DOW JONES ⬆

177.10   to   26,067.28
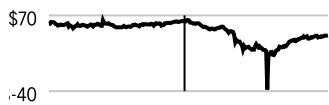
Over the past year:

30,000

18,000
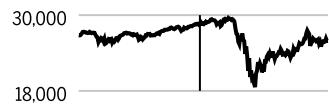
CRUDE OIL ⬆

$0.28 to $40.90

Over the past year:

$70

-40

WALL STREET BACK ON RALLY TRACK

Wall Street's rally got back on track Wednesday after more gains for big technology stocks helped pull the S&P 500 to its sixth gain in seven days.

It came after a jumbled day of trading, where the S&P 500 drifted up and down a few times before a last-hour lift sent it to a gain of 0.8%.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 177.10 points, or 0.7%, to 26,067.28, and the Nasdaq composite gained 148.61, or 1.4%, to 10,492.50 to set another record. The S&P 500, which more index funds benchmark themselves against, rose 24.62 to 3,169.94 and is back within 6.4% of its record.

Wednesday's up-and-down trading was reminiscent of the market's moves over the last month. Optimism is rising about a reopening economy, but worsening coronavirus infection levels across much of the U.S. South and West threaten to derail budding economic improvements.

"It's sort of like: Buy what feels safe, even though you know you're maybe overpaying for it," Nixon said. "But it's better than betting on a recovery that's maybe going to be slower than expected, particularly given the fact that we're seeing a spike in cases in some major areas of the United States." — AP
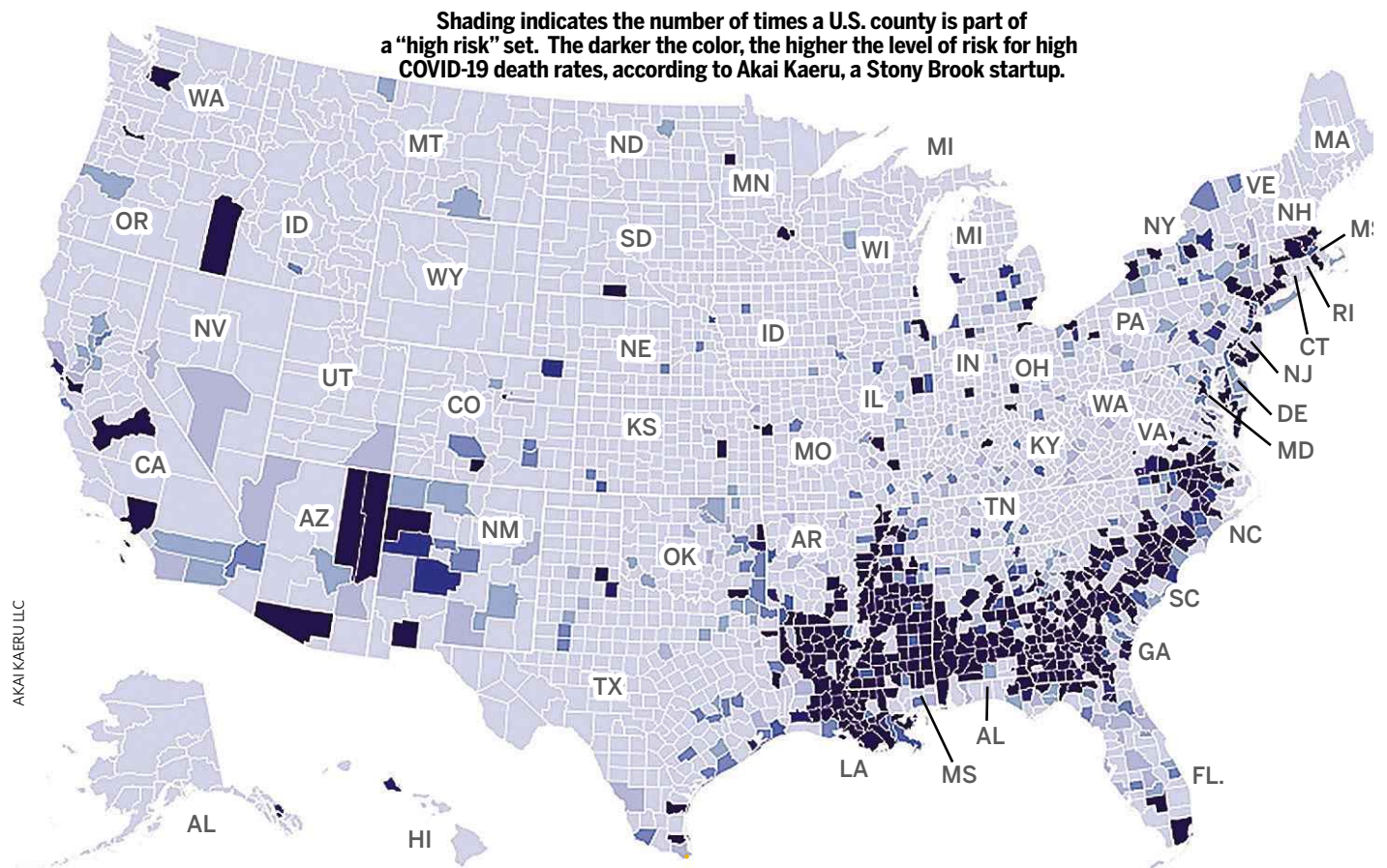
Shading indicates the number of times a U.S. county is part of a "high risk" set. The darker the color, the higher the level of risk for high COVID-19 death rates, according to Akai Kaeru, a Stony Brook startup.

