

Daily News

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Montcalm County's lone Animal Control Officer Autumn DeVries attended the county's Finance & Personnel Committee meeting on Feb. 10 to ask commissioners to hire a second Animal Control officer to work part-time to help with daily operations, including caring for animals, answering phones and doing paperwork. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Montcalm County may hire second Animal Control officer

ELISABETH WALDON
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STANTON — Now that the Humane Society of Mid Michigan has moved out of Montcalm County's former animal shelter, county officials are considering hiring a second Animal Control officer.

Humane Society Director Angela Hollinshead told the Daily News in January that her nonprofit organization moved out of the county-owned building and is no longer accepting any animals from residents or law enforcement officials due to a lack of funding.

Animal Control Officer Autumn DeVries attended the county's Finance & Personnel Committee meeting Feb. 10 to ask commissioners to hire a second Animal Control officer to work part-time up to 29 hours per week to help with daily operations, including caring for animals, answering phones and doing paperwork.

"With the Humane Society recently leaving, they're no longer caring for any animals I bring in — strays, court cases, quarantines," DeVries summarized. "In the last month, I've been caring for almost two dozen animals by myself with a few other volunteers. Volunteers are great to have. They're a huge asset, but they're not always reliable and not always

there to care for the animals."

DeVries said she already knows several individuals who are trained with animals who may be interested in the job, which would pay \$15.79 per hour, according to Montcalm County Chief Financial Officer Brenda Taeter.

DeVries said she responded to a total of 1,731 animal-related calls in 2019, including 77 complaints about animal bites, and contacted 748 people regarding a dog census. She said she generated \$55,928 in dog license revenue, \$2,425 in court summons fees, \$677 in restitution and \$55 in donations for a total of \$59,085 (not including District Court tickets).

So far this year, DeVries responded to 108 calls in January, sold 87 dog licenses (70 of them delinquent) for \$3,435 and collected \$977 in restitution, plus \$325 in summons fees for a total of \$4,737 generated.

The committee recommended the full board approve the request at their next regular meeting, which will be 6 p.m. Feb. 24 at the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton.

The Board of Commissioners eliminated Animal Control in October 2017 as part of budget cuts, along with the county's animal shelter. The county restored Animal Control to a part-time position by hiring DeVries in July 2018 and made her job full-time last October.

What's In The Runoff?

Promise And Doubt Surround Fecal Source Tracking Technique

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

It's no secret that the Pine River has a feces problem.

From the off-the-charts *E. coli* counts to the unnaturally high concentrations of phosphorus and nitrogen in the water, Alma College researchers like biologist Tim Keeton have known for years that the river is heavily impacted by fecal pollution. And because these concentrations increase after rain events, this means that surface runoff is a key player in river contamination.

So what exactly is in that surface runoff?

This question is the center of a heated debate in the county. Between the manure spread on the many agricultural fields and the assortment of failing or nonexistent septic systems in the watershed, there are a couple known sources of the bacteria and nutrients that plague the Pine.

For Keeton and fellow Alma College researcher Murray Borrello, years of studying the river have made them confident that agricultural runoff is the more significant source of contamination. Noting the sheer number of livestock in the county — livestock that produce an amount of waste equivalent to that of 1.3 million humans, according to Alma College's calculations — there is simply far more feces produced by the farm animals than by the 41,000 humans who call Gratiot home, they say.

Still, there are those in Gratiot who remain unconvinced that agricultural practices are the main source. And while a new technology is emerging that promises to use DNA to identify the source of fecal contamination in a given water sample, Keeton is not sure that the method is ready to be the simple solution many hope it is.

What is Microbial Source Tracking?

Microbial Source Tracking (MST) is a technique that uses different strains of gut bacteria to determine the types of feces in a given water sample. These bacteria, called Bacteroides, are host-specific, meaning that their DNA varies depending on the species it comes from, Keeton said.

This is a very different process from the *E. coli* culturing that agencies like the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have used for decades to determine water quality standards. While the live *E. coli* count is a good indication of the overall contamination of the water, the *E. coli* itself cannot reveal what specific animal it came from, Keeton said.

And while host-specific Bacteroides can reveal what types of feces are present in a sample, as the technology stands today, it can't be used to determine what source is the most prevalent. Because different types of these Bacteroides are used as markers, they behave differently and can't be directly compared.

"[MST is] great at detection, and we can say, 'Yes, we see these sources in the water,'" Keeton said. "To try to make statements about, 'It's 60 percent source X and 40 percent source Y' is not simple."

How is MST being used?

Keeton said that MST techniques have been quickly adopted by research labs across the country. In Michigan, a consortium of several health districts, colleges and universities, and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) — formerly the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) — is studying the technology.

Shannon Briggs, a toxicologist with the water resources division of EGLE, said that this group was formed to work with quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction (qPCR) *E. coli* techniques, but it has also been working with host-specific Bacteroides.

The group is currently working on testing these different genetic markers to see



Alma College biologist Tim Keeton demonstrates some of the technology used to perform Microbial Source Tracking, a cutting-edge technique that uses DNA markers to identify the sources of fecal matter in a water sample. (Herald photo- Selmon)

which can be used in Michigan's waterways. For a given species, there may be several different host-specific Bacteroides that can be used as markers, and Briggs said that because "there's a lot of variation" in these bacteria, not all will work in every location.

Complications and concerns

Even though MST isn't being used in major policy decisions yet, Keeton is still wary of how quickly the technique has been accepted — and he isn't sure that researchers should be releasing MST results to the public quite yet.

'There are plenty of examples of data that DEQ and EGLE has presented to the public that seem to conflict with one another.'

-Tim Keeton, Alma College Biologist

"[MST is] an evolving science right now, and it's based on how the markers themselves perform," she said. "So even, for example, if a genetic marker worked in Florida, we don't know if that would work in Michigan."

In locations where the EGLE group can "verify that the markers are working," Briggs said that the technique is being used to help identify the sources of fecal pollution. A bacterial monitoring report for Michigan rivers and streams that was published by EGLE in 2018 includes a study on MST in the Pine River, which includes samples tested from Gratiot County locations in 2017.

Briggs said that while EGLE intends to use MST alongside traditional *E. coli* monitoring techniques, currently, MST findings are not driving policy changes. The technique isn't replacing any old water quality standards or methods right now — it's being used to gather additional information to help give context to the information gathered from *E. coli* monitoring.

"I would say that the qPCR methods and these tools are designed as clues, or things that we can use, to help us identify and correct water quality contamination. So *E. coli* is still going to be the basis for, 'is this water meeting standards'... but then, once it's established that the water quality standards are not being met, the water's impaired, then we can start looking and using all sorts of different things to try to identify the source and then correct it."

Among his concerns with the procedure are the number of variables that affect the performances of the different markers. Because the Bacteroides are different species, they behave differently when exposed to changes in the water chemistry, the soil chemistry, and the weather and the temperature, for example. And some of the markers persist much longer in the environment than others.

"What that means is making comparison between sites and/or grouping multiple sites together into one data set is actually kind of in a gray area, because you're not able to control for how things last," he said.

Both Keeton and Briggs emphasized the importance of selecting genetic markers carefully. Most species have many possible markers, and some markers can be found in more than one species. But even with the "generally accepted, specific" markers that have been established for cows and humans, for example, attempts to compare different markers to one another require a lot of extrapolation, Keeton said.

"As soon as you start trying to do source tracking and you're looking at more than one source, trying to make comparisons is really fraught," he said. "And there are at least other people in this field who agree with that statement — there are clearly people who don't."

In addition to the multiple markers to choose from, there are multiple techniques

as well — and these techniques can have wildly different results.

In the Pine River MST study included in the EGLE report, the same sample from Coles Creek is tested with two different MST methods and two different markers. The first test showed that the human and bovine markers were undetectable — and the second test showed over eight million copies of the human marker, and over five million of the cow marker.

"That's not one technique says a thousand, the other says two," he said. "One technique says undetectable, the other says eight million... I think when you get that kind of difference on the same sample, you should be a little bit cautious in releasing this stuff."

Keeton noted that this is not the only study in which he's seen published MST data seemingly at odds with itself. And while this doesn't mean that the techniques aren't worth studying, he does not think that such results should be published and released to the public just yet.

"I see that there are plenty of examples of data that DEQ and then EGLE has presented to the public that seem to conflict with one another," he said. "And so as an experimentalist trying to help work on these protocols in the lab, I see that as a mild frustration."

Summer MST research plans

Despite his concerns, Keeton still views MST as a promising research tool. In the summer, he has plans to use the technique to determine how human and bovine markers at specific sites in the river behave in dry and wet weather conditions.

Keeton's planned experiment goes back to the question of what's in the runoff. He and his students aren't going to be counting genomes in the samples — instead, they are going to be taking the "most direct reading" of the MST data by simply looking at how the strength of each signal is affected.

The fact that *E. coli* concentrations in the river routinely goes up 10 to 100 times after a rain event is a "pretty clear indication" that surface runoff carries "a lot of poop" — so Keeton expects to see a change in the signal strength of the Bacteroides as well.

"We should see at least one of these markers go up... If one goes up and the other goes down, meaning it gets diluted, then that might add a little information to this runoff question," he said.

Keeton said that this experiment should help provide more information about how these markers behave without the "data massaging" required to try to count genomes or to try to compare different markers to one another. He said that with new technologies like this one, scientists should be able to explain what these numbers mean and how they're getting them — and the public should think critically when presented with results.

"If you can't explain exactly what it is you're doing and how you're getting the number you're getting, then you're dealing with a black box," he said. "And people should be really wary of that."

In Keeton's field, there is a lack of consensus on whether or not MST technologies are ready to be used in decisions that would ultimately affect policy change. Though Keeton thinks the technology is a "great" detection tool, he would like to see more work done with the techniques in research labs before it's "ready for primetime."

