

LOCAL NEWS

Orchard Park senior living facilities await vaccine

Most have scheduled dates for immunizations, but wish it had come sooner

By James Farrell
SUN STAFF REPORTER

Orchard Park nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other senior care facilities are eagerly awaiting the Covid-19 vaccine trickling into their doors and into the arms of their vulnerable senior populations.

As the nationwide effort to distribute vaccines trudges on, some local facilities, like the Fox Run at Orchard Park senior care facility, have already scheduled their first doses of the two-dose vaccines.

“Some residents are really looking forward to it,” said Mary Lou Letina-Land, Fox Run’s director of marketing and sales. “They want to try to get back to normalcy and have their friends and family come in and visit them.”

Other Orchard Park facilities, however, are still waiting to find out their spot in line.

Administrators at local facilities told The Sun last week that their residents and staff are feeling excited for the promise of a vaccine that could finally slow the coronavirus pandemic. In some cases, however, they also reported a tinge of disappointment that vulnerable seniors haven’t been able to get vaccinated sooner.

Those concerns come amid reports that the vaccination effort is moving behind schedule nation-



Sun file photo

Father Baker Manor on Powers Road is set to administer its vaccinations through Walgreens on Saturday.

wide. As of Monday, the Center for Disease Control reported that more than 15 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines had been distributed, with only 4.5 million people receiving their first dose.

That’s lagging well behind the federal government’s initial predictions that 20 million people could be vaccinated by the end of 2020.

While it had a date set, Fox Run was one of the facilities disappointed that its vaccination date hasn’t come sooner, according to officials there.

The facility is a continuing care retirement community that can provide care through all stages of the aging process – from skilled nursing care to assisted living.

Walgreens is expected to administer the first dose of the vaccine to Fox Run’s skilled nursing residents

and about half of the staff that works on a skilled nursing floor on Jan. 15. Those individuals will receive their second doses on Feb. 5. Assisted living residents will likely come next, Letina-Land said, set for vaccinations in the first week of February.

“We wish we could have gotten it sooner, we’re a little disappointed with the Jan. 15 date,” she said. “But we’re waiting patiently and doing what we’re supposed to.”

As of last week, administrators were collecting consent forms from residents’ families. Those forms had not come back yet, but Letina-Land noted that some residents may opt out of being vaccinated.

“I assume we’ll have some residents and their families that don’t want them to get it. They’re afraid of it and it’s their decision and their

right,” she said. “But I assume most people will get it.”

Other nursing homes are getting vaccinated sooner. Catholic Health’s Father Baker Manor on Powers Road is set to administer its vaccinations through Walgreens on Saturday.

The facility is participating with Walgreens through the federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program, according to spokesperson JoAnn Cavanaugh. Employees who wanted the vaccine sooner were able to do so through Catholic Health’s own vaccine program.

The memory care facility Peregrine Senior Living has a “tentative date” for a first round of vaccines on Feb. 1, according to facility administrator Catherine Dunlavy. Second doses will be administered Feb. 22. And a third round of vaccines will

come on March 15 for those who got their first doses on Feb. 22.

“I just wish we could get the vaccinations faster,” Dunlavy told The Sun.

She believed that vaccinating nursing home residents and residents in other long-term care facilities like memory and assisted living facilities is a crucial priority.

The Orchard Brooke Assisted Living facility on Armor Duells Road is still waiting for a date, according to Administrator Holly Deyarmond. She said that residents and staff are ready to get started.

“I think initially there was some apprehension with the vaccine but just with the more information coming out every day, now it’s excitement,” Deyarmond said. “Everybody’s asking when it’s going to be here. The employees have all expressed interest in receiving it, so it’s really a positive thing.”

On Monday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that the state would be stepping in to try to expedite the vaccination process for nursing homes. He pointed out that the state was participating in the federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program.

With state facilitation, Cuomo said it’s possible that all nursing home residents could be vaccinated within two weeks.

“The nursing homes have always been the most vulnerable populations and we want to get that done and we want to get that done quickly,” he said. “The federal program has not worked as quickly as we would have liked.”

