On the front lines in Denver
Food deliveries to first responders

By CHRIS LEPPEK
IJN Associate Editor

Many have discovered in the past few weeks that watching the news might best be something taken in small measures. Whether delivered via the internet, the television or in print, the news these days is almost uniformly a chorus of despair and fear — death tolls climbing, infection rates soaring, ventilators and protective equipment insufficient, first responders overworked and hyper-vulnerable to the coronavirus themselves.

Like so many others, Nathan Schweid, a youthful member of the Denver community, found himself vulnerable to the strange addictions — and not necessarily good — habit of indulging in too much bad news. "I was finding myself becoming obsessed with the news," he told the INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS last week, adding that he found the saturation coverage overwhelming and discouraging.

Rather than surrender to hopelessness and woe, he decided to do something.

"I eventually saw that there was an opportunity to help," he says. "I realized that this would be the perfect outlet for me to spend my time and energy."

In less than a week, he realized that it was succeeding beyond his wildest dreams.

Schweid's idea is beautiful in its direct simplicity. Realizing the incredibly hard work that medical first responders — paramedics, nurses, doctors — are doing to keep up with ever-increasing numbers of coronavirus patients, not to mention the risk of exposure they face daily, he decided to do something to bring a touch of comfort and pleasure to their arduous and perilous days.

"Give them something to eat!"

On March 27, he set up a non-fee food delivery service, Food Deliveries to the Front Lines, initiated by Denverite Nathan Schweid.

"When eight-day-old Ezra Samuel Knaster was welcomed into the covenant with his bris mohel, there were only four people in the room, including Ezra. Ezra’s virtual bris — via Zoom — was another sign of the strange times of social distancing and quarantine. It was also a statement that no matter the obstacles, nothing can stop some revered rituals of Jewish life.

Ezra’s parents Melanie and Brandon knew that they were going to have a boy before he was born — March 26, so they planned on having a bris on his eighth day of life — health permitting — with all the usual elements of such a celebration. That meant a large guest list, honors for family members and, of course, food.

By mid-March, the COVID-19 pandemic started changing life as we knew it in Colorado and elsewhere, with the greatest concern for medical first responders — paramedics, nurses, respiratory therapists, team leaders and a host of others. "They are our unsung heroes," he says repeatedly.

Pre-COVID-19, Kaye woke up to "excited and energized to welcome my multiple roles and the opportunity to touch and interact with patients, family and staff.

Every night he returned to the arms of his family with a sense of fulfillment.

Over the past couple of months, the mounting awareness of America’s vulnerability to COVID-19 swept through the hospital, which monitored conditions in Colorado and the US, and adopted CDC precautions as things worsened over the last months.

Rep. Rose in National Guard

NEW YORK (JTA) — New York Rep. Max Rose has deployed with the National Guard to help set up field hospitals in the city, among the hardest hit in the nation by the coronavirus pandemic.

Rose, a freshman Democrat representing Staten Island and parts of southern Brooklyn, is the first member of Congress to serve in the military during the crisis.

He’s a captain in the Army National Guard.
As I watch the genuine care, compassion and love that the medical professionals, including doctors, nurses and respiratory therapists, bestow upon their patients, my heart is filled with gratitude. The touch is vitally important. It's not just for comfort, but for the healing and well-being of our patients. The medical professionals are doing their part, and I am truly grateful for their dedication.

The immediate physical presence of a family member is my absolute preference, but we are fortunate to have tools such as cell phones and other resources.

If a patient is in the COVID-19 ICU, Kaye stands outside the glass door and speaks to the patient's phone in a meaningful way. He also has tools such as cell phones and tablets to communicate with patients in isolation.

Kaye is a man of inviolate faith, and in these most difficult of circumstances, I feel G-d is present in each and every one of our patient's rooms. "G-d is present in each and every one of our patient's rooms," he says. "And the physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists and health workers are the hands of G-d."

A muffled sound escapes his cell phone. "Yes, my voice is breaking," he says. "And I hope it's the same with you."

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Aware that the interview is about to wrap up, Kaye says he wants to share a story. "I mean, all of this is a story," he qualifies. "But what follows weaves it all together."

One of the physicians at Rose stopped Kaye in a busy hallway and asked whether the chaplain could locate tefillin for an intubated Jewish patient in the COVID-19 ICU. "I was able to communicate real-time with the Rocky Mountain Rabbinical Council and asked whether any of the rabbis had extra tefillin that, due to health and safety concerns, would never be returned to them," he says. "Draver's rabinate quickly responded with countless offers of tefillin."

"We don't give enough of a shout-out to our garbage collectors and grocery store personnel. Truckers are literally keeping this virus at bay. The truckers are sacrificing their lives laboring to keep the US and its citizens afloat amid this relentless viral pandemic. Countless individuals are working and volunteering to step up and provide for us, like people doing essential services," he said.