"It doesn't mean that MST isn't going to work. It means that the scientists that do it understand that there are limitations, and currently, we haven't worked through all of those limitations yet," he said. "So, in this scientist's opinion, we shouldn't be using it in this way. Not quite yet."

Daily News

Saturday, February 22, 2020

Meeting to discuss Palo PFAS set for Feb. 27

Staff Report

IONIA — The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), formerly known as the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, will hold a public meeting to discuss its investigation of PFAS in groundwater in the Palo area on Thursday, Feb. 27, at Boyce Elementary School, 3550 N. State Road, Ionia.

An open house for residents for one-on-one conversation will be held from 5 to 6 p.m., with presentations and a question and answer session following from 6 to 8 p.m.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of man-made chemicals that have been used in many consumer and industrial products, such as non-stick cookware, waterproof fabrics, and firefighting foam.

EGLE started its investigation in the Palo area six months ago, when some of the well water samples showed low levels of PFAS that were still high enough to meet screening requirements by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, according to Stephanie Kammer from EGLE.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has established a Lifetime Health Advisory level at 70 parts per trillion (ppt). The State of Michigan is using 70 ppt for decision-making purposes as well, and some of the samples were at that level.

“We started the investigation looking at potential sources in the area ... and we’re continuing to expand so we can delineate where it’s coming from,” Kammer said, adding that so far it seems to be in a “very discrete” area. “We are trying to protect public health and find the source or the edge of the bloom.”

The presentations will provide information on the PFAS investigation in Palo and what EGLE knows so far, and will outline next steps for additional private drinking well sampling to determine the extent of PFAS contamination in the area, Kammer said.

The meeting is being presented in coordination with the MDHHS, Ionia County and Ronald Township. Up-to-date information is available at Michigan.gov/PFASResponse online.

For information or to request certain accommodations, contact Heidi Hollenbach at (616) 356-0243 or hollenbachh@michigan.gov.

Upper Pine River Watershed Management Plan Showcased During Annual Meeting



Posted on Wednesday, February 26th, 2020 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

By Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

Site-specific locations suspected to be contributing the highest priority nonpoint source pollutants are identified in the Upper Pine River Watershed Management Plan.

Gratiot Conservation District Administrator Julie Spencer showed highlights of the plan to attendees at last week's annual conservation district meeting and banquet.

The document runs 407 pages but about the last half consists of appendixes supporting the main body of work. A copy is available to read or download on the conservation district website. Printed copies may be ordered through E&S Graphics in Ithaca or from Amazon.

Streamside Ecological Services headquartered in Lowell facilitated the research with input from Spencer and others including Jane Keon of Healthy Pine River.

HPR, which meets regularly at the Alma Public Library, is a nonprofit federally recognized group who is positioned to apply for grant assistance now that the plan is completed.

Spencer said the plan makes it possible for groups to qualify for a variety of grant funding.

The price tag for reducing nonpoint sources of pollution within the watershed is estimated at \$12 million over a 10-year period if all the recommendations were implemented.

Spencer remarked a key value of the plan offers ways to educate communities on improving water quality and the environment.

The plan shows geographical imaging of severe sedimentation and erosion from the Great Lakes Watershed Management System. This tool is used for evaluating, tracking, and reporting water quality and groundwater areas of concern.

Significant pollutants are sediment, nutrients, pathogens, high water temperature, pesticides and unidentified sources such as lawn care practices, manure spreading practices, failing septic systems, and direct sanitary connections.

"Sedimentation is excessive in many areas," Spencer pointed out.

Areas shaded in pink on a map pinpointed areas of concern. "The plan focuses on the good, the bad, and the ugly," she said.

One recommended action is to investigate sediment pollution in the Honeyoye Creek subwatershed, although this particular buildup was not part of the WMP process.

The plan states that stakeholders suspect that two separate events or human errors contributed to sediment buildup where Honeyoye Creek outlets into the Pine River in Arcada Township.

Additional sediment sources of pollution are causing the buildup of a sediment island in this location.

Stakeholders would like a further investigation of this site.

The recommended action is to work with the Road Commission and Drain Commission to inventory and evaluate road and stream crossings in order to identify and prioritize stream crossing repair and replacement within the UPRW.

With regard to livestock access, agriculture runoff, and inadequate riparian buffers, the plan recommends continued study on the impacts of manure spreading by small animal farms and concentrated animal feeding operations. Though CAFO manure is regulated, the plan acknowledged that the practice is considered a suspected and potential source of pollution in the UPRW.

Likewise, AFOs of under 1000 animal units the manure is not regulated. "The uses and impacts of AFO and CAFO manure are not fully understood, and further study may reveal if the manure is spread in ways to optimize its nutrient content and the extent of the impacts of its use when spreading on crops," the plan advised.

Among the benefits of implementing the long list of recommendations that would improve the watershed's water quality would be to create a source for kayaking, canoeing, and boating.

The plan suggests clearing an adequate path for these recreational options.

Some stakeholders who filled out questionnaires pointed out that recreational uses would be a means of observing the condition of the river.

Lastly, in order to achieve the goals requires partnerships among all the communities, government units, environmental and watershed organizations.

Spencer cited a goal is to educate the public about the plan's findings such as reminded homeowners to pump their septic tanks every three to five years. She noted that surveys taken recently indicate homeowners are not aware they even have septic systems.

The Riverdale community in Seville Township is awaiting word from the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy as to whether their grassroots effort of disconnecting and/or replacing illicit connection or failing septic systems has ended the pollution spillage into the river. A determination is expected at any time. "Human waste was most frequent and most prevalent whether following wet or dry conditions," Spencer said of the test samples taken at various locations.

Daily News

Saturday, February 29, 2020



Stephanie Kammer of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, Water Quality Division, answers questions Thursday night about the state's investigation of PFAS in residential wells in Palo at Boyce Elementary School, while Puneet Vij, toxicologist with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, listens. — DN Photo | Karen Bota

Palo PFAS study finding 'good news'

State, county partner to hold
community meeting on investigation

KAREN BOTA
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IONIA — Around 50 people attended a community meeting Thursday night at Boyce Elementary School about the state's investigation of PFAS in Palo groundwater.

Attendees came away with a reassuring message from the panel of presenters from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ionia County Health Department: Don't panic.

"Keep calm and carry on," said DHHS Toxicologist Gary Klase, who was among the representatives updating residents on the PFAS study. "We're finding a lot of good news."

PFAS, short for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a group of man-made chemicals used since the 1940s to repel oil, stains, grease and water. They're found worldwide in industry and in household products: in paints, metal plating processes, firefighting foam, cleaning products, water-resistant clothing, stain-resistant carpeting and upholstery, non-stick cookware, food packaging, some cosmetic, and more.

Because PFAS don't break down easily, the chemicals persist when they seep into groundwater, lakes, rivers and streams, and in the human body. Most non-worker exposure to PFAS comes for drinking contaminated water or eating food with PFAS in it.

Although PFAS have been around a long time, not a lot is known for sure about how they impact human health, said Puneet Vij, another DHHS toxicologist. Some health studies have demonstrated that exposure to certain PFAS has been associated with interference with the body's natural hormones, raised cholesterol levels, disruption of the immune system, lowering

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State, county partner to hold community meeting on PFAS investigation

Continued from Page 1

the chance of pregnancy, affecting birth weights, growth and learning of infants and older children and an increased risk of some cancers.

“(However) exposure to PFAS does not mean you will experience these health effects,” he said.

The statewide focus on PFAS started in the fall of 2017, when then Gov. Rick Snyder developed the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team, “very soon after they realized that Wolverine (World Wide) was a big problem,” said Aaron Assmann of EGLE’s Remediation and Redevelopment division.

“That’s when it became a statewide initiative to look for PFAS all across the state. All 95 of the wastewater treatment facilities across the state were tested,” Assmann said. “The idea was, if we could find where it was, we could it trace back to the generators of it and work with them to reduce their contributions into the storm sewer water. It’s been a pretty successful program.”

The City of Ionia was part of an EGLE program to provide biosolids — that’s the sludge leftover when wastewater treatment is completed and sewage can’t be broken down any further — to farmers for land application, because biosolids are rich in nitrogen.

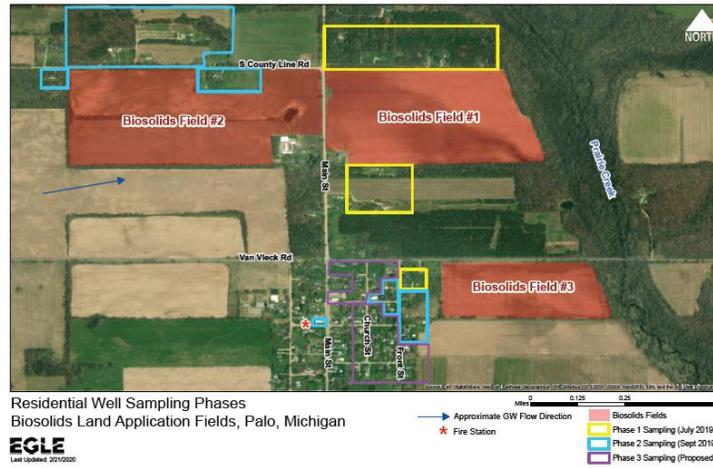
Ionia was also one of the 95 municipality water systems tested for PFAS, and its biosolids samples tested high. The city also had provided biosolids to the three fields around Palo, which is why that community was targeted by EGLE for sampling, said Stephanie Kammer of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, Water Quality Division.

“We came here because we had a specific source: the City of Ionia applied their biosolids,” Kammer said. “It doesn’t mean it’s a huge impact here, it’s just we started here.”

