



## Woodbine Ave. incident raised at Northport PD listening forum

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## Rep. Suozzi puts SALT back on the table in the House

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# The Observer

NORTHPORT'S COMMUNITY WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

90th Year, No. 53 February 4, 2021 75 cents



Despite heavy snow Monday, February 1, birds were out in full force in search of a good meal. The storm, which dumped more than a foot of snow, led to school closings and other service disruptions. See stories, page 3.

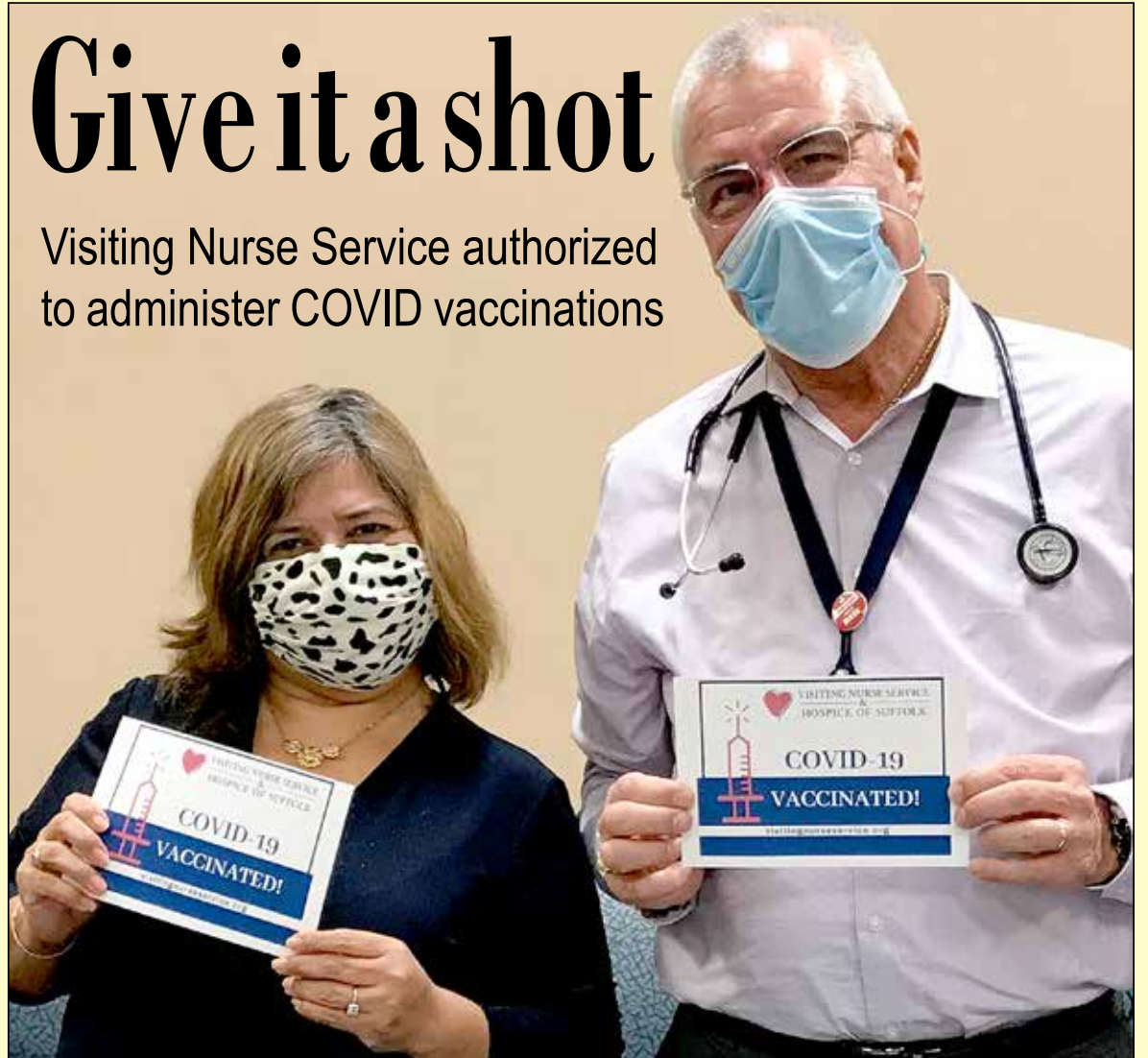
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February 4, 2021

## Give it a shot

### Visiting Nurse Service authorized to administer COVID vaccinations



Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice House Director of Clinical Operations Silvia Rivera-Belardo and one of the agency's nurse practitioners, Bruce Zitkus, after being vaccinated for COVID-19.

