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SATURDAY, MARCH 20, 2021 | MYCENTRALJERSEY.COM

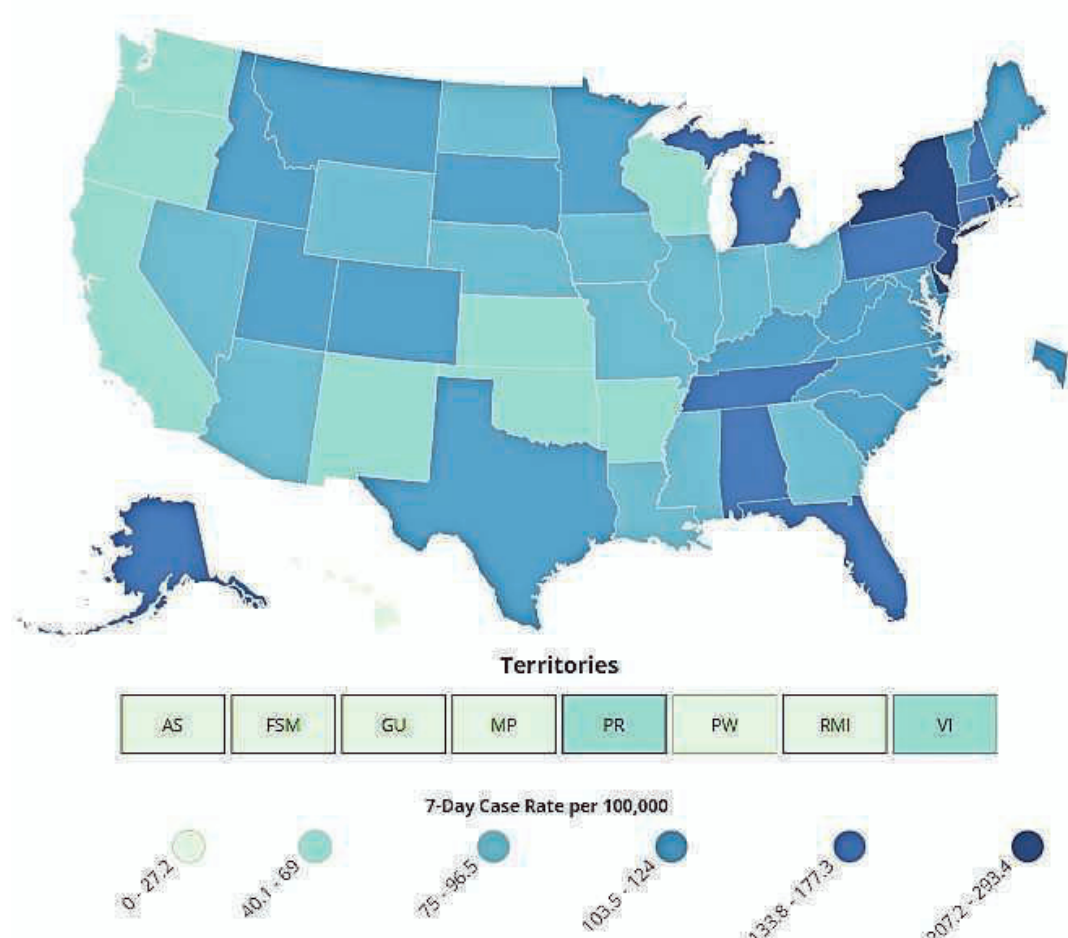
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COVID-19

View: Cases (selected) | **Time period:** Last 7 Days (selected) | **Metric:** Count (selected) | Rate per 100,000

This shows the number of COVID-19 cases for every 100,000 people over the last 7 days, allowing you to compare areas with different population sizes.

US COVID-19 7-Day Case Rate per 100,000, by State/Territory



The CDC's map showing 7-day COVID-19 case rate by state on March 19, 2021. The dark blue shows states with the highest rate. New Jersey was leading the U.S. with 293.4 followed by New York City with 274. CDC

NJ has the nation's highest per capita rate of new cases

Will expected vaccine windfall help?

Scott Fallon
NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

COVID-19 has continued to spread across New Jersey at such a high rate that the Garden State now has an unwanted distinction — it leads the U.S. in new cases per capita over the past week.

Gov. Phil Murphy said Friday the case rate and other key pandemic metrics are "uncomfortably too high."