EGLE partnered with the Ionia County Health Department and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department — the fields in question are on the county lines — and put together a plan to, starting in July 2019, sample the shallow wells near the field that had had the most biosolids applications. Based on EGLE’s findings, they expanded their sampling in September, moving outward. Now they are planning to enter their third phase of sampling. Kammer said they are focusing on Ionia County, because that’s where they had the most “hits” for PFAS.

“We think the groundwater is flowing east, maybe northeast,” Kammer said. “The question is: is it the fields or could it be something else? We just don’t know.”

Out of the 18 Palo wells tested so far, 11 had no PFAS detection, according to Vij. Seven had low levels of PFAS. Three of those were below the public health screening levels of the EGLE and federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) drinking water criteria. Four were above the level for one or more of the PFAS. Filters were distributed to all households that registered PFAS in their homes “to ensure residents’ safety while the investigation continues,” Vij added.



Residential Well Sampling Phases
Biosolids Land Application Fields, Palo, Michigan
EGLE
Last Updated 2/15/2020

Pictured is a map of biosolids fields and residential sampling phases in Palo, part of the state’s investigation of PFAS contamination in Ronald and Bushnell townships. — Submitted by EGLE



Gary Klase, toxicologist with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, right, answers a question about the state’s investigation of PFAS in Palo, while Puneet Vij, another DHHHS toxicologist, and Stephanie Kammer of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, Water Quality Division, listen at a presentation Thursday night at Boyce Elementary School. — DN Photo | Karen Bota

“Drinking water screening levels are not the danger levels, and exceeding levels does not mean there’s a public health concern,” he told the audience. “The guidelines are for public health actions. It tells us we need to look closer at the particular site.”

The team is planning to go door to door in Palo next week to get access agreements to test the wells in the third phase. The results should be back in three to four weeks, said Kammer.

“We’ll meet and review them. Once we get the data and see what we have, based on that information, we’ll make a plan,” she said. “It’s a priority for us to keep moving.”

Like with the earlier phases, if PFAS is found in the wells in the third phase, residents can call the health department to request the installation of a filter. The health department covers the cost, and then is reimbursed by the state, Bowen said. Anyone who lives outside the area now under study and who wants their water tested can call the health depart-

ment at (616) 527-5341, or email Bowen at kbowen@ioniacounty.org to learn more.

Kammer said Michigan is leading the nation in PFAS investigations, but what is known about PFAS is “still evolving.”

“We don’t have all the answers right now, but it is important to know that we are looking and trying to find out,” Kammer said. “The next step is to do the next round based on proximity to the sampling we’ve already done. We’ll decide, do we need to do more sampling or get no (PFAS) levels, which would be great. We follow the data.”

Mike Blood, Ronald Township supervisor, said that, before the meeting, he hasn’t heard much from residents. But he was glad for the presentation.

“It’s been real quiet,” Blood said. “They just want to know what’s going on. They just want to be informed, and we really couldn’t tell them anything.”

EGLE also tested schools and large residential complexes that operate their own wells, according to Bowen. In Ionia County, PFAS was found in the Evergreen



Chad Shaw, emergency preparedness coordinator for the Ionia County Health Department, discusses the water filtration system, pictured, that the department is providing free of charge to Palo residents who have PFAS in their well water. Shaw staffed a table at a community presentation Thursday night to provide information about the state’s study of PFAS in Palo. — DN Photo | Karen Bota

Mobile Home Park, the Long Lake Mobile Home Park and at EightCAP in Orleans. These locations are being tested quarterly, to see whether the levels decrease or increase over time. No one knows yet where PFAS there came from.

Jake Jelsema, chief of staff for State Sen. John Bizon, attended the presentation at Boyce. He said Bizon has continuously supported state funding for testing and funding to establish a state PFAS lab to accelerate the process of testing. Bizon also wants to see more research on PFAS, said Jelsema.

“We don’t know a lot about how PFAS absorbs through soil, how it affects domesticated animals, how it affects crops and plants and wildlife,” he said. “Sen. Bizon ... urges everyone who is concerned to contact their congressmen and U.S. senators to ask for the National Institutes of Health to research into the problem, and then also research into the microbiology element, so maybe we can clean it up someday — because charcoal filters aren’t a permanent solution.”

State Rep. Julie Calley also was in the audience Thursday night. She said she appreciated the collaborative effort that brought all the resources to one event.

“We’ve been surprised we haven’t heard more feedback from constituents,” Calley said. “We haven’t had many inquiries at all.”

Ionia County Commissioner Scott Wirtz, who lives in Ronald Township, said, like Calley, he hasn’t heard concerns from his constituents, but he was glad to have the information presented.

“Not one person has called me, but it’s good that we do this,” Wirtz said. “We don’t know where it will lead, but 11 wells not having PFAS, and three with levels below — and you can put filters on and do it for free — I think it’s a good thing.”

COMMUNITY EFFORT IN RIVERDALE FALLS SHORT

 Posted on Wednesday, March 4th, 2020 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.



Wastewater technician Matt Lumbert with the Michigan Rural Water Association positions a blower over a Lumberjack Road manhole in 2019 to determine where sewage could be spilling into a catch basin. MRWA assisted Riverdale volunteers in a search to pinpoint illicit connections. (Herald photo – Horvath)

By Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

Convinced they had abated the issue of inadequate sewage disposal in the Riverdale community and had submitted a doable remedial plan, Seville Township and a citizen committee learned this week their grassroots effort fell short in the end.

In a 3-page response dated Feb. 27, Cheri Meyer of the Water Resources Division outlines a list of steps required of the township and property owners “to demonstrate whether a long-term, community-wide system is necessary.”

The WRD is part of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

Topping the list is scheduling on-site evaluations of the 12 systems originally identified as discharging into the storm sewer and evaluations of 68 properties considered not to have a permitted septic system. Fee for this service through the MidMichigan District [Health](#) Department is \$196.

This “defensible process,” as Meyer calls it, identifies the MMDHD as the “delegated authority to ensure all occupied dwellings are served by a sewage disposal system that is constructed and operating in compliance with MMDHD Environmental Health Regulations.”

In other words, the data collected by volunteers during on-site visits in the Riverdale Community over 2019 does not satisfy health department regulations.

Meyer this week acknowledged during an interview the volunteer committee “did provide us information on the 68 homes on a spreadsheet showing that their systems passed. However, we don’t know what criteria the task force used to say that. We need an official evaluation by the health department.”

This edict marks the third warning the state department sent the township since the initial citation was issued in 2018 for inadequate sewage disposal. A second violation notice was issued in August 2019. However, past township boards had become aware of the Riverdale situation years before and had hired an engineering firm to assess the situation and recommend a solution that turned out to be a costly community-wide wastewater treatment system.

More recently in the last two years, steps at the community level were taken in hopes of satisfying state regulators and averting any prospect of being ordered to install a municipal system.

In this latest letter, Meyer outlines both short-term and long-term goals that township officials had offered to carry out previously such as conducting semiannual water testing and establishing a septic district for the unincorporated village of Riverdale.

WRD officials and local officials are expected to meet in the near future to discuss a timeline.

The following is a series of additional questions put forth to Meyer by The Herald:

H: In the letter, you acknowledge the efforts of the Riverdale Citizens Sewer Committee regarding the 12 troublesome properties but just how worthy have those efforts been?

M: Identification and correction of any illicit discharges to surface waters of the state are helpful. EGLE’s concern is that while 8 of the 12 systems identified are no longer discharging septic waste to Riverdale’s storm sewer system, they do not have a permanent solution in place. In order to protect public health and the environment, EGLE would like to ensure these properties have an approved functioning septic system. Additionally, approximately 68 of the 122 properties in Riverdale do not have a permitted septic system and may be discharging to the Pine River and/or the groundwater. Therefore, verification of the operational status of these systems is necessary.

H: Under the long-term requirements stated in your letter, there is verbiage taken from resolutions adopted by local boards promising “surveillance” measures such as water testing and a septic ordinance. Have these resolutions carried any weight?

M: Pursuant to Section 3109 (2) of Part 31 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act of 1994, as amended, Seville Township is responsible for the discharge of any raw sewage of human origin, directly or indirectly, into any water of the state if the discharge is from four or more on-site wastewater treatment systems. That being said, a resolution may aid the Township in ensuring septic systems are adequately operating and maintained by requiring certain actions by property owners. However, it is important that the Township has a mechanism in place that allows them to monitor properties on pump and haul, require mandatory pumping of all septic systems every seven to ten years, and enforce other items required by the resolution.

H: Overall, does this letter signify that the efforts of the Riverdale community have averted an order for a community-wide system, at least for now?

M: It is EGLE’s contention that the 8 properties with remaining septic systems need to be adequately addressed so that a permanent solution is in place and the 68 unpermitted properties are properly evaluated to ensure an approved septic system is in place or repaired/replaced as necessary. The resolution of the 8 properties with remaining septic issues and the results of the evaluations of the 68 properties will determine if a community-wide system is necessary. Our goal is to work with Seville Township to develop a plan, with timelines, to

determine the status of these properties to ensure the public health and the environment is protected. We anticipate the Township's cooperation in evaluating these properties and addressing them as necessary.

H: Does this response to Seville's second violation notice reflect any modification at the state level with regard to private septic systems vs community-wide treatment systems?

M: At this time, EGLE has concerns that failing and/or inadequate septic systems in Riverdale may be impairing our surface waters. Seville Township has stated that the Township Board is committed to upholding the environmental health of the Riverdale community. By evaluating the unpermitted properties using a defensible process, EGLE and Seville Township will be able to determine whether a long-term, community-wide solution in Riverdale is necessary.

