

Desperate for an end and a new beginning
How residents are coping with COVID-19 amid the holiday season

Derek Futterman | December 28, 2020 | Long Island Herald

Amid a coronavirus pandemic that shows no signs of slowing, Wantagh and Seaford residents were preparing to celebrate the holidays this week. But to many, this holiday season felt different.

“It doesn’t feel right to celebrate right now,” said Celia Carlson, of Seaford. “. . . It’s just a sad situation.”

The Centers for Disease Control has suggested postponing travel plans and celebrating virtually instead. But some residents said they were concerned about what might happen to Covid-19 case counts after the holidays, when it seemed clear that many people were ignoring those suggestions and traveling anyway, as they did on Thanksgiving.

Ken Jacobsen, a wealth manager, part-time contact tracer and the immediate past president of the Seaford Chamber of Commerce, said, “The trend [in new cases] comes from people socializing.” He added that he and his family would continue to “only socialize within our home.”

Some said that no one had the right to tell others how to behave, even in this situation. Asked if people should be celebrating the holidays in large groups, as in years past, Wantagh resident Liz Greco said, “I think that’s their decision, and nobody else should decide for them. Nobody should tell anybody else they cannot be with each other.”

Carlson, a guidance counselor in the New York City school system, said she had “learned very quickly that you can’t change people’s minds” — though, she added, you can educate them. “You have to worry about your own immediate circle, because, unfortunately, a lot of people don’t understand how severe this is, because it’s invisible,” she said. “You can’t control everyone’s behavior, but we’re going to make the best of it.”

“All along, the numbers had been low, so people let their guard down,” Jacobsen said. “If you socialize with three other people, and those three other people have socialized with 10 other people, you’re not just exposing yourself to those people; you’re exposing yourself to 30 people. That’s what people are missing. It’s not just being exposed to the couple of people you’re getting together with. It’s how many people they socialized with.”

The holiday season ushers in a new year, and some shared their hopes with the Herald Citizen. “My hopes and expectations for 2021 are that everybody is able to make their choice as to what they’re doing, and that all the businesses open up completely,” said Greco. “I read [that] the mask is for those who are sick to prevent spreading their germs. I want us to be able to wear a mask if we want and not wear a mask if we don’t want to.”

Jacobsen said he hoped that mitigation strategies such as universal mask-wearing and social distancing, combined with the rollout of two and perhaps more vaccines, will be

enough to end the pandemic by the second half of next year. He added that he wanted to see financially struggling businesses get the help they need.

“I don’t know how many businesses are going to survive going into the new year, especially if the numbers go up and we have to go into a lockdown again,” Jacobsen said. “The help that’s out there is not enough to keep businesses going.”

Carlson said she supported universal mask wearing, and wished “people would understand to watch and educate themselves” on how the virus spreads. She also said she hoped for normalcy next year, adding that she saw “a light at the end of the tunnel.”

“All we can do right now is stay positive and educate others as to what we have to do,” Carlson said. “We have to think of the kids, and the kind of world we want to leave to [them].”