By DAVID AMBRO

While it undergoes the process of vaccinating its staff and clients for coronavirus (COVID-19), the Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice of Suffolk (VNSHS), with offices at 550 Main Street in Northport Village and an eight-bed hospice at 101 Laurel Road in East Northport, has been approved for public administration of the COVID-19 vaccine.

During an interview Wednesday, February 3, VNSHS Chief Executive Officer Linda Taylor said the New York State Department of Health has approved an application to begin administering the vaccine based on the state's current eligibility guidelines.

"We see it as our role and responsibility to help the community be safe, not only for the regular

flu, but especially for COVID now that the vaccine is here," she said.

The agency received 100 doses of the Moderna vaccine January 11 and has administered those shots. Ms. Taylor said the agency has been applying on a weekly basis since being approved by the state for hundreds of additional doses but they are not currently available.

While the vaccine has been scarce, and appointments hard to find and months in advance, Ms. Taylor expressed optimism this week that it was going to start to become more abundant in the weeks to come. She also expressed confidence that VNSHS will receive more of the vaccine next week, perhaps up to 200 doses as early as Tuesday, February 9.

*(Continued on page 11)*



# Northport agency approved to administer vaccine

(Continued from page 1)

According to Ms. Taylor, most of the staff has been vaccinated, many at the office in Northport but some at off-site locations or through other nursing jobs they have, several also employed at Huntington Hospital where the staff has been vaccinated. Ms. Taylor also said that the agency intends to vaccinate its homebound clients who are eligible and to make the vaccination available to eligible members of the public to the extent that it is available. She said the agency is authorized to apply for up to 500 doses a week as the need arises.

Administration of the vaccine at VNSHS will be by appointment. Eligible individuals should check the agency's website, [visitingnurseservice.org/COVID-19](http://visitingnurseservice.org/COVID-19), for availability of the vaccine and to make an appointment.

If the agency receives the vaccine Tuesday, Ms. Taylor said it will start scheduling clinics for the eligible public starting Wednesday, February 10. "And then, whatever we schedule will be determined by how much we get," she said.

As part of its annual operations and outreach to the community, VNSHS holds flu shot clinics open to the public and goes to local companies to administer the flu shot to its workforce. Ms. Taylor said administering the COVID-19 vaccine is a natural outgrowth of that function, and that many of the staff members at the agency are already trained to administer vaccinations.

"Having provided flu shot clinics for several years at 550 Main Street as well as at locations throughout Suffolk and to our homebound patients, we already have the nurses and procedures in place which enabled us to quickly adapt and administer the COVID vaccine," Ms. Taylor said. "We are familiar with the process and are equipped and even have a resource of per diem nurses who just do flu shot clinics for us. They are not regular employees, they are just supplemental staff for that purpose."

To administer the shots, VNSHS has purchased special freezers for the 505 Main Street, Northport and 101 Laurel Road, East Northport locations to safely store the vaccine. Ms. Taylor said the state has approved the agency to administer the shot at both of its locations. She said the Northport site will be used for the general public because there is space to do it safely and while practicing social distancing.

VNSHS applied to be a vaccine distributor as soon as the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines were approved in December. She said it was not notified that it had been approved until January 10 and soon thereafter the first 100 doses were received. She said the state wanted to see them administered within seven days, so a clinic was held then through the agency and the doses went quickly.

"I felt honored to be a part of vaccinating our staff and great community. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of history," VNSHS Clinical Manager Tedra Grant said after the COVID vaccine clinic.