The following is a response provided in an email from Bob Lombard, chairman of the Riverdale Citizens Sewer Committee:

"My first take on this letter is that EGLE automatically assumes that we will test badly when they return to test sometime this spring. The million-dollar question is when we once again test cleaner than the Pine River, will they continue to hold the 234 residents of Riverdale on the hook for a bunch more hoop-jumping? It is totally unreasonable to expect the 68 properties supposedly without permits on file, to pay \$200 for a septic inspection for systems that ARE working as designed. If the onsite sewage disposal systems didn't work, owners would get them fixed because they would have to. Who would want to live in a house where you can't flush the toilet? "Most" properties in Riverdale couldn't connect to any county drain if they wanted to. There is only one main drain along Lumberjack Road.

"Many of the "permits" on file don't even have a "final inspection" which means either the owner in some cases never installed a system or in most cases the health department never bothered to come out and perform a final inspection.

"Is EGLE trying to un-grandfather systems based on the erroneous assumption if you don't have a permit than it's failed or unsafe? Is the next government overreach going to be that now everyone must have an electrical and plumbing permit on file or else the state will assume their systems are not working or unsafe? It is NOT illegal to have an undocumented septic system last time I checked.

"I find it very interesting that in this the latest letter nothing was mentioned about engineering studies. Previous studies, using bad data, came up with only one solution which was a multi-million dollar municipal sewer system. Unfortunately, no one, including EGLE, Spicer Engineering, MMDHD or the previous township board took the time to actually investigate the sources or seek more than one solution. In less than 120 days the citizens committee appointed by the township board identified 11 of the 12 properties that were directly connected to the county drain. In all previous [letters](#) and meetings with EGLE they based justification in large part on the earlier Spicer study. But now they have a new \$7000 dollar study which was paid for by the taxpayers of Seville Township which in no uncertain terms says we don't require a municipal sewer system to fix the 9% of properties that were at one time directly discharging into the county drain.

"When will the citizens of Riverdale be treated with the respect due to anyone that has been completely open and has gone above and beyond any other community in Michigan who has faced similar problems once they had been made aware of it, and has worked tirelessly to STOP the pollution? How fair is it to demand owners of three occupied houses in Riverdale whose homes have tarps on their roofs to waste money on an inspection they don't need? We the citizens of Riverdale demand EGLE to come test and then deal with the real pollution coming from upstream in the Pine River."

Toxic Algae & Waterborne Disease: Human Health Risks Associated With Pine River Pollution



Posted on Wednesday, March 11th, 2020 and is filed under [FEATURE](#), [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.



By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Fecal pollution in Gratiot County's waterways is a major threat to the [health](#) of the Pine River watershed — and local scientists and public health officials say it poses several threats to human health as well.

Alma College researchers Tim Keeton and Murray Borrello have been studying the Pine River problem for years. Between manure-laden runoff from agricultural fields and malfunctioning septic systems, there is more than one known source of fecal pollution in the Pine.

Likewise, there is more than one issue caused by this pollution. Keeton explained there is both a biological and chemical problem with the river. Biologically, the dangerous strains of *E. coli* and other pathogens found in the feces pose a threat to human health, he said. And chemically, the pollution causes unnaturally high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus, which causes the eutrophication of the river. In this process, these nutrients fertilize the water and facilitate excessive aquatic vegetation and algal blooms.

These algal blooms can severely impact the river's ecosystem, depleting the water of its oxygen and causing "dead zones" where fish and other aquatic life cannot survive. And these blooms have the potential to be Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), growths of toxin-producing algae that can cause adverse health effects — and even death — in humans and pets.

From their years of research, Keeton and Borrello are confident that agricultural runoff is the more significant contributor to the Pine River's algal blooms. In Gratiot County, humans are vastly outnumbered by both cows and pigs — livestock that produce an amount of waste equivalent to that of 1.3 million humans, according to the college's calculations. And with several thousand of the county's 41,000 residents served by functioning municipal wastewater treatment systems, the researchers agree that septic leakage is not the primary cause of the river's algae growth.

Marcus Cheatham, health officer with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, is well-versed in both the biological and chemical problems with the Pine. From his perspective, they are separate issues that require separate solutions, although they "get conflated in peoples minds."

The watershed's leaking and nonexistent septic systems need to be addressed as a matter of "basic public health sanitation," he said. Noting that the advent of sewers and septic systems greatly reduced the risk of waterborne diseases, he said it's important to maintain those systems so not to allow public health to "backslide."

But for Cheatham, the more pressing health concern is posed by the agricultural runoff because of its potential to cause HABs. As these toxic algal growths threaten to contaminate municipal drinking water systems downstream, the consequences can be far-reaching.

"In terms of urgency right now, I think the animal manure presents a more clear, present public health danger if

we start losing the ability to drink the water from the Great Lakes, which a lot of Michigan cities rely on,” he said. “But in terms of long-run problem, the aging of the septic systems... does present a danger of individual people contracting waterborne disease.”

HABs are a great threat to municipal water systems because the toxins released by the algae can’t be filtered out on such a scale, Keeton said. In humans, exposure to these different toxins can lead to paralysis, seizures, permanent short-term memory loss, and even death, according to information from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

So when Toledo’s water supply was compromised by an HAB in Lake Erie in 2014, over half a million residents were warned not to even make contact with the water flowing from their taps.

“You couldn’t do anything with the water,” Cheatham said. “And the amount of damage done to the urban infrastructure and to the environment from that algae bloom that happened right next to the city’s water intakes is just massive.”

In Gratiot County, Murray Borrello’s river research focuses on the nutrient pollution that causes algal blooms and HABs. While the Pine River is no stranger to algal blooms, he said he has not seen evidence of toxic algal growth in the river so far — although this summer will be the first year his team will be testing for HABs. But even though mid-Michigan has yet to experience HABs firsthand, Keeton said it’s unwise to ignore the events happening downstream.

“Lake Erie is kind of the canary in the coal mine because of its shallow nature and other factors that lead to it demonstrating these problems first,” he said. “Next is Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan.”

While agricultural runoff is the larger contributor to the nutrient pollution in the Pine River, the county’s failing septic systems are not without their own health risks. As Cheatham pointed out, the pathogens that can be found in human feces — especially from a sick human — pose a danger to those fishing or swimming in the river. And with some homes directly discharging waste into the river, there’s no doubt that this bacteria is alive when it reaches the Pine.

“They’re coming right out of a pipe, and they’re still warm when they hit the water,” he said. “And so that tells us that the rivers are impaired with human waste.”

Cheatham said that the septic system issue will continue to worsen over time as the systems continue to age. And considering the expense of replacing these systems, both Cheatham and Keeton believe the solution to this issue lies in economic assistance to residents and communities who can’t afford to shoulder the costs themselves.

“If we look at these rivers and the lakes as a public resource — and they are — and we all have a right to expect them to be taken care of, we need to maybe start sharing the cost of maintaining them,” Keeton said. “And so maybe the state and federal governments need to provide help to lower-income communities, smaller communities, to help them clean this up.”

But for Keeton, the risk of pathogens in the river is not exclusively a human fecal contamination problem. Noting that the “longevity” of bacteria in manure lagoons and on fields is “not very well studied,” he said that living bacteria from agricultural practices makes its way into the river as well.

And pathogens that affect humans are not only found in human feces. Livestock waste can carry several dangerous pathogens, including Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* and *Giardia*.

Keeton said considering that outbreaks of deadly waterborne diseases like polio and cholera are no longer major public health issues today, trying to make determinations about whether human feces is worse than livestock waste is simply “splitting hairs.”

“I mean, you drink water in a creek where a cow upstream has just pooped in the water, you’re going to get sick,” Keeton said. “You drink water from a creek where a person has just pooped in the water upstream, you’re probably going to get sick, too.”

Regardless of the source of the pathogens, it’s difficult to determine how many Gratiot residents have been affected by exposure to fecal pollution in the river. Keeton said it would be “impossible” to track this data well. Exposure to some of these pathogens can result in gastrointestinal distress, a symptom that can have any number of causes and usually doesn’t warrant a trip to the hospital, he said.

And even if people did routinely go to the hospital for gastrointestinal distress, “we don’t have the finances to test everybody for everything,” Keeton said. “We don’t know what the incidents of animal or human caused fecal oral infections there are.”

Despite the data-tracking difficulties, Keeton said the risks shouldn’t be ignored. With his research on the river showing off-the-charts concentrations *E. coli* after rain events — levels well above what the federal

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deems safe for human contact — there is still cause for concern. “We may not have people dropping dead left and right in the county because they’ve been exposed to our river or our ditches, but I’d like to think we don’t have to get that far before people start paying attention,” he said. Both the chemical and biological problems with the river will continue to worsen if they’re not addressed, Cheatham said. But although the river poses several serious threats to human health, Cheatham said he is encouraged that people in Gratiot County are taking the issues seriously.

“It’s really exciting how many people are getting involved in the work on the Pine River, and they’re getting fired up about it. A lot of different folks are trying to take action,” Cheatham said. “The work that Alma College is doing is really, really valuable, and that’s great to see.”

Proactive approach



A shelf for hand sanitizer products at the Greenville Walmart store sits empty Wednesday after customers purchased disinfecting products due to the spread of the coronavirus in the United States, which was announced to have been discovered in two Michigan residents Tuesday. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

What Ionia, Montcalm counties are doing to help prevent spread of coronavirus

**KAREN BOTA, CORY SMITH
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As the United States prepares for the coronavirus, which causes a disease known as COVID-19, at least one local health department official is encouraged by what people are already doing to prevent the spread of the worldwide pandemic.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) Health Officer Marcus Cheatham said many people he has spoken with as part of efforts to educate the community about COVID-19 prevention have already taken the time to edu-

cate themselves.

“Part of what makes people anxious is looking for new information,” Cheatham said. “They already know what the health department knows.”

