



Office of the
County Executive
EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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highest against
the wind,
not with it."
- Winston
Churchill*

High Risers

JULY 10, 2020 VOL #13

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This week's High Risers recognizes the impressive work of the Special Populations Team. The team members are Ken Hartman, Diane Vu; the Community Liaisons at the Office of Community Partnerships: Jessy Mejia, Kasey Kaseman, Yi Shen, Shawn Ellis, Harriet Shangarai, Yvonne Stephens, Julian Norment, Arwa Elboraei, Susan Hoffmann, Kaori Hirakawa; the Regional Service Center Directors: Jewru Bandeh, Cathy Matthews, Luisa Montero-Diaz, Reemberto Rodriguez; Jodi Finkelstein; the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center Team; and the Volunteer Center Team.



This group of remarkable leaders have been nothing less than heroic. They have provided vital services and resources to our multilingual and multicultural communities and ensured that our most vulnerable community members – including people of color, immigrants and those who are linguistically isolated - receive services throughout the COVID-19 emergency response. Their work will have long-term impacts on the lives of people in Montgomery County.

This exceptional team has served underrepresented communities, coordinated multilingual and faith-based town hall meetings, implemented a domestic violence awareness and prevention campaign, implemented the first Spanish WhatsApp outreach group; provided linguistically appropriate information and referrals, executed an extensive census outreach campaign; provided translation services for press releases,

informational graphics and emergency public service information, coordinated volunteer efforts and more.

The can-do attitude and the willingness of these High Risers to serve at the highest level is inspiring. We continue to be humbled to work alongside such dedicated professionals.

This is a turbulent and troubling time and many of our community members continue to need County services. As we always do, we will continue to serve and provide outstanding work. It is hard work and many of you have worked long hours, given up your weekends, missed out on opportunities, and are juggling family obligations and work demands. It can be an exhausting.

We encourage you to take time to take care of yourselves. As a team, we can cover whatever needs to be done so that you can take a break, breathe, and relax. Nothing is more important to our team than our employees. The work that we do is making a difference. Together we are strong. Keep us stronger by doing what you need to do to keep yourself healthy.

Thank you all. Stay safe and be well,

Marc Elrich, County Executive

Andrew Kleine, Chief Administrative Officer

HIGH RISER SPECIAL POPULATIONS TEAM LEADER KEN HARTMAN



Bethesda Chevy-Chase Regional Service Director Ken Hartman leads the Special Populations Team who have worked around the clock to provide critical outreach to multicultural and multilingual communities. They have introduced many recent programs to ensure that underrepresented communities have access to program and emergency information.

A highlight of some of their activities include:

- Executing the County's first-ever Spanish and Amharic Community Town Halls.
- Creating the County's first internal Translations Unit, providing vital translations of important documents, including the COVID-19 website, press releases and infographics, in the County's top seven spoken languages.
- Implementing the County's first WhatsApp group in Spanish to provide residents notifications in Spanish from Montgomery County regarding COVID-19.
- Providing Census outreach at events such as food distribution sites to ensure a full and accurate count of everyone in the County.
- Providing linguistically appropriate information and referrals to programs such as Emergency Assistance Relief Payment and Montgomery County Public Health Emergency Grant program.

Ken has worked tenaciously and persevered through unforeseen challenges to work toward the goal of ensuring that the County's most vulnerable residents have access to health, safety and sustenance.

His strong work ethic and unwavering commitment to expect greatness has ensured that thousands of residents seriously hurt by COVID-19 had access to services.

Ken's work has made a lasting difference for many underserved multilingual and multicultural communities.

HIGH RISER DIANE VY NGUYEN-VU



Diane Vy Nguyen-Vu, the director of the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP), leads the team comprised of the Community Liaisons (African-American, African, Asian, Caribbean, Interfaith, Latino and Middle Eastern), the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center, 2020 Census Team and the Volunteer Center. The team has met daily, six or seven times a week since February and has worked around the clock to provide multilingual and multicultural outreach, connecting communities to services and recruiting volunteers.

Diane's passions are community engagement, respect, compassion, equality, community service and working hard to build opportunities. The focus of OCP is to strengthen

relationships between the County government and the communities it serves, with special focus on underserved and emerging communities and our community members in need. The OCP serves as a bridge builder between the County government and communities to eliminate barriers such as race, ethnicity, income, and religion.