His administration is hoping to bring that number down with an "exponential" increase in vaccines that are expected to be allotted to New Jersey starting in the next few weeks.

After seeing significant drops in January and February, major COVID-19 metrics like hospitalizations and intensive care admissions have plateaued in March despite a ramp-up in vaccinations.

But the state's rate of 293 new cases per 100,000 is more than double the national average of 113, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We've got to watch this like a hawk to make sure this does not break out and up from that range," Murphy said this week.

New Jersey ranked ninth in COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 over the past week at 3.1, according to the CDC. The national average is 2.2.

The rise in cases comes as Murphy begins to slowly lift restrictions, the most significant occurring Friday when restaurants, gyms, salons and other businesses were allowed to expand to

See **CASES**, Page 7A

Carteret mom attacked by dogs faces surgeries in recovery

Father calls for justice in 3-year-old son's killing

Suzanne Russell
Central Jersey Home News Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

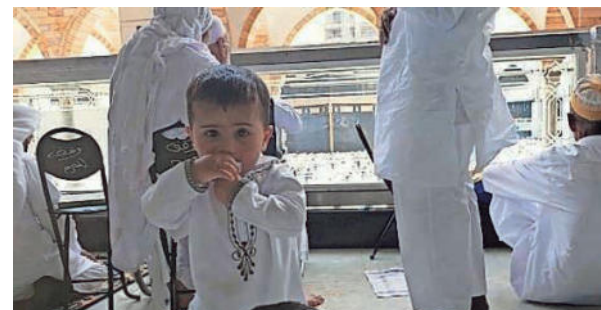
CARTERET - As two neighbor's pit bull dogs forced their way into her Laurel Street backyard on Tuesday afternoon, 3-year-old Aziz Ahmed's mother first thought was to protect her children.

She screamed for her two older sons to run into the house and then used her body to try to shield the toddler from harm, according to a manager at the father's company who declined to release the mother's name.

Her maternal instincts saved her two older children, one of whom called police, but both she and Aziz were so viciously attacked that the family's youngest child died and she was critically injured.

Funeral services were held Thursday for Aziz and his mother faces a long road of recovery and will need more surgeries, according to Barry Postrygacz, Coney Island Auto Parts sales manager and executive which is the company where the father, Tanveer Ahmed, works.

See **ATTACK**, Page 7A



Aziz Ahmed -COURTESY OF THE AHMED FAMILY

NJ arrests after Capitol riot shine light on Arab support for Trump

Hannan Adely
NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

Three people from New Jersey arrested in connection with the U.S. Capitol riot on Jan. 6 — including two men charged Sunday with assaulting fallen Officer Brian Sicknick — are Arab Americans of Lebanese heritage.

Their arrests shine a light on an overlooked segment of the Arab American population that has supported former President Donald Trump, whose followers stormed the Capitol in a deadly attempt to overturn his defeat in the November election.

Arab Americans may hold conservative views on issues such as taxes, abortion and family structure, or may be driven by foreign policy issues tied to their native country. And like some Americans, they may have gotten swept up in the Trump fervor and misinformation that led some supporters to falsely claim the election was stolen.

That was apparently enough to win over the three New Jerseyans despite years of Trump's rhetoric denounced by critics as anti-immigrant and anti-

See **ARRESTS**, Page 2A

Buy Nothing, Freecycle groups' popularity growing

Cheryl Makin
MyCentralJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

It is said that nothing in life is free, but when it comes to the "Freecycling" and "Buy Nothing" pages on social media, free is all that and more.

In the past year, these types of groups have grown in popularity. Stuck in their homes, people started decluttering and sprucing up, offering their extra or unneeded items to others. Dedicated to turning surplus into a coveted item for someone else, the groups also succeeded in creating communities among members and sending less to the landfill.

The sites also manage to help make memories.

A heartfelt exchange on the "Freecycling, East Brunswick area, NJ" site, recently renamed "Freecycling Central New Jersey," involved Liz Pepin of Sayreville, who was looking for a toy telephone.

She wanted to recreate a photograph from her own childhood with her twin daughters. She still had the dress her late grandmother made for her, but no toy phone. After an ISO ("In Search Of") post, another member offered a pink phone, which Pepin borrowed. She shared the end result, thanking the group for their "generosity and support."

"This picture is extremely important to me," Pepin said. "I love this community so much."