Ionia County Health Department (ICHD) Health Officer Ken Bowen cautioned residents to be careful where they are getting their information. If it’s not from the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, the State of Michigan or local health departments, “I’d recommend they not trust it,” he said.

“We’re seeing a lot of people getting upset about things that aren’t necessary true,” Bowen said. “We’re getting some wild phone calls from people.”

The MMDHD has shared information

with schools, health care providers and human service agencies, as well as coordinated with other health departments to do conference calls with colleges and universities, and with hospitals, according to Cheatham. A conference call with K-12 schools is planned for later this week, and the MMDHD is part of the Region Health Care Coalition, which is working to make sure hospitals have what they need to respond. The Ionia County Health Department has shared information using its website, Facebook page and press releases.

“The most important thing is that the public knows how to respond,” Cheatham said. “There is no medicine

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The following measures will help decrease and slow the spread of infection, and reduce the impact on the community, according to the Ionia County Health Department and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department:

- **Wash your hands regularly.** Scrub your hands with hot water and soap vigorously for 20 seconds, "like the doctors do," said MMDHD Health Officer Marcus Cheatham. If you don't have soap, scrub your hands with hot water. "It's the scrubbing that really does it," he said. If you don't have access to soap and water, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, but soap and water are best.

- **Clean all "high touch" surfaces every day with a disinfectant approved for SARS-CoV-2.**

- **Be current on your routine vaccinations.**

- **Social distancing works.** Consider bumping elbows or tapping toes of shoes to greet someone rather than shaking hands. The virus is transmitted by coughing and sneezing and can get on surfaces. If you aren't around it, you are much less likely to get sick, Cheatham said. When you hear coughing and sneezing around you — in church, for example — it's time to stay home. "Just like with flu season, that'll be your sign," he said.

- **If you're sick, stay home.** If you're an employer, use

your power to send sick employees home, said Cheatham. Cover coughs and sneezes, and avoid touching your face.

- **Plan now for caring for loved ones who may be sick or medically compromised.** If someone at home is sick, isolate them, and use latex gloves for any contact. Have plans for how to care for a family member who becomes sick. You will need a place for them to stay separate from everyone else, and a plan for how to feed them and do their laundry with minimum contact. The Centers for Disease Control suggests using latex gloves when handling anything that has been in contact with them. "There is a YouTube video on how to remove surgical gloves," Cheatham said, "and then immediately wash your hands."

- **Call ahead before going to the doctor or hospital if you are sick.** Most COVID-19 infections are not serious, but be watchful of concerning symptoms such as shortness of breath and prolonged fever.

- **Support your family, friends, and neighbors when they need your help.**

- **Stock up on essentials.** Be sure prescription medications are filled and over-the-counter medications are on hand. Maintain a good supply of non-perishable food items, including pet food.

- **Plan ahead on daycare options in the event that schools are closed.**

- **Talk to your employer on contingency plans for absenteeism, working from home, or other strategies for the continuation of operations.**

- **Pay attention to, and comply with, public health requests and recommendations.** Some good websites for accurate and up-to-date information are: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus; www.michigan.gov/coronavirus or ioniacounty.org/health/health-department/ for more information. For a list of approved disinfectants, visit www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2.

Many of the recommended steps for preparation for COVID-19 should be taken every flu season, said Ionia County Health Department Health Officer Ken Bowen. Being prepared for emergencies is wise, regardless of the cause.

"It's always a good idea to be prepared for an emergency situation. COVID-19 is giving us an opportunity to kickstart that planning a bit," he said. "COVID-19 will come and go, and you'll still have a plan in place for whatever comes, whether it's the next tornado or the next ice storm."

Helping prevent the spread of coronavirus

Continued from Page 1

for COVID-19 and no vaccine, so public health's powers are limited. Whether this gets bad or not depends on people taking the necessary precautions."

Taking precautions will slow the spread of COVID-19, which is important for a number of reasons. In most cases, people who do get the disease will have a mild illness, for many even less than having the flu, Cheatham said.

"As a public health official I always dread — and hope I retire before it happens — where an illness kills a lot of people and makes them really sick. This isn't going to be that," he said.

Cheatham said health officials are more worried about COVID-19 than the flu because the population has no immunity to it, and if many people have it at one time it could overwhelm the health care system, affecting not only those with COVID-19 but others with chronic illnesses who rely on medical care.

"Since we don't have immunity, it's important to continue to fight to slow it down as much as possible," he said, adding that an ideal scenario would be if COVID-19 hits the state slowly and runs its course over the entire summer. "That would be better than 25 percent having it at one time. Right now, today, I don't think that will happen, but we don't know how quickly it's going to hit."

Local health departments have been monitoring people who might have been exposed to COVID-19 and at present have only a very low risk of getting the disease. There are two such people in the Clinton-Gratiot-Montcalm area, served by the MMDHD, and they have self-quarantined and are being monitored. Two presumptive cases have been diagnosed in southeastern Michigan, but Cheatham thinks it will take time for COVID-19 to reach mid-Michigan.

In Ionia County, a group of people who returned from traveling to China three weeks ago were being monitored by the Ionia County Health Department. They are healthy, Bowen said, and the department is not currently monitoring anyone else.

It is hard to say what will happen with school closings and cancellations of community events, Cheatham said. He doesn't want communities to over-react, but the pressure to do more might start building, and that pressure can come from anywhere. School closings are "political," he noted.

"The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has not issued any guidance at this time, but if the governor gets pressured to do that, or the state might not close schools but the parents might — that's something we're telling families: to expect sudden school closures without warning, and large public gatherings might be canceled," he said. "That's what the experience of going through a



Customers shop at the Greenville Meijer store Wednesday, claiming the last few containers of disinfecting wipes that were available. All hand-sanitizer products were sold out, as customers have stocked up on products in recent days due to the spread of the coronavirus in the United States, which was announced to have been discovered in two Michigan residents Tuesday. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

panic is like — things change moment to moment."

Bowen said he has heard concerns about Gov. Gretchen Whitmer declaring a state of emergency for Michigan. That doesn't mean that people should worry, he noted. There are two reasons for Whitmer to make a formal declaration: One is so she can access federal funds, and the other is so she has the authority to cancel events or take what action she needs to to protect public health, he said.

"It is intended to set some things in motion legally, but that doesn't mean people need to panic," Bowen said.

COURT CAUTION

Ionia County's 64A District Court issued a statement Wednesday in response to Whitmer's declaration of emergency. District Court will remain open, but the following steps are now in effect:

- All hearings with vulnerable persons may be adjourned (postponed) upon request. The request must be initiated by or on behalf of the vulnerable person.

- Any civil case may be adjourned upon the request of any party. The request must be initiated by or on behalf of the party making the request.

- All jury trials will be adjourned until further notice.

- Criminal defendants not in custody

may have hearings adjourned upon request. The request must be initiated by or on behalf of the party making the request.

"I am keeping a close eye on this and am asking 64A employees to be hyper-hygienic in the meantime," Judge Raymond Voet told the Daily News. "If we start to see cases in central and west Michigan, we will consider all options and take whatever action is necessary to protect the safety of our employees and of those who come to the court to do business."

Requests to adjourn/postpone may be made by calling Ionia County District Court at (616) 527-5346 or (616) 527-5349 or by emailing apalmer@ioniacounty.org or rmorseau@ioniacounty.org.

Ionia-Montcalm Circuit Court Chief Judge Ronald Schafer told the Daily News that Circuit Court is not taking similar measures at this time, but is continuing to monitor the situation.

"Each court is different as it relates to types of cases and the volume of the public that must access the court," Schafer said. "Thus, we support the changes being implemented in the individual courts of the 8th Circuit as the presiding judges of those courts determine is in the best interest of their employees and the public they serve."

EMPTY SHELVES

On Wednesday, the Daily News visited stores including Meijer and Walmart in Greenville and observed that nearly all hand-sanitizer products had been purchased, with multiple shelves empty, void of hand sanitizers and disinfecting wipes.

As customers continue to take measures to avoid the spread of germs, Meijer President and CEO Rick Reyes said in a press release that efforts are being made to restock inventory.

"As our country works to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), we know you're shopping our stores and pharmacies for products that will help keep you and your loved ones safe," Reyes said. "We're seeing a significant increase in demand on key products you need to keep you and your families safe. Our team members are working to address any inventory issues that arise as a result of this virus. We're working to secure additional quantities of items that families need most at this time, and we appreciate your patience as we do our best to keep our shelves stocked for you and your families."

Reyes also stressed that Meijer is following the guidance of health experts, such as the CDC, in responding to this virus.

"We're ensuring all team member areas are sanitized on the same increased schedule," he said. "We're also reinforcing with our team members that they should stay home if they aren't feeling well and we have plans in place to ensure they feel supported and confident to do so."

Lakeview Area News

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Prepare For, But Don't Panic over COVID-19

**By Leslie Kinee
Public Information
Officer**

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) advises residents to prepare for, but don't panic over the virus. MMDHD is continuously working on preparedness and response planning for emerging communicable diseases, like COVID-19 with federal, state and local partners.

At this time, Michigan has no confirmed cases of COVID-19 and there are no individuals being monitored within MMDHDs jurisdiction (Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties). For up-to-date information, visit www.michigan.gov/coronavirus.

As COVID-19 cases increase worldwide, it is uncertain how it will impact the United States. That's why taking action now can help protect your health and those you care about.