Diane joined OCP in 2012 as the liaison to the Asian Pacific American and Middle Eastern communities and Language Access Coordinator. She was appointed just weeks after County Executive Marc Elrich was elected. County Executive Elrich described Diane as an indefatigable force in our County, crucial to helping County Government understand, address, and meet the needs of our diverse community while strengthening the County by connecting our dynamic population with necessary resources so all may thrive here.

HIGH RISER JESSY MEJIA



Jessy Mejia serves as the County's Latino Liaison with the Office of Community Partnerships. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency response, Jessy fiercely worked around the clock to stay connected with the Latino community and to implement new strategies to provide emergency information and resources in Spanish.

Jessy coordinated Latino community town halls meetings which gave an opportunity for community members to hear directly from County Executive Marc Elrich and other

community leaders about what was happening with the County's COVID-19 emergency response. Jessy's work connected thousands of community members with vital resources.

Jessy created the County's first Spanish WhatsApp group. This provided another innovative way to improve community and outreach to individuals with limited English proficiency.

HIGH RISER KASEY KASEMAN



Kasey Kaseman serves as the Interfaith Liaison with the Community Liaison Community Engagement Cluster of the Office of Community Partnerships. Throughout the pandemic, Kasey has forged partnerships to accomplish collectively more than any one individual, department or institution can do alone.

Kasey facilitated and hosted a series of town hall sessions with faith-based communities to openly discuss the needs that individuals and families experienced due to the COVID-19 emergency. The meetings served to bring the community together with the decision makers to provide a better understanding of the Executive Orders as it relates to the faith community. The virtual gatherings made possible a meaningful dialogue to help the County better understand the many needs and concerns of its residents who are part of the County's faith-based communities.

In addition to the town halls, Kasey has provided numerous outreach methods to share information such as website resources and information, updated and contemporary newsletters, advisory groups meetings, and more.

HIGH RISER YI SHEN



Yi Shen works as the Asian Liaison with the Office of Community Partnerships. To help keep a strong connection with the Asian communities, Yi has held multiple virtual meetings to connect and engage with community members.

Yi played an integral leadership role in organizing town halls with Asian communities to address hate/bias incidents, public safety and COVID-19, food resources, and emergency grants. Yi's work assisted the County to better understand how COVID-19 is impacting the Asian community and provided an opportunity for community members to ask questions directly to County leadership.

Yi played a pivotal role in helping the County secure a donation of 20,000 masks from Montgomery County's China Sister City of Xi'an; these masks have assisted in mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

HIGH RISER SHAWN ELLIS



Shawn Ellis is the 2020 Census Manager for the County. The Census Team's outreach plan was significantly disrupted by COVID-19 as there could be no in-person outreach or interactions. During the time without door-to-door outreach, Shawn strategically pushed forward the message of the importance of the census through available online and virtual channels. His messaging reiterated that privacy was protected and that the census could be completed online or via phone.

Shawn's work with stakeholders across government, nonprofits, philanthropy and jurisdictions to reimagine Census outreach will help ensure that Montgomery County is accurately represented, and traditionally undercounted communities will receive all available funds for necessary services. Shawn's tireless work will have a lasting impact on the County for decades.

HIGH RISER SUSAN HOFFMANN



Susan Hoffmann is the Development Manager of the Fund for Montgomery in the Office of Community Partnerships. Thanks to private financial support from businesses, foundations, and individuals, the Fund is an effective nonprofit provider of support to Montgomery County which has a measurable impact within the community.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Susan worked closely with Shawn Ellis to develop and implement a multifaceted census marketing campaign tailored to multilingual and multicultural communities. Susan's work to reach traditionally underrepresented communities will help to ensure a full and accurate count of everyone in Montgomery County.

HIGH RISERS KAORI HIRAKAWA



Kaori Hirakawa is the program manager of the County's Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity. In addition to the work that Kaori does to provide services to community members, she took on the role of managing the newly formed Translations Unit. She guided the direction of the unit making it possible for more than a thousand translations. Kaori's work ensured that educational information and safety messages were available to limited-English-proficient communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

HIGH RISERS TRANSLATIONS UNIT

The newly formed first-ever County internal Translations Unit included 20 certified multilingual employees from multiple county departments, who without hesitation stepped into the new role of providing multilingual support during the COVID-19 emergency response. Their exceptional work ensured high-quality translations connected underserved communities with critical public-health services, information, and resources and laid the groundwork for the County's translations for years to come.

