  
Public Works on Central at 29th, Lowry.....8



Kindness Bingo raises SACA donations.....9  
DeLaSalle students write to Eldercare residents.....11



Letters .....2  
The Northeast Experience.....3  
Items of Note.....4 / In Business .....8  
Worship Directory.....9  
Public Notices, Classified Ads.....10

# Pen pals keep Eldercare residents company

## 1 ◀ ELDERCARE

even if residents must stay in their rooms. The communications staff has enlisted “virtual volunteers” and found new ways to use the center’s in-house TV channel, producing travel shows. Enrichment and group activities are also broadcast. An extremely popular addition is the weekly “mail bag.”

Students from DeLaSalle High School have become pen pals with residents. The letters are isolated for three days to make sure they don’t transmit virus when they’re delivered to the residents. Once a week, the communications staff reads the best letters over the air.

Spiritual needs are also being addressed during the lockdown. “This is a difficult time for our residents,” acknowledged Baumberger. “Having six chaplains available is a real blessing. They are able to give one-to-one spiritual care.” Mass is broadcast throughout the facility daily at 11:30 a.m.

Staff have helped residents communicate with their families via FaceTime. And, of course, residents still receive care packages from their loved ones – after a three-day isolation.

Baumberger said he couldn’t say enough about Eldercare employees. “Early on, the Board of Directors recognized the personal sacrifice our people are making, and approved giving them hazard pay to reward them for being with us during this difficult time.”

Lucas celebrated the outpouring of support Catholic Eldercare has received from the Northeast community. “Companies have been dropping off 50 face shields at a time,” she said. “Tattersall donated 20 gallons of hand sanitizer formula. Cub donated N95 masks. Some families have bought lunches for the nurses. It’s really heart-stirring to see such support from the community. Small gifts like that give a lift to the health care providers as well as the residents.”

*Editor’s note: Catholic Eldercare has also received donations from Sisyphus Industries, Bolger and Northeast Makers. On April 24, they received a donation of 425 face shields from Corteva Agriscience, a Wilmington, Del.-based global agricultural company involved in seed development, crop production and digital services for farmers. Lucas said, “We’re grateful to Corteva Agriscience for their generous donation; we have enough supply for each staff member to have a dedicated shield—not just today, but also for the weeks ahead.”*

### Special cards to special people by Mark Peterson

In the best of times, nursing homes can become islands of isolation for aging residents, who have often lost friends their own age and for whom dementia and other infirmities have reduced the quality of their lives. Efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus have increased the loneliness of residents as guests and family members are kept from seeing their loved ones at their most vulnerable moments.

A young volunteer teacher at DeLaSalle High School had an idea: create and deliver handwritten cards to the residents at Catholic Eldercare’s long-term care facility on Main St. NE.

Joseph Rogers grew up in Pittsburgh, Pa., and attended Central Catholic High School there. He was taught by Christian Brothers at La Salle University in Philadelphia, now lives on Nicollet Island, and is a member of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Northeast Minneapolis.

Rogers teaches four sophomore theology classes at DeLaSalle. He also supports the school’s campus ministry program by assisting in the planning of prayer opportunities, schoolwide masses, and service projects for students.

DeLaSalle has strong historical connections to Northeast Minneapolis. Its many Northeast alumni include two-term Minneapolis Mayor Al Hofstede, one of the founders of Catholic Eldercare, and the facility is home to several retired Christian Brothers. Rogers said that before the pandemic began, plans were made to visit with residents during their mealtimes, but when that was no longer possible, the school thought that sending residents cards from



(Photo provided by Matt Hagen)

staff, alumni, friends, and students and their families “would let them know that we are praying for them during this challenging time ... and also a way for us to connect with members of the religious order who serve our school.”

Rogers said cards began filling up his mailbox within days of the project’s announcement. The cards came from not only students, but their siblings and parents, some of whom made card making an after-dinner activity for the family. Rogers said the goal was to send a special Easter greeting to each of the 150 residents at Catholic Eldercare’s Main Street facility. The nearly 200 homemade cards included birthday greetings and thanks to veterans for their service.

Matt Hagen, the school’s director of marketing and communications, worked with Rogers on the project. He noted that the school has for several years sent groups of students to sing Christmas carols at Catholic Eldercare. He recalled one time when he accompanied the group to take pictures: one of the residents told a student that her late husband had attended DeLaSalle and that she was so happy to connect with the school in this special way.

He added, “We had National Art Honor Society students prepare and share art/craft boxes with residents this last year, giving them simple opportunities to create art. Whenever we can, we find ways

to partner with Catholic Eldercare and provide meaningful connections that benefit our students and their residents.”

On the afternoon of April 21, Rogers and Hagen met with two Catholic Eldercare staff members: Diane Lucas, director for marketing communications, business development, and Renee McHugh, director of therapeutic recreation. The four stood outside the 817 Main Street entrance, wearing face masks. Rogers handed a bright yellow bag with the DLS logo on the side, stuffed with letters, to McHugh. The ceremony lasted only a few minutes.

Several days later, McHugh wrote to say that the responses from residents were “very positive” and included some quotes from the residents: “Isn’t this great that the folks over at DeLaSalle are thinking of us?” “God bless all the families and staff from DeLaSalle!” and “You can tell love was sent with this pretty card.”

McHugh said that cards and notes are appreciated by the staff as well as residents, adding, “My philosophy has always been that a resident is not just passing time day after day. My staff and I are trying to make life happen, help them discover life, continue to learn and grow. We always say, to make a difference in someone’s life, you don’t have to be perfect, you just have to care. DeLaSalle certainly proved that by sending all those cards full of love. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

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