The following measures may help decrease or slow the spread of infection, and reduce the impact on our communities:

Pay attention to and comply with public health requests and recommendations

Get your information from credible sources, like the CDC, MDHHS or MMDHD

Practice good hand hygiene by washing hands regularly and using alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% or more) if soap and water is not available

Stay home when you are sick

Clean all "high touch" surfaces daily with household cleaning sprays or wipes

Cover coughs and sneezes and avoid touching your face

Avoid sharing personal household items

Be current on your routine vaccinations

Call ahead before going to the doctor or hospital if you are sick. Most cases of coronavirus are not serious, but be watchful of concerning symptoms like shortness of breath and prolonged fever

Plan how you'll care for loved ones who may be sick or medically compromised, and how not to expose each other to sickness

Keep prescription medications filled and over-the-counter medications on hand

Maintain a good sup-

ply of non-perishable food items, including pet food

Plan ahead for day-care options if schools are closed

Talk to your employer on contingency plans for absenteeism, working from home, or other strategies for the continuation of operations

For additional information, visit: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus; www.michigan.gov/coronavirus or www.mmdhd.org

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

We take action to protect, maintain and improve the health of our community.

Advancing innovative solutions to achieve healthier outcomes

Greenville schools, MCC taking measures to prepare for coronavirus in Michigan

CORY SMITH

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GREENVILLE — As the world, the United States and now the state of Michigan deal with the spread of the coronavirus, steps are being taken to be proactive on the issue.

On Tuesday evening, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced the first cases of the COVID-19 disease had been discovered in two Michigan residents — in Oakland and Wayne counties — as they tested positive for the virus, leading her to declare a state of emergency. The virus has now been confirmed to exist in more than 120 countries.

“We are taking every step we can to mitigate the spread of the virus and keep

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At left, Monday's meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, Superintendent Linda Van Houten holds up and describes a design for one of three posters that will be placed within schools throughout the school district offering tips to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases such as the coronavirus (COVID-19). At right, during Tuesday's meeting of the Montcalm Community College Board of Trustees Tuesday, College President Stacy Young gives details on the college's plan to deal with the increasing concern over coronavirus. — DN Photos | Cory Smith

Schools taking measures to prepare for coronavirus

Continued from Page 1

Michiganders safe," Whitmer said. "I have declared a state of emergency to harness all of our resources across state government to slow the spread of the virus and protect families. It's crucial that all Michiganders continue to take preventative measures to lower their risk, and to share this information with their friends, family, and co-workers."

As the news became widespread Wednesday, many large-scale events were canceled and of the state's largest educational institutions, Michigan State University was the first to announce that all classes going forward would be online-only through April 20.

MSU officials say they learned Tuesday of a probable case of "an individual linked to our campus" that the Ingham County Health Department is currently investigating and monitoring.

"During this time period, students doing purely remote work can return to their permanent place of residence, and we strongly encourage this because there are advantages for social distancing," a statement from the school read. "But for those not able to go home, we will continue to fully support students in our residence halls and dining facilities."

Other universities, including the University of Michigan, Central Michigan, Grand Valley State, Wayne State and Michigan Tech universities, have all since announced similar decisions to move to online-only classes.

Locally, no schools have decided to move forward in such a direction at this time — though they are preparing for it.

During Tuesday's meeting of the Montcalm Community College Board of Trustees, College President Stacy Young said measures are being taken to do whatever is necessary to keep college staff and students safe.

"We have sent a message to all faculty to be ready at a moment's notice to go online," she said. "A ton of schools have already put that in place, right around their spring break, as we've heard it takes around nine days (for the virus to die) on surfaces."

Young said if the college ends up going in that direction, she is confident resources are in place to make that happen.

"As far as classes go, we feel pretty confident that if we have to go online, we could," she said. "Our executive team is talking about this every day, re-evaluating where we are. At this point, we are business as usual, but we want to be ready if we have to go to the next step."

Young described the worst-case scenario being that the college would close entirely, but she doesn't anticipate that happening.

"We're asking staff to reconsider big meetings and we also have asked everybody to identify the essential business functions in their area, such as payroll, to make sure those

continue to function," she said. "We've also asked that everybody has a backup person, to make sure they have somebody that can step in if they need them."

During Monday's Greenville Public Schools (GPS) Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Linda Van Houten said her administration has been working for several weeks on a "coronavirus plan" to prepare for COVID-19.

"We're in the process of developing a district-wide plan to respond to the coronavirus, if and when it is needed," she said. "Our direct line is with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), and I've been in contact with them three times already, getting some advice and input from them."

On Wednesday, Van Houten released a letter to parents of students in the district, providing information and a list of preventative measures the district is taking.

"For most, it (COVID19) is like a common cold; however, some have been much sicker, and a small percentage have died. We are preparing and watching the situation very closely," she said. "Greenville Public Schools is working closely with our local health department, as well as the state health department, their Regional Education School District/Intermediate School District, and the Michigan Department of Education to be prepared in case this situation worsens."

"We have an emergency plan in place and will utilize it as needed throughout this event," her statement continued. "This plan continues to be updated on a regular basis and we will continue communication as we receive additional guidance from the MMDHD."

During the school board meeting, Van Houten showcased three new posters that will be utilized throughout the district, containing information with details of how to properly wash hands and avoid spreading germs.

"The health risk remains low and the symptoms (of COVID-19) are similar to influenza, but we've intensified cleaning, already implementing some additional cleaning practices," she said. "We've ordered hand sanitizer for all classrooms and additional wipes. We have met with the environmental cleaning company that we work with, had a meeting with them, to explore ways to clean differently."

Van Houten added that measures to avoid the flu and other viruses were already receiving a focus throughout the district as overall attendance between faculty and students has been down by about 10 percent district-wide due to illnesses not related to COVID-19.

"To be honest, we had more staff out that we were concerned about than students. It's a high rate right now," she said.

In regards to student travel, Van Houten said the school will follow the advice of the CDC when it comes to the upcoming week of

spring break March 28 through April 5.

"We did receive information about students who may be traveling for spring break and whether they should return to school or be quarantined," she said. "The CDC was very clear — the airports and security will be telling people if they need to be quarantined or not. They are not expecting the schools to make those decisions. Obviously, lots of people travel over spring break, and it's not our job to track where they are going."

One Greenville school trip has been postponed at this point.

Spanish and French students at Greenville High School, along with teacher Karen Paulsen, had received approval by the school board in June 2018 to travel internationally to Spain, France and the United Kingdom from March 26 to April 3.

Van Houten said at the recommendation of the travel company the students are using, the trip will be postponed until sometime in the summer, due to concerns over COVID-19.

"The travel company has offered them an alternative, to postpone that trip to the summer and honor all of the payments," she said. "It's not going to cost anybody anything to make those changes."

A second scheduled international trip by the Village Green show choir high school students to Toronto, Canada is still on as scheduled for April 17.

A third school trip, in which DECA students who have qualified to compete at the international competition in Nashville, Tennessee — in which 20,000 students are expected to gather for the competitive conference — is also currently on as scheduled for April 29 through May 2.

In a statement released by Ionia Public Schools Superintendent Ron Wilson, no major changes have been made at this point in Ionia, but the situation is being monitored closely.

"Ionia Public Schools are working closely with state and local health authorities to monitor the developing COVID-19 situation in Michigan," Wilson said. "The Ionia County Health Department is monitoring the situation at the local level and Ionia County has no suspected or confirmed cases at this time. We encourage people to follow the CDC guidance regarding hand-washing, personal hygiene and staying home when sick. If it becomes necessary to make adjustments to school schedules or events, decisions will be made in conjunction with state and local health authorities to ensure a healthy and safe environment for everyone involved."

The Daily News reached out to the other public school district superintendents in the area Wednesday morning to ask what their coronavirus preparations included but did not receive any responses by the end of the day.

Daily News

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Commission on Aging agencies working to help senior citizens

**KAREN BOTA AND
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Commission on Aging events are temporarily canceled throughout Ionia and Montcalm counties due to coronavirus (COVID-19) concerns, but the agencies are working to make sure local seniors still have access to nutrition and socialization.

All congregate meal sites are temporarily closed at Montcalm County's five sites — Carson City United Methodist Church, Curtis Community Center in Edmore, Greenville Senior Center, Howard City Action Center and the Stanton location — and socialization clubs, in-home service aides and transportation services are also temporarily canceled. (See Page 9B for the weekly Senior Bulletin.)

The Montcalm County Commission on Aging serves approximately 200 clients through in-home services, 200 clients through transportation services, about 300 clients per week for home-delivered meals and has served a total of

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Commission on Aging agencies working to help seniors

Continued from Page 1A

4,720 meals at its five sites so far this fiscal year (since last October).

Montcalm County Commission on Aging Director Ryan Dreyer said he is working in close contact with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department as the global virus situation changes daily, sometimes hourly.

"The biggest thing for us is a focus on health and prevention and playing our part in that seeing as how seniors seem to be the most at-risk group for the virus," Dreyer said. "Based on the advice we're getting, folks in the high-risk category, which includes seniors, should avoid gatherings of 10 people or more."

