

Nearly year after outbreak, Stafholt receives first vaccine doses

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Nearly a year after Good Samaritan Society – Stafholt experienced a deadly Covid-19 outbreak in its Blaine nursing home, residents and staff rejoiced at the sight of their first vaccinations on January 19.

“We’re moving to the anniversary of March and we remember that month really well,” said Tatiana Koreski, Stafholt’s infection control nurse. “We don’t want to repeat it again.”

The outbreak entered the nursing home on C Street not long after the first confirmed virus cases began to appear in Whatcom County, and by the end of April, had infected 17 residents and six staff members, resulting in one resident’s death, *The Northern Light* previously reported.

For Koreski, the outbreak was symbolized by shutting two heavy doors that the Whatcom County Health Department instructed the nursing home to use to seal off a newly constructed Covid-19 unit. In one way, Koreski felt relieved they had control on the virus that people were scrambling to understand, but in another way, Koreski felt the reality sink in they were living through a pandemic.

“It all comes back to me with all the challenges and trials of living through the outbreak,” she said. “But we pulled through.”

Memories like watching a resident who wasn’t expected to

survive the virus get vaccinated Tuesday brought tears to Koreski and other staff members’ eyes, she said.

The nursing home received the Pfizer vaccine from Walgreens, which is distributing the vaccine under the federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-term Care Program.

Pharmacists started the clinic in mid-morning and finished by mid-afternoon. The providers had to thaw vaccine vials every half hour to ensure they were the right temperature, Koreski said. Stafholt residents went in one by one to receive the vaccination and pharmacists went to residents’ rooms who were unable to go to the vaccination room, she said.

Cayla Bullard, a certified nursing assistant at Stafholt, described the vaccinations as exciting. Over the past 10 months, Bullard said she’s strengthened her relationship with residents, who are unable to meet inside with family and friends, with activities like making cards. She looks forward to when they can be reunited with loved ones.

Stafholt resident Jerry Bladies, 84, said his vaccination went well and was only required to answer a few questions before he received the vaccine in his arm.

“I thought it was a necessary thing to do to help myself and the people around me because you always wear your mask but sometimes you forget to do it,”

Bladies said.

Bladies said he’s passed his pandemic days by talking to a staff member who will sit in a lawn chair six feet outside his bedroom window, but longs for going on walks with his wife, Grace, and visiting the Blaine Food Bank, where he said he was manager for 17 years.

The second dose is set for Tuesday, February 9, and a third clinic for those who couldn’t attend the first clinic is set for March. Koreski said the nursing home will follow the same Covid-19 guidelines, including not allowing friends and family into the facility, until more of the general public is vaccinated.

Koreski said she’ll never forget receiving a letter from the health department officially clearing the nursing home as Covid-19 free



▲ Stafholt infection control nurse Tatiana Koreski getting vaccinated. Photo courtesy Tatiana Koreski

in late May, and the freedom of letting residents out of the heavy double doors. No resident has had Covid-19 after the outbreak.

“As a country we promised to protect our vulnerable,” Koreski said. “Finally, we are, by bringing them the vaccine.”



▲ Stafholt resident Catherine Wilson getting vaccinated. Photo courtesy Tatiana Koreski

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