


MAUREEN CALLAHAN

OPINION

‘We should blow up the bridges’ — coronavirus leads to class warfare in Hamptons

By Maureen Callahan

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The emergency room entrance at Stony Brook Southampton Hospital.

Doug Kuntz

It’s all-out class warfare in the Hamptons.

The year-round residents, the locals who serve and clean and landscape for the super-rich in the summertime — and put up with all manner of entitlement and terrible behavior in exchange for good money — are silent no more.

“There’s not a vegetable to be found in this town right now,” says one resident of Springs, a working-class pocket of East Hampton. “It’s these elitist people who think they don’t have to follow the rules.”

It’s not just the drastic food shortage out here. Every aspect of life, most crucially medical care, is under strain from the **sudden influx of rich Manhattanites panic-fleeing**, bringing along their disdain and disregard for the little people — and in some cases, knowingly bringing coronavirus.

The Springs resident says her friend, a nurse out here, reported that a wealthy Manhattan woman who tested positive called tiny Southampton Hospital to say she was on her way and needed treatment.

The woman was told to stay in Manhattan.

Instead, she allegedly got on public transportation, telling no one of her condition. Then she showed up at Southampton Hospital, demanding admittance.

“Someone else took a private jet to East Hampton and did not tell anybody ’til he landed,” the resident says. “That’s the most horrendous aspect. The virus is already here, and we don’t have any medical resources.”

“We’re at the end of Long Island, the tip, and waves of people are bringing this s–t,” says lifelong Montauker James Katsipis. “We should blow up the bridges. Don’t let them in.”

It began one week ago. First came the social media posts, the rich showing off their fleets of SUVs — three to a family sometimes — with fresh and canned food bought in the city, **announcing they were headed to their second homes out east**, where they immediately ravaged every supermarket and stripped the shelves bare.

Then they hit P.C. Richard & Son in Southampton to rush-order extra freezers to hoard all that food — 700 orders last weekend alone. When one customer was asked what size freezer she wanted, she said, “I don’t care. It just needs to be big enough that I can hide in it.”

That makes no sense, but nothing out here has made sense recently.

Here’s something that never gets mentioned or seen in coverage of the Hamptons, whether it’s the news or gossip columns or **“Sex and the City” reruns**: There are actually poor people who live here. There are three trailer parks (one, of course, is already going luxury). There are food pantries for the needy, and that includes schoolkids.

Normally, the haves and the have-nots converge only in summer, and everyone plays their parts. No more.

“A big majority [of the rich] are truly disrespectful, and in my opinion don’t deserve to enjoy Montauk,” says local fisherman Chris Albronda, 33. He wasn’t shocked by the infected woman who deliberately came out here, even after she was told not to.

“That small act reflects a lot of what we deal with in the summer,” he says. “Selfish. Disrespectful. Absolutely horrifying.”

“I’ve seen breathtaking acts of selfishness,” says lifelong East Hamptonite Jason LaGarenne, 42. “I saw one guy walk out [of a grocery store] with a cart full of carrots. Just carrots. Another cart was full of bottles of water and orange anti-microbial dish soap. If you’re a ridiculous person in general, I guess your ridiculousness is amplified by something like this.”



Many stores in the Hamptons are out of paper products, meat, eggs, bread and cheese.

Doug Kuntz

Doubly so if you're greedy and self-centered. It amazes locals how little the wealthy have truly taken notice of their existence, that it hasn't occurred to them that they, with limitless resources, will never go hungry, not even in a pandemic.

"We went into the Amagansett IGA yesterday," says local realtor Romaine Gordon. "There must have been two frozen pizzas left. I've never seen anything like this."

The offseason, October through June, is sparsely populated and can be very isolating. During that time, local grocers only stock food and supplies for a severely reduced population. There is no FreshDirect, no Whole Foods, no door-to-door food delivery.

Most year-rounders don't have the ability to drop, as The Post reported, **\$8,000 in one shot at gourmet grocery Citarella**, or import hundreds of pounds of meat as another overlord just did, then stash their hoard in the extra brand-new freezers they just bought.

This is the kind of place where a wealthy homeowner rents out his house in the summer and tells his cleaning staff, at the end of the season, to throw out all the perfectly good, sealed, unopened food and beverages in all three of his refrigerators — true story.