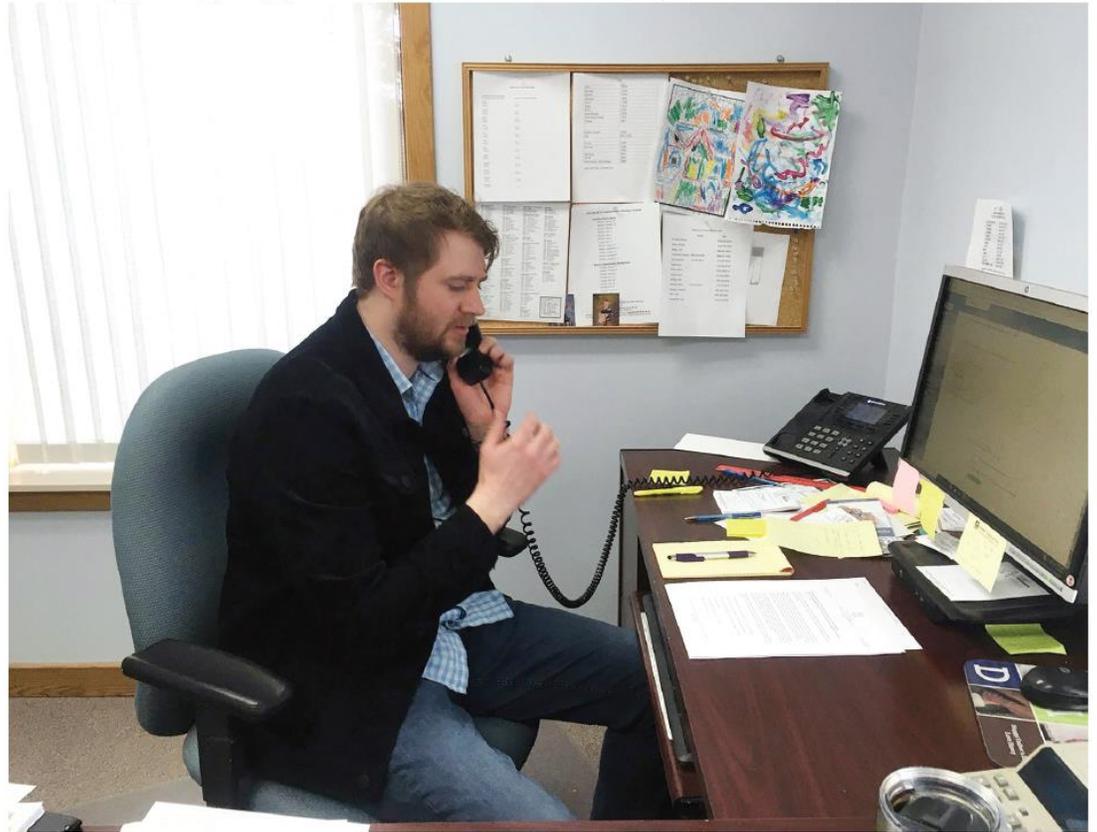
Commission on Aging officials spent Thursday and Friday on the phone with their clients letting them know about the cancellations and making sure they were well.

"We're getting good feedback, most people are very understanding of what we're trying to do," Dreyer said. "Any clients that are having a cancellation of service, our plan is to regularly follow up with them and make sure they're getting a little bit of socialization and making sure they're OK."

"We're working on having our congregate meal site hosts stay in contact with the regular clients through phone calls and that sort of thing to at least keep in touch that way," he added. "Most folks that go to those sites are going for socialization purposes, as opposed to a need for nutrition, but we're going to follow up with the regular people who are in attendance at each of those sites and if it becomes apparent that nutrition is needed, we'll arrange something through either our home-delivered meals program or our shelf-stable meals program."

The Montcalm County Commission on Aging is not financially equipped or staffed to do grocery shopping, pick up prescriptions or run other errands for senior citizens. Dreyer encourages people to check in with elderly relatives, friends and neighbors to offer a helping hand.

"I think that's critical," he noted.



Montcalm County Commission on Aging Director Ryan Dreyer spent Friday calling local senior citizens to let them know about canceled meal and socialization programs due to coronavirus concerns, as well as to check in regarding their wellbeing. The Montcalm County Commission on Aging serves approximately 200 clients through in-home services, 200 clients through transportation services, about 300 clients per week for home-delivered meals and has served a total of 4,720 meals at its five sites so far this fiscal year. — Submitted photo

The Ionia County Commission on Aging also has cancelled all congregate meals and senior center services until March 30, according to a letter on the Commission on Aging's website.

"We want you to know that your health, and that of our staff and volunteers, is of the utmost importance to us, and we have been taking the threat from the coronavirus very seriously," CoA Director Carol Hanulcik said in the communication. "Because it is now recommended that older adults avoid crowds, and stay at least 6 feet away from others when away from home, we have decided to cancel congregate meals at all our meal sites, starting tonight and for the next two weeks (March 16-March 27)."

Ionia County has meal sites in the Belhaven Community Room in Belding, Clarksville Community Center in Clarksville, Emerson Apartments in Lake Odessa, First Congregational Church in Portland and Saranac Senior Housing in Sa-

ranac, in addition to the Ionia County CoA Senior Center.

Cancellations include the State Retirees Luncheon, General Tire Retirees' Breakfast, St Pat's Potato Bar, Soup to Go Lunch & Learns and Spring Luncheons.

The Ionia County Commission on Aging serves approximately 215 clients through in-home services, 235 clients through transportation services, about 425 clients per week for home-delivered meals, and has served a total of 4,350 meals at its five sites so far this fiscal year (since last October).

All other Senior Center activities — Wellness classes, Wii Bowling, Bridge and Euchar clubs, Cloggers, Grand Valley Strings Music, Knitting Group, Alzheimer's Disease Caregiver Support Group and the Parkinson's Disease Support Group — also will be cancelled through March 27.

For the time being, Ionia County CoA is continuing to provide in-home services, including home-delivered

meals, but only to clients who don't have an illness. Transportation services are being pared down to meet only critical medical needs or services, for example, taking someone for dialysis.

"In doing this, we are taking responsibility to help limit the spread of this disease as advised by local, state and federal health authorities," Hanulcik said. "Our prevention and response plan will continue to incorporate this expert advice as the situation changes."

The Ionia County CoA office will remain open and staff will be available by phone at (616) 527-5365 to provide information and referrals, including on what to do if someone doesn't feel well.

"We urge everyone to follow the guidance of our local health department, the CDC and the World Health Organization in taking measures to protect themselves and our community and to help slow the spread of infection," Hanulcik said.

Daily News

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Local woman discusses life in quarantine for COVID-19

STACIE SMITH

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What started as a family vacation years in the making has evolved into isolation.

A Montcalm County woman diagnosed with a presumptive positive case of COVID-19 has been in a self-induced quarantine since she returned from Italy to Michigan. The woman was the first Montcalm County resident to be identified with the virus.

The woman — who has requested to remain anonymous for the safety of her family due to negative posts shared on social media — was in good spirits Friday considering she has been holed up in her home for more than a week.

The day her family arrived in Italy, it was announced that there were numerous COVID-19 cases in the northern regions of the country. The family was not overly concerned as they were staying in southern Italy. As a precaution, they refrained from going on any organized tours and they opted to return to the United States sooner than planned.

Though she does not know with certainty, the woman believes she was likely exposed to the virus on the flight. She also noted the shuttle services transport-

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Local woman discusses life in quarantine for COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

ing tourists to the airports were “packed like sardines.”

Upon return, the woman and her husband, who are both in their 60s and in relatively good health, visited their health insurance provider’s website that has a special screening for COVID-19. The screening involved a doctor asking a series of questions and based on the answers, it is determined whether a person should be screened for the virus. Both the woman and her husband underwent screening.

“I was tested at a local hospital,” the woman shared. “We had a scheduled time and they met us by the ambulance area with the weird suits and they put masks on us. You are not seeing any people, it is very careful. It is just so new. They don’t know what to do.”

The woman was hesitant to name where she underwent screening because there are so few tests in the country and she feared staff would be inundated with people requesting it. She does feel strongly

though about following the guidelines being released by state and federal health departments. She is of an age where she remembers her mother telling her about the polio scare. She did add that it required a great deal of footwork to get tested.

Due to being under quarantine for nearly two weeks, she said a good support network of friends have been dropping off necessities outside their home. She chuckled about getting toilet paper before shoppers cleared the shelves.

For an unrelated illness that warranted antibiotics, the woman was advised against even picking up her prescription through the pharmacy drive-thru. As with other necessities, her group of friends have run errands on her behalf. For other items, she has ordered them online. She agrees with the stance Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has taken by closing all Michigan schools effective March 16 through April 5.

Because COVID-19 is viral and not bacterial, it is not treated with antibiotics. The Montcalm County woman is addressing her symptoms by getting lots of rest,

staying hydrated and taking pain relievers as needed.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department lists symptoms of COVID-19 as fever, cough and shortness of breath. The Montcalm County woman said she had a very low-grade fever and described her cough as “weird.” She said it felt similar to having the flu.

“I am not well yet but I am getting there,” she said. “I don’t have a fever anymore and it was never high, like 99.”

The Health Department notes that “older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, like heart or lung disease or diabetes,” are most at risk for COVID-19.

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, “residents should wash their hands frequently for 20 seconds, cover coughs and sneezes, stay home when sick, touch their face less, avoid those who are sick and disinfect commonly touched surfaces.”

In the meantime, the Montcalm County woman is remaining under quarantine and awaiting further instruction

from healthcare providers. She said her family is frequently contacted to monitor their progress and symptoms. Her husband’s test came back negative but he still showed symptoms of the virus. She doesn’t know yet whether they will be tested again. She did recommend that everyone avoid airports or cruises.

Sen. Rick Outman, R-Six Lakes, issued a press release outlining ways residents can be prepared and hopefully prevent further spread of COVID-19. He added that along with the precautions outlined by the health department, residents should also avoid large crowds when possible.

“It is important that everyone stay calm and continue forward with the suggested protocols,” Outman stated. “Be sure to practice everyday hygiene and follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines closely.”

Visit the Mid-Michigan District Health Department’s website at www.mmdhd.org or www.michigan.gov/coronavirus or www.cdc.gov/COVID-19 for the most up-to-date and accurate information.

Board of Commissioners Extend State of Emergency

 Posted on Wednesday, March 18th, 2020 and is filed under [News](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

COUNTY AIMS TO STEM SPREAD OF COVID-19

Following the lead of Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Gratiot County Board of Commissioners Chairman George Bailey unilaterally declared a 7-day local state of emergency on Sunday in response to the COVID-19 outbreak that is spreading throughout the state. The move took effect at 12:01 Monday morning, and was extended until further notice by County Commissioners at their regular meeting on Tuesday.