Myluong Vo
Vietnamese

Baozhu "Julia" Chen
Chinese

Tiegbondje Doumbia
French

Anh Hoang
Vietnamese

Khamchanh Saetang
Chinese

Beya Tshimuna
French

Tzu-Huei "Christina" Adams
Chinese

Sara deNieto
Spanish

Van Nguyen
Vietnamese

Me Young Kim
Korean

Jean Jacques Luboya

Chong Lee
Korean

Clotilde Puertolas
Spanish

Young Kim
Korean

Demeke Seyoum
Amharic

Tesfaye Getahun
Amharic

Maria Marquez
Spanish

Judy Juh
Chinese

Yerwen Sha
Chinese

Carlos Falcon
Spanish

The Translations Unit

TRANSLATION TEAM

Tesfaye Getahun
 Demeke Seyoum
 Judy Juh
 Yerwen Sha
 Tzu-Huei "Christina" Adams
 Khamchanh Saetang
 Baozhu "Julia" Chen
 Jean Jacques Luboya
 Beya Tshimuna
 Tiegbondje Doumbia
 Chong Lee
 Young Kim
 Sara deNieto
 Maria Marquez
 Clotilde Puertolas
 Carlos Falcon
 Anh Hoang
 Myluong Vo
 Van Nguyen
 Me Young Kim



During the COVID-19 emergency response, the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center Response Team has minimized the impacts of COVID-19, particularly for immigrants and those who are linguistically isolated. Their commitment to serve and provide critical outreach to multicultural and multilingual communities connected thousands of people to critical services such as financial assistance, food and legal assistance.

HIGH RISERS VOLUNTEER CENTER TEAM



[Meet the Volunteer Center Team](#)

The Volunteer Center, under the direction of Molly Callaway, has mobilized volunteers and assisted in connecting community members with service opportunities. Whether it is aiding a food bank, assembling baby clothes or working to fill pet bowls, the Volunteer Center has been a reliable resource to help connect volunteers with purposeful volunteer opportunities throughout the pandemic.

The collaborations of the Volunteer Center with the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and Food Security Task Force has connected thousands of volunteers with opportunities that have served many needs brought on by the COVID-19 emergency.



HIGH RISER JEWRU BANDEH



East County Regional Services Center Director Jewru Bandeh has worked throughout the pandemic organizing food drives and distribution programs. His work to assist the underserved community in East County has meant that many people had food on their table. He has made connections in a meaningful way to ensure that residents are aware of available services and know how to reach out and receive help.

Jewru's hard work to provide door-to-door census outreach will have a positive impact particularly for the African, African-American, Asian and Latino communities in East County for years to come.

HIGH RISERS LUISA MONTERO-DIAZ, CATHY MATTHEWS & REEMBERTO RODRIGUEZ



Before the County announced the County stay-at-home order the Mid-County, Silver Spring and UpCounty Regional Services Directors were on the streets supporting their community members by listening, planning and implementing programs and service.

Luisa Montero-Diaz serves the Mid-County region, Cathy Matthews serves the UpCounty region and Reemberto Rodriguez covers the Silver Spring region.

Regional Services Directors are well-established and connected within their community. They have relationships with community members and a pulse on what is happening in the region. When something as large and devastating as COVID-19 hits, the regional services directors are often the first to understand the hardship that their residents, businesses and nonprofits experience.

The team has assisted the County to get COVID-19 emergency messages to those who needed government services the most. They have collaborated with multiple departments to ensure that community members had access to COVID-19 testing and safety-net services. They have worked with partners to establish community HUBs and food distribution sites to provide tens of thousands of meals to those most in need.

Luisa, Reemberto, and Cathy have worked to assist businesses and nonprofits agencies to make sure that their organizations were aware of grants and County assistance programs.

HIGH RISERS COMMISSION FOR WOMEN



Executive Director of the Commission for Women Jodi Finkelstein is often is a behind-the-scenes go-getter who makes things happen. She lets other people shine while she does a lot of the support work to make the show go on. Jodi has continually advocated for women and brought awareness to the increased risk of family violence and threats to victims during the stay-at-home order. Working with the Commission for Women, they led a domestic violence awareness and prevention campaign, which provided a strategic outreach effort to get the word out about the availability of services to assist residents experiencing family violence during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

Jodi supports the Commission for Women to promote the 2020 Girl Power Contest and plan the Commission's 100th Anniversary Women's Suffrage event.

Jodi has consistently helped raise awareness about the County's emergency health and safety net services, while asking County agencies to amplify the message that, even in this emergency, there is a place for victims to go where Montgomery County will help.