



LOCAL | A3

## BLESSINGS FOR A CITY IN A HEALTH CRISIS

From back of pickup truck, Ethiopian priest offers prayers of protection on downtown streets



B1 | SPORTS

## REPLACING THE GOAT

Patriots may look for next big thing at quarterback in NFL Draft

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See Page A4

# TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

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# WE ARE THERE WITH YOU

You have been there for us through the toughest of times. We want you to know that your newspaper will be there for you now. #ThereWithYou

As the United States faces the worst public health crisis in a generation, we want you to know we are here for you — and with you.

Whatever happens, whenever it happens, the Telegram & Gazette will be there for you.

We were on the scene when patients of Beaumont Rehabilitation and Skilled Nursing Center were moved to other nursing facilities to make way for recovering coronavirus patients; when the first COVID-19 testing drive-up site started operating at the CVS Pharmacy in Shrewsbury; when stores in the Worcester area opened during special hours for the elderly and most vulnerable; when non-essential businesses

in Central Massachusetts were forced to close their doors; and when the Worcester city manager and his staff have held daily press conferences releasing the latest information on the crisis.

And we'll continue to cover the coronavirus pandemic in Central Massachusetts.

We'll be there to let you know how our community is managing through this crisis — from business to government to the health care system and schools to the drastic impact on individuals and families.

And we'll be there to let you know about the good and extraordinary things happening in the midst of this crisis — the small business owners sewing masks for health

workers, the municipal and non-profit workers attending to the homeless community, the volunteers bringing food to elderly people who cannot leave their homes, the doctors and nurses putting themselves in harm's way to care for the sick. Amid the sadness and anxiety, there are uplifting moments that remind us of the resilience of the human spirit, and we'll be there to document those too.

Gov. Charlie Baker said the coronavirus has created an unprecedented health and economic crisis in our state. And former Lt. Gov. Tim Murray, president and CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber

See WITH YOU, A7

## Non-essential shops aim to survive

Businesses in Worcester hope to be there when it's over

By Jennifer Toland  
Telegram & Gazette Staff

WORCESTER - Sneakerama has been Worcester's go-to footwear store since 1978 and has built a large and loyal customer base, with friendly "sit-and-fit" service, a vast inventory of styles and sizes, and expert shoe recommendations for people with foot issues such as bunions or heel spurs.

On March 19, five days before Gov. Charlie Baker's state order to shut all non-essential businesses went into effect, owner Steve Genatossio decided himself to temporarily close Sneakerama because of coronavirus concerns.

"It was a very difficult decision to make," Genatossio said during a phone interview from his Lake Avenue store. "A lot of my competition was still working, but it's a matter of keeping yourself healthy, keeping your staff healthy and keeping your customers healthy."

Local, family-owned businesses like Sneakerama have long been the fabric of Worcester, and many, especially those deemed non-essential, are feeling the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

"My estimate is business is down 60 to 75%," said Paul Shusas, owner of Holmes Shusas Florists, who had to close his Ararat Street shop but is still accepting phone orders.

The \$2 trillion coronavirus stimulus package includes measures aimed at supporting small businesses.

Genatossio, who is taking phone orders and providing free shipping, said one of his longtime customers called him last week and offered to give him \$200.

"It was like an 'It's a Wonderful Life,' moment," said a deeply appreciative Genatossio, who suggested the customer purchase a gift card instead. "I said, 'Then, when it's all better, you can come back in.' It's going to get better."

Barbershops, hair salons and other spa services are also closed under the non-essential guidelines.

Mocine Salon & Spa, located on Park Avenue, also took preemptive steps by closing March 19.

"Our first concern was the health and well-being of our staff and our customers," owner Lynn Reed said. "Washing hair, doing eyelashes, massaging, you're very close, you're touching, so we made the

See NON-ESSENTIAL, A7



Sneakerama, a Worcester store owned by Steve and Lisa Genatossio, is continuing business via online and over-the-phone orders, since the retailer was deemed non-essential by Gov. Charlie Baker. [T&G STAFF/ASHLEY GREEN]

## Worcester coronavirus cases are on steep upward curve

By Kim Ring  
Telegram & Gazette Staff

WORCESTER - As expected, the number of people testing positive for the coronavirus has continued to rise in the city, with 86 people now having tested positive, City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. said during Sunday's daily press briefing at City Hall.

There were 11 new confirmed cases on Sunday, and the total of 86 is up steeply from 13 a week ago, Augustus pointed out.

"That's more than a 550% increase in the last seven days," he said. "As we have been saying, we expected to see these numbers rise. We expect to see these numbers to continue to rise in the weeks ahead."

But Worcester might have had more overwhelming numbers had there been no shutdowns, social distancing and other necessary, critical changes in day-to-day life, Augustus said.

The goal is to create numbers that are manageable for the health care system, Augustus said.

Mayor Joseph Petty said officials are still predicting a surge in the number of cases will hit around mid-April, and it's important to keep hospital beds free for people who have COVID-19 and other medical needs that require hospitalization.

"We meet with Dr. (Michael) Hirsh (the city's medical director) every day at 4:30. My biggest fear is he comes into the room one day and he says, 'Joe, just like they did in Italy, these certain people won't get the ventilator' because he doesn't have enough," Petty said.

Shelters the city set up for the homeless population had just over 60 people Saturday night, including three who are awaiting the results of COVID-19 tests staying at the shelter at Worcester Technical High School, Augustus said.

Ascension Church on Vernon Street and St. John Church on

See CASES, A7

## Adult-use cannabis shops seek 'essential' status

By Cyrus Moulton  
Telegram & Gazette Staff

UXBRIDGE - On a busy day, Caroline Frankel can see 500 to 700 people come through the door of her adult-use cannabis business.

But Tuesday, Caroline's Cannabis closed, deemed a non-essential business by Gov. Charlie Baker's administration in efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. And Frankel is one of several people interviewed who is bracing for uncertainty in an already uncertain industry.

"Look at how new and fragile this industry is," Frankel, a social equity program participant, said in an interview Friday. She reported she had laid off one of her 10 staff members and the rest of the staff is on a leave of absence. "We work so devastatingly hard to be a part of it,

See POTSHOP, A7



Caroline Frankel, owner of Caroline's Cannabis in Uxbridge, has been forced to close the store during the coronavirus outbreak. The recreational marijuana industry is pushing to be declared an essential business. [T&G STAFF/STEVE LANAVA]