On the recommendation of Gratiot Administrator Tracey Cordes, the 5-member Commission unanimously voted in favor of the extension.

The declaration essentially limits crowd sizes and modifies government services, as well as barring visibly ill people from workplaces and businesses. Overall, the move allows the county to employ more resources and staffing to respond to the pandemic.

Bailey said the county is taking its cues from the governor and the Center for Disease Control, adding adjustments will be made as called for, including the timeframe in which the declaration could be lifted.

He is also keeping tabs with the MidMichigan District [Health](#) Department and its Health Officer, Marcus Cheatham.

Cordes informed the BOC that the county's website is being kept up to date with current government information and links to helpful resources.

As a result of the state's State of Emergency Declaration, Liquor licensees have been ordered to stop dine-in services for bars and restaurants, but they may offer carry-out to customers.

Alma Brewery owner Jim Holton has encouraged his Facebook following to support local establishments and order gift certificates or place take-out orders wherever possible. Alma Brewery offers take-out from 11 to 8 p.m.

Besides the closure of K-12 schools and dine-in service for bars and restaurants, the state declaration has closed fitness centers, movie theaters, entertainment and recreational venues, and limited gatherings to no more than 50 people.

The Alma Elks Club has closed completely.

Madison Shaffer, a part-time assessing finance clerk for the city of Alma, was calling business establishments to determine what type of services they are offering. The Alma College student from Seville Township said the information would be added to the city's website at the direction of City Manager Matt Schooley.

For instance, the Cancun restaurant and the Brickk Fitness Lounge will deliver on orders of \$40 or more.

Take-out also is available on campus at Hamilton Commons and Joe's Place.

Customer Service Manager Hannah Zimmerman at Ric's Food Center in Ithaca expected to limit customers to one package of toilet paper.

A rush on toilet paper has been a nationwide phenomenon and Gratiot County is no exception.

Cleaning supplies, hand sanitizers, and bread products also have been in demand as customers pour into the store to stock up “big time,” remarked Zimmerman. “No one had any idea it would be anything like this.”

Employees, particularly at the checkout lanes, have cleaning products of their own to disinfect.

“Every surface is scrubbed down more often,” which explains why the store is not accepting return bottles for deposits.

There is no mechanized bottle machine so employees would have to handle the glass and plastic by hand which causes a risk for them, Zimmerman added.

A similar situation has been occurring at the mega Meijer store in Alma.

There, the toilet paper and hand sanitizer sell out as soon as shelves are stocked.

The store has machines to accept bottle returns but the Meijer convenience store and gas station does not so is not accepting returns.

Meijer Service Team Leader Whitney Patton reported the store has not shortened its hours of operation as directed at the corporate level. “We are doing our very best to keep the registers open, customers happy, and items on the shelf,” Patton said.

The volume of business can be compared to Christmas shopping. The parking area was packed on Monday and for the Friday before, Patton said the store was the busiest she had ever seen.

Except at Christmas, its the big TVs and games that sell out. “Never the essentials,” she remarked.

Another corporate guideline is to sanitize countertops every hour. Employees are equipped with sanitizing products and towels but a person also goes around and does that every hour.

“I’m just glad people are still shopping,” added Patton, remarking that customers have been pleasant which is a “tribute to Alma,” she said.

The steady stream of customers coming into the Meijer entrance was spotted grabbing a free Purell hand sanitizer wipe they used to wipe down a grocery cart.

And the mechanical horse inside the store popular with kids is gone. The humorous sign reads “Sandy is resting in her stable. She can’t wait to see you again soon.”

One person said this was the first time she’s ever seen the amusement not available.

[Church](#) services have been forced to cancel. Some groups such as Community Church at the Youth For Christ building on Cheesman and the Lincoln Road United Methodist Church are able to live stream services.

This week Bishop Robert Gruss of the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw has suspended all public masses throughout the diocese of Saginaw out of concern for parishioners.

The emergency limitation of 50 people per room has impacted traditions such as funeral services.

Sam Smith of Smith Funeral Homes said the staffs attempt to best serve families and have suggested limiting services to immediate family members. There are no limitations at graveside services at cemeteries.

“All our funeral homes (there are six) are wifi compatible but every family is different,” Smith explained.

It could be unnerving for some grieving family members to have a funeral broadcast to relatives at a far off distance while others appreciate the option.

“These are crazy times,” Smith noted.

Cases of COVID-19 in county rise to 5

Local officials say all look to be travel-related

Ken Palmer

Lansing State Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

The number of COVID-19 cases in Ingham County has grown to five.

Two more people were diagnosed with the disease on Tuesday, the Ingham County Health Department said.

Both cases involve men – one who has traveled internationally and one with a history of domestic travel, officials said. No other information about the circumstances surrounding those cases was immediately released.

The two new cases are in addition to the 65 positive tests reported Tuesday on the state's website.

Tuesday's statewide tally was off by at least one because it did not include one of two Ingham County positive tests reported by the county on Monday evening.

That's because one of those positive tests came from a private lab, and the state had not yet settled on a way to compile positive tests from private labs into its totals, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Health and Human Services said Tuesday.

Ingham County's first case of COVID-19 was reported last week and involved a "senior adult" woman who had traveled aboard a cruise ship.

She was reported in stable condition at a hospital last week.

On Monday, county health officials announced that two others – a man and a woman – had tested positive for the disease. Both had traveled domestically, they said.

That means all five Ingham County

See COVID-19, Page 4A

COVID-19

Continued from Page 1A

cases appear to be travel-related, officials said.

As of Tuesday evening, no positive tests had been reported in Clinton and Eaton counties.

Besides Ingham, COVID-19 cases have now been reported in Bay, Charlevoix, Jackson, Kent, Leelanau, Macomb, Monroe, Montcalm, Oakland, Otsego, Ottawa, St. Clair, Washtenaw and Wayne counties, as well as Detroit, state officials said.

Oakland County has the most confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 16. Wayne County has nine such cases. Macomb County and Detroit both have eight cases, and Washtenaw County has seven, according to Tuesday's update.

Fifty-eight percent of patients are male, 28% are between the ages of 60 to 69 years old, and at least 49% of people have not been hospitalized, according to the site.

State officials on Tuesday began reporting coronavirus case numbers at a new time with new metrics.

The state's daily updates are given at 2 p.m. and now include all information reported through midnight the previous day, according to a release Monday.

"It is important to provide the public with accurate data regarding this outbreak," Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health for the state, said in a release Monday. "As the number of people tested has drastically increased in recent days, our team has transitioned the way it prioritizes and reports testing."

If they so choose, health care providers, local health departments or others can announce cases or deaths before they are included in the statewide count, state officials said.

Contact Ken Palmer at 517-377-1032 or kpalmersj.com. Follow him on Twitter @KBPalm_lsj.

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STATE OF EMERGENCY

 Posted on Wednesday, March 18th, 2020 and is filed under [FEATURE](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

George Bailey, Chairman of the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners, declared a 7-day Local State of Emergency on Sunday, March 15, that was extended until further notice by the BOC on Tuesday night.

Daily News

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Funeral home limits attendance at visitations, services

Submitted by Simpson Family Funeral Homes

Simpson Family Funeral Homes priority is the safety, well-being, and health of the families, communities we serve, and our caring professional staff. With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting us all, it is safe to say we as a nation and community are living in unprecedented times and trying to navigate through uncharted waters. We are doing our part to be proactive and taking steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or any other illnesses.

Our hearts go out to everyone affected by this pandemic and all the uncertainty it brings to all of us.

As of Tuesday, under Executive Order by the Governor, public gatherings of 50 or more people are temporarily prohibited. While this and any subsequent Executive Order are in effect, we will continue to work with every family we serve to make sure, as we always do, that their loved one is honored, their life celebrated, and that immediate and extended family, as well as friends, have the opportunity to participate in these ceremonies.

Because of this Executive Order by the Governor, all visitations, funerals, and memorial services handled by Simpson Family Funeral Homes will be limited to immediate family only and extended family by invite-only until the Governor's ban on public gatherings is lifted. However, by utilizing all available technology, we will be offering every family the option of streaming online any portion of the ceremony they choose so people who can't attend in person may still be a part of the ceremony. As always, our online guest book is available for people to sign and leave messages for the family.

For those who do attend a visitation, funeral, or memorial service at Simpson Family Funeral Homes, rest assured our funeral homes are safe and clean. Our protocols cover everything from handwashing hygiene, cleaning product specifications, equipment cleaning and facility cleaning procedures.

Before attending a ceremony if you feel ill in any way, please stay home. As supplies allow, we will have hand sanitizer available throughout the funeral home and encourage you to use it. We will be practicing

social distancing protocols in the seating arrangements at ceremonies. We are all in this together and together we will all get through this.

Funeral ceremonies, celebration of life events, and memorial ceremonies help the family begin the grieving process and are an important part of the grief process. If you know someone who has lost a loved one, please take the time to make an extra effort to support them during this unusual time we are all in. Your support is needed now more than ever.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email us at bill@simpsonffh.com or call us at (989) 291-3611 or (989) 831-4000.

The information provided here represents our current response based upon the information available to use by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), Michigan Funeral Directors Association (MFDA), National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), State of Michigan, and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD).

Daily News

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Health department warns of COVID-19 related phone scam

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan
District Health Department

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, has learned of scam related to COVID-19.

Some Michiganders have received phone calls from someone claiming to be a nurse following up on recent COVID-19 test results. They are told that they tested positive for COVID-19 and they need to provide their credit card information in order to have antibiotics shipped to them.

This is a scam. If a nurse calls with test results of any kind, she/he will never ask for credit card information.

Also, antibiotics are not used to treat COVID-19.

Visit www.michigan.gov/coronavirus for up-to-date information on COVID-19.