"It's horrible," says Gordon. "Think of all the older people who have to wait for their Social Security checks or food stamps. Then they get the courage to go, and there's nothing to buy. Every person out here doesn't have the luxury of laying down their debit card whenever they choose. I saw old people at King Kullen shell-shocked with their empty baskets. These poor people — they're literally risking their lives to go to the grocery store, and you go home with what? It's really upsetting."

And after the rich panic-fleers bought all the available food, they did not hunker down at home. Instead, they went out partying.

"The biggest problem — what really gets me going — is that they think because they're all the way out [here], they're safe," says Katsipis. "But some of those people are sick, and they're going out to bars and acting like they're on vacation. What do these city people think — we have some imaginary, magical bubble?"

As of last weekend, SoulCycle and Flywheel were packed, as were bars, restaurants, clothing stores and coffee shops. As of Monday, "there was a line out the door at [East Hampton restaurant] Mary's and Starbucks," says the Springs resident. "If you're going to make such a hoopla over leaving the city and hoarding your food, why not stay in your million-dollar mansion on the waterfront? Don't go to Starbucks! I'm sure you have a coffeemaker."

Last weekend, Albronda says, "there were a couple of restaurants so overcrowded that the police had to come and thin them out. No one's taking this as seriously as they should be. They're just being selfish. If this disease spreads out here, that will be why."

And a fair amount of these panic-fleers don't own homes out here. "We started early," says East Hampton realtor Dawn Neway, who works with her sister Diana. "We have a lot of high-end clients, and we noticed when the private schools were closing, before the panic, they weren't going to travel. They were canceling trips to Aspen for spring break. We had one client call, budget range from \$400,000 to \$1 million, year-round, starting now. I've never seen anything like this."

Gordon has had a similar experience. Her call volume really picked up last weekend. "It was a frenzy, non-stop, Friday-Saturday-Sunday, early morning to late night," she says. Gordon says every call went like this:

"Do you have anything in a few hours?"

"Tonight?"

"Tomorrow?"

"We don't care where it's at. Any price point."

And because it's still offseason, "it's not like these homes are ready to rock and roll," Gordon says. "But I know people who had a \$300,000 bidding war [for their home], now through summer."

Katsipis has friends who caretake these homes in the winter months, and requests from sudden renters astounded them.

"The weirdest," Katsipis says, "is they all want their pools heated. It was 28 degrees the other night, and they want them heated to 88."

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Translation: Even though the bars and restaurants have shut down, these people are here to party.

Even if, when they do get sick, there will be nowhere to go.

"That's my big fear," Albronda says. "Everybody was out in big groups. It was like summertime came early. We're going to see an incredible influx of disease spreading, and our hospital isn't as prepared to

handle it as a large-scale one.”

**Hunkered-down
Hamptonites dropping
thousands on high-end
panic buys**

Southampton Hospital, which serves East Hampton, Bridgehampton, Sag Harbor, Noyack, Amagansett, Hampton Bays, Montauk, and of course Southampton, has 125 beds. Only eight are ICU. While a spokeswoman told The Post the hospital is preparing for more, locals here aren't encouraged.

“How many [ventilators] do you think they have in there?” asks Katsipis. “Ten? Twenty? The city has a lot more hospitals and, not for nothing, better care. Southampton is just not equipped for a pandemic.”

“That hospital is extremely small,” says the Springs resident, who was treated there extensively last year and says there are only four quarantine rooms. “You already get treated in the ER hallway in the summer. We don't have any medical resources here.”

 **The emergency room entrance for Stony Brook Southampton Hospital.**

The tented-off front entrance to Stony Brook Southampton Hospital's emergency room.

Doug Kuntz

Compounding the problem is the lack of ambulances. Each firehouse has only two or three, and firefighters and paramedics are not on site — when a call comes in, they're alerted at home, and they must make the drive to the firehouse and then to the emergency. And all East End firefighters are volunteers.

“It's a state of emergency now,” says a spokeswoman for an East End fire department.

Still, every local who spoke to The Post said their community has one thing going for it that the rich don't have: They really look out for each other.

“I see the bartenders and the waitresses — the people out of work — volunteering to feed the elderly,” says LaGarenne. “We don't really see that from the types of people hoarding supplies. But I guess that's to be expected.”

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