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In today's paper **SPORTS:** Wolfpack's Khalid Martin working hard to return from scary football injury. 1B

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The News & Observer

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ANALYSIS

COVID-19 toll heavy among Black, Latino essential workers

BY GAVIN OFF, AMES ALEXANDER AND AARON SANCHEZ-GUERRA goff@charlotteobserver.com

For Rigoberto Cabrera Lopez and his family, working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't an option.

All labored in close quarters in meat processing plants east of Fayetteville, where coronavirus outbreaks began to pop up early

last year. Cabrera Lopez continued to chop pork, though, even in late April 2020 after a coworker fell ill with what appeared to be COVID-19, his wife, Tomasa Cabrera, said.

Cabrera Lopez died on May 5, within a week of getting sick. He was 48. "I didn't think that this would happen, since most people get sick, and not to the point of dying, like my husband did," Cabrera told a reporter in Spanish. "I thought he would recover, but he didn't."

Cabrera Lopez was an indigenous Guatemalan who loved to fish, crack jokes and spend time outdoors. He was among COVID-19's first victims in North Carolina.

By year's end, thousands more would die, many of them lower-income Black and Latino workers whose jobs prevented them from staying home or even protecting themselves at work.

According to the state's 2020 mortality file — a dataset built from official death certificates — more than 8,300 North Carolinians died of COVID-19 last year.

For this story, McClatchy North Carolina analyzed the death records of working-age coronavirus victims — those between 19 and 65. Reporters reviewed the occupations and industries of those workers — about 1,100 records in all.

A picture emerged. Like Cabrera Lopez, those who died often had low-paying jobs in essential industries, such as food processing, food service, health care, construction and

SEE WORKERS, 16A



Erin Smith, family nurse practitioner with the Johnston County Public Health Department, talks with Briona Davis after she received a COVID-19 vaccine shot during a pop up vaccine clinic in the Smithfield Housing Authority's subdivision of Woodall Heights in Smithfield last Tuesday. With Davis is her daughter, Rayona Jones.

To reduce vaccine barriers, health workers go knocking

BY TYLER DUKES mtd@charlotteobserver.com

SMITHFIELD, N.C.

The knock on Josie Hines' door came just after 9 a.m. Tuesday.

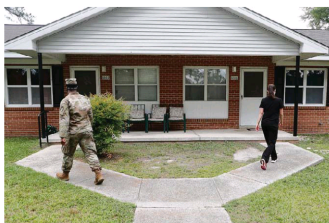
On the front stoop of her Smithfield home, a trio of National Guard troops flanked a petite woman with a clipboard, her pink floral top stark against the camo uniforms at her back.

Hines was expecting them. About two weeks ago, a similar crew arrived on her doorstep offering COVID-19 vaccines in Woodall Heights, a neighborhood of public housing off Interstate 95. Hines and Reginald Archibald, who she lives with, accepted. So did their neighbor across the street.

"We'll be down here whenever you're ready, okay?" Mary Banks, from the Johnston County Health Department, told Hines through the screen door, gesturing to a white canopy tent popped up one door down on a grassy lawn.

Hines emerged a few minutes later in a T-shirt, face mask and

SEE VACCINE, 15A



Erin Smith, right, of the Johnston County Public Health Department and Spc. Stephen Williams with the NC Army National Guard go door to door in the Smithfield Housing Authority's subdivision of Woodall Heights during a vaccine clinic last week. They were asking those at home if they wanted to get a COVID-19 vaccine shot.

hair cap, pushing Archibald in a wheelchair, lower legs bound tightly in flesh-colored bandages. Around their necks hung lanyards displaying their vaccination cards behind windows of protective plastic.

This is what the latest front in

neighborhoods, workplaces, retail stores and churches. The state is pairing these efforts with financial incentives like a new lottery Gov. Cooper announced Thursday and more modest \$25 gift cards to vaccine recipients and their drivers in some pilot counties.

To be successful, leaders of the vaccination effort must reach people living in the least wealthy areas across the state, a News & Observer analysis makes clear. A mix of state and federal data show unvaccinated residents are concentrated in places across the state where households earn the least.

That means that even if the state — as a whole — is more than 50% vaccinated, most North Carolina residents live in neighborhoods that are not.

And the reasons for that, health officials say, are complicated.

"If I have other pressing priorities because I am living at the lower end of the income scale and I'm managing to make ends meet, it's hard for

SEE VACCINE, 15A

City leaders, developers interested in former NC DMV offices in SE Raleigh

BY RICHARD STRADLING rstradling@newsobserver.com

RALEIGH

For more than 60 years, the central office of the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles has been a source of jobs and stability at the corner of Tarboro Street and New Bern Avenue east of downtown Raleigh.

Now that the last DMV employees have moved out, attention has turned to what will

become of nearly six acres of state property in the heart of Raleigh's largest African-American community.

Private developers and city leaders have already reached out to the N.C. Department of Transportation to express interest in the property, said NCDOT Secretary Eric Boyette. The department hasn't decided what it wants to do with the site, Boyette said.

"We're just going to weigh our options and see what's

best," he said.

It's unlikely that another state agency will move in. DMV was forced to leave its longtime home because the state determined that asbestos and fire safety problems in the older and larger of the two buildings on the site were too expensive to fix. The agency's headquarters moved to Rocky Mount last fall, and the local license plate office shifted 4 miles east to a new

SEE DMV OFFICES, 2A



The former North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles headquarters sits empty at the intersection Tarboro Street and New Bern Avenue east of downtown Raleigh on Friday. After the headquarters was moved to Rocky Mount last fall, private developers and city leaders have expressed interest in the property.

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