AKAI KAERU LLC

PREDICTING VIRUS HOT SPOTS

LI startup says its software can pinpoint areas of deadliest outbreaks

BY KEN SCHACHTER
kenneth.schachter@newsday.com

A Long Island artificial intelligence startup has built software aimed at pinpointing U.S. counties where the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to be most deadly.

In a June report, the data-mining company, Akai Kaeru LLC, forecast spiking COVID-19 mortality with the heaviest concentrations in counties of the Southeast, including Mississippi, Georgia and Louisiana, co-founder and chief executive Klaus Mueller said.

Nationwide, the software found 985 out of all 3,007 U.S. counties are at risk.

"These patterns identify groups of counties that have a steeper increase in the death-rate trajectory," he said.

Closer to home, the software found Nassau and Suffolk counties are likely to be relatively stable, but Westchester and Rockland counties are potential tinderboxes that could tip into crisis, said Mueller, a computer science professor at Stony Brook University.

The factors making Westchester and Rockland more vulnerable to a spike in mortality include areas with more crowding and fewer residents with access to cars, he said.

"They need to be very careful with reopening," Mueller said of the northern suburbs.

THE REGIONAL PICTURE

Westchester and Rockland, in darker blue, are more vulnerable than Long Island, Akai Kaeru says.

Rockland

Westchester

Bronx

Manhattan

Staten Island

Nassau

Suffolk

Brooklyn   Queens

AKAI KAERU LLC

"It just takes a spark for there to be a second wave."

At the same time, he said, Long Island "is not out of the woods" and abandoning policies like social distancing could lead to a new surge.

The software analyzes more than 500 attributes related to demographics, economics, infrastructure, race and ethnicity as well as deaths and other health data directly related to COVID-19.

Dr. Isaac Weisfuse, an epidemiologist and adjunct professor at Cornell University's public health program, said that data-mining software is used by public health departments.

If the software provides sufficient warning, he said, preventive measures like screening and mask-wearing policies can be instituted.

"It's more valuable if it's accurate two months before, but it's still valuable two weeks before," he said.
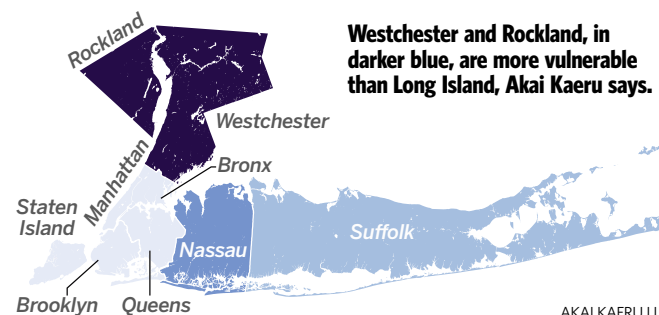
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention aggregates mortality forecasts from about two dozen software programs and expects 140,000 to 160,000 total reported COVID-19 deaths in the United States by July 25.

While many COVID-19 models provide specific fatality forecasts at the state level, the Akai Kaeru software is one of the few that assesses risk at the county level.

Mueller said that based on the one-month snapshots, the software is finding that counties at the highest risk have a death rate that grew two- to three times more than the United States, overall.

In June, the fatality rate for U.S. COVID-19 related deaths was 24.1 per 100,000 popula-

A bigger, badder Buick SUV

ROAD TEST

BY LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service

Buick possesses some truly fantastic model names that it no longer uses, including Electra, Invicta, Centurion and Apollo. These days, the brand's crossover sport utility vehicles all start with the letter "E," with its most popular model being the diminutive Encore, a subcompact crossover SUV with a dollop of Buick luxury that accounted for nearly half of Buick's U.S. sales last year.

So what is Buick doing for an encore to the Encore? Releasing a larger compact crossover SUV dubbed the 2020 Buick Encore GX.

Hmmm. That ought to sow some confusion.

The same trick didn't work for Oldsmobile, when some GM genius decided that if one Oldsmobile Cutlass sold well, three different models named Cutlass would sell even better. (For the record, they were the Cutlass Supreme, Cutlass Ciera and Cutlass Calais.) It worked so well that Oldsmobile is no longer with us.