"I saw it as a trial. The first time we put in a request it was for 500 doses and I thought we might get 1,000

doses and we are equipped for that," Ms. Taylor said. "If we know we are going to get it, we can realistically do 1,000 doses a week."

She said it is not currently available, so she does not expect to get to that point right away. "It's just not been out there," she said. "That 100 doses didn't even cover our frontline workers."

Ms. Taylor added, though, that there is an expectation that over the next three weeks there will be a big boost in the number of vaccines available. "They are saying that the federal government is releasing 20% more to New York State. That's why I am optimistic," she said.

"It's really a scramble. I hope things settle down with the availability so we can plan better. It would be nice to be able to plan more than one week at a time and thinking that it might not even happen. But everyone has been very positive, helpful and doing their best," Ms. Taylor said.

Moving forward, Ms. Taylor said it will be a challenge because the agency is trying to anticipate scheduling for an unknown volume of the vaccine. "As soon as we get something we will complete our staff as a priority. It's not that many and we should have enough to do more people and we will open it up," she said. "People should keep an eye on the website, but we are small potatoes and we're not going to make a dent in this whole thing. This is going to go on for a while."

In the context of the vaccine, Governor Andrew Cuomo has spoken about a reluctance of some people to get the COVID vaccine. Ms. Taylor said this week that she sees enthusiasm. "My experience is that people want it. My staff wants it, and I told them until we can give it to them they should get it wherever they can find it," she said. Mr. Taylor said she received the first dose two weeks ago and is scheduled for the second dose next week. She said it went without incident and that she has heard of no adverse reaction by anyone who has been administered the shot by the agency.

"It has been very positive and people in the community are calling all the time. They want it. That's not going to be a problem," Ms. Taylor said.

She said people who get the shot have to stay for 15 minutes to make sure they do not have a reaction. She said the clinics will be well staffed and that a doctor or nurse practitioner will be there to oversee the operation. "It's a very safe situation," she said.

Ms. Taylor said this week that the second surge of COVID-19 has not been as taxing on the agency as the initial wave was in March and April. Of the eight beds at the hospice house, four were converted through negative pressure systems to COVID-19 rooms. When the virus abated in the summer there were no COVID rooms and now with this second wave there are two. She said the pressure on the hospitals is not as intense and that not as many people are dying from the virus now as did during the first wave in Suffolk County.

"We are just flowing with the demand as far as the hospice house goes," she said.

With more people being discharged

*"Having provided flu shot clinics for several years at 550 Main Street as well as at locations throughout Suffolk and to our homebound patients, we already have the nurses and procedures in place which enabled us to quickly adapt and administer the COVID vaccine."*

**-CEO Linda Taylor**

from the hospital after COVID, Ms. Taylor said there is a sense of heightened caution and precaution among the agency staff because they may be coming in contact with more patients with the virus. She said even with vaccinations, the staff is still wearing masks and following the COVID-19 protocol.

"We are all wearing our masks because honestly I can't reinforce that enough. The people on my own staff who have gotten sick didn't get it from work or from patient contact. They got it from family get togethers and they have to keep monitoring that," she said.

Governor Cuomo said as of Wednesday, February 3, vaccine distribution sites in New York have received 1,554,450 first doses of the vaccine and 1,432,195 have been administered. He said that 77% of those people have received second doses required to be inoculated.

"New York has a vast network of providers and pop up sites capable

of distributing 100,000 vaccine doses per day. The problem we continue to see is, our operational capacity for administering the vaccine quickly and fairly, and the demand for the vaccine among more than seven million eligible New Yorkers far exceeds the supply," Governor Cuomo said. "Yesterday, we learned our supply will increase by more than 20% and that's really great news. Providers can plan to have more supply for at least three weeks and schedule out more appointments to vaccinate their assigned priority group. It's going to take time but the light at the end of the tunnel is bright and we will come back from this because we are New York tough."

Long Island, according to data released Wednesday by the governor, has received 288,360 doses of the vaccine of which 216,600 have been administered, or 75%. There are more than three million people on Long Island, more than tenfold the number of vaccines that have been received so far.

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