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USA TODAY

Closing in on normal: US disease specialists say in latest virus guidelines that students can sit closer. **3A**

Political Stile

Local NJ Republican leaders eagerly grab stimulus cash those in Congress opposed. **4A**

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Freecycle

Continued from Page 1A

More to the giving than receiving

Liti Haramaty began the "Freecycling, East Brunswick area, NJ" on Facebook in 2015 as an offshoot of her involvement with the township's Environmental Commission (EBEC). The group had hosted freecycling events since 2011 and Haramaty, who co-founded Friends of the EBEC and serves as the group's vice president, saw a way to increase the concept. The page would continue keeping items out of the landfill by "giving them a new home and a new life," Haramaty said.

As the original East Brunswick freecycling expanded recently, a second page, "Freecycle East Brunswick Local," was created for those who wish to keep their exchanges closer to home.

Freecycling and its similar counterpart, "Buy Nothing," is a free exchange of items. Environmentally and socially responsible, it is a way of giving items no longer needed and/or getting items that are desired. ISO posts are allowed if someone is seeking something specific.

Once an exchange is decided upon, pick-ups or drop-offs have typically been made on driveways or porches in order to ensure safety and social distancing. Several towns also established safe exchange zones in public spaces.

During the pandemic, membership — and friendship — on the freecycling page blossomed. With lockdowns and limitations, people cleaned out their homes, offering up their "treasures" to others. Some wanted to redecorate or refresh their homes, while others sought items for those in need.

"It's been great," Haramaty said. "In the last year, we have doubled in size. Every time I look at it, I am thrilled. There are so many things not going into the landfill and being re-used."

With more than 4,500 freecyclers, the group is a community whose main rule is to "be kind," co-administrator Laurel Van Leer said. Some givers prefer their items to go to "someone in need," while others "just want it out of the house as fast as possible" and "moms" on the group are often the biggest "givers and takers," she added.

A retired journalist who penned an environmental column matching people with recycled goods, Van Leer found freecycling a natural fit. Her personal freecycling wants are typically craft or project-related items for the local Girl Scouts or stuffed toys for her dog who loves to shred them. Lately, she has been more of a "giver" as she tries to clean out her house.

"When people started to be stuck at home is when it really started to take off," Van Leer said. "But, I am surprised that it became so much fun."

Creating community

Members Beth Gilbert Kalt and Christine Shenouda are two who spice it up with enticing, funny and more personal posts, Van Leer said. Others joined in, mimicking their style. Real relationships were formed over the items posted.



"Buy Nothing Somerville, NJ" was founded on Facebook by administrator and new mother Edal Garstad soon after she moved to the borough. An offshoot of the international "Buy Nothing Project" organization, the community group offer members a way "to give and receive, share, lend and express gratitude." Garstad was able to be gifted the sewing machine after she posted an ask for one.

~COURTESY OF EDEL GARSTAD

A retired graphic designer and reformed "avid shopper," Kalt would label her posts with titles such as "Dog Lovers Delight" or "It's a Guy's Weekend" depending on what she was giving away. She posted so much and so often that others started to copy her style and also make their posts more friendly.

"I think I opened it up for more feel-good posts and personalization," she said. "I'm a comedic person in real life, so I felt that if we could lighten the atmosphere up on Freecycle it would actually make people feel better, especially during this time. So, I tried to get the group to speak to each other more, so it wasn't so cut and dry."

Kalt said she also "personally became friends" with many of the Freecycling members.

She added that a group of freecyclers got "together" to help a young woman plan her DIY wedding after noticing her post about seeking certain items.

"We all looked to find things to help make the most special day in her life come to be without her having to spend any money. So she could spend her money on what she really needed it for," Kalt said. "Personally, I felt like her local 'mom.'"

The Freecycle page has become an outlet for her, especially during this

stressful pandemic crisis.

"Everyone has put down their guard and we don't just think of 'I need this' or 'I need that,'" she said. "We all become neighbors and want to offer to them more than what they asked for. You can see the friendships brewing and growing through the posts."

Kalt did find a mustard yellow silverware set just like her grandmother had when she was a child. Kalt was gifted the silverware after commenting on the post and sharing her memory.

"It's so heartwarming how people will go out of their way to make another person happy," she said. "It's not something you may need to have, but it brings back a special memory or time."

