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San Francisco Chronicle

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

U.S. workforce in free fall

Record 3.28 million file first-time unemployment claims

By Carolyn Said and Roland Li

In a stunning confirmation of how quickly the coronavirus pandemic has ravaged the U.S. economy, a record 3.28 million Americans filed for first-time unemployment last week, according to the Labor Department.

"This is Mach-3 speed," said Michael Bernick, former head of California's Employment Development Department and now a lawyer at Duane Morris

in San Francisco. "It is unprecedented."

The signs on shuttered stores and restaurants, the GoFundMe campaigns for laid-off workers and the pleas on social media tell the story of the newly jobless in the Bay Area, even though detailed local figures are not due out until later.

Initial jobless claims were more than quadruple any other week since record-keeping started in 1967, and a sharp increase from the prior week's 282,000 claims. The previous

record was 695,000 claims in October 1982.

"We may well be in a recession," said Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell on NBC's "Today Show." However, he added a note of optimism: "At a certain point, we will get the virus under control and confidence will return."

If anything, the numbers understate the situation, experts said. Many laid-off people haven't yet filed for unemployment because they couldn't get

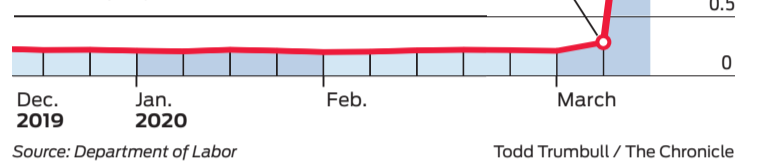
Jobless continues on A10

Millions out of work

Setting a dismal record, nearly 3.3 million people filed new unemployment claims last week, a sharp increase from the previous week, and more than quadruple any other week since record-keeping began in 1967.

U.S. initial unemployment claims

Seasonally adjusted



Source: Department of Labor

Todd Trumbull / The Chronicle



Stephen Lam / Special to The Chronicle

Amir, last name withheld, holds a photo of his late mother, Azar Ahrabi, Santa Clara County's first community infection case.

Testing ramps up as cases increase

26% of people at Hayward site turn up positive

By Mallory Moench

More than a quarter of the people tested for coronavirus at a Hayward site that opened this week turned up positive, city officials said Thursday — even as confirmed cases climbed in the Bay Area, topping 1,400, with at least 32 deaths.

At the city-run site, 26% — 54 out of 207 tested Monday, its first day — tested positive, as new sites open daily in the Bay Area and confirmed cases of the illness caused by the coronavirus rises.

Increased testing reveals more cases. But providers are still having trouble keeping up with the need.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said this week the state needs more tests, "smarter and more targeted testing, and more community surveillance," noting that the state's testing capacity is still not good enough.

A new testing site that opened last Friday in Daly City, for example, will only be open for an hour a day on weekdays — from 3 to 4 p.m. — and only for patients of North East Medical Services who have symptoms and made an appointment. The site, at 211 Eastmoor Ave., is run by that medical group. Another site, at 1870 Lundy Ave. in San Jose, also has limited hours weekdays from 2 to 3 p.m. The health care provider plans to add some locations in San Francisco and expand hours in the future.

"To combat this crisis, we will need to expand testing capacity such as this rapidly," San Mateo County Supervisor David Canepa said, adding that the new Daly City site "will save lives."

On Wednesday, UCSF **Testing continues on A9**

Woman first in Bay Area to be killed by COVID-19

South Bay mother, 68, seemed least likely to get the disease, then died quickly

By Anna Bauman

The illness struck "out of the blue."

That's how Azar Ahrabi's son, Amir, described what happened to his mother. Last month, the 68-year-old woman had been living a simple but satisfying life in Santa Clara County: running errands, cooking and caring for her own elderly mother and befriending people in the grocery store

with her sweet smile.

But one week after going to the doctor with a cough and fever, Ahrabi's illness made headlines and triggered public health alarm: She was the first person in Santa Clara County to contract the new coronavirus with no known source of infection. Eleven days later, on March 9, Ahrabi died in a hospital bed without her family by her side.

She became the first person

in the Bay Area to succumb to COVID-19 at a time when people in the region were just beginning to grasp the seriousness of the situation: Soon it was declared a pandemic, prompting orders for people to stay 6 feet apart and shuttering schools, restaurants and parks.

"It really came as an extreme shock to everybody," said Amir, the first in his family to learn of his mother's death. "I said, 'Oh

Victim continues on A10

'All hands on deck' at firm making sanitizer



Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle

EO Products started retailing its body and hair care lines at Whole Foods and now has a cheaper Everyone line.

Epidemic transforms San Rafael creator of organic soap, shampoo

By Lizzie Johnson

On a late January afternoon, as Tom Feegel scrolled through sales figures on his laptop, the businessman realized that something was amiss.

This was weeks before the novel coronavirus began dominating headlines in the United States, before the Bay Area was put on lockdown, before "social distancing" entered the public lexicon. On this ordinary Saturday, the president of EO Products was still living in

a familiar world.

The figures on his screen, though, indicated something else. The company's hand sanitizer sales were skyrocketing. "A super spike," as Feegel remembered it.

Hand sanitizer wasn't the main product of the 150-employee company. EO Products — short for "Essential Oils" — dealt in niche organic body and hair care, first retailing at Whole Foods before hitting the shelves of Target and Walmart. **Sanitizer continues on A8**

Weather
Partly sunny.
Highs: 54-64.
Lows: 42-50.
D4