Readying to welcome fans back at Bills Stadium

By James Farrell
SUN STAFF REPORTER

Eric Matwijow is a die-hard Bills fan who has been parking cars for Bills games at his private lot, the Hammer Lot, for years.

And as a Bills fan, he’s excited to see his team doing well this year, with a playoff run set to begin against the Colts on Saturday in the NFL’s Wild Card Round.

But he admits that it’s a “weird feeling” watching his team in the pandemic, without the community of fans who frequent his lot or attend the games in person.

“You’ve got that electrical feeling of the Bills doing so good, but you don’t have that emotional feeling of all the fans,” he said. “There’s just something about the communal gathering, people cheering and stuff, pulling all for the one thing and enjoying a good team.”

While it’s a far cry away from a full stadium, Bills fans might be able to regain a little piece of that emotional feeling.

Last week, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that the state would be allowing roughly 6,700 fans into Bills Stadium for the team’s first home playoff game in decades. Bills fans fabled tailgating antics will still be banned, fans will have to wear masks inside the stadium at all time and it’s impossible to get into the game without proof of a negative Covid-19 test.

But is it enough to help generate that emotional, magical playoff environment here in Orchard Park?

“It’s just giving me kind of like a goosebump rush here,” Matwijow said as he pondered the question.

Under the Bills’ rules, fans with tickets to the game will have to get



Arthur’s and Bauer Automotive are two local businesses supporting their beloved Buffalo Bills with signs in their windows.

tested at drive-thru sites set up in the parking lot outside the stadium. They’ll have to pay a \$63 fee for the Covid-19 PCR test and take it days in advance to ensure the results come back in time before kickoff. They’ll need to provide proof of a negative test to get into the stadium. They need to wear a face mask the entire time they’re in attendance, except when drinking or eating.

Orchard Park Councilman Eugene Majchrzak, who’s in charge of Orchard Park’s day-to-day town affairs in the absence of a town supervisor, said he believes that bringing fans into the stands is the kind of thing that can unite the Orchard Park community after a challenging, pandemic-addled year.

“I think it’s good for the psyche of our community and it shows possibly that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel,” he said.

The rules on tailgating have not changed this season – it’s still not allowed, either in the stadium lots or on the private lots like Matwijow’s. Throughout the season, there have been no notable issues with compliance, or people attempting to gather in tailgate lots against orders, according to Police Chief Joseph Wehrfritz.

Wehrfritz said he doesn’t anticipate there being any new, unique challenges to policing the area around the stadium whether there are 6,700 fans or not. But he said he’d make a decision on whether to put additional staff on duty after consulting with the County Sheriff’s office and Bill staff.

While the addition of fans in the stands could bring about some excitement to the football season, it also generated some controversy earlier this week.



Contributed photos

Over the weekend, a couple dozen protestors gathered outside the stadium in support of senior citizens in long-term care facilities who have been unable to have regular visitors since the pandemic started in March.

The protestors were frustrated that the state was able to facilitate testing and create protocols for a football game, but not for reopening nursing homes to visitations.

In a statement to the Buffalo News, Cuomo spokesman Richard Azzopardi noted that hosting an outdoor event in a massive stadium that facilitates social distancing is much easier and less risky than bringing outside visitors inside a nursing home filled with seniors who are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.

There’s also a petition on Change.org, requesting Cuomo be

banned from attending Saturday’s game and asking that fans come out to protest him being there. As of Tuesday, it had more than 23,400 signatures.

Elsewhere, however, Orchard Park residents are getting into the playoff spirit. Local businesses W. G. Arthur and Bauer’s Automotive recently put up signs in their storefronts cheering on the team.

And while Matwijow won’t be parking cars in his own lot this playoff season, he still hopes to be close to the action. He’s been going through the process to work as a car parker inside the stadium lot.

“It’s kind of bittersweet seeing how good the team is and not being able to really enjoy it with a group of people,” Matwijow said. “It’s out of our control, this is a very serious virus.”

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