Helping the future of the planet

"Buy Nothing Somerville, NJ" was founded on Facebook by administrator Edal Garstad soon after she moved to the borough.

An offshoot of the international "Buy Nothing Project" organization, the community group offer members a way "to give and receive, share, lend and express gratitude." According to the "Buy Nothing" motto, the "true wealth is the web of connections formed between people who are real-life neighbors."

According to Garstad, "Buy Nothing" allows members to "give where you live." As there wasn't anything like that for Somerville, she signed up with the organization, took their training and started the group in March 2020, right before the pandemic became "official."

"It's a very young group," she said, noting that it currently has 280 members. "But, this is what builds community. In this group there is no buying or selling, no trades or bartering, no soliciting for cash. We're an adult-only, hyper-local gift economy."

On "Buy Nothing" pages, it is also encouraged that givers and receivers share a bit about themselves to create community and help posters make decisions. Garstad said the Somerville-only group is becoming more active as members become more aware of it and COVID-19 restrictions ease.

"It's not necessarily first come, first serve," Garstad said. "We try to make connections and then pick somebody that you want to gift the items to, based on maybe who you think needed it the most or based on who wrote the funniest response. That helps build community. But it's hard when we are not able to get together or even talk in person much with the people whom we are dropping off or picking up. I hope it will work itself into being more social or interactive once things get safer."

The "Buy Nothing" group was a big help personally for Garstad, a new mother of a now one-year-old daughter.

"We have hardly bought any clothes or books for her," Garstad said. "People are giving us their old stuff that they don't need anymore. There are so many needs that can be fulfilled with what the community already has if we just share our resources better."

There are many Freecycling groups in local communities and more "Buy Nothing" groups have been created recently. Check on social media or buynothingproject.org to find one in your area.

Email: cmakin@gannettnj.com

Investigation requested into Iowa reporter's arrest

William Morris
Des Moines Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Des Moines Register is asking the Des Moines Police Department to investigate the circumstances surrounding the 2020 arrest of its reporter Andrea Sahouri.

In a letter sent Tuesday to the department's Office of Professional Standards, executive editor Carol Hunter asked for a probe into the actions of officer Luke Wilson, who pepper-sprayed and arrested Sahouri as she covered a racial justice protest May 31 near Merle Hay Mall. Sahouri was charged with failure to disperse and interference with official acts, and was acquitted March 10 after a three-day jury trial.

Hunter asked the department to investigate three things:

- Whether pepper-spraying Sahouri in the face and upper arm constituted an assault and was an excessive use of force.

- Whether her arrest was unlawful and a civil rights violation.

- Whether Wilson was disciplined in any way for violating body camera policy.

In court last week, Wilson testified that he failed to turn on his body camera when he arrived on the scene. He also failed to notify a supervisor at the end of his shift that his camera had not recorded the arrest. The IT department could have recovered the lost footage, court testimony revealed.

Des Moines police spokesperson Sgt. Paul Parizek said Tuesday the department does not comment on ongoing internal reviews.

While covering an at-times chaotic protest attended by hundreds of people,

Sahouri testified that she and another Register reporter had withdrawn from officers deploying tear gas near the mall to the parking lot of the nearby Verizon store.

Wilson, part of a unit deployed to clear the area of protesters who were throwing objects at officers, was the first to round the corner of the building and encounter Sahouri.

He said at trial he arrested Sahouri for failing to follow a dispersal order from police. He also claimed that Sahouri and her then-boyfriend tried to pull away from him as he detained her. Both denied that accusation while testifying in their defense.

Sahouri said she had identified herself as a reporter several times during her arrest, and video footage played in court corroborated that.

"I put up my hands and said, 'I'm press, I'm press,' and he grabbed me and pepper-sprayed me and told me, 'that's not what I asked,'" she testified last week.

The Register's other reporter, Katie Akin, who was with Sahouri that night was not arrested.

Tuesday's complaint marks the second time the Register has requested the Des Moines Police Department review an incident involving one of its reporters.

On June 1, one day after Sahouri's arrest, Akin was covering a protest near the Iowa Capitol when officers began deploying tear gas and flashbangs to disperse the crowd. Akin can be heard on video telling officers she is leaving, while identifying herself as a reporter 17 times in about 30 seconds. An officer jogged ahead of her to pepper-spray her in the right eye and ear.

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