Given that, you have to wonder why Buick's new Encore GX, an all-new vehicle built on different architecture from the Encore, shares its name but little else. Instead, the Encore GX's genetics are shared with the equally new 2020 Chevrolet Trailblazer.

Names aside, the Encore GX's wardrobe eschews any semblance of old-school Buick, opting instead for a compendium of stylishly modern sculpted flanks that are fetching and sporty, if a bit generic. Its size is perfect for urban duty, and more accommodating for corn-fed Americans than the Lilliputian Encore.

Inside, you'll find an equally modern cabin that's surprisingly spacious and inviting thanks to some options that gussied things up a bit, like the $1,500 Experience Buick Package, which adds a power moon roof along with 18-inch wheels, and the $770 High Gloss Convenience Package, which adds automatic parking assist, wireless charging, rear camera mirror and rain-sensing windshield wipers.

Enhancing the Encore GX's modern looks, premium cabin, perfect size and high technology quotient are thoughtful interior touches that make it the perfect automotive life partner. Despite its 171.4-inch length, there's 25.4 cubic feet of storage space. If you need more, the folding second row is split 40/60, with the narrower section behind the driver's seat to better accommodate an 8-foot long item angled from the folding front passenger seat to the rear driver's side. And the cargo floor is height adjustable, able to provide more under-floor storage or become level with the folded seats. It's more flexible than your loved ones.

When it comes time to move, you'll find the Buick to have a uniquely captivating demeanor. It delivers a surprisingly hushed ride, something expected of a Buick, but unexpected given its energetic demeanor.

It all makes for a charming little crossover bruiser, one perfectly adept at fighting it out on city streets or oozing down the interstate. Its personality is unique, and well worth sampling. Once you do, you'll be hooked, no matter what Buick calls it.

TNS / BUICK

2020 Buick Encore GX

- **Base price**: $25,095-$31,495
- **Engine**: 1.3-liter turbocharged DOHC three-cylinder
- **Power**: 155 hp, 174 pound-feet torque
- **EPA fuel economy estimates**: 26 mpg city, 29 highway

- **Bottom line**: Stylishly modern

FACEBOOK FAULTED ON RIGHTS RECORD

The Associated Press

A two-year audit of Facebook's civil rights record found "serious setbacks" that have marred the social network's progress on matters such as hate speech, misinformation and bias.

Facebook hired the audit's leader, former American Civil Liberties Union executive Laura Murphy, in May 2018 to assess its performance on vital social issues. Its 100-page report released Wednesday outlines a "seesaw of progress and setbacks" at the company on everything from bias in Facebook's algorithms to its content moderation, advertising practices and treatment of voter suppression.

The audit recommends that Facebook build a "civil rights infrastructure" into every aspect of the company, as well as a "stronger interpretation" of existing voter suppression policies and more concrete action on algorithmic bias. Those suggestions are not binding.

"While the audit process has been meaningful, and has led to some significant improvements in the platform, we have also watched the company make painful decisions over the last nine months with real world consequences that are serious setbacks for civil rights," the audit report states.

Those include Facebook's decision to exempt politicians from fact-checking, even when President Donald Trump posted false information about voting by mail. Last month, Facebook announced it would begin labeling rule-breaking posts — even from politicians. But it is not clear if Trump's previous controversial posts would have gotten the alert.

LI startup says its software can identify areas of deadly virus spikes

tion, he said.

Aside from finding geographies in jeopardy, the software is able to unearth specific — and sometimes surprising — combinations of factors that appear to be connected to counties with higher death rates.

For instance, counties with low poverty levels, high homeownership rates, but high levels of housing debt were found to be at high risk.

"The more housing debt you have, the more death you have," Mueller said.

Other counties at risk had a combination of residents who were sleep-deprived (according to data from the CDC) and had low levels of education and low rates of health insurance coverage.

Another group of counties had few Asian residents but high overall minority populations, including impoverished Black children.

Rural counties with high poverty rates and an aging population also were deemed at risk.

"One of the defining characteristics is we focus on explainability," said Eric Papenhausen, chief technology officer and co-founder of the company. "You can create a narrative around it," which can lead to changes in public policy.

Akai Kaeru is based at the Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology on the Stony Brook University campus.

The 4-year-old company, whose name is Japanese for red frog, has raised $1 million in funding from the National Science Foundation's Small Business Innovation Research program and about $200,000 through the New York State Strategic Partnership for Industrial Resurgence program and the New York State Center for Advanced Technology.

The COVID-19 software is a demonstration project for the company, whose data-mining software can be applied to a variety of tasks, including assessing mortgage risk, speeding drug discovery and investment analysis.

Another startup, Manhattan-based Dataminr, is seeking to use social media posts as a leading indicator of COVID-19 infections at the county level.

Artificial intelligence refers to the ability of software programs to learn and perform actions previously reserved for humans.

Mueller said his company's "explainable AI" is not a black box and can provide insight into how the software reached its conclusions.